

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENTIAL NATURE OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA THROUGH POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS ANALYSIS: THE CASE OF THE 'FIXTHECOUNTRY' MOVEMENT IN GHANA

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Abstract. *What explains why protest movements refuse the support of opposition parties despite the correlation in their demands? Answers to this question make up the content of this paper. In recent years, protest movements have dominated the political space of several sub-Saharan African countries, many of which have claimed to have no partisan ties. Relying on insights from the detachment thesis, this paper argues that the nature of the strategies adopted by protest movements in relation to political parties depends on the nature of the country's political settlements. The study uses the FixTheCountry protest movement in Ghana as a case study. After a discourse analysis into speeches and press statements, an analysis of 15 qualitative interviews conducted in Ghana, as well as a review of various secondary literature ranging from journal articles to books, this paper concludes that protest movements instrumentalise the competitive nature of a country's political settlements to gain popular support from the citizenry. Given that only two political parties dominate Ghana's political arena, the protest movement presents itself as non-partisan, a strategy intended to first, express distrust in both parties; and second, attract the attention of non-partisan citizens and disaffected supporters of both parties. The paper demonstrates that the nature of a country's political settlements is a key determinant of the nature of the relationship between protest movements and political parties, both ruling and opposition ones. This paper's findings contribute to our understanding of how contemporary African protest movements continue to shape and reshape their relationship with political parties and the relevance of a country's political structure in the process.*

Keywords: *Political parties, protest movements, political settlement, Ghana, FixTheCountry*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aftermath of the wave of independence on the African continent witnessed varied forms of political transformation across different countries. Although the early decades were dominated by one-party systems with socialist leaders (Kiprono, 2020), the demand for multi-party rule gradually increased following resentment against a government controlled by the few and the advancement of alternative political ideas (Armah-Atttoh & Robertson, 2014; Bratton & Logan, 2015; Odihr, 2011). Despite the role of political parties, especially opposition ones, in checking government activities and contributing to national development (Hout, 2003), their actions are largely guided by their political goals. Thus, the sprang of protest movements pursued certain demands outside the political party domain.

As later reviewed in the paper, the detachment and closeness thesis seeks to explain the relationship protest movements build with political parties. However, little is known about the

circumstances that explain the decision by protest movements to associate with political parties or otherwise, taking into account the nature of the country's political structure. Hence, the importance of this paper. Particularly, the study focuses on the relationship between opposition parties and protest movements, answering why a protest movement will detach from opposition parties when they may have similar demands of pressuring the government to act. Deploying insights from the literature on political settlement analysis, the study revealed the nature of the distribution of power in the country is very vital in the strategies protest movements adopt.

In this endeavour, I adopt a single-country case study (Ghana) to understand the rationale underlining the decision by the FixTheCountry protest movement to delink themselves from any political party, including the opposition ones, in their activities. This paper draws on fifteen qualitative interviews in Ghana between November 2021 and April 2022 with participants from the FixTheCountry Movement's conveners (5), communicators of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (3) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (3), journalists (2) and political analysts/academics (2). This was complemented by documentary sources, such as newspaper articles, press statements and speeches from the relevant actors. Whereas the age of the interviewees from the FixTheCountry Movement ranged between 20 and 35, all the other participants were above 35 years. The interviewees were all Ghanaians from different ethnic groups. The participants comprised nine males and six females. Having categorised the data into major and sub-themes through thematic analysis, the information was interpreted using discourse analysis. This process was useful for understanding the rationale of the actors taking into consideration the context and their positionalities. The documentary sources were also used to triangulate the interview data, which proved useful in the data interpretation.

Proceeding this introductory section are five successive sections. Section two reviews the literature on the closeness and detachment thesis to understand the nexus between political parties and protest movements. This helps to better understand the puzzle the paper seeks to tackle. It serves as a background to introduce the political settlement analysis in the next section and how it serves as a useful framework in this field of study. Section four gives a brief review of protest movements in Ghana from a historical perspective but mainly focuses on the period from 1992 and the nature of the relationship that has existed between protest movements and political parties. The penultimate section turns attention to the case study used in the paper, with section six concluding the study's findings.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE NEXUS BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS IN A POLITY

A political party, by definition, can be said to be a structured association of people who work collectively towards the aim of competing for political office as well as promoting a common set of policies (Kadima, 2006). On the other hand, protest movements are organizations aimed at changing certain policies or the established political system through either routine or non-routine avenues (Orum, 1974). Both political parties and protest movements shape state governance in different ways (see Bratton & Logan, 2015; Carothers & Youngs, 2015; Honwana, 2012; Hout, 2003; Kiprono, 2020; Ngwane, 2017; Stahler-Sholk et al., 2007; Teshome, 2009; Wole, 2004).

In state governance, it is worth mentioning that a connection exists between protest movements and political parties, which goes beyond alliances (Kriesi, 2015). Hutter et al., (2018) add that these two parties stand a high chance of playing complementary roles in representing the population's interests, particularly in a well-functioning democratic space. In their study, Borbath and Hutter (2020) found that parties are more inclined to engage in

protests if they are in opposition. Governing parties, in their position, are inhibited by laid down policies coupled with the burden of meeting the populace's various social, economic and political needs. This puts some limitations on them from facilitating or engaging in protest activities. Although popular trust in the ruling party exceeds that of the opposition (Bratton & Logan, 2015), the latter are more flexible to build broad social support coalitions in an attempt to respond to citizens' demands (Borbath & Hutter, 2020).

Focusing on the detachment and closeness thesis, this section critically reviews the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between political parties and protest movements. This serves as a useful background to adopt a conceptual framework in the form of political settlement analysis to better appreciate the conditions that may influence a protest movement to detach from or be close to a political party in its pursuits.

2.1. The Closeness Thesis

The closeness theses hold that protest movements build alliances with polity members in terms of sharing goals, tactics and even organisational structures in some cases. Here, polity members render support to protest movements by formulating and implementing policies that favour the demands of these movements (McAdam et al., 2003). This is made possible taking into account incumbent parties' possession of key resources, which could be harnessed to make concessions to protest movements or repress them when need be (Hutter et al., 2018). Getting close to polity members thus increases protest movements' awareness that they can rely on powerful allies to address their demands. They end up mobilising more protests, knowing that they are less vulnerable to stigmatisation by the media and too harsh and arbitrary repression by police forces (Somma & Medel, 2017). This closeness to polity members makes protest movements feel more optimistic and empowered. Such close relations could also end up giving room to protest movements to capture the political party, subsequently creating polarisation (Hutter et al., 2018).

Borbath and Hutter (2020) found protests that are sponsored by political parties to be more likely during periods of frequent protest mobilisation. This is due to the opportunity it affords them to create alliances with these social movements that are already mobilising protests on the streets. In addition to gaining exposure through their sponsorship, political parties ride on these protests to amass support from potential voters. During electoral campaigns where competition among political parties is heightened, parties invest in mobilising their supporters. It is usually at this period that sponsoring protest activities has the potential of yielding the anticipated results in terms of vote shares. In addition, political parties that sponsor protests become more resilient, putting them in the position of having one foot on the street and another in parliament (Borbath & Hutter, 2020).

Opposition parties also have a high probability of joining forces with less institutionalised bodies or individuals to directly engage in protests purposely to challenge the ruling government (Borbath & Hutter, 2020). Due to their desire to regain government control, Hutter & Vliegenthart (2016) consider opposition parties to be more motivated to respond to citizens' demands. This implies that when in opposition, political parties stand a higher chance of reacting to signals of protests in the news than in government. This mirrors arguments in the political approach about why opposition parties should facilitate protest mobilisation than parties in power (Kriesi et al., 1995). Apart from their indirect involvement in protests, Borbath and Hutter (2020) assert that political parties are likely to exclusively organise protests, usually taking the form of demonstrations and petitions. Their comparative analysis of protesting parties in Europe reveals that political parties are more inclined to take to the streets shortly before and after elections in highly differentiated contexts.

2.2. *The Detachment Thesis*

On the other hand, the detachment thesis holds a contrary assertion in that there is an increase in protests in situations where movements are detached from polity members. The consistent failure of polity members to meet the demands of protest movements makes the latter less supportive of the policies of the former. The movements then perceive protests as the most effective strategy to adopt to press for change (Somma & Medel, 2017). Consequently, the action frames of protest movements are usually a reaction to the @inability of polity members to address the problems detected by these movements.

Considering how leaders are largely motivated by their desire to remain in power (Bratton & van de Walle, 1992), the youth are devising alternative approaches beyond partisan politics to benefit from interventions. As such, they engage in movements that do not necessarily require party membership, although involving some political action (Honwana, 2012). As Ngwane (2017) points out from the South African experience, an alliance between protest movements and the governing political party allows the politics and ideas of the latter to infiltrate the former. He further states that leaders of protest movements tend to fight to gain influence inside the ruling party instead of their core mandate of opposing its policies.

It is worthy of note that detachment does not mean the total non-existence of a relationship between social movements and polity members. This is because a number of changes that these movements demand require legislative decisions and actions taken by political authorities. Social movements must make efforts to influence them, and this often necessitates engagements and negotiations (Somma & Medel, 2017).

Undoubtedly, the literature on the relationship between political parties and protest movements, as reviewed above, gives a good understanding of the strategies protest movements adopt in pursuing their interest. A substantial gap, however, still exists in the circumstances under which certain strategies would be chosen over others within the context of successfully organising a protest movement. There is no robust conceptual framework explaining this phenomenon. Knowledge of this will be useful in understanding the decisions and actions of protest movements in relation to political parties. As a contribution to filling this lacuna, the next section shows how insights from the political settlement analysis can be useful in understanding the choice of protest movements in their relations to political parties.

3. EXPLAINING ELITES' DECISION-MAKING THROUGH POLITICAL SETTLEMENT ANALYSIS

The political settlement analysis (PSA) is proposed to address the challenges posed by the institutional approach of governance by establishing the link between the distribution of power and development outcomes (Khan, 2018). Unlike the new institutional economists, where institutions are viewed as the rules intended to solve a particular problem of social interaction, PSA describes the distribution of power across organisations that are relevant for analysing a specific institutional or policy problem (Khan, 2018). In this regard, Political settlement (PS) is the) balance or distribution of power between contending social groups or social classes, on which any state is based' (di John and Putzel, 2009 p:4). The emergence and outcome of institutions and development depend on the bargaining power of the existing social groups (Grey, 2019). Institutional performance is viewed as a continuous interaction among actors relative to their disruptive abilities. The actual enforcement of institutions and their impact can be understood by analysing the social structures that shape conflict over the institutions (Grey, 2019). In essence, PSA contributes to our understanding of the capacity of the state and its relation to development processes and outcomes (di John and Putzel, 2009).

More importantly, PSA, as framed by Khan (2010), draws our attention to how the relationship between ruling elites and other coalition shape the actions of state actors. The extent to which individuals and groups are able to actualise their interest is dependent on the power they wield in disrupting the current settlement or hurting the interest of ruling elites (Behuria et al., 2017). The actions of ruling elites are not only determined by the excluded factions but also by the lower-level factions within the same coalition. To this end, Khan (2010) identifies two main forms of power distribution, horizontal and vertical, that shape the state’s capacity. The former focuses on the relationship between the ruling elites and the excluded factions. A weak, excluded faction will enable ruling elites to act without considering power sustenance. However, if the excluded faction is strong, policy delivery is also guided by the need to hold on to political power and decimate the electoral fortunes of opponents (Behuria et al., 2017).

The vertical distribution of power, on the other hand, emphasises how the ruling elites relate with the lower-level faction within the same ruling coalition (Khan, 2010). Under this arrangement, the strength of the lower-level faction determines the extent to which ruling elites can enforce the institutions and how (Behuria et al., 2017; Khan, 2010). In theory, a PS with a strong excluded coalition and a lower-level faction is likely to weaken the state’s capacity, a situation Khan (2010) calls competitive clientelism. Conversely, the state may be highly capacitated to deliver development, including industrial policies, if the excluded coalition and the lower-level faction within the ruling coalition are weak (Behuria et al., 2017). Such an arrangement will likely produce a ‘dominant party settlement’ (Khan, 2010). The table below describes the four main types of political settlement, as propounded by Khan (2010).

Typology	Features	Examples
Potential Developmental Coalition	limited power of lower factions and supporters; weak excluded factions; long time horizon of Ruling coalition; Interest of ruling elites strongly aligned to growth; High enforcement capabilities.	South Korea in the 1960s – 1980s
Authoritarian Coalition	relatively weaker lower factions; moderate to strong excluded factions; the stronger the excluded faction, the vulnerable the authoritarian coalition; the weaker the ruling coalition, the likelihood of the use of force to control excluded factions; relatively good enforcement capabilities but gets poorer over time; poor time horizon	Bangladesh 1980s – 1990s, Tanzania under the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in the 1960s.
Dominant Party Coalition	excluded factions are weak because either powerful groups have been included in the dominant party or excluded factions are highly fragmented or both; ; Unlike the Authoritarian coalition, the dominant party can contest and win formal elections; Longer time horizons but weak implementation capacity	India under the Congress Party (1950s – 1960s, Tanzania under the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM).

Typology	Features	Examples
Competitive Clientelism	Both lower factions and excluded factions are strong; elections serve as a means of testing the organisational power of competing coalitions; Ruling coalition has short time horizon, weak implementation and enforcement capacity	India after 1980s

Source: Adopted from Khan, 2010.

The paper, therefore, adopts Khan's PS typologies to analyse protest movements' operations. It is my postulation that the nature of a country's PS greatly shapes the activities of protest movements. Protestors, therefore, highly consider the form and nature of a country's PS in mapping out their strategies and modus operandi. This is significant, as the nature of the PS determines the power held by the state in inflicting cost on other social groups and the capacity to absorb the same (Khan, 2010; 2017). To this extent, the choice of protest movements to detach or form an alliance with a political party should be understood in the context of the power they wield to threaten the survival of political elites. As an illustration of this theoretical strand, the rest of the paper focuses on how the FixTheCountry protest movement of Ghana instrumentalises the competitive clientelism of the country to pursue its agenda. But first, the next subsection gives an overview of Ghana's political settlement underpinned by competitive clientelism.

3.1. *Understanding Ghana's contemporary political settlement*

Since the colonial era, Ghana has experienced different forms of political settlement under civilian and military rule regimes. Ghana, then the Gold Coast, was under British colonial rule from 1874 to 1957 when the country gained independence through the Nkrumah-led Convention People's Party (Austin, 1996). Upon its independence, the nation was subject to the one-party authoritarian political settlement under the same government (the CPP). This was achieved mainly through Nkrumah's use of legislative instruments such as the passage of the Avoidance of Discrimination Act (ADA) and Preventive Detention Act (PDA), which served as means of silencing opposition groups (Asante, 2016). This resulted in some fallouts within the party and the subsequent overthrow of the government in 1966 through a military coup d'état under the leadership of Lieutenant Emmanuel Kotoka.

Following this event, the country's political space had been unstable, alternating between military and civilian regimes with a high frequency of inter and intra-conflicts aimed at advancing the political interest and ideas of different coalitions. The distribution of resources during these periods was characterised by clientelist tendencies (Asante, 2016). The country experienced economic recession in the mid-1980s, causing Jerry John Rawlings, whose military regime was ruling then, to shift from his populist strategy of self-reliance to implement the IMF-backed policies of the Economic Recovery Policy (ERP) and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Pressured by domestic and external forces, President Rawlings returned the country to civilian rule in 1992, marking the beginning of the fourth republic. During this era, Ghana's political settlement shifted to one of competitive clientelism (Oduro et al., 2014).

The country's political settlement in the fourth republic is clientelist in nature, considering how the use of resource distribution serves as a means of amassing support and

votes (Lindberg, 2003). According to Ayee (2014), the National Democratic Congress (NDC) strengthened its clientelist networks through local government reforms and strategic appointment of traditional authorities, pensioners and farmers to the local assemblies. In an attempt to expand its support base and suppress the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), the NDC strengthened its lower-level factions, that is, the party agents and officials in the various districts and local areas (Hutchful, 2012). The ruling elites were then motivated to distribute rent to party supporters to win their allegiance and enhance the party's electoral fortunes (Whitfield, 2011).

Likewise, upon assuming office in 2000, the NPP took urgent steps to expand its coalition by attracting electorates in the rural areas where the NDC had been dominant. This expansion increased the NPP's support at the grassroots level and strengthened the party's holding power (Lindberg, 2010). This new form of mobilisation increased the bargaining power of lower-level factions to demand resources and rewards as an appreciation for their continuous support of the party (Whitfield, 2011). Consequently, the NPP government was incentivised to provide job opportunities and create rents for party supporters and cronies (Bob-Milliar, 2012). Unlike the NDC, the NPP created rent opportunities for the business class, which in effect, tilted the support of the private sector to the NPP (Asem et al., 2013).

A key feature of Ghana's competitive clientelism lies in the highly competitive nature of the country's elections between the NDC and the NPP (Oduro et al., 2014). Both the NDC and NPP have won four each of the eight presidential elections held in the fourth republic. Given the closeness of the election results, both political parties engage in tendencies aimed at winning the next elections (Abdulai, 2017). Consequently, the distribution of resources is not necessarily guided by national interest but by political interest. This has seen the pursuance of short-term as against industrial policies for immediate manifestation, a situation that can prove helpful on the campaign ground (Abdulai, 2017; Whitfield, 2011).

In this regard, as we shall see below, political parties often attempt to win the support of voters by forming protest movements. However, given the incessant politicisation of protest movements, neutral voters tend to be apathetic towards such protest movements (Paalo, 2017). As an exception, the rise of the FixTheCountry movement has sought to be completely non-aligned politically. It is the postulation of this paper that the political non-alignment strategy of the FixTheCountry movement has been largely successful due to the competitive clientelism nature of Ghana's political settlement.

4. GHANA'S PROTEST MOVEMENTS: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although protest movements may not be uncommon in every country, the shape and form of these movements may vary across countries and even temporalities. The aim of this section is to give a brief historical overview of the various major protest movements in the country. Priority is given to Movements that have emerged in the fourth republic but to situate it in historical context, I give a brief overview of some movements in the colonial era.

4.1. *Movements Preceding the Fourth Republic*

Protests date as far back as before Ghana's independence in 1957. The Aborigines Right Protection Agency (ARPS) in 1897 was the first of such social movements that protested for the protection of traditional land tenure practices and the social structure. This group sought to ensure that every person was abreast with the Lands Bill (Nti, 2012). The political activism by the ARPS is significant, as it laid a foundation for political action, which contributed to the independence that was later achieved in the country (Noll & Budniok, 2021).

Another of prominence was the 1948 riots, where the ex-servicemen who had returned from World War II demanded independence and better living conditions. Some civilians joined these soldiers to embark on a peaceful demonstration at the Independence Square (then the Polo Ground). However, upon reaching the crossroads to the Cristen burg Castle, these protestors were stopped, and their leaders were shot to death. This enraged the protesters into the destruction and looting of properties (Howard, 1999). Following this was the 1950 “Positive Action” by Nkrumah’s CPP, which combined strikes, demonstrations and rallies, all aimed at mounting pressure on the colonial government for independence (Howard, 1999). In the post-independent era, different movements rose for various purposes. For the aim of this paper, the focus is placed on some major protest movements in the fourth republic. This will be useful to understand how these movements differ from the FixTheCountry protest movement, which is the case study adopted in this piece.

4.2. *Alliance for Change (AFC)*

The Rawlings-led government introduced a 17.5% VAT on selected goods and services in 1995 (Prichard, 2009) which was met with agitation from the public. Considering the limited level of education that accompanied the introduction of this tax, there was an indiscriminate increase in the prices of goods and services by some traders and service providers, which led to hardships suffered by citizens. This triggered the Alliance for Change (AFC), a combination of opposition parties and civil society groups, to organize protest marches in almost all the capital cities of the ten regions of Ghana (Anebo, 1997).

This protest took the form of a demonstration dubbed ‘kume preko’, an Akan language which means ‘kill me completely’. The first which took place in Accra was peaceful with about 100,000 people participating on the 11th of May, 1995. There was however an incident that interrupted the peace of the protest where a counterdemonstration that was alleged to be sponsored by the government led to the demise of about four of the protesters (Boafo-Arthur, 2007).

4.3. *Alliance for Accountable Governance (AFAG)*

The Alliance for Accountable Governance (AFAG) in 2009 organized a street protest dubbed ‘Ataa adaadaa me’, an Akan phrase which means ‘Atta (President John Evans Atta-Mills) has deceived me’. This non-profit, pro-democracy civil society group was peeved about the Mills’ administration’s failure to deliver its promises to the electorates prior to general elections in 2008. This was evident in the economic hardships, freeze in public sector employment, increase in fuel prices, unavailability of pre-mix fuel and the inability of the government to increase wages beyond 17.5 percent (Daily Guide, 3rd August, 2009).

4.4. *Occupy Ghana*

In expressing their displeasure in the Mahama-led government (2012-2016), the Concerned Ghanaians for Responsible Governance (CGRG), a purported non-partisan civil rights organization, staged a protest march titled ‘Occupy Flag Staff House’ in 2014. The movement articulated in their petition to the president the issues that instigated the protest to include the government’s poor response to labour-related issues, inability to regulate small-scale mining effectively, fight against corruption, and address erratic power supply, deplorable roads, the depreciation of the Cedi, increasing taxes, and other administrative malfunctions (Graphic Online, 2014). This implies that the decision to engage in the protest

was grounded in the group's discontentment over the socio-economic situation of the nation and its attendant perceived lack of political action.

The state confronted these protesters with security forces, resulting in the arrest and name-calling of some protesters (Bokpe, 2014). Regardless, the movement saw success in their protest, continuing their activities and subsequent transformation into 'Occupy Ghana'. The movement sought good and responsible governance and inspired great leadership for Ghana. Their success in the protest was evident in the news coverage and attention they received from both the local and international front. Subsequently, they made significant strides in promoting positive social change in the country through the consistent demand for accountability from the state and other actors. An instance is the pressure the movement mounted on the state when Mr Alfred Woyome embezzled GHc51m. This resulted in the Supreme Court ordering Mr Alfred Woyome to refund this amount (CitiFM, 2016).

Although this movement was initiated on purported neutral grounds with no political association, the reverse was rather the case later. The individual interests of some of the actors in the movement ended up influencing their participation and, eventually, their withdrawal from the movement. The individual interests of political goals defeated the objective of the movement of being non-partisan from the onset. The Mahama and National Democratic Congress government labelled the movement as a pro-New Patriotic Party. This is not farfetched, considering how some active movement participants like George Nenyi Andah and Yofi Grant later served in the NPP government as Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) and Member of Parliament respectively (Citi FM, 2017). As Paolo (2017) argues, the partisan affiliation of these movements hinders the mobilisation of neutral public support, which minimises their chances of yielding the expected change. I now turn my attention to the rise and activities of the FixTheCountry Movement to illustrate how they have, unlike the previous movements, pursued a complete non-partisan approach by taking advantage of the competitive clientelism of Ghana's political settlement.

5. THE RISE OF THE FIXTHECOUNTRY MOVEMENT AND THE APOLITICAL APPROACH

Having narrowly won the 2020 presidential elections, Nana Akuffo Addo was sworn in on January 7, 2021, to begin his second and final term of office. In the proceeding months, Ghanaians began agitating about economic hardships characterised by price and tax increases. In response, Joshua Boye-Doe, affectionately known as Kalyjay, a young social media influencer, tweeted the hashtag, 'FixTheCountry' in May 2021. The tweet resonated with several Ghanaian youth and hence yielded numerous retweets.¹ Kalyjay, who boasts of over 450 thousand followers on Twitter, is known for commenting on content related to Ghanaian sport athletes. Hence, he is not known in the country's political space and is not linked to any of the country's political parties. The move by Kalyjay, and the corresponding response emphasises the significance of social media in contemporary protest movements, as contended by Carothers and Youngs (2015). The apolitical nature of Kalyjay made the FixTheCountry movement attractive to several Ghanaian youths regardless of their political affiliation. As one of the key conveners emphasised, 'I was very comfortable joining FixTheCountry because it is not like any of those previous protest movements where the founders are politically linked' (Interview, 16th Nov 2021).

Although the movement began as a reaction to the economic turmoil under the NPP government, the group's conveners have consistently argued that the problems today are the consequence of successive governments, both the NDC and the NPP (Interview, 16 Nov

¹ See <https://borgenproject.org/ghanas-fixthecountry-protests/> (accessed 1st Nov, 2022)

2021; 8th Dec 2021). ‘We are saying the first point is a new constitution.... Our constitution gives too much power to the executive, which is why they take arbitrary decisions,’ a convener of the movement emphasised (Interview, 8th Dec 2021). Blaming the governing NPP and the Opposition NDC for Ghana’s woes, the FixTheCountry movement has strived to remain politically neutral by distancing itself from any political party’s activities. As Somma & Medel (2017) argue, protest movements resist any attachment to political elites if they deem them part of the problem. This notion reflects the position of the FixTheCountry movement. As elaborated by a senior political journalist in Ghana,

‘The protestors cite issues that go as far back as twenty years.... So, they see both the NDC and NPP as part of the problem, which is why they don’t want to associate themselves with them (politicians)... although it will look like the NPP is being disadvantaged because they are in power... but if you look at their concerns critically, both parties are at fault’ (Interview, 29th March 2022). Although the movement does not have any criteria for membership, it resonates with the youth and touts itself as not only apolitical but ethnic neutral.

5.1. *Ghana’s Competitive Clientelism: A Leverage for Sustaining Political Neutrality*

As shown earlier in the section, almost all the previous protest movements in the fourth republic beginning from 1992 are linked to a political party, particularly the opposition parties. In line with the postulation of the closeness thesis, such strategies enable the protest group benefit both financially and tactically from the political parties and in some cases, hold political office, if the political party wins power (Hutter et al., 2018; Mcadam et al., 2003). Under Ghana’s current republic, the FixTheCountry movement appears to be the only exception, as they have publicly denounced involvement in any activities covertly or overtly supported by a political party. The question is why and how have they been able to do this?

The answer to the former (why) lies in the competitive nature of Ghana’s political settlement. As explained by one of the key conveners of the protest movement,

‘In Ghana, it is either NPP or NDC and Ghanaians, especially we the youth are realising that none of them can help us... we need a third force that will not be political but act according to the national interest.... That is why FixTheCountry is here... it is also why people are really supporting us (FixTheCountry)’ (Interview, 16th Nov 2021).

The movement has, thus, capitalised on the failure of both the NPP and the NDC to turn the fortunes of the ordinary Ghanaian to mobilise and rally support for the group. Aiming to sustain and increase their membership base, the FixTheCountry protestors have sought to trash any action that may have political party leanings. For example, they ban the use of any political party paraphernalia during their activities. Also, during a protest organised by the FixTheCountry movement in August 2021, the conveners denied the request of Abu Sakara, a former Flag Bearer of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) to make a remark (Interview with a FixTheCountry Convener, 8th Dec 2021). Perhaps, more importantly, the movement has strived to refuse any financial support from any political party in order to maintain their neutrality. As confirmed by all of the conveners I spoke to, both the NDC and NPP have attempted to give them huge financial package with different conditions, but they have resolved to turn them down. Consequently, they have exclusively relied on public donations to fund their activities.²

² For more on how they raise funds, see <https://fixthecountrygh.com/> (accessed 24th Sep 2022)

So far, it appears this medium of financing their activities has been fruitful. In explaining their success, a political analyst and academic argued:

‘People are really willing to donate because they know they (FixTheCountry) are for the people.... The people are just tired of the dominance of NPP and NDC and really want someone who will first serve the national interest’ (Interview, 1st March 2022).

5.2. Understanding the Survival of FixTheCountry Movement: A Consequence of Accusations and Counteraccusations by Political Parties

As it is often the case in Ghana, protest movements are accused of being political, especially tilted towards the opposition party (Anebo, 1997; Bob-Milliar, 2014). Consequently, those who participate in their activities are deemed to be political, a tendency that discourages the neutrals from associating themselves with such movements (Paalo, 2017). Unusually, officials of both NPP and NDC accused each other of covertly sponsoring the FixTheCountry movement in my interaction with them. However, neither of the political parties provided evidence to back their claims.

Speaking to a senior communications officer of the NPP, they alleged the NDC are the master brains behind the movement and that they have been financially sponsoring their activities (Interview, 17th Dec 2021). However, there have been several instances where the FixTheCountry protestors have refused to join protests organised by the NDC, despite the similarity in demands. For example, although the FixTheCountry Movement is perhaps the most vociferous opposition to the introduction of the E-levy,³ they turned down an invitation from the opposition party, NDC to join them in a demonstration against the E-levy.⁴ In response to why the FixTheCountry Movement will refuse to join the NDC, their Sponsors, as it is claimed, to protest against the E-levy, a senior communicator of the NPP argued the NDC has no integrity:

‘they know the NDC has integrity issues.... If they associate themselves or join them, they (FixTheCountry) will be infested by their (NDC) lack of integrity’ (Interview, 17th Dec 2021).

Similarly, the NDC also accused the movement of being political. Speaking to an NDC communicator, he claimed:

‘I doubt FixTheCountry is truly apolitical and want the interest of the nation... if they really are (politically neutral), why should they refuse to join us (NDC) to protest when the issues bother on national interest.... I am sure some NPP people are behind them that is why they also accuse us (NDC) of being part of the problem... why should you accuse the opposition when we are not in power?’ (Interview, 9th April 2022).

Like the NPP officials, the NDC officials also failed to give any evidence to support their claims. These accusations and counteraccusations have done little to discredit the movement. Although it is unusual for a protest movement to be accused of being supported by opposing political parties, the accusations and counteraccusations by the NDC and NPP are not rare in a competitive settlement, as each faction will do anything to hold onto power (Oduro et al., ,

³ The E-levy was introduced by the government of Ghana in early 2022 to tax electronic transactions. For more, see <https://www.uncdf.org/article/7408/ghana-electronic-levy> (accessed 1st October 2022)

⁴ See <https://citinewsroom.com/2022/02/fixthecountry-movement-declines-ndcs-invitation-to-join-demo-against-e-levy/> (accessed 6th Oct 2022)

2014). These alleged claims of being partisan by the political parties appears to be making them stronger. As argued by one of the conveners of the protest group:

‘the good thing is they (NPP and NDC) both accuse us of belonging to the other party... that even makes the ordinary Ghanaian believe our neutrality and we have consistently and frequently denounced any political party’ (Interview, 8th Dec 2021).

This suggests how the FixTheCountry movement has leveraged on the actions of the two major political parties, due to the competitive nature of the country’s settlement, to advance their goals and gain momentum in the country.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper sets out to contribute to the understanding of the nature of protest movements in Africa. Particularly, an explanation of the conditions that shape protest movements’ decision to align with or disassociate from political parties has been at the core of this piece. Like all other associations, protest movements aim to be successful in their endeavours. Thus, the paper argues that the strategies deployed by these movements depend on how power is distributed in the country. Put another way, the nature of a country’s political settlement is vital in shaping how protest movements set out to operate. These movements assess their power and the extent to which they can inflict cost on duty bearers to decide whether to be politically aligned.

As shown above, Ghana’s FixTheCountry protest movement reflects this postulation. The movement has relied on the competitive nature of the country’s settlement to remain politically neutral in their pursuits. As demonstrated in section 4, almost every protest movement that has emerged since 1992 has some political flavourings. The consequence has been the low interest in participating in any protest movement by the ordinary Ghanaian, as such movements are viewed as a means to attain some parochial political goals by the conveners (Palo, 2017). For example, Armah-Attoh and Robertson (2014) found that most Ghanaians expressed a low readiness to embark on protest marches, with a majority (63%) of them never engaging in collective action to raise an issue. Against this backdrop, the FixTheCountry protest movement has stayed apolitical to win the support of the majority of Ghanaians, especially the youth who are politically neutral.

Three main features/phenomenon of the movement make them distinct from previous movements and support their apolitical claims: first, the movement began with someone who is alien to politics in the country and was supported widely by non-political⁵ entities; second, in its advocacy, the movement does not only blame the current government but successive governments, making both the NDC and NPP targets of their activities; third, they have consistently refused people to use their platform to promote their political parties and have refused to join any demands led by a political party, even if they share in their demands.

This has gained them support among the masses. As described in the earlier section, this has been possible due to the competitive clientelism of Ghana’s political settlement. The competitive nature of the settlement has made elections an ultimate interest of the two main parties (NDC and NPP) and hence their actions are driven by how to win elections. Given that previous movements were later politicised, the ordinary person does not want to be actively involved in a protest that will later serve the political interest of few individuals. It is this

⁵ Political, here is used as one who is associated with a political party in the country. So, apolitical or non-political refers to not associated with any political party.

phenomenon that the FixTheCountry movement has instrumentalised to gain the support of the ordinary Ghanaian by staying politically neutral in their activities.

Although Ghana's competitive clientelism has proven useful in understanding the actions of the FixTheCountry movement, future studies is relevant to understand how other forms of political settlement shape the nature of protest movements. For example, how the actions and inactions of protest movements are shaped by countries with a dominant party or authoritarian political settlement will be helpful for purposes of juxtaposition across space and political settlements.

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ПОДХОД К ПОНИМАНИЮ СВОЕОБРАЗИЯ ПРОТЕСТНЫХ ДВИЖЕНИЙ В АФРИКЕ НА ОСНОВЕ АНАЛИЗА СЛУЧАЕВ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО УРЕГУЛИРОВАНИЯ. ПРИМЕР ДВИЖЕНИЯ *FIXTHECOUNTRY* В ГАНЕ

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Аннотация. Чем объясняется, что протестные движения отказываются от поддержки оппозиционных партий, несмотря на сходство их требований? Ответы на этот вопрос составляют содержание данной статьи. В последние годы протестные движения доминировали в политическом пространстве нескольких стран субсахарской Африки, и многие из них отрицали свою связь с партиями. В статье утверждается, что характер стратегий, принятых протестными движениями в отношении политических партий, зависит от характера политического урегулирования в стране. Примером автору служит протестное движение *FixTheCountry* в Гане.

На основе дискурс-анализа речей и заявлений для прессы, пятнадцати интервью, взятых в Гане, а также научной литературы в статье делается вывод о том, что протестные движения инструментализуют состязательный характер политического урегулирования в стране, чтобы получить народную поддержку. С учетом того, что только две политические партии доминируют на ганской политической арене, протестное движение представляет себя как непартийное, и эта стратегия преследует цели, во-первых, выразить недоверие обеим партиям и, во-вторых, привлечь внимание беспартийных граждан и недовольных сторонников обеих партий. В статье показывается, что характер политического урегулирования в стране является ключевым фактором для определения характера отношений между протестными движениями и политическими партиями, как правящими, так и оппозиционными. Содержащиеся в статье выводы вносят вклад в понимание того, как современные африканские протестные движения продолжают формировать и изменять свои отношения с политическими партиями и актуальность политической структуры страны в этом процессе.

Ключевые слова: политические партии, протестные движения, политическое урегулирование, Гана, *FixTheCountry*

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