

**Protests for Transformational Change:
Analysis of Ghana's #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014)
and #FixTheCountry (2021) Protests**

**by
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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
School for International Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Fall 2023

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Abstract

In recent times, the African continent has experienced many protest actions, but these protests have attracted few academic studies, with their impacts less explored. The few attempts at evaluating these protests have labelled them failures due to the lack of tangible evidence of transformational change in the countries where they occurred. Some scholars have, however, criticized this approach to analyzing protest impact as narrow. This study assesses the impacts of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests that occurred in Ghana, focusing on the perspectives of the protest organizers. The study finds that elements of the protests, such as their non-partisanship nature, non-hierarchical leadership structures and uses of social media, significantly impacted the protests in more distinctive ways than previously observed in studies of other contemporary social movements. The protest organizers stated both tangible and less tangible outcomes of the protests. The tangible outcomes include the emergence and impactful actions of the civil society organization Occupy Ghana from #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014), and the legal re-enforcement of citizens' right to protest as a result of the #FixTheCountry (2021) protest. The less tangible outcomes include feelings of empowerment among people to demand accountability in other protests and enhanced political consciousness of the population. The study indicates that tangible outcomes may not directly come from the protest itself, and intangible outcomes of protests are equally important. Thus, although the protests did not cause direct changes to most of the concerns that triggered them, their impact on Ghana's political development cannot be overlooked. As such, this thesis agrees with Sanches's (2020) call for a more open and flexible conceptualization of "transformational change" to ascertain a protest's success or failure.

Keywords: Africa; Ghana; protest; #OccupyFlagstaffHouse; #FixTheCountry

To my parents,

Wilson Obuo Owusu and Lydia Ntiriwaa Owusu,

for their unwavering commitment to children's education.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to Professor Elizabeth Cooper, my senior supervisor. Her guidance, patience, and encouragement carried me through the entire process of undertaking this thesis, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have had her support and mentorship.

I would also like to express my profound appreciation to Professor Jason Stearns, my supervisor, whose constructive feedback and insights significantly shaped this work. I am grateful to Professor Gerardo Otero, the committee chair, and Professor James Busumtwi-Sam, my external examiner, for their invaluable feedback and constructive criticism, which enhanced the quality of this research.

To my interviewees who opened their doors and availed themselves to be interviewed, I would like to say a big thank you. Not only did their stories contribute to my thesis, but also left me greatly inspired. I am truly grateful.

I also thank the School of International Studies for the Simon Foundation International Travel Grant and the Travel & Research Award, which greatly facilitated my travel to Ghana. I sincerely thank the entire faculty and staff of the School of International Studies for their immense support.

I have been sustained in this process by the prayers and encouragement of my family and friends. They have always been present, and I do not take their unceasing support for granted. I am truly grateful!

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Since 2011, the African continent has seen a wave of protests (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Larmer, 2010; Lodge, 2013; Sanches, 2022; Sadovskaya et al., 2021; Strong, 2018). Ghana, a country on West Africa's coast, has witnessed many such collective actions. They include #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and the #FixTheCountry (2021) protests, which both gained national and international prominence. Most research on African protests has focused on three questions: Why do people embark on protests? Who are the participants? And what are the different forms of protest? However, little attention has been paid to protest's ability to effect transformational change in society, and even where attempts have been made, they have lacked systematic study and in-depth contextual analysis (Sanches, 2022).

Some of the few academics who have explored the outcomes of protests argue that the post-2011 protests that have occurred across the African continent have not been successful based on the lack of tangible evidence of positive change in countries where they have occurred and even where protests have led to regime change, positive transformations in the lives of the people are judged to have been lacking (Dwyer & Zeilig, 2012; Honwana, 2013; Maganga, 2020). Others disagree and argue that protests have tangible and intangible outcomes (Branch & Mampilly, 2015). There are also degrees of transformational change which could span over a period (Elamin, 2020; Sanches, 2020), so judging the success of a protest based on immediate tangible national outcomes is a limited approach (Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

My study prioritizes Ghanaian protest organizers' evaluation of how the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests have had significant impacts and what factors contributed to or limited, their transformational potential. This approach is taken to ensure that specific contextual considerations are given to ascertaining the significance of the protests. The approach is informed by the argument that 'transformational change' arising from protests can be understood in flexible and broad senses (Sanches, 2020).

Comparing the outcomes of the protests - as stated by the protest organizers - to the concerns that led to the protests, I observe that most of the protesters' concerns were unresolved, but however, their actions have had significant impacts on Ghana's

economic and socio-political development. These significant impacts include the actions of Occupy Ghana. This organization, which originated from a protest, played a crucial role in enforcing the independence of the Auditor-General and its power to disallow expenditures and impose surcharges, leading to substantial savings between 2017 and 2018, estimated at approximately 6.1 billion Ghana Cedis (World Bank Global Report, 2020). Also, the activities of #FixTheCountry contributed to the empowerment of citizens and a heightened level of political engagement. These observations echoes the positions of Branch & Mampilly (2015), Elamin (2020), and Sanches (2020) that evaluating the success of a protest cannot be based only on immediate tangible outcomes. The case studies also indicate that tangible outcomes may not result directly from the protest but from the residual organizational activities that follow it.

Furthermore, my study's findings underscore the substantial influence of the protests' non-partisan approach, their non-hierarchical leadership structures, the social impact of key individuals, the actions of law enforcement agencies, and the utilization of emotions through social media as pivotal factors that significantly impacted how the protests unfolded and influenced the protests' implications for change. These factors must be considered to provide new insights into how African protests can be studied, understood and evaluated.

In the rest of this chapter, I review existing scholarly literature regarding how protests in Africa and Ghana have been studied and theorized. Chapter 2 outlines the study's research methodology. Chapters 3 and 4 present the study's key findings, providing detailed narratives of how the convenors experienced the two protests. The last chapter, Chapter 5, analyzes the outcomes of the protest and considers the protests' effects on Ghana's political landscape.

Protests in Africa: A Literature Review

Protests in Africa and Their Disputed Significance.

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), 79,000 protests occurred across Africa between 2010 and 2021. Mampilly (2014) indicates that there were more than 90 popular uprisings in over 40 African states between 2005 and 2014. Protesters have taken to the streets in Egypt, Algeria,

Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Senegal, Sudan, Kenya, Angola, and Nigeria, among other countries, to resist authoritarian regimes, the extension of presidential term limits, unfavourable government policies, economic hardship, and political and civil rights violations (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Engels, 2015; Larmer, 2010; Maganga, 2020; Mueller, 2018). In the process, some autocratic regimes have been deposed, some third-term presidential bids have been resisted, and government policies have been changed. Conversely, lives have been lost, public and private infrastructure has been destroyed, and some people have found themselves living in worse conditions.

Despite the role protests have played in the development of the African continent, most academic writings on political change in Africa have failed to recognize their contributions (Dwyer & Zeilig, 2012). Protests are sometimes dismissed as "riots" and not given enough scholarly attention (Asante & Helbrecht, 2018; Branch & Mampilly, 2015) or characterized as "valence protests" which "do not fit easily into the typical narratives about contentious behaviour: they are neither social movements nor revolutionary, nor a manifestation of organized labour" (Harris & Hern, 2019, p. 1). According to some, the lack of appreciation of African protests' contributions to transformational change stems from the lack of understanding of the temporal and geographic contexts in which such protests occur (Mueller, 2018).

Accounts of Africa's Third Wave Protests

Historically, protests across Africa can be categorized into three waves, all with roots in the anti-colonial struggle (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Sadovskaya et al., 2021). The first wave of protest occurred between the late 1940s to the 1970s and resulted in many countries gaining independence from colonizers. The second wave from the 1980s to the 1990s caused the end of single-party and military states and gave birth to multi-party democratic states across the continent. The contemporary and current wave of protests, which started after the 21st century, is what is referred to as the third wave (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Sadovskaya et al., 2021). These protests have been the subject of much analysis, as reviewed below.

Who participates in protests?

They are found to be “predominantly youth-led, urban, technology-activated, and converge around state grievances, social inequalities, and, increasingly, revolutionary transformation” (Strong, 2017, p. 2). Analysts posit that the youth bulge scenario (large youth cohorts relative to the adult population), youth underrepresentation and marginalization, rural-urban migration, and the failure of neoliberal social and economic policies to provide favourable socioeconomic conditions have created a challenging environment for young people to thrive (Bertelsen, 2016; Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Honwana, 2013; Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021; Maganga, 2020; Tarrow, 2022; Urdal, 2006). These protests have often occurred in urban areas, particularly capital cities (Beall et al., 2013; Golooba-Mutebi & Sjögren, 2016; Raleigh, 2015; Maganga, 2020). These urban centers are home to many young people, who – like their counterparts in Western jurisdictions – are experiencing various socio-economic challenges, such as unemployment and high costs of living (Maganga, 2020). Some have been left stranded in the "waithood" period, conceptualized as an extended life stage of marginalization between childhood and adulthood occasioned by a lack of jobs and economic opportunities (Honwana, 2013). Some analysts argue that such struggles have driven many frustrated and driven young Africans into the streets in protest movements that challenge the status quo and contest socioeconomic policies and governance strategies that exacerbate poverty and heighten social inequalities (Honwana, 2013; Tarrow, 2022).

However, in the context of the ‘third wave’ of African protests, such blanket generalizations of protesters as "youth" limit the understanding of the current wave as the composition of the protesters is more complex (Branch & Mampilly, 2015). For example, while acknowledging the contribution of youth to the Tunisian revolution, Gilbert Achcar, one of the world's leading analysts of the Arab region, asserts that the main organizer of the uprising was The UGTT (the French acronym for the Tunisian General Labor Union), not young people, as western media widely reported (Matta & Achcar, 2015). In Sudan, the neighbourhood resistance committees, farmers, factory workers, tea vendor unions, and youth and feminist groups were prominent grassroots revolution members (Elamin. 2020). To better capture the participants in these protests, Branch and Mampilly (2015: 21) use the term "political society," which refers to a category that typically comprises the economically most deprived, bringing together "the

unemployed, the underemployed, informal workers, and even parts of the petty bourgeoisie."

It has thus been observed that the third wave of protests has emerged from "coalitions between a politically motivated middle class and an economically motivated lower class" (Mueller, 2018, as cited in Sanches, 2020:34). Lisa Mueller (2018) argues that the opportunistic political middle class takes advantage of economic hardships suffered by the lower and underclass to mobilize them to challenge the status quo. Again, the protesters' constitution extends beyond the youth and gathers a broad coalition of persons of different classes with varied interests.

The diversity of protest participants in Africa's third wave of protests makes it distinct from 'civil society'-like protest movements in Western countries, which are more organized and structured with explicit ideologies (Branch & Mampilly, 2015). It may appear "unpredictable, spontaneous, indiscriminate or disruptive," as a result of which it may emerge without any formal organizations and is primarily leaderless (Branch & Mampilly, 2015: 24). It may also lack clear goals and ideologies and protesters are unable to effectively communicate what they want, making it easily dismissible (Honwana, 2013; Satell & Popovic, 2017).

How are protests organized?

Protests' organization, programs and leadership are often considered critical to transformational change as such elements tear down old ways of doing things and usher in new ways of thinking, which propel societal advancement, while their lack may lead to stagnation (Beinin, 2014; Dwyer, Peter, et al., 2012; Satell & Popovic, 2017). Third wave protests' common lack of these elements has been described as a weakness affecting contemporary protests' success (Ali, 2013; Beinin, 2014; Fraser, 2013; Zeilig & Peter Gerard Dwyer, 2012). Other authors, however, disagree with this argument. Drawing on Fanon, Branch and Mampilly (2015) emphasize that the lack of leadership, formal organization and programs are strengths rather than weaknesses if third wave protests are analyzed in the political context in which they arise. They also contend that a lack of leadership and formal organization prevents protesters from being co-opted by political elites or the state, frequently harming the effectiveness of protest movements. As a result, a contextual analysis of the third wave protests can provide a better

understanding and appreciation of such characteristics as a strength rather than a weakness.

Influence of digital and social media

Another significant aspect of the third wave protests is the internet and social media use. Social media and information infrastructure have contributed immensely to social movement organizing and the mobilization of popular protest in Africa (Hussain & Howard, 2012), particularly in relation to the recruitment and mobilization of people and resources (OBAID, 2020). For example, online social media and internet campaigns were crucial to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions in January and February 2011, which led to a regime change in both countries (Breuer & Groshek, 2014; Kessler, 2011; Niekerk B.V et al., 2011). By 2008, a few years before the Tunisian revolution, 1.7 million out of a total population of 10.2 million inhabitants of Tunisia had access to the Internet (Breuer & Groshek, 2014). This made it possible for social media to rapidly share the self-immolation video of Mohamed Bouazizi, which courted a lot of support and sympathy and became a catalyst for the revolution (Hussain & Howard, 2012). Similarly, in the case of Egypt, social media was used to report on youth unemployment, corruption, repression, and injustice, including election rigging during the country's 2005 elections, which courted much disaffection for Hosni Mubarak's presidency (Hussain & Howard, 2012).

With 20 years of data drawn from 54 countries between 1992 and 2012, Ajay Seebaluck concludes that Internet use has a direct relationship with the likelihood of social protest when there is the existence of political and economic grievances such as corruption, lack of civil liberty, low income, low economic growth, and unemployment (Seebaluck, 2014). In other parts of Africa, hashtags such as #endsars #freesenegal #FixTheCountry #OccupyFlagstaffHouse have been effectively deployed and have helped with easy mobilization and resulted in significant protest participation. Contemporary protests rely on the internet and social media to disseminate their message and to increase their political impact (Bosch, 2017; Ekine, 2010; Luescher et al., 2017).

However, Breuer and Groshek (2014) remark that information communications technology (ICT) could be a destabilization tool, especially in new democracies. They

explain that protest mobilization to overthrow an authoritarian regime differs from constructing a new political order, such as democracy. They say this occurs when people's high hopes in a democracy are dashed when the regime change does not immediately lead to economic change. This frustration then results in cycles of protests, threatening the stability of young democracies. Thus, "the very individuals who, through their use of ICT, experienced political empowerment may feel emboldened to employ their newly adopted political digital literacy and skills to mobilize popular protest against grievances rather than trying to achieve societal or political change through the newly established institutions of representative democracy" (Breuer & Groshek, 2014, p. 30). Therefore, at the same time, ICT tools may be effective for easy mobilization of protests to cause regime change, and they also may hinder the extent to which protests lead to transformational change.

According to Zeynep Tufekci Tufekci, a sociologist and New York Times columnist, in a June 2020 article titled "Do Protests Even Work? It Sometimes Takes Decades to Find Out", contemporary 'social media aided' protests have little impact in established democracies because they are so easy to organize and "low effort things do not communicate credible threats." She explains that the massive demonstrations against the US government's invasion of Iraq in 2003, aided by ICT tools and social media, did not prevent the US government from invading Iraq, and inequality worsened following Occupy Movements in which many people poured into the streets both within and outside the US. She contrasts this with the impact of the August 1963 March in Washington, which was challenging to organize as it took more than ten years from conception to realization.

Such analysis raises the question of how the successes and failures of protests should be evaluated, which factors matter and how, and the potential of protests to bring about transformational change.

Analyzing The Successes or Failures of Protests

Widespread protests have been a driver of societal evolution. In Africa, the first and second waves of protests brought significant shifts in the continent's political, social, and economic development, including achieving independence from colonial rule and adopting multi-party democracy (Branch & Mampilly, 2015). The impacts of the third

wave of protests are still being analyzed and debated. However, the situation in some countries post-protest has not been desirable, with political instability and lack of socio-economic development being some of the main challenges.

Indeed, most countries that witnessed the "Arab Spring" are arguably in worse shape today than ten years ago (Tarrow, 2022). Libya is in disarray; the country has been divided into two rival administrations, with some militia groups occupying some parts, and the national economy has weakened (Abderrahmane, 2021; Borgen Project, 2021). Egypt's attempt at democracy was short-lived, as Mohammed Morsi suffered a military coup in 2013 after just one year as president (Abderrahmane, 2021; Aras & Fark, 2016). The second transition in 2014 ushered in the current president, Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, currently in his third term as president. Under his presidency, there have been reports of human rights abuses, with tens of thousands of his critics languishing in prison (HRW World Report, 2021). Tunisia is the only country to have successfully democratized after the protest. However, the country has seen an economic downturn, recording -7% growth in 2020 (Abderrahmane, 2021). As a result, confidence in democracy has waned in the country. A survey in 2014 saw the percentage of preference for democracy drop from 71% in 2012 to 46%. Youth labour force participation increased marginally from 31.1% in 2010 to 31.6% in 2014, resulting in many Tunisian youths leaving the country to seek employment elsewhere (Prince et al., 2018). Hence, "in North Africa, the narrative of a "winter" following the "spring" has gained currency" (Branch & Mampilly, 2015, p. 5).

Other parts of the continent have witnessed similar developments: Sudan has failed to stabilize after the ousting of Omar al-Bashir in 2019 through protest (Abderrahmane, 2021) as the transitional period after 2019 was characterized by political tensions, a failing economy and continuous protests. A coup in 2021 led to a military regime and further conflicts, escalating to civil war in 2023. Also, Senegal experienced one of the worst violent protests in a decade of its political history in March 2021 (Maclean & Camara, 2021; Wade, 2022; WION (Web Team, 2021). This was almost a decade after "Y'en a marre and Mouvement du 23 Juin (M23) mobilized people onto the streets to protest against former president Abdoulaye Wade's autocratic trajectory, which eventually contributed to his massive defeat in the Senegal 2012 elections (Dimé, 2022; Gellar, 2021;). The March 2021 protest was triggered by the arrest of the opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko, with the lack of jobs for the youth,

economic hardship occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, and perceived arrogance, incompetence, and dictatorial traits of current president Macky Sall, reported as some of the underlying factors that led to the protest (BBC, 2021; Maclean & Camara, 2021; Wade, 2022). Ironically, Macky Sall was a direct beneficiary of the 2011 protests against former President Abdoulaye Wade (Dimé, 2022; Gellar, 2021) but failed to meet the citizens' expectations. In an interview with VOA in March 2016, Fadel Baro, a coordinator of the Y'en a marre group, bemoaned Macky Sall's failure to bring extensive reform to the country and stated that he (Macky Sall) is no different from his predecessor. Macky Sall has also been massively criticized for his failure to reduce his mandate from seven to five years as he promised (France 24, 2016), and people have vowed to resist any attempt by him to usurp the constitution to seek a third term (Dia, 2023; Resnick, 2022).

These developments in countries that have experienced Africa's third wave protests have led some authors to conclude that contemporary protests in Africa have failed, as they haven't fundamentally transformed the nations (Harris & Hern, 2019). At the core of this argument is conceptualizing transformational change as the ability for protest to result in regime change and democratization and using these as the metrics to assess contemporary African protests. However, some authors disagree and assert that evaluating the successes or failures of third wave protests based on their immediate tangible outcomes is flawed (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Sanches, 2020), and thus, protests must be considered part of a longer-term reform that could take years to accomplish (Elamin, 2020).

One of the most instructive works on transformational change is "Zooming in on Protest and Change in Africa" by Edalina Rodrigues Sanches. She opines that "transformational change" as a criterion to determine the success or failure of a protest must be understood in a flexible and broad sense. She provides three criteria to analyze protest; firstly, protests can be assessed based on a scale of the degree of change, which could be either "limited" or "significant." For example, some protests alone can significantly shift the citizenry's political order or socio-economic lives. Some can result in small changes that may seem insignificant but may lay the foundation for other positive changes in societal order. Secondly, protests can be assessed based on "material" or "non-material" outcomes, in other words, tangible or intangible. The tangibles could be regime change, change in policy, prevention of prolonged presidential

bids, and improvement of economic indices such as GDP, employment rate, literacy rate, etc. The intangibles or non-material are primarily cognitive and include "citizen consciousness," "collective solidarity," "perceptions of empowerment," and imaginations about the future (Sanches, 2020, p. 219). The third is analyzing the success of a protest based on both a scale of the degree of change and on the tangible or intangible outcomes.

In the context of the third wave African protests, the intangible outcomes and the degree of change must be significantly emphasized. To make this point, Branch and Mampilly (2015) recall the approach to understanding Africa's protest as espoused by Claude Ake, an eminent Nigerian political scholar. Ake used Ghana's struggles for independence from colonial rule to explain how protests in the West African country in the late 1940s and early 1950s did not result in immediate independence from British rule but sparked a process of raising political consciousness and engagement that eventually led to the country's independence in 1957. Ake, therefore, emphasized the importance of not "judging African protest based on the immediate material outcomes according to laid-down democratic criteria but on its effect on the political consciousness and imagination of African societies" (Branch & Mampilly, 2015, p. 6). Even when a protest fails to achieve the tangible goals it has set out to achieve, it can create a feeling of empowerment and collective solidarity among the citizenry and new future imaginings, which can catalyze significant structural and transformational change (Sanches, 2020).

Conclusion

How to understand and analyze third wave protests in Africa lacks consensus (Philipps, 2016). Many features have been identified as potentially strengthening or harming protests' impacts on society. Meanwhile, knowing what comprises transformational change and when a protest can be credited with achieving that is not always straightforward. Attempts to summatively label the third protest wave as a failure or a success reduce what else we can learn from these protests and how they might influence future possibilities (Sanches, 2020). The rich detail that comes to light from carefully contextualized case studies can help scholars appreciate other ways of considering how protests affect change in societies. These insights can contribute to the protest and social movement literature on how protests in Africa should be understood

and evaluated, and on a global level, such studies will broaden existing social movement theories to encompass global south perspectives (Fadaee, 2017).

Chapter 2. Methodology

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study is: How do Ghanaians who participated in #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests for political and economic reform view the successes and failures of those protests? Supplemental questions that guided the research are: a) What were the protesters hoping to achieve with their protest (s)?; b) What elements contributed to how the protest unfolded?; and c) How do the protesters evaluate the successes and failures of their protest (s)?

Protests have contributed to shaping Ghana's political history. In the past decade, the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests have shaped and dominated the media and public conversation, especially in the period where the demonstrations were held. However, these protests have not attracted much academic exploration nationally or globally. Very few attempts have focused on the reasons for these protests, the participants involved, and the tools they employed (Andrea et al. in Sanches, 2020; Asante & Helbrecht (2018); JK Adjei, 2016; Market al., 2023). Despite these attempts, questions regarding how these protests have contributed to the country's transformation have been largely absent (Sanches, 2022). Political and social commentators in Ghana have often evaluated the successes or failures of these protests based on the number of people who have participated. These are narrow ways of assessing the impact of protests, and there is a need for more academic exploration.

As one of the pioneering works in analyzing the success or failures of protests in Ghana, this thesis seeks to undertake this project from the protesters' perspective.

Research Design: An Exploratory, Qualitative Case Study

This research comprises case studies of two protests in Ghana: #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021). The case study approach was chosen to elicit a comprehensive, in-depth, contextualized understanding and analysis of protests in Ghana. As espoused by Fyvbjerg (2011), case study research can enhance our knowledge of the empirical world. An in-depth study of a single

phenomenon unit can shed light on broad units of the same phenomena (Gerring 204) and take account of complex issues in natural human settings (Harrison et al., 2017; Ridder, 2017). I chose the case study method to elicit an understanding of real-world experiences of protest action. I appreciate that conducting a detailed and carefully contextualized study is particularly important to my aim of generating insights about protests that are informed by and relevant to the Ghanaian and potentially broader African contexts (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Tarrow, 2022).

Case Selection: The Choice of # OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry(2021)

The #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests are unique cases of protests in Ghana under the country's current 1992 Fourth Republican constitution, mainly due to their non-partisan character, the composition of protest participants, and their ability to attract global attention. Since the beginning of its fourth republican democratic dispensation, Ghana has been governed by two major political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). In the 2020 election, the two parties had amassed more than 98% of the valid votes cast at the time of the declaration of the results.

Most often, protests of national character in Ghana whose aim is to demand economic and political change have been organized, supported by, or led by the major opposition party (the NPP against an NDC government or vice versa). In some instances, such protests have been organized by unaffiliated civil society or pressure groups, such as the Committee for Joint Action Protest (CJA) (2008), Association for Accountable Governance (AFAG) (2009), Let My Vote Count Alliance (LMVC) (2015), but even then, the leaders or organizers were recognized and well-known sympathizers or card-bearing members of the major opposition party. There have also been protests by trade unions or existing organized bodies such as student unions. These protests usually have specific demands relating to their sector or members' interests (Asante & Helbrecht, 2018). The #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests, however, were protests of national character that were not aligned with any of these established organizations or political parties. During these two protests, the organizers publicly banned any political party paraphernalia to enforce their non-partisan nature.

The timing of these protests also makes them interesting to study. Both protests occurred during the second term of the governing political party. While #OcupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) happened under an NDC administration, #FixTheCountry (2021) occurred under an NPP government.

Both protests attracted significant youth participation (Ahmed et al., 2022; Noll and Budniok in Sanchez, 2022). Amongst them were young professionals who regarded themselves as "neutrals" and did not associate with any political party. Digital technology and social media played a critical role in organizing these two protests. Both gathered momentum in online spaces like Twitter and Facebook before hitting the streets, which I account for in detail in my findings.

Key Informants and Interviews

This study focuses on the experiences and perspectives of those involved in organizing the protests rather than those who just participated. I was interested in learning from individuals with in-depth knowledge about the work that goes into planning and executing a protest and how they evaluate the successes or failures of the protest. In Ghana, the leaders and organizers of protests often refer to themselves as conveners. The conveners mostly plan and design strategies for the protest. They coordinate the logistics for any mobilizations, aggregate people's concerns and demands into communiques or petitions, and publicly represent the group. For instance, when the need arises, the conveners may represent the protestors in negotiations with government bodies or authorized persons about their concerns.

In addition, there is an essential legal obligation regarding embarking on a protest in Ghana. The country's Public Order Act, 1994 [Act 491] requires the notification of the police administration about an intended event five days in advance. After the notification, the police engage the protesters to discuss the proposed dates, routes, times, and duration of the protest. The police, if they have "reasonable grounds to believe that the special event, if held, may lead to violence or endanger public defence, public order, or public safety," could take legal action to stop such an event from happening (ACT 491, clause 4). During such legal battles, the conveners represent the group in court. Long after a protest, some leaders continue to act in its name by keeping up the pressure to ensure the ruling government yields to their demands.

Due to the critical nature of the work of these conveners, they may have profound insights and a holistic understanding of the entire protest process, the plans, and the strategies employed to organize the event, and the outcomes. Such extensive insights about the protests provide an essential context within which the protests occur, which is critical to understanding, analyzing, and appreciating any transformative change protests may bring. This makes the conveners ideal key informants for this study.

Study Population

From June to August 2022, I conducted in-depth interviews with 14 subjects in Accra, Ghana. The subjects were recruited using purposive sampling and the snowball sampling method. Of the 14 subjects, nine were part of the #FixTheCountry protest, and five participated in the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest.

To identify potential key informants for this study, I first scanned through several reports of the two protests on local and international news websites. I visited the websites and social media handles of the protests. I identified conveners or prominent participants of both protests through these mediums and searched for their contacts. Due to my previous engagements as a political TV show producer in Ghana for nearly eight years, I had the contact information for a couple of them and reached out to them. For others, I resorted to the snowballing method. My initial contacts gave me contacts of the other influential members in organizing the protests.

The initial idea was to recruit ten subjects for each protest. My first interview with a participant in the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest revealed that the core group of organizers of that protest was not more than eight, and a few of the original core group of eight have relocated to other countries. Nevertheless, by the time of my fifth interview, I had reached saturation regarding the protest details. For the #FixTheCountry protest, it was not cumbersome to get to the subjects since the protest was recent and most participants were still actively involved in activism in the socio-political space. By the ninth interview, I had gathered sufficient data for this research.

Ethical Considerations

This study held minimal risks as far as the participants were concerned. The recruitment processes, data collection and analysis described below did not inflict any physical or psychological harm to any participants. The Research Ethics Board (REB) at Simon Fraser University issued a Minimal Risk Approval letter, giving ethical clearance for this thesis project.

Data Collection

The interviews were one-on-one in-person interviews, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English and audio recorded, and I was solely responsible for conducting them. 80% of the interviews were conducted in Accra, the capital city of Ghana, while 20% were conducted in neighbourhoods a few kilometres from the capital. For #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protesters, most of the interviews were held in the comfort of their private offices, conference rooms, and homes. For the #FixTheCountry, the interviews were held in public spaces such as restaurants, university campuses and spaces within shopping malls.

Informed consent, including the consent to record interviews for subsequent transcription, was obtained from all respondents. No one refused to participate in this study.

All participants were assured before and after the interviews that their identities would be kept secret, and no one could trace the information they shared with me back to them. Some of the participants who are active activists in Ghana were willing to be identified and traced to responses they provided during the interview.

At the beginning of each interview, I collected two sets of personal profile data, the first being their status and the second at the time of the protest. The profile data includes employment status and profession, education, family life, etc.

I then asked them how they got involved in the protest, their role and contribution and most importantly, if they would consider their action a success or failure.

Although I had an interview guide, the semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to ask follow-up questions and delve deeper into exciting themes during the conversation. I had a good rapport with the interviewees, and they freely shared their experiences with me.

Data Storage and Analysis

Before the conduct of interviews, I assigned each participant a pseudonym and kept a record of these assigned pseudonyms in a password-protected file on my iCloud storage account. There was no note of an individual informant's real name in my handwritten field notes or interview transcripts. This is a safety precaution to guard against the names of informants being learned by others.

Handwritten notes taken during data collection have been kept safe in a private, locked residence. All audio recordings have been saved on an encrypted hard drive in a locked safe, which I only have access to. All typed-out electronic transcripts made of them are saved as password-protected files on the same encrypted flash drives.

All interviews with respondents were transcribed. The transcribed data were manually organized and structured under broad concepts and themes identified from each narrative. Through a coding process, codes and subcodes were created to identify emerging broad themes and concepts. Each broad thematic area and concept was then deeply analyzed for deeper insights.

The following two chapters are a detailed description of how #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #FixTheCountry unfolded. The narratives have been written based on the first-hand accounts of the convenors, who played an essential role in organizing protests. They highlight how they mobilized resources, exploited opportunities available to them, and formed their messages to attract the support and attention of the Ghanaian people. Their narratives fill in the contexts in which these two protests occurred and show the convenors' ingenuity and resilience to overcome the laborious bureaucratic processes and deliberate attempts to prevent them from exercising their right to protest. The narratives tell us how the key actors experienced the protests. Following these two chapters, I combine my analysis of the impact of the two protests in

chapter 5 to draw out key insights that speak back to knowledge and questions raised in pre-existing scholarship about protests.

Chapter 3. #OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) Protest

On a wet and cloudy July morning in 2014, scores of determined Ghanaians took to the streets of the capital, Accra. The protest, dubbed #OccupyFlagstaffHouse, was met with fierce resistance from the police. However, the protesters prevailed and delivered a written petition to Flagstaff House, the residence and office of the President of Ghana. The protestors' concerns included the worsening economic hardships, fuel shortages, a resultant cost spike in the unreliable electricity supply, and general angst over the country's governance. How did the protest come about, and why was it significant?

In this chapter, I account for how the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest developed, according to the recollections of individuals who identify as its convenors. I focus on three aspects: how the protest began, unfolded, and the aftermath.

The Spontaneous Eruption of a Collective Action

Driving around Accra with a near-empty tank in search of fuel prompted one of the protest organizers to galvanize to demand better conditions for Ghanaians. That was what Paa Kwesi (not his real name) told me when I visited him in his Accra-based law chambers in 2022 to discuss the “#OccupyFlagstaffHouse” protest. As a young lawyer, Paa Kwesi's drive to court one morning was almost derailed by an unexpected fuel shortage. He found himself in a difficult situation with most fuel stations closed and the few open ones engaging in blatant price gouging. “I had to think on my feet and pleaded with a client who owned a fuel station to give me some fuel. Luckily, the client obliged, and I was able to make it to court on time,” he said, burying his forehead in the palm of his hands as he recalled the anxiety-inducing event. This experience was the catalyst for Paa Kwesi's desire to challenge and hold those in power accountable for what he and many others believed was the irresponsible governance of the ruling class at the time. “I was so upset by this experience, and on my return, I sat by my desk and drafted a letter to notify the Ghana Police Service of an intent to occupy the Flagstaff House to protest.” The letter was signed by the “Concerned Ghanaians for Responsible Governance (CGRG),” a name Paa Kwesi coined spontaneously that afternoon. Having taken the

first step, he reached out to some friends he knew were just as frustrated with the country's state as he was and got them to co-sign the letter of intent to the police.

One such friend was Mensah (not his real name), an engineer who was on the brink of being seconded to the prestigious Flagstaff House when he decided to participate in a protest against the very government he was soon to serve. In a cozy restaurant in Dzorwulu, a well-off suburb in Accra, with the soft sounds of high-life music transmitting from inconspicuous speakers, I sat down with Mensah in 2022. I asked what could have motivated a young man with an envious opportunity to oppose the government. "Dumsor," he said sharply, referring to the frequent power outages that had plagued the country at the time. "Dumsor" is a word coined from a Ghanaian local language, Akan, which means "off and on." For Mensah, the lack of stable electricity meant that his household and scores of others in his neighbourhood only had sporadic access to power for an average of ten days per month. "When I close from work," he explained, "I would have to call the house to find out whether the lights are on or off. ... Sometimes, even with the confirmation that the lights are on, you will get home only to realize it has been taken off. The situation was unbearable!" According to him, he posted on Facebook about his willingness to join a protest against "dumsor." "So when Paa Kwesi reached out to me with his intention to organize one, I did not hesitate to give my support," he said proudly.

These young people were not the only ones fed up. Some notable and influential persons in society became associated with this protest. One such person was Mr. Appiah (not his real name), a high-profile and prominent member of one of the strong civil society organizations in Ghana and a known political activist and analyst often appearing on major TV and radio channels in Ghana. He collaborated with the convenors and invited people in his network to participate in the protest. He felt it was time to show the leaders that relatively comfortable people were upset with their bad governance. "As civil society, we talk, we debate, we win the arguments, but they [the ruling elites] go ahead to do what they want anyway, so I felt it was time to move from the intellectual activism...we were so upset that we were ready to confront the government physically but lawfully," he said.

While energy issues compelled Paa Kwesi and Mensah to organize and join the protest, for Koranteng (also not his real name), another renowned lawyer, the tipping

point was the revelation that some government officials had chartered an aircraft to transport three million dollars to a disgruntled Ghanaian football team participating in a tournament. Koranteng, who was in London then, recalled precisely where he was when he first heard the news: a grocery shop. He spoke of how shocked and embarrassed he was when the cashier at the checkout looked at him and remarked, "Oh, Ghana, a rich country." According to Koranteng, that comment stung. When he arrived in Ghana on the day of the protest, he drove directly from the airport to the protest gathering point.

Recruitment of Protest Participants

The six people who appended their signatures to the letter addressed to the police became the group's original core members and referred to themselves as conveners. The conveners settled on Tuesday, July 1, 2014, as the day of the protest. This was no random date; July 1st, 1960, was the day Ghana became a republic, a significant historical event commemorated as a national holiday until 2017. They set up a petition on change.org to gather support for their cause and contacted their networks to join the protest and broadly spread the word via social media. It was unpredictable how many people might join them.

One early step the conveners took was to fulfill the legal requirement to notify the police. However, the young protesters had not received any reply just days before the planned protest. Paa Kwesi was not concerned. As a lawyer, he knew that per the Public Order Act, they were only required to notify the police of their protest, not seek their permission. He believed that the lack of acknowledgement from the police could have stemmed from the group's unknown status and the fact that the signatories did not influence Ghana's social setting at the time.

Barely days before the protest, a renowned actress shared the group's letter on her Facebook wall, calling out the Ghana Police Service for their refusal to respond or acknowledge the group's notification for the protest. Within hours, the post went viral, and the hashtag #OccupyFlagstaffHouse was trending on all social media platforms, catching the attention of mainstream media outlets, radio, and television stations. Suddenly, the conveners were thrown into the limelight, granting numerous media interviews. As a producer at one of the leading television stations in Ghana at the time, I vividly remember the chaos this viral news created in our newsroom, with journalists

scrambling to get the group members to speak on our network and producers were busy researching the group and their cause.

As the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest continued to gain momentum, Supporters took to social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, and spread the calls for the July 1 #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest. The digital realm became a hotbed of activism, with users from all corners of Ghana and beyond joining the conversation. As some conveners observed, the hashtag took on a life of its own, drawing attention to their planned protest in ways even they had not anticipated.

As the impending protest continued to create a nationwide buzz, the police could not ignore the notice of protest they had been served. On the eve of the event, the police invited the conveners to a meeting that conveners went into with apprehension. "The Ghana Police had the penchant of securing ex-parte injunctions on protests, but because they were late to react, they only had the Monday 30th of June to invoke such legal gymnastics," according to Mensah. "But fortunately for us, the courts of Ghana were on a break that day." With no possibility of getting an injunction against the protest, the police demanded that the protesters change their route, citing security concerns about their plan to occupy the Flagstaff House. However, the protesters refused to back down. Paa Kwesi explained that occupying the Flagstaff House was essential to send a clear message to the President. "The president came to our homes when he needed our votes, and we wanted to go to his home so he could hear us." The meeting between the police and the organizers ended without an agreement, leaving everyone on edge. It was unclear what would happen next. Would the police use force to disperse the protesters? Would the protest lose its momentum?

1st July 2014 – Day of Protest

The protesters did not have any elaborate strategy other than to occupy the seat of government. They spent only a few hours strategizing or holding meetings. Mensah confirmed that they never met as a group before the day of the protest, and there were some signatories to the letter he had never met.

One deliberate element of their coordination was the absence of a clear hierarchical leadership structure. According to Paa Kwesi, this was to prevent anyone

from being targeted by the government or the security institutions. Therefore, they referred to themselves as convenors, demonstrating their commitment to working together as equals to achieve their shared goals.

As the day of the protest dawned, the organizers were filled with anxiety. For Paa Kwesi, he was worried the day might not go as planned, and people would not show up. Despite the doubts, he remained resolute in his determination to protest, even if he had to do it alone. Not even his father's persuasive words could sway him. His father had tried to persuade him to abandon his activism for fear of being targeted or harmed before, during or after the protest.

He was not alone; Mensah described how he was gripped with fear and anxiety on the morning of the protest. His mother had learned of his involvement through family members and friends who had seen him on TV and heard him on the radio. She tried to dissuade him from attending for fear of his safety. Like Paa Kwesi, Mensah also worried about the turnout. However, his belief that he was on a just cause encouraged him to stand up for what he believed in. At dawn, he left the house to buy a megaphone and reached the starting point.

The Afua Sutherland Park had been advertised as the starting point of the protest. Attendees were to arrive at about 8 a.m. and then march on foot for about 2.8 kilometres on Independence Avenue to the Flagstaff House, where they would occupy the building and present their petition to the president. By 7:45 a.m., only a handful of people had arrived, and to make matters worse, it started to rain. Paa Kwesi and Mensah could not help but feel a sense of unease as they watched the small group of protesters getting soaked in the rain. Would this be all? Would they be standing alone in the shower, their voices unheard and their message ignored? As they braced themselves for disappointment, they could not help but feel a flicker of hope as they saw more and more cars start to arrive. "People came in their Benzs, Land Cruisers, BMWs, and many of them were well-known and highly rated professionals from diverse fields," Mensah recalled. The police arrived in full force, armed and ready for combat. They came with hot water cannons and heavy vehicles. Scores of journalists from various media outlets were also in attendance, with some providing live coverage of the event.

A little over a hundred people gathered at the meeting grounds for the protest, but the police refused to let them begin the march. "We managed to force our way out onto the street, but the police quickly formed a barricade and blocked the road before us. We immediately sat on the floor on the road while some people exchanged words with the police." Mensah recounted.

While reliving their encounter with the police, Mr. Appiah seemed emotional. "It was not funny, my brother, it was not," he said, his words punctuated by deep breaths. "I was on the frontline, and it was intense. The police had readied themselves to unleash on us; their water cannon and all other weapons had been ready. It felt like one wrong move could have resulted in a casualty, with the way the policemen were dressed and armed to the teeth." At this point in our interview, he paused momentarily to answer a knock on his door. It was his wife dropping off an item. He smiled and said, "My wife was unhappy with me for putting myself at such risk." When we resumed the interview, I asked him why the stand-off had occurred in the first place. He explained that the police had insisted that the protesters remain confined to the park, as the Flagstaff House is a designated security zone. However, the protesters, determined to march to the seat of government and make their voices heard, had refused to comply. He explained that it was a tense and dangerous situation, with both sides unwilling to back down.

The police eventually managed to push the protesters back, trapping them within the confines of the Afua Sutherland Children's Park and securing the main entrance. Meanwhile, the live coverage of the event on traditional and social media had drawn more attention to the protest, increasing the number of protesters. However, attempts to overpower the police personnel and break out of the park failed.

Defeated, the protesters gave up and started chanting to go home. They retreated to the parking area to get into their cars, drove to the park's main entrance and began honking in frustration to be allowed to leave. The police eventually opened the gates and let them go. After all, they thought they had succeeded in foiling the protest, said Mensah with a broad smile.

Little did the police know that the protesters had hatched a plan while confined. "It was a strategy we had hatched, thinking on our feet," Mr. Appiah explained in a hushed tone. "We quickly sent around information among ourselves via text messages,

telling everyone to leave the park in their cars as if to go home, but to reconvene at a restaurant called Afrikiko, a few meters away from the Flagstaff house." Thus, as the protesters left the park, they went in different directions as though heading to their various homes while rerouting to converge at the newly designated meeting point. The protesters' ingenuity completely outwitted the police.

The Flagstaff House is located on the Liberation Road adjacent to the former French embassy. On the opposite side of the street from the embassy lies the Afrikiko restaurant. This cozy eatery is a popular haunt of the middle class and civil servants who work in the vicinity. Its spacious compound, large car park, and numerous trees and plants make it an ideal relaxing spot. Close to the restaurant is an intersection, usually with police officers stationed there, to ensure a smooth traffic flow. Located barely a kilometre from the restaurant is the headquarters of the Ghana Police Service. Despite the proximity to law enforcement agencies, the arrival of the protesters at the Afrikiko restaurant in their cars did not raise any alarm. They stepped out of their vehicles and started chanting and organizing themselves to begin their march as the live coverage resumed on social and traditional media platforms.

The air was tense as the protesters marched towards the Flagstaff House, determined to make their voices heard. They did not go unnoticed for long; within a short time, police officers were quickly mobilized to the area. The peaceful demonstration was again met with aggression from the police. Mr. Appiah narrated how he had to risk his safety in solidarity with two young men who were arrested and thrown into a waiting police pick-up. Without hesitation, he jumped into the pick-up with them to protect them. "Those two young people were unknown, and anything could have happened to them," he said. "I knew that I had to act. I am a lawyer, a known figure, and I knew that it would be difficult for the police to harm me or those boys in my presence." It was a dangerous move, but Mr. Appiah knew he had to do what was right, he said in defence of his actions. He stayed with them at the police station, challenging the lawfulness of the arrest. He also called on other lawyers who came to the station to provide support, and they all stayed until the two young men were eventually released.

Amid the clashes, an agreement was reached between the protesters and police. It was decided that only four of the organizers would be allowed to walk to the Flagstaff House, accompanied by a select group of reporters from mainstream media outlets. It

was a risky option as they had yet to learn what they were walking into, but they hoped it would be enough to get their message across to the president. After navigating through the heavily guarded streets, the four organizers finally arrived at the presidency. The tension in the air was palpable as they handed over their petition to the Chief of Staff, who accepted it on behalf of the president.

As they returned to Afrikiko, the organizers could feel the moment's weight on their shoulders. The four were met with cheers and applause. Despite overwhelming opposition, they had done what many thought was impossible and shown that their voices could still be heard. It has been estimated that about 500 people participated in the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest.

From #OccupyFlagstaffHouse to Occupy Ghana

The protest dominated media attention in Ghana and sparked the emergence of Occupy Ghana, a civil society organization. This non-partisan group was formed to follow through with the demands made during the protest and hold the government accountable. The group gained traction in the Ghanaian socio-political space. The protest's impact had given this group a voice, and they were soon called upon as panellists on many leading political programs in the country. They were deliberately non-partisan and issued press statements on issues of national concern and organized public forums, roundtable discussions and seminars to criticize government policies and provide alternative ideas and solutions. Koranteng, who became one of the founders of Occupy Ghana, said he believed that the group's post-protest publicity and pressure the group sustained was why people still remembered the protest.

The leading members of Occupy Ghana were not immune to the dangers that came with their newfound political visibility. The path they had chosen, which had catapulted them to the forefront of Ghanaian politics, was riddled with security challenges, including constant intimidation and harassment, that some believed to be state-sponsored. Mr. Appiah revealed they had friends in the corridors of power who warned them always to be vigilant because their work did not please those in power.

Koranteng's voice grew stern as he talked about the security challenges, "You hear whispers – 'Watch your back,'" he said, emphasizing the gravity of the situation.

Paa Kwesi's office was ransacked, and his tablet and hard drive were stolen. Other members of the group received numerous threats. Some members would leave meetings in public places only to find that the bolts on their car tires had been loosened. And then there were the two members who had acid poured on their car tires.

In addition to the personal risks they faced, some group members also suffered severe consequences in their professional lives. Mr. Appiah, despite his extensive expertise, found himself unable to secure any government contracts. For Mensah, not only was he dropped from the list of persons seconded to the Flagstaff House, but he was also excluded from all sensitive projects his ministry was undertaking. These actions were intended to undermine the group's efforts, but none were deterred. "I have chosen to be a Ghanaian, and I am dedicated to seeing Ghana work," declared Mr. Appiah, showing his unwavering commitment to the cause.

To put more pressure on the government, the group subsequently organized another protest called Red Friday later that same year. They called on the public to wear red to work on Fridays to pressure the government to address the concerns raised in their petition during the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest. Grievances included increased utility tariffs, high taxes on petroleum products, the controversial emergency power plant purchase agreement famously known as the Ameri deal, and corruption. The citizenry responded massively as many wore red to work, including people in the informal sector, such as traders and market sellers. This continued for a couple of weeks.

Despite the impact of Occupy Ghana in the Ghanaian political space, news of a split within the group was reported by the media a few months after the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest. This came as a shock to many, given the group's impact. According to my interviews with some members, this break-up was chiefly a result of differences in ideology and modus operandi regarding how the group should proceed. While some members favoured boots on the streets, others preferred the intellectual route, such as challenging the ruling elite in debates and the courts and scrutiny of government policies backed by sound research. Those who chose the intellectual aspect stayed with Occupy Ghana, while the others who favoured bringing people into street protests broke away to form a new group called Citizen Ghana Movement.

Koranteng, one of the people who remained in the Occupy Ghana group, was quick to defend why he stayed. "Some wanted action! Some of us were like, for what?" said Koranteng. To him, real sustainable results require more than just hitting the street. He believed the protest was too dangerous an enterprise as one risked being brutalized by the police. "My main argument was that let us fight where they cannot hurt us!" he said passionately. Mensah shared similar sentiments with Koranteng. Coupled with the dangers associated with street protests, Koranteng also believed that the masses were growing apathetic to that method of activism, citing the short-lived interest in the offshoot Red Friday movement.

Others, such as Paa Kwesi and Mr. Appiah, had a different viewpoint. Although they appreciate the apprehension about going on street protests, they believe it is an effective way to achieve concrete results. Mr. Appiah, who strongly supported the idea of 'boots on the ground,' recounted his years of political activism through a civil society organization without tangible outcomes and saw the protest as a platform to demand change from the ruling elite.

In essence, they all agreed that it was necessary to hold the government accountable, but they disagreed on the methodology to achieve this goal.

The breakaway group held their conviction that taking to the streets yields results. Having formed the Citizen Ghana Movement, they successfully organized several demonstrations, including "Dumsor Must Stop," in May 2015, which involved collaborating with celebrities to pressure the government to resolve the electricity crisis. Meanwhile, those who stayed with the Occupy Ghana movement worked to make it a significant and influential civil society group in Ghana's political landscape today.

Key Elements From #OccupyFlagstaffHouse Protest

The #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 protest drew intense interest. In their narrative accounts, the convenors highlighted elements that contributed significantly to how the protest turned out. These factors include the spontaneous eruption of the protests, leadership structures, and the role of social media, which are all characteristics noted of other recent protests across Africa. The protest's non-partisan approach and the actions

of the police were other distinctive elements contributing to how the protest unfolded and its impacts.

Leveraging social influence for protest success

Social influence and reputation proved instrumental to how the protest turned out. #OccupyFlagstaffHouse highlights the role of one such influential figure, Mr. Appiah, who played a central role in mobilizing support. With his high social status, his endorsement of the protest carried significant weight and appealed to his network of high-profile middle-class citizens and other non-governmental organizations. This stresses the importance of social networks to protest participation, which has already been emphasized in social movement theories (Gould, 2003; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Passy, 2001). Also worth noting is the support from the renowned actress Ama K Abebrese. Her post drew the public's attention to the notification letter about the protest, which the Ghana Police had ignored. Her solidarity exposed the police intimidation of the group, caused awareness, and courted public affection towards the protest.

The critical role of social media

Social media and ICT tools were vital in organizing the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest. The narration highlighted how social media helped individuals with political and socio-economic grievances to organize a protest. This affirms Ajay Seebaluck's findings that a direct connection exists between internet usage and the probability of social protests where political and economic issues are present. Also, contemporary protests use the internet and social media to disseminate their message (Bosch, 2017; Ekine, 2010; Luescher et al., 2017). In this case, Facebook and hashtag deployment helped mobilize people for the protest and spread the movement's messages.

In addition to the established theory that social networks influence protest participation (Gould, 2003; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Passy, 2001), the case shows how the protest gained momentum via a celebrity's post of police unresponsiveness and how social media coverage of police clashes attracted more participants. This, in addition to Hussain and Howard's (2012) observation that the dissemination of a self-immolation video by Mohamed Bouazizi contributed to the Tunisian revolution, suggests

that the sharing of tragic or intimidating incidents could motivate people to show support for protesters and join their cause.

Leadership structure and internal complexities

To minimize potential victimization and shield themselves from perceived co-optation, #OccupyFlagstaffHouse strategically adopted a non-hierarchical leadership structure where the organizers have equal leadership status and consider themselves convenors. This reflects an observation made in existing scholarship that a decentralized leadership structure can be more effective as it lessens vulnerability to suppression or cooptation by authorities (Gerlach & Hine 1970:34—56, cited in Jenkins 1985; Branch & Mampilly, 2015) However, the eventual breakup of the convenors due to ideological differences supports the argument that the lack of a centralized leadership makes movements conflict-prone (Gamson, 1975; McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977).

The debate on the most suitable leadership structure for the third wave protests is ongoing. Honwana (2013) contends that protesters' choice of horizontal and non-hierarchical leadership structure negatively affects their movement. In sharp contrast, Elamin (2020), in analyzing the Sudan December revolution, rejects the seemingly leaderless description of the movement and states that it is rather “leaderfull” and makes it powerful. The case of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse highlights the advantages and limitations of non-hierarchical leadership. Although their preference for a less hierarchical leadership structure insulated them from leaders from being suppressed or co-opted by political elites or the state, it affected their unity after the protest.

The spontaneous eruption of the protests

The interviews with the convenors of the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 protest highlighted the relatively spontaneous decision to take to the streets. As shown, the idea to occupy the Flagstaff House, mobilization of the first team of convenors, and writing to notify the Ghana police about their intent to protest all occurred in 24 hours. According to them, the spontaneity of the protest shows a genuine expression of grievances, which courted the empathy and solidarity of diverse stakeholders.

'Non-partisanship' approach

Throughout the protest, the convenors consistently rejected any form of solidarity or assistance from the opposition political parties. The emergence of a non-partisanship movement independent of the two major political parties was welcomed and helped the movement establish credibility. Such a perception of neutrality attracted resourceful individuals with diverse expertise who were otherwise disengaged from politics. These individuals supported the movement with their technical knowledge and time.

The role of the Ghana Police

The actions of the Ghana Police Service were pivotal to how the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest unfolded. The Ghana Police's blatant disregard of the initial notice of protest prompted the celebrity's Facebook post, which then shot the protest to prominence. As the convenors recalled, most people were triggered by the perception of intimidation of the group by the police. According to some of the convenors, the clash with police on the day of the protest increased the protest turnout.

Some of these factors, such as the role of social media and leadership structures, are well-recognized in existing scholarship. However, other factors, such as the effect of the actions of the police and the non-partisanship approach to the protest, are less adequately theorized. Therefore, more academic attention to these elements would contribute significantly to understanding the present protest wave in Ghana and Africa.

Chapter 4. #FixTheCountry (2021) Protest

Barely four months after President Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo was sworn into office for his second term as president of the Republic of Ghana after having won the 2020 general elections comfortably with over 500,000 votes, a powerful wave of discontent surged through some sections of the Ghanaian population. Fueled by various frustrations and a burning desire for change, people took to the streets in a passionate protest, demanding nothing short of a complete overhaul of their beloved nation. Their rallying cry? "Fix the country!" "What exactly do you want fixed?" asked government functionaries and journalists. The resolute reply echoed unwavering conviction: "What in Ghana does not need fixing?"

From Tweets to Street Protest

Like many other nations, Ghana's economic foundations were shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic. The annual GDP growth rate in 2020 was under 1%, and the debt to GDP had risen to 76.1% (2021 Ghana Budget Statement). According to the data on Statistica, 694,000 full-time equivalent jobs were lost in Ghana in 2020. To restore microeconomic stability, the government, in its 2021 budget statement, put forward proposals to increase taxes. These included a 1% increase in the National Health Insurance Levy (NHIL), a 1% point increase in the VAT flat rate, a new sanitation and pollution levy, a 5.7% increase in fuel prices, and the introduction of a new gaming policy that would tax incomes accrued from online betting and games (Yeboah, 2021). In addition to the economic hardship already experienced by Ghanaians, these revenue generation measures led to frustration, particularly among the youth. During these tumultuous times, a Ghanaian Twitter influencer named KALYJAY emerged as a catalyst for a nationwide movement.

KALYJAY took to social media on May 2, 2021, and, tweet after tweet, shed light on the pressing issues facing Ghanaians and highlighted the daily struggles of ordinary Ghanaian workers. One text read: "Taxes are going up, but salaries remain the same. Please #FixTheCountry." (KALYJAY, 2021/05/02). Another tweet from KALYJAY exposed the stark disparities: "V8 baako tumi si school dan! [The cost of one V8 vehicle can build one school block.] #FixTheCountry"(KALYJAY, 2021/05/02). The message

served as a poignant reminder of misplaced priorities, contrasting government officials' choices to purchase new vehicles over providing the necessary infrastructure for public education. In another tweet, he highlighted the plight of Electoral Commission officials: "EC officials have not been paid since December. #FixTheCountry" (KALYJAY, 2021/05/02).

Ghanaians retweeted KALYJAY's messages and adding their voices to the chorus. Within 24 hours, the #FixTheCountry surged to the number one trending hashtag on Twitter in Ghana with 325,000 hits (getdaytrends.com, May 3rd, 2021, 17hr GMT). The #FixTheCountry maintained its prominent position over four months and became a powerful declaration demanding transformative change.

As the #FixTheCountry continued reverberating across social media, a group of passionate activists emerged as leaders of the movement. This core group of dedicated individuals also called themselves "convenors." These individuals became the driving force, working to safeguard and nurture the momentum that had begun.

However, this 'movement' had not occurred in a vacuum, as I discovered during my interviews with some convenors. Okyere (not his real name), who was a 22-year-old student at the time of the protest and has temporarily put his education on hold to dedicate himself to activism fully, shared valuable insights into the genesis of the phenomenon. He revealed that a group of Ghanaian youth had established an online movement called Speak-up Ghana. They used digital spaces like Twitter to openly discuss and express their opinions about the societal challenges in Ghana. KALYJAY was an active member of this group, so when he used #FixTheCountry, it resonated among the other members of Speak-up Ghana, who swiftly rallied behind him, adopting the hashtag and amplifying their collective voice. According to Okyere, they expanded their reach to influential youth figures, including young professionals, media personalities, activists, and renowned personalities from the music and film industries.

One such person is Twum, a young and dynamic lawyer who became very influential in the legal affairs of #FixTheCountry. As we sat face to face in the cozy confines of his law chambers, he shared an interesting perspective about the #FixTheCountry. He revealed a historical background that even the hashtag originator and some advocates might not have been conscious of. Twum recounted an

impassioned speech in May 2009 by the current president, Nana Akufo Addo, who, despite the incumbency advantage, narrowly lost in the runoff of the 2008 presidential elections to John Evans Atta Mills of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). Fueled by frustration at the new Mills administration's incessant blaming of the previous NPP government for Ghana's woes, Nana Akufo Addo said to Mills, "If you say that the system is broken, fix it." Twum emphasized the irony of the situation as the #FixTheCountry had occurred under the leadership of Nana Akufo Addo, the person who had once uttered those powerful words. He believed this historical context added depth to the movement's resonance among the Ghanaian populace.

Amongst the people who also joined the convenors of #FixTheCountry were members of the Economic Fighters League (EFL), a well-known activist group in Ghana. On a scorching afternoon in Accra, I met Ayikoi, a political activist and a prominent member of the EFL. Our rendezvous had been arranged at a department of a major hospital in the city. Inside the vast conference room with a stage and rows of empty seats in the auditorium, Ayikoi and I settled at a corner table. This was my first one-on-one conversation with Ayikoi, although I had followed his activism in Ghana for quite some time. As I introduced myself and recounted our intersecting paths near and far, I noticed relief in his eyes. Despite disclosing my identity before our meeting, he was still trying to figure out my intent.

EFL stood out as the only institutional convenor to participate in #FixTheCountry. Intrigued by their decision, I probed Ayikoi about EFL's motivations. He said they viewed this movement as a potential revolution and had joined to provide guidance. Frustration with the two major political parties, NDC and NPP, was evident in Ayikoi's words. He passionately exclaimed, "Ghanaians have been trapped in this perpetual cycle of the NDC and NPP. We must break free from this duopoly and imagine ourselves beyond their limited options. We deserve better." Ayikoi also sheds light on the marginalization of youth in Ghana despite their significant representation in the population. He stated, "We are around 60% of the population, yet our voices are ignored, and our concerns are brushed aside. The decisions made by our current leaders have far-reaching consequences for our future. We cannot be reduced to mere cheerleaders. We deserve a seat at the table." Ayikoi's frustration was evident. He exclaimed, "Our elders take on loans that future generations must repay. It is unjust. We cannot continue down this path. We need a system prioritizing our country's and its people's long-term well-being.

With these and other concerns in mind, EFL chose to join the emerging movement." After joining, EFL was pivotal in transforming #FixTheCountry from a social media hashtag to a tangible, on-the-ground movement. Ayikoi narrated, "We swiftly activated all our structures nationwide, galvanized our members to participate in the online campaign, and mobilized our resources to make the #FixTheCountry visible in several communities across Ghana."

Apart from the EFL, some individuals independently joined the #FixTheCountry convenors. Bamfo, an activist, and television presenter who works with a leading Ghanaian media conglomerate, was among them. Reflecting on his decision, Bamfo shared, "When I first heard about #FixTheCountry, I did not pay much attention. However, someone told me their cause aligns with my activism, and that is when I decided to get involved." Bamfo expressed his concerns, saying, "When our peers travel abroad, and within a year, they are building houses back home, it is evident that something is gravely wrong with our system that urgently needs fixing." His almost high-pitched words carried a weight of frustration, and I could feel what this meant to him. Leveraging his position as an on-air media personality at the media conglomerate where he works, he garnered support. He actively promoted the #FixTheCountry activities in their programming, amplifying their message to a broader audience. Additionally, Bamfo actively contacted other activists with significant social media followings. In his own words, he shared, "I urged fellow activists who had a substantial reach on social media to come and contribute their voice to this important cause. And to my delight, they answered the call."

Through their extensive networks and personal connections, a diverse group of influential people gradually joined the #FixTheCountry as convenors, and their collaborative effort propelled the hashtag to prominence.

The convenors created a group on Telegram's social media platform to hold discussions. Through deliberations on the platform, the idea of taking the #FixTheCountry movement to the streets emerged. Twum emphasized the importance of engaging people beyond the confines of social media, stating, "There were many individuals who were at the receiving end of bad governance but were not active on social media. We needed to translate the energy and conversations happening online into real-world action because governance affected people's lives on the ground." Naa, a

30-year-old lawyer who had joined the convenors through EFL, expressed the need for the youth to rise and speak out. "When things are not right, we should not sit and say 'Nyame b3 y3' (God will do it). We must rise and speak up to get them fixed!" she exclaimed, brimming with passion and emotion.

Taking Their Grievances to the Streets

The convenors decided on May 9th, 2021, as the day to embark on a street protest and made this plan public. However, this scheduling coincided with the government scrambling to procure vaccines for the population to combat the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As of April 30th, the country had reported 92,683 cases, with 1,584 active patients and 779 deaths (UNICEF - GHANA COVID-19 Situation Report #17). Although the vaccination drive had commenced a week prior, and the number of active cases gradually declined, strict COVID-19 protocols and restrictions on large gatherings remained. The annual Kwahu Easter celebration, one of Ghana's major events during the Easter season, had even been cancelled as a precautionary measure. Thus, deciding to hold a street protest during this delicate time raised some concerns. Nevertheless, the convenors wrote to the Ghana Police Service to notify them of their intent to go on a street protest as required per Ghana's Public Order Act. The police, citing COVID-19 restrictions and public health concerns, denied their request.

Armed with their extensive legal knowledge, the convenors stood firm in their decision to proceed with the protest, undeterred by the police's refusal. As I sat across a beautiful dining table in the home of Nimako, who was another lawyer within their ranks, he elucidated their stance, saying, "We were fully aware of our rights, and we understood that we did not require permission from the police but only needed to inform them. While we acknowledged the police's concerns, we clarified that we would proceed regardless. After all, anti-mandate protests were happening in Europe and North America, which had been badly hit by Covid 19. Also, Ghana had recently conducted a general election amidst the threat of COVID-19. Therefore, using public health as a reason to deny us our democratic right was simply unacceptable."

Just days before the scheduled protest, the police, sensing the unwavering determination of the protestors, sought a court order ex-parte and obtained a perpetual injunction on the protest, effectively prohibiting the demonstrators from taking to the

streets until all COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. The news left the members of the #FixTheCountry and their supporters seething with anger as they took to social media to vent their frustration. They, however, refused to let the injunction derail their cause and decided to challenge the order in court.

Adapting to Challenges and the Name-And-Shame Campaign

Meanwhile, to keep up with the momentum while challenging the legality of the police's injunction, the convenors launched an online protest called the 'Name and Shame' campaign. The idea was for people to hold up a placard with the #FixTheCountry, stand next to an issue in their communities they wanted fixed, take a photo, share it on social media, and tag the Member of Parliament (MP) responsible for their area. The #NameandShame campaign resonated across social media platforms, sparking widespread discussions and highlighting development issues in many parts of the country. According to Okyere, the online campaign garnered an astounding 10,000 hits just a day after its launch.

Among the convenors were technologically savvy individuals like Okyere, who shared with me how he identified other IT experts who sympathized with their cause and were eager to lend their expertise to support it. With a team of five IT experts, the group undertook the challenge of sifting through tweets. The convenors recognized that #FixTheCountry held different meanings depending on people's experiences and immediate circumstances. Their efforts focused on curating and analyzing this vast stream of information, aiming to comprehensively understand the prevailing issues that resonated with their supportive community.

According to Okyere, as they delved into the sea of posts, four key pillars emerged as the focal points, shaping the narrative of the movement:

1. **New Constitution:** There was a resounding call for a complete overhaul of Ghana's constitution, considered outdated and unsuitable for the new generation. They believed a new constitution would pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive society.
2. **National Development Plan:** There was an emphasis on the importance of a comprehensive and well-defined national development plan. They stressed the need for a strategic roadmap to

guide Ghana's progress and address pressing issues such as infrastructure development, economic growth, and social welfare.

3. **Trust in Democracy and Governance:** The erosion of trust in democratic institutions and governance was a recurring theme. Contributors expressed discontent with corruption, lack of transparency, and inefficiencies within the system. They called for greater accountability and integrity in public office to restore faith in democracy.
4. **Judicial Reform:** The judicial system came under scrutiny, with contributors highlighting concerns about its fairness, impartiality, and delays in justice delivery. There was a demand for reforms to ensure a more effective and accessible judiciary where the rule of law is upheld, and justice is served promptly.

Within the multitude of concerns raised, the call for a new constitution resonated strongly among the convenors and their supporters. Many firmly believed that Ghana's 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution had exceeded its usefulness and required a comprehensive overhaul. Ayikoi passionately declared, "We do not seek a mere revision or amendment; we demand a new constitution that caters to the needs of the new generation. Meaningful change cannot be achieved if the rules themselves are flawed." A specific concern expressed about the constitution is the marginalization of the youth within the governance system. When I was sitting across a table with Asantewaa, also a convenor and a known media personality interested in youth development., in a small smoothie bar on the outskirts of Accra, she questioned rhetorically, "Why does our constitution grant individuals aged 18 and above the right to vote but restrict them from being eligible to stand for Parliament until they reach 21? And why can one only run for the presidency after age 40?" The ambiance of the smoothie bar seemed to fade into the background as her words hung in the air, inviting deep reflection on the inequalities embedded within Ghana's political landscape. "These disparities within the constitution," she continued, "highlight the need for a more inclusive and youth-centric governance framework." Hence, another slogan; "A new constitution for a new generation."

Overall, the convenors were pleasantly surprised at the Ghanaians' overwhelming support expressed through the 'Name and Shame' campaign. "With the anger demonstrated through the online protest, we became more resolute and emboldened to take this to the streets," said Nimako. Above all, he expressed, "It was time to show the political class that we were not faceless or hidden individuals on the internet but brave enough to reveal our faces on the streets."

Challenging the Status Quo: The Legal Battle for the Right to Protest

With the injunction secured by the police from the court, the protestors were barred from hitting the streets. This legal roadblock triggered a protracted legal battle from May through July. The case wound its way through the intricacies of the judicial system, from the High Court to the Supreme Court and back again. The protestors grew increasingly convinced that specific influential figures within the government were determined to quash their right to protest. Twum confided, "It was evident that there were individuals in power who were adamant about preventing us from carrying out the protest. But we were committed and ready to assert our rights."

The Ghanaian press closely followed every development, ensuring extensive coverage of the court proceedings. Thus, amid the arduous legal battle, the #FixTheCountry movement remained in the spotlight, capturing the nation's attention. The court dates came with their tumultuous moments, becoming the center stage of an unfolding drama. Instances of physical assaults and the arrests of numerous #FixTheCountry activists near the court created controversy, igniting even more anger and amplifying the visibility of the movement.

Asantewaa shared a harrowing incident, recounting how she was physically harassed for taking out her phone to livestream an altercation at the court complex gate. The police had attempted to prevent her and her colleagues from entering the premises en masse, donning t-shirts with #FixTheCountry logos. Determined to document the intimidation, she transmitted the scene live on social media using her phone. However, one of the police officers took offence and resorted to physical aggression, forcefully grabbing her hair and bringing her to the ground.

Another incident occurred on June 25th during a court proceeding, where 15 members of the #FixTheCountry convenors were arrested for peacefully holding placards with inscriptions while standing on the road in front of the courts. After spending several hours at the police station, they were granted bail. Twum observed that the actions of the police to frustrate the movement only served to heighten interest and participation in the protest. He remarked, "I dare say that if it had not been for the deliberate attempts by the police to prevent the protest from happening, it would not

have gained such widespread support, and perhaps many people would not have shown up." Therefore, the confrontations with law enforcement agencies catalyzed the public and fostered a greater awareness among the population.

After weeks of intense courtroom battles, a five-member Supreme Court panel unanimously declared that the High Court exceeded its jurisdiction in imposing an indefinite order that prohibited the applicants from demonstrating. Therefore, the High Court's order was quashed, clearing the path for the convenors of #FixTheCountry to proceed with their planned street protest. The ruling marked a significant victory for the group, finally granting them the legal freedom to take their grievances to the streets and make their voices heard, or so they thought.

The protesters' jubilation was cut short when the police administration issued a press statement stating that the Supreme Court ruling only quashed the injunction but not the substantive case about their plan to protest, pending at the High Court. The High Court, however, subsequently ruled against the Ghana Police Service in the pending case, and the police officially announced on July 19th that the group was now free to proceed with the protest.

Strategizing for the Protest

The convenors wasted no time setting the date for the long-awaited demonstration: August 4, 2021. August 4th holds immense significance in Ghana's political history. It marks the formation of the United Gold Coast Convention, the country's first political party that began the movement for Ghana's independence from colonial rule. The protesters planned to march through some principal streets of Ghana's capital, Accra. The destination and culmination of the march was set to take place at the iconic Independence Square, situated in the heart of the Accra central district.

However, even with their legal triumph, the #FixTheCountry convenors could not escape the red tape of official procedures. The Supreme Court and the High Court rulings may have removed the ban on protesting. However, it did not exempt them from following the constitutional process, which included notifying the police about their intentions and plans. "Despite the ruling, the police were still intent on frustrating us. They insisted on a different route than what we had planned, citing concerns about

potential risks to public safety and even potential terrorist attacks. We were willing to make concessions this time because the route was insignificant compared to our larger goal of expressing our grievances through the protest.” Naa said.

As the day of the protest approached, ensuring the safety of the protesters became a top priority for the convenors. Drawing from their experiences with past protests, the tension that has built up between them and the police and their encounters with police brutality, they focused their attention on how to organize a violence-free protest. To this end, one of the crucial measures they implemented was the deployment of marshals. These would be peers in uniform who would serve as intermediaries between the police and the protestors. Their presence aimed to prevent confrontations and maintain a peaceful atmosphere. The marshals discussed various scenarios and devised strategies to respond effectively to police confrontations or aggressions. Akosua Serwaa explained, “We knew exactly how the police operated, having witnessed their excessive force in previous protests. We were well-prepared to handle any situation that might arise.”

In addition to crowd control, the convenors took logistical steps to ensure widespread participation. They bought megaphones to amplify their message and draw attention to their cause. Furthermore, they arranged for buses to transport individuals from other cities, such as Takoradi, Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Obuasi, eager to join the protest. Local transportation within Accra was also organized to facilitate commute to the converging point.

The atmosphere was charged with anticipation; the protest had caught the attention of both local and international media outlets, social media platforms were abuzz with the #FixTheCountry, and social commentators and political analysts closely observed the situation, curious to witness the unfolding events. At the same time, the police also prepared for the event.

When asked about their fears, I gathered that fear was not a prevailing emotion among the convenors. Ayikoi asserted, “Street protest comes with a certain proportion of risks, but I have never been afraid of getting hurt or dying in this line of service. It is the least of my worries because this is a cause for which I prepared to die. However, I am constantly unable to shake off the feeling that others may perish.” Similarly, Asantewaa

expressed her worry for the lesser-known members of the movement, as any harm to them might be considered by authorities to have minimal repercussions. With a lighthearted laugh, she indicated, "Unlike me, if something were to happen to me, my dad would break down every door in this country."

On The Street, They Go!

"On the day, as early as 4 am, people started coming," Naa recalled. "We were supposed to begin the protest at 8 a.m., but to our surprise, a huge crowd had already gathered when we arrived at the convergence point around 5:30 a.m. And as time passed, more and more people joined in. It was an incredible sight. We had media personnel arriving with cameras and microphones, ready to capture the moment."

Amidst the growing crowd, a different presence made itself known. An entire police force arrived, armed to the teeth. They came with assault rifles, some on horseback, and armoured vehicles. "In our meetings with the police, I pleaded with them not to come to the protest grounds with guns, and they agreed not to," Okyere recounted, "So, I was completely shocked to see the show of force. But I was not discouraged or scared. Freedom is never attained through fear. It comes through being bold and courageous."

"Due to the massive attendance and the heavy presence of police and their accoutrements, we had to alter our strategy slightly to ensure we had a peaceful protest," recalled Akosua Serwaa. "We divided the crowd into seven batches, each coordinated by a group of marshals. There were about forty marshals, each wearing vibrant reflector vests and red berets for easy identification; each set of marshals was tasked with coordinating their assigned batch of people and ensuring that the protestors did not go off the agreed route. They ensured that the protesters did not have any reason to get in direct contact with the police and vice versa. We had to put in much coordination."

On the streets, the protestors, clad in red and black and chanting patriotic songs, marched forward, their voices merging into a mighty chorus of demands. Placards adorned with impassioned messages waved high, and megaphones amplified their unified cries.



Image 1. A cross-section of #FixTheCountry protesters with placards. [Nipah Dennis/AFP via Aljazeera.com]

Batch after batch, with about 20 meters separating one from the other, they moved along the agreed-upon route. As they marched, some among the crowd paused to share their stories with eager media outlets. Others captured the moment through the lenses of their cameras. With the guidance of marshals, the protestors traversed the streets peacefully.



Image 2. A picture of some of some of the #Fixthecountry protesters on the streets of Accra [Nipah Dennis/AFP, 4 Aug 2021 via Aljazeera.com]

Their journey culminated at Ghana's hallowed Independence Square. The convenors took turns addressing the immense gathering before them, standing on a makeshift stage.



Image 3. This is a photograph taken at the converging point. The leaders took turns addressing the crowd, using a vehicle as a stage. [fixthecountrygh.com, August 2021]

The atmosphere remained peaceful and harmonious. It was estimated that several thousands of people had united in this protest, with over 50 media houses, including renowned international channels like DW Channel, bearing witness to the occasion (Aljazeera, 2021).

For Okyere, this was more than just a protest—it was a defining moment in Ghana's recent history. He believed the protest symbolized a shift from mere rhetoric to tangible action. "We knew people would come, but it was so much more than that," he affirmed. "It was a massive demonstration, signalling a transition from 'talk and no show' to 'talk and action.' This was the largest non-partisan street protest our nation has witnessed recently, and its impact will reverberate for years to come."



Image 4. A section of the media needing help finding the best angles to capture the unfolding event. [fixthecountrygh.com, August 2021]

"This was unlike any protest I have ever been a part of," Ayikoi reflected, his voice filled with awe as he spoke to me nearly a year after the event. "The sheer magnitude of the numbers, the organic nature of their presence—it was an honour to witness. August 4th will forever hold a significant place in our history. This protest embodied the sentiments and spirit of our people." Naa, echoing the sentiment, emphasized the people's ability to take action and make their voices heard in tangible ways.

From Accra to Takoradi: Different City, Different Dynamics

In the days following the August 4 protest, the front pages of newspapers were adorned with captivating images and bold headlines, while radio and television stations dedicated hours of discussion to dissect the impacts of the protest.

The protest had also caught the attention of those in power. The convenors were invited to a meeting with the Inspector General of Police, who acknowledged their efforts and congratulated them for their ability to organize such a peaceful protest. Additionally,

Okyere disclosed that they met with the government's cabinet, although it was not publicized.

The success of the #FixTheCountry protest in Accra, bolstered by their followers' overwhelming support and calls to replicate the rally in other regions, gave rise to the idea of taking the movement to cities across Ghana. The calls for more dispersed action from supporters through social media inspired the convenors to expand their reach and amplify their message of change. They believed time was of the essence to seize the opportunity while the momentum was at its peak. In response to popular demand and numerous requests, they decided that Takoradi would be the next city where they would organize a protest.

They had high hopes as they prepared to take their movement to Takoradi, the capital of the Western region of Ghana. However, their experience in Takoradi differed from what they had anticipated. Arriving in Takoradi, the convenors were met with unexpected challenges. They soon realized that only a tiny percentage of the population in Takoradi was aware of the #FixTheCountry movement. Also, Takoradi, as a constituency, has consistently been a stronghold of the ruling NPP party, successfully securing victory in every presidential election within that constituency since the inception of the Fourth Republic. In 2020, President Nana Akuffo Addo won 68% of the total valid votes in Takoradi (Peacefmonline.com, 2020). As Ayikoi acknowledged, "The political dynamics in Takoradi were different, and the people seemed to have a stronger inclination towards the ruling party. This made our task of mobilizing the community much more challenging."

The protest was held, but the turnout was disappointing. Apart from the dynamics in the community, the convenors reflected on how their words and actions had shaped public perceptions. Some of the remarks made by the convenors had inadvertently created the impression that the protest was aligned with the opposition party, which hindered their efforts to gather support from the community. In hindsight, the convenors acknowledged that a different approach should have been taken for the Takoradi protest. Akosua Serwaa emphasized the importance of local ownership, stating, "The leaders of the Accra protest should not have led the Takoradi protest. The youth of the place should have owned it." The challenges faced in Takoradi served as a valuable

lesson for the convenors, highlighting the importance of understanding the local context and tailoring their strategies accordingly.

Perceived Threats and Intimidation

The aftermath of the protest came with challenges, including perceived threats and intimidation. Back in Accra, the convenors' shot to the limelight brought about some personal security concerns. Okyere, for instance, shared the unfortunate incident of a burglary at his residence, where all the data-saving devices containing pictures and videos of the protest and court days were stolen. The apparatus also had some of the IT team's data analysis. He suspected foul play, considering the sensitive nature of the data. Although he reported the incident to the police, nothing came out of it.

Others faced direct and indirect threats and intimidation. Okyere highlighted how KALYJAY, the originator of #FixTheCountry, pulled out of the protest. According to him, KALYJAY was leveraging his massive following on Twitter for social media advertising. His clients threatened to abandon him if he continued to participate in the activities of #FixTheCountry. For fear of losing his source of income, he pulled out. However, KALYJAY, in a recent interview with Deloris Frimpong Manso, a popular lifestyle show host on her celebrated show called the Delay Show, stated that he quit due to continuous concerns raised by his family and friends about his safety.

Akosua Serwaa had her share of unsettling experiences. She shared a troubling incident before the demonstration, leaving her vulnerable and concerned about her safety. "I left my house for only an hour and thirty minutes, and when I returned, I noticed that someone had tampered with my belongings," she recounted. "My bedsheet, which I had hung out to dry, had been mysteriously moved and placed on the sofa. It was perplexing because nothing else seemed disturbed, including my laptop, which was left untouched." The incident left her with a sense of unease and raised questions about her security.

"It got to a point where I had to be extra cautious because I had received credible information that I was being targeted for arrest," Bamfo also revealed. "I had intel from some sources that there were individuals within the police service who had marked me down, and it was clear that my safety was at stake." Bamfo took preventive measures to

protect himself, including changing his daily routines and meeting locations. "You think it was by chance that I suggested we change our meeting place?" he questioned me when we met in 2022. "I had to ensure my safety because I knew the risks involved. I will not die twice."

Departure of the EFL

On December 13th, 2022, while strategizing and exploring ways to adapt the protest to the regional complexities of taking it across the country, EFL suddenly announced its breakaway from #FixTheCountry. I was eager to understand the reasons behind the EFL's decision, so I asked Ayikoi. As I posed my question, his expression grew pensive, and I could sense the weight of emotions building up behind his eyes. Taking a brief pause, he broke his gaze, and I could see his fingers moving across the table, contemplating if he should share. He fixed his gaze back on me with a composed and determined demeanour.

"On December 1st," Ayikoi began, his voice filled with both resolve and a hint of frustration, "EFL made its intentions clear to the convenors. We proposed the idea of fielding credible individuals to populate parliament." Pausing momentarily, he continued, "Shortly after, a message appeared on the group's chat page. It was from one of the convenors, informing us of a communication from his boss, the owner of the prominent media conglomerate whose platforms had been extensively used by the #FixTheCountry movement. The boss delivered a chilling message – the #FixTheCountry movement would no longer be welcomed on their platform if the convenors pursued the idea of fielding candidates for parliamentary seats.". Ayikoi continued, "Some of us felt it was an unacceptable infringement on the movement's independence. We could not allow external forces to control the trajectory of our cause. The movement was not occasioned to serve the interest of the opposition party," Ayikoi shared, his voice filled with unwavering conviction. "Regrettably, this conflict led to the inevitable departure from the #FixTheCountry movement."

The revelation of the main reasons for the EFL's exit was interesting, and I wanted to know more. I could not help but inquire further about their underlying motive for seeking parliamentary representation. Ayikoi's unravelled their decision's historical context and motivations. "Do you remember the CJA?" Ayikoi asked - in reference to the

Committee for Joint Action, a pressure group which organized a series of protests before the 2008 elections in Ghana - "They fought relentlessly against the NPP government led by President Agyekum Kufuor, only for their efforts to inadvertently aid the rise of the NDC in 2009. Similarly, the activities of Occupy Ghana were exploited by the current NPP government during their time in opposition, helping them come to power in 2016." Ayikoi emphasized providing a clear alternative to the dominant NDC and NPP parties. Others shared similar sentiments. Akosua Serwaa expressed her concerns, "There were individuals within the movement who were working for the opposition party. While we intended to direct the power towards a third force, they sought to direct it to their paymasters."

During my interviews with other members of the #FixTheCountry, some of whom are still part of the movement, they vehemently denied being agents of the opposition. Instead, they attributed the departure of the EFL faction to a combination of leadership crises, ideological differences, and personal egos. Bamfo emphasized that the absence of a written charter contributed to the internal conflicts. "There was no written charter for the group, so after the demonstration, there was no consensus as people had different ideologies, and some individuals were overly ambitious," he explained. Others, such as Okyere, believed that while convenors shared a common objective, they favoured different approaches to achieving them. These differences created tensions and divisions within the movement. Meanwhile, Asantewaa perceived that a clash of egos and personalities further exacerbated the internal conflicts. "The kind of flat leadership structure we had created conflicts. People had been working alone for a long time, and it was difficult to gel in a group. Others purposely came in because they saw a leadership vacuum and wanted to fill it," The multifaceted narrative surrounding the split reveals the deep-seated tensions and divisions within the #FixTheCountry movement. While both factions, #FixTheCountry and the EFL, continue their pursuits up to this point of writing in 2023, they do so with differing levels of prominence.

Key Elements from #FixTheCountry Protest

Like the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 protest, #FixTheCountry 2021 attracted significant attention, including extensive coverage by domestic media and some coverage by international media such as the BBC, DW, CNN, and Al Jazeera. Almost all the elements that contributed to how the 2014 protest turned out, such as the

spontaneous eruption of the protests, flat leadership structures, the influential role of social media, a non-partisan approach, and the actions of the police, were manifested in the 2021 protest.

Social media: more than just a communication tool

The convenors' narratives highlight the spontaneous public reaction to a series of tweets by a Twitter influencer and the deployment of social media as a primary mobilization tool throughout the protest. Like the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest, online activities played a chief role in #FixTheCountry. However, in this case, not only was social media used as a communication and dissemination tool, but the protest started from social media before transitioning to a street protest.

What is also interesting about the use of social media in this context is the harnessing of people's emotions to shape the trajectory of the protest, a concept Gerbaudo (2012) describes as the "emotional quality of the communications of contemporary movements" (pg. 161). Gerbaudo asserts that social media serves not only as an information technology tool but also to craft an emotional narrative that fosters a sense of unity and solidarity to maximize support. The "emotional quality" conveyed through tweets, images, videos, and messages that characterized the protest elicited considerable empathy and garnered substantial support for the group's cause.

Exploring interpersonal and social networks

The main actors leveraged their massive following on social media, bringing the hashtag to prominence. For example, KALYJAY, the movement's hashtag originator, has over 1 million followers on Twitter. The same can be said of the other convenors. It is also crucial to appreciate the efforts of members of Speak Up Ghana and initial convenors in reaching out to their friends and colleagues to join the cause. It emphasizes the importance of interpersonal networks in organizing the protest, as articulated by Walgrave and Wouters (2021).

The weakness of the non-hierarchical leadership structure amplified

#FixTheCountry convenors also adopted a non-hierarchical leadership structure to avoid any suppression by the government. However, this leadership structure again may have allowed conflict to divide the group. Asantewaa, one of the convenors of #FixTheCountry, confirmed, “The lack of a hierarchical structure created conflicts due to clashes of personalities and egos.” She further explained that some people joined because they saw a leadership vacuum and wanted to fill it but later got disappointed, and working together as a group became a challenge.

The allegations and counter-allegations of group members leading to EFL’s departure illustrate how personal ambitions and differences in ideologies could harm a movement with a non-hierarchical leadership structure. Also worthy of note is the allegation that some group members were not interested in building a third force with the hope of diverting gains to the political party they secretly sympathize with. This caused a rethinking of the cooptation of protest leaders not only from the outside but also from within the group leaders.

How the actions of the Ghana Police shaped the protest

Even more worthy of note were the several attempts by the police to prevent the street protest, which helped the protest gain prominence. The four months of legal battle and several clashes between the convenors and the police during court days ensured that the protest consistently remained in the news cycle, which sustained the public interest. As Twum, one of the convenors, expressed, the actions of the police became a vital publicity tool. However, the convenors became preoccupied with the police as they spent most of their time dealing with the impediments put in their way. Even after the court case, their attention and planning focused on avoiding clashes with the police, neglecting other elements of protest strategy, logistics, organization, and post-protest direction. The absence of such detailed planning created a sense of inadequacy at the endpoint of the protest.

Can the threats of digital activism drive change?

It is essential to emphasize the closed-door meetings between the convenors and the government's cabinet, which was mentioned by Okyere and has since become a matter of public record (Graphic.com.gh, 2023). The meetings organized at the instance of the government contradicts the assertion by Zeynep Tufekci (2020) that protest that relies on social media does not pose enough threats in democratic states and are ineffective. Within a political landscape like Ghana's, where a presidential election was determined by a margin of fewer than 90,000 votes, large-scale civic movements have the potential to impact the incumbent government's political fortunes negatively. In this context, the widespread backing of the protest facilitated by social media was viewed as a threat, and the convened meeting reflects the government's concern and recognition of the protest's significance. Contrary to Tufekci, this echoes Freelon et al. (2020) argument that online actions support, rather than hinder, activist goals by increasing their visibility for effecting change.

The next chapter will assess the outcomes #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 protest and #FixTheCountry 2021 primarily from the protesters' viewpoints, contributing to theories on evaluating the transformative potential of protests.

Chapter 5. Assessing Protests' Impacts: How Protest Convenors Evaluate The Successes And Failures Of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 and #FixTheCountry 2021 Protests

The #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 and #FixTheCountry 2021 protests gained national and international attention. But how should scholars understand their significance, and how do insights from these two case studies inform our theories regarding how to evaluate protests? It is not always apparent to outsiders what legacies can be credited to protests. Protest organizers, however, who have behind-the-scenes, detailed knowledge of the history of a protest and its aftermath can appreciate connections between different developments. This chapter, therefore, addresses the questions by analyzing the factors the convenors of the two protests perceive as successes and limitations in making lasting changes through their protest efforts.

For example, the convenors of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 consider the formation of Occupy Ghana, a civil society organization whose initiatives contribute in diverse ways to Ghana's development, as a success originating from their protest. In the case of #FixTheCountry, the convenors consider their successes to include how their legal clashes with the police reinforced citizens' right to protest and their general broadening of people's political consciousness.

In what follows, I consider in more detail how the protest convenors assess the significance of their protest in relation to Ghana's political landscape, classified into tangible and intangible types of outcomes.

Tangible Outcomes of The Protest

The emergence of Occupy Ghana

The convenors regard the formation of OccupyGhana, a civil society organization, as a significant success of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest. They assert that, since its inception, Occupy Ghana has played a vital role in enhancing democratic governance in Ghana by remaining committed to holding the government accountable, scrutinizing policies and, when necessary, seeking legal recourse.

Koranteng highlighted one of such key interventions concerning the long-standing constitutional mandate of the Auditor-General in Ghana, which grants the Auditor-General the power of disallowance and surcharge. He asserts that the Auditor-General had not exercised these powers for over 25 years until Occupy Ghana took the matter to the Supreme Court in 2014. The Supreme Court of Ghana finally ruled in 2017 in favour of Occupy Ghana, affirming the constitutionally mandated powers of the Auditor-General. As a result, GHS 67.3 million (USD 12.2 million) was recovered into government coffers in 2017 and 2018 through surcharges. Also, 5.4 billion Ghana Cedis (equivalent to around 1 billion USD at the time) was disallowed for payments (World Bank Global Report, 2020).

Another illustrative example of Occupy Ghana's impact cited by the convenors is their response to the president's June 2020 directive to the then Auditor-General, Daniel Yaw Domelevo, to take his accumulated leave and retire afterward. Occupy Ghana collaborated with other civil society organizations (CSOs), to challenge the president's directive in court, asserting it was unconstitutional as the Auditor-General is an independent public office holder not subjected to the president's control. The Supreme Court agreed with Occupy Ghana and the CSOs and ruled that the president's action was unconstitutional. According to them, this has set a precedent for future executive decisions.

Re-Enforcement of citizens' right to protest

The legal battle between the Ghana Police and #FixTheCountry convenors became a national issue concerning citizens' right to protest and freedom of expression. According to Nimako, the ruling by both the Supreme Court and the High Court that quashed the police's ex-parte injunction against the protest as unconstitutional will serve as precedent and guide the courts in not granting such future requests from the police. According to the convenors, this ruling enforces Ghanaian citizens' right to protest.

The enforcement of disallowance and surcharges has resulted in substantial fiscal savings for Ghana, amounting to millions of cedis. These recovered resources can then be redirected towards addressing the nation's pressing infrastructural and societal challenges. A persistent commitment to enforcing these legal provisions will protect the public treasury and mitigate instances of misappropriation of public funds. Furthermore,

the Supreme Court's ruling, affirming the autonomy of the Auditor-General, along with judicial decisions nullifying the injunction on the protest, represents significant checks on the powers of the presidency and the Ghanaian police force. In the view of the convenors, these concrete outcomes hold particular importance for Ghana's nascent democratic system.

Accounting for Protests' Less Tangible Changes

Beyond trying to account for the more immediate and material achievements attributed to the two protests, the convenors outlined some intangible or non-material outcomes. As defined by Sanches (2020), the non-material outcomes of protest are cognitive and include "citizen consciousness," "collective solidarity," "perceptions of empowerment," and imaginations about the future (pg. 219). The non-material outcomes, as articulated by the convenors, include:

Expanding ideas of political engagement and citizens' empowerment

As explained by the convenors, in Ghana, people are encouraged to express dissatisfaction with the government during the elections; hence, the saying "kokromoti power" means "your thumb is your power." It is, therefore, not uncommon to hear people say they would not vote in the next election in retaliation for poor infrastructure development. Also, culturally, protest is considered somewhat unorthodox. As Bamfo, one of the respondents, highlights, "Here in Ghana, protest is seen as a deviant way of expression. However, we must understand that democracy is not just about casting votes every four years. We need to hold our leaders accountable, and protest is one way of doing so." They again emphasize that protest is an all-inclusive exercise that transcends boundaries of education, economic status, and social class, enabling anyone to participate.

The convenors believe their protests sparked a feeling of empowerment among the population, which has energized people to confront authorities to demand accountability. For example, the convenors of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse contend that, after their protest in 2014, protests like "Dumsor Must Stop" aimed to demand immediate resolution to the electricity crisis were staged with film and music stars leading the charge. Indeed, celebrities mobilizing their fans and the public to protest the menace

was a surprising and historical event (Asante & Helbrecht, 2018). Some of the convenors of #FixTheCountry also alluded that their action in 2021 took inspiration from the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest. Also, the convenors of #FixTheCountry in 2021 profess that their action inspired a series of protests by other groups of people. They cited the protest by the National Association of Law Students (NALS) in October 2021 as an example. The law students expressed frustration and disappointment over the recurring failures in the Ghana School of Law entrance exams. They called for transparency, fairness, and reforms in the legal education system, aiming to address the systemic issues that hindered their aspirations of becoming practicing lawyers. They also mentioned a June 2022 protest by Islamic Senior High School in the Ashanti Region of Ghana against the frequent road accidents in front of their school. The high school children embarked on a protest to raise awareness about the need for improved road safety measures and infrastructure to prevent further accidents and protect lives. In September 2023, some convenors of #FixTheCountry under a new organization called Democracy Hub organized a three-day demonstration in Accra dubbed #OccupyJulorbiHouse.

Stimulating critical consciousness

The convenors highlighted both protests' ability to ignite a national conversation about the country's development. The convenors of #FixTheCountry, for example, emphasize that, their actions have ignited the discussions on the need for a new constitution. This topic has since remained dominant in the national discourse, prompting comments from President Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo (Yeboah, 2023). The convenors believe that the eruption of the protests has raised awareness and stimulated critical thinking among authorities regarding the need to prioritize challenges affecting the youth. Additionally, to the convenors of #FixTheCountry, the massive turnout for their protest signalled a powerful message to the government and the older generation. Naa affirms that "through the protest, we made a bold statement and proved that the youth are not apathetic but are willing to take action." According to the convenors, such large-scale readiness to participate in a protest signalled a shift in political participation norms.

These non-material outcomes of protests, as outlined by the convenors, cannot be overlooked. As Edalina Sanches' argues, they can empower the citizenry, promote

unity among citizens, and inspire fresh visions for the future, which have the potential to spark substantial structural and transformative advancements (Sanchez, 2020). Interestingly, Ghana's infamous 1948 'Riots' was used by Claude Ake in Branch & Mampily (2015) to demonstrate the cognitive impact of protest on the citizens. He explains that the 1948 'Riots' propelled Ghanaians to imagine themselves as independent from British rule, and thus, this shook the "foundations of colonial rule from which the colonialists never recovered" (Branch & Mampily, 2015, p. 29). Hence, the protests' intangible impacts, namely their capacity to empower and ignite the collective imagination of the populace, are equally as significant as the concrete economic and legal advantages they have yielded.

Comparing concerns and outcomes: Did the Protests Fail?

The #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #FixTheCountry erupted out of discontent with the country's governance. During the protest, the protesters communicated their concerns to the government of the day, seeking to have them addressed. In the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest, these concerns were captured in a petition to President John Mahama. The petition stated:

"Your Excellency, our concerns, in no particular order of importance, are as follows:

1. The erratic supply of electricity nationwide.
2. The unreliable supply of potable water across the country.
3. The ever-depreciating value of the cedi.
4. Constant increases in taxes.
5. Inefficient revenue collection.
6. Very poor road networks.
7. Constant increments in utility tariffs.
8. Frequent increase in the prices of petroleum products.
9. Government's inability to make statutory payments timeously to schools, health facilities and other state institutions.
10. Government's inability to address labour-related issues on a timely basis.

11. Government's inability to exhibit decisive leadership in the fight against corruption.
12. Government's inability to kick out incompetent and non-performing appointees.
13. The over-politicization of socio-economic issues along partisan lines.
14. Government's inability to create job opportunities for the youth and 15.fresh graduates.
15. Government's inability to effectively regulate small scale mining (galamsey) activities.
16. Improper administrative decisions taken by some government officials.
17. Lack of proper communicative skills on the part of some government officials.
18. The Non-Passage of the Freedom of Information Bill
19. The Non-Implementation of the Senchi Consensus.
20. Government's inability to tackle perennial flooding in the capital city and elsewhere in Ghana." - Graphic Online (2014)

In the case of #FixTheCountry, the convenors did not present any such petition. This is not because they could not do so. However, as described by Branch and Mampilly (2015) concerning political society uprisings, "they understand the absurdity of making demands in a context in which no one with power will listen to reason and in which force alone brings results" (P.g. 35). Despite the absence of a petition, Okyere confirmed that four key elements emerged after they have delved into the sea of posts made on social media. They include:

1. New Constitution: There was a resounding call for a complete overhaul of Ghana's constitution, considered outdated and unsuitable for the new generation. They believed a new constitution would pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive society.
2. National Development Plan: There was emphasis on the importance of a comprehensive and well-defined national development plan. They stressed the need for a strategic roadmap to guide Ghana's progress and address pressing issues such as infrastructure development, economic growth, and social welfare.
3. Trust in Democracy and Governance: The erosion of trust in democratic institutions and governance was a recurring theme.

Contributors expressed discontent with corruption, lack of transparency, and inefficiencies within the system. They called for greater accountability and integrity in public office to restore faith in democracy.

4. Judicial Reform: The judicial system came under scrutiny, with contributors highlighting concerns about its fairness, impartiality, and delays in justice delivery. There was a demand for reforms to ensure a more effective and accessible judiciary where the rule of law is upheld, and justice is served promptly.

Reflecting on the issues that instigated the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #FixTheCountry protests and comparing them to what the convenors consider to be the outcomes of their collective actions, there is little evidence that their concerns have been adequately addressed. #OccupyFlagstaffHouse protest did not resolve the depreciation of the Cedi and bad road networks, nor has there been a new constitution after the #FixTheCountry protest. Also, it can be inferred from the September 2023 protest dubbed #OccupyJulorbiHouse organized by some convenors of #FixTheCountry that the grievances raised by the #FixTheCountry in 2021 are still outstanding. However, the convenors of the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse 2014 and #FixTheCountry 2021 protests indicate that their collective actions had tangible and intangible outcomes. They contend that #FixTheCountry contributed to the cognitive and political engagement of Ghanaians in the affairs of the country while activities of Occupy Ghana have deepened aspects of Ghana's democratic governance and saved the country some million Cedis.

Thus, although the two protests did not immediately achieve their intended outcomes in their petition and communications, they cannot be said to have failed as they have significantly impacted transformative changes in Ghana. The findings also suggest that concrete results may not arise directly from the protest per se but rather from the subsequent efforts of organizations that emanated from the protest. In addition, the study also shows that accounting for tangible outcomes can require longer-term appraisals considering a broader scope of influence than the short period of the protest and its immediate aftermath, re-echoing the arguments advanced by Elamin (2020) and Sanches (2020).

Conclusion

#OccupyFlagstaffHouse (2014) and #FixTheCountry (2021) protests are two interesting protest cases in Ghana's 4th democratic dispensation and have significantly impacted the country's social, economic, and political environment. Their impacts have come from their tangible and intangible outcomes, some of which were immediate and others that took years to manifest.

Out of #OccupyFlagstaffHouse emerged Occupy Ghana, a civil society organization whose efforts, through the legal system of Ghana, enforced the independence of the Auditor-General and its authority of disallowance and surcharges. As a result, Ghana recovered GHS 67.3 million (USD 12.2 million) in surcharges and disallowed payments of 5.4 billion Ghana Cedis, equivalent to around 1 billion USD between 2017 and 2018 (World Bank Global Report, 2020). The position of the Auditor-General's office has been safeguarded from Executive interference, a departure from an unconstitutionality which was becoming a norm. As the convenors articulated, the legal battles with the Ghana Police, in the run-up to the #FixTheCountry protest in 2021, have enforced citizens' right to protest, and their collective action on the streets of Accra empowered sections of the population to demand accountability from leaders, resulting in other demonstrations and stimulating civic engagement. Therefore, although the concerns that prompted the protests remain outstanding, the protests cannot be said to have failed.

In a young democracy like Ghana, the protests' material and cognitive outcomes and their impact on the country's political landscape and potential transformation are significant. Their significance may, however, lack appreciation, a limitation that has characterized most studies on third wave protests (Dwyer & Zeilig, 2012). This reinforces the assertion made by Mueller (2018) that an in-depth understanding of the context in which protests occur is required to appreciate its contribution fully. Therefore, assessing a protest's success or failure should involve a comprehensive and adaptable understanding of "transformational change", as echoed by Sanches (2020). Taking such an approach is an obvious challenge for protest-focused research, but it may be a more realistic approach to accounting for change. This factor must be considered, thereby contributing to the literature on evaluating third-wave protests.

Furthermore, the two protests have shown how a non-partisan approach to protest led to greater solidarity in a politically polarized society like Ghana and how intimidation by law enforcement agencies created positive publicity that drove the protests. Also, contrary to the argument that social media-inspired protests communicate fewer threats (Tufekci, 2020) and are easily dismissible (Honwana, 2013; Satell & Popovic, 2017), the cases have shown that in Ghana, the ruling elite is gravely concerned about such actions due to their potential effect on electoral outcomes. These insights make a modest contribution to the literature on contemporary social movements and how the third-wave protest in Africa should be understood.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

Background

- Can you tell me how you got involved with #OccupyFlagstaffHouse(2014) / #FixTheCountry (2021) protest?
- What informed your participation in the protest?
- What was your age at the time of the protest?
- What was your employment status?
- How did you first hear about the idea of possible protests?
- Please describe how involved you were with the organizing of this protest?
- Do you think there were clear goals for the protest?
- What were those goals?
- Do you think everyone participating shared the same goals, or were there different agendas being pursued at the same time? Please explain.
- How did you feel at that time? (e.g. did you feel hopeful – how or why not? Did you feel afraid – how or why not? Did you have other feelings about what might happen through the protests?)

Strategy

- How did the protest organizers:
 - Choose leadership (if applicable) ◦ Try to recruit participants ◦ Spread the word/ publicize the event ◦ Make their objectives known ◦ Engage traditional media (eg. which media, engage how?) ◦ Use social media
 - Raise funds (if applicable)
- What kinds of impact did social media use have on the success of the protests?
- In what ways do you think social media might have been used differently to have a more positive impact?
- Do you recall how the decision was made to embark on the street protests? What informed your choice of route?
- What were some of the challenges you encountered before gaining the consent of the police to embark on the course, and how did you deal with those?

Protests

- How many protests were there as part of the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse(2014) / #FixTheCountry (2021) protest? (If applicable)
- How many protests were you involved in? (And how?)
- Approximately how many people were there for each protest?
- Did the protests go the way organizers imagined they would go? How or how not?
- What was unexpected?
- What were some of the challenges you faced on the day of the protest?
- How did the objectives of the protest capture the grievances of all the protesters?
- Did you make specific demands? What were some of them?
- How did you communicate your grievances and demands?
- How well were your grievances and demands responded to?
- By who, through what channels (e.g. direct meetings, statements in media, actual changes, etc.), at what points of the protest/movement, etc, etc.
- Were you/organizers satisfied with these responses? Why/why not?
- Did the protests go the way organizers imagined they would go? How or how not?
- What was unexpected?
- What did you achieve with your protest?
- Overall, would you say your protest was a success or a failure? What do you regard as success or failure as far as your protest was concerned?
- Do you think your choice of non-violent protest was the best strategy? Why/why not?
- Do you think there are any long-term changes these protests may cause? Please explain (e.g. how the protest might yield these long-term changes)
- Do you hope to change your strategy in the future?
- Reflecting on those experiences, what do think should be done differently in any future movements for change in Ghana?

- how young people consider themselves as influential or not, how politicians consider young people's concerns or not, how politicians seek the participation of young people in policymaking,

The aftermath of the protest

- What is the status of the group after the protest?
- Have you faced any personal security concerns by being part of the protest? How has that impacted your personal life, group strategy, and future protests?
- What reputation do you think the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse(2014) / #FixTheCountry (2021) protest gained in Ghana – perhaps different reputations among different parts of society?

External support

- What was the role of the opposition party in your protest, and how did it positively or negatively affect the entire movement and protest?
- Did you receive support from other organizations (NGOs, international organizations, civil society, etc.)? What was some of this support, and how did it impact our movement/protests?
- Which organizations and what kinds of support?
- Do you think protest is the best tool to seek political and economic change in Ghana? Why or why not?

Appendix B. Letter of Initial Contact

Hello,

My name isand I am a researcher from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.

I am contacting you because I am seeking individuals to speak to me about their experiences as participants of the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse(2014) / #FixTheCountry (2021) protests. I am interested in learning from participants how they experienced the protests and what they regard as the success or failure of those protests.

I am contacting individuals who were actively involved in the organization, execution, and post-protest activities rather than those who simply attended the protest as a one-time event.

If you are interested in participating in this research, I will keep your identity confidential from all others.

If you would like to learn more about this research and what can be expected, please see the attached Consent Form.

To learn a bit more about me, please see my profile at:

If you are interested in doing an interview with me, please contact me at:

Please do not reveal any confidential information via email.

Sincerely,