

GHANA'S REBELLIOUS CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF #FIXTHECOUNTRY MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Just as many countries in Africa and the developing world, Ghana's response to the "third wave" of global democratization process in the late 1980s resulted in the 1990s political liberalization, democratic transition, and the current efforts towards democratic consolidation. Along all these chains of democratic processes spanning three decades (1992 to 2022), various civil society organizations have played instrumental roles within the nation's public sphere. Using #FixTheCountry movement as a case study, this paper explores the role of civil society in Ghana's efforts towards democratic consolidation. In highlighting the impact of civil society in Ghana's democratic processes, the study relies mainly on secondary information from the official website of #FixTheCountry movement, media publications, government reports, among others. The study concludes that, despite their radical posture, particularly the constant attack on Ghana's 1992 constitution, #FixTheCountry movement has expanded the frontiers for youth activists and other dissident groups within the political system to demand democratic accountability from members of the political class.

Keywords: Civil Society, #FixTheCountry, 1992 Constitution, Democratic Consolidation, Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

Africa's current embrace of democratic political system was hugely influenced by many global developments in the 1980s through to the early 1990s, particularly the collapse of the Berlin Wall (Anderson, 1993). Consequently, many African countries under various forms of autocratic rule at the time saw the signal of the blowing political wave afar and started initiating processes towards the eventual embrace of pluralist democratic political practice. Some of the early African democratizers in this regard included countries such as Benin, Ghana, Gabon, Mali, Zambia, among many others (Diamond, 2010; Ihonvbere, 1996).

Ghana embarked on its own brand of political liberalization and democratic transition under Western pressures combined with the impact of the rapid transformation of the world into a neoliberal political and economic order (Huntington, 1993; Arthur, 2010). However, Folson (1993) contends that, the liberal political order adopted under the 1992 Fourth Republic constitution has been a fulfilment of ambition by the Ghanaian state and its people after three previous democratic dispensations have been thwarted by military adventurism in 1957–1966, 1969–1972 and 1979–1981. Thus, accordingly, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana affirmed a transition of the state from authoritarianism to one of liberal democratic form of governance.

After eight successive elections and three turn-over of power from one democratically elected government to another, democratic norms seem to have gained roots in the county (Nsiah, 2021). Almost three decades after the birth of the political transition process, scholars have argued that, Ghana's current democratic political system is moving towards consolidation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001, 2009). The Fourth Republic, despite the numerous obstacles it encountered in the three decades of its existence, has survived, surpassing the longevity and record of the three earlier Republics since the attainment of independence from the British colonial rule in 1957. Nonetheless, after the 2020 general election in an interview with Bernard Avle on Citi TV, Gyimah-Boadi described Ghana's democracy as "highly flawed" (Citinewsroom, 2021). With this damning verdict, Gyimah-Boadi was only re-echoing the sentiments of many scholars and pundits who have raised various concerns about the direction and future of Ghana's democracy.

Despite these unfavourable views, different state, non-state and autonomous institutions and organizations have played different roles in getting Ghana to this stage of its democratic process. One of the most indispensable of these institutions are civil society organizations. Since the transition to democracy in 1992, the Ghanaian state has tolerated the autonomy of civil society and therefore, countless number of them have proliferated in the three decades of the history of the Fourth Republic. Jandoh-Gyekye (2015) argues

that, civil society under the authoritarian state of the 1980s through to the early days of the democratic transition faced various obstacles including co-optation by the government. However, she concludes that, a decade after the adoption of the 1992 constitution and its accompanying raft of civil liberties, associational activities multiplied and civil society eventually regained its status as a partner in the democratic process.

Centuries before Ghana's transition to democracy under the Fourth Republic, many scholars have underscored the essential contribution of civil society to the democratization process. From the ancient to the Enlightenment theorists, the presence of civil society institutions and their autonomy has been perceived as bulwark against the overbearing power, influence and dominance of both the state and its ruling class (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994; Brehm & Rahn, 1997). The history of civil society in Ghana is partly tied to the history of British colonialism and its associated resistance movements beginning from the first half of the 1900 (Appiagyeyi-Atua, 2005; Brako & Asah-Asante 2015). However, the history of associational activities in Ghana after independence cannot be divorced from the chequered political history of Ghana in the immediate aftermath of independence. In this regard, tolerance, autonomy and vitality of associational life were boosted anytime the state found itself under liberal democracy and ebbed when the military or civilian autocrats took over governance of the state. Despite this, Drah (1993) argues that the main objectives of civil societies in Ghana are the promotion of social networking for "interaction, debate and support," and all these are very vital for the nourishment of a democratic political system (p.77).

Thus, using #FixTheCountry movement as a case study for my discussion, this study explores the boundaries between associational life and Ghana's democracy under the Fourth Republic. I discuss the methods and impact of civil society organizations on the consolidation of the country's democracy utilizing existing data from various sources including Ghana Centre for Democratic Development's (CDD-Ghana's) Afrobarometer, #FixTheCountry, GhanaWeb, 3News, among others. Existing data from the websites of these institutions are gathered and thematic analysis of the content is carried out to tease out the linkages between #FixTheCountry movement and Ghana's march towards democratic consolidation under the Fourth Republican constitutional dispensation. Further analysis and discussions in this study are carried out within the framework of Tocqueville's conception of civil society in the democratization process.

THE CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSIONS

Democratic Consolidation

Scholars such as Linz and Stepan (1996), Schneider and Schmitter (2004), Chu and Diamond (1999), Gasiorowski and Power (1998), and Schedler (2001) approach the issue of democratic consolidation from very diverse conceptual and empirical perspectives. For instance, Linz and Stepan (1996) shed light on the basic ingredients of democratic consolidation after the state's initial transition from authoritarianism. Thus, when a regime accepts certain reforms and actions that improve the overall quality of the democratic process to the extent that democracy becomes "the only game in town", then it can be said that there is democratic consolidation. According to the scholars, democratic consolidation is measured by the positive behaviour and attitude of the state and all political actors towards the democratic and constitutional processes. They further noted that, there are certain important determinants before any polity can be described as democratically consolidated. Healthy and successful interactions among these arenas are prerequisite for democratic consolidation. These conditions for democratic consolidation include the existence of a well-functioning state, autonomous and lively civil society, vibrant, independent and free political society, rule of law to safeguard citizens' civil liberties, professional bureaucracy and institutionalized and buoyant economic society (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Further, Schneider and Schmitter (2004) stress on the salient building blocks of democratic consolidation using Robert Dahl's concept of "procedural minimal" as measuring tool. To start with, democracy cannot exist without important features such as "secret balloting, universal adult suffrage, regular elections, partisan competition, associational freedom, executive accountability" (p.63). Again, all these attributes of democracy must not only flourish, but must interact with each other. For instance, elections must guarantee free and fair political competitions, freedom of information upheld, civil society must be autonomous to challenge the arbitrariness of both the state and the government and civil liberties must be protected. The longer these minimal procedural features exist, the more democracy is consolidated and deepened (Schneider & Schmitter, 2004). Chu and Diamond (1999) also concur with some of the assumptions of Schneider and Schmitter (2004) and Linz and Stepan (1996) but argue that, electoral competitiveness is not the only yardstick for measuring democratic consolidation. Other critical components of liberal democracy such as rule of law and independent judiciary are required to protect citizens from state arbitrariness. Again, other mechanisms of accountability such as the legislature, independent and pluralist media, autonomous civil society etc. are also vital for the consolidation of democracy (p.809). Moreover, for Gasiorowski and Power (1998), democratic consolidation

is achieved when a newly transitioned democratic regime has reached a level where the risk of democratic reversal is unlikely. In this regard, strengthening democratic institutions and liberal values are very critical to the democratization process. These institutions include political parties, civil society organizations, among others. Again, Schedler (2001) differentiates between what he considers as the minimalist and maximalist conception of democratic consolidation. The minimalist assumes that democracy is consolidated when democratic breakdown is almost impossible while the maximalist focuses on deepening democracy and continuous opening of more democratic frontiers. Also, as a major proponent of the minimalist approach, Linz (1990) suggests that in such circumstances, there is a consensus among all the major democratic actors and stakeholders including political parties, political elites and other institutions that the only route to acquire and retain power is through the democratic process. Thus, democracy is the “only game in town.”

Civil Society

Scholars such as Baker (2003), Drah (1993), Encarnación (2003), and Matanga (2001) highlight the important role civil society plays in the democratization process, particularly in the so-called third-wave. While many political thinkers in the past have explained the interface between liberal democracy and civil associations, Baker (2003) emphasizes that, it was the work of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59) that resonates with the present mainstream ideas of the concept, particularly under the third wave of democratization process. Tocqueville argues for “strong, independent associations – ‘corps intermédiaires’ as he terms them – to stand between the individual and the state” (p.6). Baker (2003) expands this proposition and draws parallels between Tocqueville’s description of the post-revolutionary French state with the Central-Eastern European states before the collapse of communism and the eventual surge in the third wave democratization. Thus, in both situations, the society’s “self-defence” against a totalitarian and stifling state has been palpable (p.6). On the other hand, Drah (1993) broadly identifies two models of civil society organizations across the world. These are what he terms the “corporatists” and the “pluralist.” In the corporatist model, civil society organizations are captured by the state and its apparatuses. They are thus funded, sustained and safeguarded by the state. However, the pluralist model advocates for the independence and autonomy of civil society. In this regard, voluntary groups must be allowed to proliferate and compete with one another within the marketplace of the civil and associational community. Thus, the pluralist model seems more amenable to liberal democracy which firmly upholds political pluralism and freedom of association. In this regard, Matanga

(2001) and Encarnación (2003) stress that in a pluralist democratic society, once an organization falls outside the family, the state, and the marketplace and can be seen as voluntary in nature and formed to advance the mutual interest and objectives of its members, then it can be described as a civil society organization. Consequently, while #FixTheCountry movement seems to have adopted militant approaches in its activism, it nonetheless falls within the associational groups described in the propositions of scholars such as Matanga (2001), Encarnación (2003), Kim (2004), Fan (2004), Behar and Prakash (2004), Radcliff (2011), Alidu and Ame (2013), and Botchway (2018). The consensus among all these scholars is that, civil society is indispensable in the process of democratic transition, reforms and consolidation and therefore the aim of this study is not only to contribute to the literature but also to explore the various ways #FixTheCountry is making contributions in Ghana's democracy. For instance, Ekiert and Kubik (2001) and Alagappa (2004a) concluded that, in many instances, radical approaches undertaken by associational groups like #FixTheCountry within the general democratic environment including strike actions, protests, demonstrations or rallies are vital in consolidating democracy and protecting civil liberties. Sahoo (2013), Aspinall (2004), and Franco (2004) however disagree and postulate that, radical activism like that of #FixTheCountry can become problematic when the organization is "captured by predatory interests, whose economic and political agenda are often profoundly anti-liberal and anti-democratic" (Sahoo, 2013, p.3). In this case, civil society may rather increase animosity and cleavages among various groups in the society thereby stifling "more open, participatory, and accountable politics" (Franco, 2004, p.100; Aspinall, 2004).

DISCUSSION

#FixTheCountry and Ghana's Democracy

There is hardly any debate that the existence of vibrant democratic opposition and dissident movements and groups within the Ghanaian political system in the last three decades has boosted the efforts towards consolidating the democratic political system started in 1992 (Ekiert & Kubik, 2001; Matanga, 2000; Tar, 2008; Linz & Stepan, 1996). The latest of such rebellious civil society groups in Ghana's democracy under the Fourth Republican dispensation is the #FixTheCountry movement, a protest movement formed by various youth activists and political dissidents led mainly by a Ghanaian PhD student from the Cambridge University, Mawuse Oliver Barker-Varmawor.

Abrogation of the 1992 Constitution

Since its inception in the middle of 2021, #FixTheCountry has sought to resist the Ghanaian state and the political class on several fronts utilizing the power and influence of the mass media, public opinion formation and mass protests. While all the past activist groups under this current democratic dispensation such as the Committee for Joint Action (CJA), Let My Vote Count Alliance, and OccupyGhana have limited their advocacy and activism on government's social and economic policies, #FixTheCountry has launched frontal attacks on the 1992 constitution, which embodies the very essence of the new democratic political order started in 1992 (FixTheCountry, 2021). Linz and Stepan (1996b) identify constitution or constitutionalism as one of the vital ingredients for democratic consolidation. In this regard, all opposing forces and dissident groups within a democratic political system (whether governmental or non-governmental) must endeavor to settle their conflicts and differences within the remit of the laws, procedures, processes, and institutions established and clearly defined by the constitution. What is more, till date, they have not been able to offer any coherent alternative to the 1992 constitution, neither have they been able to identify which aspect of the constitution needs reforms. It is therefore paradoxical for a civil society organization such as the #FixTheCountry movement to call for the abrogation of the very constitution that guarantees the very freedom upon which they are established. Nevertheless, the group pinned the blame of all the country's socio-economic problems to what they perceived as anachronistic and dysfunctional nature of the 1992 constitution. While they have not been able to convincingly articulate which aspect of the constitution they perceived as causing the nation's chronic economic problems, there is evidence to suggest that, the dysfunctional and fragile structure of the Ghanaian economy has persisted since independence in 1957 and therefore all present and past Ghanaian leaders cannot escape blame in this situation (Killick, 2010). Additionally, as a result of mismanagement and corruption in the last six and half decades, various economic policies and countless paradigms from socialism and one-party system of government under President Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP) to economic nationalism under Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong's National Redemption Council (NRC) military regime have failed to produce any major positive outcome. Consequently, the Ghanaian economy remains reliant on primary commodities with little or no value addition (Killick, 2010). Despite this, the movement, mainly made up of Ghanaian youth of varied backgrounds, mounted a nation-wide campaign to rally one million signatures of Ghanaians both within and outside the borders of the country to enable them pass a vote of no confidence on the Fourth Republican Constitution (FixTheCountry, 2021).

At numerous fora, particularly at a press conference organized by the group on Monday, August 23, 2021 at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle in Accra, various members of the group argued that, the 1992 constitution cannot be extricated from the failure of the Ghanaian state and the political class in the past three decades to fully uphold the principles of social justice and equality within the Ghanaian society (Classfmonline, 2021). This, according to them is contrary to the objectives of the framers of the constitution. Further, the group bemoaned what they perceive as the capture of the nation's important natural resources by foreign and globalization forces at the detriment of the Ghanaian state and citizens. Again, they point accusing fingers at the 1992 constitution for promoting this development and therefore demand its immediate abolition in favor of a fresh constitution that would promote a much fairer and equitable society for all Ghanaian citizens (Classfmonline, 2021 cited in GhanaWeb, 2021).

The Constitutional Review Commission

Since the political liberalization and the transition of 1992, many scholars have highlighted the weaknesses of the 1992 constitution of Ghana in building or safeguarding a fair and equitable society (Asare & Kwasi Prempeh, 2010; Bofo-Arthur, 2003; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). Thus, the constitution has been variously blamed for concentrating state power in the hands of the executive arm of government, thereby providing the necessary authority and mandate to the incumbent and his few selected appointees to determine the economic and social direction of the state particularly regarding the distribution of the national cake (Asare & Kwasi Prempeh, 2010). While it may seem as a radical proposition, #FixTheCountry's clamor for the complete abrogation of the national constitution has some resonance with the demands of Ghanaians for some form of constitutional amendments. This was the outcome of the findings of the Ghana Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) in its nationwide consultation almost a decade ago. The CRC highlights a growing demand among Ghanaian citizens across the country for a thorough review of the 1992 Constitution to expunge all obnoxious provisions that are seen to be exploited by individuals and groups, particularly members of the ruling class to pervert the current democratic processes and entrench social and economic inequality (Constitutional Review Commission [CRC] Report, 2011). The commission did not however suggest a nationwide support for the wholesale abrogation of the constitution as demanded by #FixTheCountry movement. Diamond (1999) argues that, democratic consolidation is manifested through the political culture of the various key stakeholders and players of the democratic process including the elites, masses and the various associational groups. Thus, despite their justified misgivings after almost three

decades of democracy, the Ghanaian masses, as one of the key stakeholders of the democratic process, are unwilling to support any propositions that would lead to the complete abrogation or disruption of the 1992 constitution. Rather, the citizens supported an all-inclusive, participatory and dialogical approach of the CRC, where ordinary people have the free will to interact with the state and share ideas on the “forms of laws, rules, and regulations” that “can best be adopted through the reform processes to enhance the quality of life and protect and safeguard the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of the Ghanaian state and its citizens” (Kpessa & Atuguba, 2013, p.108).

Moreover, the CRC pointed out the arduous legal and political hurdles needed to be surmounted before some of these radical changes to the constitution can be realized. According to the commission, these procedures are also clearly explained by the 1992 constitution itself. For instance, according to the commission, amending the entrenched provisions of the constitution needs at least 75 per cent of the votes in favor at a referendum with at least 40 per cent of voter turn-out. Moreover, amending the non-entrenched provisions of the constitution require at least two-thirds majority of votes from all Members of Parliament (CRC, 2011). The subsequent white paper in response to the commission’s report accepted most of the recommendations of the commission (White Paper, n.d.). Thus, despite the proposed vote of no confidence by the #FixTheCountry and the nationwide clamor for some radical changes to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the processes and procedures defined by the constitution itself are not as easy as it may seem. Serious political will is therefore required from any government that intends to practicalize these demands of constitutional changes.

Democracy, the only game in town

Many governments in Africa have tolerated the activities of associational activities in response to rising demands from their citizens for greater democratic accountability, political representation and participation. Thus, in Ghana and under the Fourth Republican democratic dispensation, civil society organizations actively work to deepen the democratic process through advocacy on government or state policies. These include media engagement, public debate and articulation of alternative narratives on social and economic policies (Botchway, 2018). While articulating their demands for the change of the constitution, #FixTheCountry and their leaders have been categorical that, such exercise should take place only within the remit of the democratic political process. The main convener of the group, Oliver Mawusi Barker-Vormawor, reacting to the August 2021 military overthrow of the Guinean government of Alpha Conde, draws a linkage with the

Ghanaian situation and asserted that, if the people of Guinea had been allowed to freely use the existing democratic structures to reform their society and politics, the military takeover in that country would have been unlikely. He therefore admonishes Ghanaians to endeavor to reform their polity, re-emphasizing that “the 1992 Constitution (of Ghana) shouldn’t be changed through the barrel of the gun! It should be changed through our voices” (3News, 2021). Further, he affirms that, “no soldier can take away our sovereign right to decide the fate of our constitution” (3 News, 2021 cited by GhanaWeb, 2021). This position of #FixTheCountry and its leaders buttresses the various postulates of consolidation theorists such as Almond and Verba (1963), Diamond (1999) and Linz and Stepan (1996b) on one of the necessary conditions of democratic consolidation. These scholars are unanimous in their views that positive attitudes, beliefs and behaviors from both the citizens and the elites are vital in the efforts towards consolidating democracy. For instance, Linz and Stepan (1996b) suggest that attitudinally, “democracy becomes the only game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedures (p.16).” Moreover, for civil society to truly play a part in the expansion of the frontiers of democracy, it has to be dominated by individuals and groups who believe in democratic norms and ideals of the state. Again, civil society must be strong enough to simultaneously resist the institution’s subordination to the state and the ruling elites and demand adequate representation and inclusion into the democratic political process (Sahoo, 2013). Thus, attitudinally and behaviourally, the insistence by the #FixTheCountry of using the existing laws defined mainly by the 1992 constitution of Ghana to reform the constitution itself instead of resorting to any extra-constitutional means is not only a testament of the group’s unalloyed faith in the democratic process, but also a proof that Ghana’s democracy is treading on the right track. This is remarkable given the resurgence of coups, counter coups, failed coups and other unconstitutional means of changing government in Africa particularly in some neighbouring countries in recent years. For instance, writing for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Mwai reveals that:

This year has seen two takeovers in Burkina Faso as well as a failed coup attempt in Guinea Bissau... In 2017 in Zimbabwe, a military takeover brought Robert Mugabe’s 37-year rule to an end.... In April last year after the death of the Chadian leader, Idriss Déby, the army installed his son as interim president leading a transitional military council. His opponents called it a “dynastic coup”....We are only three years into the current decade and while in 2020 only one coup was reported (in Mali), in 2021 there was a noticeably higher than average number – six coups or attempted coups

were recorded...There were successful coups in Chad, Mali, Guinea and Sudan and failed military takeovers in Niger and Sudan all in that year.... Overall, Africa has experienced more coups than any other continent. Of the 14 coups recorded globally since 2017, all but one – Myanmar in 2021 – have been in Africa. (Mwai, October 3, 2022)

Fight Against Corruption

In theory, consolidating democracy anywhere in the world presupposes that institutional and legal frameworks would be effective in curbing corruption to the barest minimum within the public sphere. However, in practice, this is not the case in Ghana and many other democracies across the world (Brierley, 2020). While the Ghanaian state under various governments has instituted different strategies since the 1992 democratic transition to nip the menace in the bud through numerous legal and institutional reforms, the most pronounced policy initiative against corruption in recent times was the passage of the Office of the Special Prosecutor's Act 2018 (Act 663) by the government of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) under the Presidency of Nana Akufo-Addo (Abotsi, 2020). In spite of this renewed vigour in the fight against corruption, the Centre for Democratic Development's (CDD) Afrobarometer reports from its nationwide survey that 77 per cent of Ghanaians believe that the level of corruption in Ghana has risen over the past year (2021–2022) (CDD, 2022). This verdict is “more than double the proportion recorded in 2017 (36%).” Further, 65 per cent of Ghanaians agree that most or all police officials in Ghana are corrupt, the office of the president followed on the list of the most corrupt state institutions after the Police Service with 55 per cent and then finally the Ghanaian Parliament with 54 per cent (CDD, 2022).

Scholars of democracy are unanimous in their opinion that in consolidating democracy, associational life is expected to drive the political process by providing additional social infrastructure to challenge the arbitrariness and abuse of state power and corruption by the ruling elites and state institutions (Alagappa, 2004 b, p.41 Diamond, 1994; Gibson, 2001). Significantly, Diamond (1994) stresses that, there is nothing more scintillating in the democratic polity than the stories of civil society represented by “brave bands of students, writers, artists, pastors, teachers, labourers, and mothers challenging the duplicity, corruption and brutal domination” of the state and its agents or institutions (Diamond, 1994 as cited in Tar, 2008, p.18). Consequently, the emergence of aggressive civil society like #FixTheCountry movement at this stage of the nation's democratic journey is seen by many observers as an opportunity to improve the governance process regarding the canker of corruption in the public arena, particularly when the

problem seems to have so far defied any conceivable solution. Specifically, the fight against corruption has been one of the major demands of #FixTheCountry. For instance, since the middle of 2021 when the movement was formed, street actions have been used to pressure members of the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP) and other members of the ruling class to step up their efforts towards fighting corruption which to them has been the foundation of all the problems of the economy and social life of Ghanaians (Krippahl & Kaledzi, 2021). In this regard, the group was able to organize Ghanaian citizens of all socio-economic and political backgrounds to embark upon its maiden protest in Accra on August 4, 2021 against corruption and lack of equity in the society with a promise to expand the street actions across other parts of the country and in many major cities across the world (FixTheCountry, 2021). The organization has also used the power of the social media including WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter to influence public opinion on their stance against corruption (Krippahl & Kaledzi, 2021). These new media platforms were complemented by the traditional media such as radio and TV in the battle for the hearts and minds of the general Ghanaian public. While there is no data yet to gauge the true impact of #FixTheCountry in the fight against corruption, many observers have applauded the movement for its uncompromising and tough stance on corruption and abuse of power in Ghana.

Fighting High Cost of Living

Few will contest the view that Ghana's economy has faced dire challenges, imposing unbearable hardship on the ordinary citizenry in recent times. However, critics including #FixTheCountry have linked the present economic challenges to poor governance and mismanagement, accusing the ruling class of imposing intolerable hardship on the general populace. Many scholars have argued that, in consolidating democracy, civil society has the onerous responsibility of challenging the state on individual's economic problems such as high cost of living, unemployment and widespread poverty. Thus, the activities of #FixTheCountry movement in the campaign against the poor management of the economy and the resultant hardship mirrors the important assumptions articulated by Tocqueville which perceives civil society as an important tool that could confine the state to its assigned role as a facilitator and promoter of the economic well-being of the citizens within the liberal political atmosphere (Alagappa, 2004 b, p.30). Remarkably, various narratives and protests carried out by members of #FixTheCountry movement including those in the diaspora focused on wide-range of issues including high cost of living, unemployment, poverty, among other social and economic maladies bedeviling the youth (FixTheCountry, 2021). In this regard, members of the group, which cut across different professions and social

backgrounds, criticized the poor working conditions of Ghanaian workers and called for a fairer distribution of the national cake among Ghanaian citizens of all backgrounds. They argued that, since time immemorial, annual increment of the National Daily Minimum Wage by the state has not been commensurate with the rise in the rate of inflation and exchange rate depreciation, thereby undermining the purchasing power of the ordinary Ghanaian worker (GhanaWeb, 2021). To them, this fosters poverty and economic inequalities among the citizens despite sustained efforts at consolidating democracy (FixTheCountry, 2021). The group again blames the 1992 constitution for creating what they describe as a class society where the problem of inequality is aggravating on daily basis. According to a press statement by the group, “we are rejecting the fraudulent Fourth Republic (Constitution) that impoverishes its citizens, disables accountability from the political class and creates an imperial presidency” (GhanaWeb, 2021). This insistence on better living condition for Ghanaian citizens by the group is firmly rooted in Przeworski’s (2000) study which highlights the strong interface between economic prosperity and better living conditions of the citizens on the one hand and democratic consolidation on the other. According to him:

...the probability that a democracy would die in a country with an income above \$4,000 was almost zero. Indeed, no democracy has ever been subverted, not during the period we studied nor ever before, nor after, regardless of everything else, in a country with a per capita income higher than that of Argentina in 1975: \$6,055. There is no doubt that democracy is stable in affluent countries: The probability of it collapsing is almost zero... (Przeworski, 2000, p. 98).

Thus, the struggle for better living conditions of Ghanaians by #FixTheCountry movement can sufficiently be equated with a struggle for democratic consolidation in Ghana.

Safeguarding Citizen's Natural Rights

While Ghana has made inroads in the protection of human rights and civil liberties, there is no debate that there are still numerous human rights violations committed by different governments since 1992. Hence, Ghana features constantly in various human rights reports. For instance, the 2021 US Department of State report cited Ghana for various human rights abuses such as infringement on freedom of expression and speech, politically motivated killings and other forms of inhuman treatments (Nyabor, April 26, 2022). However, building on the various propositions of both John Lock and Adam Smith on safeguarding citizens’ natural

rights and protecting them against state arbitrariness, Tocqueville articulates the interaction between civil society and the new global democratic order (Merket, 1999). In his view, in any democracy, voluntary associations are vital in “protecting individual liberty, preventing tyranny of the majority, decentralizing power and authority, and fostering active engagement of citizens in politics and governance” (Whitehead, 1997, pp. 98–99 as cited in Alagappa, 2004 b). Moreover, both Diamond (1999) and Linz and Stepan (1996) concur on the indispensability of civil liberties in the attainment of democratic consolidation. In this regard, #FixTheCountry movement has since its formation been at the forefront of the fight against human rights violations. The group has on various platforms and during their numerous protests and demonstrations demanded justice for victims of human rights violations including victims of politically–motivated murders. One of such victims was Ibrahim Muhammed (also known as Kaaka) who was not only a key member of the group but also a central pillar of their organization and online activism, particularly in the Ashanti Region of Ghana (FixTheCountry, 2021). At a press conference on August 3, 2021, the group accused the state and its security apparatuses of dereliction of duty and complicity in many politically–motivated murders in the country in the past and warned of sustained campaign to make the murder of Kaaka an “exception” to the situation (Starrfmonline, 2021 cited by GhanaWeb, 2021). Arthur (2010) stresses that in consolidating democracy, civil society should be free, autonomous and assertive in their activism including mobilizing citizens to embark on mass protests and other methods of civil disobedience. Consequently, the movement mounted intense pressure on the security apparatuses of the Ghanaian state with intermittent protests and other civil activism when their leader, Oliver Barker–Vormawor was arrested by the Ghana Police Service on Friday, February 11, 2022 and put before court for what the state security apparatuses described as attempt to stage a coup and disrupt the democratic process (GhanaWeb, 2021). However, Barker–Vormawor insisted he was exercising his freedom of speech for declaring that there will be (a legal) coup against the controversial E–levy if it is ever passed by the nation’s legislature. He subsequently went on hunger strike to demand his freedom from what he and his supporters considered as illegal detention by the security services (GhanaWeb, 2021).

#FixTheCountry, #Fixingthecountry and #Fixourattitudenow

Tar (2008) postulates that, in many instances, some sections of civil society organizations may be allied to the states and a particular government or political interest, while other sections take opposing stance (to the state). In reinforcing this view, Dra’s pluralist model (1993) also articulates the importance of the

proliferation of different civil society organizations in a democracy even if they portray antithetical and opposing objectives, views and interests. Their autonomy, independence and diversity are vital ingredients for democratic consolidation. Suffice to say, while #FixTheCountry group has been at the forefront of the struggle against the Ghanaian political establishment, there have been counter-narratives and activism from other two groups widely perceived as being pro-ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and its government led by President Nana Akufo-Addo (Kaledzi, May, 2021). While all these three antagonistic groups agree in principles on the dire socio-economic problems facing the country; corruption, unemployment, high cost of living, economic mismanagement, poor economic and social infrastructure, there are palpable divergence of tactics, strategies and views in combating the problems (Adjei, August, 2021). For instance, both #Fixingthecountry and #Fixourattitudenow seemed opposed to the militant approach being used by #FixTheCountry. While membership of #Fixingthecountry movement is dominated by supporters and appointees (and former appointees) of the ruling NPP, #Fixourattitudenow seems to be dominated by some celebrities sympathetic to the ruling NPP. Both of these groups are united in their opposition to what they see as radical methods being used by #FixTheCountry movement. They suspected clever attempts by some elements within the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) to hide behind the supposed neutrality and non-partisan posture of #FixTheCountry organization to make the ruling NPP unpopular among the electorate.

The #Fixingthecountry also argues that, these socio-economic and political problems being constantly highlighted by #FixTheCountry are inherited problems and therefore have been with the Ghanaian state at least since independence in 1957 (Adjei, August, 2021). They point out that, the NPP government cannot therefore be blamed for a problem it has inherited from numerous regimes since independence. Moreover, #Fixourattitudenow also postulates that, solution for the socio-economic problems being articulated by the rivaled group, #FixTheCountry can only be found if the citizens are prepared to change their attitude and become more patriotic than they are currently. According to them, large sections of Ghanaian citizens on daily basis condone and connive in actions and behaviors that have the tendency of destroying the capacity of the state to play its traditional social and economic functions smoothly.

While there is no empirical evidence linking the state and the government of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) to the establishment and the activism of both #Fixourattitudenow and #Fixingthecountry and also the NDC to #FixTheCountry, Alagappa (2004c), points out that, across the world, civil societies have become an anathema to a segment of the ruling elites. Consequently, they employ all manner

of tools to constrain their activities. These include “legal, financial, institutional, and coercive measures” (p.455). The measures are often adopted by the ruling class to repress, compress their space for effective actions and mobilization, and if necessary, co-opt some of them in the governance process. These actions are deemed necessary because over the period, non-state organizations have through sustained struggle and advocacy succeeded in not only bringing down governments but also trimming the over-bloated state, “contributing to a restructuring of the relations among state, political society, and civil society” (Alagappa, 2004c, p.455).

Networking and Collaboration

Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1994), identify what they term as the “internal” and “external” effects of civil society in consolidating democracy. Internally, the effects border on the ability of civil society organizations to inculcate time-tested societal norms such as “cooperation, solidarity and public-spiritedness” into its members (p.89-90). Furthermore, the diversity of these groups and the variations of views and agendas lead to the moderation of views, mutual interaction, understanding, collaboration and self-discipline among the members. All these societal norms are essential building blocks in the process of democratic consolidation. Externally, networking among civil society groups promotes interest articulations and interest aggregations within the democratic arena (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1994). #FixTheCountry exhibits all these important features. The movement is an amalgamation of different associational groups with varied backgrounds united by common agenda of upholding political freedom and economic and social justice (FixTheCountry, 2021). Membership of the #FixTheCountry movement also goes beyond the boundaries of the Ghanaian state and seems to be global in nature and therefore diaspora activism has been an integral part of the strategy of the group since its formation (FixTheCountry, 2021). For instance, members of #FixTheCountry extend their political campaign outside the country with a protest on August 14, 2021 in Dortmund, Germany. According to them, as the struggle intensifies, the group intends embarking on numerous demonstrations in various cities across Europe and America. One of the activists of the group named Barima Nana Yaw Boubu in a Facebook message articulated the group’s intention of extending the protests in cities such as “Washington, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Toronto, Rome, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Geneva etc.,” in order to put maximum pressure on the country’s political establishment to kowtow to their demands for social and economic reforms (GhanaWeb, 2021). Tocqueville stresses that, in situations where membership of civil society is diverse, citizens within the group get to know one another and their zeal is increased by the sheer

size of their large numbers and diversity. The association is then able to unite the energies of these “divergent minds and vigorously directs them toward a clearly” defined objective of political freedom and economic development (Tocqueville, cited in Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1994, p.90).

CONCLUSION

There is a broad consensus from the works of scholars such as Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), John Locke (1632–1704), Montesquieu (1689–1755), Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas and Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1994), that civil society organizations such as that of Ghana’s #FixTheCountry movement is central to democratic consolidation (Merket, 1999). While the group is still in its foundational stages of advocacy and activism, its ability to organize young and diverse groups to demand democratic accountability from Ghana’s political elites has so far been remarkable. Economic mismanagement, corruption, human rights violations and abuse of political power have been among the core pillars of its activism and advocacy. Further, its radical demands for the abrogation of the 1992 Constitutions is what markedly differentiates it from other combative civil society groups formed in the earlier stages of the Fourth Republican democratic dispensation of Ghana. However, what remains unclear is whether the group is genuinely interested in social and economic reforms as it always claims in its activism or may at some point join forces with some other political parties as other civil society groups such as the Committee for Joint Action (CJA), Let My Vote Count Alliance, OccupyGhana among many others, had done in the past. Thus, there is the need for further studies in the future to analyse the full intensions, actions and activities of the group to determine whether it is yet another politically partisan organization supporting the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) to re-capture power from the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the 2024 elections. Moreover, there is also the need for a future study to investigate whether it has made any impact on the various social and economic issues it has raised in its activism.

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