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**The politics of social protection in a
competitive African democracy:
Explaining social protection policy
reform in Ghana (2000-2014)**

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The politics of social protection in a competitive African democracy: Explaining social protection policy reform in Ghana (2000-2014)

Abstract

The Kufuor (New Patriotic Party) administration of 2000-2008 implemented substantial reforms of the contributory social insurance system (including the introduction of a national health insurance scheme and a new 'three tier' pensions system), and introduced a range of social assistance schemes targeted at the 'extreme poor'. This paper analyses the factors that drove policy reform and the broad cross-party consensus that emerged despite highly competitive elections. Electoral dynamics played a significant role, and this is reflected in the political 'messaging' and 'branding' of parties and candidates during election campaigns, although there is little evidence of the political salience of social protection. Other important factors include a complex set of 'agendas' from actors including domestic bureaucrats, international agencies and donors, as well as politicians. These interacted in complex ways with elite alignments that have favoured or worked against pro-poor policy reform at various stages. The paper draws on studies of election campaigns and political parties, electoral dynamics, the 'political settlement' in Ghana and public opinion data.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the political dynamics in Ghana's 'Fourth Republic' that help to explain the path of social protection policy reform, and social policy more broadly since 2000. Significant reforms to the contributory social insurance system and limited social assistance schemes were introduced during the presidency of John A. Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party (2000-2008). These reforms continued to be implemented, together with modest expansion of social assistance, under the Mills and Mahama National Democratic Convention governments (2008 onwards). Social protection policy in Ghana is characterised by remarkable cross-party consensus within the political elite, as well as a relatively high degree of bureaucratic autonomy. The striking characteristics of social protection policy reform in Ghana include an unusual (for Anglophone

Africa) emphasis on contributory social insurance; the fact that the most significant expansion of social protection took place under a ‘right of centre’ government; and the apparent consensus on both the need for and shape of Ghana’s social protection system (such that neither party has opted to embrace substantial expansion of social assistance as a populist electoral tactic). This paper situates the emergence of this consensus and the shape of Ghana’s reform path within the political dynamics of Ghana’s ‘Fourth Republic’. These include electoral incentives – from the point of view of voting behaviour as well as the ways in which parties and candidates have attempted to ‘brand’ themselves with respect to social policy; public opinion on and the political salience of social policy; a range of ‘agendas’ pursued by political actors (including the ‘ideological’ and ‘political’ agendas of party and political elites and a ‘technocratic’ agenda pursued by bureaucrats and international agencies); and the agenda-setting power of various actors.

After near-continuous military rule in the decades after the first military *coup d’etat* against independence leader Kwame Nkrumah’s leftist government in 1966, Ghana re-democratised in 1992. A new Constitution was promulgated, which allowed for a Presidential system and constituency-based multiparty parliamentary elections. Ghana’s democratisation is complicated by the fact that the successful presidential candidate in the 1992 elections – Jerry Rawlings – had been the head of the authoritarian Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime, which had ruled for more than a decade. Election-related violence, claims of election-rigging and of bias in the state-owned media’s coverage of campaigns (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994; Agyeman-Duah, 2000; Temin & Smith, 2002) were not uncommon. Further, the PNDC’s political party successor, the National Democratic Convention (NDC) enjoyed limited legitimacy during the first parliamentary term, after a boycott of the parliamentary elections by the main opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Rawlings and the NDC emerged victorious again in 1996, but NPP’s John Kufuor won a run-off presidential election against the NDC’s candidate (and Rawlings’s Vice President, John Atta Mills) in 2000 and the NPP secured exactly half of parliamentary seats. Kufuor was re-elected in 2004, but in 2008 the NDC returned to power with a small majority of seats and Mills winning the presidential election. Mills died in office in 2012, and his Vice President (John Mahama) was elected president in the same year, with the NDC retaining a parliamentary majority. These six relatively peaceful elections, largely judged ‘free and fair’ and, in particular, two peaceful handovers of power through the ballot box have cemented Ghana’s reputation as a rapidly consolidating democracy and as the ‘Golden Child of West Africa’ (Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh, 2012; Armah-Attoh & Robertson, 2014).

The paper starts with a brief outline of the major social protection policy reforms undertaken since 2000. These reforms are described in detail in a separate, companion paper (Grebe, 2015). It then reviews a range of potential aspects of Ghanaian political dynamics that may help to explain the particular character of these reforms, and the broad elite consensus on social protection policy. First, electoral dynamics – including voter behaviour and political branding – during the critical elections of 2000, 2004, and 2008 – are reviewed, together with public opinion data on the salience of social protection. Particular attention is paid to the role of social protection in the election campaigns of 2004 (when the NPP retained power after introducing several reforms) and 2008, when the NDC managed to regain power. Specific questions include whether social protection was a sufficiently salient electoral issue to help explain policy choices, and whether parties’ electoral campaigns reveal attempts to differentiate themselves on the basis of social policy and whether this may have significantly influenced electoral outcomes.

Second, the roles of various actors, including political leaders (both in government and the parliamentary opposition), bureaucrats, and transnational actors (bilateral donors and multilateral development agencies such as the World Bank) are reviewed. For this purpose, and following Devereux and White (2010), distinct ‘technocratic’, ‘ideological’, and ‘political’ agendas can be identified and their interplay examined. Finally, the role of elite configurations (‘ruling coalitions’) and the nature of what is widely termed the ‘political settlement’ in Ghana’s ‘Fourth Republic’ is examined in an attempt to pull together the various strands of the analysis. In the conclusion the explanatory power of the various approaches is assessed, questions for further research raised, and some speculative reflections on the implications of Ghanaian political dynamics for the future direction of social protection policy offered.

2. Background: Contributory social insurance reform and the introduction of limited social assistance in Ghana’s ‘Fourth Republic’

During the Kufuor (NPP) administration’s term, a range of social protection reforms were introduced. Most significantly, substantial reform of contributory social security was undertaken, with the introduction of a national health insurance scheme and major reforms to the pension system. Additionally, a range of social assistance measures were introduced, including the introduction of free primary education (school fee exemption via the ‘capitation grant’) in 2004, a school feeding programme (the Ghana School Feeding Programme or GSFP) in 2005, and a cash transfer scheme known as the Livelihood

Empowerment Against Poverty scheme announced in 2007 and implemented from 2008 as the ‘flagship programme’ of a National Social Protection Strategy (MMYE, 2007). It also established the National Youth Employment Programme, and active labour market policy intended to contribute to skills and job creation among the youth in 2006. The period of NPP rule (2000-2008) can therefore be characterised as one of intense reform of contributory social insurance and modest expansion of social assistance. After 2008, the NDC government has largely continued with the implementation of reforms initiated under the NPP, modestly expanded the cash transfer scheme and introduced a number of additional programmes, including the Ghana Social Opportunities Project, which includes a substantial Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) component (largely funded by a US\$88 million World Bank-grant).

Before 2000, the only major postcolonial reform to the pension system was the creation of a range of provident funds from the 1960s onwards, and their conversion in 1992 into a single defined-benefit scheme, known as ‘national basic social insurance’ under the management of the Social Security National Insurance Trust (SSNIT), a statutory body. The creation of SSNIT (and the closure of the unfunded ‘Cap 30’ pension scheme for civil servants – dating from the colonial era – to new entrants) converted hitherto popular provident funds (that provided lump sum payments upon retirement) to a pension scheme that would guarantee a monthly income. This conversion took place under trade union pressure, owing to high inflation and repeated currency devaluations (as part of the IMF-sponsored structural adjustment reforms undertaken by the Rawlings regime from 1983) which eroded the value of lump sum payments (Kpessa, 2011: 96). Despite the substantial growth in SSNIT membership between 1992 and the early 2000s, the scheme was seen as suboptimal, and the Kufuor administration endeavoured to reform the system so as to create a more comprehensive retirement income security package.¹ Following a long process of consultation, including the appointment of the Presidential Commission which reported its findings in 2006, a new National Pensions Act was passed in 2008, shortly before the NDC’s return to power. The Act provided for two additional ‘tiers’ in the statutory pension system, including a mandatory privately-administered tier and a voluntary third tier (aimed primarily at attracting informal sector workers) which constituted a set of individual accounts-based defined-contribution schemes. Implementation of these reforms, including the creation of a regulatory body (the National Pensions Regulatory Authority) to oversee private sector fund managers and trustees took place under the NDC government after 2008.

¹ Interview, Dr Anthony Akoto Osei, 5 November 2014.

The introduction of the National Health Insurance Scheme in 2003 was the realisation of an election promise that formed an important part of the NPP's platform in the 2000 elections (Agyepong and Adjei, 2008). Its aim was to replace the 'cash and carry' healthcare system (in which public health facilities charged patients after the introduction of user charges during structural adjustment in the 1980s) with a system in which both public and private healthcare providers would provide service free of charges at the point of delivery to the insured. Technically it constituted an amalgam of three kinds of schemes, including 'district-wide mutual health schemes', which were later centralised under the NHIS. Regulations provided for premium exemption to the 'core poor' (or destitute) and children whose parents were paying members, as well as a progressive scale of premiums and exemptions for SSNIT contributors and pensioners. Premium exemption was extended to all pregnant mothers and all children under 18 in 2008. While the original target was to reach full population coverage within five years, by 2013 only about a third of the population were classed as 'active members' – i.e. with a current registration card and 'paid up' if not premium-exempt (see Grebe, 2015).

While not technically social assistance education-focused reforms, most notably the introduction of free primary education through the capitation grant in 2004 and the launch of the Ghana School Feeding Programme (aimed both at reducing hunger and improving primary school enrolment rates) in 2005, are seen by Ghanaian policy-makers as an integral part of the country's 'social protection package.' The capitation grant, which amounts to school fee abolition, has resulted in substantial rises in enrolment rates (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007), but a decline in the quality of education and substantial fund 'leakages' (Ampratwum and Armah-Attoh, 2010; Ampratwum, Armah-Attoh and Ashon, 2012). Initially launched in a small number of schools, GSFP would eventually reach about 1.7 children in 2013.

The LEAP programme – much-vaunted as a domestically-driven cash transfer schemes – is a conditional cash transfer scheme, launched as the 'flagship programme' of the NSPS in 2007, with pilot implementation starting in 2008. Its design is based on district-level, village-level, and household-level targeting, with the former two selected based on poverty rankings, and the latter making use of community targeting and centralised proxy means-testing to verify eligibility. Eligibility criteria include the household being classified as 'extremely poor' and the presence of at least one household member falling into one of the eligible categories of vulnerable persons (those over 65, the 'severely disabled', or orphans and vulnerable children). Conditions include young children being in primary school, enrolment in the NHIS and regular health facility visits. Benefit levels were initially extremely low (ranging from US\$2 and US\$3.90 per household), but tripled in 2012, and the number of

beneficiaries enrolled in the programme grew very slowly to reach approximately 70,000 households in late 2013 (Handa *et al.*, 2014).

While it is significant that a cash transfer scheme was initiated by the Government of Ghana itself,² benefit levels, numbers of beneficiaries, and total expenditure remained very low both under NPP and NDC governments. More significant expenditure aimed at reaching MDG goals on primary school enrolment and eliminating extreme hunger show a willingness throughout the political elite to make pro-poor resource allocations, but social assistance has been highly parsimonious. It is also notable that the major structural and parametric reforms to social protection was to contributory social insurance (although the NHIS has a large and growing social assistance component through premium exemption), suggesting a dominant development discourse emphasising self-reliance, productivity, and ‘growing out of poverty’ (see Grebe, 2015). It is notable that social security reform has mainly benefited the urban middle class and those in formal employment, while the modest expansion of social assistance and active labour market policy has largely benefitted the rural poor. The urban poor have largely been left out of these benefits – despite the attempts at covering ‘informal sector’ workers under the new pensions and health insurance schemes. This constitutes somewhat of a puzzle in the light of research on voting behaviour in African democracies, such as that of Resnick (2012; 2013), which points to the importance of the urban poor in African electoral politics.

3. Electoral politics and public opinion

It is difficult, on the basis of the evidence gathered during the course of the fieldwork for this study, to come to strong conclusions about the potential impact of electoral dynamics on welfare reform policy choices in Ghana. Politicians generally deny in interviews that electoral matters influenced their decisions (a highly questionable claim) and tend to emphasise (1) their ideological commitment to a chosen policy path and/or (2) the technical appropriateness or ‘correctness’ of the policy given the circumstances.

General structural forces, mainly based on secondary literature, are discussed in the first subsection in order to shed light on the electoral incentives that policy-makers faced at various stages in the reform process. What is most distinctive about Ghana is the highly-competitive two party system. It therefore appears highly likely that political leaders – at various levels of the political system – would have faced substantial incentives to adopt and implement policies that

² Interview, Akusua Frema Osei-Opare, 31 October 2014.

they believed either would resonate with their core supporters or would be likely to sway swing voters in their direction. Two puzzles present themselves when an electoral incentives perspective is adopted: (1) why has neither major party seized the populist initiative and campaigned on a platform of substantial expansion of social assistance? And (2) why have the urban poor largely been excluded from social protection policy reform? Further, the broad cross-party consensus around key policy choices in Ghana's social protection reforms needs to be explained.

In the second subsection, the analysis of electoral politics is developed by paying attention to how public opinion may have shaped candidates and parties' assessments of which policies may resonate with the electorate. The third subsection provides a brief analysis of election campaign strategy and 'political branding' – i.e. how candidates and parties positioned themselves in order to attract support.

In the next section, the focus is turned to the impact of 'technocratic agendas' and 'ideological agendas' (as distinct from 'political agendas' which largely refer to electoral responses and other structural incentives). This necessitates attention to the role of a relatively autonomous bureaucracy (an autonomy that may well be, at least in part, a function of the multiple transitions of power and competitive democracy). The key point here is that policy-making is a complex process involving a diverse array of actors with divergent agendas, subject to different incentives. But none of these actors are automatons simply responding to incentives: ideas matter and agency matters. Brief reflections are offered on the implications of the composition of elites, and elite alignments (coalitions) in Ghanaian politics, or what is referred to in the literature as Ghana's 'political settlement'. This perspective may help to make sense of some of the counterintuitive aspects of Ghanaian political dynamics with respect to social protection policy-making.

3.1 Electoral incentives and voting behaviour

Ghana transitioned to multiparty democracy with the founding election of the 'Fourth Republic' under a new constitution in 1992, when former military ruler Jerry Rawlings won the election under the banner of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the civilian political party incarnation of the ruling PNDC. Rawlings emerged victorious in both the 1992 and 1996 elections, but his successor NDC candidate lost to the opposition New Patriotic Party presidential candidate, John Kufuor in 2000, who was re-elected in 2004. In the 2008 general election, power reverted to the NDC, with their candidate John Atta Mills elected president in a close contest and his vice president, who succeeded Mills

upon his death in 2012, re-elected in December 2012.³ Ghana's 'Fourth Republic' has therefore performed well, with six elections and two handovers of power. It has also, unusually, emerged with a stable two-party alignment characterised by highly competitive elections, a majority of 'core voters' (i.e. stable allegiance to one of the major parties), but a substantial minority of 'swing voters' who exhibit, according to Lindberg and Morrison (2005: 566) 'mature voting behaviour' in switching their support based on candidates' performance and policy issues. Other analyses of voter behaviour have, however, emphasised different aspects of voter behaviour, with Nugent (1999) finding strong ethnic and rural/urban themes prevailing in the 1992 and 1996 elections and Bossuroy (2011) finding a strong relationship between ethnicity and voting patterns.

The NDC describes itself as a social democratic party and tends to engage in populist rhetoric, while the NPP is generally seen as centre-right.⁴ The NPP's origins can be traced to the conservative United Gold Coast Convention party of the 1940s (described by Morrison, 2004, as representing the local merchant and professional class and as part of a 'liberal-mercantilist' axis), the Northern People's Party of the 1950s, and the United Party, which was the main opposition to Kwame Nkrumah's socialist Convention People's Party from independence until Ghana became a one-party state in 1964. It is therefore the most recent incarnation of one of the two 'great political traditions' of Ghana.⁵ These are the Nkrumahists, on the one hand, and the Busia/Danquah tradition on the other – both of whom, according to Nugent, considered themselves Ghana's natural rulers:

'Time and again, a return to multi-party politics has been accompanied by the regrouping of politicians around one of two poles, represented by the Nkrumah and Busia/Danquah traditions, respectively. ...it is

³ The party whose candidate won the Presidential election also gained a simple majority in the Parliamentary elections accompanying each Presidential poll, except for the 1992 election, in which the NPP withdrew from the parliamentary elections after refusing to accept the results of the presidential election. Like the Presidential elections, Parliamentary elections have been highly competitive, with the opposition NDC controlling 92 seats to the NPP's 100 in the 2000 election, 94 to 128 (after an increase in the size of Parliament) in 2004, and 116 to 107 when an NDC President returned to power in 2008.

⁴ This is the way in which the parties were described by most informants, including senior politicians in the parties themselves. It is also evident from the rhetoric employed in election campaigns, although there are no dramatic differences between the parties on either economic policy or social policy (see, for example, Nugent, 2001; Morrison, 2004; Lindberg and Morrison, 2005).

⁵ In fact, John Kufuor himself had served as a junior minister in the Busia government (Interview, John A. Kufuor, 6 November 2014).

worth noting that even military rulers found it expedient to identify with one political tradition or the other.

...

Not surprisingly, when the PNDC hinted that there would be a return to constitutional government in the early 1990s, the pattern repeated itself. The leaders of the Busia/Danquah tradition now rediscovered the unity that had been lacking in 1979 [when a brief return to civilian rule saw the election victory of the Nkrumahist Convention People's Party under Hilla Limann], and founded the New Patriotic Party to contest the 1992 elections. By contrast, the Nkrumahists found themselves split four ways' (Nugent, 1999: 287).

While not Nkrumahist itself, and despite overseeing a decade of structural adjustment reforms, the NDC's left-wing rhetoric probably allowed it to attract the support of a significant proportion of the divided Nkrumahist parties' support base. As described earlier, it was the NPP government under John Kufuor's presidency that undertook the most important welfare reforms of recent decades, which substantially expanded the coverage of social insurance and to some degree social assistance. Mills's – and later Mahama's – NDC administrations embraced the reforms introduced under the NPP, overseeing the implementation of most of the details of the 2008 pension reforms (such as the creation of the National Pensions Regulatory Authority and the additional two tiers of pension funds), and stuck to a national health insurance approach to expanding healthcare access. The NDC government further embraced and expanded the LEAP programme (despite some initial doubts about its commitment), introduced further programmes such as the World Bank-funded Ghana Social Opportunities Project with a large LIPW component and expanded the existing Agriculture Subsidy Programme in 2010, with the intention of reaching all farmers in the country.

It therefore appears that a remarkable cross-party consensus existed on the need for social protection measures in Ghana, and even on the broad outlines of the social protection system, including a large social insurance component augmented by social assistance to the poorest in the form of cash transfers and subsidised health insurance, but with social assistance parsimonious, highly poverty-targeted and conditional. This begs explanation, given that welfare reforms, and cash transfers in particular, have tended to prove controversial in many African countries, with strong elite resistance to 'handouts.' While the LEAP programme was controversial upon introduction – with both politicians

and members of the public expressing opposition to ‘free money’ and ‘handouts’ (Abebrese, 2011), resistance appeared to have largely dissipated by 2014.⁶

It might be tempting to leap to the conclusion that a competitive democracy creates incentives on all parties to support ‘popular’ (or even ‘populist’) measures like cash transfers, but this neglects both the complexity of voting patterns and the fact that continental patterns do not fit the map of highly competitive elections as neatly as one might expect. Nor does this explain why it was the right-of-centre NPP that introduced most reforms, when the NDC could as easily have reached for cash transfers as a populist tactic before 2000 if it suspected this might avert electoral defeat. At least part of the answer is likely to lie in the international diffusion of ideas and the role of international agencies like the World Bank and bilateral aid agencies such as the UK’s DFID, which started more aggressively promoting cash transfers during the 2000s. Resource availability may also have played a role in that economic growth and revenue collection only really started increasing fiscal space from the 2000s onwards. Transnational political economy may therefore potentially have been as significant a factor as domestic electoral considerations.

Several puzzles remain. Why was a universal social pension never seriously considered in Ghana – despite evidence of the breakdown of traditional kin support for the elderly (Apt, 2002; Aboderin, 2004)? And why did opposition to the LEAP cash transfer largely disappear?⁷ Were opponents simply appeased by its parsimonious and conditional nature, or had attitudes shifted substantially within the political policy elites? Why has the Kufuor administration’s preference for social insurance not proven more controversial, or any attempts made to expand social assistance to reach more of the poor (rather than the ultra-poor)? Why was there no discussion of replacing the premium-bearing national health insurance with free healthcare services? Most importantly, Ghana’s social protection initiatives are widely seen as largely home-grown and government-owned (Sultan & Schrofer, 2008), which would be exceptional on a continent where social protection has often been perceived as primarily a donor agenda, as has been the case in many of the other case studies conducted for the LIWPR research programme (see, for example, Grebe, 2014; Grebe & Mubiru, 2014; Seekings & Kabandula, 2015; Granvik, 2015).

⁶ Although opposition to ‘handouts’, even within the NDC, had not entirely disappeared. See Grebe (2015).

⁷ Informants involved in the initial proposal described strong political resistance (Interviews, Akusua Frema Osei-Opare, 31 October 2014; Ebenezer Jerry O. Odotei, 28 October 2014), but current managers of the programme describe strong support from their political principles (Interviews, Mawutor Ablo; Dzigbordi Kofi Agbekpornu, 12 November 2014).

One potential factor mediating the influence of electoral pressures on policy choices is that the NDC may have a majority of firmly-aligned and loyal core voters (Lindberg & Morrison, 2005: 574-575) – although this would need to be confirmed using more recent data – which would place stronger incentives on the NPP to enact popular (populist?) reforms in order to attract swing voters. In any event, both parties relied on swing voters to overturn previous electoral defeats, and if Lindberg & Morrison (2005: 577) are correct that although swing voters are not distinguished by structural characteristics (like age, gender, or class), they did “evaluate government performance as relatively ‘mature’ voters”, electoral pressure would tend to support policy reforms that are expected to appeal to a wide cross-section of the population. Furthermore, a growing proportion of Ghanaians of voting age report believing that voters should hold elected representatives accountable by ‘ensuring that they do their jobs’ (Armah-Attoh *et al.*, 2014: 5), although only small minorities report engaging in collective action in order to raise concerns (Armah-Attoh & Robertson, 2014: 6).

Table 1 shows presidential election results by region, with colour coding indicating which party’s candidate attracted most votes (NDC victories are indicated in orange and NPP victories in blue). The election results make clear that certain regions constitute “core support” for each party (Ashanti for the NPP, for example, and Volta as well as the Northern regions for the NDC). “Swing areas” – which include Greater Accra and Central, large population centres – are shown in green, and these have been the key battlegrounds for the two parties.

Table 1: Presidential election results: 1992-2012

Region		1996		2000		2000 R/o		2004		2008		2008 R/o		2012
Greater Accra	Rawlings	54%	Kuffour	53%	Kuffour	60%	Kuffour	52%	A. Mills	52%	A. Mills	54%	Mahama	52%
	Kuffour	43%	A. Mills	42%	A. Mills	40%	A. Mills	47%	N. Addo	46%	N. Addo	46%	N. Addo	47%
Ashanti	Kuffour	66%	Kuffour	75%	Kuffour	81%	Kuffour	77%	N. Addo	73%	N. Addo	74%	N. Addo	71%
	Rawlings	33%	A. Mills	23%	A. Mills	20%	A. Mills	22%	A. Mills	26%	A. Mills	26%	Mahama	28%
Eastern	Rawlings	55%	Kuffour	53%	Kuffour	64%	Kuffour	60%	N. Addo	57%	N. Addo	57%	N. Addo	57%
	Kuffour	44%	A. Mills	43%	A. Mills	37%	A. Mills	38%	A. Mills	41%	A. Mills	43%	Mahama	42%
Central	Rawlings	55%	Kuffour	50%	Kuffour	60%	Kuffour	59%	A. Mills	51%	A. Mills	54%	Mahama	52%
	Kuffour	43%	A. Mills	44%	A. Mills	40%	A. Mills	39%	N. Addo	46%	N. Addo	46%	N. Addo	46%
Western	Rawlings	57%	Kuffour	49%	Kuffour	62%	Kuffour	58%	N. Addo	50%	A. Mills	52%	Mahama	54%
	Kuffour	41%	A. Mills	45%	A. Mills	38%	A. Mills	40%	A. Mills	46%	N. Addo	48%	N. Addo	44%
Volta	Rawlings	95%	A. Mills	86%	A. Mills	89%	A. Mills	84%	A. Mills	82%	A. Mills	86%	Mahama	85%
	Kuffour	5%	Kuffour	8%	Kuffour	11%	Kuffour	14%	N. Addo	15%	N. Addo	14%	N. Addo	13%
Brong Ahafo	Rawlings	62%	Kuffour	51%	Kuffour	60%	Kuffour	52%	N. Addo	51%	A. Mills	51%	Mahama	51%
	Kuffour	36%	A. Mills	45%	A. Mills	40%	A. Mills	46%	A. Mills	48%	N. Addo	49%	N. Addo	47%
Northern	Rawlings	61%	A. Mills	51%	A. Mills	51%	A. Mills	58%	A. Mills	57%	A. Mills	62%	Mahama	58%

	Kuffour	33%	Kuffour	30%	Kuffour	49%	Kuffour	35%	N. Addo	38%	N. Addo	38%	N. Addo	39%
Upper East	Rawlings	69%	A. Mills	50%	A. Mills	58%	A. Mills	53%	A. Mills	56%	A. Mills	66%	Mahama	66%
	Kuffour	17%	Kuffour	19%	Kuffour	42%	Kuffour	32%	N. Addo	35%	N. Addo	34%	N. Addo	29%
Upper West	Rawlings	75%	A. Mills	62%	A. Mills	62%	A. Mills	57%	A. Mills	54%	A. Mills	62%	Mahama	66%
	Kuffour	11%	Kuffour	16%	Kuffour	38%	Kuffour	32%	N. Addo	38%	N. Addo	38%	N. Addo	29%

Resnick (2012; 2013) shows how the urban poor's political participation has become an increasingly important determinant of electoral outcomes in Africa. In particular, where opposition parties have employed 'populist strategies' for mobilising the urban poor, it has substantially increased their chances of unseating incumbents. At the same time, African elites have traditionally been seen as favouring urban dwellers over their rural counterparts (see, for example, Lipton, 1977, cited in Resnick, 2013), despite the latter until recently making up a very small proportion of the population in most African countries. The rise of interest in the urban poor as an important political constituency can be traced to several views, including that this is a group more prone to violence and unrest resulting from a sense of marginalisation and relative deprivation, and Resnick's view that the evidence suggests the poor in general, but the urban poor in particular, show higher levels of political participation in the form of voting than their non-poor and rural counterparts.

All of this would suggest that in seeking electoral advantage, in a truly competitive democracy like Ghana, parties would face an incentive to adopt policies favouring the urban poor (in particular, opposition parties should benefit from appealing to urban poor voters through populist positions and mobilisation strategies; incumbents should face at least some incentive to seek to neutralise this force by appealing to the same constituency). The improvement of social insurance for those (mostly urban) citizens in formal employment and modest expansion of social assistance for the rural poor largely leaves out this urban poor constituency. On the other hand, incumbent governments are considered more able to appease the rural poor (Resnick, 2013), and LEAP could be seen as an ultimately unsuccessful strategy by the NPP to appease poor rural voters seen as more likely to vote NDC.

The literature on other African democracies suggest that even in the absence of highly competitive elections, the key factors that determine whether electoral politics impacts on social policy are (1) the salience of the policy question as an electoral issue and (2) access to information on the issue – including sufficient information on parties and candidates' (prospective) positions and

(retrospective) performance on the issue (see, for example, Stasavage, 2005; Harding & Stasavage, 2012).⁸

A key question is therefore how salient social protection policies were as election issues in the critical elections of 2000, 2004, and 2008 (although the first of these may have been so over-determined by the two-decade dominance of Ghanaian politics by Jerry Rawlings as to render the impact of policy questions relatively insignificant). Further, whether media coverage and other factors allowed those voters for whom social protection was important enough that it might have impacted on their votes to acquire sufficient information (the performance of the current government and/or parties and candidates' positions) for this to be the case. To get at this one needs to look at public opinion data and the conduct of actual election campaigns since 2000, i.e. how parties positioned themselves in order to appeal to voters, whether voters were likely to have been responsive to social protection 'branding' and 'messaging' and if so, in which way. Specifically, did social protection form a significant component of the platforms and political branding employed by either incumbent or opposition parties in the 2000, 2004 and 2008 elections? The next two subsections begin to answer these questions, although a detailed and sophisticated analysis of public opinion, electoral campaigns, and voting patterns falls beyond the scope of this paper.

3.2 Public opinion on social and economic policy

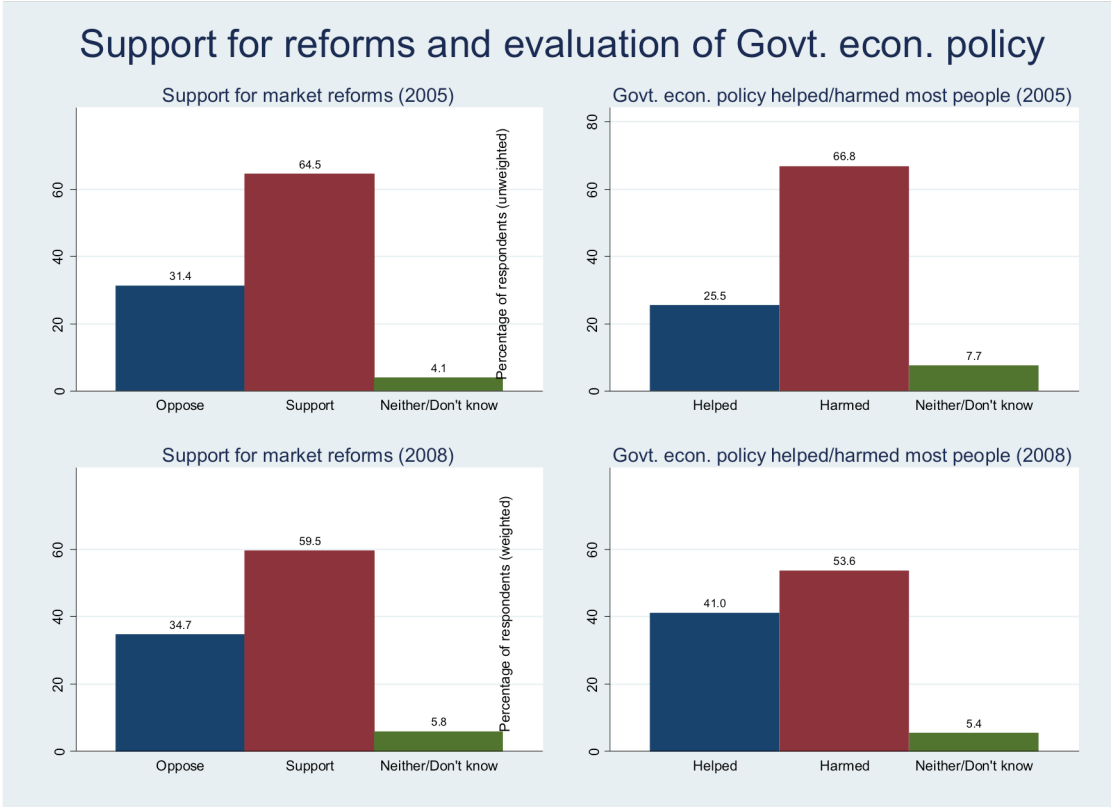
It is not possible to offer here an exhaustive analysis of the rich public opinion data available for Ghana from the six rounds of the Afrobarometer survey conducted in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014. However, the data do provide useful insights into Ghanaians' attitudes towards economic and social policy and provide some basis for understanding political party campaign strategies, and whether promised and/or delivered policies may have been designed to appeal to certain demographics, to be broadly popular, etc. and may therefore have been driven by electoral incentives.

In 2008, before the elections, a majority of Ghanaians in the Afrobarometer sample expressed broad support for economic reform (agreeing that "in order for the economy to get better in the future, it is necessary for us to accept some hardships now", with a substantial minority feeling that the costs of reform are

⁸ Stasavage (2005: 53) argues, for example, that "the move to [Universal Primary Education in Uganda] has indeed been linked to democratic politics, and that this outcome has depended on the salience of education as an issue, as well as on the public's access to information about UPE."

too high when asked to choose between two alternative statements). There is certainly not the consensus on market-oriented reform among the public that appears to exist among the political elite. A majority further agreed that the government’s economic policies had hurt most people, with a striking 40% agreeing “very strongly” that government’s economic policies “have hurt most people and only benefited a few”, when asked to choose between that and an alternative statement that economic policies have helped most people and only a few have suffered (CDD-Ghana, 2009: 7). This contrasts with 2005 (after re-electing Kufuor as president), when a larger majority supported reform (64% in 2005 vs 59% in 2008), although an even greater proportion then felt that economic policies had hurt most people – 67% in 2005 vs 54% in 2009 (Selormey *et al.*, 2005: 7).

Figure 1: Support for economic reforms and evaluations of economic policy in 2005 and 2008

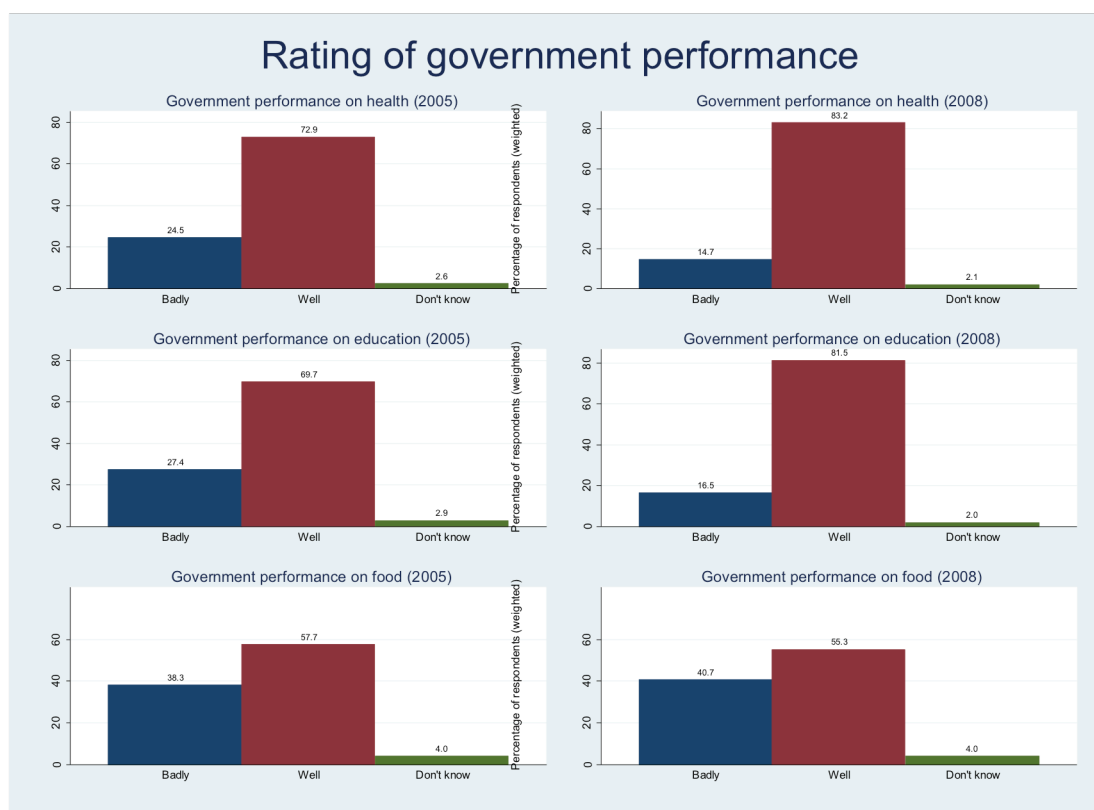


Source: Afrobarometer, Rounds 3 and 4.

This data seems somewhat paradoxical: Ghanaians appeared to support reform, accepting that short-term hardship would be necessary, but also felt that current economic policy was hurting the majority. In neither the 2005 nor the 2008

rounds do the responses vary greatly between urban and rural respondents. Several other variables indicate a high level of economic dissatisfaction in both years. E Gyimah-Boadi and Mensah (2003: iv) interpret similar results from the earlier 2002 round as indicating “a deep ambivalence over market-centred economic reforms, reflected in strong support for state interventions that offset the expression of a lukewarm preference for a market economy”. These assessments of economic policy do not directly explain either the NPP’s election victories in 2000 and 2004 or its defeat in 2008. A more sophisticated analysis is necessary if we are to determine whether economic and living conditions were highly salient to voters in these elections, for example by exploring potential relationships between satisfaction with economic policy, assessments of government performance on various dimensions, perceptions of own living conditions, perceptions of future prospects, party affiliation, and voting intentions. The story is further complicated by what Gyimah-Boadi and Mensah (2003: xiii) described as a “power alternation bonus” in which willingness to endure hardships, political patience and trust in representatives had increased, despite deep economic dissatisfaction. This “bonus” may have worked in favour of the NPP in the 2004 elections. Nevertheless, the ‘lukewarm’ public support for market-oriented reform (among both urban and rural Ghanaians) may help to explain the lack of clear differentiation between the parties on macroeconomic policy.

Figure 2: Evaluation of government performance on health, education and food security in 2005 and 2008



Source: Afrobarometer, Round 3 and 4.

Nor is the election victory of the NDC in the 2008 elections easily explained by public opinion data on government performance. Evaluations of government performance in 2005 (shortly after the NPP was re-elected) and 2008 (shortly before they lost the election to the NDC) did not shift greatly on health and education. In 2008, 15% of respondents rated the NPP government's performance on "improving basic health services," poorly. 17% rated its performance in "addressing educational needs" poorly and 40% on "ensuring everyone has enough to eat. This was actually an improvement on the 2005 ratings of health and education, when the respective figures were 25% and 27%, and only a slight worsening on food security ratings (38%). While this does not explain voting behaviour directly, the very favourable ratings on health and education policy may help explain why the NDC did not depart radically from the policy path (the capitation grant, school feeding, and national health insurance) initiated by the NPP government. As Table 2 shows, both these issues were highly salient, ranked as among the most serious problems facing the country.

The hypothesis that food security may have been a particularly salient issue for rural voters (many of whom rely on subsistence agriculture), and that the NPP could therefore have been harmed by the substantial minority who judged their performance as “fairly badly” or “very badly” is belied by the very small proportion of rural respondents who considered food shortages or agriculture the most important problems facing the country in 2008 (1% and 5% respectively). The salience of unemployment and poverty has been very high, with unemployment consistently rated as the most important problem facing the

Table 2: Salience of unemployment, poverty, health and education, 2005 and 2008 (Afrobarometer rounds 3 and 4)

Proportion of respondents ranking each issue as the first, second or third most important problem facing the country

Issue		2005			2008			2012	2014
		Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Total	Total
Unemployment	First	28	17	22	31	20	25	24	17
	Second	16	8	12	15	11	13	13	10
	Third	7	5	6	8	9	9	10	7
	Top three	51	30	40	54	40	47	47	34
Poverty / destitution	First	7	7	7	8	13	11	6	6
	Second	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	4
	Third	3	3	3	3	5	4	4	3
	Top three	16	15	15	16	23	20	14	13
Education	First	15	14	14	6	6	6	13	10
	Second	17	14	15	10	12	11	14	12
	Third	12	14	13	12	13	12	11	9
	Top three	44	42	42	28	31	29	38	31
Health	First	4	4	4	3	2	2	4	3
	Second	9	10	10	6	4	5	9	8
	Third	13	14	14	10	12	11	13	10
	Top three	26	28	28	19	18	18	26	21
Health and education top three		70	70	70	47	49	47	64	52

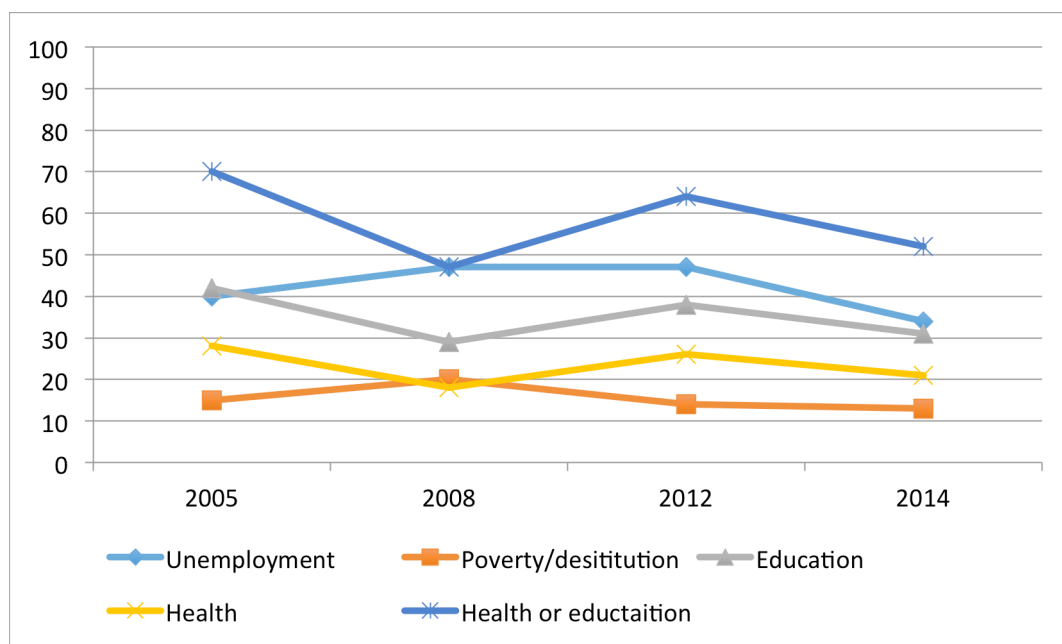
Sources: Asunka *et al.* (2008: 27-28); Selormey *et al.* (2005: 34-36)

country by Afrobarometer respondents, in the surveys conducted in 2002 (Gyimah-Boadi and Mensah, 2003), 2005 (Selormey *et al.*, 2005) and 2008 (CDD-Ghana, 2009). However, education and health are also consistently identified by a large proportion of respondents as among the three most

important problems facing the country, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 3. Neither poverty and destitution nor health was identified by more than 30% of Afrobarometer respondents as among the top three problems facing the country in the four rounds of the survey conducted between 2005 and 2014. It therefore seems unlikely that social protection (in the form of cash transfers or access to health insurance) would have been a particularly salient electoral issue in any of the recent elections. It should be noted that unemployment and education were identified by a consistently large proportion of respondents as among the top three concerns.

These results do not explain the outcomes of the elections, especially given the mysterious fact that weighted responses to the question “If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party’s candidate would you vote for?” show a clear preference for the NPP in 2008 (45% compared to the NDC’s 24%), although 37% of respondents indicated that they would not vote, didn’t know, or refused to answer the question. But the substantial salience of poverty, health, and education (at least as matters of public concern) – may point to substantial incentives on parties and candidates to be seen to be addressing poverty directly, and to expand access to education and healthcare. However, in the absence of data on the level of information available to the electorate, and the paradoxical results described above it is impossible to draw any strong conclusion. A more sophisticated analysis (such as multivariate regression models) would be needed to understand how public opinion on social protection may have influenced the outcome of the 2004 and 2008 elections, and how public opinion may have influenced the election strategies of the major parties.

Figure 3: Salience of Unemployment, Poverty, Health and Education (among top-three concerns 2005-2014)



Source: Afrobarometer; Selormey, Asunka, and Armah-Attah (2005: 34-36); Asunka, Armah-Attah, and Ofose (2008: 27-28).

3.3. Election campaigns and political ‘branding’

Boafo-Arthur (2008: 33-36) attributes the NPP candidate’s victory during the run-off presidential election against Rawlings’ anointed successor, John Atta Mills, in 2000 to five primary factors: (1) the “arrogance and accompanying complacency” of the NDC, (2) the NDC’s lack of internal party democracy (which led to divisions and the formation of a breakaway party), (3) the economic hardship faced by Ghanaians, which ensured that a ‘sound economic management’ platform would resonate with the electorate, (4) the NPP’s well-run campaign operation, and (5) the NPP’s success in portraying Mills as Rawlings’s puppet or “Rawlings [coming] to power through the back door.” The literature on the 2000 elections largely focuses on the momentous nature of the loss of power by the incumbent party, and the NPP’s successful campaign built on a platform of ‘sound economic management’ and ‘good governance.’ It does not appear that specific social protection issues featured prominently in the campaigns of either party. It would seem fair to conclude that the 2000 election might have been what is often referred to as a ‘referendum on the incumbent’ (Rawlings and an NDC dominated by the former), and consequently less issue-based than subsequent elections.

However, we should not be too quick to dismiss the role of social protection in the 2000 elections. Universal health coverage through a national health insurance scheme was an election pledge of the NPP, one which according to Agyepong and Adjei (2008) brought significant urgency to the party's attempts to implement the NHIS before the 2004 elections. The content of election platforms and messaging will be addressed in greater detail below.

Furthermore, and in line with Boafo-Arthur's arguments, several analyses suggest that media coverage in the period leading up to the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections played a crucial role in the NPP's victory (Agyeman-Duah, 2000; Temin and Smith, 2002; Mensah, 2011),⁹ as well as a "skilful campaign fought by the [NPP]," which included messaging (particularly its slogan of 'Positive Change') that successfully appealed to particular groups, such as the youth (Nugent, 2001). Mensah argues on the basis of his interviews with party officials and a systematic analysis of media coverage that

'...the [NPP] needed to improve on its *image* as well as its *vote gains* in areas known to be strongholds of the opposition [in fact, at the time the incumbent NDC]. In these areas, the age-old perception amongst electors [was] that the NPP is a party that is tribal, elitist, anti-migrants, and Christian-dominated. Thus, geographically five out of the ten regions in Ghana ... were drawn as the battlegrounds by the NPP campaign. The objective in focusing on these regions was for the party to rid itself [of] the perceived sectarian image, in addition to gaining votes.

...For example, in 1999 there was intense debate and rumours about the selection of vice-presidential candidates, particularly from the camp of the NPP due to its historic past as identified above. Since then, the selection of vice-candidates has become one of the pillars of electioneering strategy in Ghana, and one that has gained electoral traction in the news' (Mensah, 2011: 193-194).

Political 'branding' (i.e. of both parties and candidates) and the nature of election campaigns may therefore be crucial to the outcomes of elections in Ghana's fourth republic, but crucially also for the evolution of social protection policy, especially if social policy featured significantly in the campaigns and the political salience of these issues were high enough to be deemed important electoral issues by politicians. Several case studies conducted as part of the 'Legislating and Implementing Welfare Policy Reforms in Africa' research

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programme have shown that ‘social protection brands’ featured prominently in recent elections in Botswana (Hamer, 2015b) and Malawi (Hamer, 2015a).

On the other hand, Tweneboah-Koduah, Akotia, Akotia, and Hinson (2010: 87) conclude that “political parties in Ghana are not managed as brands ... [nor] do they constitute mental [or] emotional effects [sic] akin to strong consumer brands.” They are however, writing from a commercial brand management perspective, and while one should take note of their findings, this does not invalidate a ‘political branding’ perspective on the behaviour of politicians and parties in Ghana. One must nevertheless be careful in analysing campaign activities, since non-media-visible aspects and a range of non-branding dynamics may have played a significant role in how election campaigns have impacted on voters, and on politicians’ calculations about how policy positions may be received by the electorate.

There is also evidence of direct patronage (effectively ‘vote-buying’) by parliamentary candidates in constituency-level electioneering (Lindberg, 2003). Furthermore, despite a proliferation in private media outlets after the repeal (shortly before the 1992 elections) of the Newspaper Licensing Law (which required publication licences from the Secretary of Information) in force under the NDPC regime (Temin & Smith, 2002: 588), the largest newspapers remained state-owned. The main state-owned newspapers were reported to have shown “considerable bias in favour of the NDC and its allies in the Progressive Alliance” during the 1992 elections (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994: 79). It should be noted, however that Temin & Smith (2002: 587) temper their conclusions on the basis of public opinion survey data, which show vast discrepancies in media consumption: “just as they are virtually omnipresent in Ghana’s more urbanised areas, the mass media are largely absent in more rural and remote parts, where many Ghanaians have very limited access to media outlets.”

This suggests that even with a high degree of electoral salience of social protection issues (of which there is no direct evidence – the public opinion data cited earlier merely shows that the issues which social protection schemes may be used to address are of substantial concern to the public), lack of access to information may render the electoral impact lower than expected. This appears to be particularly true of rural populations (Stasavage, 2005).

Social protection policies do not appear to have enjoyed great prominence during recent elections, nor does the public opinion data suggest that the 2004 or 2008 elections were won or lost on performance in social policy. In fact, a naïve review of the public opinion data does not sit well with the analysis of Lindberg and Morrison (2005) that issue-based voting by ‘swing voters’ determined the election outcomes. Coupled with the overriding salience of ‘unemployment’ as

the chief concern and favourable ratings of the NPP government's performance in health and education, it seems unlikely that the 2000, 2004, or 2008 elections were substantially influenced by 'social protection brands'.

While, in the 2000 elections, the NPP felt the need to shed its image of being elite-based, ethnic, and that Kufuor himself attempted to project a concern for the welfare of the poor (Nugent, 2001), according to Hinson and Tweneboah-Koduah (2010), the party failed to communicate with the 'grassroots electorate' during the 2008 campaign (for example, by not communicating in local languages) and instead projected an image of aloofness. Despite a sophisticated campaign operation, it trumpeted its successes in macroeconomic management in ways that did not resonate with ordinary Ghanaians, but not its successes in social policy:

'As far as integrated marketing communications is concerned, the NPP ran one of the most impressive ever in Ghana's political history. However, it was all style without substance. The process adopted placed too much emphasis on style with little or no emphasis on substance. The NPP failed to communicate the several social interventions, NHIS, Free Bus Ride, School Feeding Programme, and Free Maternal Care it had initiated, and went on about microeconomic indicators that ordinary Ghanaians cared little about' (Hinson & Tweneboah-Koduah, 2010: 208).

Perhaps some lessons were learnt from the 2008 failure. The social protection reforms pursued by the NPP administrations between 2000 and 2008 were prominently trumpeted as achievements in their 2012 election manifesto's preamble, and the document expressed support for continuing and expanding these schemes. But it was still not a 'front and centre' theme in their election material:

'The NPP has a proud history of providing value and comfort to the Ghanaian people. Legislation and policies introduced under the Kufuor administration include providing free Compulsory Basic Education, the National Health Insurance Scheme, the Metro Mass Transport, Micro and Small Loans Centre and the Livelihood Empowerment and Advancement Programme (LEAP). We promoted good governance and democracy by strengthening our institutions of governance.

Our pensioners hold a special place in our country, having served many years in contributing to national development in various capacities. Many of our pensioners and the aged fall into the category

of LEAP beneficiaries. We will revive the social protection programmes that the NDC has allowed to deteriorate and restore them from a depressed, inactive state. ... We will popularise and promote the tier three provisions of the new Pensions Act, 2008, Act 766 to enhance the value of the pensions for our elderly' (NPP, 2012).

There was very little academic literature available on the 2012 campaign at the time of writing, and it was hard to tell whether a concerted effort was made by the NPP to employ social protection policy in the election campaign. What was clear is that neither party has promised either a universal social pension or substantial fiscal commitment to LEAP as a populist electoral strategy. If social protection enjoyed at least some salience – public opinion data suggests that unemployment (partially addressed through public works), education, healthcare and similar issues were important to the voting public and may have influenced their electoral choices - why did the NDC not adopt a populist social protection platform, either one that painted the Kufuor administration's reforms to the contributory system as inequitable or one that promised massive expansion of social assistance. The former may have appealed to the urban poor and second to their rural base. The puzzle as to why the urban poor constituency (so important in Resnick's analysis) is 'left out' of Ghana's welfare regime remains unsolved. This may be explained in part, if it in fact remained the case in 2008 and 2012, that swing voters did not share any specific structural similarities and therefore did not constitute a cohesive bloc to which parties could attempt to appeal with populist strategies.

On the basis of the available information it is not possible to conclude whether such a strategy would have stood much chance of success, and it may well be that the *electoral salience* of and information availability on social protection was simply too low to create a strong incentive for party elites to radically alter course. Although national health insurance had been a key election pledge in 2000, and a desire to deliver on this election promise in time for the 2004 election appears to have given substantial impetus to early implementation, there is scant evidence of electoral dynamics having been a major driver of social protection reform in Ghana. This question requires further research for any conclusive answer to be possible.

4. Actors and reform agendas under NPP and NDC governments

The previous section dealt mainly with the actions of politicians, responding to electoral incentives (or the perceived electoral advantages and disadvantages of

particular policy positions and enacting reforms), as well as the ‘social protection branding’ employed in election campaigns. But when it comes to the actual policy-making process, a number of other sets of actors become important, most critically bureaucrats and donors. These actors have divergent interests and agendas, which can (and have, in the case of Ghana) important implications for the formulation and implementation of reforms. In order to understand the shape of the reforms, it is helpful to think about the interests and agendas of these actors. Devereux and White (2010), distinguish between ‘technocratic’, ‘ideological’ and ‘political’ agendas. The latter can largely be equated with ‘electoral agendas’, although the way in which parties and candidates position themselves with respect to social protection policy is of course influenced by ideology, and not the product of naked electoral calculation.

In this section the main focus will therefore be on the interplay between ‘technocratic agendas’ among bureaucrats and transnational actors, and ‘ideological’ as well as ‘political’ agendas among the politicians who ultimately decide which reforms are legislatively enacted, and which (as well as to what extent) programmes are funded. But structural factors, such as the power and autonomy of bureaucrats *vis-à-vis* their political principals and donor influence are equally important. An attempt is made to analyse this complex interplay in order to help explain the policy reform path in Ghana since 2000.

Agyepong and Adjei (2008), in their analysis of Ghana’s healthcare financing reforms during the first term of the Kufuor/NPP government, cite Grindle and Thomas (1991), who offer a useful typology of actors in policy reform processes:

‘Successful public policies and programs are rare because it is unusual to have progressive and committed politicians and bureaucrats (saints) supported by appropriate policy analysts with available and reliable information (wizards) that manage hostile and apathetic groups (demons) and consequently insulate the policy environment from the vagaries of implementation (systems).’

While this terminology is not adopted in this paper, it is worth keeping in mind that the ‘bureaucracy’ referred to is not a monolithic entity. As research in Uganda has shown, disagreements and contestation over policy within the bureaucracy can be a significant impediment to reform’ (Grebe, 2014; Grebe & Mubiru, 2014).

4.1 Who drove the reform agenda?

Informants differ in their assessment of the relative impact of bureaucrats (or a ‘technocratic agenda’) and political and ideological agenda in driving welfare reforms in Ghana. Predictably, senior bureaucrats claimed that ideas were generated within the bureaucracy, whilst politicians claim that ‘political vision’ was what was required in order to inspire a lethargic civil service. When asked about the obstacles to implementation of social security reforms, former President Kufuor cites the bureaucracy first (rather than the political opposition, more conservative opponents within his party, or even fiscal constraints):

‘I found the bureaucracy to be quite lethargic. They weren’t resisting out of, say, ideology. The civil servants, at least at that time, tended to be passive. They needed political leadership to do ... what the [we] had as a vision and wanted to implement, in terms of getting the laws, etc. So it wasn’t active resistance against the new administration, it was just that the bureaucracy [needed] a driver with vision and to activate it.’

This view was not shared by bureaucrats interviewed for this research. In fact, they generally paint a picture of a professional bureaucracy pushing ‘good policy,’ and at the mercy of the constraints imposed by politics. Senior bureaucrats understood that whether their proposals would be adopted depended on political support and give credit to politicians who bought into their ‘technocratic agenda’ on social protection.¹⁰

When one reviews the history of policy proposals with respect to pension reform, health insurance, and cash transfers, a rather complex picture emerges, in which donors also played a significant role. While the available data from public documents is limited, instructive examples can be found, for example the participation of donors in the informal ‘Social Vulnerability Group’ assembled by the then-Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment to draft the National Social Protection Strategy in 2007,¹¹ and donors’ increasing involvement in LEAP – both as funders and in providing technical assistance (see Grebe, 2015).

Interviews with former President John Kufuor and Dr Anthony Akoto-Osei (his advisor who was tasked with driving the pension reforms and who later became deputy Finance Minister) primarily reflected a discourse of assistance to the destitute, but a vision of self-sufficiency and productive activity, in which most Ghanaians would eventually have the ability and opportunity to insure

¹⁰ Interview, Mawutor Ablo (12 November 2014).

¹¹ Interview, Akusua Frema Osei-Opore (31 October 2014).

themselves against the risks of old age, disability and health. It therefore appeared to reflect an ideological agenda characterised by a developmental vision in which a social insurance system would become viable for a growing proportion of the population as they entered productive work, incomes rose, and their ability to join contributory schemes increased. This was further reflected in the primary focus on contributory social insurance, both in the information volunteered during the interviews¹² and in the actual policy reforms pursued during the NPP's period in power. LEAP did not form a central part of this agenda, but was rather something seen as necessary, in the interim, as a response to extreme poverty under underdevelopment in the countryside.

An ideological agenda that saw social assistance as a 'temporary' buffer against the shocks of economic reforms, including fuel subsidy reductions, would also help explain the relatively parsimonious nature of the LEAP scheme. Of course, one cannot rule out that an electoral/political agenda existed in which LEAP featured as a political expedient, particularly in the light of its introduction shortly before the 2008 elections. (Similarly, the 'capitation grant' was introduced shortly before the 2004 elections.) But, as shown in the previous section, the evidence for such a conclusion is thin.

The ideological agenda revealed in interviews with Kufuor and his close associates¹³ stands in contrast with a technocratic agenda, which saw social assistance (and cash transfers in particular) as an effective tool to address extreme poverty, which existed both among sections of the domestic bureaucracy¹⁴ and reflected a 'transnational poverty agenda' which had significant influence over development discourse in the later 1990s and 2000s.

When asked directly about the choice of social security reforms introduced by the NPP administration, President Kufuor refers to his free-market-oriented economic philosophy. This may help explain why social insurance was such a major component of the reforms pursued by his administration, although he also suggests that social assistance is necessary for the poorest most vulnerable households that 'slip through the net':

'Empowerment, to put 'meat' into citizenship. ... Empower the people with these policies, so that you give them the opportunity to become truly equal within the polity. ... We did not do it for socialism. I do not believe in state control, I do not subscribe to that. ... But market

¹² Interviews, John A. Kufuor (6 November 2014) and Anthony Akoto Osei (5 November 2014).

¹³ Interviews, John A. Kufuor (6 November 2014); Anthony Akoto Osei (5 November 2014) and Prof Baffour Agyeman-Duah (31 October 2014).

¹⁴ Interview, Ebenezer Jerry O. Odotei (28 October 2014).

with a conscience, of course. Then the individual should be strong enough to do things. So this is why those policies were selected' (Interview, John A. Kufuor, 6 November 2014).

Social assistance and direct income transfers to the poor do seem, as claimed by some respondents, primarily to have resulted from the successful pursuit of a technocratic agenda. This agenda was driven to a certain extent by bureaucrats within the national development planning apparatus, who had become aware of the limited impact of existing policies on families in extreme poverty, and also by an increasingly strong donor agenda and policy/idea diffusion from a transnational development discourse in which social protection (in which social assistance and specifically cash transfers) had become increasingly central to the poverty reduction agenda during the 2000s.

It is also probable that the PRSP process and Millennium Development Goals increased the pressure on the Ghanaian state to demonstrate (in the transnational domain) concrete progress in reducing poverty. Cash transfers may have seemed like a reasonable way to achieve relatively quick progress, accounting in part for the willingness of political leaders (most especially President Kufuor) to entertain these proposals, despite cash transfers not naturally forming a component of their political vision, as well as worries over a backlash against 'handouts'. While the Brazilian example with conditional cash transfers may have contributed to an openness to the idea, LEAP was not a direct emulation of Bolsa Familia (or the result of the relationship between Lula and Kufuor, as claimed by Akoto Osei), since it was vastly less ambitious in terms of fiscal commitment, benefit levels, and the number of beneficiaries it was intended to reach.

On balance, it seems reasonable to conclude that an 'ideological agenda' was the primary driver of contributory social security reform and a 'technocratic agenda' was the primary driver of social assistance expansion during this period – although the reality of policy-making is necessarily less neat and clear than this rather simplistic formulation would suggest. (For example, politicians like Frema Osei-Opare were important figures with an ideological commitment to social assistance within the political elite, and some technocrats were ideologically opposed to cash transfers.)

4.2 Bureaucrats and politicians: managing and implementing reforms

It appears that a strong technocratic agenda existed to improve health-sector performance, which gained substantial political momentum through the NPP government's strong desire to see reforms promised before the 2000 election enacted before the 2004 elections. According to Agyepong and Adjei (2008), bureaucrats saw this sense of political urgency around a major policy platform as an opportunity to bring about reforms that would not otherwise be viable. However, they were hampered by political naiveté:

‘[Bureaucrats] were aware of the technical issues, difficulties and challenges of developing and implementing a viable NHIS. It appears, however, that they were slower to fully discern the political concerns, climate, influences and policy characteristics, their importance, and how to create appropriate space to manoeuvre to steer policy in the desired technical direction within them’ (Agyepong & Adjei, 2008: 158).

Interviews with bureaucrats responsible for the implementation of the LEAP programme (from the national director of social protection, down to village level) created the impression of a genuine commitment to ‘client service’ with respect to beneficiaries and a desire for professional management of programmes free from political interference.¹⁵ National-level bureaucrats, including those in national agencies responsible for the regulation of the new ‘three tier’ pension system (the NPRA)¹⁶ and implementation of the NHIS (the NHIA),¹⁷ seemed to enjoy a significant degree of autonomy and professionalism. In an entirely different context, Crook and Ayee (2006) found a similarly ‘positive organisational culture’ among ‘street level bureaucrats’ in Ghana, although it “was not sufficient to cope with the negative impact of politically protected privatisations,” indicating that political interference remains a problem for bureaucrats in Ghana. The programme manager of LEAP (and director of the LEAP implementation unit) said:

‘It appears that Ghanaian social protection bureaucrats had a relatively high degree autonomy from their political masters, at least by the 2000s, both in terms of agenda-setting powers and professional

¹⁵ Interviews, William Niyuni (10 November 2014); Robert Austin (11 November 2014); Mawutor Ablo (12 November 2014); Dzigbordi Kofi Agbekpõrnu (12 November 2014); Musah Abdul-Majeed (15 November 2014); Zulai Alhassan (17 November 2014).

¹⁶ Interview, Ernest Amertey-Vondee (12 November 2014).

¹⁷ Interview, O.B. Ocheampong (21 November 2014).

management of programmes, although programmes are not entirely insulated from ‘clientelistic’ manipulation. Abdulai (2014a), for example finds clear evidence of educational resources being disproportionately allocated along neopatrimonialist lines under both NPP and NDC governments.’

In the companion paper describing Ghana’s social protection policy reform process (Grebe, 2015), reference was made to both disappointing impacts of the LEAP programme as revealed in a formal impact evaluation (see Handa *et al.*, 2014) and operational problems, such as the late payment of transfers (Park, Handa *et al.*, 2012),¹⁸ that had beset the programme. There is clear evidence of a desire among bureaucrats to improve efficiencies and the standard of the programme’s operational management, and a willingness to draw extensively on technical support from donors. The LEAP programme manager¹⁹ describes substantial efforts – supported by donors – to strengthen the operational capacity of the unit:

‘Just before I came in, DFID recruited some technical assistance, based in their office. ... Finance technical assistance, a cash payments specialist, an M&E [monitoring and evaluation] specialist and the Honourable Minister brought me on board to complement their programme to manage the programme very professionally. ... So that we look at our beneficiaries as customers, and make sure they receive all the customer service ... so that is how we are trying to drive the programme. ... In terms of human resources, we are currently running a very lean team. I’ve just initiated a World Bank process to recruit additional staff to help boost the programme. ... We have just completed a process of improving case management and grievance procedures with technical assistance from UNICEF.’ (Interview, Dzigbordi Kofi Agbekpornu, 12 November 2014).

There appears to be a clear shared ‘technocratic agenda’ between social development bureaucrats and donor agencies, not only in favour of cash transfers, but also to ensure that the LEAP cash transfer is successful. However, the programme’s success depends not only on its successful management, but

¹⁸ These problems were also described to the author by beneficiaries interviewed in November 2014 and by officials with operational responsibility, although all were keen to emphasise recent improvements in the regularity of payments and other operational matters (Interviews, William Niyuni, 10 November 2014; Musah Abdul-Majeed, 15 November 2014).

¹⁹ Dzigbordi Kofi Agbekpornu, an accountant and experienced manager, had recently assumed this position at the time of the fieldwork, having been recruited from the private sector with the express purpose of improving the professionalism and efficiency of the LEAP implementation unit within the Department of Social Welfare.

the political commitment to it, and the willingness of the government to commit resources to the programme. Informants generally described a high level of political commitment to the cash transfer scheme, although this commitment is called into question by the actual resources devoted to it.

When asked why Ghanaian political leaders appeared supportive of cash transfers, compared to political elites in many Sub-Saharan African countries where strong resistance to ‘handouts’ have been observed (see, for example, Grebe, 2014; Grebe & Mubiru, 2014), the Director of Social Protection alludes to an alignment between ‘technocratic’ and ‘ideological’ agendas:

‘We don’t have that problem. The political leadership has so much concern for [the poor]. So that if there’s a program that will support them... what will it be? ... There was a lady [Frema Osei-Opare, Deputy Minister at the time of LEAP’s design]. [She and other members of the committee] were more or less technocrats, but they were also a politicians. They had been in the development field. ... So she really understood, and we did not have any problems, the programme was initiated. Now, when the political leadership changed [in 2008], we still did not have any problem. Because the incoming government was a social democratic government. They saw this programme as compatible with social democracy. They embraced it. They even enhanced it. For instance, the level of benefits was increased, a new targeting mechanism was introduced to enhance the identification of beneficiaries, etc...’ (Interview, Mawutor Ablo, 12 November 2014).

4.3 Elite politics and reform

The arguments made so far do not yet capture the complex dynamics of Ghanaian politics in the post-democratisation period – and by focusing on the relevant ‘agendas’ merely hint at some of the driving forces of distributional outcomes. For example, Abdulai & Hickey (2014: 1) argue that resource allocation in Ghana’s education sector during the period 1993-2008 were “closely shaped by the incentives and norms generated by Ghana’s competitive ‘clientelistic political settlement’, which overrode rhetorical concerns with national unity and inclusive development.”

As mentioned earlier, attempts have been made to move beyond a simple dichotomy of democratic political dimensions (electoral incentives, including voter behaviour and attempts to appeal to core and swing voters) and ‘clientelistic’ or ‘neopatrimonial’ dimensions in African politics. Abdulai and

Hickey (2014: 2) frame their analysis as a critique of previous attempts to identify broad correlations between distributional outcomes (specifically spending patterns) and voting patterns, that seek to analyse how democratic procedures and ‘neopatrimonial’ forms of politics combine in complex ways. These have largely focused on ways in which electoral politics generate incentives, for example on incumbents to direct public resources on the basis of maximising voter support, either by disproportionately benefitting areas of core voter support or to appeal to swing voters. These aspects were discussed above. Abdulai and Hickey attempt to offer a more sophisticated analysis of the dynamics at work, by focusing on complex elite behaviour and elite-popular dynamics through a ‘political settlements’ approach (see, for example, Khan, 2010; 2011a; 2011b; Laws, 2010). Their application of the political settlements approach includes consideration of the ‘holding power’ of different factions within ruling coalitions.

Several authors have argued that Ghana’s political settlement and political dynamics have impeded structural economic transformation (Whitfield, 2011; Oduro *et al.*, 2014), including the failure to close the development and poverty gap between Northern and Southern regions of Ghana (Abdulai, 2014a; 2014b; Abdulai & Hulme, 2014). For example, Abdulai (2014a) analyses systematic disproportional resource allocations in the education sector, broadly favouring the South in under both NDC and NPP governments, but with varying specific ‘clientelistic’ use of public resources. He links this to the representation, and consequent agenda-setting powers, of regional politicians within ruling coalitions, and specifically distinguishes this factor from voting behaviour:

‘...the findings here also suggest the need to rethink the prevailing perception that the politics of resource sharing in Africa is shaped fundamentally by the voting patterns of different ethnic groups and regions. Although the three poorer northern regions are widely known to be the electoral strongholds of the NDC along with Volta, we have seen that none of the Northern regions enjoyed the level of per child educational spending like Volta during the Rawlings-led NDC governments in the 1990s. Moreover, while one would have expected the NPP political elites to direct substantial educational expenditures to the North so as to court votes from opposition strongholds, in reality this did not happen...

... the weaker representation of northern politicians and their corresponding lack of agenda-setting powers within these ruling coalitions (even if to varying degrees) implied that even social protection programmes designed with the aim of specifically targeting the poorer localities ended up marginalising the poorer northern

regions at the level of implementation. It is this relationship between the regional distribution of political power at the level of elites and the distribution of public goods at the mass level that also helps explain why the Volta region could so easily transform from being one of the most favoured to one of the most marginalised...’ (Abdulai, 2014a: 41-42).

5. Conclusion: Ghanaian political dynamics and social protection policy reform

A number of inter-related analytical approaches have been applied to Ghanaian politics in an attempt to help explain the nature and timing of the significant social protection reforms that have been undertaken since 2000. These include reflections on the nature of electoral incentives and voter behaviour, public opinion and ‘political branding’ with respect to social protection, as well as an analysis of ‘actors’ and ‘agendas’ in the policy reform process. However, neat answers were not produced. It is probably safe to conclude that the ideological orientation of the New Patriotic Party and former President Kufuor played a significant role in driving contributory social insurance reforms. Furthermore, it seems that the transnational ‘poverty reduction agenda’ of the 1990s and 2000s (which found its most prominent expression in the PRSP process linked to debt relief for highly indebted poor countries and the Millennium Development Goals) combined with a domestic ‘technocratic agenda’ to provide impetus to the introduction of pro-poor social policies (most prominently free primary education and a large school feeding programme) and a limited cash transfer programme.

However, the role of electoral incentives is much less clear. For example, the electoral salience of social protection is hard to determine, and it appears that neither major political party judged it electorally useful to adopt a strongly populist position and try to court poor rural voters with the promise of substantial expansion of social assistance (for example, by using a large expansion of LEAP as an electoral promise). In order to explain this, one may need to turn not to voting patterns, but rather the nature and composition of the ‘ruling coalitions’ (under the governments of both major parties), including elite bargains and relative agenda-setting powers, as is emphasised in the so-called ‘political settlements’ framework. However, a puzzle remains, even if one accepts that Southerners dominate the political elite – across both major parties – and that anomalous (and therefore presumably clientelistic resource allocation) cannot be explained by a simplistic analysis assuming either the reward of core supporters, or attempts to appeal to swing voters or voters in opposition-voting

constituencies where members of the incumbent party calculate they may be able to woo opposition voters through the distribution of state resource. In such circumstances, where Southerners dominate the political elite and have disproportional agenda-setting powers, one might expect poverty targeting of social assistance programmes to be controversial. It has indeed proven to be the case in other settings, where ‘universal’ benefits such as a non-means-tested social pension (which tends to disproportionately benefit the better off) have been preferred – because this would channel a greater proportion of the resources allocated to poverty reduction programmes to wealthier districts than would (even imperfectly or politically-manipulated) poverty-targeted programmes.

Indeed, this dynamic may form part of a plausible explanation for the preference that has been shown among Ghanaian policy-makers for contributory social security schemes – as these would, by design and by definition, benefit the better-off. Yet it would not channel resources towards the poor who live in Southern (wealthier districts) as would social assistance programmes that were less poverty targeted – especially given that poverty targeting in Ghana has generally involved geographical targeting (identifying the poorest districts and rolling out programmes there first) in addition to household-level targeting. Countervailing forces certainly may include the ideological preference for parsimonious and highly selective programmes (as LEAP has proven to be), and the almost complete absence of a ‘rights-based’ discourse around social protection among the political elite, as well as the strong influence of the ‘technocratic agenda’, which favours poverty-targeting as a technical mechanism to maximise impact. Yet it remains surprising – and unexplained – that universal or ‘categorical’ social assistance programmes have not featured prominently on the poverty agenda in Ghana.

In order to answer these complex unanswered questions, a more sophisticated analysis of the impact of Ghana’s complex political dynamics on social protection policy-making would be necessary than has been achieved in this paper. But it would likely have to incorporate rhetorical/ideological agendas and individual leaders’ agency, the structural power and autonomy of Ghanaian bureaucracy, the role of transnational actors (donors and development agencies) – which impacts on the power technocratic agendas, as well as both electoral incentives in Ghana’s highly competitive democracy and the complex elite dynamics that help shape party politics. The web of power relations and incentives at work in Ghana’s ‘Fourth Republic’ would not be easy to disentangle, but is a task worthy of further effort.

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