Political Support For Governmental Regimes And Democratic Backsliding

Statistics from V-dem, a multidimensional dataset that represents democracy globally demonstrate that democratic backsliding has caused the number of liberal democracies to fall from 39 to 44. Despite the fact 16 states have converted to democracy over the 25 years (including Nigeria) there is a reasonable level of instability. In 2013 alone, 5 converted to democracy whilst 9 did the opposite. Democratic backsliding Is an undeniable reality in the modern-day. Thus, I will address a potential cause: dwindling political support. (V-Dem, 2020)

This essay assesses whether low levels of Political support for governmental regimes leads to democratic backsliding. I study Nigeria and Ghana in recent times and their current state of democracy and political support for their respective governmental regime. This essay will establish and rationalise the selected cases, the time period considered, and the comparative method selected. Then, this essay will define key concepts namely what constitutes 'democratic backsliding' itself and discuss the theoretical discourse of relevant literature. Thirdly, this essay will provide an assessment and comparison of the cases selected by evaluating quantitative data collected from Freedom House and Afrobarometer to evidence democracy and political support. Lastly, it will sum up its results in a conclusive section and propose the limitations to the methodical approach used.

I hypothesise that low levels of political support therein lead to democratic backsliding, possibly due to a governmental need to control populations who view them with disdain.

Methodology

A comparative study is a mode of research, extensively utilised within numerous, if not in all, disciplines of scientific study. As a methodology, comparison plays a crucial role in the most diverse branches of social sciences, particularly in politics. (Azarian 2011, p.1-3). Additionally, this essay will make use of the most similar system design (MSSD). When employing MSSD, we choose subjects of research systems that are as similar as feasibly possible, except when concerning the phenomenon (dependent variable), the impacts of which we are concerned in evaluating. The rationale behind selecting systems that are similar is the motivation to keep constant as many superfluous variables as possible. This enables a view of the impact of the Independent variable in an (almost) closed system allowing us to isolate and observe the effects of a given dependant variable upon the independent variable. (Anckar, 2008)

Therefore, to minimise the impact of variables that may affect my conclusions, I have selected Ghana and Nigeria in the modern day as they are not too dissimilar sharing characteristics such as West African geography, Tribal culture, colonial history, and democratisation from stratocracy just before the turn of the 21st century. (Chazan, 1989). Their societal make-up is also quite similar, both being presidential republics and key figures of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) which Is soon adopting a single universal currency. When referring to MSDD, Ghana and Nigeria are evidently similar besides citizen's political support for their respective governmental regimes.

Additionally, small-N comparison is utilised in this study due to the enhanced internal validity it brings. This is pivotal to this study as internal validity reflects how well the study is conducted within its structural parameters adding increased reliability to the results if the framework laid out Is robust. (Brady and Collier, 2010)

Theory

Before undergoing analysis in pursuit of an answer to the given hypothesis. It is important to define the parameters the hypothesis is founded upon by disclosing the literature and theory behind democratic backsliding, and democracy itself. It is seemingly insufficient to use a dictionary definition of Democracy for this study as democracy and its degradation is the focal point of this study. Therefore, I will be utilising Robert A. Dahl's definition of democracy as it is complex and intuitive. Dahl' states that the essential principle of democracy is "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" with unhindered prospects. (Dahl, 2007 p.1-5). Secondly, I will evoke the definition of Democratic Backsliding curated by David Waldner and Ellen Lust. They articulate the process of democratic backsliding, as the continuing deterioration of the quality of democracy. (Waldner and Lust, 2018) This is the theoretical framework that the following analysis is based upon.

Opposing the aforementioned hypothesis of this study which surmises that a lack of political support therein leads to democratic backsliding an array of literature has the opposing view that (the rise in) populism is in actuality a key cause of democratic backsliding. Many scholars have theorised that populists pursue anti-pluralist institutional reforms, consequentially fuelling trends of democratic backsliding. (see, e.g., Bauer and Becker, 2020; Norris 2017; Pierson 2017). However, Zhaotian Luo and Adam Przeworski surmise both theories are seemingly valid stating:

"Backsliding occurs either under "populism," when citizens knowingly consent to erosion of democracy because they find the incumbent highly appealing, or under "polarization," when citizens oppose the incumbent regardless of the attractiveness of the challenger, so that the incumbent can remain in office only by backsliding" (Luo and Przeworski, 2019)

The latter statement is a plausible cause if the given hypothesis of this study is evidenced by the following data sources.

Analysis

Data Sources

Nigeria and Ghana are two of the most developed nations of ECOWAS and Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. To affirm the strength of this study's argument this paper will delve into the analysis of three indicators: Democracy index, Trust in politicians and Approval of politicians.

Afrobarometer uses national probability sampling methods created to generate nationally representative outcomes. Samples are curated to generate a sample that is a representative cross-section of all citizens of eligible voting age in each nation. The aim being to be able to give every adult citizen an identical and recognised chance of being chosen for an interview. (Afrobarometer, 2020)

Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World' is a yearly review, surveying the state of civil rights and common freedoms across the globe. It is made of mathematical appraisals and supporting descriptions for 195 nations and 15 regions. Freedom in the World is the most generally perused and referred to report of its sort, utilised consistently by policymakers, writers, scholastics, activists, and numerous others. (Freedom House, 2020)

Political Support

The first indicator to be considered is approval of politicians an indicator of political support, represented in Figure 1.

As seen in Figure 1 27% of Nigerians Strongly disapprove of the President's performance, a stark contrast to the 7% of Ghanaians who feel the same way toward their own presidents' performance. This is a clear indication that political support towards the current regime is at a low level in Nigeria. Whereas, in Ghana, it is not as dire.

The findings in Figure 1 are accentuated in Figure 2 as levels of Strong disapproval for MP/National Assembly in both Nigeria and Ghana are even greater than strong disapproval levels towards Presidential performance. However, Nigerian's Disapproval is again greater than Ghanaian's towards their respective MP's/Assembly Reps'.

Nigeria has nearly half the democracy score of Ghana in addition to a regressing democracy which can be interpreted as democratic backsliding. This is inline with the original hypothesis as Nigeria has less political support. However, Ghana's democracy is also backsliding by this measure but only by a third of the rate of Nigeria.

Ultimately, if Figure 1 and 2 are seen in conjunction a negative correlation between levels of political support and democratic backsliding is noticeable. As Nigeria who has low levels of political support Is experiencing 3x as much democratic backsliding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study suggests that low levels of political support lead to greater levels of democratic backsliding. This is in line with the hypothesis surmised in the introduction. Nevertheless, this result is contrary to most literature regarding democratic backsliding in recent times. Besides Luo and Przeworski who also gave the plausible assumption that democratic backsliding caused by poor political support is due to governments maintaining control by flexing power in an authoritarian manner. (Luo and Przeworski, 2019) Which can be seen in Nigeria today as members of the Government sanctioned Nigerian Armed Forces opened fire on peaceful protester at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos, Nigeria on October 20th, 2020. An act described by amnesty international as "extrajudicial executions" which violate basic human rights. (Amnesty International, 2020) Thus making it even clearer that poor political support does lead to Democratic Backsliding.

Limitations

1. MSSD small sample size: 2 singular cases does not allow for external validity. So, findings may not be generalizable beyond the sample used in the study in some

instances. However, this allows for internal validity.

2. Nigeria’s Uniqueness: Nigeria is possibly too dissimilar to Ghana. Nigeria is a West African powerhouse culturally, economically and geographically most influential. However, Ghana is second to Nigeria in ECOWAS influence.
3. Time as a democracy: It can be argued that due to Ghana and Nigeria’s statuses as developing nations within relatively early stage of democratic endeavours they are expected to go through trialling times democratically regardless of any specific variables democratic backsliding. However, this is not as detrimental to this study as in actuality it boosts the MSSD as both Ghana Democratised 212eahbgin the 90’s.