Neoliberalism, Social Capital and Political Violence in Ghana

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I. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This proposal will interrogate and explore the linkages between neo-liberal globalization, social capital, and political violence. The proposed research will be conducted in Ghana. The study will examine the impact of neoliberal theory on negative social capital formation and the resultant rise in Ghana's political violence. Working within the purview of the neoliberal theory, the study will explore how external forces of globalization, propelled by the free market principles, have implicitly and explicitly weakened the state's capacity in Ghana to govern.

In recent years, neoliberalism's limits and significant failure to deliver economic growth and quality governance have become more apparent (Piketty, 2015). The ideals of neoliberalism, including individualism, competition, and market efficiency, are at odds with ideas of redistribution and solidarity. As a result, the limitations of the liberal theory serving as the engine of economic growth have been well documented. Also limited is the responses of various governments to these challenges. This research examines neoliberal globalization's harmful effects on social capital and its relationship with Ghana's political violence.

According to Ferragina & Arrigoni, 2017), the term 'neoliberalism' indicates a political, economic, and cultural paradigm, which redefines state market relations in favor of the latter. Harvey (2007) points out that neoliberalism is a political, economic process that has been used to organize society and economies around the principle of free-market activity while primarily attempting to shift the balance of power towards dominant economic classes that control capital. Neoliberalism encompasses a combination of the political commitment to individual liberty and neoclassical economics, and a devotion to the free market and opposed to state intervention in that market (Harvey, 2007). Economic agents are to be liberated, markets and trade are free, have minimum interventions, and have a robust property rights regime. Seen in this light,

neoliberalism is still a powerful force shaping political and economic changes in much of the world today. This promise of neoliberalism, combined with the logic and force of growing market capitalism and information society, defines a view of globalization that has become hegemonic in contemporary society (Harvey, 2007).

According to Ritzer & Stepnisky (2013), neoliberalism "involves a combination of the political commitment to individual liberty and neoclassical economics, which is devoted to the free market and opposed to state intervention" (p. 616). Under this system, businesses are unfettered, free trade is encouraged, and minimal government intervention. Tax cuts for corporations are the order of the day with the idea the tax savings will be reinvested. The belief is that a higher profits regime would "trickle-down" and benefit most people in society. The neoliberal framework requires a low expenditure on welfare and a reduced safety net for the poor. This strategy's merits are to structurally reduce government expenditures, thereby allowing for ever more tax cuts. Obviously, with little or no safety net, the poor people will be forced to find work, often at minimum wage. Reducing the safety net also creates a more extensive "reserve army" that businesses can draw on in a tight labor market to expand their workforce Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013).

decolonization. According to Ritzer & Stepnisky (2018), postcolonial theory "considers the continuing impact of colonialism on the social, cultural, and economic development of both colonial powers and the colonies seriously" (p. 568). The postcolonial theory developed as a field of study in the humanities, particularly in literature. It tends to focus on the cultural forces that enable postcolonial power and serve as sources of potential resistance to postcolonial power (Ritzer & Stepnisky (2018). This research study identifies neoliberalism as a significant factor in

exacerbating Ghana's political violence. The pursuit of austere free-market policies facilitates the weakening of the existing social capital.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since the 1990s, Ghana has attempted to implement neoliberal policy prescriptions as part of the Structural Adjustment Program introduced by the World Bank and the IMF (Ayelazuno, 2014). In a way, the country did experience some growth, but it was not accompanied by economic development. Consequently, most Ghanaians are still mired in poverty. Over that same period, Ghana has been practicing multiparty democracy for close to 30 years. However, the electoral landscape has been dominated by two main political parties; National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party. Since 1992, Ghana has had a good history of successful political transitions, with four peaceful shifts in power (Osei, 2018). However, in recent years, the Ghanaian economy has continued to be weak with high unemployment, especially among the youth. Corruption among the political elite is excessively high, and increasingly many of the citizens have grown disenchanted with the lack of proper governance (Brierley, 2017). Without any tangible success to point to, the ruling political parties have now resorted to repression and violence as a way to hold onto power. In the past three years, local elections have been marred with violence. The two main parties now boast their own vigilante groups, and the trend towards violence continues (Paalo, (2016).

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the research are: The study has the following objectives: (1) to assess the effects of the neoliberal policy reforms on the citizens (2) to analyze the role of state elites in managing the implementation process of the policy reforms (3) to investigate the degree

to which civil society groups, the media, and the judiciary operate with some sense of autonomy and (4) to assess the degree to which poverty and the failure of the state managers have led to the depletion of positive social capital. To meet these objectives, the research sought answers to the following questions: What are the politicians' shortcomings that increase public disaffection with the government? What perception do people have about their political opponents? What ways of speaking out, protesting is there? What makes the level of hatred towards the opposition party members so high? What aspects of the social and political culture inhibit or depress progress?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ritzer & Stepnisky, "Globalization is the spread of worldwide practices, relations, consciousness, and organization of social life" (p. 593). In today's age, globalization encompasses the lives of billions of people worldwide. Beck (2001) observes that globalism is a view of the world dominated by economics and the consequent emergence of the capitalist world market's domination and the neoliberal ideology that underpins it. In recent years globalization has become fundamental to discussions about the contemporary world. In this context, it is easy to state that globalization's dominance is attributable to neoliberalism's inter-relations. Neoliberal globalization impacts the economy and the democratic process across the world (Ferragina & Arrigoni, 2017).

As a consequence, neoliberal globalization occupies a hegemonic position in contemporary society. The degree and saliency of its impact can be seen almost everywhere in the products being used and in the foods being consumed. Its effect can also be observed in the opposition from labor unions and others that show up at high-level meetings of global organizations such as

the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Globalization can be analyzed culturally, economically, politically, and institutionally. The globalization of culture can be perceived either as the transnational expansion of common practices or a process in which many cultural inputs interact to create cultural hybrids (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018).

Lappé & Collins (2015) make the case that the idea that a free market will end hunger is a myth. That is because markets need a democratic government to provide public goods that will enhance transactions. Besides, markets need the government to deliver a legal framework that will support the arms-length transactions required by the market. The trust and confidence needed for a market system have to be in place with the belief that the government will enforce the rules to support transactions among individuals. Actually, they make the case that the absence of hunger cannot be ended without a "Living Democracy," engaging citizens and accountable to them" (p. 163).

According to Stiglitz (2017), the free-market policy prescriptions pushed by the IMF and the World Bank on developing countries have failed. The policies implemented ended up in abysmal failure, pushing countries already in dire situations into even worse conditions, leading to riots and political instability. As stated by Lappé & Colins (2015), free markets cannot work under anti-democratic regimes. Stiglitz declares that the neoliberal policies have resulted in an increasing number of people in the developing world been left in gripping poverty. Another fiction propagated as a panacea for low-income countries is on globalization and free trade. Most of the structural adjustment policies championed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank had had disastrous consequences for developing countries. These policies required countries to reduce government spending, remove trade tariffs, eliminate subsidies on

agriculture, and privatize state-owned enterprises. Many governments who followed these

policy prescriptions, especially in Africa, ended up opening their economies to imports, which

decimated domestic producers.

Furthermore, the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO) under the guidance of the

United States and the European Union end up destroying the productive capacity in a lot of

developing countries. Here, the United States and the European Union find loopholes to protect

products in their home countries while demanding other countries lift their subsidies. Lappé and

Collins (2015) cite examples such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA),

which displaced many Mexican farmers. The authors provide evidence regarding the exploitative

trade system enacted through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) and the Transatlantic Trade

and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Lappé and Collins argue that the rich countries always find a

way to tilt the rules in their favor in all these trade agreements. The authors claim the free trade

agreements are, in fact, a race to the bottom in search of the lowest wages, weak regulatory

environment, and the least protected resources. In effect, all these treaties do not enhance

sustainable global development; they actually hinder it.

Neoliberalism

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Neoliberalism in Sub-Saharan Africa

Generally speaking, neoliberal globalization has affected countries in the global system differentially (Basiru, 2014). While the advanced countries of the north had developed various strategies to deal with the enigma and had even made a huge success, the dependent, post-colonial states in Africa have been at the mercy of this technologically driven post-cold war phenomenon. It is observed that globalization has dented the integrity of many governments in Africa that has caused them to lose legitimacy. The outcome of such a state of affairs has been the burgeoning of sub-state agents, violent gangs, or in some cases, terrorist groups (Basiru, 2014).

Observers seem to conclude that one reason for the prevalence of internal conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa may reflect the reality of the post-cold war neoliberal globalization. Basiru (2014) argues that the post-cold war global politico-economic architecture and the forces of trans-nationalization it unleashes have continued to cripple the economies of already poor countries. Neo-globalization has increased national and local inequalities within countries and weakened the legitimacy of governments. Neo-liberal globalization has effectively downsized the strength of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries like Ghana, Senegal have privatized many state-owned enterprises and laid-off a large number of public sector employees on the World Bank and the IMF's advice. Furthermore, human insecurity has been exacerbated, leading to many territorial disputes. There is a theoretical linkage between neoliberalism, the nature of the states, and intra-country conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa.

Globalization has manifested itself in the area of neo-liberal economic reforms. Many African countries have been coerced into enacting market-oriented policies championed by the IMF and the World Bank. As a result, many countries abandoned developmental roles ascribed to them at independence heightening poverty and human insecurity. Moreover, political democracy based on the neo-liberal assumptions worsened the experiences of the states in sub-Sahara Africa. The inherent contradictions between globalization and liberal democracy have been disastrous for many African countries (Basiru, 2014). Contrary to the neo-liberal advocates' position about the benefits of the neo-liberal package's democracy-enhancing power, the policy adoptions have instead intensified the authoritarianism that has been the state's proclivity postcolonial Africa (Bangura,1994). Thus, neoliberal globalization did not spur democratization but has led to many social upheavals, including industrial disputes, strikes, and violent protests in many African countries.

Structural Adjustment programs, as briefly outlined earlier, enjoins the governing elites of the indebted states in Africa to pursue economic policies which include: (1) The liberation of foreign trade; (2) Currency devaluation; (3) Cutbacks in social expenditures, particularly education, health, housing, etc., subsidy removal; and (4) Privatization of state-owned enterprises allows the market forces to regulate not just supply but demand. Unfortunately, the neoliberal globalization marauding as liberalization and democratization launched a new phase of the assault on the already weakened neo-patrimonial state. While liberalization further deepened the economic crisis, democratization unleashed the centrifugal forces tamed for decades under the various authoritarian regimes (Ferragina & Arrigoni, 2017). In many cases in Africa, the pressure for democratization spurred by authoritarianism inherent in post-adjustment reforms coincided with the demand for ethnic equity. For example, Lemarchand (2007), in his insightful study, demonstrates how the push for democratization spurred the ethnic conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda in 1994.

The onset of democratic impulse buoyed the demands of marginal groups around the continent, and they began to question authoritarian regimes' legitimacy. Ethnic mobilization has accounted for the descent of some countries into statelessness; Liberia(1990), Somalia(1991), Rwanda (1994), and Zaire (1997) (Basiru, 2014). As democratization was opening up the political spaces in Africa for ethnic mobilization, the post-adjustment globalization policies embraced by African states not only weakened their capacities but further heightened poverty and inequality. Consequently, while substantial progress has been made in some regions of the world, Africa as a whole has not made much significant advancement but has rather experienced significant regress (Basiru, 2014).

Thus, given the reality of the post-cold war sub-Sahara Africa, neo-liberal globalization has weakened the state's capacity to perform its traditional distributive and mediatory roles leading to the erosion of its legitimacy by groups attempting to 'exit' from it. For example, before Chad, Zaire, and Rwanda descended into anarchy and finally collapsed, the remnant of the state had already collapsed (Van de Walle, 2007). As the state's capacity to perform its legitimate role wanes, state failure looms (Basiru, 2014). Van de Walle (2007) observed that nature abhors a vacuum and that the central state's weakness is often the cause of civil conflict. Ellis (2006) supports this view empirically by providing the example in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The central state's failure led to the emergence of rival ethnic warlords and civil wars (Ellis, 2006).

The Role of Social Capital

According to Emile Durkheim (1966), a society can work adequately only through the mediation of secondary groups, which are necessary bodies in grafting atomistic individuals to a nation's life. Alexis de Tocqueville argued that liberal democracy would fail to function if it is not accompanied by a healthy civil society (Tocqueville, 1961). This says that negative social capital will begin to grow in the presence of high social inequalities (Ferragina & Arrigoni, 2017). It has long been accepted in sociology that for society and political institutions to function well, there have to be strong secondary groups and healthy trust levels among community members. Therefore, it is an accepted view that society works better if the social bonds that tie people together and a sense of cooperation among the people are healthy.

The sociological literature (Portes, 2000; Leonard, 2004; Messner, Rosenfeld, & Baumer, 2004; Keefer & Knack, 2008; Van Deth & Zmerli, 2010) recognizes the problem of the multifaceted and imprecise nature of social capital. Putnam (2000) suggests that social capital

characteristics should be observed as a continuum. The relevant contrast here is between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital tends to be exclusive, while bridging is inclusive. As a result, substantial bonding social capital creates strong in-group loyalty (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Leonard, 2004). This loyalty to the in-group tends to generate out-group antagonism. On the other hand, bridging social capital allows individuals to develop ties and links beyond the in-group to out-groups (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Pugno & Verme, 2012).

According to Sotiropoulos (2005), individuals tend to seek security with their traditional family groups, community, racial, ethnic, or religious groups in times of political and economic uncertainty. As a source of social identity, this type of bonding tends to produce negative social capital. Consequently, negative social capital facilitates the weaving of close-knit informal associations. In contrast, positive social capital thrives much better in social arrangements where individuals engage with others based on extended business and social ties outside the realm of family or narrow ethnic or tribal affiliations (Sotiropoulos (2005).

Recent research (Sotiropoulos, 2005; Putnam, 2007; Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2009; Pugno, & Verme, 2012) sheds light on the adverse effects of social capital. The prevalence of negative social capital in social relationships limits benefits to the broader society. These limitations are observed in the overall social distance amongst the population and artificial boundaries between different ethnic and tribal groups. The manifestation of these artificial boundaries reinforces individuals' distrust of out-groups. Social interaction, therefore, ends up being filtered through the lens of negative social capital. The attitudes of individuals participating in these narrow ethnic enclaves lead to suspicion and cynicism within social encounters (Sotiropoulos, 2005). Consequently, this leads to widespread distrust of political and administrative institutions, leading to social disorganization (Penar, Aiko, Bentley & Han, 2016);

Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2009). The presence of negative social capital creates a conducive environment for the design and incidence of violence against fellow citizens (Roßteutscher, 2010).

Social Capital and Political Violence

Social capital analysis has been used to examine how violence destroys social capital, leading to social breakdown. Most people tend to fall back on tribal-based networks and family ties as a coping strategy in times of stress. According to Goodhand, Hulme & Lewer (2000), the most resilient social capital sources, are socially embedded networks and institutions, particularly those based on tribal and traditional processes. In several Ghana communities, particularly in urban areas, there had been a reassertion of ethnic rituals. Traditional festivals and other markers of ethnic identity have been rejuvenated to coincide with interparty political contests. As a result, political entrepreneurs have exploited the environment to weaken positive social capital elements while enhancing negative social capital (Fine, 2010; Goodhand, Hulme & Lewer, 2000).

These political agents employ propaganda and violent tactics to nurture a currency of fear, victimhood, and a sense of grievance. In effect, years of bridging social capital between communities have been purposely undermined. This is reflected in the decline of associations with cross-cutting memberships that transcend ethnic fault lines. Consequently, social capital depletion appears to be greatest where communities were subjected to competing for interparty conflicts (Fine, 2010; Goodhand, Hulme & Lewer, 2000).

The Ghanaian Political Landscape

The democratic dispensation of Ghana's Fourth Republic provides the framework for the re-emergence of political parties. A vibrant democratic process has been institutionalized in Ghana (Mohan, Asante, & Abdulai, 2018). Ghana is among the countries in sub-Saharan Africa with highly competitive two-party systems and relatively stable democracies in recent times (Mohan, Asante, & Abdulai 2018). Elections have been periodically held since 1992, with the most recent being the December 2016 general elections (Ayee 2017). Yet, Ghana's electoral politics is gradually becoming prone to violence. The 'winner-takes-all' type of politics practiced in Ghana is hugely divisive. It is characterized by a partisan sub-culture that excludes all other Ghanaians who are not part of the ruling party (Penar, Aiko, Bentley & Han, 2016). This situation inflames opposition and leads to polarization of the nation along party lines. This then facilitates the dissolution of indigenous people who possess the necessary talents and knowledge for national development.

One apparent feature and result of "winner-takes-all" politics is the feeling of marginalization and exclusion from the governance process by those who are not a part of the ruling party (Gyampo, 2016). The feeling of marginalization and exclusion from the governance process by those not members of the party in power poses a danger to Ghana. It breeds apathy, creates a divisive "we and them" situation, and ill-feeling against the state (Frimpong, 2019; Penar, Aiko, Bentley & Han, 2016). The result is tension, acrimony, and rancor in the body politic. Again, the unbridled practice of "winner-takes-all" politics, which awards wealth and gains to party devotees, makes people ever ready to undermine the national interest and resort to violent tactics to win elections with its ensuing substantial benefits (Gyampo, 2016).

Political Settlements Theory

Political settlements theory concentrates on how the balance of power between dissimilar parties can shape the types of social institutions that emerge and function at the macrolevel (Abdulai, 2017; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Rocha Menocal, 2017). Khan (2005) sees clientelism as the most pervasive form of politics in developing countries because the productive economy is not set enough to allocate resources through more formal mechanisms. The clientelist nature of politics in Ghana is widely acknowledged (Hirvi & Whitfield, 2015; Rocha Menocal, 2017). As a result, political parties participate in activities that inflict costs on each other and, reciprocally, absorb costs imposed on them in repeated rounds of conflict. Consequently, political parties rely on vigilante groups and other alliances to survive (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008).

For a country such as Ghana, with a long history of coup d'états, the resurgence of political violence has increasingly called into question the state's legitimacy. The traditional parties' dependence on vigilantism to mobilize support shows that most of the population is excluded from the clientelist network. Those who feel left out try to find other means to make their demands upon the state machinery (Gonzalez-Ocantos, & Oliveros, 2019; Rocha Menocal, 2015). The tribal nature of Ghanaian politics has weakened Ghanaian political elites' capacity to deal with increasingly serious problems of social conflict and political violence. Subsequently, the erosion of traditional sources of authority and legitimacy and their replacement by political parties has led to political immobilism. Furthermore, the escalation of social conflict and major political parties' apparent weakness has resulted in a fragmented governance structure (Gonzalez-Ocantos, & Oliveros, 2019; Nathan, 2016).

VI. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research seeks to assess the degree to which neoliberal policies' harmful effects, coupled with perverse social capital, influence Ghana's political violence. For this research, negative social capital is conceptualized as a process by which social ties are garnered to facilitate or influence people's propensity to engage in political violence on behalf of political parties. The following indicators will be examined: affiliation with a political party, ethnic identification, trust, social cohesion and religiosity. This research has generated several questions: (1) What aspects of social capital influence the nature of Ghana's political violence? (2) To what degree does corruption within the two main political parties' foster violence? (3) To what extent do you think the implementation of the neoliberal policy reforms successful? (4) To what degree did state elites contest the implementation of neoliberal reforms? (5) To what degree did civil society groups challenge the implementation of the neoliberal reforms? (6) How much autonomy do the media, judiciary, and civil society enjoy? (7) Do you blame internal actors (state elite) or external actors (World Bank/IMF staff) for the neoliberal reforms' failure?

Hypothesis

The etiology of political violence in Ghana is due to rising negative effects of neoliberalism.

VII. METHODOLOGY

Design

This research will be an exploratory study, as there is a lack of research on Ghana's electoral violence. For this study, a mixed-methods research design will be used. Here, quantitative methods will be embedded within a broader qualitative research effort (Creswell,

2017). Creswell & Creswell (2017) define mixed methods research is an "approach to an inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks "(p. 52). This approach will be combined with different types of data collection and analysis within a single integrated study.

As a result, quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection will be undertaken concurrently. I will collect and analyze closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended questionnaires. The sample size for the quantitative data collection will involve 75 participants and 20 participants for the qualitative data. I will proceed with a two-phase process. The first phase will be quantitative, and I will seek to assess the participants' attitudes towards political violence. In the second step, I will follow with interviews of some of the key participants. The goal is to create processes that can ensure deeper insights than could be achieved by one method.

Political violence is a sensitive topic in Ghana, especially after the electoral malpractice in recent years. However, as one who grew up in Ghana, I am aware of cultural practices and norms, which will help me build quick rapport and trust with subjects. Having lived in Ghana, I have had firsthand experience with some of the themes I am proposing in the study. Consultations will be made with the political parties' regional leadership to gain support for the surveys conducted. I also have contacts with key informants with an in-depth understanding of the socio-political context, who will provide expertise with the survey's content. I am aware of the different cultural traditions regarding the rules of etiquette and communication. I will reach out to gatekeepers within the communities to assist in overcoming potential cultural barriers.

Participants

Quantitative data for this study will be collected from 75 respondents who will complete web-based questionnaires. For the qualitative data, 20 participants will be interviewed. Limited demographic information will be collected from participants to protect their identities.

The study will require participants to be over 18, which will be part of the informed consent. Participants will be required to identify as registered members of a political party. I will conduct twenty interviews, ten interviewees from each of the two major political parties.

Measures

The questionnaires will consist of both open-ended questionnaires and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions will allow respondents to express their answers in their own words. The main advantage of open-ended questions is that they will most likely allow for spontaneous answers and deeply held beliefs. Closed-ended questions will be designed to help respondents concentrate on the more specific aspects important to the research. Closed-ended questions will yield more uniform responses that will facilitate data analysis.

Procedures

This study will need to be approved by the Morehead State University Human Subjects Review Board. The data will be gathered using a mixed methods approach. The qualitative approach will allow the researcher to understand better the motivation, beliefs, and experiences of individuals identified as members of a political party. The quantitative approach will allow for eliciting specific responses. Participants will complete informed consent forms before beginning the research. The study will be conducted using questionnaires that respondents can

access online and by interviews using WhatsApp, which is readily used in Ghana. Participants

will receive a brief overview of how to use online platforms' main features, an overview on

completing the questions, and information regarding digital security and privacy policies. It is

hoped that I will be allowed to conduct the research during summer 2021.

VIII. LIMITATIONS

There are some constraints inherent in this study. We are in a pandemic, and many

countries, including Ghana, have not fully opened their borders. So, it is likely the timeline for

data collection may be delayed. Also, the methodological approach may become selective due to

time and budget constraints. Furthermore, due to the topic's sensitive nature, the researcher has

decided not to collect demographic data. However, the lack of demographic data may end up

becoming a shortcoming of the research. Omitting the participants' social-economic status may

likely prove to be a loss of additional insight.

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