

POLITICAL ALIENATION IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: A TEST FOR POLITICAL EFFICACY AMONG INFORMAL SECTOR OPERATORS

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Abstract

This study investigated the degree and pervasiveness of political powerlessness (internal inefficacy) and the perception of the political system as unresponsive (external inefficacy) among the operators of informal enterprises in Southeast Nigeria. An instrument adapted from American National Election Study (ANES 2008) was administered to a cross section of the population. The objective was to determine the degree and prevalence of political alienation among the population in order to establish that operating an informal enterprise has a political dimension outside being an economic survival mechanism. The result showed a high level of political alienation among the population suggesting that running an informal enterprise is a form of political withdrawal and resistance due to perceived inequity and unresponsiveness in the political system.

Key words: Political alienation, Informal sector, political institutions, political efficacy, political resistance and withdrawal.

Introduction

For years Nigeria has been struggling to reduce the size of its informal economy. The country's economy is dominated by unregistered, unincorporated and untaxed enterprises whose output is not captured in the national gross domestic product (GDP). It currently has the largest size of informal economy in Africa albeit also being the largest economy in the continent (Schneider, 2002; Ogbuabor & Malaolu, 2013). In 2007 Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) was established by the government to lure the informal sector enterprises which constitute the bulk of the SMEs into formalization. Various schemes were adopted for this purpose including, Small and Medium Enterprises Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS), Small and Medium Enterprises Credit Guarantee Scheme (SMECGS), Learning Initiative for Entrepreneurs (LIFE)), Micro Finance Initiative, Refinancing and Rediscounting Scheme (RRF), National Enterprise Development Programme (NADEP) as well as the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund (MSMEDF). In 2013 the Central Bank of Nigeria established Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Fund, in it a total of 220 billion Naira was mapped out for loans to SMEs in an attempt to draw them towards formalization. However after years of implementation of these policies the expansion of informal sector in Nigeria has not abated. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2016) reported that between 2012 and 2016, the informal sector has been creating 70% of all new jobs more than the formal and public sector combined.

The persistence and pervasiveness of this phenomenon in Nigeria calls for investigation. There seems to be a consensus in literature that the Nigeria informal sector is strictly an economic phenomenon. It is seen as a survival mechanism born out of economic necessity with poverty and unemployment being taken as the root causes (Ogbuabor & Malaolu, 2013; Ikeije, Akomolafe & Onuba, 2016). This however appear to be a reductionist submission when compared with the reality on the ground. Incentives both monetary and statutory have been offered to the operators by the state. Business registration procedure has been decentralized and the cost reduced. Loans/credit schemes, entrepreneurial trainings and tax relaxation have been offered but no one is paying attention. Very often in major cities of Nigeria there is a constant battle between the agents of the state and the informal sector operators. The more the illegal shops and structures are brought down the more they spring up. The more the regulatory bodies shut down illegal factories the more uncertified products fill the markets. Arresting the street and road vendors /hawkers and destruction of their wares have not succeeded in deterring new comers and old guards from bouncing back. A veritable war is going on between this population and the state. The state does not appear to be winning.

This brings to fore the political dimension of the informal sector. Ab initio operating informal enterprises is an affront to the state. In the USA, it is viewed purely as a criminal offence. The state neither recognised it nor has any policy on it, it is simply a crime. It goes against the laws of the state that regulate business operations. It puts the operator outside the apparent and easy reach of state. Its existence and persistence suggest at best a withdrawal from and at the worst a resistance to the state. Those two attributes (withdrawal and resistance to the state) are acknowledged indicators of political alienation (Malkoun, 2004; Adetoro, 2012; Southwell 2012).

This study investigates political alienation among population of operators of informal enterprises in Southeast Nigeria. It seeks to establish that their actions stem not only from economic necessity but also from the will to withdraw from, and resist the state as a result of perceived unresponsiveness of the state to the plight of the population.

Theoretically the position is in line with the new institutionalist approach as postulated by North (1990) in development economics and Steinmo, Thelen & Longseth (1992) in political science. The most essential feature of the approach is the recognition of the impact of political institutions and mechanisms on economic structure and growth; the role of non-economic factors especially power distributions in influencing economic behaviour. As North puts it "politics and economics are inextricably linked in any understanding of the performance of an economy" (North 1990 p.23). Our focus on state and political factor instead of economic factors in investigating the informal sector is based on this approach. The level of political integration, the perception of the legitimacy of the state, the perception of government's responsiveness to people's need, the extent to which the people feel that the government is fulfilling the basic social contract and the perception of fundamental justice in the political system determines the extent to which the people will submit themselves to the state rules and regulations even in matters of business operations.

According to Marx alienation implies estrangement, detachment or separation from an object or situation due to some objective social condition. The concept of political alienation refers to a set of attitudes that portray a negative perception of the political system and sometimes accompanied by a total rejection of the state and political system. People became politically alienated when they could not recognize fundamental justice in the political system. Disillusion, estrangement and disconnection from the state are essential elements of political alienation which makes the population feel cut-off from the political system and operation and the inherent benefits. In Clarke & Alcock (1989); Wheatherford (1992) and Johnson & Hayes

(1992) two components of political alienation were identified as internal efficacy and external efficacy. The individual's sense of political competence was termed internal efficacy while the responsiveness of the political system was termed external efficacy. Internal efficacy reflects the individual's assessment of how much power or influence he or she can have on the course of political events and outcomes. External efficacy, or government responsiveness, represents a more general evaluation of how receptive are political institutions to input from all individuals in society (Southwell, 2012).

In this study we assessed the degree and prevalence of political powerlessness (internal inefficacy), the perception that one lacks the power to influence or determine political outcomes he desires. The extent to which one feels incapable of exerting an effect on the political system. The feeling of political powerlessness weakens the urge to get involved with the state as one feels incapable of influencing outcomes. The state seems so distant that one feels cut off from the political system or it seems so huge, pernicious and intimidating that one has no option but to seek for withdrawal and resistance. We also tested for external inefficacy, the extent to which one feels that the government is unresponsive to his needs and desires. People with high efficacy have confidence in and are satisfied with and are proud of the state. On the other hand people with low efficacy (inefficacy) sees the state as incompetent and unresponsive, the consequence is withdrawal and /or resistance.

Materials and Method

The study was conducted in some commercial cities in the five States of South-east Nigeria-Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. According the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2010), there are a total of 1,320 434 operators of informal enterprises in Southeast Nigeria. This forms for us the population of study. Taro Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size at 400. Proportional stratified sampling method was used as the sampling technique to determine the number of the questionnaire allocated to each state. The number allocated to each state was determined by the percentage contribution of each state to the population of study as provided in NBS (2010), this is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sampled States, Population of informal Sector Operators and Sample Size

States	Population of Informal Enterprises	% Population	Sample Size
Abia(Aba)	316,183	23.9	96
Anambra(Onitsha)	298,215	22.6	90
Ebonyi(Abakaliki)	230,643	17.5	70
Enugu(Enugu city)	196,523	14.9	60
Imo(Owerri)	278,870	21.1	84
Total	1,320,434	100	400

Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

A structured questionnaire adapted from American National Election Study (ANES, 2008) was used as the instrument of data collection. Internal inefficacy was measured by a simple statement that seeks to ascertain the respondent's perception about his/her ability/capacity to influence government's policies and actions. External inefficacy was measured by a statement that probes the respondent's perception on government's responsiveness. Data collection was done through direct method of street to street administration and collection. In analyzing data we employed tables, calculated weighted mean score and percentage distribution. Item 1 was used in testing for internal inefficacy (political powerlessness) while item 2 tests for external inefficacy (the perception of government as unresponsive).In calculating the weighted mean score, the number of responses made were multiplied by the assigned corresponding values or points to get a

product. The product was divided by the number of respondents in order to get the weighted mean score. The criterion mean was obtained by adding up all assigned values or points of 5+4+3+2+1 and divided by 5 which is equal to 3. Items with less than the mean score of 3 were rejected, while those that scored 3 and above were accepted. For ease of analysis of the percentage distribution, ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ were collapsed into ‘agree’ while ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ were collapsed into ‘disagree’.

Results

Results were presented in disaggregated form among the five states in Southeast Nigeria appearing in alphabetical order, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. Upper figures represent the weighted mean score while lower figures stand for percentage distribution. The aggregate response was presented in Chart 1 and 2.

Table 2 below showed that the feeling of political powerlessness did not appear to be prominent among the informal sector operators in Abia State. Among the 96 respondents surveyed in the State only 21(or 21.8%) responded positively to the feeling of political powerlessness while 66(or 68.7%) responded negatively.

Table 2: Weighted Mean Score and Percentage Distribution of Political Inefficacy Among Operators of Informal Enterprises in Abia State

S/ N	Questionnaire Item	Responses							
		SA (x5) %	A (x4) %	DK(x3) %	D (x2) %	SD(x1) %	Total N(96)	X	R
1	People like me have no say in what government does.	11(55) 11.4%	10(40) 10.4%	9(27) 9.3%	36(72) 37.5%	30(30) 31.2%	96(224)	2.33 21.8%(A) 68.7%(D)	Rejected
2	Government does not care about what people like me think.	54(270) 56.2%	38(152) 39.5%	2(6) 2.0%	1(2) 1.0%	1(1) 1.0%	96(431)	4.49 95.7%(A) 2%(D)	Accepted

Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

The weighted mean score was 2.33 which was below our criterion mean (3) and the item was thus rejected. What this entails is that majority of the respondents felt that they have the power to influence political outcome. They felt powerful enough to be capable of impacting on the political system to achieve a desired goal; they therefore have high internal efficacy. The result on test of external inefficacy was however different: 95.7% amounting to 92 out of 96 respondents felt that the State does not care about people like them. The feeling of external inefficacy was extremely high with a weighted mean score of 4.49 on a scale of 5. Great majority of the respondents feel disconnected from the state, they feel cut-off and have no faith or confidence in the state to do what they considered the right thing.

The result from Abia state shows a population that is utterly dissatisfied with the state but feel powerful enough in their capacity to make impact and influence political outcome. They are likely therefore to be active in politics of resistance as may be seen in their total disregard for laws effecting business establishment, operations and taxation.

Table 3: Weighted mean score and percentage distribution of political inefficacy

Among operators of informal enterprises in Anambra State

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Responses							
		SA (x5) %	A (x4) %	DK(x3) %	D (x2) %	SD(x1) %	Total N(90)	X	R
1	People like me have no say in what government does.	20(100)	24(96)	28(84)	10(20)	8(8)	90(308)	3.42	Accepted
		22.2%	26.6%	31.1%	11.1%	8.8%			
2	Government does not care about what people like me think.	29(145)	25(100)	26(78)	7(14)	3(3)	90(340)	3.78	Accepted
		32.2%	27.7%	28.8%	7.7%	3.3%			

Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

Table 3 shows the response among the respondents in Anambra State. In Anambra State 48.8 % of the respondents exhibited the feeling of being politically powerless while 19.9% rejected the position; 34% however were indifferent. The weighted mean score of 3.42 was slightly above 3 which is our criterion mean so item was accepted. On external inefficacy, 54 out of 90 respondents amounting to 48.8% felt that government was not receptive and responsive to their feelings and desires. The calculated weighted score was 3.78 and was accepted as it was above the criterion mean. In Anambra State therefore the feeling of political inefficacy is prominent among the study population. Practically this will manifest in behaviour ranging from political apathy to active resistance to the State.

Table 4: Weighted Mean Score and Percentage Distribution of Political Inefficacy Among Operators of Informal Enterprises in Ebonyi State

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Responses							
		SA (x5) %	A (x4) %	DK(x3) %	D (x2) %	SD(x1) %	Total N(70)	X	R
1	People like me have no say in what government does.	10(50)	13(52)	11(33)	24(48)	12(12)	70(195)	2.79	Rejected
		14.2%	18.5%	15.7%	34.2%	17.1%			
2	Government does not care about what people like me think.	22(110)	19(76)	18(54)	7(14)	4(4)	70(258)	3.69	Accepted
		31.4%	27.1%	25.7	10%	5.7%			

Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

The result from Ebonyi State as shown in Table 4 above have similarities to the situation in Abia State as seen in Table 2: the population felt politically powerful but have no confidence in the State. About 51.3% of the respondents in Ebonyi State rejected sharing any feeling of political powerlessness and 58.8% expressed lack of confidence in the state. The

result shows an environment that would most likely be characterised by confrontation and resistance by the population against the state.

Table 5: Weighted mean Score and Percentage Distribution of Political Inefficacy Among Operators of Informal in Enugu State

S/ N	Questionnaire Item	Responses							
		SA (x5) %	A (x4) %	DK(x3) %	D (x2) %	SD(x1) %	Total N(60)	X	R
1	People like me have no say in what government does.	30(150) 50%	19(76) 31.6%	4(12) 6.6%	6(12) 10%	1(1) 1.6%	60(251)	4.18 81.6%(A) 11.6%(D)	Accepted
2	Government does not care about what people like me think.	33(165) 55%	22(88) 36.6%	5(15) 8.3%	0(0)	0(0)	60(268)	4.47 91.6%(A) 0%(D)	Accepted

Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

Table 5 shows the responses from Enugu State. In this State there is a very high rate of both internal and external inefficacy, the feelings of political powerlessness and government unresponsiveness. The data show that 81.6% of the population felt that they had no power to influence what government does. They are too powerless to influence political and policy outcomes. A whopping 91.6% (55 out of 60) of respondents expressed the feeling that the government do not care about their feelings and desires. The respondents in Enugu State were a highly politically alienated class.

Table 6: Weighted Mean Score and Percentage Distribution of Political Inefficacy Among Operators of Informal Enterprises in Imo State

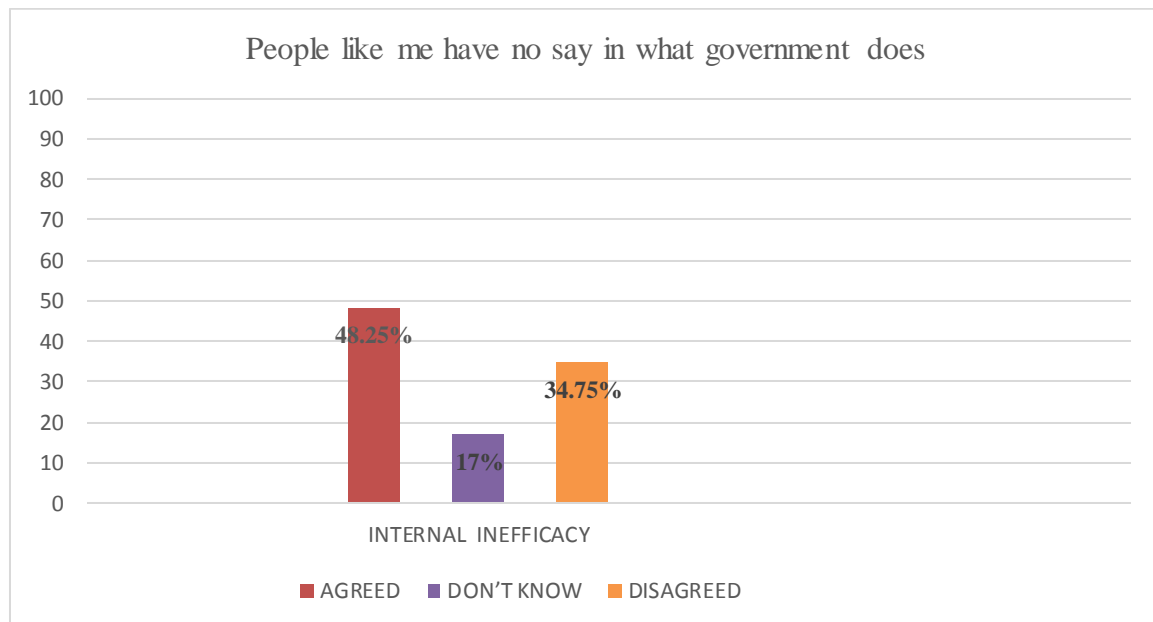
S/ N	Questionnaire Item	Responses							
		SA (x5) %	A (x4) %	DK(x3) %	D (x2) %	SD(x1) %	Total N(84)	X	R
1	People like me have no say in what government does.	42(210) 50%	14(56) 16.6%	16(48) 19.0	10(20) 11.9%	2(2) 2.3%	84(336)	4.00 66.6%(A) 14.2%(D)	Accepted
2	Government does not care about what people like me think.	61(305) 72.6%	19(76) 22.6%	2(6) 2.3%	2(4) 2.3%	0(0)	84(391)	4.65 95.2%(A) 2.3%(D)	Accepted

Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

Table 6 shows the responses from the respondents in Imo State. It shows that 66.6% of the respondents feel incapable of effecting political outcome; they feel politically powerless.

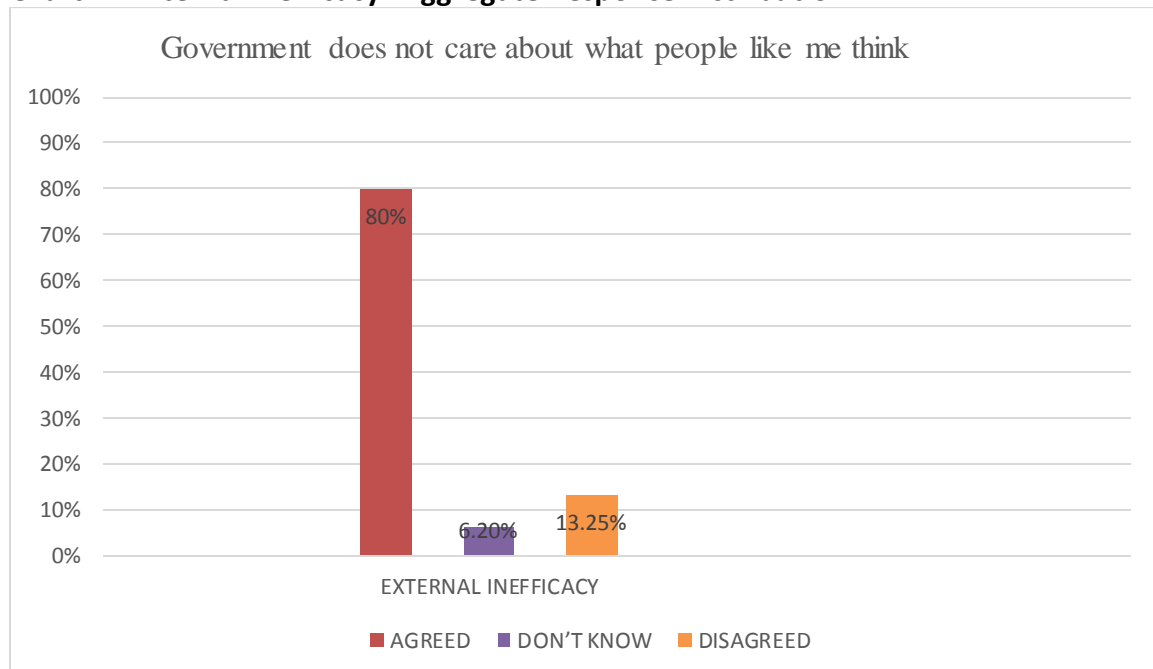
This represents the size of the respondents that felt that they were not powerful enough to influence government policies and actions. On government’s receptiveness to their feelings and desires, 95.2% felt that government does not care about their desires and feelings. This portrays a high rate of external inefficacy. Being thus politically alienated the informal sector operators in Imo State represents a class the will offer confrontation and resistance to the state.

Chart 1: Internal inefficacy- Aggregate Response Distribution



Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

Chart 2: External inefficacy- Aggregate Response Distribution



Source: Researchers, field Work (2018)

Discussions and Conclusion

Two broad and contradictory trends are identifiable from the results: internal efficacy with extreme external inefficacy, and extreme internal and external inefficacy. Abia and Ebonyi States demonstrate the first category while Enugu and Imo States belong to the second. Curiously Anambra State does not fit into either trend: the respondents showed moderate internal and external inefficacy.

On aggregating results from the five States as shown in Chart 1 and 2 we saw a situation of moderate internal inefficacy as expressed by 48% of the population and extreme external inefficacy as it affects 80% of the population. Conclusively what we got was a population that felt cut off from a political system they perceive as being unreceptive and unresponsive to their desires and feelings. The population does not overall feel politically powerless as expressed by 34.7% who felt that they have the power to influence government actions and policies. However their disaffection, severance and disconnection from the political system results from their assessment of the government as neither caring nor responsive to their needs, desires and aspirations. This weakened or zero attachment to institutions of the state is what defines political alienation (Weakliem & Borch 2006). A politically alienated individual is one who is totally dissatisfied with the political output of the state and as such feels disillusioned with and estranged from the political system. The feeling of exclusion and detachment within the political process makes such an individual to refrain from engagement except in form of resistance.

In Paige (1971) individuals with high internal and external efficacy are those that actively support the political structure, have confidence and faith in their political system. However individuals with low internal and external efficacy exhibit a subordinate attitude towards the state, but in a situation where you have high internal efficacy with high external inefficacy a dissident attitude will emerge. A somewhat similar conclusion was reached in Mierina (2012) in developing a model of citizen's political inclination in a given political environment. Coping attitude occurs among people with low or moderate internal and external inefficacy as in Anambra State. Conflict attitude on the other hand occurs in a situation of internal efficacy with high external inefficacy as in case of Abia and Ebonyi States. The summation is that when the population is politically alienated but feel that they have power to effect change it results in what Paige called dissident attitude but is termed conflict attitude in Mierina (2012).

Our submission therefore is that operating an enterprises outside the confine of the state, in total disregard to that state's laws and regulations guiding business establishment and operations, is a form of dissident or conflict attitude on the side of the individual. That operating an informal enterprises is a form of political resistance (Whitson 2007). This becomes more glaring when one puts into consideration the amount of money, time and energy being spent by the state agencies to entice this population into formalization and thus begin to abide by state regulations. Each week, in one State or another and most Nigeria cities "illegal" motor, motorcycle mechanic and welders workshops, kiosks, markets, factories and refineries are destroyed. This is usually widely publicized. Many States and City Councils have constructed Mechanic villages but great majority of the mechanics will rather rebuild their destroyed illegal workshops and wait for another season of destruction than enter into the government's Mechanic villages. National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has been fighting a running battle to rid the country of unregistered and unlicensed food, drug and water production. The producers and distributors of unregistered and unlicensed drugs would rather attempt an assassination of the head of the agency than submit themselves to State regulations. The battle line has since been drawn between the vendors and hawkers on Nigerian major streets and highways who have strongly resolved that they may be killed, imprisoned or their goods/wares confiscated but Nigerian streets and

highways must remain a market place for all sorts of things. The war is still on and the state is not winning and may never win until it realizes that the phenomenon of informal economy is a form of political resistance which results from political alienation. What is called for is political /social integration not bulldozers and armed police.

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