

The political economy of Anioma State creation to Ndigbo Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

The creation of Anioma State has been a topic of great interest in the political economy of South East Nigeria, especially among the Igbo Community in Delta state and Igbo tribe generally. This proposed state aims to address the long-standing marginalization of the Anioma people of Delta State and Ndigbo tribe and provide them with more political representation and resources. With the growing tension and political unrest in the region, the debate surrounding Anioma State creation has intensified. Proponents argued that it will bring about economic growth and development, while opponents raise concerns about its feasibility and potentials conflict with neighboring states. This paper delves into the historical, political landscape, and potential impact of Anioma State creation on Ndigbo South East Nigeria. It examines the various perspective and arguments surrounding the issue and provides insight into its potentials outcomes. The paper is qualitative one and utilized Political Economy theory and through a thorough textual analysis of literature, it aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the political economy of Anioma state creation and its implications on Ndigbo South East Nigeria. The paper strong recommends actual creation of the Anioma state to make up six Igbo states.

Keywords: Political Economy, Ndigbo, South East, Development.

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Introduction

Nigeria is a complex political landscape. The issue of state creation has become a critical concern over the years, deeply intertwined with the quest for equitable representation and national unity. Its journey from initial four regions in 1967 to the current 36 states has been marked by series of administrative changes intended to address regional and cultural disparities and promote more localized governance, with the aim of reducing regional tensions and promoting more localized governance in response to the political and ethnic tension at any given time (Omife, 2024). Unfortunately, these expansions were often driven by political considerations and strategic interest rather than purely equitable distribution of resources and representation. While these changes sought to address the needs of various regions, they sometimes result in the political imbalances, underrepresentation of some ethnic group and socio-cultural tension (Ake, 1994).

The proposal for Anioma State, a new state carved from the existing Delta State, represents a significant measure to address historical injustices and systemic marginalization faced by the Igbo-Speaking population in Nigeria. This Proposed state is not merely an administrative adjustment but a crucial step towards correcting historical imbalances and fostering long-term national cohesion and stability (Omife, 2024). There is one immortal maxim, that a man's ancestry defines his origin regardless of how much he may wish to deny the fact. Truth remains constant and eternal. This universal maxim clearly response to those who argued that Anioma people are not Igbos, it confronts an immutable fact that Anioma people of Delta State and Ikwere people of River State and others groups with Igbo ancestry all belong to Igbo ancestral and cultural bloc, based on incontrovertible, historical, cultural, cum legal documents in defense of this assertion, despite denial by few.

The significant issue arising from this state creation process has been the underrepresentation of the Southeast zone. This zone, comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states, has consistently

been underrepresented compared to other geopolitical zones. For instance, the North-west zone, has seven states, while the North east, North central, South-south, and South west zones each have six states. This discrepancy is not merely a matter of numbers but reflects deeper concerns related to resources distribution, political power and developmental opportunities (Amali & Bierrenu-Nnabugwu 2024). The South-east underrepresentation has contributed to systemic marginalization and a perception of inequity in resources allocation and political influence. This imbalance has had tangible effects on the region's development and its people's sense of inclusion in the national affairs. The proposal for Anioma State creation seeks to address these disparities directly. This new state also represents a crucial step towards rectifying the historical oversight of the Anioma region and providing a fair share of political power and resources to its people. It will also address the South East's longstanding grievances and foster a greater sense of national unity by demonstrating Nigeria's commitment to fairness, equity, justices and inclusivity, reducing regional tension and promoting a more cohesive national identity.

Conclusively, the paper seeks to explore the political Economy of the proposed Anioma State, to Southeast that will enable it gain an additional voice in the senate, to enhance its ability to advocate for policies and projects and benefit the region for equity in governance. It will ensure fair representation and resources allocation for Southeast, which will address a longstanding geopolitical issues of marginalization and inequity faced by the Southeast region.

Statement of Problem

The Nigerian Federation is anchored on 36 states structure with a strong central government. The central government is quite dominant because of over-centralization of powers and control of the national resources by the federal government as a result of unitary system of governance. Over the years, agitations for creation of new states and true fiscal federalism has been strident without any fruitful results. This problem has been supported by the Nigeria 1999 constitution as amended that promote a rentier Political culture and Economy where resources allocation favors some section of the country against others ((Amali & Bierrenu-Nnabugwu 2024). The 36 states are populated by three main tribes which include Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups. The current operating constitution, further divided the states into six geopolitical zones, with the three main ethnic groups located into one of the geopolitical groupings. This explain why the coexistence of center-seeking and center-fleeing forces in Nigeria federal arrangement seems to have resulted into delicate state apparatus.

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findings will contribute to the broader discourse on Political stability, equity and socioeconomic development, particularly in contexts reducing political marginalization and increasing national unity.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to critically explore the socio-economic and political impact of Anioma State creation to Southeast region of Nigeria, with a focus on its impact on reducing marginalization and enhance equitable representation for socio-economic development, in order to assess whether the creation of the additional state to southeast will provide sustainable solutions to inequality and imbalance in political distribution in Nigeria. Specific goals of the study include the following:

1. To show how political underrepresentation of southeast region has fuel marginalization and centre-fleering agitation in the region.
2. To assess the impact of the Anioma state creation on the socio-economic status of Southeast region.
3. To examine the implications of the creation of Anioma state to the socio-economic and political development of Ndigbo, South East region, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

It has been argued by some scholars, that the federal Government of Nigeria has deliberately prevented the creation of Anioma State as part of Eastern region solely because the government never wanted the Eastern Region to have political strength and man power, so they decided to scatter Igbo clans across other non-Igbo States (Omife, 2024 & Amali & Bierrenu-Nnabugwu 2024). But what they could take away, is the cultural heritage that binds Igbos together as one. Prior to the 1906 amalgamation of the Southern Nigeria protectorate, the present South-south and South East, the whole of Igbo Land was in one region, the Southern Nigeria protectorate. And it remains so, till the final amalgamation in 1914 when the country was divided into northern and Southern protectorate. In 1939, Colonial Governor General Bernard Bourdillian divided the country into three administrative units for the interest of colonial masters and Anioma region was added to the South west region, consequently, three Anioma Kings namely- the Obi of Agbor (Ika), the Obi of Abor (Ukwuani) and the Obi of Idumeje-Ugboko (Ika) petitioned the colonial government in 1939 for separating Anioma from the rest of Igbo Nation (ASEPP (2024). The south-East region of Nigeria currently has fewer states compared to other regions. This imbalance has resulted into political and economic marginalization. Anioma State would address this inequity by ensuring better representation and resources allocation for the people of Delta North and the broader South-East region.

Therefore, the creation of Anioma State will not only correct this imbalance of State in South East geo-political zone but will also correct historical damage done against the Igbo Nation as well as bring Anioma people together with their kith and kin (Onwubiko, 2023). Chinua Achebe (2013) argued that the Nigerian civil war and events like the Asaba massacre have left deep wounds in the national psyche. Hence Omife, (2024) averred that creating Anioma State will address these historical injustices and it will begin the process of healing and reconciliation in the country. The current quest for the creation of Anioma State championed by Senator Ned Nwoko is a continuation of efforts initiate by past Anioma leaders for the past over 50 years. Its creation will have a broader implication for Nigeria as a whole. It is a step towards achieving true federalism and ensuring equitable representation for all ethnic nationalities. It would also serve as model for addressing historical injustices and promoting reconciliation and unity in a diverse nation (ASEPP 2024).

Political Representation: There is Pan-Igbo Unity Supporting Anioma state creation, especially among Ohaneze group, Association of South East Past Presidents General (ASEPP) as a way to promote unity and solidarity among all Igbo people, regardless of geographical location. The creation will increase the political representation of Igbo speaking people and bring to the same level with other ethnic groups in Nigeria (Omife, 2024). Igbo speaking states in South East Nigeria is currently five as against six in other geopolitical zones. This explain why the region has less political representatives in National Assembly. This less representation has affected inflow of resources in the zone among many other things. Currently, four new states have so far been proposed and tabled at the National Assembly for creation in the south east to fill the vacuum of a sixth state for the zone. The proposed new States are Anioma, Orlu, Etiti and Adada states. Two of the four proposed state Adada and Etiti are proposed to be carved out from States from South East States. While Orlu is proposed to be carved out from some local government areas from five south east states of Abia, Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi and Imo, on the other hand Etiti is proposed to be carved out from three States namely, Anambra, Imo and Abia. The proposed Adada state comprises seven local government areas of existing Enugu north senatorial zone of Enugu State (Amadi, 2023). Whereas, Anioma State, as presently proposed aims to emerge by detaching from another geo-political zone to increase the number, size and population of Igbo State, the three other proposed State aims to emerge by reducing the population and landmass of existing Igbo State.

Socioeconomic Potential of Anioma State: The socioeconomic, political, administrative and cultural potentials of Anioma State are not in doubt, it is a region rich in natural resources, infrastructure, population and economic resources. Anioma is located in present day Delta State. It has 9 local government areas and verse land with great deposit of oil and gas in large quantity.

Infrastructure: Anioma people of Delta State already has established capital city, Asaba and it has Agbor, Kwale as other budding area. It has a federal and state University, Airport and state polytechnic and many other infrastructures which gives it edge and therefore shall not be economic burden to the federal government (Nwoko (2024). The remaining part of Delta State have enough infrastructure to sustain the State. Warri, the State's largest city, has the potential of a state capital, and was even the original proposed state capital of Delta State, before it was merged with Anioma state movement to create the present Delta State. It has a viable airport and seaport, with Ughelli, Sapele, Ude as other urban areas. It also retains a State University, federal University and two campuses of State Polytechnic.

Economic Resources: The Anioma region is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas and limestone, which could provide a solid foundation for economic growth and development. Additionally, the fertile land and favourable climate make it ideal for agriculture, which could further boost the state's economy. The state has potential to become a major economic hub, attracting businesses and investors, creating jobs and improving the standard of living in the state. The strategic location of Anioma State offers significant advantage and position it as gate way of Southeast and South-South regions, Anioma State could facilitate trade and commerce, fostering economic integration and cooperation between the two regions. It could also include the development of new market and expansion of existing ones, benefiting not only Anioma State but also its neighbouring states and the country as a whole (Omife, 2024). With Anioma State in South East, the south east would have six states in South east development Commission like every other region, and four oil producing states. Delta State presently is Nigeria's second largest oil producing state and produce 21st percent of Nigeria's oil wealth, Anioma region produced about 28 percent of this, thus translating to

about 8 percent of Nigeria Oil production (Omife, 2024). With this Anioma will be the largest oil producing state in south east states, with Imo, Abia and Anambra whose combined oil output do not reach 5 percent. Anioma would rank as the fifth largest oil producing states in Nigeria, topping Ondo, Edo, Abia, Lagos and Anambra states.

Cultural Affinity, preservation and identity: Anioma people share affinity with Igbo based not only on language, but also on other culture and traditional norms. Anioma people and other Igbos equally observe same four market days' namely-Nkwo, Eke, Olie, and Afor. They observe and celebrate the same farming season and have similar religion apart from Christianity. In fact, the masquerade dance (Egwu Nmanwu) all over Anioma is the same with other Igbo land (Nwoko 2024). Though there are some opposition in the creation of Anioma state as part of South East geopolitical zone, it is abundantly very clear that majority of Anioma people as well as the mainstream South east Igbo want the Anioma state as part of Igbo ethnic group. The demand for Anioma State as part of South East geopolitical zone qualifies as a collective determination for equity and justices. The call for Anioma state has widespread support from various stakeholders. The Anioma socio-cultural group, Izu Anioma, the Pan Igbo cultural organization, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, the Association of South-East Past-Presidents General (ASEPP) are among host of other Igbo Socio-cultural and political organizations that are in front for the advocacy for the creation of the new state as part of south East zone. The Anioma people have a distinct cultural identity that needs to be preserved and promoted. A state of their own would provide a platform for the promotion of their unique heritage, traditions, and values. Their cultural festivals, traditional dances, and languages are treasures that should be nurtured and celebrated (Nwoko 2024). The word Anioma is an acronym derived from the four original local government, that is A for Anioch, N for Ndokwa, I for Ika, O for Oshimili, M and A are common denominators found in the four original local governments and they all Igbo speaking Councils. Anioma, comprises nine out 25 local government of present Delta state, they include: Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Ika North East, Ika South, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa west, Oshimili North, Oshilimili south and Ukwani. These nine local governments span a multitude of over 60 communities.

Population of Anioma People: The proposed Anioma is composed of nine local government areas, six of which are rich in oil and gas resources. Its population according to the 2006 census was about 1.3 Million people, which is today estimated to be about 2 Million people (Delta State SBS 2024). The major towns and villages include Asaba, Agbor, Kwale, Oligbo, Ibrode, Ibusa, Igbanke, Igbodo, Igbuku, Illah, Isa-Ogbashi, Issele-uku, Ishiagu, Isikiti-Isiagu, Issele-Azagba, Isslel-mkpitime, Issele-Uku, Isumpe, Kwale, Mbiri, Ndemiri, Ndokwa, Abbia, Eziunm, Nkpolenyi, Nsukwa. Obieti, Obi Anyiama, Obi Umutu, Obi, Obianiku, Obikwele, Obinumba, Obior, Obodo-Eti, Obomkpa, Ogbe, Ogode, Ogume, Ogwashu-uku, Oko Anala, Oko/Ognele, Oko-Amakom, Okotomi, Okpa, Okpanam, Okwe, Oligbo, Olor-Usisa, Olu-Odu, Omaja, Onicha Olona, among others. The region boast of significant human capital, making it a viable and sustainable contender for statehood (Nwoko 2024).

Methodology

This research is a qualitative work, anchored on secondary sources. The sources include Anioma 1954 white paper on state creation, government publications on minority quest for state creation, newspaper documentary, prominent individual interviews and 2025 report of Animoa people quest for independent state creation. It adopted explanatory research design to explore the identified literatures in the investigation of the research problem. Documentary method of data collection was utilized to generate data from secondary sources, while a textual analysis rooted on systematic logical induction was used to test the hypotheses argumentatively.

Discussions of the Findings

The Igboness of Anioma People: It is widely accepted theory of ancestral origin that the first component that identifies or differentiate a group of people is the language they speak. We identified Hausa, Yoruba, Urhobo, Bini, Igbo, Ijaw, and people by the language they speak. Cultural and traditionally, Anioma is Igbo. Anioma people share affinity with Igbo based not only on language, but also on other culture and traditional norms. Anioma people and other Igbos equally observe same four market days' namely-Nkwo, Eke, Orie, and Afor. They observe and celebrate the same farming season and have similar religion apart from Christianity. In fact, the masquerade dance (Egwu Nmanwu) all over Anioma is the same with other Igbo land.

It is trite knowledge that politically delineated geopolitical zones don't change people from who they are. Therefore, that Anioma people were added into Delta state does not and cannot change it Anioma people from Igbos they are. Just as being in River state does not change Ikwerre people, Ndoni people and other Igbo component from other state as Igbo people. The word Anioma is an acronym derived from the four original local government, that is A for Anioch, N for Ndokwa, I for Ika, O for Oshimili, M and A are common denominators found in the four original local governments and they all Igbo speaking Councils. Anioma, comprises nine out of 25 local government of present Delta state, they include: Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Ika North East, Ika South, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa west, Oshimili North, Oshimili south and Ukwani. These nine local government are span a multitude of over 60 communities.

Anioma state the best option for Ndigbo: The demand for creation of Anioma State has the support of the overwhelming majority of South East Igbos to make up the 6th South East State. The reason for this mass support are many, which include but not limited to the following:

1. Ethnic affinity: Anioma people are Igbo speaking and Igbo people and they see themselves as part of Igbo larger ethnic family.
2. Shared history: Anioma and Igbo people share a common history and cultural heritage.
3. Geographical proximity: Anioma land is adjacent to core Igbo states, making it a natural extension.
4. Economic benefits: A separate Anioma State would boost economic development in the region, benefiting neighboring Igbo States.
5. Political Solidarity: Igbo people see the Anioma State movement as an opportunity to support their kin and strengthen Igbo Political influence.
6. Cultural preservation: Igbo people believe that Anioma state would help preserve Igbo culture and language.
7. Historical justices: Igbo people see the creation of Anioma State as a way to address historical injustices and marginalization.
8. Strategic interest: Anioma state would provide a strategic buffer zone for Igbo people, enhancing their security and interest.
9. Kingship ties: Many Igbo people have family ties and connections with Anioma people, fostering a sense of responsibility and support.
10. Pan-Igbo Unity: Supporting Anioma state creation is seen as a way to promote unity and solidarity among all Igbo people, regardless of geographical location.

Currently, four new states have so far been proposed and tabled at the National Assembly for creation in the south east to fill the vacuum of a sixth state for the zone. The proposed new States are Anioma, Orlu, Etiti and Adada states. Two of the four proposed state Adada and Etiti are proposed to be carved out from States from South East States. While Orlu is proposed to be carved out from some local

government areas from five south east states of Abia, Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi and Imo, on the other hand Etiti is proposed to be carved out from three States namely, Anambra, Imo and Abia. The proposed Adada state comprises seven local government areas of existing Enugu north senatorial zone of Enugu State.

Whereas, Anioma State, as presently proposed aims to emerge by detaching from another geo-political zone to increase the number, size and population of Igbo State, the three other proposed State aims to emerge by reducing the population and landmass of existing Igbo State.

A critical review of the above options for Ndigbo underscore that the Political Economy of the Anioma State Creation to Ndigbo lies on the fact that the best option for Ndigbo is to support Anioma State Creation to increase the size, land mass and population of Ndigbo and South East Zone. This is the thrust of our thesis.

Recommendation

The study shows that Anioma State creation will be the best option for Ndigbo in many respects. And that the new State if created shall have enough manpower, economic resources, infrastructures, and developed cities for immediate take off. We therefore, wish to make the following recommendations:

1. National Assembly and federal government of Nigeria should make effort to create Anioma State and locate it in South East Zone to make the 6th State of the zone. This will go a long way to reduce south East zone marginalization and underrepresentation.
2. All Igbo speaking national Assembly members should work with Senator Ned Nwoko to achieve the creation of Anioma State as best option to Ndigbo as it will increase the zones population and land mass.
3. There is need for all voices in Delta State to support the Anioma State Creation especially from Anioma Region. The current existing few voice against Anioma addition to South East zone is counterproductive and will benefit anyone as the Igboness of the Anioma people is not in doubt.
4. All Igbo socio-cultural groups should support the South East Past-President General zone (ASEPP) in the quest for the creation of Anioma State as additional state to south east because of its strategic benefit to Ndigbo ethnic group.
5. The new Anioma State should have its State capital at Asaba while the Delta State capital should be located in Warri town. This will give a balanced share of resources of the old state to the new state.

In conclusion, the creation of Anioma state would lead to shift in political power and representation at both state and federal levels. This reconfiguration could balance political influence in the surrounding zones, fostering a more inclusive and representative political landscape. With the proposed Anioma State, the south east would gain an additional voice in the Senate, enhancing its ability to advocate for policies and projects that benefit the region. This increase representation would enable the zone to play a more significant role in national decision-making processes, promoting greater inclusivity and equity in governance.

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