

When Perceived Official Terror Drives People out of Politics: A Systemic Analysis of Political Alienation in the Context of Authoritarian Democracy

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Abstract: The paradox of political alienation as a social and scientific phenomenon is that, if on the social level it has remained a topical subject, perceptible through many citizens' non-participation in formalized political activities, on the scientific level, on the other hand, it has experienced a long period of hibernation over several decades. Despite the recent revival of academic interest in this construct, methodological and theoretical gaps are perceptible. These relate respectively to the absence of a standardized instrument allowing it to be evaluated and to the fact that the data available until then, and which underlie the theoretical propositions on this construct, have been exclusively collected in democratic contexts, excluding authoritarian contexts, within which citizens' disaffection for political activities is nevertheless a remarkable fact. This research aims to fill these gaps, through two studies carried out in Cameroon; an authoritarian democracy where institutional authoritarianism generates, among populations, a model of behavior consistent with the manifestations of political alienation. Study 1 (N= 1184) proposes a psychometric measure to assess individuals' tendencies towards political alienation. The data collected provide satisfactory empirical evidence of its factorial and confirmatory structure, internal consistency, as well as convergent and discriminant validity. Study 2 (N= 513) focuses on the link between perceived official terror and political alienation. It provides support for the hypothesis that perceived official terror generates political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy. The theoretical and empirical implications of political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy are discussed.

Keywords: Political Alienation, Political Inefficacy, Political Distrust, Authoritarian Democracy, Perceived Official Terror, Cameroon

1. Introduction

In many societies around the world, relations between those who govern and those who are governed are increasingly marked by growing political disaffection as well as a decline in citizens' political engagement and trust in their government [8, 9, 52]. In order to analyze the mechanisms underlying this reality, research has explored, among other things, the impact of political alienation, theorized as the relatively persistent feeling of distance that an individual experiences from politics, institutions and leaders of his

society [5, 31, 44, 59]. It is precisely a feeling of powerlessness which arises from the conviction that citizens have that their actions cannot influence either the political trajectory of their society, nor the political decisions of the institutional authorities [15, 16]. In fact, this feeling gives rise to two main behavioral orientations, namely: 1) "taking corrective measures", consisting in particular of taking acts of defiance towards the established order, such as voting for candidates radically opposed to the status quo or participation in violent political demonstrations [23]; and 2) "exit the scene", that is, completely disengage from the political

process by refusing to take part in formalized political activities. The aim of this strategy is to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the institutional authorities' political practices; which represents the most commonly observed form of political alienation [51]. From this perspective, the politically alienated are individuals who do not believe in the efficacy of conventional democratic behaviors (voting or taking part in political demonstrations for example), because they think that these behaviors are not likely to impact on the mode of operation and expression of their political system [8, 16].

The literature suggests that citizens can become politically alienated mainly if they believe that the functioning of their political system is out of step with their social, political and economic expectations, and that their action to remedy this is ineffective [16, 48, 59]. It follows that political alienation can be conceived as active political disinterest, with a strong feeling of cognitive awareness marked by a voluntary rejection of an entire political system by citizens, dissatisfied with the public policies implemented in their society [16, 17]. From this perspective, we can distinguish two categories of politically alienated, namely: 1) individuals who were engaged at a one time and subsequently lost interest in politics for whatever reason; and 2) people who have always had little interest in politics [4, 30].

The politically alienated express themselves above all through attitudes rather than behavior, even if the former can affect the latter [6]. Thus, abstention from voting [45] or renunciation of citizenship [15], for example, are less direct indicators of political alienation than behaviors provoked by attitudes which reflect the feeling of political alienation. Indeed, in its attitudinal and behavioral manifestations, political alienation is considered more as a definitive political rejection, rather than circumstantial attitudes and behaviors, since it is the result of a lasting political socialization process [13]. This means that it is political socialization that structures and organizes the expression of an individual's feeling of political alienation over time, particularly in the case of exposure to institutions or communities that fuel their disinterest in the political system in which he operates [12, 18, 19]; which suggests that political socialization is a relatively stable and lasting component of an individual's political characteristics [6].

Political efficacy and political trust are considered the most expressive dimensions of the feeling of political alienation [see 59]. Political efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs that their personal actions have a real effect on the decisions made by the political leaders of their society. Political trust, for its part, refers to individuals' confidence that their political leaders are working to achieve their aspirations [36]. However, political alienation only occurs when these two dimensions are absent from individuals' consciousness; that is to say, instead of the feeling of political efficacy and confidence, we have respectively the feeling of political inefficacy and political distrust. Political inefficacy is individuals' feeling that their actions cannot impact the political trajectory of their society, while political distrust

refers to individuals' feeling that their government is not taking action for their well-being. This is particularly noticeable among individuals belonging to socially disadvantaged groups [7, 15, 22, 54]. As an illustration, within the American society, political alienation is particularly high among Blacks in general, and those with low incomes and education levels [22] in particular. The reason is that education has become so central in the processes of economic and social stratification that the least educated citizens feel poorly recognized due to their marginal presence in societal and political institutions, which inevitably leads to their political alienation, particularly within the most educated societies, that is to say in societies where school is a more dominant and governing institution [56]. This means that political alienation occurs when citizens believe that the political establishment only benefits members of high-status groups and not citizens as a whole [59]. However, by adopting behaviors related to political alienation as a means of expressing their discontent, marginalized citizens are not likely to generate any profound change within their political system, precisely because it is almost impossible to unify them around a social and/or political cause [60].

Although political alienation is a current phenomenon in many societies around the world, very few studies have focused on its theorization in recent decades [59]. One of the consequences of academic disinterest in this construct is that the theoretical corpus formalized so far has the disadvantage of providing more information about its causes, manifestations and consequences from the unique point of view of democratic contexts [8, 17, 56], excluding authoritarian contexts, including specifically competitive authoritarianisms or authoritarian democracies, which are political systems where components of democracy and authoritarianism coexist [27]. For example, they organize pluralist elections at regular intervals, but at the same time resort to a brutal repressive arsenal to annihilate any challenge to their power [32, 39]. These are hybrid political systems whose balance lies in the capacity of institutional actors to surf between a form of government with which they officially identify (democracy), and another whose use they deny (dictatorship). In other words, authoritarian democracies are "legitimate authoritarianisms", that is to say authoritarian systems which, through democratic mechanisms, seek to be accepted in the eyes of the world as being democratic regimes [3, 34]. It is therefore concretely a form of government where "democratically elected" leaders are paradoxically allergic to any democratic expression (free and transparent elections or freedom of expression and demonstration) likely to put an end to their political hegemony [20, 34, 39].

In the context of authoritarian democracy, to impose respect for existing socio-political arrangements, institutional authorities do not hesitate to resort to official terror, that is to say the explicit and generalized use of armed violence against populations [39]. This consists concretely of torture, murders, arbitrary and illegal arrests and imprisonments

perpetrated against ordinary citizens and members of opposition political parties by law enforcement forces, with the aim of deterring populations from any attempt to challenge the existing socio-political order [10, 11, 35, 39]. This reality is particularly perceptible within African authoritarian democracies where, through standardized official terror, institutional authorities have succeeded in drawing populations into the path of blind submission [57], masochistic docility, and continued disinterestedness in political participation and a collective weariness materialized by slogans such as: “How are we going to do it” in Cameroon; “one day, he will end up leaving” in Gabon; or “it’s God who will drive him out of there” in Equatorial Guinea [43]. These language elements express individuals’ feeling of disaffection and detachment from their political system; anything constituting a model of behavior consistent with the manifestations of political alienation which constitute the object of investigation of this research.

2. Overview of Studies

The recent revival of academic interest in the phenomenon of political alienation, after a period of hibernation lasting several decades [59], reveals its methodological and theoretical limits. To the best of our knowledge: 1) methodologically, there is no standardized measure to assess this construct; and 2) on a theoretical level, the elaborations relating to the causes and manifestations of political alienation are based almost exclusively on observations made from the realities specific to democratic socio-political contexts [8, 17, 59], excluding contexts of authoritarian democracy, the functioning of which is characterized by the use of political terror by institutional authorities to ensure their political hegemony; not taking into account the consent of citizens, dissatisfied with the public policies implemented [39]. To fill these gaps, two studies are being carried out in Cameroon, a country categorized as authoritarian [see 14]. Its political stability is, to some extent, the result of a strategy based on violence [39] exercised against the political opposition and civil society, who regularly suffer acts of violent repression from the regime in place. This regime does not hesitate to torture, arrest and imprison individuals who rebel against its logic of governance, even without judgment [1, 26]. The first study is devoted to the development and validation of a psychometric measure making it possible to understand individuals’ tendency towards political alienation. The second study analyzes the link between perceived official terror and feeling of political alienation in a context of competitive authoritarianism, little explored until now in the literature on political alienation. Its theoretical contribution consists of the proposition of official terror as an antecedent factor of political alienation, in a theoretical context where this phenomenon is, until now, explained only by citizens’ lack of confidence in institutional authorities and their feeling that their actions cannot impact the policies implemented by the said authorities. In this study, official terror is therefore conceived as a factor with the potential to

generate political demobilization [39]. Thus, the present study intends to contribute to the theorization of political alienation by extending research beyond Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic [21] populations; which could make it possible to nuance theoretical accounts on the causes, manifestations and consequences of this phenomenon, depending on the socio-political contexts where it is explored.

2.1. Study 1

The objective of this research is to develop and validate an instrument for measuring political alienation. Indeed, the data coming from studies which structure the theorization of political alienation are generally obtained not from a standardized measuring instrument, but rather from a formulation of a few items which do not generally take into account the main constituent dimensions of the feeling of political alienation [36], and whose metric properties are generally unknown. The present study therefore contributes to filling this gap by providing a standardized measurement tool capable of collecting information on the dimensions of the feeling of political alienation [36, 59]. This study should therefore provide the literature with a reliable and valid instrument for collecting empirical evidence for predictions based on the theoretical propositions of political alienation.

2.1.1. Method

(i). Participants

The participants of the present research are 1184 Cameroonians (525 Women and 659 Men) whose age varies between 22 and 61 years ($M = 28.79$; $SD = 9.43$). They all had higher education; which suggests that they have the capacity to analyze and understand the functioning of the current Cameroonian political system, since the literature reveals a strongly positive correlation between education and political participation in 15 Sub-Saharan African countries, including Cameroon [34].

(ii). Material and Procedure

The Political Alienation Scale was constructed following the three steps recommended by the literature [42], namely: identification of the domain/construct to be assessed, generation of items, and formalization of the initial version of the instrument. To identify the construct to be evaluated (step 1), we considered the literature that structures the theorization of political alienation [6, 16, 17, 31, 56] as well as the measurement proposals suggested until now to assess this construct [see 6, 15, 36]. It appears that the factors constituting the feeling of political alienation are political efficacy and political trust [36]. The advantage of these two factors is that they summarize the four factors proposed by [15] (political powerlessness, insignificance, lack of perceived political norms and political isolation) and [6] (cynicism, negativism, rejection of values and distrust). Thus, following the sizing proposed by [36], we formulated a set of twelve items (see Table 1) ensuring that their content addresses the particularities of each dimension, while being consistent with the theoretical construct of political alienation

(step 2). However, in order for the scores to be consistent with the construct evaluated (Political Alienation), the dimensions retained (Political Efficacy and Political Trust) were analyzed in the opposite direction (Political Inefficacy and Political Distrust) to ensure that High scores are associated with a greater feeling of *political alienation*, rather than *political allegiance*. This means that the proposed items refer to the idea that it is the individuals' feeling of political inefficacy and political distrust towards their government which constitute the feeling of political alienation [59]. After developing the set of items, a pilot study was carried out on 340 participants to ensure that their understanding is not subject to any ambiguity, and that the time required for the administration of the instrument (average of 4 minutes) is acceptable (Step 3). No modifications were subsequently made to the constructed instrument, due to the satisfactory results of this pilot study. Participants responded to items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The Cameroonian Democratic System Justification Scale

was adapted from the Italian Democratic System Justification Scale [50]. It contains 6 items ($\alpha = .81$). As an illustration, item 1 suggests that: "In general, the Cameroonian political system functions as it should"; and item 6 states that: "Most Cameroonian policies serve the collective good." These items are coded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

2.1.2. Results

All statistical analyses were carried out with the 0.18.1 version of Jeffreys' Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) software. First of all, a reliability analysis was carried out in order to estimate the internal consistency of the proposed instrument, via Cronbach's alpha; while a factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was carried out in order to explore its factor structure (see Table 1). Then, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out in order to test the obtained factor model (see Figure 1). Finally, the convergent and discriminant validities of the constructed Political Alienation Scale were analyzed (see Table 2).

Table 1. Exploratory analysis of the factor structure of the political alienation scale (Factor loadings, Measure of sampling adequacy and reliability).

Political Alienation Scale Items	FL	MSA	α	Item-rest correlation
Political Inefficacy ($\alpha = .77$)				
1. As a citizen, I feel like I have no impact on the political trajectory of our country.	.59	.79	.81	.34
2. I am convinced that whatever our political actions, our political system will not change.	.72	.79	.89	.44
3. Our political system does not need us to function.	.63	.87	.80	.55
4. Whether our political leaders remain in power for decades does not depend on us, the citizens.	.56	.88	.80	.50
5. I believe that no democratic action is effective in bringing about political change in our country.	.50	.92	.80	.58
6. As ordinary citizens, we must distance ourselves from everything that concerns our political system rather than trying to change it at the risk of being imprisoned.	.47	.89	.89	.44
Political Distrust ($\alpha = .79$)				
7. I have no confidence in our government.	.65	.86	.80	.54
8. I do not expect our government to respect its socio-political commitments.	.71	.85	.79	.57
9. I am no longer interested in the politics of our country because our government has always disappointed me.	.48	.91	.80	.48
10. I am convinced that our current government cares neither about our interests nor about the future of our country.	.52	.90	.80	.45
11. Our current political leaders are all corrupt and untrustworthy.	.60	.82	.81	.36
12. There is no point in voting in elections; the results will be rigged in favor of the same politicians.	.67	.85	.80	.47
Cronbach's alpha of the global Political Alienation Scale $\alpha = .82$; MSA (KMO) = .86; Bartlett test: $X^2 = 3817.54$; $df = 66$; $p < .001$;				

The metric properties of the Political Alienation Scale are generally satisfactory (see Table 1). Indeed, to assess whether the correlation matrix was factorizable, we carried out the Bartlett test of sphericity [2] and the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy measure [30]. Bartlett's test showed that the correlation matrix was significant ($\chi^2 = 3817.54$, $df = 66$, $p < .001$), while the KMO index revealed a good value (0.86), above the lowest standard to carry out an analysis [24]; which means that the data collected meets the criteria for factor analysis. Following this logic, exploratory factor analysis revealed that the first factor (Political Inefficacy) has an eigenvalue of $3.47 \geq 1$, a proportion of explained variance of 29%, and sampling adequacy indices (MSA) high with factor loadings (FC) varying between .47 and .72. Six items correlate strongly with the factor and present good reliability indices (Cronbach's α if item dropped from $>.70$). The characteristics of the second factor (Political Distrust) endorse an eigenvalue of $1.26 \geq 1$, and the

proportion of explained variance is 10.60%, while the measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) reveals high indices and factor loadings (FC) varying between .48 and .71. Six items also correlate strongly with this second factor and present good reliability indices (Cronbach's α if item dropped from $>.70$). Thus, the proposed Political Alienation Scale reveals a good index of overall internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$), while its two dimensions reveal acceptable indices (Political Inefficacy: $\alpha = .77$; Political Distrust: $\alpha = .79$). However, although the information obtained validates the factorial structure of the instrument, it remains that the results contained in Table 1 relate to a purely exploratory approach, so they should be reproduced using other procedures aimed at strengthening the empirical evidence of the quality of the scale for measuring individual differences in the feeling of political alienation. In other words, the factorial indices obtained do not provide information on the quality of adjustment of the factorial structure of the Political

Alienation Scale; hence the need to carry out a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to account for this (see Figure 1).

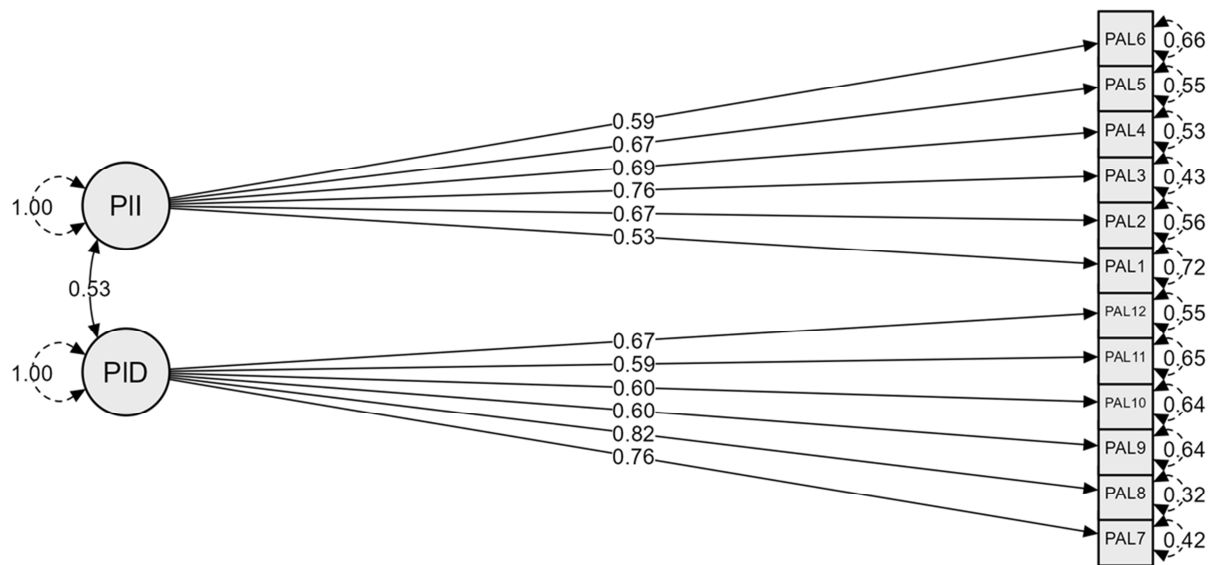


Figure 1. Model plot of two-factorial structure of political alienation (PII = Political Inefficacy, Factor 1; PID = Political Distrust, Factor 2).

Figure 1 presents the validation indices of the bifactor structure of the Political Alienation Scale. It reveals that the factor loadings are above average and vary between 0.53 (item 1) and 0.82 (item 8). The two factors are strongly positively correlated ($r = 0.53$). Statistical indices such as chi-square (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with a robust 90% confidence interval, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) were used to evaluate the

adequacy of the model [25]. In fact, these statistical indices reveal an optimal fit of the model of the two-dimensional factor structure obtained. More precisely, the robust chi-square statistic is significant ($\chi^2 = 602.73$, $df = 53$, $p < .001$) and the incremental fit indices considered are above the threshold of excellence of 0.95 (CFI = 0.962; TLI = 0.953), while the absolute fit indices are satisfactory (RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = .08, GFI = .980). Overall, these statistics allow us to conclude that the structural fit of the model to the data collected is excellent.

Table 2. Analysis of the convergent and discriminant validity of the Political Alienation Scale.

Variable	M(SD)	1	2	3
Political Alienation	50.49 (14.90)	—		
Political Inefficacy (Factor 1)	22.30 (9.04)	.84***	—	
Political Distrust (Factor 2)	28.18 (8.76)	.83***	.40***	—
Cameroonian Democratic System Justification	16.84 (8.33)	-.10***	.06*	-.24***

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 reports the data relating to the convergent and discriminant validity of the Political Alienation Scale proposed in this research. In fact, to ensure the convergent validity of the two-dimensional scale for measuring political alienation, Political Inefficacy (Factor 1) and Political Distrust (Factor 2) were correlated with each other and with the overall scale. Thus, if the proposed instrument truly assesses political alienation, its dimensions should then converge with each other and with the overall construct [53]. In accordance with these expectations, the results report that the two dimensions evaluated correlate positively, strongly and significantly with each other ($p < .001$) and with the overall scale ($p < .001$); which thus ensures the convergent validity of the developed Political Alienation Scale. For its part, discriminant validity verifies whether the proposed political alienation scale presents divergences with the Cameroonian Democratic System Justification Scale. The

results indicate that overall, political alienation is negatively and significantly associated with the Cameroonian Democratic System Justification, and that Political Distrust (Factor 2) is negatively related to the Cameroonian Democratic System Justification, while Political Inefficacy (Factor 1) is positively and significantly associated with the Cameroonian Democratic System Justification. These indices thus ensure the discriminant validity of the proposed Political Alienation Scale.

2.1.3. Discussion

The present study contributes to the development of the literature on political alienation through the construction and validation of an instrument for measuring this construct in the context of authoritarian democracy. The exploratory and confirmatory factor results provided data revealing that the proposed instrument presents a bifactor structure with

excellent psychometric properties, meeting the required standards [25, 42]. These results thus provide the first empirical evidence that the proposed Political Alienation Scale is consistent with the two-dimensional conceptualization of political alienation [36], and which represents, to date, the most appropriate method for measuring political alienation [59]. Analysis of the relationship between the dimensions of the proposed Political Alienation Scale provided empirical evidence for its convergent validity, while weak association with the Cameroonian Democratic System Justification Scale revealed empirical evidence for its discriminant validity. This is theoretically explained by the fact that political alienation refers to a generalized feeling of distance from the central political institutions, leaders and society's political values [59], while system justification is an ideology of allegiance, since it is analyzed as a fundamental psychological motivation which pushes individuals to perceive social, political and economic arrangements as being fair, legitimate and necessary [28]. In short, the dimensions and overall structure of the proposed scale present strong internal reliability coefficients; which helps to reinforce the idea that the Political Alienation Scale developed in this research is suitable for measuring individual differences relating to political alienation.

2.2. Study 2

Analysis of authoritarian democratic contexts suggests the presence of a pattern of behavior that is consistent with manifestations of political alienation (disinterest in political participation and collective weariness for example) [43]. However, the literature available to date does not reveal any investigation carried out to analyze the mechanisms that could underlie such an eventuality, in a political context where institutional authoritarianism is the regulator of political interactions between citizens and their government [39]. The disadvantage of such a breach is that it deprives the literature of a theorization of the causes, manifestations and consequences of political alienation in an authoritarian context, where the demobilization of populations on political issues is nevertheless a notable fact [34, 39]. This is because the examination of the link between official terror and feelings of political alienation is notably absent from the literature. The present study aims to fill this gap, in particular by analyzing official terror from the angle of its demobilizing potential for political issues among individuals living in an authoritarian context. It specifically tests the hypothesis that in the context of authoritarian democracy, perceived official terror generates the feeling of political alienation.

2.2.1. Method

(i). Participants

The participants of the present study are 513 Cameroonians (218 Men and 295 Women) whose ages vary

between 19 and 50 years ($M = 24.84$; $SD = 5.37$). They meet the same inclusion criteria as the participants in study 1.

(ii). Material and Procedure

Perceived official terror was measured using three items formulated for the purposes of this research ($\alpha = .69$). The items were as follows: "In general, the Cameroonian government is very violent towards its citizens"; "The excessive use of violence and arbitrary arrests is generally our government's response to the citizens' socio-political demands"; and "Our government is ready to mobilize security and defense forces to kidnap and assassinate citizens who oppose its political hegemony." These items were all coded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Political alienation was assessed using an abbreviated 6-item version of the political alienation scale developed in study 1. This includes, among others, item 2 which suggests that: "I am convinced that any political actions that we undertake will have no effect on the decisions of our leaders", and item 7 which states that: "I have no confidence in our government". This abbreviated version was also coded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It has an acceptable internal reliability index ($\alpha = .74$); which supports the idea that the use of a short version of an instrument is possible if it retains adequate psychometric properties [50].

2.2.2. Results

The results of this study are presented in two stages. The first relates to descriptive and correlational statistics, while the second is devoted to a test of the hypothesis formulated, from a linear regression analysis and a Structural Equation Model (SEM). These results were produced using Jeffreys' Amazing Statistics Program (JASP, version 0.18.1) data processing software.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and Correlation between official terror and political alienation.

Variables	M. (S. D.)	Official terror (—)
1. Official terror	13.60 (4.13)	—
2. Political alienation	25.98 (7.06)	0.368***

Note: *** $p < .001$; M. = Means; S. D. = Standard Deviation

Overall, the results presented in Table 3 report that participants present tendencies in favor of the constructs assessed. Concretely, this means that they perceive official terror and have a feeling of political alienation. In the same vein, the Pearson correlation index reveals the presence of a positive and significant relationship between perceived political terror and political alienation ($r = 0.36$; $p < .001$). This means that the more individuals perceive official terror, the more they develop a feeling of political alienation; thus confirming the demobilizing potential of official terror for political questions in an authoritarian context.

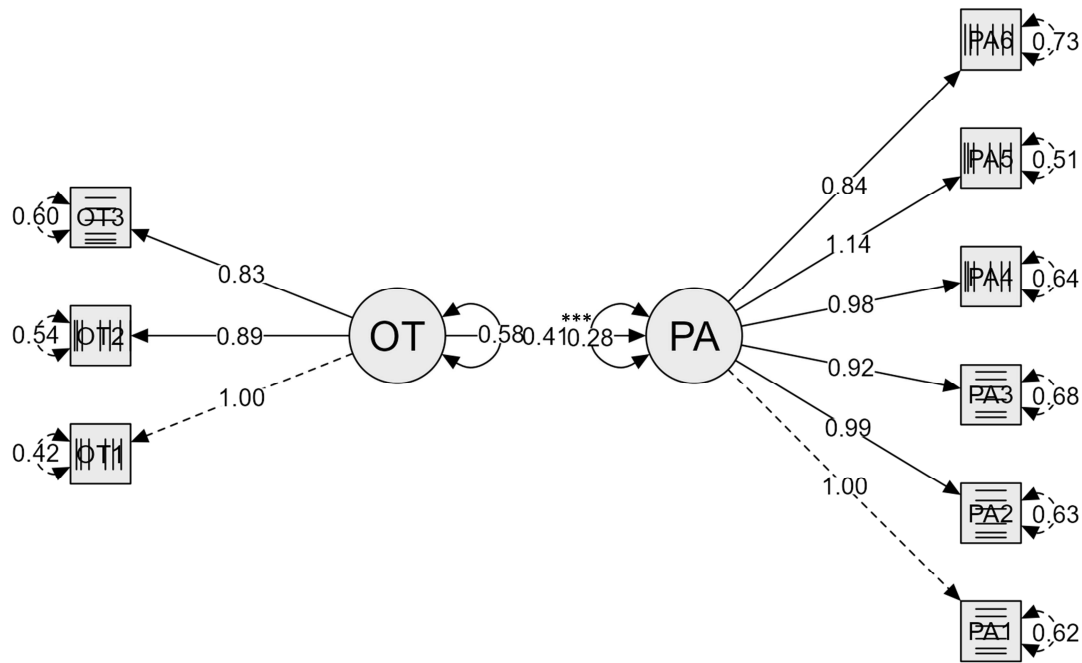


Figure 2. Structural equation modeling testing the relation between perceived official terror (OT, Predictor) and Political alienation (PA, Outcome).

Note: Model fit: $\chi^2 = 107.79$, Df= 81, P= .02, $\Delta\chi^2 = 107.79$, $\Delta df = 81$, P=.02; Fit indices: CFI= .99, TLI= .976, RMSEA= .02, SRMR= .05; Estimate= .41, Std. Error= .03, z-value= 12.63, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.34, .48]

The results of the analyses carried out by the Structural Equation Method (Figure 2) support the link between perceived official terror and political alienation, through a positive and significant coefficient ($p < .001$) and a better fit of the structural model established ($\chi^2 = 107.79$, Df= 81, $p < .05$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 107.79$, $\Delta df = 81$, CFI= .99>.95, TLI= .98>.95,

RMSEA= .02, SRMR= .05). In addition, it presents positive factor loadings which vary between .84 and 1.14 for political alienation and between .83 and 1 for perceived official terror. In the same vein, the regression coefficients obtained indicate that perceived official terror significantly explains political alienation (see Table 4).

Table 4. Linear regression testing the effect of perceived official terror on political alienation.

Model Summary – Political alienation									
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSEA	R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
H ₁	0.368	0.135	0.134	6.574	0.135	79.945	1	511	<.001
Coefficients									
Model	Unstandardized			Standard Error		Standardized	t	p	95% CI
Perceived official terror	0.628			0.07		0.368	8.941	<.001	Lower: 0.49, Upper: 0.76

Linear regression analysis confirms that the prediction coefficient of perceived official terror on the feeling of political alienation is positive and significant ($R^2 = .135$, $p < .001$), as are the standardized and unstandardized beta coefficients ($\beta(t) = .36$ (8.94), $B = .62$, 95% CI [49, 76], $p < .001$); which provides empirical support for the prediction being tested (see Table 4).

2.2.3. Discussion

The present study examined the link between perceived official terror and political alienation. The data collected provide support for the hypothesis that perceived official terror generates political alienation. This means that in the context of authoritarian democracies, political alienation is a consequence of the logic of authoritarian governance imposed by the institutional authorities. In the particular case of Cameroon, it is a governance based on an explicit political exclusion of populations through the use of political terror

(arbitrary arrests, intimidation, beatings, etc.) as an institutional response to all the citizens who are dissatisfied with the existing socio-political arrangements [38, 39]. In other words, the recourse of institutional authorities to repression against any individual or political group that attempts to oppose existing socio-political arrangements pushes individuals to abandon the political scene. Indeed, under threats of arrest and arbitrary imprisonment, marginalized populations are forced to internalize their political powerlessness, particularly their inability to impact their society's political trajectory. Thus, failing to be able to take corrective measures towards an ineffective political system incapable of responding favorably to their needs, the politically alienated prefer to "exit the scene", that is to say, to completely disengage from anything related to the politics of their society [5, 15, 58]. This means that in the context of authoritarian democracy, political alienation is a variable likely to account for the stability and maintenance of the

political status quo. Indeed, it represents the renunciation of individuals from politics and any act that could force institutional authorities to political change; anything that contributes to the maintenance of political systems in place, sometimes over decades (41 years in Cameroon, 39 years cumulatively in Congo, and 44 years in Equatorial Guinea) or to systemic renewal through the transmission of power in a dynastic mode, from father to son, as was the case in Gabon and Togo for example [46].

3. General Discussion

Political alienation is a current phenomenon in many societies around the world [8, 17, 56]. However, despite its relevance, the literature reveals that very little work has been devoted to its analysis in recent decades, hence the call for researchers to be more interested in its theorization [59]. The present research was part of this logic and explored, in two studies, the concept of political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy; a socio-political context usually unexplored. Study 1 proposed a valid and reliable psychometric measurement that makes it possible to understand individual tendencies towards political alienation, thus contributing to facilitating the interest of future empirical work for new perspectives of theoretical analysis of political alienation. Study 2, for its part, revealed that in the context of authoritarian democracy, perceived official terror generates the feeling of political alienation, thus contributing to an extension of the theoretical explanations proposed so far regarding the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. Taken together, the contributions of the present research represent a first integration of systemic conditions into the analysis of the mechanisms underlying political alienation, particularly in non-WEIRD sociopolitical contexts [21]; which makes it possible to nuance the theoretical accounts of the causes, manifestations and consequences of political alienation according to the socio-political contexts in which the studies have been carried out to date. In this vein, we can consider that in the context of authoritarian democracy, political alienation is more of a defense mechanism adopted by populations to protect themselves from the possibly lethal consequences of political protest [41]. However, an ironic consequence of this coping mechanism is that the attitudes and behaviors of withdrawal that protect populations from the violent consequences of anti-system protest also turn out to be implicit support for existing socio-political arrangements, since it allows oppressive regimes to persist for decades. Thus, in these regimes, the political status quo could be considered as the result of citizens' authoritarian socialization [37], inducing political alienation as a strategy to avoid the sanctions incurred against any transgression of norms and political benchmarks imposed by the institutional authorities. Indeed, the tendency of authoritarian regimes towards brutal, even lethal repression of anti-system social movements is a tactic aimed at generating an atmosphere of terror responsible for the demobilization of dissident forces and therefore the

maintenance of the socio-political status quo [38].

4. Limitations and Future Directions

The present set of studies has a number of clear limitations. First of all, certain information relating to the participants' sociodemographic characteristics were not collected, which does not allow an analysis of possible associations between sociodemographic variables and individuals' feeling of political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy. Future studies could be conducted to examine how sociodemographic variables explain individual differences in feelings of political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy, as is particularly the case in democratic contexts [see 59 for a review of the literature on this point]. Then, given that the data of the present research were obtained from a sample consisting solely of Cameroonian citizens, the results obtained cannot be generalized to other countries without any reservations. It would therefore be interesting for future studies to endeavor to consolidate the methodological and theoretical propositions of the present research, based on data from other authoritarian democracy contexts in order to guarantee their inter-contextual validity, since the belonging of various countries to the same category of political regimes does not prevent the existence of differences between them from the point of view of the Democracy Index score for example [see 14]. Finally, it would be important to ensure the measurement invariance of the proposed instrument [40]. However, despite the limitations noted above, the results of the present research are sufficiently robust to attest to the reliability of the data collected from the developed Political Alienation Scale.

5. Conclusion

The general objective of the present research was to explore political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy. The results of the two studies carried out in Cameroon indicate that it is not justified to ignore authoritarian contexts when analyzing the causes, manifestations and consequences of political alienation. Indeed, the proposed measurement instrument made it possible to collect valid data which, coupled with official terror, perceived as a systemic variable explaining the feeling of political alienation in the context of authoritarian democracy, makes a significant theoretical contribution to the literature by attesting the need to take an interest in new contexts, particularly those which include non-WEIRD samples in which psychological literature too rarely pays attention; hence its difficulties in addressing the problem of human diversity in the analysis of social phenomena [47, 55].

Declarations

Author Contributions

All authors made a substantial, direct and intellectual

contribution to the completion of this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

The research protocol was approved by the local ethics committee of the corresponding author's academic institution, and all participants provided written informed consent to participate in the research.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this research will be made available by the authors, without any undue reservation.

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