

Power of Language:

The Impact of Officially Recognizing Minority Languages on the Dignity of Linguistic Minorities

Abstract

This study empirically investigates the impact of the multilingual policy that officially recognizes the minority languages and aims at social inclusion on the dignity of linguistic minorities, using the multilingual policy as a natural experiment in Zimbabwe. To measure perceptions of dignity, a composite dignity index was developed using data from Afrobarometer reflecting four dimensions: equality, national identity, perceived freedom, and perceived political participation. The results show that the official recognition of minority languages as official languages has a significant positive effect on the dignity of linguistic minorities. Among the four dimensions of the dignity index, the perceptions of both freedom and political participation were particularly statistically significant. Furthermore, mechanism analysis reveals that this positive shift in dignity is primarily driven by increased trust in the central government, rather than local government. In addition, multilingual policy facilitates greater political engagement with the central government, contributing to the broader social inclusion of linguistic minorities.

Keywords: Nation-Building, Minority Groups, Language, Dignity, Political Trust