

Electoral Conflicts in Cameroon: Causes, Consequences and Remedies

Ndille Ndille Njume

Masters Student in Peace Studies and Humanitarian Action, Heritage Higher Institute of Peace and Development Studies, Yaoundé - Cameroon

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8090268>

Received: 16 September 2024; Accepted: 21 September 2024; Published: 22 October 2024

ABSTRACT

The advent of multiparty politics in Cameroon in the 1990s meant the acquisition of state power was to be achieved through competition, this saw the creation of political parties, birthing a pluralist democracy and shifting the paradigm of partisan politics from the one-party system to a multiparty dynamic. Elections were thus the only means through which these parties had to compete for state power, although it instilled hope in many, this phenomenon was accompanied by much more worrying issues in the name of electoral conflicts. From 1990 till present, elections in Cameroon have always been marred by conflicts. This paper examines the causes and impact of these conflicts on Cameroonians and proposes remedies to optimise the electoral landscape.

Keywords: elections, conflicts, electoral conflicts

INTRODUCTION

An electoral process is not void of conflicts and must be efficiently managed to avoid degeneration. As Jeff Fischer says, “it is when an electoral process is perceived as unfair, unresponsive, or corrupt, that its political legitimacy is compromised and stakeholders are motivated to go outside the established norms to achieve their objectives”,¹ electoral contestation may even become a tactic in political competition. Since the introduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s, electoral competition for state power has become the norm and Cameroon has since held several elections. While the frequency of elections and the advancements in the quality of democracy has generated a sense of optimism for multiparty politics, this development has been closely accompanied by another, much more worrying trend, of election-related conflict. This trend not only poses a threat to peace and security in the country, but also risks undermining the long-term sustainability of this democratization process. The electoral atmosphere in Cameroon is subject to controversies, sometimes often characterized by arbitrary arrests, hate rhetoric and violence. The question as to why electoral conflicts persists in Cameroon, its consequences and prevention mechanisms is the sole aim of this article. The paper also looks at the impact of this conflict on voters, leadership outcomes, and assets, finally, it proposes institutional mitigation strategies such as the overhaul of Cameroon’s election management body, review of the electoral code, neutrality of the media, economic empowerment of citizens, just to name a few.

Research objective

The main objective of this research is to outline the major causes and consequences of electoral conflicts in Cameroon as well as propose remedies.

METHODOLOGY

The research utilises a descriptive approach to analyse electoral conflicts in Cameroon, it also gathers opinions from key actors, other researchers and uses vivid examples to enable readers gain a deeper understanding of the

¹ Jeff Fischer, “Electoral Conflict and Violence”, *IFES White Paper (February 2002)*, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/econflictpaper.pdf>

electoral landscape in Cameroon, as such, this work is heavily reliant on secondary data which is applied all through the major rubrics of the paper (causes, consequences and remedies).

Theoretical framework

Democratic theory posits that elections are a fundamental mechanism for expressing the will of the people. Cunningham Frank, a prominent democratic theorist is of the view that when electoral processes are perceived as unfair or manipulated, it can lead to conflict.² He made this observation while analysing the problems of democracy. The democratic theory emphasizes the importance of free and fair elections as a cornerstone of democracy, as per this theory, if election stakeholders believe that votes do not count or that the electoral process is rigged, they may resort to criticisms and in extreme cases protests to express their dissatisfaction and demand amends. This has been demonstrated in Cameroon through protests, petitions and outright criticisms of elections perceived to be unfair, there have also been calls for an amendment of the electoral process by civil society.

The conflict theory, as associated with Karl Marx, is a another theory with a stance that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources.³ At the core of conflict theories is the phenomenon of power, especially when power determines the lives and resources of people, this provides a rational as to why there is a constant conflict in Cameroon between the ruling party and major opposition parties, who both are competing for state power. It also justifies the motif behind tussles experienced within political parties over leadership, conflict theory further explains that members of interest groups will / can attempt to use the law and resources to their advantage and to the disadvantage of members of opposing groups as demonstrated during electoral campaigns in Cameroon whereby the ruling party is allegedly often favoured by national media, to the detriment of the opposition.

Conceptual framework

Election

To the average person in the street, election is the selection of someone for a position. On a higher intellectual plane election is defined as “the process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the vote of its qualified members”.⁴ Such an election may be in a corporate organisation choosing a chairman, a political party conducting its primaries to choose its standard bearer for a presidential contest, a nation wanting to choose its president, or an international organisation selecting its secretary general.

Akzin informs us that “elections have technical and social significance. In the technical sense, they are the process through which an office or a post is assigned to a person by an act of volition that requires the simultaneous expression of many people’s opinions”.⁵ In the social sense an election is the process by which a person is linked to an office through the due participation of the people who will bear the weight of his or her authority. It is this social aspect of elections that generates the idea of governing a society with the consent of the governed, and this boils down to democracy and distinguishes election from appointment.

We should add here Mayo’s view that the main ‘purpose of the whole electoral process is to produce a government invested with legitimacy’.⁶ This point should be noted by heads of state, political parties, and chairpersons of election administrative bodies, for they must know that any election result which is contrary to the votes cast by the people automatically and naturally creates a legitimacy crisis. Thus, elections are significant because they convey legitimacy to leaders and governments when they are democratically conducted but generate legitimacy crises when persons and governments that are not the true choice of the people are foisted on them.

² Cunningham, Frank, “Theories of Democracy: A Critical Introduction”, (London: Routledge, 2002)

³ Adam Hayes, “Conflict Theory Definition, Founder, and Examples”, (Investopedia, July 2024)

⁴ Nwolise, O B C. 2007. “2007 Elections and The Tribunals”. *The Guardian, Lagos*, (May 7)

⁵ Akzin, B. 1960. “Election And Appointment”. *American Political Science Review* LIV (3).

⁶ Mayo, H. 1960.” *An Introduction to Democratic Theory.* New York: Oxford University Press

An election can also be considered a democratic procedure through which one or more persons are chosen as executives or representatives in certain bodies. Persons who have voting rights (the electorate) vote in a predetermined procedure (voting system) to choose a mandate or office holders for a particular term.⁷

Conflict

Conflict according to Wall, is a “process in which two or more parties attempt to frustrate the attainment of the other’s goals”.⁸ The factors underlying conflict are threefold: interdependence, differences in goals, and differences in perceptions.

According to Coser, “conflict is a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources”.⁹

Traditionally, conflict is defined as “the result of opposing interests involving scarce resources, goal divergence and frustration”.¹⁰ It is not defined simply in terms of violence or hostility, it also includes incompatibility or differences in issues and positions, in brief, conflict means perceived differences in issues and positions between two or more parties in the same moment in time.

Electoral Conflicts

Taking into consideration the above definition of conflicts, electoral conflicts can be defined as perceived differences in issues and positions between two or more stakeholders in an electoral process. They are clashes that occur only within the framework of an election.

According to Jeff Fischer, electoral conflict and violence can be defined as “any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process”.¹¹ He further divides electoral conflicts into four intervals;

Campaign conflicts: which can occur when rivals seek to disrupt the opponents’ campaigns, intimidate voters and candidates, and use threats and violence to influence participation in the voting.

Balloting conflict: this can occur on Election Day when rivalries are played out at the polling station

Results conflict: occurs with disputes over election results and the inability of judicial mechanisms to resolve disputes in a fair, timely, and transparent manner.

Representation conflict: can occur when elections are organized as “zero sum” events and “losers” are left out of participation in governance.

An overview of electoral crises in Africa

Electoral crises are a persistent phenomenon in Africa, studies reveal that no single election has been held in Africa without incidents of conflict and violence. Though violence has been a long-standing feature of the democratisation process in Africa, its recent manifestations have assumed an unprecedented magnitude and a changing form and character. This has tended to put the democratisation process on the line in many African states, threatening the prospects of democratic stability and consolidation. Most recent examples include disputed and violent elections in Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and DRC Congo. Shola Omotola has it that “rising electoral violence in Africa, including its changing form and character, may not be unconnected with the neo-patrimonial character of the African state, the nature of contestation for power, the shadows of military

⁷ Polyas, “Elections”, POLYAS Election Glossary, <https://www.polyas.com/election-glossary/elections>

⁸ Wall A. J., “Negotiation: Theory and Practice” (Glenview, Scoff, Foresman, Illinois, 1985).

⁹ Coser A. L., “The Functions of Social Conflict” (Free Press, New York, 1956).

¹⁰ Classroom lectures on Politics and Conflict by Dr Awah, Masters I, Department of Peace Studies and Humanitarian Action, Heritage University Institute of Peace and Development Studies

¹¹ Jeff Fischer, “Electoral Conflict and Violence”, IFES White Paper (February 2002), <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/econflictpaper.pdf>

authoritarian overhangs over the democratisation process, and the weak institutionalisation of democratic architectures, including the economic foundations of the democratisation process, political parties and Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)".¹²

"A recent study using data from more than 50 African elections from 2011 to 2017, showed that almost all these elections had cases of electoral violence at some stage of the poll".¹³ The risk of violence is especially evident when incumbents propose referenda or parliamentary votes to change the constitution in a bid to extend their presidential terms, as was the case in Burkina Faso 2014 and Burundi 2015. Beyond the relatively few cases that make it to the international headlines, many countries experience an 'everyday' kind of electoral violence: low-scale but pervasive and typically occurring long before election day, between electoral cycles, and in local elections far away from the international spotlight.

Electoral conflict is not limited to general and national elections. In Sierra Leone, for example, several parliamentary by-elections at constituency level have generated high levels of violence, intimidation and insecurity, as the main political parties compete to hold ground and make territorial in-roads in preparation for the next round of national elections.

Another arena for electoral crisis, not usually depicted in scholarly literature, is intra-party politics. Party members are involved in a constant struggle to create and maintain the connections that will ensure their progress up the party ladder.¹⁴ This struggle often intensifies around transition times. In the absence of clear succession plans, this can result in vicious intimidation and violent attacks. For instance, in Burundi, violence that broke out in connection to elections in 2015 was preceded by a longer period of intra-party tensions and attacks on individuals within the ruling party.

The situation is complicated by the absence/paucity of democrats who really have a democratic mindset, and can play the game of politics according to established standards and rules, leading to the deinstitutionalisation of the people in the democratisation process. Electoral conflicts are thus a major source of democratic instability with palpable threats of deconsolidation. These contradictions will have to be redressed to tame the monster.

Background to electoral conflicts in Cameroon

Pluralist democracy in the 1990s in Cameroon was inaugurated by the organization in March 1992 of the first competitive legislative elections, followed by Presidential elections in October 12 of the same year, Cameroon has since then experienced a regular cycle of electoral disputes, starting with the violence surrounding the birth of the Social Democratic Front, and "heavily contested 1992 presidential election".¹⁵

Maiden multiparty elections in 1992 was coordinated by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, but this government agency was outrightly criticized for its lack of impartiality, opposition political actors pushed the government to consider the creation of an election management body. "The National Elections Observatory (NEO) will be created to give a little more credibility to the electoral process",¹⁶ despite this change, the management of elections in Cameroon was still at the heart of controversies between the government and the opposition political parties, often met with conflicts.

According to Olinga, "the creation in December 29, 2006 of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) was aimed at improving the electoral process in Cameroon and make it credible, the electoral processes' credibility was consolidated in April 19, 2012 by the promulgation of the electoral law, placing elections in a new legal and

¹² Shola Omotola, "Explaining electoral violence in Africa's 'new' democracies", *Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (November 2008)*

¹³ Kiven James Kewir Ph.D., Ngah Gabriel (MA, PGD), "Causes of Election violence in Africa", *Democracy Chronicles (February 2018)*, <https://democracychronicles.org/electoral-violence/>

¹⁴ policy note no 7:2018, "Violence in African Elections", *Nordiska Afrikainstitutet/The Nordic Africa Institute, (November 2018)*

¹⁵ The SDF believed they won the 1992 presidential election, but the Supreme Court judge that heard its petition alleging fraud said his "hands were tied" - and let the official results granting victory to incumbent Paul Biya, with 40% of the vote, stand, (Randy Joe Sa'ah, BBC News, June 2023), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65891543>

¹⁶ Fombad, Charles Manga. "Election Management Bodies in Africa: Cameroon's 'National Elections Observatory' in Perspective." *African Human Rights Law Journal* 3 (2003): 25-51.

institutional environment”.¹⁷ This law contains multiple texts governing the organization of election at each level. It brings together provisions common to the different elections and a referendum while establishing their specificity. “The electoral code coincided with the advent of the debate on a biometric electoral register as a guarantor of transparency and credibility of the electoral process”.¹⁸ Notwithstanding, elections in Cameroon continued to be at the center of controversy. The creation of the constitutional council in 2018 did not calm this controversy on the fairness of elections in Cameroon, irrespective, this controversy does not stop participation in elections.

Since 1992, there has been permanent participation of certain political actors in the various organized elections. These political actors can be divided into two categories, i.e. traditional actors and occasional actors, by traditional actors, it refers to the people and political parties that have taken part in the various elections since 1992. In this category, we find political parties such as the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM), the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU), the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP). At the national level, politicians found in this category include Paul Biya, Cavaye Yeguié Djibril, Bello Bouba, Adamu Ndam Njoya (of blessed memory) and Ni John Fru Ndi (of late). “These political parties have participated since 1992 in elections such as presidential election, legislative elections.”¹⁹ and, more recently, the senatorial elections. They present candidates in the various local elections as was the case for municipal elections and very recently, regional elections.

By occasional actors in electoral events, it refers to those who take part in a national or local elections on an irregular basis. For political parties, they present candidates in less than half of the constituencies and disappear at the following election. Likewise, politicians in this category disappear from the electoral scene after having participated in a vote.²⁰ This category is more numerous and has also known some victories. This is the case of Jean Jacques Ekindi and his political party called the “Progressive Movement” who ran for and won a seat in the national assembly during their only participation in the legislative elections in 2007. However, it should be noted since 2013, new political parties have entered the field of electoral competition with varying degrees of success. These are the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM), Cameroon Party for National Reconciliation (CPNR) and Union of Socialist Movements (USM).

The act of rendering an election credible by concerned institutions was indexed by Luc Sindjoun “as a failure attributable to the supreme court in its mission of arbitrating electoral disputes and maintaining independence in the processing of election results”.²¹

The works of Mouiche, Njoya, Issa and Machikou, shed light on the democratic process in Cameroon²² and post electoral transition meanwhile Ngange and Ekpele Mekole have written on the impact of digital media on elections and post electoral transition.²³ However, the question of electoral defeat still remains poorly documented in the Cameroonian context, everything happens as if after proclamation of results, marking a near-end to the electoral process, all eyes are shifted towards the winners, however, upon observation, losers have been identified to be the main actors in the disruption of the post-electoral political order.

These three decades of pluralist elections in Cameroon have also been marked by post-electoral conflicts / crisis, straining the routine functioning of political life, the outcomes of presidential elections of October 1992 and

¹⁷ Olinga, Alain Didier. “Le nouvel environnement juridique et institutionnel des élections au Cameroun.” *Presses universitaires d’Afr*, (2007).

¹⁸ Obame, Yves Valery. “Gouverner par la biométrie : dynamiques d’institutionnalisation d’une réforme technopolitique dans la compétition électorale au Cameroun”. *Thèse de doctorat en sociologie politique, Université de Yaoundé 1*, 2022.

¹⁹ Takougang, Joseph. “The 2002 legislative election in Cameroon: a retrospective on Cameroon’s stalled democracy movement.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41 (2003): 421 - 435.

²⁰ Mathias Éric Owona Nguini, “Cameroun : trois décennies d’élections pluralistes : Leçons et perspectives”, *The calendar for the humanities and social sciences (April 2024)*

²¹ Luc Sindjoun, “La Cour Suprême, la compétition électorale et la continuité politique au Cameroun: La construction de la démocratisation passive”, *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement*, vol. 19, No. 2, (1994) : 21-69.

²² Njoya, Jean. “Démocratisation, divergences ethniques et politisation de la pluralité au Cameroun.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 36.2 (2002): 239-280.

²³ Henry Ekpele Mekole. “Social Media and Electoral Law Violation in Cameroon: The Case of the 2018 Presidential Election,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, vol. 7(9), (2023): 298-307

October 2018 offer a list of violent actions to contest electoral results. This was illustrated in the 2018 presidential election through “electoral hold up” protests organised by MRC militants and designation of Maurice Kamto as “President elect” by the same party, these acts were met with repression and imprisonment of demonstrators by law enforcement agents.

Key election stakeholders in Cameroon

Elections Cameroon (ELECAM)

The 2006 law (as amended) establishing ELECAM provides that it is an ‘independent’ body and a ‘moral entity’ with ‘managerial autonomy’. ELECAM’s duty is to ‘organise, manage and supervise elections and referendums.’ In this respect, ‘it shall be vested with the requisite powers to perform its duties’. ELECAM was established following the recommendation made by the Commonwealth Observer Group for the Cameroon Presidential Election in 2004 that Cameroon should have an independent election management body. Elections Cameroon was created in 2006, set up in 2009, and effectively became operational in 2011 when it organised the 9 October 2011 presidential election.²⁴ It subsequently organised in 14 April 2013, senatorial elections, the twin legislative and municipal election of 30 September 2013, senatorial elections of 25 March 2018, presidential elections in October 2018 and Senatorial, legislative and municipal elections in 2020 and senatorial elections in March 2023. ELECAM draws up electoral registers, issues voters cards and works in liaison with political parties and the administration to supervise elections.

The Constitutional Council

The implementation of the Constitutional Council was done by Presidential Decrees No. 2018/105 of 7 February 2018 appointing the members of the Constitutional Council, and No. 2018/106 of the same day appointing the President of the Constitutional Council. Amongst its function, this institution is charged with ensuring the regularity of presidential, legislative and senatorial elections as well as referendum operations, the Constitutional Council chairs the final counting of votes for the abovementioned elections, it also arbitrates disputes arising from these elections and proclaims results.

Administrative Courts

Administrative courts are the competent institutions to arbitrate conflicts resulting from Regional and Municipal elections. Law No. 2006/022 of 29 December 2006 establishes the organization and functioning of the Administrative Courts in Cameroon and these courts have a pivotal role to play in election disputes in the country.²⁵ By virtue of Sections 194(1) and Section 267(1) of the Electoral Code, any elector, candidate or the state representative or government election officer may request the total or partial cancellation of the election operation in the region or council concerned by simple application before the competent administrative court.

The Ministry of Territorial Administration

The Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) is responsible for the development and implementation of Government policy in terms of territorial administration, civil protection and monitoring of electoral issues.²⁶ MINAT also handles questions relating to the public financing of political parties, electoral and referendum campaigns. During elections, the ministry in charge of territorial administration ensures permanent liaison between Government and Elections Cameroon. MINAT is also the competent organ to accredit international election observers, she does this in collaboration with the Ministry of External relations and ELECAM.²⁷

²⁴ Diom Richard Ngong, “How to Prevent and Combat Electoral Fraud in Cameroon: Practical Guide”, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2012), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kamerun/09614.pdf>

²⁵ Ayuk Nkwa Pascal, “Administrative court and the settlement of regional and municipal election disputes in Cameroon”, Research Gate, October 2021.

²⁶ Ministry of Territorial Administration, “Presentation of MINAT”, <https://minat.gov.cm/presentation/>

²⁷ International observers can only be accredited by MINAT on recommendation from the Ministry of External Relations as provided for by paragraph 2 and 3 of Section 296 (1) of the Electoral code, MINAT and ELECAM are charged with setting a code of conduct for the observers

Political Parties

Political parties are key stakeholders in elections. They compete for public office, carry out election campaigns, and attempt through party issue-based electoral platforms to convince eligible voters to vote for them. Ultimately, the possibilities for party-affiliated candidates to campaign, assume public office, or form a credible opposition depend on the legal, political, and cultural environment in the country, and on the administration and outcome of the elections. From another perspective, the final validation of the election result is in practice in the hands of the political parties and candidates. If they do not accept the results due to real or perceived electoral fraud or irregularities, the legitimacy of the resulting legislature or government is questioned. To date, there are 330 political parties in Cameroon²⁸, they are also usually invited to appoint their representatives in the joint electoral commissions.

The Electorate

The electorate are persons entitled to vote in an election in any constituency, they are registered in the electoral register and are not subject to any legal incapacity to vote, are Cameroonian citizens, and are aged 20 years or over on the date of the poll. Cameroonian citizens who are resident outside the Cameroon can qualify as overseas electors and must make a declaration that qualifies them as such. The electorate, whether affiliated with a particular party or not, must perceive and believe that the results officially declared after Election Day are valid and represent the expressed will of the electorate, any contrary outcome questions the legitimacy of an electoral process.

The President of the Republic

The President of the Republic is a key election stakeholder, according to section 86, article 1 of the electoral code, "Electors shall be convened by decree of the President of the Republic".²⁹ No less than 90 (ninety) days shall elapse between the date of publication of the convening decree and the day of election, the decree convening electors shall specify the time of opening and closing of polling stations.

The Media

The media plays a critical role during elections, including by acting as a watchdog to ensure transparent political processes, and by offering a platform for candidates and voters to discuss important issues. Their communication activities enable them to contribute in informing, educating and sensitising voters, candidates, political parties, development partners, and other actors, on the electoral process. They, not only support, but serve as relays as well. According to Mbamome Divine, "with the liberalization laws of 1990 in Cameroon, there has been a proliferation of media around political issues, including elections".³⁰ So great is the impact of the media in Cameroon today that it has become a common goal among political actors, including government, politicians, civil society organizations, political parties and any other relevant stakeholder in elections, such as the ELECAM, to gain access to the media as they perceive it to be a powerful tool to promote their interest. These stakeholders have indeed come to realize that much can be gained or lost through what is printed or broadcasted in both private and public communications channels. As per reporters without borders, "there are more than 600 newspapers, approximately 200 radio stations and more than 60 TV channels"³¹ in Cameroon.

Causes of electoral conflicts in Cameroon

The causes of electoral conflicts and violence in Cameroon are multifaceted, and can be divided into two broad categories: first; structural factors related to the underlying power structures prevalent in new and emerging democracies, such as government influence on election management bodies, exclusionary politics and a faulty electoral law, second; factors related to the electoral process and the electoral contest itself, such as intra-party

²⁸ Ministry of Territorial Administration, "Political Parties of Cameroon", <https://minat.gov.cm/annuaire/partis-politiques/#>

²⁹ Section 86 (1) of Law No. 2012/001 of 19 April relating to the Electoral Code

³⁰ Mbamome Divine Nkendong, "The Media and the Administration of Elections in Cameroon", *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* (March 2024)

³¹ Reporters Without Borders, "Cameroon Media Landscape", *RWB web-blog*, <https://rsf.org/en/country/cameroon>

tensions, electoral fraud, controversial rulings of the constitutional council, bias nature of national media, just to name a few. Cameroon is, to varying degrees, a relatively new democracy. Democratic institutions like Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) and the Constitutional Council and procedures like the Electoral Code, have been introduced or reinforced, while the norms governing the political system (such as the constitution), have not yet been transformed. Cameroon has a long history of one-party and dominant political party state (state control from the Cameroon National Union to the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement) where politics and economics are often conflated. As a result, politics has often been exclusive (decision making is the sole prerogative of the ruling party), intolerant of opposition and sometimes militarized (bloody circumstances surrounding the birth of SDF and arbitrary arrest of MRC militants). Furthermore, many of the socio-economic and political benefits of democracy have yet to be fully realised among large parts of the population.

Doubts over the impartiality & independence of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM)

Elections Cameroon, known by its acronym ELECAM, is the organ in charge of organising and supervising elections in Cameroon. "There is much criticism over the independence and impartiality of ELECAM".³² "The opposition is especially criticising the fact that most of the members of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), who were appointed by President Paul Biya, are former members of the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement".³³

The President of the republic appoints all members of the electoral board (ELECAM) for a period of four years (renewable as appropriate) and equally has the power to dismiss them. As the President is also the chairman of the ruling party, the board members are viewed by the opposition as being partisan and partial to the ruling party.³⁴ Though as an independent body, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Ministry of Finance wield a lot of influence on the functioning of ELECAM. ELECAM cannot elaborate its own budget independently and it is the government that has the final say on what to submit to parliament as ELECAM's budget.³⁵ This is a sorry state of affairs since the government at any given time, can decide to starve the institution of funds. It should also be noted that, most ELECAM board members are former CPDM hardliners, thus questioning their objectivity in handling electoral matters.³⁶

The ELECAM law provides for the terms and condition of service of members of the Electoral Board as well as the Director General and Deputy. The Chairperson and Vice-chairperson of ELECAM as well as the Director General and his deputy are entitled to monthly remuneration and statutory benefits.³⁷ The other members of the Electoral Board are only entitled to session allowances during meetings of the Electoral Board and a refund of all expenses incurred upon presentation of supporting documents. They are equally entitled to session and mission allowances. All the forms of remuneration mentioned above are exclusively determined by the President of the Republic by decree.³⁸ The terms and conditions of service of ELECAM members are therefore left to the whims and caprices of the President who can use his discretion to manipulate the institution. The exclusive powers conferred on the president to determine the remuneration of ELECAM officers, without any form of oversight is dangerous to the independence and efficiency of the body because the president can use such powers to entice ELECAM members with attractive salaries and get them to toe a pro government line; or set the remuneration in a way that will affect the objectivity ELECAM members.³⁹

³² International Federation for Human Rights (October 2018), "Election in Cameroon: several organisations call for restraint and dialogue", <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/cameroon/election-in-cameroon-several-organisations-call-for-restraint-and-dialogue>

³³ BBC News Afrique (October 2011), "Cameroun: ELECAM au pied du mur", https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region/2011/10/111003_cameroun_elecama

³⁴ See Sec 7 (2) of the Electoral Commission Act.

³⁵ See secs 27 – 30 of the ELECAM law

³⁶ available at www.picam.org for details on members of ELECAM and their links with the ruling party and president of the Republic

³⁷ Sec 37 (1) & 38 of the ELECAM law.

³⁸ Sec 37 (3 & 4) of the ELECAM law

³⁹ Tem Fuh Mbu, "Election Management in Cameroon: Can Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) Turn the Tide of Flawed Elections?", *A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of The Requirements of The Degree LLM (October 2010)*

Obosso,⁴⁰ a civil society organization committed to fighting for systematic change in the electoral structure of Cameroon has identified the dissolution of ELECAM as the most important of its eleven-point demand for reform in the country. Arguing that this body is incapable of conducting democratic elections, Obosso threatened to resort to street marches in order to force its scrapping which however did not materialize.

A flawed Electoral Code

An electoral code should supposedly enhance public trust in the electoral system by promoting transparency and accountability. When voters see that there are established guidelines governing how elections are conducted, they are more likely to have confidence in the integrity of the process. This trust is crucial for encouraging voter participation, as citizens are more inclined to engage in an electoral system, they believe is fair and reliable.⁴¹

According to Socialist International, the key demands of opposition parties for an electoral code that will guarantee their rights in future elections have not been met. Proposals made by the Cameroonian opposition, such as the implementation of biometric technology for use in the voting process, and the abolition of presidential powers to create special constituencies, the abolition of presidential powers to convene the electorate at will have been ignored. Despite earlier assurances from the Prime Minister that the code would be adopted on a consensual basis, measures that had the backing of the majority of Cameroonians were rejected as unconstitutional. These demands, such as limiting the presidential mandate, holding a two-round presidential election, creating single constituencies for legislative elections and using a single ballot paper, could have been included in the electoral code that would guarantee free, fair and transparent elections.⁴² The lapses of the electoral code has always been evoked by opposition parties as a hinderance to a level playing ground.

Controversial rulings of the Constitutional Council

A total of 61 rulings were rendered on electoral disputes by the Constitutional Council from 2018 to 2020, including 10 during the 2018 senatorial elections, 20 during the 2018 presidential elections and 31 during the 2020 legislative elections, out of these 61 rulings, only 2 were in favour of petitioners.⁴³ It can be observed that the vast majority of the rulings are indeed not in favour of opposition petitioners.⁴⁴ Rulings of the Constitutional Council record around 3.2% success against around 96.8% rejection, after 18 post-electoral petitions claiming electoral fraud were rejected by the Council during presidential elections in 2018, she earned the nickname “irrecevable Council”.

The reasons for these statistics, which are largely unfavourable to the petitioners, can be attributed to the nature of constitutional litigation which has often been very fussy on formal and procedural issues, “leaving many unsatisfied.”⁴⁵ Rulings of the Constitutional Council are considered final and not subjected to appeal, however, in 2018, Presidential candidate Maurice Kamto contested rulings and results of the election proclaimed by the Constitutional Council by declaring himself winner, organising a protest in the cities of Douala and Yaoundé which was brutally suppressed by forces of law and order, leading to mass arrests and tortures. He also went as

⁴⁰ The Post Newspaper [A leading English language daily] of November 2009. This author interviewed the Director of Obosso, Mrs Kah

⁴¹ Venice Commission, “CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN ELECTORAL MATTERS”, (*Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 51st Plenary Session, July 2022*), https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Code_conduite_PREMS%20026115%20GBR.pdf

⁴² Socialist International, “Cameroon: electoral code does not address democratic concerns” (may 2012), <https://www.socialistinternational.org/news/press-releases/cameroon-electoral-code-does-not-address-democratic-concerns-1013/>

⁴³ Dr GATSI TAZO, “The Constitutional Council in Cameroon 5 years later. Assessment and challenges”, *Centre africain d'Etudes Internationales, Diplomatiques, Économiques et Stratégiques (February 2023)*

⁴⁴ No favourable ruling was rendered during the first two electoral disputes handled by the Constitutional Council, out of 38 petitions filed (8 during the senatorial of 2018 and 30 during the presidential election of 2018); while around 70 rejections were recorded out of the 95 petitions introduced during the 2020 legislative litigation.

⁴⁵ Hans De Marie Heungoup, “Uncertainties Deepen in Cameroon after Divisive Election”, International Crisis Group (November 2018), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/uncertainties-deepen-cameroon-after-divisive-election>

far as seizing the African Rights Commission on the validity of results proclaimed by the Constitutional Council, urging her to cancel and recount votes.⁴⁶

Parliamentary majority of the ruling party

The Constitution of Cameroon provides that the National Assembly adopts laws in the simple majority of deputies.⁴⁷ Out of 180 seats that make up the national assembly, the ruling party, Cameroon People's Democratic Movement occupies 152,⁴⁸ an overwhelming majority that favours the adoption of bills tabled by this political party.

In March 2011, the ruling party-dominated parliament passed a bill giving the government oversight of poll preparations through the Ministry of Territorial Administration, a task previously carried out by the independent electoral body Elections Cameroon (ELECAM). Once the bill was signed, the Ministry of Territorial Administration was given the authority to appoint representatives to various commissions overseeing the full range of electoral preparations.⁴⁹ Cameroon opposition leaders accused the ruling party (CPDM) of preparing to steal the 2011 election by seizing control of vote preparations from ELECAM.⁵⁰ This bill was also criticised by prominent figures like "Matthias Eric Owona Nguini",⁵¹ and "Afany Ngeh".⁵²

Another case of influence by this parliamentary majority was in April 2008 when parliament adopted a bill to remove a two-term limit on Presidential mandates previously established by the 1996 constitution. The national assembly, then composed of 153 ruling party MPs⁵³ voted this bill against the will of their opposition counterparts, then 27 in number. Opposition lawmakers, criticised the bill as a setback for democracy, stormed out of the chamber before the vote. This change, when earmarked, was a major cause of riots in February 2008 that killed dozens of people, many shot dead by security forces.⁵⁴ It should be noted that President Biya's CPDM, continues to enjoy a huge majority in parliament till date.

Bias national media / proliferation of hate speech on social media

Political parties have accused state media CRTV on several counts for allocating more slots on-air to the ruling party CPDM for electoral campaigns, meanwhile opposition parties receive one slot each, CPDM leaders can receive up to 6 slots during campaigns, thus fuelling discontent amongst political actors. During the 2018 Presidential elections, opposition leaders like Cabral Libi, Akere Muna and Maurice Kamto decried a discriminatory situation in which, out of 13 reporting teams that were placed at the disposal of 9 presidential candidates, 5 were dedicated to Paul Biya.⁵⁵

Social media played a role in amplifying hate speech that helped fuel the 2018 election crisis, Facebook was used to spread ethnic stereotypes, exchange ethnic-based insults, propagate misinformation and even incite violence. Competition between the ruling party CPDM and the main opposition party CRM for instance

⁴⁶ News Day Cameroon, "Banjul Court to Try Cameroon, After African Rights Commission Validates Kamto's Petition", <https://newsdaycameroon.wordpress.com/2019/05/29/banjul-court-to-try-cameroon-after-african-rights-commission-validates-kamtos-petition/>

⁴⁷ Section 19 of the Cameroon Constitution

⁴⁸ Global data on national parliaments, (IPU Parlines), <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/CM/CM-LC01/election/CM-LC01-E20200209/>

⁴⁹ Reuters, "Cameroon opposition accuse Biya of poll rigging bid", Defence Web (March 2010), <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/governance/governance-governance/cameroon-opposition-accuse-biya-of-poll-rigging-bid/>

⁵⁰ "Paul Biya doesn't want change. He wants to die in power," Elizabeth Tamanjong, former Secretary General of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), said of Biya, "And the only way for this to happen (...) is by ensuring that there cannot be free, fair and transparent elections."

⁵¹ "The bill is indicative of the bad faith of the government and shows the regime's determination to have total control over election matters in the country," said Mathias Eric Owona Nguini, then professor at Yaoundé II University.

⁵² "This law is the worst law we've ever had because it brings back the administration and members of the judiciary into the electoral process in full force," said Afany Ngeh, Executive President of The Foundation for Human Rights and Development.

⁵³ AFRICAN ELECTIONS DATABASE, "Elections in Cameroon", <https://africanelections.tripod.com/cm.html>

⁵⁴ France 24, "Cameroon parliament extends Biya's term limit", (France 24 website, April 2008), <https://www.france24.com/en/20080411-cameroon-parliament-paul-biya-term-limit-extension>

⁵⁵ AFP, "Les médias publics sont pro-Biya selon l'opposition camerounaise", Voice Of Africa (September 2010), <https://www.voafrique.com/a/les-m%C3%A9dias-publics-sont-pro-biya-selon-l-opposition-camerounaise/4577952.html>

increasingly aligned with ethnic affiliations—a situation only made worse by the use of social media by both politicians and the public,⁵⁶ especially after the outcome of the 2018 elections which CRM described to have been marred by irregularities. The social media feud between these parties have given birth to appellations like “tontinard, sardinard” which have ethnic connotations, describing mainly people from the bamileke and beti ethnic group, this is proof of the fact that the media can also amplify or even incite national prejudices or tensions during contentious elections.

Restriction of opposition party campaigns by government officials

The right to freedom of assembly for political parties has been severely curtailed in Cameroon since the transition to multi-party politics in the early 1990s. Areas known to be strongholds of the ruling party are usually denied access to opposition parties for electoral campaigns. According to Article 19 (a non-governmental organisation):

In the far North region of Cameroon, precisely in Maroua, authorities banned political party meetings from around 10 May 1997 and throughout the entire campaigning period for the parliamentary elections, according to the Movement for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (MDDHL). This measure was reported to have been announced on the radio. In Kolofata sub-division, found in Mayo Sava division, about 90 km from Maroua, and the home town of then Secretary General of the Presidency Amadou Ali, a number of meetings by National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) local party representatives were banned in 1997. In Bipindi, South Region, authorities were reported to have prohibited opposition rallies five days before the parliamentary elections with the reason that Bipindi was the government's stronghold.⁵⁷

In the build-up to the presidential elections of October 2011, aspiring candidate, Jean de Dieu MoMo, leader of the Democratic Patriots for the Development of Cameroon (PADDEC) saw his campaign rally halted in Mvomeka, birthplace and home town of the President of the republic, as he was prevented from entering the town by the Presidential Guard, acting on instructions from the sub-divisional officer for Meyomessala, Viang Nguete. Despite attempts to reverse this restriction, local authorities were firm on the fact that without an authorisation, there will no campaign rally, a stance disputed by PADDEC's leader as being against the electoral code.⁵⁸

Electoral malpractices

Electoral malpractice, often referred to as electoral fraud is any alteration or change of vote count in an election. It is also a process by which the rules and regulations that govern the conduct of elections are manipulated to favour specific interests; this has been a major source of conflict during elections between political parties, often resulting to contestation in the form of petitions. Commonly observed electoral frauds in Cameroon include campaigning on polling day, vote-buying, granting the largest number of electoral constituencies to areas that lean towards some political parties, refusal to register potential voters, multiple registrations on the electoral register, non-issuance of voters' cards, issuance of more than one voter card for the same person, ineligibility of electoral contestants and late publication of electoral lists.⁵⁹

According to Joseph Thierry OKALA EBODE:

The selection of polling centres and stations is unilaterally decided by ELECAM. Despite the existence of voter list revision committees formed around the organization's local branches responsible for managing the electoral

⁵⁶ Arrey Elvis Ntui, “Cameroon's Ethno-Political Tensions and Facebook Are a Deadly Mix”, International Crisis Group (February 2021), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/camerouns-ethno-political-tensions-and-facebook-are-deadly-mix>

⁵⁷ Article 19, “Cameroon: A transition in crisis”, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/cameroon-a-transition-in-crisis.pdf> (October 1997)

⁵⁸ Jérôme Essian, “Campagne 2011 : Le candidat Jean de Dieu Momo refoulé de Mvomeka'a, village de Paul Biya”, Cameroon-Info-Net (September 2011), <https://www.cameroon-info.net/article/campagne-2011-le-candidat-jean-de-dieu-momo-refoule-de-mvomekaa-village-de-paul-biya-133143.html>

⁵⁹ Diom Richard Ngong, “How to prevent and combat Electoral fraud in Cameroon”, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (October 2010), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kamerun/09614.pdf>

process, stakeholders are not involved in this phase. We should acknowledge the application of Article 96, Paragraph 4 of the Electoral Code, which stipulates: “all polling stations must be located in a public place or a place open to the public.” Consequently, polling stations previously located in private residences, traditional chieftaincies, and military barracks, where access was contingent on voting orientation, have been relocated.⁶⁰ Despite this progress, military personnel and other law enforcement forces have not been spared from intimidation at polling stations where they were meant to exercise their right to vote. This is evident, for instance in Yaoundé, at polling stations relocated from the headquarters brigade to Lycée Leclerc.

Regarding the display of voter lists and polling stations, this is systematically done late—in some cases the day before, or even on the voting day itself—in flagrant violation of the provisions of Article 83, Paragraph 2, which states: “The commission shall register the voter on the list which is published no later than four (04) days before the date of the poll.” Article 97, for its part, stipulates that “the list of polling stations shall be transmitted to the communal branches of Elections Cameroon for display at least eight (08) days before the date of the poll.”

This practice is compounded by the unequal distribution of voters across polling stations. This approach involves assigning more voters to polling stations located in voting centres where the electorate is more favourable to the incumbent president. During the 2018 presidential election, this practice significantly benefited voting centres identified in villages on the outskirts of Yaoundé, otherwise known as the rural zone, where the number of registered voters often doesn't align with the voting-age population.

In some centres, according to consistent testimonies, the voter list was only displayed in the early hours of election day. The reason given by ELECAM officials was the fear that these lists might be vandalized. However, mobilizing law enforcement forces could have, in a collaborative effort, deterred any inclination toward destruction. Given the number of polling stations set by ELECAM's general management, all could have been secured without limiting the intervention capabilities of the associated police and gendarmerie.⁶¹

During the senatorial elections of March 2023, some parties of the opposition in Cameroon accused the ruling party of buying votes. Early results showed the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) winning all seats in the poll which 10 opposition parties contested, notably the Social Democratic Front, Cameroon Party for National Reconciliation and Cameroon Democratic Front.

Denis Emilien Atangana was a candidate of the “Front des Démocrates du Cameroun”, or FDC. He said it was scandalous for the ruling CPDM to hire buses to transport all municipal and regional Councillors who constitute the electoral college to polling stations, this was seen as a campaign strategy and tagged illegal as it violates the stipulations of the electoral code on electoral campaign which reads that “The election campaign shall open on the 15th (fifteenth) day preceding the election and close at midnight on the eve of the election day”.⁶² He also said the CPDM used threats, bullying and vote-buying to deprive voters of their freedom to make democratic choices. He also claimed, while in the buses, “officials of the CPDM distributed money and threatened to punish voters who refused the bribe”.⁶³

In October 2011, during presidential elections, officials of the Social Democratic Front, a major opposition party, accused the ruling party and ELECAM of fraud. They said people had been caught voting more than once, others complained that they were unable to cast their ballots while the then SDF chairman, Ni John Fru Ndi (of blessed memory) reported some cases of intimidation in polling stations.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Nathan Ndoumbe, “Cameroun – Présidentielle 2018 : les militaires votent hors des casernes”, Actu Cameroun (October 2018), <https://actu cameroun.com/2018/10/07/cameroun-presidentielle-2018-les-militaires-votent-hors-des-casernes/>

⁶¹ Joseph Thierry OKALA EBODE, “Electoral Fraud and the Weakening of Cameroonian Democracy”, NKAUFU Policy Institute (September 2024), <https://nkafu.org/electoral-fraud-and-the-weakening-of-cameroonian-democracy/>

⁶² Section 87 (1), Law No. 2012/001 of 19 April relating to the Electoral Code

⁶³ Moki Edwin Kindzeka, “Cameroon's Ruling Party Leads Senatorial Election; Opposition Alleges Fraud”, Voice of America (March 2023) <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-s-ruling-party-leads-senatorial-election-opposition-alleges-fraud/7002336.html>

⁶⁴ BBC Correspondent, “Cameroon election: SDF accuse Paul Biya's CPDM of fraud”, BBC News (October 2011), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15238067>

Conflict of interest within political parties

Political parties in Cameroon are susceptible to experience internal disagreements. These disagreements usually revolve around the selection of candidates to represent them during elections. Candidate selection and nomination procedures differ among democracies and among typologies of parties. It is the responsibility of the party to decide who is eligible to contest in the election. Selection of party candidates should be devoid of prejudices. This is a serious problem in Cameroon.

Recent elections have been characterized by battles most of which were caused by intra-party squabbles over nomination of candidates, a notorious instance of what happened between Professor Ngolle Ngolle Elvis and Mr Elung Paul Che, during the nomination of candidates for the 2023 Senatorial elections, while professor Ngolle Ngolle is said to have backed incumbent Senator Agnes Ntube, Minister Elung Paul reportedly settled for one Hilda, a school principal, both personalities had almost gone physical at each other and although Ngolle Ngolle's candidate was retained, Paul Elung Che vowed to secretly campaign against the CPDM candidate for Kupe Muanenguba Division.⁶⁵

A similar conflict as mentioned above, also took place within the ranks of the Mouvement pour la défense de la République (MDR) party, between Barrister Paulin Djourwe and Tigana Tassi Dakolé, contesting over leadership of the party after the passing of its founder and chairman, late Senator Dakolle Daissalla,⁶⁶ this dispute was also extended to the constitutional council, with a petition deposited against Djourwe for representing the party during the March 2023 Senatorial elections.

Anglophone crisis

The Anglophone regions are experiencing a separatist crisis, with armed separatists seeking independence from the state. Separatists have targeted individuals and institutions associated with the central government, including election officials and candidates, seeing this as defiant to their movement.

During the build up to the twin municipal and legislative elections of February 2020, armed separatists targeted those willing to participate in the legislative and municipal elections, whether as candidates, election officials, activists, or citizens. The targets included members and supporters of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party, which the separatists accuse of failing to show solidarity with their cause. Attia T. Azohnwi reveals that;

Separatists burned at least three offices of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), the national election body, in Misaje, North-West region, on January 7, 2020; in Babessi, North-West region, on January 16; and in Tombel, South-West region, on February 2. Separatists have also burned down a post office where electoral material was stored in Bafut, North-West region, on the eve of the elections, and at least seven homes belonging to government officials and candidates in various localities in the North-West region since November 2019.⁶⁷

Consequences of electoral conflicts in Cameroon

In broad terms, the consequences of election-related conflicts may include the following:

Voter apathy

Electoral conflicts have discouraged the political participation of citizens. This was evident in the 2018 presidential elections where only 7 million people registered out of over 25 million Cameroonians and only

⁶⁵ Maxwell Fokwen, "CPDM Senatorial Investitures in NW, SW: Ngolle Ngolle, Elung Paul flex muscles over choice of Kupe-Muanenguba Candidate", The Guardian Post (January 2023), <https://theguardianpostcameroon.com/post/727/en/cpdm-senatorial-investitures-in-nw-sw-ngolle-ngolle-elung-paul-flex-muscles-over-choice-of-kupe-muanenguba-candidate>

⁶⁶ Arnaud Nicolas Mawel, "Cameroun-crise de leadership au MDR : Paulin Djourwe conteste l'arbitrage du Minat", Journal du Cameroun, <https://fr.journalducameroun.com/cameroun-crise-de-leadership-au-mdr-paulin-djourwe-conteste-larbitrage-du-minat/>

⁶⁷ Atia T. AZOHNWI, "Cameroon –February 9 twin polls: Armed Separatists kidnapped over 100 people, burned property, threatened voters in North West, South West", (February 2020), <https://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroon-february-9-twin-polls-armed-separatists-kidnapped-over-100-people-burned-property-threatened-362664.html>

roughly 4 million ended up voting. According to Marie Mimesse Me Fame, “voter turnout rate has dropped from 71.9 % in 1992 to 43% in 2020”.⁶⁸

Poor leadership

Electoral violence and conflicts when poorly managed will enhance the enthronement of leaders that lack accountability, integrity and responsibility in various levels of public offices in Cameroon. This has affected the quality of leadership and governance in our nation. As a result, Cameroon is still battling with the challenges of bad leadership, poor governance and corruption. These issues have adversely affected social transformation, economic advancement and national development.

Loss of lives & property / human rights abuses

Furthermore, violence leads to chaos, anarchy and unrest. This has been the trend with elections in the English-speaking regions. As a result, several people have lost their lives and valuable properties have been destroyed within the framework of elections. Although this trend has persisted, there is need to change the narrative. The arrest of Maurice Kamto and four of his staff for organising “peaceful” post electoral rallies was also heavily criticised by human rights activists who considered it as a violation of human rights. “More than a hundred protesters were arrested in Douala, Yaoundé, Dschang, Bafoussam and Bafang.”⁶⁹

Remedies to electoral conflicts in Cameroon

Electoral democracy in Cameroon has gone through a period of profound conflicts, yet each conflict points us toward potential solutions and more collaborative processes. Here are proposals to help resolve electoral conflicts.

An overhaul of the elections management body

The opposition has fear and doubts regarding the neutrality, representativeness and independence of the Electoral Board, to remedy this, it has proposed that the 18-member body be composed – in future – of;⁷⁰

- eight representatives from parties sitting in the Assembly;
- three representatives from parties only present in municipal councils;
- three figures from the three parties whose candidates emerged top during the last presidential election;
- two representatives from the administration that were chosen by the president of the Republic who have had no political affiliation for at least three years; and
- two members of the civil society.

Role of the media / social media

The media should not be impeded in its role as a platform to publicly discuss political and governance issues, state-owned media should be required to give equal coverage and balanced reporting to all candidates. Media outlets should also promote “peace journalism,” government should implement guidelines to avoid and punish

⁶⁸ Marie Mimesse Me Fame, “Electoral Participation in Cameroon: Variations in Voter Turnout”, *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* (November 2020)

⁶⁹ “The arrest of Maurice Kamto and four of his staff supporters signals an escalating crackdown on opposition leaders, human rights defenders and activists in Cameroon”, *Samira Daoud Amnesty International’s West and Central Africa Deputy Director*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/cameroon-postelection-crackdown-escalates-with-arrest-of-opposition-leader-maurice-kamto/>

⁷⁰ Franck Foute, “Cameroon’s opposition wants to change the electoral code”, *the Africa report* (December 2021), <https://www.theafricareport.com/155223/camerouns-opposition-wants-to-change-the-electoral-code/>

hate speech. Politicians should also refrain from issuing irresponsible and inflammatory statements on social media.

Dialogue amongst political stakeholders

There is a need to cultivate a culture of constant dialogue and coordination among the key players in the electoral and political fields so that the existing gap of suspicion between them is bridged.

Socio-economic empowerment of citizens

Broad-based socioeconomic development programmes so as to empower citizens and prevent selling of votes for cfa notes.

Conflict prevention mechanisms within political parties

Political parties should incorporate conflict-prevention policies and strategies in their framework, clearly establish conditions for eligibility of their electoral candidates (such as consensus in the form of voting) so as to avoid internal conflicts. Political parties are also to establish clear succession plans, in the absence of a plan to replace the chairman of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), Paul Biya, for instance, an internal turmoil might erupt, which can split the party into factions.

Resolution of the anglophone crisis

All actors should come together and focus on finding a political solution to the anglophone crisis, as well as offer mediation. This will go a long way in curbing electoral violence in that part of the country.

Amendment of the electoral code

In line with members of the opposition who have identified the lapses of the current electoral code, the need for a new one is imperative, in the year 2021, 15 political parties and 12 civil society organisations developed a new draft electoral code of 231 pages.⁷¹ Some of the modifications contained in this new code include;

- introducing a single ballot paper;
- lengthening the duration of electoral campaigns (30 days instead of 15);
- lowering the security deposit required for legislative elections from 3,000,000 CFA francs to 500,000 CFA (per candidate) and municipal from 50,000 CFA francs to 25,000 CFA francs
- prohibiting polling stations from being set up in barracks or chieftaincies
- make voting compulsory; this would complement Article 2 of the electoral law, which currently stipulates that the election is by universal, equal and secret suffrage, and that it can be direct or indirect (the measure aims to reduce the abstention rates observed in recent elections, during the last local elections in February 2020, turnout was just over 40%)

Resolution of post electoral disputes after provisional results

Another proposed change – which would amend Articles 133, 168 and 194 of the electoral code – is that post-election disputes be examined after the provisional results have been announced. Therefore, the Constitutional Council would only be able to proclaim an election's final results once she settles any possible post-election disputes. This will go a long way to curb post electoral unrests characterised by protests.

⁷¹ Franck Foute, "Cameroon's opposition wants to change the electoral code", *the Africa report* (December 2021), <https://www.theafricareport.com/155223/camerouns-opposition-wants-to-change-the-electoral-code/>

Votes supervisory communal commissions

The minutes from the 2018 presidential election proved to be a stumbling block while the case was being examined before the Constitutional Council. In general, the authenticity of the documents transmitted to the National Vote Counting Commission was often questioned. There is therefore a need to establish a communal commission that will be responsible for supervising votes, ensuring the conformity of the minutes and be above the departmental commission. The objective is to reduce the risk of litigation at the national level. All minutes should also have the same legal value, unlike the case today where only ELECAM's minutes (*process verbale*) is valid in case of dispute.

A few changes at the Constitutional Council

To curb controversies and render the Constitutional Council more independent, its members should be separately appointed by the President of the Republic, the Senate President, President of the Lower House of Assembly and an independent Higher Judicial Council "as practiced in France".⁷² The President of the Republic should not also have an influence over the time limit for the passing of rulings as provided for in the Constitution.⁷³ Also, the time limit for the filing of petitions should be extended from 72 hours to at least 21 days as is the case in "Nigeria",⁷⁴ or to 30 days as practiced in "Namibia and South Africa",⁷⁵ this will enable petitioners have ample time to constitute petition files, which sometimes might require extensive travels across the national territory, petitions such as that of "Cabral Libi in 2018 was rejected for being submitted few minutes after 72 hours",⁷⁶ it sparked controversy and dissatisfaction amongst opposition political parties., extending deadlines will amend this mishap.

Repression of Electoral Malpractices

To deter electoral malpractices such as vote buying, campaigning on polling day, bullying, etc. Electoral courts should adopt repressive measures for these acts such as sentencing defaulters. By enforcing such decisions, actors will be compelled to abide with the norms, thus mitigating avenues for conflicts, usually demonstrated in the form of petitions. As Nkansah puts it, "there have not been enough prosecutions of election malpractices to warrant deterrence because of lack of political will and the failure of the police to enforce those laws".⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

The democratic process of any nation can neither be successful nor progressive without the conduct of free and fair elections. Although elections form part of the process, they are fundamental to both the development of democracy and the values that define democracy. These values which include accountability, integrity, transparency, social justice, rule of law, equity, fairness, true leadership and good governance help to shape our nation and its people and as such there is need for continuous review of the causes of electoral violence and conflict in order to find innovative and lasting solutions to them.

⁷² Constitutional Council of France – Members, <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/en/current-composition>

⁷³ Article 49 of the 1996 Constitution, revised in 2008 states that, "in any case, the Constitutional Council shall give ruling within a period of 15 (fifteen) days once a matter has been referred to it, however, at the request of the President of the Republic, such time-limit may be reduced to 8 (eight) days"

⁷⁴ Timelines associated with election petitions and the various stages of the legal process in Nigeria", (*Nigerian Economic Summit Group*, <https://nesgroup.org/blog/Timelines-associated-with-election-petitions-and-the-various-stages-of-the-legal-process-in-Nigeria>)

⁷⁵ Zimbabwe election support network, "Electoral Conflict Management Mechanisms", (May 2017), page 20 & 21, https://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/_protected/publications/publication_116.pdf

⁷⁶ "Contentieux post électoral : Après Kamto, le conseil constitutionnel rejette le recours de Cabral Libii", *Le Bled Parle (Octobre 2018)*, <https://www.lebledparle.com/contentieux-post-electoral-apres-kamto-le-conseil-constitutionnel-rejette-le-recours-de-cabral-libii/>

⁷⁷ Nkansah L.A. (2012) Democratic Succession in Africa: The Quest for an Orderly Transition. Paper presented at a Conference on International Law in Africa under the Theme "The Quest for Human Security, Peace and Development: Challenges and Responses", organised by the African Foundation of International Law (AFIL), the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa, the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa (ICLA), University of Pretoria, South Africa and Faculdade de Direito, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique, held from 5 th -6 th October, 2011 in Mozambique.

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