

The Illusion of Pluralism: Political Fragmentation, Subversive Co-Optation, and the Hegemonic Architecture of the CPDM in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a rigorous structural examination of political fragmentation, party proliferation, and the enduring democratic deficit in post-1990 Cameroon. Utilizing a multi-layered theoretical framework that synthesizes party system theory, neo-patrimonialism, and the political economy of authoritarian resilience, we demonstrate that numerical pluralism within the state operates primarily as a manufactured construct curated by the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). Rather than reflecting organic social diversity, the extensive proliferation of over 300 legally registered political parties is driven by elite self-interest, tactical co-optation, and regime survival strategies designed to split the opposition vote and project a cosmetic facade of competitive democracy. By tracking the historical trajectories of major opposition formations and evaluating municipal electoral data where the CPDM retains an absolute monopoly over 87% of councils this study reveals how attempts at opposition party regeneration are systematically neutralized through state-sponsored internal subversion, elite bargaining, and structural dependency. The paper concludes by outlining mandatory legal, institutional, and constitutional recommendations engineered to dismantle single-party hegemony and chart an authentic pathway toward substantive democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Political fragmentation, party proliferation, Cameroon, democratic deficit, neopatrimonialism, party system theory, authoritarian resilience, elite self-interest, co-optation, CPDM.

INTRODUCTION

The institutional transition of Sub-Saharan African polities during the "Third Wave" of democratization in the early 1990s was widely celebrated by transition theorists as an irreversible progression toward polyarchic governance, open electoral markets, and pluralistic accountability. In the Republic of Cameroon, this transition was formally marked by the enactment of the landmark "Freedom Laws" of December 1990, notably Law No. 90/056, which re-authorized the legal formation of competitive political parties after twenty-four years of *de jure* single-party compression under the Cameroon National Union (CNU) and its successor, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). However, three and a half decades into this nominal multi-party experiment, the Cameroonian state remains an exemplary archetype of a resilient, highly adaptive hegemonic single-party regime masquerading under the cosmetic architecture of procedural democracy.

The fundamental paradox of contemporary Cameroonian politics lies in the co-existence of extreme party proliferation alongside total executive and legislative stagnation. Despite the registration of over 300 political parties, effective political competition remains structurally constrained, giving rise to an enduring democratic deficit where electoral outcomes are entirely predictable and the opposition is kept permanently weak, atomized, and localized.

This monograph offers a comprehensive structural and behavioral critique of political fragmentation within the contemporary Cameroonian party system. We advance and systematically defend two central, reinforcing

hypotheses.

- First, we postulate that the primary lines of cleavage defining the modern Cameroonian opposition are fundamentally elite-driven factional outcomes originating from within the ruling CPDM matrix itself. Rather than representing coherent ideological alternatives or distinct societal cross-sections, the top-tier leadership of the primary opposition parties consists overwhelmingly of disgruntled former high-ranking state functionaries, central committee members, and regime insiders who split from the CPDM following internal resources-distribution disputes or shifting ethno-regional calculations. These actors establish political vehicles not to dismantle the autocratic state, but to generate localized electoral leverage to negotiate their eventual re-incorporation into the ruling patronage system.
- Second, we assert that the Cameroonian executive branch, operating through the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) and the state intelligence architecture, actively engineers and funds a vast ecosystem of "window-dressing" or satellite parties (*partis satellites* or *partis alimentaires*). These nominal organizations are strategically licensed to saturate the political marketplace, intentionally diluting the electoral strength of independent reform movements, confusing rural voters, and providing the Biya regime with an international facade of competitive pluralism.

The empirical consequence of this manufactured fragmentation is a total imbalance in electoral outcomes, leaving the ruling CPDM with near-absolute control over both the legislative chambers and local municipal councils across the country.

Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

To evaluate the resilience of authoritarian architectures under the guise of multi-party pluralism, this study integrates three distinct bodies of political science literature: Sartori's party system theory, neo-patrimonial and clientelist frameworks, and the political economy of authoritarian resilience.

Party System Theory and Atomized Pluralism

Sartori (1976) posits that the structural mechanics of a party system depend not merely on the numerical count of parties, but on their relevance, ideological distance, and systemic compliance. In systems characterized by "extreme polarization" or "atomized pluralism," an excess of political parties does not deepen representation; rather, it degrades it by introducing high levels of volatility, personalization, and fragmentation. Mainwaring and Scully (1995) expand this by measuring the degree of "party system institutionalization," arguing that in weakly institutionalized systems, parties lack stable roots in society, function primarily as personalist vehicles for elite ambition, and fail to project consistent policy alternatives. This study utilizes this framework to diagnose the Cameroonian party system as a pathological manifestation of atomized pluralism, where numerical proliferation is inversely proportional to democratic consolidation.

Neo-Patrimonialism, Prebendalism, and the Political Marketplace

The survival of dominant parties in post-colonial Africa is deeply tied to neo-patrimonial networks, where formal constitutional structures are subordinated to informal clientelist linkages. As Bayart (2009) famously conceptualized through the "politics of the belly" (*la politique du ventre*), the post-colonial Cameroonian state operates as an extractive mechanism where elite legitimacy is secured through the redistribution of state rents, appointments, and bureaucratic privileges. Joseph (1987) describes this as "prebendalism," where state offices are treated as personal fiefdoms to enrich specific ethno-regional clienteles.

Alex de Waal (2015) modernizes this through the concept of the "political marketplace," wherein political loyalty, compliance, and dissent are commodified and traded like financial assets. In this marketplace, the creation of an opposition party is frequently a rational business strategy: an elite sets up an opposition franchise to demonstrate their capacity to cause disruption, thereby raising their valuation in the eyes of the central state-party, which subsequently buys back their loyalty through co-optation, Ministerial portfolios, or direct financial subsidies.

Authoritarian Resilience and Competitive Authoritarianism

Levitsky and Way (2010) define "competitive authoritarianism" as a hybrid regime type where democratic institutions exist and are legally real, but the playing field is so heavily skewed in favor of the incumbent that the system remains fundamentally autocratic. Authoritarian resilience is maintained not through raw physical repression alone, but through sophisticated institutional engineering: managing electoral calendars, manipulating registration thresholds, and weaponizing state resources.

In Cameroon, the ruling party does not seek to eliminate the opposition; instead, it *cultivates* a hyper-fragmented opposition. By ensuring that no single opposition force can build a cross-regional, multi-ethnic coalition, the regime exploits the classic colonial tactic of "divide and rule," utilizing controlled pluralism to legitimize its grip on power before international observers while maintaining a domestic monopoly over the state apparatus.

The Historical Architecture of Dominance: From CNU to CPDM

The structural depth of the CPDM's contemporary hegemony cannot be understood without evaluating the historical processes through which the post-colonial Cameroonian state consolidated its power. Following the violent suppression of the grassroots nationalist movement, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC), by French colonial forces and the early administration of Ahmadou Ahidjo, the regime sought to criminalize independent political action and eliminate all autonomous centers of civic organization. In September 1966, this authoritarian consolidation culminated in the forced merger of all active regional, linguistic, and ideological political groups—including the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), the Cameroon People's National Convention (CPNC), and the *Union Camerounaise* (UC)—to construct a single national entity: The Cameroon National Union (CNU/UNC).

Under Ahidjo, the single party became completely integrated with the administrative, judicial, and security structures of the state. The party-state apparatus served as the sole platform for social advancement, resource allocation, and bureaucratic elite selection, justifying its total monopoly under the ideological banner of "national unity" and "economic development". When Paul Biya assumed the presidency in November 1982 following Ahidjo's managed resignation, he inherited and maintained this underlying institutional model. Although Biya rebranded the CNU as the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM/RDPC) during the historic Bamenda Congress in March 1985, the change was purely cosmetic. The transformation utilized modern rhetoric—shifting the official discourse from "national unity" to "communal liberalism"—but preserved the identical clientelist architecture, security enforcement mechanisms, and administrative command structures that had sustained the autocratic state since independence.

Consequently, when domestic general strikes (*Villes Mortes*), economic contractions, and international pressures forced the formal re-legalization of multi-partyism in 1990, the Biya regime did not dismantle the CPDM-state merger. Instead, it adapted its institutional strategies to ensure regime survival under pluralism. Rather than relying solely on overt violence to suppress the emerging opposition, the state weaponized its administrative powers. By controlling the legal recognition process through the Ministry of Territorial Administration, distributing targeted financial inducements, and exploiting deep regional and ethnic rivalries, the executive branch transformed multi-partyism into a state-managed market of political fragmentation, ensuring that newly formed parties remained weak, fragmented, and fundamentally dependent on state patronage.

The Taxonomy of Fragmentation: Splinter Groups and Satellite Formations

A detailed genealogical analysis of the major political parties active in Cameroon reveals that the leadership of the nominal opposition is deeply linked to the historical elite matrix of the ruling party. When these actors face marginalization within the internal structures of the CPDM, lose access to lucrative state appointments, or are outmaneuvered during local party reorganizations, they frequently launch independent political parties. These groups are then positioned to capture local or regional discontent and leverage it to secure concessions and re-entry into the central state.

Case Analysis of Hegemonic Co-optation: UNDP, MP, ADD, and MDR

A classic example of this dynamic is the National Democratic Alliance for Enlightenment and Progress (UNDP), led by Bello Bouba Maïgari. Maïgari was a foundational member of the post-colonial administrative class, serving as Prime Minister under Paul Biya from 1982 to 1983. Following a political rift and a period of exile, he assumed the leadership of the UNDP, which positioned itself as the leading opposition force in the northern three regions during the highly contested 1992 legislative and presidential elections. However, rather than sustaining an independent challenge to the regime, the UNDP was quickly drawn back into the system. Maïgari accepted a ministerial appointment, establishing a permanent governing alliance with the CPDM that has persisted for over three decades. This co-optation neutralized the northern opposition vote and transformed the UNDP into a key "window-dressing" entity that reinforces the single-party system.

This structural pattern of elite splintering followed by administrative reintegration is a defining characteristic of the Cameroonian party system. It is evident in the trajectory of the Progressive Movement (MP) founded by Jean-Jacques Ekindi, the former president of the influential Wouri (Douala) CPDM section, who left the ruling party in 1991 only to formally rejoin it in 2020 after decades of financial marginalization.

Similarly, the Alliance for Democracy and Development (ADD), led by former CPDM Minister of Public Service Garga Haman Adji, and the Movement for the Defence of the Republic (MDR), established by Dakolé Daïssala, have consistently operated as highly localized, regionalized organizations. They divide anti-incumbent votes in the northern and western regions while entering into strategic alliances with the central government when required to preserve their leaders' access to state resources.

Contemporary Contrapuntal Vehicles: MRC and PCRN

Even contemporary political movements that project a radical break from the past are constrained by these structural dynamics. The Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC/CRM), led by Maurice Kamto, was established in 2012 following Kamto's resignation from his position as Minister Delegate to the Minister of Justice—a post he held for seven years within the CPDM administration. While the MRC has faced severe state containment, judicial harassment, and physical suppression due to its direct legalistic challenge to the 2018 presidential election results, its leadership remains deeply shaped by their long socialization within the state's judicial and administrative structures.

Meanwhile, the Party for National Reconciliation of Cameroon (PCRN), led by Cabral Libii, faces internal splits as its original co-founders—deeply connected to traditional northern CPDM networks—regularly launch state-backed legal challenges designed to destabilize the party's current leadership, demonstrating how the state can manipulate internal party mechanics to control and fragment independent political movements.

Summary Matrix of Elite Circulation

The specific trajectories of these factional dynamics and their structural functions within the broader Cameroonian political ecosystem are systematically codified in Table 1.

Table 1: Genealogies of Major Cameroonian Political Parties and CPDM Factional Crises

Political Party	Founder / Current Leadership	Prior Status in CNU-CPDM Elite Matrix	Nature of Split & Current Functional Status
UNDP	Bello Bouba Maïgari	Prime Minister of Cameroon (1982–1983); Central CNU Grand Commis de l'État.	Splintered after the 1983 Ahidjo-Biya structural rift. Returned to form a permanent ruling coalition with the CPDM.
MRC / CRM	Maurice Kamto	Minister Delegate to the Minister of Justice	Resigned from government in 2011. Formed the MRC as an elite-driven

		(2004–2011); CPDM Legal Strategist.	legalistic challenge; faces extreme state containment.
PCRN	Cabral Libii / Robert Kona	Robert Kona (Co-founder) was a staunch CPDM elite from the Far North.	Acquired by Cabral Libii in 2020. Currently fragmented by state-sponsored internal legal battles led by original founders.
ADD	Garga Haman Adjii	Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reform (1990–1992); Senior Central Committee.	Resigned in 1992 citing systemic executive corruption. Operates as an isolated, highly localized northern political spoiler.
MP	Jean-Jacques Ekindi	President of the crucial Wouri (Douala) CPDM Section (1985–1991).	Resigned during 1991 protests. Following decades of marginalization, he formally dissolved his opposition stance and rejoined the CPDM in 2020.
MDR	Dakolé Daïssala	Director General of state transport corporations; traditional Far North elite.	Formed in 1992. Instantly entered into a formal legislative alliance with the CPDM in 1992 to grant Biya a working parliamentary majority.
PADDEC	Jean de Dieu Momo	Human rights lawyer initially aligned with anti-Biya civil society groups.	Co-opted entirely ahead of the 2018 elections. Awarded position of Minister Delegate; serves as an aggressive public defender of the regime.

Empirical Dissection of Electoral Impotence and Territorial Exclusion

The political consequence of this manufactured fragmentation is clearly visible in the statistical outcomes of national and local elections. By controlling the legislative framework, managing the appointments of the board of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), and deploying local administrative blockades through Senior Divisional Officers (Prefets), the CPDM-state ensures that the opposition remains fragmented and electorally non-viable. This dynamic is illustrated by the official results of the October 2018 presidential election, where the fragmentation of opposition candidates guaranteed a victory for the incumbent, Paul Biya, who secured over 71% of the valid votes cast.

Table 2: Statistical Decomposition of the October 7, 2018 Presidential Election Results

Candidate Name	Political Affiliation	Total Valid Votes	Percentage Share (%)	Functional Typology & Structural Role
Paul Biya	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)	2,521,934	71.28%	Hegemonic Incumbent; absorbs state and administrative resources.
Maurice Kamto	Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC)	503,384	14.23%	Primary legalistic challenger; targets urban and diaspora groups.
Cabral Libii	Univers / PCRN Network	222,020	6.28%	Youth-centric mobilization vehicle; structurally constrained by legal challenges.
Joshua Osih	Social Democratic Front (SDF)	118,706	3.35%	Historically dominant Anglophone-led party, now weakened by splits and co-optation.
Garga	Alliance for Democracy and	55,048	1.55%	Former CPDM Minister; localized

Candidate Name	Political Affiliation	Total Valid Votes	Percentage Share (%)	Functional Typology & Structural Role
Haman Adji	Development (ADD)			regional spoiler in northern regions.
Adamou Ndam Njoya	Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC)	25,975	0.73%	Geographically isolated entity; ethnically confined to the Noun Division.
Serge Espoir Matomba	United People for Social Renovation (PURS)	19,704	0.56%	Minor satellite entity; functions as a vote-fragmenting factor.
Fabien Assigana	Republican Network	2,390	0.07%	Minor window-dressing formation; non-viable entity.

The distribution of votes among opposition candidates reveals the structural limitations of fragmented electoral strategies. Maurice Kamto of the MRC finished second with 14.23%, followed by Cabral Libii at 6.28%, and Joshua Osih of the historically dominant Social Democratic Front (SDF) at 3.35%. The remaining votes were divided among minor regional candidates. This scattering of the anti-incumbent vote across multiple personalized platforms prevents the emergence of a unified democratic front capable of challenging the entrenched administrative and financial advantages of the ruling party.

This centralized dominance is even more pronounced at the local level. Following the February 2020 municipal and legislative elections, which were boycotted by several prominent opposition groups due to security concerns in the Anglophone regions and structural irregularities, the CPDM secured absolute control over the country's local governance frameworks. Out of the 360 municipal councils in Cameroon, the ruling party won definitive majorities in 316, establishing a local capture rate of 87.78%.

Table 3: Distribution of Municipal Council Monopolies and Local Territorial Control (Post-2020)

Political Formation	Municipal Councils Controlled	Percentage Monopoly (%)	Structural Impediments Imposed on Opposition Governance
CPDM / RDPC	316 Councils	87.78%	Maintains direct access to FEICOM funds and total administrative backing from governors.
UNDP	16 Councils	4.44%	Confined to specific northern enclaves; operates under national governing alliance.
PCRN	7 Councils	1.94%	Isolated in Nyong-et-Kélé division; subject to intense financial monitoring by MINAT.
SDF	4 Councils	1.11%	Sharp decline due to internal conflict, co-optation, and regional instability.
UDC	6 Councils	1.67%	Strictly limited to traditional regional base within the Noun Division.
SALAM / Others	1 Council	0.28%	Highly localized municipal presence with minimal national impact.
Vacant / Contested	1 Council	0.28%	Subject to protracted litigation before administrative courts.

The remaining councils are scattered among co-opted or highly localized organizations, such as the UNDP (16 councils), the UDC (6 councils), and the PCRN (7 councils). This overwhelming dominance over municipal governance cuts off independent opposition movements from local resources and isolates them from the daily administration of the territory, reinforcing the structural dependency of local elected officials on central state largesse.

The Behavioral Codes of Collusion: Dual Case Studies in Subversive Co-optation

The structural integration of nominal opposition parties into the broader CPDM hegemony is sustained not only

through formal constitutional barriers, but also through shared behavioral expectations, linguistic mimicry, and explicit declarations of alliance within the political class. This section examines these behavioral dynamics through two distinct analytical vectors: the linguistic alignment of a municipal opposition mayor, and the systematic public declarations of loyalty by historical opposition factions.

The "Comrade" Mayor Epistolary Case Study

The integration of opposition parties into the ruling party's administrative network deeply shapes the political behavior and language of elected opposition officials. When opposition figures depend entirely on the central state for funding, regulatory approvals, and local authority, they frequently adopt a cooperative, subservient posture toward the ruling party, weakening their role as an independent check on power.

A clear example of this dynamic appeared in an official letter sent by a municipal mayor from the opposition Party for National Reconciliation of Cameroon (PCRN) to a regional CPDM municipal counterpart. In the correspondence, the PCRN mayor explicitly addressed his CPDM counterpart using the highly specific political term "Comrade" (*Camarade*):

"Monsieur le Maire et Cher Camarade, ... C'est avec un sens élevé de responsabilité républicaine que je m'adresse à votre haute bienveillance afin de solliciter notre synergie d'action pour le développement partagé de nos collectivités locales respectives..."

Within the context of Cameroonian political discourse, the term "Comrade" carries deep historical and institutional meaning. It is not a generic civic greeting, but rather a specific title tied directly to the organizational culture of the single-party system, inherited from the CNU and preserved within the modern CPDM. For a nominally independent opposition mayor to use this language in official correspondence with a ruling party official reveals the persistent influence of the single-party framework on the country's political elite.

This incident can be analyzed across three distinct structural dimensions:

- **Linguistic Socialization:** The vocabulary of the single party remains the dominant political language in the country, showing that even new political actors rely on the established institutional terms of the CPDM state to conduct official business.
- **Structural Dependence:** Because opposition-led municipalities are financially dependent on central ministries and state funds managed by CPDM officials, local leaders often adopt familiar internal language to build rapport and facilitate the release of local development resources from the Special Council Support Fund for Mutual Assistance (FEICOM).
- **Shared Elite Consensus:** Many opposition figures share professional, educational, or familial ties with members of the ruling party. As a result, behind the performance of partisan competition, there is often a shared elite consensus focused on maintaining institutional stability and preserving access to the state's patronage networks.

Public Outings and Declarations of Alliance: The Case of PADDEC and the Historical UPC

A broader manifestation of this psychological and structural subservience occurs through the mechanism of explicit, public declarations of loyalty by opposition parties, which formally convert active political organizations into satellite factions of the CPDM. This behavioral pattern is exemplified by the contemporary trajectories of the Patriotic Alliance for Integration and Development of Cameroon (PADDEC) and substantial factions of the historic *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC).

PADDEC, established by human rights attorney Jean de Dieu Momo, initially positioned itself within the radical civil society sphere critiquing the Biya administration's governance failures and human rights record. However, ahead of the 2018 presidential election, the party executed a total ideological pivot. Through a series of highly publicized media outings, press conferences, and political rallies, Momo and the PADDEC leadership explicitly declared their unyielding loyalty and formal electoral alliance to President Paul Biya and the CPDM.

Momo argued that political realism and the preservation of national stability necessitated total submission to the incumbent hegemony. Following this public display of allegiance, Momo was brought into the executive apparatus as Minister Delegate to the Minister of Justice, demonstrating how public declarations of loyalty function as tradeable currencies in the political marketplace. Since his appointment, PADDEC's public communications have focused exclusively on defending the ruling party from domestic and international criticism, neutralizing its role as an opposition party.

Even more structurally revealing is the capture of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC), the historic nationalist movement that fought against French colonial administration. Following its re-legalization in 1991, the UPC was systematically targeted by the Ministry of Territorial Administration, which weaponized internal administrative factions to fragment the party into multiple, competing sub-groups.

To secure legislative seats and municipal resources, dominant factions of the UPC leadership began organizing public outings and formal ceremonies to sign electoral protocols and alliances with the CPDM. These factions publicly framed their alignment with the CPDM as an act of "republican responsibility" or "national synthesis".

By analyzing these public outings, this study demonstrates that alliance-building in Cameroon does not follow an ideological logic; rather, it represents a structural survival mechanism. The public performance of loyalty by the UPC and PADDEC serves a dual purpose: it grants opposition elites access to state-managed prebends while allowing the CPDM regime to absorb the symbolic legitimacy of historical nationalist movements, neutralizing potential sources of revolutionary or counter-hegemonic mobilization.

Institutional and Constitutional Recommendations for Democratic Transition

To break the institutional impasse generated by manufactured political fragmentation and foster an authentic, pluralistic democracy, the Republic of Cameroon must implement deep structural, constitutional, and electoral reforms. The following five recommendations are designed to dismantle the hegemonic single-party architecture and create a level playing field for genuine democratic contestation.

Establishment of a Genuinely Independent Electoral Commission

The existing electoral management framework, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), is structurally flawed due to its dependence on executive appointments, which allows the ruling CPDM to control the selection of its board members and direct its operational activities. ELECAM must be replaced by a fully autonomous and independent electoral commission.

This new institution must possess exclusive, constitutionally protected budgetary control, and its leadership must be chosen through a consensus-driven process involving civil society networks, professional associations, judicial bodies, and all active political parties, completely removing the president's unilateral appointment power. This commission must hold final authority over the counting, transmission, and provisional publication of electoral data, eliminating the involvement of the Ministry of Territorial Administration in election logistics.

Introduction of a Two-Round Presidential Voting System

The current single-round, first-past-the-post voting system for the presidency heavily favors the incumbent by allowing a candidate to win without an absolute majority in a hyper-fragmented field. Cameroon must amend its constitution to establish a mandatory two-round presidential voting system.

Under this framework, if no individual candidate secures an absolute majority (>50%) of the valid votes cast in the first round, a decisive runoff election must be held two weeks later between the top two candidates. This institutional change would reduce the strategic value of state-funded satellite parties and incentivize opposition formations to build broad, cross-regional coalitions behind a single alternative candidate in the second round.

Reform of State Campaign Subsidies and Funding Architecture

The legal framework governing political funding must be overhauled to eliminate the financial incentives for

creating opportunistic, "window-dressing" parties designed solely to extract state resources or operate as spoilers during election cycles.

State campaign subsidies must be made completely transparent and strictly tied to verifiable electoral thresholds. Public financing should be distributed in two phases: a minimal baseline allocation provided only to parties that demonstrate national organization (e.g., maintaining active offices in at least five regions), and a larger retroactive allocation distributed proportionally based on the percentage of the popular vote secured or parliamentary and municipal seats won in previous election cycles. This mechanism would naturally phase out non-viable satellite entities and encourage the merger of smaller parties into sustainable coalitions.

Adoption of Proportional Representation in Municipal and Legislative Elections

The current electoral system utilizes a majority-bonus framework that grants an overwhelming share of parliamentary and municipal seats to the party that secures a simple plurality, effectively locking out minority opposition voices and producing artificial single-party monopolies across local councils.

Cameroon must transition to a clean proportional representation system with a reasonable national and regional threshold (e.g., 5%). Seats within the National Assembly and municipal councils would be allocated in direct proportion to the total number of votes received by each party list. This reform would ensure that local and national legislative bodies accurately reflect the true distribution of voter preferences, providing alternative political movements with a viable institutional voice and local governance platforms without requiring them to adopt a submissive posture toward the central ruling party.

Strict Enforcement of the Separation of Powers and Civil Service Neutrality

To dismantle the historic party-state merger that allows the CPDM to weaponize the public administration for its political survival, comprehensive civil service legislation must be enacted. The law must strictly prohibit active state officials, including regional governors, divisional officers, judges, and directors-general of parastatal corporations, from holding leadership roles or organizing campaign operations for any political party while serving in office.

Public administration, state vehicles, and regional communication channels must remain strictly neutral. Furthermore, the financial mechanisms managed by the Special Council Support Fund for Mutual Assistance (FEICOM) must be reformed to follow clear, legally binding statutory formulas based on population size and objective local development indicators, removing the administrative discretion that allows the central state to financially starve opposition-led municipalities unless they demonstrate political subservience.

CONCLUSION AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Political fragmentation in contemporary Cameroon is not an organic reflection of societal diversity or democratic vitality; rather, it is an engineered institutional mechanism designed to maintain a single-party grip and sustain the hegemony of the ruling CPDM under the guise of an open multiparty marketplace. Behind the cosmetic appearance of pluralism lies an adaptive system of co-optation, elite circulation, and state-sponsored atomization. The majority of prominent opposition groups operate either as factional products of internal CPDM rifts—where disgruntled elites use localized parties as temporary leverage to negotiate their eventual return to state patronage—or as satellite, "window-dressing" formations engineered by the regime's security-bureaucratic complex to systematically divide the anti-incumbent electorate and neutralize the opposition's ability to challenge its authority.

This structural capture is empirically visible in the lopsided outcomes of national and local contests, leaving the CPDM with an absolute monopoly over 87.78% of municipal councils and depriving citizens of a viable democratic alternative. The behavioral dimensions of this hegemony are deeply reflected in the shared codes of the political class, as illustrated by the linguistic alignment of an opposition PCRN mayor addressing a CPDM official as "Comrade," and by the frequent public outings of historical parties like the UPC and PADDEC declaring their loyalty to the ruling regime. These dynamics show how the single-party framework continues to

shape the behavior and expectations of both insiders and ostensible challengers, effectively turning local administration into an extension of the state-party system and limiting meaningful public participation.

Breaking this institutional impasse requires moving past cosmetic adjustments toward a comprehensive overhaul of the state's constitutional, electoral, and academic frameworks. To dismantle the mechanisms of manufactured fragmentation, decouple the ruling party from the public administration, protect local governance from central financial pressure, and establish the level playing field necessary to guide the country toward a peaceful, authentic democratic transition, the following structural and scholarly reforms are recommended:

INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission: The current ELECAM framework must be replaced with a genuinely autonomous and independent electoral commission. This new institution must possess exclusive, constitutionally protected budgetary control, and its leadership must be chosen through a consensus-driven process involving civil society networks, professional associations, and all active political parties, completely removing the executive's unilateral appointment power. This commission must hold final authority over the counting, transmission, and provisional verification of electoral data, eliminating the involvement of the Ministry of Territorial Administration in election logistics.

Introduction of a Two-Round Presidential Voting System: The current first-past-the-post system heavily favors the incumbent by allowing a candidate to win without an absolute majority in a hyper-fragmented field. Cameroon must amend its constitution to establish a mandatory two-round presidential voting system. Under this framework, if no individual candidate secures an absolute majority (>50%) of the valid votes cast in the first round, a decisive runoff election must be held between the top two candidates. This institutional change would drastically reduce the strategic value of state-funded satellite parties and incentivize opposition formations to build broad, cross-regional coalitions behind a single alternative candidate.

Reform of State Campaign Subsidies: The legal framework governing political funding must be overhauled to eliminate the financial incentives for creating opportunistic, "window-dressing" parties designed solely to extract state resources or operate as vote spoilers. State campaign subsidies must be made completely transparent and strictly dependent on verifiable electoral thresholds, such as securing a minimum percentage of the popular vote or winning a set number of local seats. This mechanism would naturally phase out non-viable satellite entities and encourage the merger of smaller parties into sustainable coalitions.

Adoption of Proportional Representation: The majority-bonus framework used in municipal and legislative elections must be eliminated, as it grants an overwhelming share of seats to the party that secures a simple plurality, producing artificial single-party monopolies across local councils. Transitioning to a clean proportional representation system with a reasonable threshold would ensure that local and national seats accurately reflect the true distribution of voter preferences. This reform would provide alternative political movements with a viable institutional voice and local governance platforms without requiring them to adopt a submissive posture toward the central ruling party.

Strict Enforcement of Separation of Powers: Comprehensive civil service legislation must be enacted to strictly prohibit active state officials, regional governors, divisional officers, and judicial officers from holding leadership roles or organizing campaign operations for any political party while serving in office. This separation is vital to completely decouple the ruling party from the public administration, protect state resources from partisan exploitation, and create a neutral state apparatus.

Academic Recommendations

De-politization of University Governance: Implement strict statutory reforms that decouple academic appointments—such as University Rectors, Deans of Faculties, and heads of research institutes—from executive patronage networks. Ensuring that state universities operate as neutral spaces for critical civic thought, rather than hubs for ruling-party mobilization, is paramount to intellectual independence.

Funding Independent Political Science Research: Establish autonomous national research grants managed by independent academic bodies to fund objective, empirical investigations into electoral trends, clientelism, and local governance frameworks. This will reduce scholars' reliance on state-centric or partisan financing that compromises objective analysis.

Curriculum Modernization on Democratic Citizenship: Overhaul civics and political science curricula across primary, secondary, and tertiary educational tiers to prioritize critical thinking, constitutional literacy, and the history of authentic Cameroonian nationalism. This curricular shift is designed to directly counter the normalization of single-party behavioral codes and linguistic subservience among the youth.

Institutionalizing University-Civil Society Research Partnerships: Build formal, protected institutional bridges between university research faculties and independent think tanks, election observers, and civil society organizations. This synergy will facilitate the co-production of data-driven policy briefs that track administrative neutrality, audit electoral integrity, and hold public institutions accountable.

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