

Diplome d'Etudes Approfondi thesis Proposal for the CODESRIA Small
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TOPIC:

The Cameroon Electoral System, Processes and Outcomes through the Prism
of the Performance of the Government and Opposition Parties

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1.1.1 Background

Elections in Africa are generally badly organized by the incumbents¹ and are usually accompanied by contestations, violence, and bloodshed often presented as tribal killings in the western media. A few cases of recent elections are illustrative of this phenomenon. The 2007 general elections in Nigeria that culminated in the election of President Yara'Adua was contested by the opposition and the international observer team and ended in court. The December 2007 elections in Kenya resulted in total violence that claimed more than 1000 lives and has been presented as tribal killings between the dominant Kikuyu and the Luo. This image of elections overflows in Africa affirms stereotypes that all African problems can be reduced to savage tribal violence and killings.

An examination of electoral systems, processes and outcomes in Africa is therefore important as a contribution to peace and conflict resolution and the nation-building endeavours of Africa which is comparatively a continent with young, fragile nation-states in the offing. Electoral systems are today viewed as one of the most influential of all political institutions and are therefore of crucial importance to the broader issue of governance. This study intends to look at the electoral system and elections in Cameroon since the inception of multipartyism in 1990.

In Cameroon elections are organized at a national level for a head of state-the president-a legislature and local governments. The president used to be elected for a five year term but a 1996 constitutional amendment changed the presidential tenure to seven years. The National Assembly has 180 members who are elected for a five year term in single and multi-seat constituencies. Local government elections take place after every five years. Cameroon is so far a one-party dominant state with the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement in power. Opposition parties are allowed to stand for elections but they are widely considered to have no real chance of gaining power.

¹ Exceptions to this include the 2007 general elections in Mauretania that was acceptable to all the contesting parties and was confirmed by international observers as free and fair; elections in post-Apartheid South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, the Seychelles and Mauritius Islands and a few doted cases in West Africa.

Cameroon's first multiple legislative and presidential elections were held in 1992 followed by municipal elections in 1996 and another round of legislative and presidential elections in 1997. In 2004 presidential elections were held while in 2007 parliamentary and municipal elections were organized. Each organized election since 1992 is characterized by the expansion of the government party and the retreat of the opposition. The Cameroon electoral processes and trends need to be examined critically to explain this situation.

1.1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

(i) The Principle of Elections

Elections are an important part of the democratic process which allows various political actors to compete over choices and issues. Sue Nelson (2001) notes that the goal of elections is to have an open and competitive process that allows voters to pronounce on an issue or choose a representative. The results of the elections should accurately reflect the will of the voters. Elections are generally demanding and require a multitude of actors and institutions whose intervention is critical to the holding of a credible election. There is also the need for a clear legal and institutional foundation which establishes the scope and nature of participation, election administration and oversight.

For free, fair and equitable elections to be achieved certain acceptable elements must be put in place and these include: an equitable and fair electoral framework; a professional neutral and transparent election administration; a generally acceptable code of ethical behaviour in political and press freedom; accountability of all participants; integrity safeguard mechanism and the enforcement of the electoral laws and other relevant laws.

(ii) Overview of the Electoral system in Cameroon

One cannot study elections in a given country without understanding the electoral system because it translates the votes in an election into results-offices/seats/issues-won by candidates/parties. There are two key variables.

The first is the electoral model used: whether a plurality/majority, proportional, mixed or other systems used. The mathematical formula used to calculate the seats allocated, the ballot structure (i.e. whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences) and the district magnitude or size (i.e. how many representatives to the legislature or municipality that district elects).

The second variable is the authority charged with managing the elections from beginning to finish. Is that authority an independent body or a dependent body? We have seen how these election managing mechanisms have operated successfully in Sierra Leone and Mauritania in 2007 but failed woefully elsewhere as was the case in Nigeria (2007) and recently in Kenya.

The way an electoral system is designed also affects other areas of electoral laws. The choice of an electoral system impacts on the way electoral constituencies or districts are demarcated, the registration of voters, the designing of ballot papers, and the counting of votes among other things.

In Cameroon the electoral system is determined by the type of election that is being organized. For the national legislature and municipal elections, the Party Block Vote (PBV) system is used. The PBV is a plural/majority system using multi-member

districts in which voters cast a single party-centred vote for a party of choice, and do not choose between candidates. The party with an absolute majority vote will win every seat in the electoral district. In case of no clear winner, the seats would be proportionately divided.

The electoral system for presidential elections in Cameroon is the First Past The Post (FPTP). FPTP is the simplest form of plurality/majority electoral system. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not the absolute majority of valid votes. The system uses single-member districts and the voters vote is not an absolute majority of valid votes. This system of elections has proved to favour the incumbent. Cameroon opposition parties failed to force the government party to adopt a two-round majority run-off system of elections at the presidential level as is practiced in France and several Francophone countries. In 2000 Senegalese opposition parties denied President Abdou Diouf a first-round victory and by previous agreement, united behind the leading opposition candidate, Abdoulaye Wade, the defeat the long-standing Socialist Party leader in the second round.

(iii)Electoral Processes encompasses the entire election process comprising pre-election, election and post election management.

(iv)Electoral outcomes refer to the statistical performance of the various candidates and parties in elections.

2.0 Literature Review

Elections in Cameroon, particularly since the reintroduction of multipartyism in Cameroon in 1990, has been the subject of scholarly writing. A critical review of scholarly works provides useful methodological insights for the work as well as a lacuna that needs to be filled.

Scholars writing on the organization of elections in Cameroon (*cf.* Wallechnisky 2006: 286, Gros 1995, Fombad 2003, Emvana 2005, Ngwana 2004, Sindjoun 2005, Takougang 2003, Krieger 1994) or international observers including the National Democratic Institute and the Commonwealth Group of Nations are generally unanimous about its flawed nature (*cf.* NDI 1993). Wallechnisky (2006: 286) describes Cameroon's electoral process in these terms:

Every few years, [President] Biya stages an election to justify his continuing reign, but these elections have no credibility. In fact, Biya is credited with a creative innovation in the world of phony elections. In 2004, annoyed by the criticisms of international vote-monitoring groups, he paid his own set of international observers, six-ex-US congressmen, who certified his election as free and fair.

The flawed nature of elections in Cameroon has not been satisfactorily explored by scholars. They have neither identified nor analysed the weakest link in the Cameroon electoral machinery. There is need for a critical study of the processes of organizing elections in Cameroon with view to establishing its flawed nature and the extent to which it conforms or not to other systems in Africa or to the prescribed spirit of free and fair elections. Further more, the whole electoral process including the registration of voters, election proper, vote counting and proclamation of results need to be scrutinized for each of the elections held in Cameroon.

Nohlen *et al* (1999), in “Elections and Electoral Systems in Africa”, provide a useful theoretical and conceptual frame for this study. But their presentation of types of electoral systems and political regimes in Africa is somewhat muddled. Regime types in Africa, comprising parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential are not electoral systems. The contributions of Bogaards (2000), Ishiyama (2000), Vengroff (2004) are useful in appreciating electoral systems and contextualizing the Cameroon case.

Authors studying elections in Cameroon since the reintroduction of multipartyism in 1990 tend to select specific elections for scientific scrutiny (*cf.* Gros 1995: 112-127, Takougang 2003; Fonchingong 1998, Krieger 1994, Ngoh 2004, Fombad and Fonyam 2004). While this approach has the advantage of thoroughness, it does not allow one to determine and appreciate electoral trends over an appreciably long period of about a decade and a half. By examining the conduct and outcome of elections over a significantly broad timeframe, it would be possible to unravel the trajectory of elections.

3.0 Aims and Objectives of Study

This study is a critical examination elections in Cameroon with a focus on the electoral systems, the organizational processes of the elections and their outcomes. It looks at the context in which the electoral system was conceived, and the preparation and management of elections. What is the role of electoral systems in this process of attitude formation in terms of regime support and legitimacy? Does the electoral institution have differential impacts on people’s attitudes toward their political systems in various social contexts? How does the Cameroon electoral system interact with the influence of ethnic heterogeneity on citizens’ levels of institutional trust, and satisfaction with democracy in a country where there is an Anglophone-Francophone divide which is further compounded by its 250 ethnic groups? These questions point to the importance of the survey method in this study.

A well planned and a well organized election that is professionally administered can increase the participation of candidates and voters and build confidence in the electoral process and the election results. Good planning can avoid many of the problems often encountered during the operational phases and help the Election Management Body variously known as Independent Electoral Committee, Autonomous Electoral Committee etc meet the dates in its electoral calendar. Good planning can help an electoral management board to ensure that it has created a good organizational structure, with productive management and operational systems. It can also ensure that it has a professional and well trained staff and maintain good relations with the political parties, candidates, media and voters. The electoral systems and the various bodies established by the Cameroon government to manage elections have to be scrutinized to appreciate electoral outcomes.

The organization of elections in Cameroon can be comprehensively understood by examining electoral management bodies and the existing laws used in governing the organization of elections. This makes it necessary to examine the periodic elections against a background of the Electoral Management Bodies and the operational legal frameworks. The 1992 election management and legal frames were comparatively liberal and allowed room for the opposition to overthrow the government party as the election results in the early 1990s revealed. After the mid-1990s, the government systematically

modified the electoral management system to clear any possible obstacle to its winning absolute majorities. There is therefore a relationship between the Electoral Management Bodies and their operational legal frameworks and the performance of the various political parties.

3.1.1 Hypothesis to be investigated:

From the aims and objectives of this study, the following hypotheses are formulated:

(i) That the electoral system choice in Cameroon is a fundamentally political process that emanated principally from the government; the consideration of the political advantage of the government party was the principal consideration. The electoral system is therefore designed to work to the partisan advantage of the incumbent.

(ii) That the principal determinants of electoral outcomes are the government appointed officials of the Ministerial of Territorial Administration comprising Governors, Divisional Officers and Sub-Divisional Officers who register voters, publish voters' lists and proclaim results.

(iii) That various Electoral Management Bodies established since the reintroduction of multipartyism are largely cosmetic and do not have any real powers to influence elections in Cameroon.

(iv). That elections outcome since 1992 is characterized by the expansion of the government party and the retreat of the opposition.

(iv) That international Election Observers have had a minimal effect on the electoral processes in Cameroon

(iv) That each type of democracy has much to learn from the positive or negative experiences of the other. Elections practices in countries surrounding Cameroon like Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, and Central African Republic impact directly on electoral practices in Cameroon.

4.0 Partition of thesis

This work is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and deals with conceptual and theoretical issues. Chapter two is a comparative overview of electoral systems with particular reference to Francophone Africa. In most of Francophone Africa, the new democratic institutions including the electoral system were debated and selected in a broadly-based National conferences which included the representatives of officially registered political parties and the civil society. The electoral system that emerged out of this process was a compromise.

Chapter three examines the formulation of the Cameroon electoral system. Electoral systems are of great relevance to the building and sustenance of national cohesion, good governance, peace and stability. Chapter shall explore whether the Cameroon system provides for larger geographical, minority and ethnic representation;

strengthens of the peoples' faith in governance or creates disillusionment and political apathy etc.

Chapter four treats the elections that were held in Cameroon in the 1990s while chapter five studies the ones in the 2000s. This is important because it would enable one to evaluate the impact of the changing provisions of the electoral regime on electoral outcomes.

Chapter six looks at the regional political influences on the election processes in Cameroon. The scandalous organization of elections by Cameroon's neighbours often dampen the spirit of free and fair election and provides a pretext for the organization of crooked elections.

Chapter seven is the conclusion.

5.0 Scope of Thesis

This thesis covers elections in Cameroon from the organization of the first multiparty elections in 1992 after the reintroduction of political pluralism to the 2007 elections. There are over 210 officially registered political parties but not more than five have been able to contest elections and win seats. These include Paul Biya's Cameroon's People Democratic Movement (CPDM), John Fru Ndi's Social Democratic Front (SDF), Frederic Kodock's Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC), Adamu Ndam Njoya's Union of Cameroonian Population (UCP), Maigari Bello Buba's National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP). The government party and John Fru Ndi's SDF are the two front runners of significance and shall constitute the main focus of this study.

6.0 Methodology

The selected methodology for this study is a combination of desk research, primary research (through quantitative and qualitative techniques and methods of data collection) to enable triangulation of findings and thus provide more reliable data for a better understanding of the election processes. I have been an active participant in election monitoring in Cameroon in my capacity as a member of the Catholic Peace and Justice Committee.

A1: Desk Research

This involves the collection and review of relevant documentation on the study. There are rich documentation centres in Yaoundé, Douala and Buea which are university towns.

Data to be exploited would include:

- Unpublished reports/ records; the archives of opposition parties
- Published reports (research studies/ Case studies and so on);
- Conference abstracts, poster presentations and materials on CD;
- Newspaper articles, other media coverage;
- Information accessed through the Internet;
- Personal memoirs if any;
- Any other authentic available sources of information that are documented
- Official Records of the Ministry of Territorial Administration

A2: Primary research

In order to have first hand information on the dynamics and complexities of election processes, I shall have to undertake primary investigation through interviews. A selective quantitative assessment, using questionnaire shall be administered in a span of about six months. Questions related to peoples' opinion about the electoral institutions shall be addressed by the collection of survey data from Cameroonians in the language of the respondent's choice. This shall be done with the assistance of trained research assistants. About 500 respondents shall be selected randomly to represent the adult population. Quantitative data collection shall be done through administering structured questionnaires to respondents and using relevant computer programmes for analysis.

A qualitative component of analyzing detailed issues shall be considered. In this light formal and informal interviews with key political actors will be conducted. Questions on specific issues would be posed to an individual and the detail responses would be recorded. Focus Group discussions would be conducted using semi-structured interview guides. The quantitative, qualitative and desk research would therefore provide a triangulation which would generate relevant research findings on the study.

7.0 Ethical Issues and Data Analysis

Throughout the interview process, confidentiality of the respondent would be given paramount importance. A constant comparative method would be used in analyzing some of the qualitative data. Focus group discussions would be analyzed using two methods: analysis of individual transcripts and analysis of all focus group discussions. The transcripts would be read several times and the general impressions noted down, with the study's objectives and areas of interest kept in mind. Then, specific comments and ideas from the transcripts would be noted and a logbook maintained to record specific areas of interest and themes. Finally, the results would be analyzed.

For in-depth interviews of key actors and actresses in the political processes, data analysis would be done using the SPSS. The qualitative information would be coded in separate answer forms and analyzed using a constant comparative method. Quantitative data analysis shall be done using SPSS.10.

8.0 Expected Results of Thesis:

This thesis on Cameroon's electoral processes would constitute a groundwork for a PhD dissertation that will culminate in a book. Actually the DEA in the Cameroon system is usually the direction of a synopsis of a candidate's PhD dissertation.

There is definitely useful research findings that the work will bring out in the light of better election management that would generate an atmosphere of good governance and social peace. Since the reintroduction of multipartyism in Cameroon in 1990, elections have often been moments of tension, chaos, insecurity and uncertainty that set in motion centripetal forces in the polity. This work should be able to contribute in the critical x-ray of the of the electoral processes in Cameroon with a view to make viable proposals, particularly in the light of the establishment of an acceptable and credible electoral management body.

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Detailed Work Plan, Timetable and Budget.

	Activity	Duration (weeks)
1	Library research	Week 1-8
2	Archival research	Week 9-16
3	Fieldwork	Week 17-24
4	Data analysis	Week 25-28
5	Writing/typing drafts and submission to supervisor	Week 29-40
6	Editing the final paper	Week 41-43

7	Binding and submission of thesis	Week 44-48
8	Estimated total number of weeks	48 Weeks

#	Dimension	Amount (USD)
1	Cost of 10 provincial travels for data collection, visit to archives and venues for collection of government records	1000
2	Fee for Research assistants	700
3	Cost of documentation (Books, relevant scholarly journals)	100
4	Cost of communication (telephone, postage etc)	100
5	Cost of presenting preliminary findings in seminar (including printed handouts of drafts) to have faculty reaction before writing its final version	200
6	Cost of printing of printing and binding thesis	200
7	Contingency	100
8	Institutional fee	20%
	Total Budget	2500