



Revisiting the advent of multiparty politics and the quest for political supremacy in Cameroon, 1990-2018

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Abstract

The rebirth of multiparty politics in Africa in the early 1990s epitomised a crucial stage for countries in the process of democratic transition. Since the liberalisation of public life in Cameroon in the 1990s, partisan politics has become the daily issue of most politicians who aspire to get the presidential seat through their various political umbrellas. But as time passes, the situation becomes very difficult and complex for them. This explains why some of these political parties form alliances with the ruling party whereas others continue to operate at grassroots levels. This article, besides tracing the early history of political parties in Cameroon, seeks to assess the origin, evolution, and challenges faced by political parties in the electoral process, especially in terms of their performance between 1990 and 2018. The results arrived at in this paper are thanks to a consortium of multinational academic literature embodied with the historical methods of analysis. In sum, the study reveals that the multiplicity of opposition parties and their dryness in terms of programming leave voters with no choice but to continue in a system that tends to swallow up all opposition leaders. The multiparty system thus appears to be only a façade and only serves the interests of some party leaders, which resulted in a ruling party majority.

Keywords: Multiparty politics, democracy, political supremacy, Cameroon

Introduction

The Republic of Cameroon, constituted on the basis of the autonomous state of Cameroon set up on May 10, 1957, was founded on the territory under French trusteeship (Eastern Cameroon) and gained independence on January 1, 1960, while the territory under British trusteeship (Western Cameroon) remained administered in an associated manner with the regions of Northern Nigeria (for Northern Cameroon) and Eastern Nigeria (for Southern Cameroon). After the referendum of February 11, 1961, Western Cameroon was reunited with Eastern Cameroon. But the official reunification could only take place after the constitutional conference of Foumban (from July 17 to 21, 1961) and the adoption, by the assemblies of the two states, of the federal constitution drafted on September 1, 1961. Thus, the official date of reunification was set for October 1, 1961, and Cameroon became a Federal Republic. Since this date, the Cameroonian political scene has gone through several stages. It went from a multiparty system after independence and the reunification of the two Cameroonians in 1961 to a single-party system in 1966. The 1990s marked a decisive turning point in the socio-political lives of African states. The “new wind” of democracy, which came from the East, blew onto the African continent, and one of the challenges facing Africa in the last decade of the 20th century was the democratisation of its institutions. Also, at the end of the La Baule summit from June 19 to 21, 1990, François Mitterrand, the then French head of state, demanded and encouraged the democratisation of political life in Africa in the following terms: “France’s aid will be more lukewarm towards authoritarian regimes and more enthusiastic towards those that take the step towards democracy and respect for human rights”. In Cameroon, democratisation is becoming an imperative and an effective reality with the creation of several political parties and associations for the defence of human rights and freedoms. This aspect of Cameroon’s political evolution is undergoing

contradictory changes that call for our analysis. This transformation involves a critical examination of the functioning of political parties from reunification to the present day, through an in-depth study of the internal and external effectiveness of this functioning. More specifically, the aim is to determine the dynamics of the functioning of these political parties over the last fifty years. Therefore, the central question that can be asked is the following: How could Cameroon’s democratisation be captured to the point of preventing the country’s transformation into a parliamentary state? From this question, other questions arise: Did the action and activity of political parties in Cameroon contribute to validating the country’s status as a pluralist democracy, when we know that political parties are an essential element of pluralism and a means of promoting the free expression of the people’s opinion? What influence or link has multiparty politics had on the functioning of Cameroon’s legal and political institutions? Answering these concerns will enable us to present the advent of multiparty politics on the one hand and the search for political supremacy in Cameroon on the other.

The Evolution of Multiparty Politics in Cameroon Before 1990

This evolution was noticed the day after the independence and reunification of the East and West Cameroons. Political parties such as the UPC, CU, CNU, BDC, KNC, KPP, and KNDP, just to name a few, were very vibrant before and after reunification. Thus, this section discusses these political spheres.

1. The Composition of the First Political Parties

Cameroon went through three fundamental moments in the lives of its political parties. The advent of multiparty politics after the Second World War with the Brazzaville Conference (30 January to 8 February 1944) took effect in Cameroon until 1966 with the existence of about 90 political

parties, including the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) of Ruben Um Nyobè, created on April 10, 1948 (the first party in Cameroon to be banned from activity in 1955), the Cameroon Union (CU) of Ahmadou Ahidjo, and the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) created in 1955 by John Ngu Foncha, to mention only those three.

Then, between 1966 and 1990, Cameroon operated under a single-party regime. The Cameroon National Union of Cameroon (CNU) held power until the Bamenda Congress in 1985, when it became the *Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais* (RDPC), known in English as the Cameroon People Democratic Movement (CPDM) ^[1]. In this section, we will first look at the organisation of the UC and the KNDP.

2. Composition of the CU and the KNDP

Besides the many political parties noted in or before the 1960s, we will study these two parties (CU and KNDP) because they will be very decisive later on in the merger of the two parties.

a. The Organisation of the CU

The political situation in former East Cameroon was quite precarious for the Cameroon Union and its figurehead, Ahmadou Ahidjo, when the country's independence was proclaimed on January 1, 1960. The Prime Minister represented only the Fulani and Muslim North, and no anti-colonialist struggle made him a national figure. The results of the referendum of February 21, 1960, clearly show the ethnic basis of the government. Indeed, 10/21 constituencies voted no to the draught constitution; they were all located in the Centre-South and represented 89% of the total number of votes (531,000 in total). The 797,498 votes in favour came from the Ntem, the East, and especially the North. In the legislative elections of April 10, 1960, Ahidjo lost because of this regional aspect of his party. It should be noted that Okala (the Cameroon Socialist Party) brought him the votes of Bafia (the Centre-South), Charles Assalé (the Cameroon National Action Movement, MANC), and those of Ntem (the Centre-South). Certain texts and certain exactions implicitly codified the monopolisation of the political scene by the CU ^[2].

The Prime Minister was able to show authority and demonstrate who was in charge. He proved to be a genuine statesman, jealous of his prerogatives, and a skilful and sometimes formidable tactician, which enabled him to put some of his opponents out of the political game. The discovery of the embezzlement of public funds for the benefit of Daniel Kemajou, for example, forced the latter into exile and permanently removed him from the political scene. Later, Ahidjo did not hesitate to have Chief Kandem, Minister of State, arrested and executed, and then to imprison Kanga. Following an assassination attempt in 1961, he reportedly announced the formation of elimination committees to physically liquidate all politicians in Cameroon if he himself disappeared. Ahidjo has imposed himself on the country's ruling class and has always been able to use this advantage. He was elected by the National Assembly as President of the Republic on May 7, 1960 ^[3].

The rise of the Cameroonian Union was the logical consequence of Ahmadou Ahidjo's position. It was first reflected in the absorption of a number of other parliamentary movements and groups. In October 1960, the MANC of the new Prime Minister Charles Assalé merged

with the CU. The Independent Peasants of Mathias Djoumessi did the same. In April 1961, Chief Kandem, Minister of State, also announced his intention to join the ranks of the CU. The *Front Populaire pour l'unité et la paix* (the popular front for unity and peace), a parliamentary group that brought together the Bamiléké deputies who had joined the CU, in particular Kanga, and of which Chief Kandem was the leader, broke up and finally merged with the party of Ahidjo. From then on, the Cameroonian Union's presence went far beyond the regional framework of the North and tended to become national ^[4].

This political turnaround of the party is quite visible on the electoral level because in 1956, the CU won only 34% of the votes cast and thirty seats, and in 1964, the CU won 93.5% of the votes cast and all the seats in the federal legislative elections. From then on, there was no obstacle to the march towards a single party, which took place in 1966.

b. The Organisation of the KNDP

The Kamerun National Democratic Party, for its part, was also marked by the imprint of its leader, John NGU Foncha, Vice-President of Western Cameroon. The party, which was initially close to the UPC ^[5], had a number of UPC members who had fled persecution in the Francophone zone in its early days. However, although Foncha supported self-government for the Southern Cameroons and reunification with East Cameroon, the UPC wanted full independence. The KNDP ended its relationship with the UPC in 1957. The party also split from the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), of which Foncha had previously been a member. The two parties became rivals because the KNC supported incorporation into Nigeria. The KNDP's position proved more popular, and they won the 1959 parliamentary elections, forcing the KNC into opposition. As the governing party, Foncha and his KNDP supported an independent United Cameroon, organised on a federal basis, which was approved by referendum in 1961 ^[6].

After the reunification, democracy in Cameroon declined significantly. The KNDP in West Cameroon and the CU in East Cameroon have established their respective hegemonies. However, although Ahmadou Ahidjo and the CU had full control in the East, the KNDP initially did not enjoy the same level of approval in the West. In the 1964 legislative elections, the KNDP received 78% of the vote, far from the CU's 98%. In 1965, Foncha was elected Vice-President of Cameroon, and he gave up his position as Prime Minister of Western Cameroon, as constitutionally the two positions were incompatible. As a result, Augustine Ngom Jua was chosen as the new Prime Minister after a confrontation that saw Salomon Tandeng Muna, an important figure in the founding of the KNDP, split from that party to form the Cameroon United Congress (CUC). Initially, this left the KNDP in a weak position, particularly with regard to the CUC, which had been the only effective party in the East. Eventually, the KNDP's dominance became more complete when Dr. Endeley's Cameroon People's National Party (CPNC) and the CUC were absorbed into the KNDP.

Finally, the two dominant parties merged into one, the CNU, in 1966, and almost immediately this group became the sole party in the unitary state. On April 27, 1962, in collaboration with Vice President Foncha, President Ahidjo set up a joint coordination committee (CU-KNDP) to find ways and means to merge the two parties into one large

national party open to all other political tendencies in the federation.

On May 21 and 22, 1966, this coordination committee, which became the National Working Committee on September 1, 1964, decided on the principle of creating a vast political grouping at the federal level. On June 11, 1966, the delegations of the UC and the KNDP, as well as the delegations of the CUC (Cameroon People's National Congress of Dr Endeley), two rival parties of the KNDP, decided to dissolve their respective parties. This was done on August 6 by the CUC; on August 13 by the KNDP; on August 21 by the UC; and finally on August 27 by the CPNC, thus opening the way for the advent of the CNU, which came into being on September 1, 1966, a year and a half after the triumphant presidential re-election of 1965, in which the UC-KNDP list was the object of a veritable plebiscite^[7].

The centralisation of power, which began in February 1962 with the neutralisation of the main opposition leaders facing the CU, André Marie Mbida (Cameroonian Democratic Party, PDC); Marcel Eyidi Bebey (Cameroon Socialist Party, PSC); Pierre Paul William Hygin Emah Otu (Union des Populations du Cameroun, UPC legal); and Charles Henri Okala (Cameroon Socialist Union, USC), was reinforced with the proclamation of the single-party CNU, built around the CU^[8].

From then on, power was exercised within the framework of a highly authoritarian and centralised single-party presidential regime based on strict administrative, police, and military control. After having definitively conquered the state monopoly of coercion, the UNC governing bloc consolidated its political-administrative control by instituting the United Republic of Cameroon after the highly supervised referendum of May 1972, which put an end to the Federal Republic of Cameroon. From the above, it is obvious that the two political entities merged to become a single political party, which, from then on, animated the national political scene.

It was only with the political liberalisation of 1990 that shook French-speaking Africa after the Baule speech delivered by French President Mitterrand that many African countries, including Cameroon, reverted to a multiparty system. This new political moment gave birth to a slew of political parties, including the CPDM, SDF, UNDP, UPC, CDC, MDR, UDC, MLJC, PPD, AMEC, RDPF, and DIC^[9], all of which vied for political supremacy in Cameroon.

The Return of Multiparty Politics

The Western world democracy doctrine, otherwise known as the "East wind", that blew in Africa in the 1990s transformed political life in many African states in general and Cameroon in particular. Thus, Cameroon again returned to a multiparty system as a result of political liberalisation in the West. Besides the factors responsible, we therefore witnessed a proliferation of political entities in Cameroon, as discussed in this section.

1. Multiparty System following Political Liberalisation

The relevance of political party pluralism precedes the emergence and organisation of parties born of political liberalisation. Thirty-two years after the parliamentary session known as the "liberties session" of 1990^[10], which consecrated the law on multiparty politics, Cameroon has about 273 legalised political formations. Of this multitude of

parties, barely twenty are regularly active, while a maximum of ten compete for universal suffrage. The presidential party, the CPDM, dominates most of the political scene^[11].

a. The emergence and organisation of political parties as a result of political liberalisation

Since 1990 and the end of the single-party system^[12] the leaders of the parties have not changed. The CPDM is still led by its founder, Paul Biya. The SDF, the first opposition party, has also been under the leadership of Ni John Fruy Ndi since its creation in 1991, as have Bello Bouba's UNDP (since 1991), Louis Tobie Mbira's Cameroonian Democrats Party, heir to André Marie Mbida's former PDC (1991), and Nyoya's UDC (1991), to mention but a few examples. Very often, those who have a desire for change are obliged to create their own parties, unfortunately, to perpetuate this lack of alternation. Thus appeared the National Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP), led since its creation in 1995 by Ahmadou Moustapha, a former influential member of the UNDP. To this, we can add the multitude of parties founded by former members of the CPDM. The political field's diversification in terms of freedom of expression is more quantitative than qualitative, as the economic crisis appeared to be the only campaign and conviction argument of these parties.

In the 1990s, opposing meant questioning the single party, putting oneself on the outskirts of the field of legitimate or official political action, which was limited to the single party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Rally (CPDR). This is a real paradigmatic revolution because the opposition was stigmatised through rhetoric that equates multiparty politics with disorder and disunity and presents opponents as troublemakers^[13].

Despite the results of the last elections, which made the CPDM a sort of national or even inter-territorial party, it is still unfortunate that parties are still organised around the personalities of their leaders. There is a kind of personalization of power.

Traditional parties such as the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), and the Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC) have more than resisted the ruling party's machine, achieving a continuous presence in the national assembly and municipal councils since the first post-independence multi-party elections in 1992. Although some of them have lost ground, they have sometimes moved the lines despite their inferiority as elected representatives in the hemicycle. They continue to fight for an integral democracy and present themselves as an alternative to power in the political landscape in Cameroon.

In this changing political landscape, new political forces have emerged in recent years, including the Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon (MRC)^[14] and the Cameroonian Party for National Reconciliation (PCRN). Alongside them are other movements that have continued to make their way despite a generally unfavourable socio-political context. The renewal of the ruling class is a hope for the future. Apart from these parties that stand out, the rest, about 300 parties, are political formations without relief, many of which gravitate towards the CPDM, especially during elections and other major moments in the political life of the nation, to give themselves a certain existence^[15]. However, while the opposition has not been able to achieve political

alternation over the past three decades, it is worth noting that it had a majority in parliament at the end of the 1992 legislative elections, obtaining 92 seats against 88 for the ruling party. The CPDM negotiated alliances to consolidate its majority in the National Assembly before definitively reversing the trend since then. Many opposition activists and supporters considered this act a betrayal and either abandoned politics or moved closer to the CPDM, which they had intended to overthrow ^[16].

All in all, the return to political pluralism has brought notable progress on the political, economic, social, and cultural levels. Significant developments have been noted in various areas, particularly with regard to individual and collective freedoms. Despite resistance, Cameroonian democracy is being built and refined, even if citizens identify less and less with political parties because of partisan interests. Political culture is an achievement that must be consolidated. This suggests that the next elections should reinforce this commitment to freedom and democracy.

b. The Relevance of Political Party Pluralism

Despite some structural and non-structural challenges in the democratisation process, political parties contribute equally to the promotion of democracy in Cameroon.

However, in view of the programmatic indigence that these parties have shown and continue to show, one will deny these contributions. The debate on whether Paul Biya should leave or not has remained the main issue in the partisan debates. It is obvious that the number of legalised parties per year peaks as elections approach (whether municipal, legislative, or presidential) ^[17]. Very often, the people's interests give way to personal interests, and those for whom a political party must fight are forgotten. The concern is all the greater because, to thwart the boycott call by the opposition parties, the CPDM political party did not hesitate to go into alliance with some potential or newly created political parties. Indeed, on February 7, 1992, Paul Biya announced on television, to the astonishment of the audience, that he was making 500 million CFA francs available to those political party leaders who agreed to participate in the elections ^[18].

Beyond the financial lure, the lure of ministerial posts ended up destroying the presidential ambitions of the Cameroonian opposition, which confined itself to simple disputes over mayoral and deputy seats. The public daily *Cameroon Tribune* no. 5247 noted that the success of candidate Paul Biya in the presidential election of October 11, 1992, was due to several parameters, including the effectiveness of the presidential majority. This majority was formed on the eve of the electoral campaign following negotiations between the CPDM, the Movement for the Defence of the Republic (MDR), and about fifteen non-radical opposition parties ^[19]. The objective was for Paul Biya to benefit from wider support than that of his militants alone.

When one recalls the results of the said presidential election, which gave Paul Biya the winner by 39.97% of the votes against 35.96% for his immediate rival, Ni John Fru Ndi, one realises that a union of the opposition would have probably led to an alternation. At the end of the day, it must be said that, whatever the camp, a political proposal remains truly serious only if it is based on a strong argumentative construction ^[20].

However, if the opposition has not been able to achieve political alternation over the last three decades, it should be noted that it had a majority in parliament at the end of the 1992 legislative elections, obtaining 92 seats against 88 for the ruling party. The CPDM negotiated alliances to consolidate its majority in the National Assembly before definitively reversing the trend since then. Many militants and sympathisers of the opposition considered this act a "betrayal", and either abandoned politics or moved closer to the CPDM, which they had intended to overthrow ^[21].

All in all, the return to political pluralism has brought notable progress on the political, economic, social, and cultural levels. Significant developments have been noted in various areas, particularly with regard to individual and collective freedoms. Despite resistance, Cameroonian democracy is being built and refined, even if citizens identify less and less with political parties because of partisan interests. Political culture is an achievement that must be consolidated. This implies that the next elections should reinforce this commitment to liberty and democracy ^[22]. It is against this backdrop that the next section examines the weaknesses of political parties in the democratisation process in Cameroon.

2. Weaknesses of the Political Parties

Despite the existence of several political parties in Cameroon, on observation, one realises that the political life of Cameroon is active around very few political parties. These are the ruling CPDM, UNDP, SDF, CPNR, UDC, FNSC, MDR, and USM, all represented at the national assembly. The other parties are only active during electoral periods. In addition, there are other aspects that weaken the effectiveness of multiparty politics in Cameroon. These include the technicalities of political parties and the inconsistent use of political platforms.

a. Party Politics based on Ethnicity

After independence, Cameroon, which until then had a multiparty system, plunged into 24 years of single-party politics before returning to a multiparty system in the wake of the democratisation processes that are trembling Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. What is to be deplored is that some of the political parties, such as the UPC, CRM, and SDF, to name a few, remain very regionally and ethnically organised. This then leads to the conclusion that no political party, except for the CPDM to some extent, has a national base.

In the 1960s, for example, Mbida's PDC grouped the Etons and Ewondos, while the UPC grouped the Bassas, Doualas, and Bamilékéés, all depending on changes in the party's leadership. Until the 2018 presidential elections, the parties reflect their leaders: the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) is generally described as a Beti party; the Social Democratic Front (SDF) is the party of the Anglo-Bami; the Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) is the party of the Fulani, or the northern ethnic group; the Cameroon Populations Union (UPC) is assimilated to the Bassa ethnic group, and the Movement for Democracy and for the Republic (MDR) to the Kirdi community. Ethnicity is instrumentalised for political calculations in order to occupy positions of power in the ruling order. This ethnicisation is also detectable in the behaviour of voters. Thus, membership in a political party

depends not on economic or religious conditions but on ethnicity ^[23].

Until recently, a phenomenon was observed where the populations of the North-West and the West Regions voted mostly for the SDF, while those of the Centre-South voted mostly for the CPDM in previous presidential, municipal, and legislative elections ^[24]. This could lead to the conclusion that the political field in Cameroon is dominated more by ethnic than ideological affiliation. Even though Law N°90/56 of December 19, 1990, on political parties prohibits authorising a party that undermines national integrity, especially through all kinds of discrimination based on tribes, provinces, linguistic groups, or religious denominations, one realises that, in practice, the terms of this law are not always respected ^[25]. This situation weakens and jeopardises Cameroon's political parties. Instead of promoting common issues within the parties, the partisans indulge in antagonisms, divisions, betrayals, and scheming of all kinds. Ahmadou Sehou, in his analysis of the functioning of opposition political parties in North Cameroon, recognises that they are characterised by their ethnic membership. In this regard, he emphasised that the instrumentalisation of ethnic groups has led to the diversion of the masses from common regional issues, to the reawakening of identity-based quarrels, and to the undermining of social peace. For him, ethnicity and micro-regionalisation are part of this essentially clientelistic posture ^[26].

In the 1992 presidential election, Paul Biya obtained 94.82% of the votes in the South, his region of origin, and 39.17% of the votes cast nationally; Maïgari Bello Bouba, 50.42% in the North, and 19.21% of the votes cast at the national level; John Fru Ndi, 86.30% in the North-West, or 35.96% of the votes overall; and Adamou Ndam Njoya, 17.58% in Noun (Western Region) among the Bamoun and 3.622% of the votes at the national level. As for Jean-Jacques Ekindi, he obtained 0.679% of the votes, while Ema Ottou had 0.545% of the votes cast. A certain evolution of these trends was nonetheless noted in the last elections of 2011. These saw Paul Biya win with 77.98%, or 3,772,527 valid votes ^[27]. This could also be justified, not by the end of the regionalisation of parties but by the multiplicity of candidates (in total, 23), which left the voter with an embarrassment of choices. Faced with this situation, maintaining power in place often remains the least painful solution in a context where opponents appear at the whim of the poll. If ethnicisation appears to be a weakness of the political alternative because it undermines national integrity and social peace, one wonders about the use of political platforms.

b. Inconsistent use of Political Platforms

The use of political platforms is a Western-inspired reality that Cameroonian political parties sometimes try to copy, but with many weaknesses and clumsiness. In the aftermath of the 2011 presidential elections, in which Paul Biya was re-elected for a seven-year term, a group called the G7 was formed that brought together the leaders of the opposition political parties. This coalition fell apart after one year. Indeed, the three resigning political parties include the UDC of Adamou Ndam, the Alliance of Progressive Forces (AFP) of Ben Muna, and the Cameroon Democratic and Development Party (PADDEC) of Jean De Dieu Momo. They accused the SDF, the leading party of the

parliamentary opposition, of having made a deal with the ruling CPDM party at its eighth congress in October 2011 ^[28].

These three parties are therefore creating another grouping called the Republican Pact. It remains to be seen whether this new coalition will last long enough to achieve the expected results. It is not enough to invite other opposition parties, civil society, and other forces of the nation to mobilise in order to fight for the liberation of the Cameroonian people bruised by 30 years of misery and oppression, as the supporters of the Republican Pact are asking ^[29]. The opposition should rather come out of its amateurism and finally propose strong arguments that would aim at improving the living conditions of the Cameroonian people so as to attract their sympathy in the ballot box and kick out Biya's supremacy or bring a political alternative to Cameroon.

3. Political Repressive Measures

In order to domesticate the destabilising capacities that democratisation could generate for the ruling bloc, the operators and actors of the regime have relatively loosened the established frameworks of coercive management of political change. President Paul Biya relied on the less hostile actors of the opposition and protest groups, such as Celestin Bedzigui, Louis Tobie Mbida, and Martin Nseth, to forge the Tripartite Conference (between October 30 and November 13, 1991), which saved the systemic recourse to repression in the critical context of 1991 between January and April ^[30].

The negotiations that imposed this avatar of the Sovereign National Conference made it possible to evolve towards an institutional formula of development favouring the reduction of the use of violence and coercion in the opposition between the social movement of the dead cities and the counter-movement based on the operational commands. Several laws were adopted with a view to side line the various opponents. In addition to maintaining the ban on the activities of the UPC, Ordinance No. 62/0F/12 of March 12, 1962, on the repression of subversion in Cameroon further curbed the expression of individual freedoms.

These actors and operators of the Cameroonian governing bloc paradoxically used state means of symbolic violence linked to the law to avoid resorting to the active use of sovereign coercion, as when, in March 2017, the Cameroonian central power relied on the governor of the Littoral region, Ivaha Diboua, to counter the will of the fiery SDF deputy Jean-Michel Nintcheu to mobilise in Douala on the Anglophone crisis. In this regard, it was a matter of using administrative powers to ban public meetings or demonstrations on the grounds of endangering public order in order to avoid a possible mass mobilisation that could lead to repression that would be difficult to manage politically ^[31].

President Biya and the members of the Cameroonian governing order have effectively used an art of political-administrative normalisation, an art of putting things in order and in order, in order to get Cameroonian citizens accustomed to "the foreclosure of political violence" in the sense of electoral civility. Thus, after the often politically fraught (rough and violent) operations of the electoral cycle from 1992 to 1997 (especially between March 1992 and January 1996), and despite the recurrent controversies over

the proper conduct of elections between 1997 and 2013, the political and institutional operators of the Cameroonian governing bloc have nevertheless succeeded in regulating the political game in such a way as to relativize the recourse to coercion in electoral situations. Other weaknesses of the opposition like “cross-carpeting”, “multiplicity of parties”, and “politics of the stomach” remain well noted in the Cameroonian political landscape.

The Search for Political Supremacy in Cameroon

After about twenty years of occupying the political space, it is time to take stock of the situation so as not to continue to slide into a dead end. We note that only one political party (CPDM) dominates the political scene in Cameroon. It is therefore necessary to show the mechanisms by which this party manages to maintain this hegemony.

1. The Institutional Hegemony of the CPDM

The hegemony of the CPDM on the Cameroonian political scene is an undeniable reality. This stronghold can be justified both by the weakness of the opposition parties and by the party's control over the country. It is not an exaggeration to say that this party is a national superpower whose manoeuvres, however innocent, distort the ability of other political parties to move.

For example, at a time when we are talking about registration on electoral lists, the CPDM seems to be in the best position to convince its voters to register insofar as its representatives in the localities are, for the most part, executives of the high state administration. Similarly, the balance of representation within the assembly has become too asymmetrical. Besides that, there are not enough representatives of the opposition parties in the national assembly to ensure that their counterbalancing role is effectively checked^[32].

It is therefore important that Cameroonian political pluralism, if it wants to consolidate its democratic vocation and achieve a better balance of representation, review both its internal and external strategies. This would ensure that the opposition is not crushed by the underrepresentation of the majority. Examples can be multiplied to show this superpower. The fact that the president of the CPDM party is also the head of the executive occasionally causes confusion. The powers granted to him as head of the executive by the constitution necessarily influence his relationship with the other parties. These relations appear to be those of dependence and even domination. While the predominance of the CPDM cannot be denied in parliament, it must be recognised that the failure of the opposition political parties to act collectively contributes to maintaining this state of affairs^[33].

2. The Failure of the Opposition Political Parties to Act

The main characteristic of opposition political parties in Cameroon is that they are deficient in terms of strategies and do not propose any real alternative to the people. Indeed, when they have something to propose to the electorate, there is a real end to ideologies, as they all propose the same thing. The real strategies for the conquest of power are almost non-existent, except for the hasty mobilisation of the population on the eve of elections without any prior political education. The Cameroonian opposition must get out of its amateurism if it wants to embody a credible alternative.

Although they face many difficulties, especially the administrative obstacles that hamper their activities, they should not indulge in complaining. Rather, they should find solutions to circumvent these obstacles and propose a plausible alternative to the people^[34]. The attitude of the opposition is simply to criticise the government and not to build ideologies that could improve the living conditions of Cameroonians. As much as it makes claims against the governing system, it should introspect to identify its flaws and inadequacies in order to make the necessary corrections. After twenty years of occupying the political space, it is time to take stock of the situation so as not to continue to slide into a dead end.

3. The Association of certain Opposition Parties with the Party in Power

The political strategy of the Renewal regime consists of a dialectical combination of authoritarian decompression and authoritarian restoration. It is to expand the ruling factions by skilfully using co-optation in opposition circles as a “power retention” technique and by associating former anti-government operators with governing lines (legitimate or illegitimate) of accumulation. The association of opposition personalities such as Augustin Frédéric Kodock, Paul Dakole Daissala, Ahmadou Moustapha, and Issa Tchiroma Bakari and their associates or party mates with government coalitions massively dominated by Paul Biya's ruling and directing bloc is not gratuitous^[35].

These are techniques of attestation of authoritarian democratisation and hegemonic democracy^[36] under which the National Renewal co-opts opposition political operators to limit their potential to democratically challenge the perpetuation of President Biya's rule. In so doing, the Cameroonian ruling bloc works to curb the competitive capacity of these political operators so as to subjugate the dynamics of democratisation to the objectives of post-monopolistic reproduction and renewal of the control of post-colonial state institutions of power. The regime's actors thus inscribe the opposition forces in a logic of secondary and marginal participation in executive power. The governing group has resorted to learning the politics of coalition government, associating politicians from the Movement for the Defense of the Republic (MDR), the UPC, the UNDP, or the FNSC with different government teams between April 1992 and March 2018^[37].

In doing so, the National Renewal works to impose the belief in a consistent and resolute activity of its regime to institute a pluralist and democratic dialogue with opposition formations that are invited to participate in the government and thus benefit from the consensual or collusive advantages that transactional leadership provides^[38].

Between November 1997 and January 1998, two delegations led by Joseph-Charles Doumba (secretary general of the presidential party) and Nyoh Samuel Wakai (president of the SDF's advisors' cell) sought political appeasement through the transactional dynamic. Thus, the democratisation of Cameroon, which took place between the 1990s and 2010, was accomplished by ruling political techniques that occasionally used “uncle-macoutization”, or unmeasured types of coercion^[39].

Conclusion

In the end, the work to which we were subjected dealt with the advent of multiparty politics and the quest for political

supremacy in Cameroon. From this, it appears that fifty years later, it is difficult to say that things have evolved in the direction of the expression of an effective multiparty system. Indeed, the CPDM, heir to the CNU, the former single party, is still very dominant. The multiplicity of opposition parties and their dryness in terms of programming leaves voters with no choice but to continue in a system that tends to swallow up all opposition leaders. The multiparty system thus appears to be only a façade and only serves the interests of the party leaders. Even if, as if to mitigate this fact, Mono Ndjana protested against Achille Mbembe, who sees the Cameroonian opposition as not very far apart from the power it is attempting to oppose. At the end of the day, the Cameroonian political scene has not seen many changes since the establishment of the single party in 1966. We still have the same political actors, the same structures, and the same personalities in power. The system established by Ahmadou Ahidjo has been perfected by adapting to the times with the view of achieving greater representativeness at both national and international levels.

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