



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Cameroon

Konings, P.J.J.

Citation

Konings, P. J. J. (2005). Cameroon. In *Africa Yearbook: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara in [..]*. Leiden: Brill. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4631>

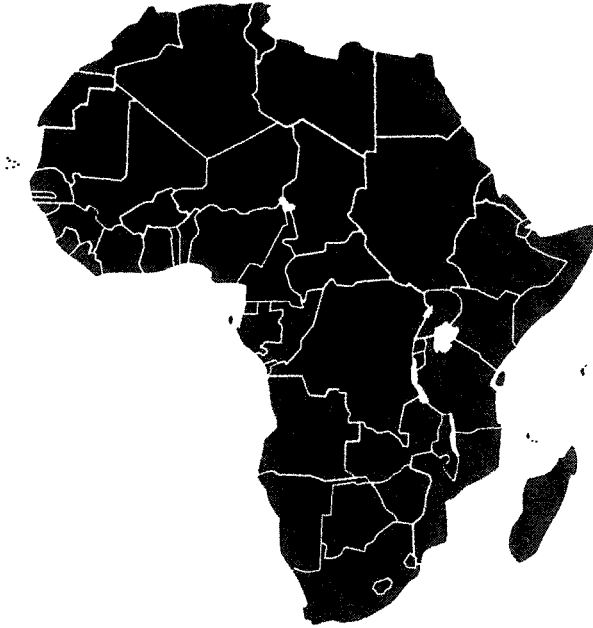
Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4631>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cameroon



In 2004, Cameroon maintained a remarkable degree of political stability, in spite of its stark ethnic and regional cleavages. One of the most significant events was the re-election of the incumbent Paul Biya as president. This will most probably result in the continuation of the national and international policies pursued since his assumption of office in 1982. A major setback for Cameroon's socioeconomic development was the government's failure to successfully implement the three-year poverty-reduction and growth programme prescribed by the Bretton Woods institutions and Western donors.

Domestic Politics

The major event on the political scene in 2004 was undoubtedly the **presidential election**. It was not until 11 September that a presidential decree announced the exact date of the election, namely 11 October. Presidential candidates had to deposit their files with the ministry of territorial administration and decentralisation (MINATD) for approval before 16 September. It was only then that the 'natural candidate' of the ruling 'Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais' (RDPC), the incumbent Paul Biya, in power since 1982, declared his candidature. In a television and radio message, the 71-year-old Biya justified his decision to run for another seven-year term on the basis of the popular appeals

by internal and external groups, which he interpreted as a mark of trust. The 'Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès' (UNDP) of Bella Bouba Maigari and the 'Union des Populations du Cameroun' (UPC) faction of Augustin Frédéric Kodock supported Biya's candidature, and together with the RDPC formed the so-called presidential majority.

The main **opposition alliance**, the 'Coalition pour la Reconstruction et la Réconciliation Nationale' (CRRN) was then also obliged to decide on its presidential candidate. The CRRN was formed in November 2003 following high-level negotiations between Cameroon's two largest opposition parties, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the 'Union Démocratique du Cameroun' (UDC). The coalition agreed to put forward a common candidate in the 2004 presidential poll and succeeded in attracting several smaller parties into its membership. During the course of 2004, it organised several protest marches for electoral reform, especially the computerisation of the electoral register, but it continued to postpone the selection of the 'unity' candidate for the presidential election until the last moment. On 15 September, a CRRN selection committee agreed upon the candidature of UDC leader Adamou Ndam Nyoya, whose electoral base scarcely extends beyond his home region, Bamoun. The SDF then withdrew from the coalition and fielded its own candidate, its chairman John Fru Ndi, who is the most prominent leader in anglophone politics and arguably the most significant opposition politician in Cameroon. The degree of division among the entire opposition was also visible in the number of candidates that submitted their files to MINATD before 16 September: 46, of whom 16 finally remained. Most prominent among those who were refused admission to the presidential race was Chief Pierre Mila Assoute, the former leader of the reformist wing within the RDPC, the so-called modernists. The reason given for his rejection was confusion over his party affiliation. Disappointed with the lack of support within the RDPC, Assoute resigned from the party before the presidential election and declared his candidacy for the presidency on a reform platform.

As was generally expected, the RDPC candidate Paul Biya proved overwhelmingly victorious in the 11 October election. On 25 October, the constitutional council proclaimed the **definitive results**. Biya was declared elected with 70.9% of the votes, followed by the SDF candidate Fru Ndi (17.4%), the CRRN candidate Ndam Njoya (4.4%) and the 'Alliance pour la Démocratie et le Développement' (ADD) candidate Garga Haman Adji (3.7%). The results were strongly contested by the opposition candidates, who insisted that the election was marred by massive fraud. The SDF claimed its candidate had won the election with 45% of the vote, against Biya's 43%. As in the 1992 presidential election, Fru Ndi accused Biya of "theft of his victory" and threatened to form a government of his own. Massive troop numbers were subsequently deployed to Bamenda, Fru Ndi's fief, to crack down on any demonstrations against the election results. On 3 November, Biya was sworn in as new president.

Election observers appeared to be divided on the conduct of the presidential poll. Some former US congress members and the delegation from the Francophonie described the elec-

tion as free, fair and without hitches “huge enough to influence the outcome of the poll.” Their view was supported by François-Xavier Mbouyom, the president of the national election inspectorate, the ‘Observatoire National des Élections’ (ONEL), and Rev. Joseph Mfochivé, president of the ‘Fédération des Églises et Missions Évangélique du Cameroun’ (FEMEC). Other observers, like the ‘Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme’ (FIDH) and the ‘Parti Socialiste’ (PS) of France firmly condemned the conduct of the election, pointing to ‘numerous irregularities’. In its report, the Commonwealth observer team stressed that “in a number of key areas the election process lacked the necessary credibility.” It, nevertheless, claimed that the election results broadly reflected the wishes of those who had been able to vote. The leaders of the Roman Catholic church made contradictory declarations on the poll. In an interview with ‘Radio France Internationale’ (RFI), Christian Cardinal Tumi, archbishop of Douala, who is a noted critic of the regime, condemned the election as badly flawed due to disenfranchisement of voters (only half the country’s estimated eight million eligible voters were on the electoral roll), multiple voting, stuffing of ballot boxes and intimidation of opposition representatives in the polling stations. Victor Tonye Bakot, archbishop of Yaoundé and president of the episcopal conference, by contrast hailed the election as a major step towards the consolidation of Cameroon’s democracy (31 October).

There was a minor **cabinet reshuffle** on 23 April, when Biya sacked four ministers. The changes were clearly aimed at assuaging public opinion because they targeted ministries whose difficulties had sapped the government’s popularity and credibility. Following the presidential election, on 8 December, another major cabinet reshuffle took place with a view to realising the newly elected president’s proclaimed ‘great ambitions’. The president not only increased the number of ministries from 32 to 36 but also appointed 60 ministers and secretaries of state – a record in Cameroonian history. Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge, who had been in office since August 1996, was replaced by Ephraim Inoni, the former deputy secretary general in the presidency. Both of them are Bakweri – an ethnic group in the South West Province of anglophone Cameroon. Some long serving ministers, like Joseph Owona, Hamadjoda Adjoudji and Meva’a M’Eboutou were sacked. The cabinet reshuffle clearly restored the Beti-Grand North hegemony: 20 members of the new cabinet are Beti, the president’s ethnic group, and 17 members originate from the Grand North. Anglophone Cameroon appeared to be the big loser. No less than five anglophone ministers were dismissed. Besides the prime minister, there was only one full minister from anglophone Cameroon in the new cabinet. The North West Province of anglophone Cameroon, the stronghold of John Fru Ndi’s SDF, was not given any ministerial position. Remarkably, the cabinet reshuffle re-created the super ministry of economy and finance in an effort to better coordinate the IMF-World Bank poverty-reduction and growth programme within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative (see below).

Under heavy pressure from international donors, the government began implementing some long-awaited **institutional reforms** to comply with the 1996 constitution. In its June-

July session, the national assembly passed legislation that set up a constitutional council, introduced a limited form of decentralisation in the country, and empowered the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF). The NCHRF, created by the Biya government in 1990, was to receive financial autonomy and freedom to publish annual reports by itself.

The **Anglophone problem** continued to worry the regime. In his new year's message, the chairman of the Anglophone secession movement, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Chief Ayamba Ette Otun, called for an anglophone boycott of the presidential poll. On 2 January, he and another SCNC activist, James Sabun, were arrested in Mutengene. Again, on 1 October, a number of SCNC activists and paper sellers in the Tiko-Mutengene area were detained, and were charged with distributing tracts that called for a boycott of the poll. The split within the SCNC, already evidenced by the existence of some six factions, was aggravated when a newly formed faction led by Thomas Nwanchan had talks with the minister of justice, Laurent Easo, on 21–23 January and allegedly was promised a huge sum of money should it agree to abandon the struggle. In January, Boniface Forbin, the publisher of 'The Herald', a private English-language newspaper, launched a new political party, the Justice and Development Party (JDP), whose main aim was to fight for the rights of anglophone Cameroonians. Standing as a candidate in the presidential election, he enjoyed little support in anglophone Cameroon. A great loss to the anglophone cause was the death on 12 July of Albert Mukong, a renowned opponent of the Ahidjo and Biya regimes, SDF founding father, ex-SCNC leader and retired human rights activist (former director of the Human Rights Defence Group).

After having been classified in two succeeding years, 1998 and 1999, as first on the list of **most corrupt countries** in the world, Cameroon has since somewhat improved its position. It moved up from ninth position last year to sixteenth position in the October 2004 report of Transparency International. While this may please the regime, the ordinary Cameroonian hardly noticed any amelioration in the widespread corruption.

Cameroon's **human rights record** has improved in recent years but remains flawed. National and international human rights organisations have reported renewed instances of violations of civil and political rights as well as of torture, and they continued to condemn the poor prison conditions in 2004. There was an increase in the number of incidents of repression and harassment against members of the opposition in advance of the presidential election. The CRRN's protest marches for electoral reform were mostly violently broken up. The chief of Balikumbat in North West Province, who is a RDPC parliamentarian and notorious for his ruthless behaviour towards political opponents, was held responsible by the SDF for the murder in August of John Kohtem, a local journalist and SDF district chairman. The SDF organised protest marches in Bamenda calling for a full investigation of the incident. Later on, 11 suspects were arrested, but the chief, who continued to deny any involvement, was not among them. Human rights activists have pointed out that the Kohtem murder follows the pattern of traditional chiefs' intimidating, torturing and detain-

ing opponents of the RDPC while the authorities turn a blind eye. Another serious civil rights violation occurred during the presidential poll, when Ndi Richard Tanto, an election observer on behalf of the 'Service Oecuménique pour la Paix' was brutally beaten up by the police when he expressed his disapproval of their obstructive behaviour at a Bamenda polling station.

The minister of communication, Fame Ndongo, made various attempts to control **the media** in the run-up to the presidential election. In January, he closed twelve independent radio and television stations in the southwest of the country suspected of supporting the opposition. In the wake of a widespread rumour in early June that President Biya had died, a rumour that caused great panic among the population for fear of imminent ethno-regional unrest and a violent succession struggle, he formed a special unit within his ministry to monitor internet sites and track media coverage of events in Cameroon. In September, he ordered private radio and television stations not to broadcast any propaganda campaigns by presidential candidates. Following the presidential election, he blamed the RFI for partiality in its coverage of the election.

Foreign Affairs

The relations between Cameroon and **Nigeria** continued to be determined largely by their border adjustments in the wake of the October 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict. Some progress was made on 13 July when there was an exchange of three border villages in the Lake Chad area. Nigeria acquired the villages of Bourba-Wango and Ndabakura and Cameroon took ownership of the nearby village of Narka. This latest border adjustment followed Nigeria's return of 33 villages near Lake Chad in December 2003. On that occasion, Nigeria received one Cameroonian village in return. However, the most delicate part of the ICJ verdict, the transfer of the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon, has still to be implemented. Under a working plan drawn up in 2003 and approved by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the heads of state of both countries during a tripartite meeting in Geneva on 31 January – the third of its kind – Nigeria was to withdraw its forces from Bakassi by the end of May. But at the 11 February session of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission – a body set up by the UN to implement the ICJ verdict and chaired by UN Special Representative for West Africa Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah – Nigerian members requested a revision of the ambitious timetable, and a deadline of 15 September for the transfer of sovereignty over the peninsula to Cameroon was agreed upon. Nonetheless, Nigeria failed to respect the new deadline, citing technical problems. Nigerian authorities referred particularly to the vehement resistance by the majority Nigerian population on Bakassi to Cameroonian rule. On 25 September, the Nigerian House of Representatives called for a UN-organised plebiscite on Bakassi to decide upon an eventual transfer to Cameroon. Although the presidents of both countries pledged their commitment to a peaceful solution to the problem at their meeting in Yaoundé on 28 July, Cameroon and the

UN began to express their impatience with Nigeria's foot-dragging over withdrawal from the disputed peninsula during the October session of the mixed commission in Abuja.

Relations between Cameroon and **Equatorial Guinea** sunk to an all-time low at the beginning of March following the expulsion of over 1,500 Cameroonians from Equatorial Guinean territory in the aftermath of an attempted coup. The government of Equatorial Guinea tried to justify its action by alleging that the mercenaries involved in the coup attempt had a training camp in Cameroon. Reports of the ill-treatment of expelled Cameroonians caused a public outcry in Cameroon, prompting President Biya to recall Cameroon's ambassador to Equatorial Guinea on 16 March. Following visits by the Equatorial Guinean minister of foreign affairs, Pastor Miche Ondo Bilé, and President Obiang to Cameroon on 23 March and 11 April respectively, calm was restored between the two countries. Relations between both countries have also been strained by Equatorial Guinea's apparent support for Nigeria in the border dispute with Cameroon.

The inauguration of the **Chad-Cameroon pipeline** in Kribi on 12 June was hailed by the Cameroonian authorities as a manifestation not only of growing cooperation between Cameroon and Chad, but also of regional integration. Present at the occasion were the following presidents: Biya (Cameroon), Déby (Chad), Obiang (Equatorial Guinea), Bozizé (Central African Republic) and, unexpectedly, Compaoré (Burkina Faso). There was also a delegation from Congo-Brazzaville. Conspicuously absent was President Bongo from Gabon, undoubtedly due to the longstanding rivalry between the two neighbours.

The official visit of King Mohamed VI of **Morocco** at the end of June was aimed at strengthening relations between the two countries. Other points of discussion were the Western Sahara question and the wish of Morocco to reintegrate into the continental organisation.

Cameroon's relations with **Western countries**, the major donors to its development programmes, are generally good. Despite regular allegations of corruption, human rights abuses and stalled political reforms, most Western donors believe that they can exert a positive influence through cooperation. France remains Cameroon's foremost ally in the West, while Britain and the US regard President Biya as an increasingly valuable asset as the 'war on terror' takes on a West and Central African dimension. There was a temporary cooling of the usually excellent relationship between President Biya and French President Chirac on the eve of the Iraq war, when the Cameroonian president visited the White House on 20–21 March 2003. Chirac was inclined to interpret this visit as a manifestation of Cameroon's support for America's pro-war policy and its shift from the French sphere of influence to the Anglo-Saxon world. This interpretation appeared to be confirmed when Biya made an official visit to London on 24–25 February 2004. Subsequently, Biya kept trying to no avail to mend fences with Chirac. Chirac refused him an audience during the two-day Niger Basin Authority summit in Paris in April. Nevertheless, there are signs that Chirac intends to be reconciled with Biya. The French president rushed to congratulate Biya after

his victory in the October presidential elections, even before the official proclamation of the results. In his congratulatory message, Chirac expressed the wish that Cameroon and France would strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation that have existed between both countries over the years.

In **Asia**, China and Japan remained the principal partners in Cameroon's development efforts. Japan made a major contribution to educational expansion in Cameroon, and China laid the first stone in the construction of a sports palace (6 August).

What is difficult to understand is the almost complete absence of any active Cameroonian diplomacy at the **sub-regional and continental level in Africa**. Since 1996, the year that he was elected head of the OAU in Yaoundé, President Biya has not attended any summit of the pan-African organisation. In July, he lived up to his reputation when he failed to attend the third summit of the African Union in Addis Ababa. Biya was also absent when Cameroon and the other five members of the CEMAC signed a non-aggression and solidarity pact in Brazzaville in January. The treaty, which included a mutual assistance clause, was intended to make CEMAC a more effective body for preventing conflict and maintaining peace and security in the sub-region, committing its signatories to contribute to an intervention force when the need arose. Biya's practice of sending subordinates to represent him at meetings of sub-regional and continental organisations was said to irritate his peers.

Socioeconomic Developments

The Cameroonian **economy** was marked by steady growth (5.1% in 2004) and a stable inflation rate (1–2%). Constant annual growth rates, however, are not yet reflected in a noticeable improvement in employment creation and poverty reduction. In fact, economists appear now to be less optimistic about the possibility of sustainable development than a few years ago. This is mainly due to the fact that Cameroon has failed to successfully implement the fiscal and structural adjustment programme prescribed by the Bretton Woods institutions and Western donors. On 30 August, Cameroon was declared 'off-track' by the IMF for its repeated failure to reach the 'point of achievement' of a three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, which was due to expire in December 2004. The immediate consequences were that the donor agencies could no longer open lines of credit to the government and that a substantial external-debt relief, amounting to \$ 2.3 bn (of an estimated total external debt of more than \$ 6 bn) could not be granted. Henceforth, a substantial proportion of the annual budgets must be used for external-debt service (28% in 2005). As a result of these developments, relations between the IMF and the Cameroonian government deteriorated to a point where the resident representative of the IMF returned to Washington unceremoniously. Following a meeting between the director of the African department of the IMF,

Abdoulaye Bio-Tchane, and Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge on 29 October, both parties declared themselves ready to resume talks. On this occasion, the IMF director made it clear that before a new PRGF could be negotiated, the government would be required to demonstrate its commitment to fiscal discipline, to expanding its non-oil revenue base and to structural reform – the main aims of the now-lapsed PRGF – by pursuing a staff-monitored reference programme for six months. An IMF mission was in the country from 3 to 18 December to assess the state of the economy and to discuss the modalities and content of a reference programme for 2005.

In its IMF-inspired **budget for 2005**, amounting to CFAfr 1,721 bn and approved by the national assembly on 17 December, the government made a determined attempt to raise its non-oil revenues by introducing new taxes and augmenting existing ones, including an increase in the value-added tax from 17 to 17.5%. Additional revenues thus acquired will be used for investment in priority sectors, notably health, education, infrastructure and rural development, as well as for servicing internal debts. Oil revenues, however, continue to contribute more than a quarter of the budget. The steady decline in crude oil production (from 35 m barrels in 2003 to 32 m barrels in 2004) was more than compensated for by high world market prices. Cameroon was also fortunate that in 2004 there was not only an increase in output but also favourable prices on the world market for its other main export commodities – timber, cocoa, cotton, aluminium and coffee.

One of the reasons for the IMF's growing discontent with the government's performance was the slow pace of the **privatisation process**. Privatisation, however, created a number of technical and sociopolitical problems, which were largely responsible for the lack of progress in this field. The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), a huge agro-industrial parastatal in anglophone Cameroon, was a case in point. The privatisation of CDC has been regularly postponed because of fierce resistance from the Bakweri ethnic group in the Fako division, who claim ownership of the CDC lands. The so-called Bakweri Land Claims Committee (BLCC) has brought up the matter with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and in May this commission urged President Paul Biya to cause the suspension of "the alleged detrimental alienation of the disputed CDC lands in Fako pending a decision on the matter by the African Commission." The CDC used to have four sectors: banana, rubber, palm oil and tea. So far it has been able to sell only its tea estates, to a South African holding company, Brobon Finex Pty in October 2002. The new company, the Cameroon Tea Estates (CTE), is also experiencing a variety of problems. On 15 January, the CTE management laid off 585 workers "in a bid to reduce the company's cost of production which has soared to an unbearable level." On 18 June, its first general manager, John Niba Ngu, who was soon fired by the company's board of directors for unilaterally sacking 23 top management staff appointed by Brobon Finex, instituted legal proceedings against CTE and the Cameroonian state in the International Court of Arbitration in Paris for his alleged entitlement to 5% of the company's shares, claiming CFAfr 7.8 bn as damage.

The American company, AES-Sirocco Corporation, which took over the 'Société Nationale d'Électricité' (SONEL) in 2001 for \$ 69 m, failed to keep its promise to guarantee an uninterrupted electricity supply in 2004. Various parts of the country suffered regular power cuts, leading to a reduction in economic output and various hardships to consumers. As a result, the American general manager, Helen Tarnoy, was replaced in March by a Cameroonian, Jean-David Bilé, the former assistant general manager. In July and August there were protests in Bamenda organised by the SDF against the 'excessive price' of electricity supplied by the company.

The Cameroonian government was happy when it finalised one of the most complex privatisations in 2004. On 28 June, the container terminal of the autonomous port of Douala was taken over at a price of about CFAfr 15 bn by a consortium consisting of Maersk (31%), Bolloré (28%) and certain Cameroonian enterprises.

Transport between anglophone and francophone Cameroon was seriously affected when a fuel tanker crashed on the Mungo bridge on 1 July, leading to the dramatic collapse of the historic crossing point between the two Cameroons and severe economic losses. It was not until 31 August that Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge officially opened a temporary bridge across the Mungo.

Long-standing problems at the **Postal Savings Bank** caused it to become insolvent in January. The bank could not pay its depositors, who were said to have CFAfr 45 bn with the bank. Although the bank controls only a small fraction of total deposits in the country, its difficulties affect many small savers, especially in the rural areas where there are few commercial banks. The government's rescue package for the bank involved the creation of the Cameroon Postal Company to take over the bank's operations and run it along with the national postal system, and the setting up of a special treasury account of CFAfr 60 bn to improve postal services and cover the bank's liability to depositors.

Following political liberalisation in the early 1990s, a large number of autonomous **teachers' trade unions** have emerged in the country and have been displaying a high degree of militancy. On 12 May, these trade unions and their federations decided to form a common front. The newly formed National Coordination of Teachers' Trade Unions in Cameroon is expected to tackle the enormous problems facing the educational sector, to fight for a substantial improvement in its members' deplorable living and working conditions and to force the government to adopt trade union legislation that conforms with international norms. One day after World Teachers' Day, on 6 October, the national coordination body initiated a series of intermittent strikes to bring pressure to bear on the government to increase the teachers' various allowances and to finally sign the texts bringing into effect the special teachers' statutes. On various occasions, **university students**, too, have protested against their increasingly precarious living and working conditions.

Western NGOs have become increasingly concerned about **environmental problems** in Cameroon. A major contribution towards responsible forest management was made at the end of April when the World Wide Fund for Nature coerced two foreign logging

companies, Vedeka and Decolvenaere, to sign an agreement ensuring that timber in Cameroon is exploited and sold with strict regard for the forestry law. In a report published by Global Witness in July, the level of over-exploitation by companies active in the forest sector was exposed.

Piet Konings