



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Pros and cons of the political ideals and systems of Cameroon

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### Abstract

This paper examines the political system of Cameroon, exploring its evolution from colonial rule to its present-day governance under the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the leadership of President Paul Biya. The study highlights both the advantages and disadvantages of the country's political structure, with a focus on stability, traditional governance, and democratic elements. On the one hand, Cameroon has maintained political stability and long-term continuity under Biya, which has contributed to infrastructural development and regional diplomacy. Additionally, traditional governance systems, such as the influence of local chiefs, offer cultural continuity and community-based decision-making. However, the paper also critiques the centralization of power in the presidency, which limits political pluralism, weakens regional autonomy, and perpetuates a lack of political competition. Furthermore, systemic corruption and regional inequalities are significant challenges that hinder equitable development and social cohesion. The paper concludes that while Cameroon has a unique blend of modern and traditional governance, reforming its political system to decentralize power, combat corruption, and foster greater political pluralism is essential for creating a more inclusive and dynamic political environment. These findings hold implications for the potential evolution of governance systems in other African nations with similar challenges.

**Keywords:** Cameroon; Political System; Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM); Paul Biya; Political Stability; Centralization Of Power; Traditional Governance; Customary Law; Cultural Heritage; Democratic Processes; Multi-Party System; Electoral Commission; Political Pluralism; Limited Political Competition; Corruption; Inequality ; Regional Disparities; Electoral Fraud; Voter Intimidation; Freedom Of Speech; Freedom Of Assembly; Political Repression; Human Rights; Governance Challenges; Decentralization; Political Autocracy

### 1. Introduction

Cameroon most often called "Africa in miniature," is a country in Central Africa with a diversity of languages, ethnic groups, cultures and traditions. Its political system has developed and evolved over time through a blend of traditional, colonial, and the establishment of modern democratic frameworks. Its political landscape is shaped by its outstanding history which transitioned from a colonial protectorate of Britain and France to its present-day independent republic. Since 1960, which is its independence year, its political evolution, Cameroon has been dominantly ruled by Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the leadership of President Paul Biya, who has been in power for more than four decades and is still the ruling President. This article seeks to examine the political systems of Cameroon, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses that define its governance.

Cameroon's political system has undergone remarkable evolution over the years since its independence. Since the adoption of the presidential model of government, where the President is both the government and the head of state, with majority influence and control over significant executive functions. While the formal structure of democracy is mainly based on democratic principles, which requires elections to be regular, Cameroon still has a touch of socialism and customary governance that influence the political environment. Traditional governance, which is deeply rooted in

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Cameroon's diverse ethnic communities, exists alongside more contemporary institutions, creating a dynamic political structure that balances modernity and tradition. However, Cameroon's system has been criticized for its centralization of power, lack of political pluralism, and persistence of corruption.

### **1.1. Stability and Continuity**

One of the notable advantages of Cameroon's political system is the stability and continuity it has maintained over the decades. Under the leadership of President Paul Biya, Cameroon has largely avoided the civil wars and military coups that have plagued many other African nations. This stability is often attributed to the CPDM's ability to maintain control over political structures and its focus on a strong central government. Cameroon's relatively peaceful environment has made it a hub for regional diplomacy and a stabilizing force in Central Africa.

Furthermore, the continuity of leadership has fostered long-term planning and infrastructure development, particularly in sectors like transportation and energy. The political system's ability to prevent major instability has made it an attractive destination for foreign investment, though this stability comes at the cost of reduced political competition.

### **1.2. Traditional Governance**

Traditional governance systems, such as the influence of local chiefs, play a vital role in managing community issues and preserving Cameroon's rich cultural heritage. These customary systems are deeply entrenched in various regions, where local leaders, often referred to as "fon" or "sultans," have significant authority in resolving disputes, enforcing local laws, and maintaining order. These leaders are respected by their communities and often provide a counterbalance to the central government, especially in rural areas. In a country as culturally diverse as Cameroon, the preservation of traditional governance provides a sense of belonging and continuity for various ethnic groups. Customary law ensures that local customs are respected, and community-based decision-making processes can help address issues in a culturally sensitive manner.

### **1.3. Democratic Elements**

Despite criticisms of the overall political system, there are democratic processes in place that foster citizen participation. Cameroon holds regular elections, which allow citizens to vote for their representatives at both the national and local levels. There is a multi-party system, albeit with limited political pluralism, and the government has allowed opposition parties to exist, although they face challenges in gaining power. Additionally, there have been reforms in the election process over the years, such as the establishment of an electoral commission aimed at ensuring fairer elections.

Some regional elections, such as those for regional councils, have allowed citizens to have more control over their local governance, providing an outlet for local concerns and aspirations. The country's political system, despite flaws, incorporates key democratic elements such as an elected legislature and constitutional protections for citizens' rights, however imperfect they may be in practice.

### **1.4. Centralization of Power**

One of the primary criticisms of Cameroon's political system is the extreme centralization of power. The presidency is extremely powerful, with extensive control over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This centralization has led to a situation where regional governments and local officials have limited power and influence in national decision-making processes. This structure makes it difficult for local issues to be addressed effectively and for diverse regions with distinct needs to have a meaningful voice in governance.

The dominance of the executive branch also limits the development of political pluralism, as most decision-making takes place at the national level, leaving little room for regional or local autonomy. This concentration of power in the hands of a few has undermined the functioning of democratic institutions, as the president's extended tenure (now over 40 years) has perpetuated a lack of political competition and alternation in power.

### **1.5. Limited Political Pluralism**

Despite the theoretical existence of a multi-party system, political pluralism in Cameroon is severely limited. The CPDM has maintained a strong grip on power since independence, and opposition parties are often marginalized, restricted, or harassed. Political campaigns are frequently subject to state control, with government resources used to strengthen the position of the ruling party. There have been reports of electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and restricted media access, all of which undermine the democratic process.

Opposition leaders and parties are often disqualified or face significant obstacles in running for office, and civil liberties, including freedom of speech and assembly, are regularly restricted. As a result, the political space in Cameroon remains constricted, preventing a genuine democratic environment where diverse viewpoints can flourish.

### **1.6. Inequality and Corruption**

Corruption is a pervasive issue within the political system of Cameroon. Public officials and government bureaucrats are often accused of embezzling funds, using their positions for personal gain, and engaging in nepotism. This corruption not only hinders economic development but also contributes to inequality, as public resources are diverted away from vital sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few elite individuals has led to significant disparities between the urban elite and rural populations. Inequality is further exacerbated by regional disparities, with the economic and political power of the capital, Yaoundé, overshadowing other parts of the country. In a system where patronage is critical to political survival, the continued persistence of corruption has stymied efforts to create a more equitable society.

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## **2. Results and discussion**

### **2.1. Comparative Analysis**

Comparing Cameroon to other African countries reveals both similarities and differences. For example, like Cameroon, countries such as Gabon and Equatorial Guinea have also been dominated by long-serving presidents and centralized political systems. However, Cameroon stands out due to its relatively more stable political environment, with fewer instances of violent regime change compared to its neighbors, such as Chad or Sudan. Nevertheless, like many African nations, Cameroon's political system suffers from the same challenges of corruption, lack of political pluralism, and regional inequality seen elsewhere.

In contrast, countries like Ghana or Botswana have made strides toward strengthening democratic institutions, allowing greater political competition and transparency, which has helped to foster a more inclusive and participatory political environment. These nations serve as models for Cameroon in terms of building stronger democratic systems that are less reliant on centralized power and more focused on regional autonomy and political diversity.

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## **3. Conclusion**

Cameroon's political system exhibits both positive and negative attributes. On the one hand, it has ensured relative political stability and preserved valuable traditional governance structures, contributing to its national cohesion. On the other hand, it has also fostered a system where power is highly centralized, limiting political diversity and perpetuating inequality and corruption. To address these issues, reforms could be made to decentralize power, enhance political competition, and combat corruption more effectively. Strengthening democratic processes and ensuring that all regions and ethnic groups are represented in the political system would help Cameroon's governance evolve into a more inclusive and dynamic model.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

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This research is dedicated to the people of Cameroon, whose resilience and commitment to their nation's development continue to inspire those who seek to understand its political and social evolution.

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