

# **The Opposition and their performance of electoral power in Cameroon (1992 – 2007)**

**By George Ngwane**

## **Introduction**

The return to multiparty politics in Cameroon in 1990 was met with reluctance and resistance by the regime. Triggered by the events of 26<sup>th</sup> May 1990, that led to the defiant launching of an Opposition party (Social Democratic Front – SDF), multipartyism and eventually Opposition parties became institutionalized following the Law of Association of 19<sup>th</sup> December 1990 (Law No. 90/056) In spite of this reform to accommodate multipartyism, the main kernel of democratic transition to put enabling structures in place evaded the political establishment in Cameroon. Unlike other African Countries like Benin (1990), Mali (1991), Zaire now Democratic Republic of Congo (1991) and South Africa (1994) that planned a democratic transition, the leadership of Cameroon resisted then reluctantly gave in to a form of transition whose outcome fell below general expectations. Such a context only encouraged the emergence of a new elite in the political arena, next to the old ones who switched over, for the occasion, to the virtues of political pluralism (Tidjani Alou 2002: 28). The setting up of Constitutional Conferences, Sovereign National Conferences and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as modes of transition was meant to provide new political and economic paradigms suited to the demands of pluralism. As discussion forums, transition modes served as the balm of national reconciliation and catharsis as well as avenues to put in place reforms and structures that will change the qualities of lives of the masses.

When President Paul Biya therefore declared on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1991 at the National Assembly that “*Je l’ai dit et je le maintiens, la conference nationale est sans objet pour le Cameroun* (I insist that the National Conference is baseless in Cameroon), Cameroonians were stunned into both rage and revolt.

Biya’s refusal to yield to popular demand for a national conference was partly due to the opposition parties’ misconception of the purpose of such a conference. Their perception was not one of over hauling the obsolete monolithic apparatus but one of impeaching and eventually stripping Biya of legitimate

power. Cameroonians therefore missed a rare opportunity to reassess the gains of independence and to examine the expectations of a democratic renewal. What they (Cameroonians) instead got was a Tripartite Conference consisting of the ruling party, the opposition and the civil society. This conference that was held from 30 October – 18<sup>th</sup> November 1991 proved to be futile as national aspirations became mortgaged on the altar of parochialism. The main weakness of this conference was the quasi-obsessional temptations of the ruling party, which wanted rules and results for its prime benefit alone.

So without any concrete rules on the exigencies of multiparty politics, without a change of the monolithic constitution, without a defined role of the opposition and without a clear cut line between the party and state, Cameroon set forth on the journey of electoral democracy (Ngwane 1996. 175).

This paper seeks to assess the impact of electoral democracy so far especially in terms of the performance of the Opposition between 1992 to 2007, evaluate the internal shortcomings of Opposition parties and make a projection of a vibrant democratic space that will go beyond routine elections to speak to the issues preoccupying the Cameroonian masses.

## **Elections Database**

### **1) PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

#### **a) 1<sup>st</sup> March 1992**

Registered Voters	4.019.562
Total Votes	2.435.443
Voter Turn out	(60.6%)
Invalid /Blank Votes	238.200
Total Valid votes	2.197.243

<b>Party</b>	<b>Number of seats</b>
Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM)	88
National Union For Democracy and Progress (UNDP)	68
Movement of the Defense of the Republic (MDR)	18
Union of Cameroon Populations (UPC)	06

Two opposite parties, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC), boycotted the poll.

**b) 17 May 1997**

Registered Voters	4.000.000 (approx)
Total Votes	Not Available (N/A)
Voter turnout	Not Available (N/A)

<b>Party</b>	<b>Number of seats</b>
Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)	109
Social Democratic Front (SDF)	43
National Union For Democracy and Progress (UNDP)	13
Union of Cameroon Populations (UPC)	05
Movement of the Defense of the Republic (MDR)	01
Union of Cameroon Populations (UPC)	01
Liberty Movement of the Cameroon Youth (MLJC)	01
Vacant	07

The Supreme Court cancelled the election results in seven constituencies due to serious irregularities. On 3 August 1997 further conducted to fill the vacant seats. The RDPC won all of the seats, thus increasing its level of representation in the national assembly

**c) 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002**

Registered Voters	Not Available (N/A)
Total Votes	Not Available (N/A)
Voter Turnout	Not Available (N/A)

<b>Party</b>	<b>Number of seats</b>
Cameroon People's Democratic Movement	149
Social Democratic Front (SDF)	22
Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC)	05
Union of Cameroon Populations (UPC)	03
National Union For Democracy and Progress (UNDP)	01

The Supreme Court nullified the result for 17 seats on account of various irregularities. By-elections were held on 15 September to fill the vacant seats.

**d) 22 July 2007**

Registered Voters	5.000.000 (aprox)
Total Voters /Voter Turnout	not Available

<b>Party</b>	<b>Number of seats</b>
Cameroon People's Democratic Movement	140
Social Democratic Front (SDF)	14
Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC)	04
National Union For Democracy and Progress (UNDP)	04
Progressive movement (MP)	01
Vacant	17

The Supreme Court nullified the result in five districts (affecting a total of 17 seats) on account of various irregularities. By-elections to be held on 30<sup>th</sup> September to fill the vacant seats.

**2 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS****a) 11<sup>th</sup> October 1992**

Registered Voters	4.195.687
Total Votes	3.015.440
Voter Turnout	71.9%

<b>Party</b>	<b>% of Votes</b>
Paul Biya (CPDM)	39.98%
John Fru Ndi (SDF)	35.97%
Bello Bouba Maigari (UNDP)	19.22%
Adamou Ndam Njoya (UDC)	3.62%

**b) 12 October 1997**

Registered Voters	Note Available
Total Votes	Not Available
Voters Turnout	81.4%
Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	3.422.055

<b>Candidate (party)</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>% of votes</b>
Paul Biya (CPDM)	3.167.820	92.57%
Henri Hogbe Nlend (UPC)	85.693	2.50%
Samuel Eboua (MDP)	83.506	2.44%
Albert Dzongang (PPD)	40.814	1.19%
Joachim Tabi Owono (AMEC)	15.817	0.46%
Antoine N'Denabbu (RDPF)	15.490	0.45%
Gustave Essaka (DIC)	12.915	0.38%

The election was boycotted by three main opposition parties – the Social Democratic Front (SDF), National Union for Democratic Progress (UNDP, Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC) and. a small Party, The Union of African Population (UPA)

#### **c) 11 October 2004**

Registered Voters	4.657.748
Total Votes	3.830.272
Voters Turnout	82.2%
Invalid/Blank Votes	72.051
Total Valid Votes	3.758.221

<b>Candidates (party)</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>% of votes</b>
Paul Biya (CPDM)	2.665.359	70.92%
John Fru Ndi (SDF)	654.066	17.40
Adamou Ndam Njoya (UDC)	168.318	4.48
Garga Haman Adji (ADD)	140.372	3.74
Justice Mouafo (NPC – BUSH)	14.915	0.40
Yondo Mandengue Black (MNSD)	13.601	0.36
Ancient Ekane (MANIDEM)	13.290	0.35
Fritz Pierre Ngo (MEC)	13.122	0.35
Jean Michel Tekam	12.785	0.34
Victorin Hameni Bieleu (UFDC)	11.920	0.32
Boniface Forbin (JDP)	10.542	0.28
Djeukam Tchameni (MDI)	10.539	.028

Jean-Jacques Ekindi (MP)	10.158	0.27
Hubert Kamgang (UPA)	7.508	0.20
George Dobgima Nyamndi (SLC)	6.730	0.18
Gustave Essaka (DIC)	4.996	0.13

## **Analysis**

Statistics show that in 1992, Opposition parties put together won 92 seats as opposed to 88 for the ruling party giving the opposition a 51.1% in Parliament. From the face of it, this would have given the Opposition a strong weapon to initiate reforms through the Assembly but for the fact that one of the Opposition parties (Movement for the Defense of the Republic) decided to form a coalition with the Ruling party. That kept the opposition in a minority status in the National Assembly.

In 1997, the Opposition had 64 seats of the 180 scoring a 35.5%.

In 2002 the Opposition had (before the rerun for 17seats nullified by the Supreme Court) 31 seats of the 180 scoring a 17.2%.

In 2007 (pending results of the rerun for 17seats nullified by the Supreme Court) the Opposition had 23 seats scoring a percentage of 12.7%

So up from **51.1% in 1992**, the Opposition has plummeted in Parliamentary configuration to **17.2% in 2007**.

With regards to Presidential elections, the Opposition put together obtained a 58.81% as opposed to 39.98% for the ruling party of President Paul Biya in 1992. Therefore, were the Opposition parties to present a single candidate, they would have won the Presidential elections of 1992. Nonetheless the election results were shrouded in controversy with other sources giving opposition party (SDF) leader (Fru Ndi) 37% and ruling party (CPDM) 36%.

So the fragmentation of the Opposition flawed electoral system and lack of a run-off electoral procedure deprived the Opposition from winning the first multiparty Presidential elections in Cameroon in 1992.

In 1997, the Opposition put together scored a dismal percentage of 7.42 as opposed to 92.57% for the ruling party. Part of the reason for this ridiculous performance by the Opposition was the boycott of these elections by three main Opposition parties (Social Democratic Front, National Union for Democratic Progress and the Cameroon Democratic Union.)

In 2004 the Opposition put together scored 29% as opposed to 70.92% by the Ruling party.

So from a **58.81%** score sheet in Presidential elections in 1992, Opposition put together waned in its performance by half scoring **29%** in 2004.

**Therefore for both Parliamentary and Presidential elections since 1992, the Opposition has shown a steady decline.**

### **Categories of Opposition parties**

The circumstances that led to the emergence of Opposition parties in Cameroon were predicated on the twin phenomena of challenge and change. Challenge was based on the need for the establishment to reform itself and give access to alternative voices while change was the political agenda that meant to reverse the ruling oligarchy in favour of a new dispensation (regime change).

Initially like in most African countries, the resurgence of multipartyism in Cameroon was borne out of the hunger for change hence the liberation theology preached by most Opposition parties became the democratic mantra.

In Cameroon the slogan “*Biya must go*” was used by Opposition parties as a template for grabbing power. But even the most radical of the Opposition failed to go beyond what Celestin Monga has termed “slogans in line with populist; illusions”. In other words transforming the liberation theology into a structural ideological philosophy became a problematic among Opposition parties. Since the quest for political pluralism is reduced to multipartyism, Opposition parties are expected to be distinct from and autonomous of the ruling party (Olukoshi, 1998:19)

With no clear constitutional provision on the status of Opposition parties in Cameroon (unlike a country like Mozambique where the Opposition is treated as a government in waiting) Opposition parties in Cameroon have through various electoral processes given themselves a political identity.

#### **a) The Opposition of liberation**

It is the SDF approach that focuses on a zero-sum arrangement. Referred to as “external” opposition by Tangie Fonchingong, this category of Opposition is formed outside the ruling constellation and often within the background of deep-seated disagreement, conflict and protest. It sees itself as a symbol of change and

fighters to the end for a radically alternative system (Tangie, 1998:125). Its political mindset is based on “*Biya must go*” strategy.

**(b) The Opposition of cooptation**

It is characterized by the desire to share power and the prebends or spoils of power with the ruling party. Attracted by the obnoxious notion of broad based governance or government of national unity, this category of Opposition poses no fundamental challenge to the regime. It shores up the regime and seeks mainly to ensure its own share of the spoils rather than presenting radically different proposals. (Tangie. 1998: 125). The mind-set of such opposition is based on a win-win situation. All through the electoral process in Cameroon, the NUDP, MDR, MLJC and UPC (which in 1948 was the only Opposition of liberation in Cameroon) are Opposition parties that are of this nomenclature. Its political paradigm is based on “*Biya must share*” strategy.

**(c) The Opposition of proposition**

It is characterized by a strong ideological outfit, working more on ideas rather than revolutionary propaganda. Emerging from the mass base within the same party, the Opposition of proposition seeks mainly for a redress of grievances either in terms of party policy or party performance. It may sometimes break away as splinter group but more often than not stays within as mainstream members disagreeing at their own risk and peril, with party focus. The case of the Progressive or Modernist wing of the CPDM comes out with its lists of grievances presented in “The White Book” written by Chief Milla Assoute. The recent (31st August 2007) defiance by the CPDM Parliamentary candidate Honorable Adama Modi Bakary to contest for the post of Speaker of the National Assembly against the party hierarchy’s choice (Honorable Cavaye Yegue Djibril) is another case in point. The political mindset of this group is based on “*Biya must change*” strategy.

In sum it has been easy to determine the Opposition of conviction from the Opposition of convenience within the electoral process in Cameroon with the latter always taking a strong numerical rise albeit with a weak ideological stance over the former. In the end we have witnessed an Opposition that has over the years become vehicles for the maximization of the interests of political

opportunists and not frameworks for mobilizing popular forces for genuine change (Tangie: 1998:127). This has had a toll on our democratization which according to Francis Nyamnjoh has served mainly as a face powder, used to justify reactionary propaganda by the ruling party and its acolytes and revolutionary propaganda by the Opposition (Nyamnjoh 1999:115).

### **Shortcomings of the Opposition**

It is generally accepted that the playing field in Cameroon does not militate in favour of Opposition parties winning elections. With no genuine **independent/neutral persons** within an Independent Electoral Commission, the elections have been reduced to a two horse race between the CPDM and the RDPC. In effect there are a lot of exogenous factors that deprive the Opposition from starting the election race on the same block as the ruling party- disenfranchisement, nonchalant international community, low civic participation, mass rigging, sterile political debates occasioned by the trading of accusations of illegitimacy between the ruling party and the Opposition parties etc (Fonchingong,2004: 35).

But apart from these, there are failures that are inherent in the modus operandi and structures of Opposition parties in Cameroon. They include:

#### **(a) Lack of internal democracy**

The first thing one notices is that all Opposition parties have as Chairmen or Presidents those who founded the parties. So for close to two decades the same people who created or founded these parties are in the helm of affairs (Ngwane 2004:21) Paradoxically, most of these Opposition members were hell bent on pushing the ruling party leader Paul Biya out of power when he was “only” eight years as President of the country (1982-1990) and “only” five years as Chairman of his CPDM party (1985-1990).

The case of the main Opposition party (SDF) is a cause for concern. Apart from the tenacity syndrome of its leader, Article 8.2 of the party’s constitution raises controversy on the notions of dissent versus debate and discipline versus dictatorship. Only recently (August 11, 2007), five elected mayors were dismissed for not complying with the caprices of the National Investiture Committee. Before this, the axe or guillotine of Article. 8.2 has fallen on militants who oppose

policies or performances of hierarchy .Yet it must be recalled that the SDF was founded “to rid the Cameroonian society of a system that deprives people from being free men or otherwise punishing them for daring to think freely, associate freely, assemble peacefully and freely”.

This long stay of leadership at the helm of all Opposition parties has resulted in party clientelism, personality cult, and the personalization of power.

### **(b) Lack of an Opposition leadership consensus**

Since the creation of Opposition parties, attempts at instituting an identifiable, credible and consensual leadership and program have failed. Unlike, other African countries that have a clear leadership within the Opposition (Gabon, Zambia, Kenya, Mozambique, Zimbabwe) the case of Cameroon in which Ni Fru Ndi would have easily stood out as the rallying point Opposition leader owing to his mass grass roots support has been met with contempt for his relatively “low academic” baggage and mistrust for his Anglophone origin. Fru Ndi’s own inflexibility and temper tantrums have sometimes not helped matters.

### **c) Broken strategic alliances**

Alliances formed before elections get broken even before the elections take off. The “Directorate” “Union for Change” Allied forces for Change”, “Coalition for National Reconciliation and Reconstruction”, have not been as coherent and program-focused as for example that of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) by the Opposition in Kenya, set up in the 2002 Presidential elections, resulting in a victory of 62.2%. A new Opposition alliance of unknown faces has just been created (27<sup>th</sup> August 2007) in Cameroon calling itself “Dynamique pour le Changement”

### **d) Disconnection with democratic development**

Most Opposition parties concern themselves with what happens during elections and not what takes place between elections. In other words, within the five years that span municipal/ legislative elections and the seven years that span Presidential elections, the Opposition parties do not connect with the population on issues of daily survival (power cuts, fuel price hike, inflation, water outage, unemployment, industrial action etc) and on government policies (IMF policies,

sub regional or continental disaffection etc). This is compounded by the poor performance of some of elected Opposition party representatives in local councils and the National Assembly.

Therefore to quote Achille Mbembe, it is necessary for the opposition to define a real strategy towards a social struggle (social democracy and democratic development) that is adapted to the present Cameroonian conditions (Mbembe, 2004:12)

#### **e) Lack of linkages with Activist Elements of civil society.**

One of the most important groups in the pro-democracy movement is the activist elements in civil society, which include the human rights lobby, minority rights groups, movements for the empowerment and participation of marginalized groups such as women and youth, students and labour the Church and the media. (Ake, 2000:135). ) The Opposition in Cameroon built organic linkages with these groups in the early 90s but the relationship has strained due to so many reasons. Yet it was the youths that gave power to the Opposition leader (Abdoulaye Wade) in Senegal; it is the feminization of power policy that Paul Kagame of Rwanda survives on, the Opposition leader Morgan Tswangirai of Zimbabwe feeds on workers union (himself a product of it) and most recently on the church.

### **Projections before 2011**

The real battle for the sustenance of democracy in Cameroon lies on what happens between now and 2011 (when President Paul Biya is expected to constitutionally quit office).

#### *i) Positive Peaceful avenue*

Contrary to other hypotheses put forward, I take the risk of misjudgment to say that Paul Biya is actively preparing his smooth political exit. His desire for his party to have a crushing majority in the National Assembly is neither to elongate his tenure of office nor to return the country to a one party system It is, in my opinion, to leave the political scene secured enough that his peers do not witch hunt him. He is creating a dominant party state to forestall all Opposition success after him. This has been the strategy of Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Olesugun Obasanjo of Nigeria and it is being noticed with Thabo Mbeki of South

Africa. Biya's thawing of his erstwhile icy relations with Nigeria and Gabon only testify to his smooth political exit. Infact if the present constitution (18 January 1996) is to be tinkered it may not be Art.6.2 that specifies the seven year and last tenure of office for Mr. Paul Biya but Arts. 6.4 (a) and (b) that would return the "successor-ship" of the Presidency back to the Prime Minister in case of vacancy of the former. And the "successor-ship" hypothesis provides the Opposition with a beacon of hope. That is if Biya's successor does not draw enough party consensus it may force some of the Opposition of proposition militants in the CPDM to join camps with the Opposition of liberation, Opposition of cooptation and activist elements of the civil society to win fresh elections. It happened in Kenya when Daniel Arap Moi chose Uhuru Kenyatta as the KANU party leader giving way for the joint Opposition alliances (NARC) to win. If Biya's successor within the CPDM party does not command the same aura, he (party successor) may lose elections to the Opposition like it is presently happening in Sierra Leone.

### **Neutrality and Independence**

Of course for this to happen, President Paul Biya would have to assume a neutral states man status (something which has been recurrent in his recent speeches) and not interfere with the 2011 Presidential elections. He has always wanted to be remembered as the person who brought democracy to Cameroon and it would be in his interest to leave the scene with that legacy.

Ahmed Tedjan Kabbah of Sierra Leone, in spite of his lackluster performance as President of Sierra Leone for over ten years has been praised for his non- interference in the 2007 electoral process which have kept the Opposition in the lead. Mathieu Kerekou of Benin and Ould Ahmed Taya of Mauritania are of this same democratic school.

The second condition would be for ELECAM (the election body that will manage the 2011 elections) in spite of some of its shortcomings to recruit people of courage, independent stance, integrity and sterling patriotic qualities to manage the body. In other words it is not the name of the institution that makes it independent it is the people chosen to manage it.

Thirdly, the electoral law needs to be revised to allow **Independent Candidates** to run for Presidential elections without the infamous 300 signature clause.

Related to this would be the need for a second round or run-off electoral process to be introduced during the 2011 Presidential elections. Still in this connection the civil service, the judiciary and the army must be depoliticised (Mbile, 1990:14). I also propose that a law be enacted before 2011 that gives a special status (immunity, allowances etc.) to ex-Presidents of the country.

Fourthly while the elite should resist the peddling of compensatory development advantages by parties, the Cameroonian electorate would have to rise above its present inertia blind party adherence and refuse to be cheaply bought over by allurements and material inducements (bags of rice and bottles of beer etc). The youth in particular must see the long term advantage of building a sustainable development policy for Cameroon rather than trivial immediate interests that border on greed and gluttony. This means constant political education should be provided by activist elements of the civil society with funding assistance from Development Agents.

Lastly and to quote Peter Vakunta “the democratic impasse in Cameroon is not just systemic; the personalities running the show are obsolete and should be gotten rid off without further ado. Anything short of that would be tantamount to political suicide for as all”. (Vakunta, 2005)

#### *ii) Negative Peaceful avenue*

If the positive peaceful avenue fails, at best, activist elements or prodemocracy movements in the civil society may throw caution to the wind and shed all party influences to embrace the streets for a repeat of the 1991 Ghost town experiences but this time on their own terms. This happened in Guinea this year (2007) when the populace foisted their agenda on the political class. At worse militocracy may rear its head as used to be the case when civilian chaos and predatory governance jeopardise genuine democracy and national unity in Africa.

### **Conclusion**

In spite of all external odds, the Opposition in Cameroon still survives, albeit waning in numerical strength, controversial in ideological focus and riven with leadership tussles. This is symptomatic of the liberal democratic choice most African countries adopted rather than a peculiar disease with our Cameroonian political system (Ngwane 2004:18). From all indications, the fruits of the second

independence have still not been borne and may be a new democratic transition bringing all active forces together in an **ALL Cameroonian Congress** may help chart a new course that would go beyond routine elections and usher in bold, creative and indigenous development programs that resonate with human and infrastructural development. Even where the pendulum of leadership has oscillated between ruling party and the Opposition in most African countries (recycled prebendalism) the masses have still not felt the impact of people driven programs and nation building projects.

It is therefore my hope that what happens between now and 2011 (and this means every patriotic Cameroonian should speak up and out) would lay a solid democratic foundation that would give birth to a leadership that shall inspire citizen confidence and national solidarity so that Cameroonians can put behind them the two decades of the elections of rigging and ranting and the politics of party clientelism and state failure.

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***George Ngwane is Executive Director of the civil society organisation in Cameroon called AFRICAphonie. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Forum "Political Dialogue" on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2007, Yaoundé, Cameroon***