

The continuing crisis in Cameroon: A case study in politics and economics

David Drew

The continuing crisis in Cameroon: A case study in politics and economics

David Drew

Abstract

A political and economic crisis developed in Cameroon in 2016 and resulted in a wave of strikes and demonstrations. The aim of this paper is to identify the political and economic factors which led up to these events. Economic and social statistics from the UNDP, the World Bank, the Cameroon government and other sources were used. The lengthy presidency of Paul Biya, widespread corruption and the continuing influence of France and China were all important political factors. The mismanagement of the economy and the effect of IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes led to high levels of poverty exacerbated by poor health and education services resulting in low standards of living. These all contributed to the crisis.

1. Introduction

A political and economic crisis developed in Cameroon in 2016 and resulted in a wave of strikes and demonstrations. The aim of this paper is to identify the underlying causes of the protests and the size and importance of different political and economic factors, particularly the latter. The argument is that these issues came together as a 'perfect storm', which led to the current troubles.

Cameroon is a country with eight Francophone and two Anglophone regions, a country where English and French are official languages. Although, like Canada, Cameroon is nominally a bilingual country, this does not work very well in practice. Latent tensions reached their peak in November 2016 when English-speaking lawyers went on strike (Foretia, 2017). At a protest by lawyers, the police used tear gas. Shortly after these protests, the teachers joined the strike and the also the university students. These strikes have continued since then bringing the Anglophone areas to a standstill (Chinje, 2017).

The government's reaction was ruthless and repressive; videos appeared on social media showing the police raiding students' halls of residence and allegations were made that female students were beaten and sexually abused (Daily Telegraph, 2017). In January 2017, an attempt was made to seal off the Anglophone regions by cutting off the internet, a situation that lasted three months. In March 2017, the three leaders of the protest movement were arrested and put on trial before a military tribunal, facing a possible death penalty.

By way of introduction we should briefly consider four political sets of factors which also contributed to Cameroon's problems: the presidency of Paul Biya, the continuing influence of France, corruption at both high and low levels and the involvement of China (Drew, 2019).

Paul Biya (born 1933) became President of Cameroon in 1982 and is still the President now at the age of 86. His ethnic origin is Bèti, he comes from South Central Cameroon and he was educated at the Institut des Hautes Etudes d'Outre-Mer in Paris where he obtained a Higher Educational Diploma in Public Law.

It is claimed that Biya used a number of tactics to remain in office (Pigeaud, 2011). He created fake political parties (as was the case with Mobutu in Zaire) in order to spread confusion and dilute the

effectiveness of the opposition: there were 253 political parties by 2011. In order to consolidate his position Biya also frequently offered top positions in government to opposition leaders (as well as radical intellectuals).

In a country with a large number of ethnic groups Biya was able to use the technique of 'divide and rule' to create the 'ethnic state', maintaining ethnic divisions within the country to help him manage any opposition. The Bèti held all the key positions in government, in government administration, in state corporations, in the diplomatic corps and in the army, giving Biya all the support he needed.

Secondly, France is also important. Colonialism was not the end of the involvement of France in Cameroon and still plays an important economic and political role providing support to Paul Biya over a lengthy period. This assistance is based not on an equal partnership between the two countries but a patron-client relationship with Paris as the hub. In October 1992, Biya narrowly won the Presidential election, with 40% of the poll as against 36% for John Fru Ndi, the opposition leader. It is generally believed that there was widespread fraud during this election. A state of emergency was declared after the election and Ndi was put under house arrest.

The result of this was shock within the international community and donor communities reduced their aid, Germany by 40%. In contrast, France continued its support. President Mitterand congratulated Biya on his election success and doubled its aid within a two year period (Emmanuel, 2012). As well as this, France wrote off Cameroon's outstanding debt. The reason France provided this support was that Mitterand was keen for Biya to remain in power and this was more important to him than multi-party democracy. Cameroon was and still is a source of raw materials and minerals for France and, at the same time, an export market for French goods.

Thirdly, Corruption at high and low levels is a regular feature in the country. In 1998, 1999 and 2002 Cameroon was said to be the most corrupt country in the world. Currently, Transparency International ranks Cameroon at 130 from 168 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2016). They say that: 'Cameroon is greatly affected by corruption. A strong executive branch, lack of judicial capacity, and widespread poverty in the country are some of the factors that have made corruption, in the form of bribery, extor-

tion, tax evasion and electoral manipulation, so rampant. Cameroon shows little progress in modernizing its fiscal system or making it transparent’.

Recent surveys show that bribery is commonplace and this ranges from gaining school admission to settling fines for traffic infringement. Nearly 70% of people say they have paid bribes to the police and 20% have given bribes to get medical attention at public hospitals (see the Transparency International, 2013; Afrobarometer, 2015).

The President controls almost all high-level appointments in government right down to appointments at a local level, the Senior District Officers (SDOs) and the traditional rulers. A major issue is that the judiciary and the executive (the government) are not separate or independent and Paul Biya appoints all the judges and the prosecutors (Transparency International, 2015). When it comes to public sector contracts the president handles procurement for all public finance projects himself (World Economic Forum, 2015).

Now that Mugabe has stood down in Zimbabwe, Biya has been described as one of the three most corrupt dictators in Africa, alongside Mswati in Swaziland and Mbasogo in oil rich Equatorial Guinea.

Finally, China is also important in the economy of Cameroon. This offers consumers in Cameroon short-term benefits but undermines long-term sustainable development (Amin, 2015). There is a two-way traffic of trade here, to the detriment of Cameroon. China is pleased to import oil and minerals whilst Cameroon is a market for cheap manufactured goods from China and its policies have contributed to unemployment.

In foreign policy terms, China has become a counterforce to the Western countries that have been long been involved in West Africa. Loans from China have reduced the dependence of Cameroon on the World Bank and the IMF without attaching conditions for human rights and anti-corruption policies. In the early 1990s when Biya’s government almost collapsed, many nations spoke out about the repression of activists and the need for a multi-party state. China, by contrast, said nothing.

Cameroon has not built up a manufacturing infrastructure. It produces rubber but has no shoe industry, the clothing industry is

not functioning and cheap motor bikes have ruined the taxi business. The fishing industry has collapsed and fish is imported from China. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that China, whilst profiting from trade, is only making a minimal contribution to the economic development of Cameroon.

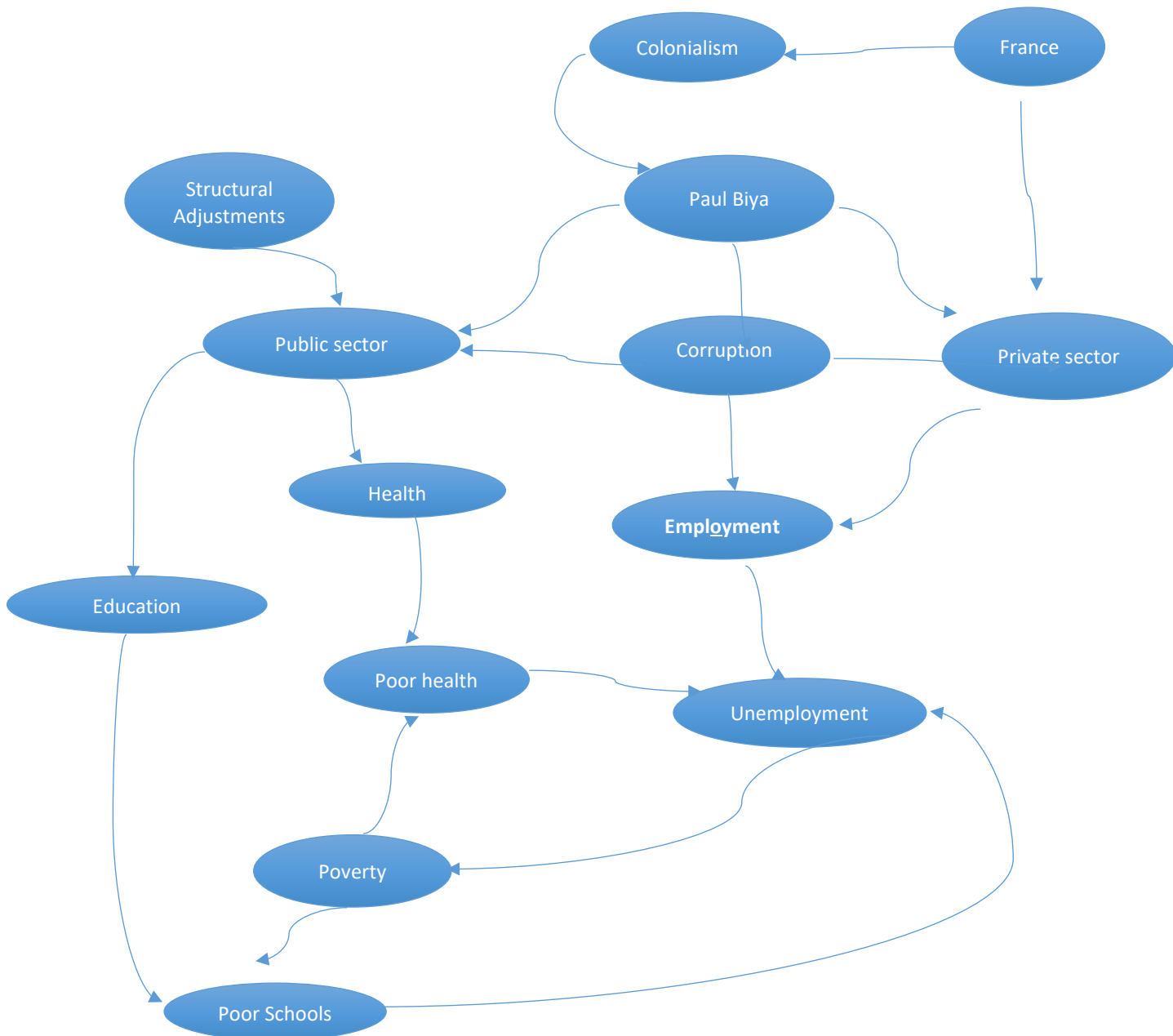
1. Mismanagement of the economy

In the introduction we have focussed on the history and politics of Cameroon and the influence of France and China. In the next section, we will examine how these factors have affected the economy and the lives of ordinary citizens. We can see best these links in an influence diagram, a type a diagram that shows cause and effect and the bonds between them in a diagrammatic way (Figure 1).

At the top of the diagram, we have France, the UK, the World Bank and the IMF (called externalities in an influence diagram like this). These factors have had a major impact on Paul Biya and the government. His own influence extends to governance and policies in the public and private sector and the control of corruption.

In this paper, I am trying to show how these factors interact. The argument is that they all bring pressure to bear on the ordinary citizen, each of whom experiences these pressures in a different way. The subsistence farmer, the plantation worker and the unemployed youth are at the mercy of these forces and has little influence upon them. These economic and social factors are the focus of this section. Doula is an industrial city, a busy and dirty town with shop fronts lining the roads. There are massive cargo ships and tankers in the harbour and a huge bridge spanning the river. A second bridge is under construction with the letters 'Lafarge' on the side, evidence that the French are involved in the construction. Traveling north you reached banana plantations that stretch for many kilometres alongside the road. The influence of the French is never far away.

Figure 1: A model for the Cameroon economy, an Influence diagram



In order to study the economy, we need a perspective on the successes and challenges of Cameroon. Although our main interest is in Cameroon, no statistic is of interest on its own and we need some comparisons with other countries. The 2017 UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) is a robust data set that is useful here because it sets out indicators for all 189 countries of the world. I will discuss the income indicator here (and return to the table later).

Table 1: The Human Development Index and its components, 2017

HDI rank	Country	Colonial rule	HDI	Life Expectancy (years)	Mean years of schooling (years)	GNI per capita (PPP \$)
14	UK		0.922	82	12.9	39,100
24	France		0.901	83	11.5	39,300
140	Ghana	British	0.592	63	7.1	4,100
151	Cameroon	French	0.556	59	6.3	3,300
157	Nigeria	British	0.532	54	6.2	5,200
182	Mali	French	0.427	59	2.3	1,900
184	Sierra Leone	British	0.419	52	3.5	1,200

Source : United Nations Development Programme.
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018>

Three groups are set out (Table 1). The first group, the UK and France, are the countries that originally colonised West Africa. The per capita incomes of both of these is nearly \$40,000. Secondly, we have a group of middle-income West African countries that includes Ghana, sometimes considered a success story in the region, and Nigeria. The incomes of these countries are 25% and 50% higher than Cameroon, respectively. Finally, we have Mali and Sierra Leone that are amongst the poorest countries in the world. Some of these countries came under French rule and others were under British rule. The most

striking fact is that the Britain and France have incomes that are almost ten times higher than those in Africa, although we have perhaps become used to these levels of inequality between the rich and poor world.

A subtler point is that Cameroon has a per capita income lower than that of some of its neighbours and lower than one might expect from the HDI and we can reasonably ask whether this is a statistical aberration or a fundamental difference. Below we will discuss some of the economic developments in the last three decades that might explain this.

According to Tambi, the economic development of Cameroon can be divided into three periods; economic growth (until 1985), an economic crisis (1986-94) and a recovery period (after 1995; Tambi, 2015). There was real growth in the economy between independence and 1985. During the 1980s, Cameroon was a middle-income country and one of the most prosperous countries in the whole of Africa; the discovery of oil off the coast to the south in the late 1970s was very important and a petroleum industry developed that led to an annual GDP growth rate of 8.7% in that period until 1985.

Unfortunately, commodity prices of petrol, cocoa, coffee and cotton dropped in the mid-1980s and this, together with economic mismanagement, plunged Cameroon into recession; the GDP per capita fell by 60% between 1986 and 1994. Oil was both a blessing and a curse. The country became over dependent on imported goods and failed to develop its domestic economy and agricultural production, for example in fisheries, poultry and clothing (Amin. 2012).

The economy was at this point in great difficulty, Biya's government turned to the IMF and the World Bank on three successive occasions in 1988, 1992 and 1994 and Structural Adjustment Programmes were agreed (SAPs). These in general consist of loans to countries experiencing economic crisis (many of them in Africa at that time). Borrowing countries have to implement certain policies in order to obtain the loans. The aim of these policies is to provide stability and develop a free market economy and the mechanism for this is the privatisation of state enterprises, currency devaluations, reduced government spending (austerity) and the elimination of food subsidies.

In the field of development economics, many academics have been severely critical of the approaches used by the World Bank and the IMF. There are two warring groups of economists here. The neo-classical thinking is that governments should not intervene and unobstructed free market is the best and most 'efficient' way to successful development. The opposite approach (neo-colonial dependency theory) is set out in the work of Ha-Joon Chang at Cambridge University (Chang, 2003; Chang, 2008). His view is that major developed countries use interventionist economic policies to get rich and then forbid other countries from doing the same. His 2002 book, 'Kicking Away the Ladder' argues that the unregulated free market approach is rarely successful in producing economic development and that growth does not come about from privatisation. Cameroon has adopted the free market approach.

The conditions placed on the country receiving loans have been widely criticised for a number of reasons (Hickel, 2017). The professed reason for these policies is to reduce debt but unfortunately the results is often to drive countries into debt still further. As well as this, countries in Africa need to develop higher levels of industrialisation but the SAPs often cut back these developments in a drastic way. Furthermore, privatisation means that the government sells off state resources and the shareholders receive the benefits of any success, not the public.

One of the most serious and far-reaching issues is that there is little attention to social sector effects and therefore little support for projects that most affect the poor, projects on employment, health or education.

Many of these negative factors came into play in Cameroon. In 1994, Biya devalued the currency (the CFAF) by 50% and this led to a decrease in the purchasing power of ordinary citizens when prices locally rose by 40% (Tambi, 2015). Secondly, there was an effect on agriculture. Given the fall in commodity prices, farmers abandoned large acreages of land under coffee and cocoa. Thirdly, the government cut the salaries of all public sector employees by over 60%. Fourthly, there was little or no investment in agriculture research or infrastructure. The government slashed public expenditure on education, roads, water supply, electrification and health and education provision remained poor. As a result, poverty increased both

in urban and rural areas. Whilst poverty was only 1% in Yaounde and Douala in 1983, ten years later it had risen to over 20% in both these cities (Amin, 2015).

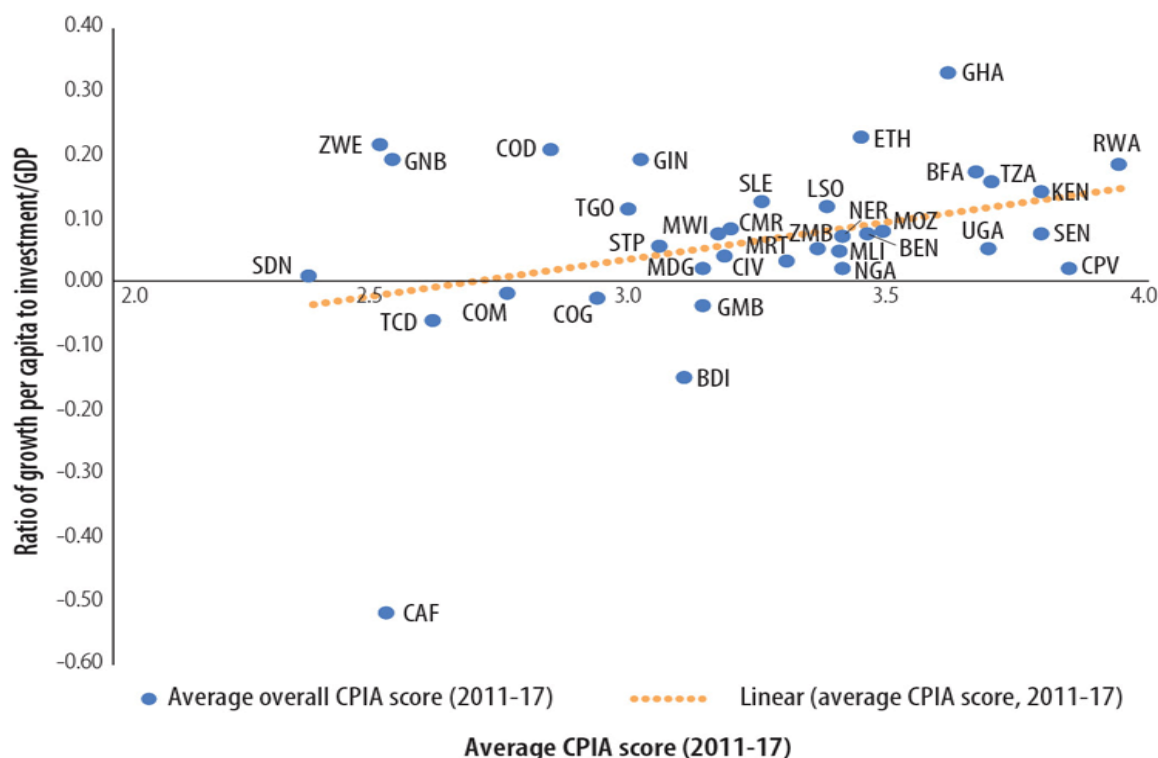
4.2 The economy now

To bring this up to date we see that France is still the largest source of private investment in Cameroon and the largest source of foreign aid and President Biya is still making agreements with the World Bank and the IMF. An agreement with the IMF in the 2000s will mean that the government will privatise almost all private enterprises as well as the remaining banks. In the period since 1995, the economy has grown (in a modest way) and the rate of inflation has remained stable (Tambi, 2015).

Cameroon is not the only country in Africa with economic problems. The World Bank makes an assessment each year of the quality of the economic policies of each country, with an index (the CPIA score) covering four areas: economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public-sector management and institutions (World Bank, 2018). The Bank also assesses efficiency of investment. The chart shows that Ghana (GHA) has a high score on both measures. Cameroon (CMR) is about average for both variables and just above the regression line (Figure, 2). It is not the worst and not the best.

Whilst these trends are positive, the counter point is that the macroeconomic policies have been at a cost to ordinary Cameroonians and do not help the poor. Below are three relevant examples.

Figure 2: Investment efficiency by quality of economic policies (average CPIA score) for countries in Africa



Source: World Bank (2018)

Transport infrastructure is a continuing problem in Cameroon. As in every developing country, the need for good transport links, both for people and goods, is central to the development of a robust economy. Farmers need to get their produce to market. In Cameroon, the road network is extremely poor (so poor that it is cited on a current website on the world’s most dangerous roads with examples of dirt track roads and planked bridges www.dangerousroads.org). The port of Douala is an important example of the problems of shipping. In March 2018, a French forestry and wood company Rougier filed for bankruptcy blaming major logistical problems with shipping out timber for export (Businesslive, 2018). They said ‘The port has not been targeted for investment and has silted up considerably which is a problem for ships trying to get to the quaysides to pick up containers for export’. It is interesting to find then that a French company Bollore controls the port (along with the Danish company Maersk). French influence continues.

Secondly, the monetarist approach prioritises low inflation and fiscal restraint but this has resulted in chronically underfunded health provision. The numbers of doctors and nurses is insufficient and there are poor working conditions. Given that the skills of health professionals are very transferable, many doctors and nurses in Cameroon have moved overseas to work. This greatly undermines the fight against ill health and HIV/AIDs in Cameroon.

Thirdly, free market policies have benefitted companies based overseas more than those in Cameroon. This is the case in the banana industry. Cameroon ranks fifth in the world for banana production and first in Africa (freshplaza.com, 2017). However, their policies replicate some of the worst labour practices from colonial times. The two largest companies are 'La Fruitiere from Marseille' and the 'Cameroon Development Cooperation' (CDC), a subsidiary of the US company Del Monte. These companies declare their work as 'cooperative agricole', and because this is an aid programme, they pay no tax. Furthermore, the companies keep their labour costs low by paying monthly wages as low as 35 Euros for a 14-hour shift. Aircraft spray the plantation with pesticides, a practice that is not only dangerous for the employees but also for those living in the surrounding villages. Examples of tax avoidance, low pay and dangerous working conditions by foreign companies are common in Cameroon.

We have seen how the above factors affect the economy (the macro effects). We now need to see the effects of the economy on ordinary people and the contribution of this to the growth of poverty and inequality.

4.3 The crisis of poverty and inequality

Poverty manifests itself in many ways both in the city and in the villages and subsistence farmers in the rural areas are generally poor with a limited diet. They eat the things they grow, maize, huckleberry and cabbages. In the small towns, you see Irish potatoes and carrots for sale by the roadside. Due to the favourable climate and soil, they are enormous. They cook using wood, although it is not very healthy to do so, or charcoal, which is expensive. When we visit a restaurant in Bamenda at lunchtime, the food is basic, rice, beans and hot sauce. The police eat there and it is cheap.

We will consider the effects of the government on the lives of its citizens and provide up to date data on the health, employment and education systems for which the government is responsible. The measurement of poverty has been well researched in the UK and France (Lansley, 2015). Statisticians (and politicians) are attracted to two approaches, one using a poverty line based on income and the second an approach based on things people need to have for a reasonable existence, for example proper food and housing.

Table 2: The Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index, 2017

HDI rank	Country	Gross national income (GNI) per capita (PPP \$)	Multi-dimensional poverty headcount % (2016)	Number of poor 000s (2016)	Population below \$1.90 PPP a day % (2014)	Gender Development Index Group
14	UK	39,100				1
24	France	39,300				1
140	Ghana	4,100	28.92	7,798	12.0	4
151	Cameroon	3,300	45.40	10,097	23.8	5
157	Nigeria	5,200	51.95	96,623	53.50	5
182	Mali	1,900	78.11	14,056	49.70	5
184	Sierra Leone	1,200	76.49	5,657	52.20	5

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-MPI>

We return to the UNDP Human Development Index that we saw before (Table 2). This sets out indicators for 189 countries of the world using three dimensions. One is the probability of living a long and healthy life using life expectancy at birth, a second is an education measure using the mean number of years of schooling (for adults over 25 years of age) and the third is a measure of the standard of living using gross national income (GNI) per capita.

We are comparing three West African countries here: Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria. This shows that in income terms, Cameroon is doing less well than the other two. Cameroon ranks 151 on the HDI (from 189 countries) with a gross per capita income of only \$3,300, a life expectancy of only 59 and the mean number of years of schooling that is only 6.3 years (calculated for those over 25 years of age). Since primary school education is free and takes six years this suggests that many adults in the labour market have very little secondary education.

The income criteria currently used for all countries by UNDP is the percentage of households living on less than \$1.90 per day (Table 2). About one quarter of the population of Cameroon live in poverty using this definition (24%).

Table (3): Indicators in the new Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index

Dimensions of Poverty	Indicator	Deprived if living in the household where...	Weight
Health	Nutrition	An adult under 70 years of age or a child is undernourished.	1/6
	Child mortality	Any child has died in the family in the five-year period preceding the survey.	1/6
Education	Years of schooling	No household member aged 10 years or older has completed six years of schooling.	1/6
	School attendance	Any school-aged child is not attending school up to the age at which he/she would complete class	1/6

		8.	
Standard of living	Cooking Fuel	The household cooks with dung, wood, charcoal or coal.	1/18
	Sanitation	The household's sanitation facility is not improved (according to SDG guidelines) or it is improved but shared with other households.	1/18
	Drinking Water	The household does not have access to improved drinking water (according to SDG guidelines) or safe drinking water is at least a 30-minute walk from home, round trip.	1/18
	Electricity	The household has no electricity.	1/18
	Housing	Housing materials for at least one of roof, walls and floor are inadequate: the floor is of natural materials and/or the roof and/or walls are of natural or rudimentary materials.	1/18
	Assets	The household does not own more than one of these assets: radio, TV, telephone, computer, animal cart, bicycle, motorbike or refrigerator, and does not own a car or truck.	1/18

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-MPI>

A further measure of poverty is the UNDP Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index that utilises a set of indicators (Tables 2 and 3). The innovative aspect of this index is that it is based on the lack of essential items. The areas covered are, as before, health, education and standard of living (Alkire, 2018). This involves calculating a deprivation score (and a threshold value) based on having or not having certain things. For example, for health this includes having family members that are under nourished. For education, it includes having family members who have not completed many years of school. For standard of living, it includes electricity, drinking water and

sanitation but also the absence of a radio, a TV a bicycle or other assets.

These results show that 45% of people in Cameroon are living in deprived households according to these criteria (10 million people, Table 2).

We should keep in mind these two indicators. One says that 24% of people are living in poverty (on less than \$1.90 per day) and the other says that 45% of people are living in multi-dimensional poverty. Cameroon is a country that is rich in natural resources, in minerals and has rich soil. Why are people so poor? The question we might ask is whether things are improving and whether the government and other agencies are putting measures in place to reduce poverty. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case; the World Bank says that the reduction in poverty since 2007 has been slow and less than in other similar African countries (World Bank, 2015).

The data on average income per adult are shown in Figure 3 (and are slightly different from the data on average income per person shown in Table 1). This, together with the statistics on gross domestic product per adult shows the relative improvement in the 1980s, the crash in the 1990s and the slow recovery. (Information on income inequality, for example for the top 10% of the population, is not available on this database.)

Poverty and wealth go hand in hand and Cameroon has its share of multi-millionaires. Thomas Picketty and his colleagues have shown that during the colonial period, income inequality was already high in the colonies (including Cameroon) and much higher than in metropolitan France. European settlers at that time were rich (Alvaredo et al., 2018).

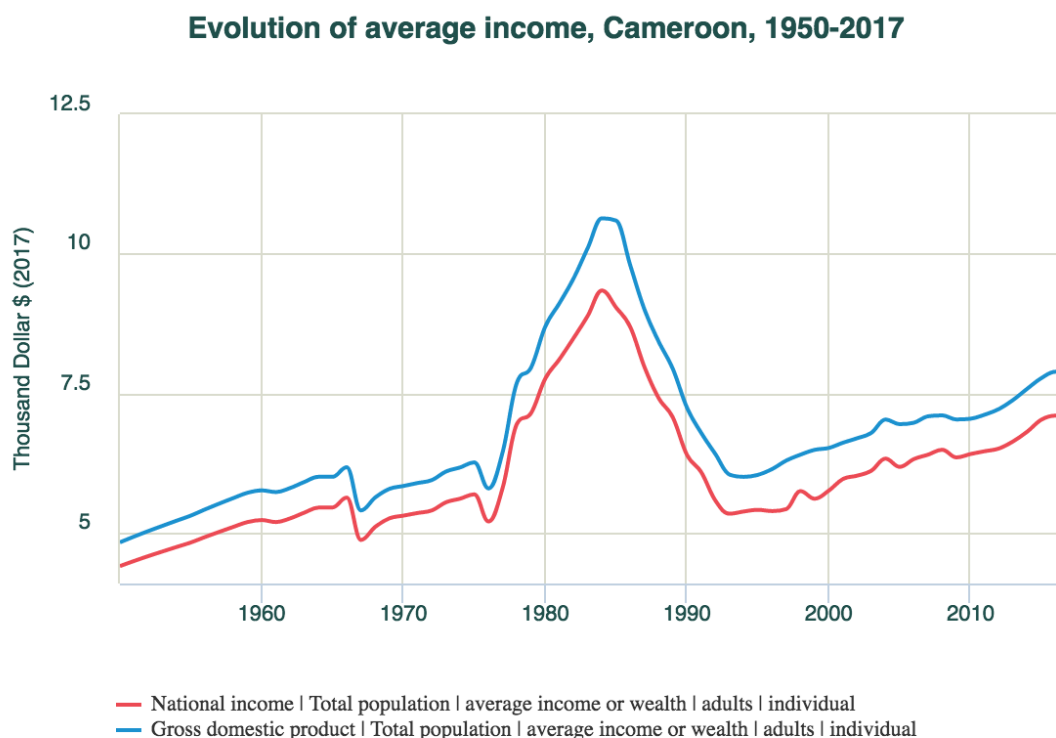
After independence, a new cadre of rich men emerged and Cameroon now has its own share of multimillionaires. The richest man is Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, with an estimated wealth of 940 million dollars. Danpullo owns a television channel, the largest tea estate in West Africa and hotels in Johannesburg, and has caused problems for Mbororo Fulani, seizing traditional pastoral lands used for livestock. Politics and wealth go hand in hand and Paul Biya has a net worth of \$ 200 million.

4.4. Poverty now

We could write a great deal about the three areas in Table 3: health, education and standard of living. These correspond to areas where government makes provision for its citizens using taxes paid to the Treasury; it seems money is not going to the right places.

Take health first. The Ministry of Public Health is responsible for all public health services. Poverty is a major cause of illness but the poor cannot get the healthcare they need. There is a shortage of professional medical staff because pay is poor and doctors and nurses emigrate to Europe and South East Asia. Many clinics are using outdated equipment and there are only two doctors per 10,000 people (Borgen Project, 2017). Given that people have to pay for treatment as they use, it is common to see doctors collecting money on the wards for drugs which they are about to administer. Many people cannot afford healthcare, dying because they cannot get treatment.

Figure 3: Evolution of average income, Cameroon, 1950-2017



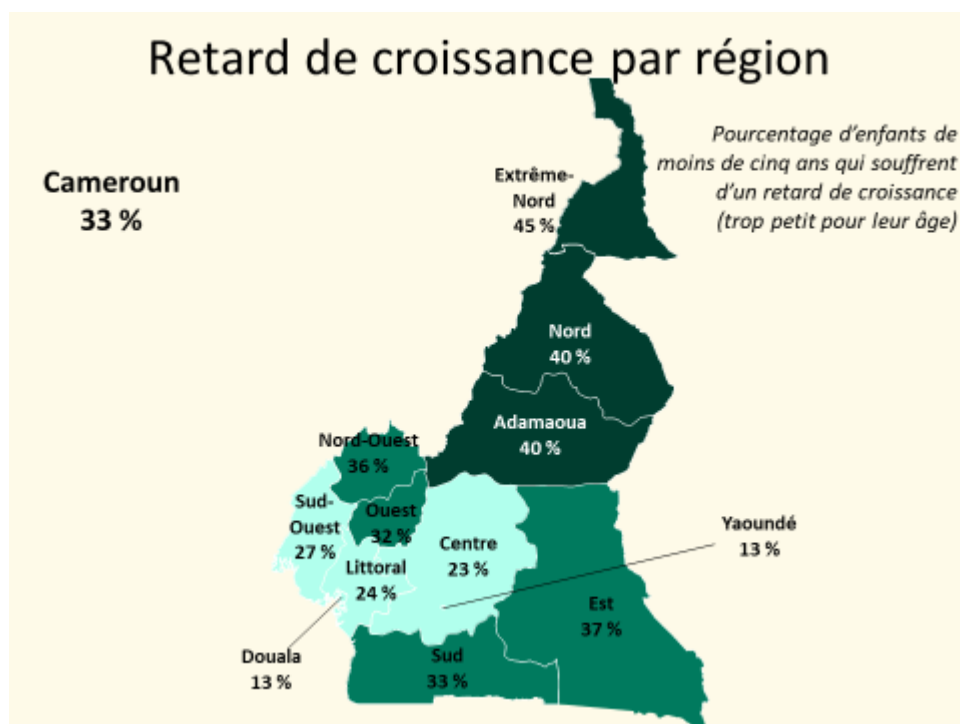
Source: World Inequality Database;
<https://wid.world/country/cameroon/>

There are three major causes of death. The first are lower respiratory infections, which account for 12% of all deaths. Doctors can easily treat these infections in most developing countries. The second is HIV/AIDS, which accounts for 13% of all deaths and is one of the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa. The third are diarrheal diseases and account for 14% of all deaths. This group particularly affects people living in poverty due to poor sanitation and inadequate water supplies.

In addition to this one third of children under five years of age are affected by chronic malnutrition. Poverty leads to high levels of malnutrition among children and for every 1,000 children born, 122 die before the age of five (United States State Department, 2013). In the North West region, the number of stunted children under five is 36% (Figure 3). These are serious problems.

Take education next and the education system. Cameroon became a unitary republic in 1972; up until 1976 there were two educational systems, one French and one English. These systems were then merged but they did not blend well and are still to some extent separate with A levels in the English side of the system and the Baccalaureate on the French side. This has remained a source of division and was one of the factors that led to strikes in the Anglophone regions in November, 2016.

Figure 3: Stunted growths by region, 2011

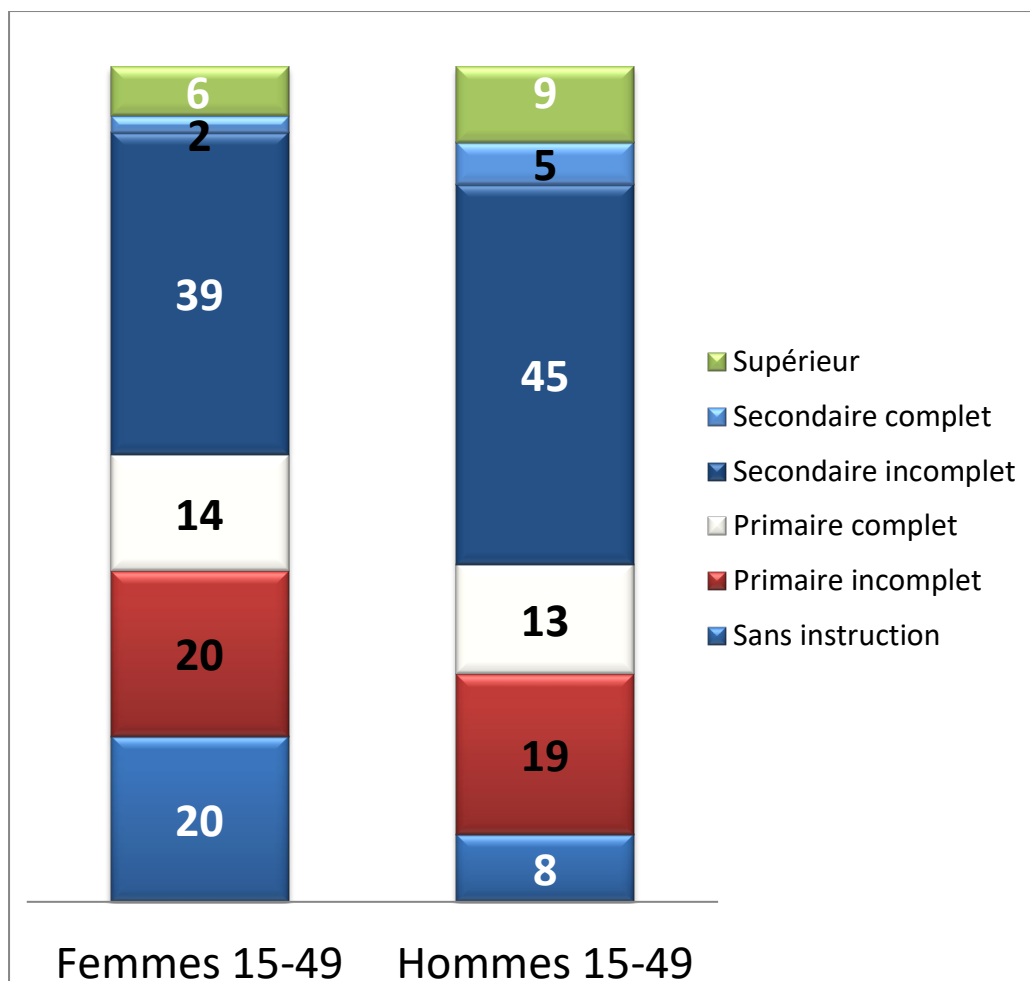


Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, USAID; <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-PPT31-Survey-Presentations.cfm>

Primary schooling (which lasts six years) has been free since 2000 although parents pay for uniforms and book fees. The facilities are basic and there are not enough places for everyone. In a 2004 study it was found that elementary schools only had enough seats for 1.8m students, although 2.9m attended school (U.S. Dept. of State, 2007). Only 19% of pupils had access to toilets and only 30% had access to water taps. Corruption is also a problem; in a 2011 study, the main problem was found to be embezzlement of school funds (Transparency International, 2011).

In secondary schools, students have to pay fees. Teaching for the English and French sub-systems still operate separately (Figure 5). The middle school is five years (up to GCE level) and the high school is two years (up to A level). There are fewer girls than there are boys in school due to early marriage, pregnancy and domestic responsibilities; in general, given the high cost of secondary education there are high levels of dropout. Wealthy people send their children overseas for their education.

Figure 5: Levels of qualifications: Percentages of women and men, 2011



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, USAID

<https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-PPT31-Survey-Presentations.cfm>

The lack of educational opportunities leads to a workforce in which people lack appropriate qualifications. As the World Bank says ‘the country’s tertiary education continues to focus on traditional academic disciplines and is not positioned to respond to economic transformation’ (World Bank, 2015). It is still case that over 40% of the population has little or no formal and primary education (Borgen, 2017). Furthermore, nearly 70% of the population of working age have received no further vocational training and this leads to high levels of unemployment among youth, especially those living in rural areas.

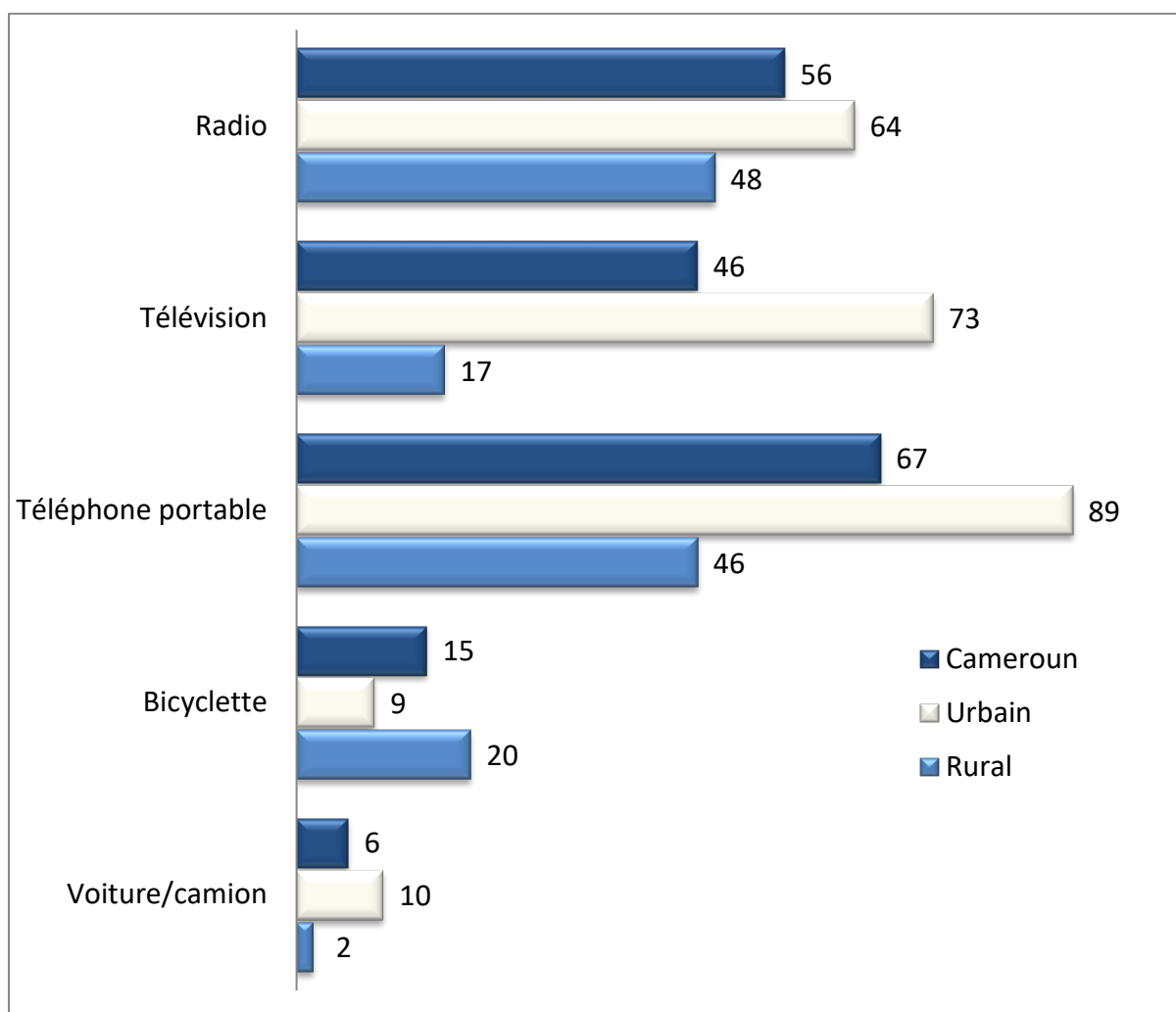
Finally, let us look at the standard of living indicators. These factors are ones that are so important, for example appropriate cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water and electricity. It is well known that using wood over a smoky fire over a long time-period is not healthy. Sanitation is important because poor sanitation leads to illness. If

children live in houses, with no electricity, it is virtually impossible to study in the long evenings (and sunset is always at around six o'clock). When it comes to assets, it seems incredible that some families may not have access to a radio or a bicycle let alone a refrigerator or a motorbike (Figure 6). In this USAID study, they found that only seven out of ten households (71%) in Cameroon draw their drinking water from an improved source: 41% of households use unimproved toilets and only 54% of households have electricity (USAID, 2011).

Let us look at one particular indicator, the availability of safe drinking water. It would not be difficult to improve on this situation, particularly in hilly areas. By constructing large stone tanks, it is possible to divert water coming down from the springs and pipe this to nearby villages. (Nchinda et al., 2018). This significantly reduces the incidence of typhoid and other water borne diseases and has a measurable effect on health outcomes.

Given very high levels of poverty, this surely begs two questions. What do people see for their taxes and why is the government not doing more in this area?

Figure 6: Possessions by household: Percentage of households, 2011



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, USAID

<https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-PPT31-Survey-Presentations.cfm>

5. Conclusion

The problems in the North West region have not been resolved. By early 2019, events had taken a turn for the worse and two distinct groups had emerged. The first group are separatists who are calling for an independent state of Ambazonia and the second group are more moderate and are calling for a federal system of government similar to the one abolished in the early 1970s. Paul Biya has been virtually silent except to say that the country is ‘indivisible’. He won the election with over 70% of the vote, amidst claims of vote rigging. The three protest leaders are still awaiting trial in Yaounde, the ‘Amba

boys' threaten those who try to go to school and some schools have been set on fire.

The aim of this paper has been to identify the underlying causes of the protests and the size and importance of different political and economic factors, particularly the latter.

Earlier we drew on the work of Chang and his book, 'Kicking Away the Ladder', that argued that the rich nations of the global north benefit at the expense of the global south (Chang, 2003). When France, China and the UK are involved in trade projects in Cameroon, this is not an act of charity on their part: the rich countries take out more than they put in. France, China and the UK all have interests in Cameroon as do the World Bank and the IMF. Within Cameroon, those who govern appear to benefit at the expense of those who are governed and Paul Biya and those closest to him have a huge interest in staying in power. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that it is the poor who suffer the most. This is why people protest.

Acknowledgements

This paper is derived from a dissertation submitted to the University of Sheffield in 2019 for a B.A. in French Language and Culture. The dissertation was in French. Many thanks go to Sophie Belot and Christine Baycroft at the University Sheffield for their supervision. Thanks also go to Nuhu Salihu Jallow and Doug Bell for their substantive comments and to my friends in Bamenda Cameroon with whom I have been working for Village Aid.

References

- Afrobarometer (2015) Afrobarometer Survey, Round 6, Cameroon. Retrieved 15 April, 2016, from <http://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>
- Alkire, S. (2018) *The New Global MPI 2018: Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals*. UN Development Programme
- Alvaredo, F., Cogneau, D. and Picketty, T. (2018) Income inequality under colonial rule: Evidence from French Algeria Cameroon, Indochina, and Tunisia 1920-1960
- Amin, J. (2015) Sino-Cameroon relations: A foreign policy of pragmatism. *African Studies Review*, Vol 58, Issue 3, pp 171-189
- Amin, J. (2012) Understanding the protest of February 2008 in Cameroun. *Africa Today*, Vol 58, No. 4. pp21-43
- Borgen Project (2017) Understanding the causes of poverty in Cameroon. Joseph Dover, Aug 2017. <https://borgenproject.org/tag/cameroon/>
- Businesslive (2018) African jobs at risk over French wood giant bankruptcy. www.businesslive.co.uk, 8 March 2018
- Chang, H. (2008) *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism*. London: Bloomsbury
- Chang, H. (2003) *Kicking Away the Ladder; Development Strategy in Historical Perspective*. London: Anthem
- Chinje, E. (2017) The Political Crisis in Cameroon. *Sur la Politique*. April, 2017
- Daily Telegraph (2017) A nation divided: tensions mount in Cameroon as English speakers marginalised by francophone majority. A. Blomfield, 18 March, 2017
- Drew, D. (2019) La crise politique et économique actuelle au Cameroun : Une étude de recherche. Dissertation for the award of BA (Hons) French Language and Culture at the University of Sheffield
<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9879806.v1>
- Emmanuel, N. (2012) With a friend like this: Shielding Cameroon from democratisation. *Journal of Asian and African studies*, 48 (2) 145-160
- Foretia, D. (2017) Cameroon continues its oppression of English speakers. Washington Post

Hickel, J. (2017) *The Divide; A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions*. London: William Heinemann

Lansley, S. (2015) *Breadline Britain: The Rise of Mass Poverty*. London: A One World Book

Nchinda, V., Drew, D., Ijang, T., Che, M., Abubakar, S. and Napoleon, C. (2015) In Search of Common Ground: The farmer grazer conflict in North West Cameroon. MBOSCUDA and Village Aid Working Paper

Pigeaud, F. (2011) *Au Cameroun de Paul Biya*. Paris: Editions Karthala

Plaza.com (2017) Banana cultivation in Cameroon booming but provides nothing for labourers. www.feshplaza.com. 31 January 2017

Tambi, M. (2015) Economic growth, crisis and recovery in Cameroon: A literature review. *The International Journal of Industrial Distribution and Business*. Vol 6, No 1, pp 5-15

Transparency International (2016) Cameroun: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption. Author: Inaki Ardigo. European Commission

Transparency International (2015) *Barometre de la Corruption 2015 au Cameroun*. European Commission

Transparency International Cameroon (2013) *Global Corruption Barometer 2013: Cameroon*. European Commission. Retrieved from <http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country/?country=cameroon>

Transparency International (2011) *Lessons learned: Primary Education in Cameroon and South Africa*. Transparency International. July 27, 2011. European Commission (http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/lessons_learned_primary_education_in_cameroon_and_south_africa)

United States State Department (2013) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013: Cameroon*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2013humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=220090#wrapper>

USAID (2011) *Demographic and Health Surveys* <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-PPT31-Survey-Presentations.cfm>

U.S. Dept. of State (2007) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006*. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78723.htm>). U.S. Department of State. 2007

World Bank (2018) *In Five Charts: Understanding the Africa Country Policy and Institutional Assessment*. Publication. September 12, 2018.

World Bank Group (2016) *Doing Business in Cameroon*. Retrieved from <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/cameroon#paying-taxes>

World Bank (2015) *Cameroonian youth on ending poverty: It's about bridging the skills gap*. Nov 19, 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/11/19/cameroonian-youth-on-ending-poverty-its-about-bridging-the-skills-gap>

World Economic Forum (2015) *How Cameroon is Tackling its Procurement Problems*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/05/how-cameroon-is-tackling-its-procurement-problems/>