

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Biya Must Go to Biya for Ever: Understanding the Paths of Presidentialism in the Context of Democratic Consolidation

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Abstract

The restoration of multiparty politics in 1990 led to the organization of competitive elections. The presidential election of October 11, 1992 was fiercely contested between the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the Social Democratic Front (SDF) at the end of which Paul Biya, the CPDM candidate, in power since 1982, won by a narrow margin to the detriment of Ni John Fru Ndi, the SDF candidate. The legislative elections of March 1 of the same year in which the SDF did not take part were not equally competitive. The CPDM was unable to obtain an absolute majority in the National Assembly thanks to the play of alliances. Unlike these first elections which were tough for the CPDM, those organized subsequently restored the colors of the single-party system in view of the scores garnered by the former single party. How can we account for the comeback of the CPDM and its President, who was "condemned" without appeal in the aftermath of the restoration of multiparty politics? This article analyses the socio-political mechanisms deployed by this party to retain and seize political power since 1982, based on a number of socio-political theories, namely the theories of ruling authoritarianism, rational choice and political clientelism.

Keywords: Political Party, Election, Single-Party System, Multi-Party System, Power.

1. Introduction

Cameroon, after a brief experience of multipartyism (Ngongo LP, 1982), has closed the parenthesis of this part of its political history to relive it after more than 3 decades. Under the influence of dynamics from outside and inside¹, this country with complex socio-political configurations returned to multiparty politics in 1990². It took very little for the political system to shake (P. Bigombé Logo and HL Mentong, 1996). Dead cities, years of embers, food riots are some socio-political events that translated into action this situation that had to overthrow the Biya regime that came to power through the Constitution³ and who consecrated his election a few years later with an

early presidential election, an election that could well be described as an «election without choice» (Hermet G., 1977) for the simple reason that Paul Biya was the only candidate for his own succession. Since then, the national president of the CPDM has always renewed his mandate. Apart from the very first presidential, legislative and municipal elections which were tough for the CPDM, the others were a plebiscite for the «man of renewal» who, in answering journalists' questions during an official visit by the former French President, François Hollande, implied that: not everyone who wants to stay in power can stay long, but those who can. Strongly contested in the aftermath of the restoration of multiparty democracy, Paul Biya

¹Read the following about this topichasD. B.'s valleysourmaud, Politics in Africa, Paris, Editions Montchrestien, 1997; Conac G., Africa towards pluralism, Paris, Economy, Dallos, 1993.

²These are Laws No. 90-52 on freedom of social communication, Law No. 90-53 on freedom of association, and Law No. 90-56 on the creation of political parties.

³Refer to the Cameroon Constitution of 1972 amended by the laws of March 9, 1975, June 29, 1979, July 21 and November 18, 1983, and February 4, 1984.

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ended up being elected, re-elected and described by some of his opponents of yesterday as the one who is the only one capable of leading Cameroon. How then can we account for such a political situation? How can we explain the fact that we went from Biya's protest to today's quasi-unanimity? How did Paul Biya manage to stay at the head of state? These are the questions to which this article attempts to provide some outlines of answers through the observation of the Cameroonian political scene and socio-political theories, all supported by documentary analysis.

1.1 The Political "Earthquake": on the Tracks of a Plausible Planned Departure

Cameroon's recent political history has been irrigated by events that can be analyzed as the beginnings of an announced departure of President Biya. The first moment draws its source from the resignation of President Ahidjo, a resignation that was accompanied by the constitutional succession as provided for by the fundamental law but which turned out to be a controversial succession.

1.2 Constitutional Succession: a Controversial Succession?

By resigning from his functions in November 1982 and organizing the tour of the provinces, the outgoing president believed he was working for the successor he himself had chosen. Unfortunately, subsequent events would tend to demonstrate the opposite (Eboua S., 1996: 211). Indeed, on the night of 5 to April 6, 1984 "the inhabitants of the capital are awakened by the crackle of machine guns and the rolling of heavy weapons" (Eboua S., 1996: 211). This coup d'état marks the apotheosis of a crisis that began since the peaceful resignation. But, well before, Paul Biya revealed on August 22, 1983 the discovery of a plot against state security. Two former collaborators of the former president are implicated: Salatou⁴ and Ibrahim Oumarou⁵. The succession was accompanied by misunderstandings and dissensions between the new president and his predecessor. They were summarized by (Bandolo H. 1985) through a title with anthropological overtones, *The Flame and the Smoke*.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the succession, controversies structured the relations between the resigning

president and his constitutional successor. Everything goes back to the nature of this succession. For a part of the Cameroonian political class, Ahidjo would have cleverly organized his departure. Others, on the other hand, believe that the latter was deceived by his French doctors and that he was not at all ill. "By continuing to carry out political activities⁶, Ahidjo wanted to «take back with one hand what he had just given up» (Eboua S., 1996: 33). Let us recall that he was until then the president of the single party, the Cameroon National Union (UNC). It was in this capacity that he convened a meeting of the political bureau on June 19, 1983. President Biya did not take part; a sign of political unease due to the two-headedness at the head of state. This two-headedness was the source of conflicts of a protocol nature. Who had precedence in official ceremonies and the definition of the nation's policy? This question was followed by analyses and points of view that were in reality partisan. Ahmadou Ahidjo eventually resigned as party president on 27 August 1983 due to «a merciless fight, cruel to the Cameroonian people» (Bandolo H., 1995: 33). This fight led to a coup on 6 April 1984.

1.3 The Power Grab and Loyalty in Service for the Restoration of the Authority of the State

The political crisis to which we have referred ended in an attempted coup on April 6, 1984. Thanks to the forces that remained loyal, those responsible for this coup d'état, the consequences of which still haunt the minds of Cameroonians, were routed. Holong Etienne⁷, is at the center of what we call loyalty in the service of the restoration of the authority of the State. Indeed, a certain opinion has stated that this element of the Directorate of Present Security would have led the President of the Republic to the bunker of the palace and would have ordered him not to surrender at the risk of being executed by his own care. Other sources of information also give him the courage to have foiled the first attempt to assassinate the President in August 1983. Not having the evidence to confirm such assertions, we nevertheless believe that they are plausible to the extent that this non-commissioned officer of the gendarmerie at the time of the events, experienced a meteoric professional rise⁸. He continues to enjoy the confidence of the head of state to this day.

⁴ The latter served as aide-de-camp to President Ahidjo.

⁵ Ibrahim Oumarou was a steward at the presidency of the Republic.

⁶ After his resignation, the former president undertook tours in the provinces to ask Cameroonians to support the new president.

⁷ From the Moundang ethnic group, he comes from Garey, a small town not far from the city of Kaélé.

⁸ Holong Etienne was a Sergeant at the time of the sad event that Cameroon experienced on April 6, 1984. He rose through the ranks and was able to reach the rank of Colonel in the Cameroonian Armed Forces. Although retired, he continues to serve in the Presidential Security Directorate.

In this context of political turmoil, a presidential election was organized on January 14, 1984. Alone against himself, Paul Biya was elected. Another presidential election coupled with legislative elections was organized on April 24, 1988. If the legislative elections were marked by internal competition⁹, this was not the case for the presidential election for the simple reason that the President of the Republic was the only candidate for his own succession. He was re-elected. But these elections could not guarantee stability because the entire country was caught up in political upheavals.

1.4 The Years of Embers

They allude to the political turmoil that Cameroon experienced in 1990, a turmoil marked by the ghost towns organized across the national territory. It is in reality “a form of protest, of refusal of the rules of the game and of seeking their transformation by illegal means” (Sindjoun L., 2004: 13).

1.5 Dead Cities

The city as a geographical and social environment formed by a large gathering of buildings housing inhabitants who work for the most part within the agglomeration offers several services that were disrupted in 1990 due to the cessation of certain activities that take place there. We must understand by ghost towns “The paralysis of all activities in an urban center so as to have the streets, offices, shops and markets closed from Monday to Friday, only the weekend is then retained as a time of normal life in the city in order to stock up for the rest of the days of the week” (Abbé C., 2006:38). For some, it is “a diabolical war (...) A discovery first tested on 18 and 19 April 1991 in Douala consisting of an appeal to the population to observe certain watchwords: close shop, do not go out, do not go to work” (Sindjoun L., 2004:13). In drawing up a synoptic table relating to the unfolding of this discovery in the main cities of Cameroon, Sindjoun believes that the objective of this phenomenon was to force the regime to organize the national conference.

1.6 Organizing a National Conference: A Failed Political Strategy

To oppose, Sindjoun (2004) reports, “is to demand the unconditional and immediate holding of a sovereign national conference. This is a formula for democratic transition marked by the shelving of state power institutions, the intensification of consultation

between political actors and the reestablishment of a political order; it implies a new beginning.” Its theorists wanted to make it a tribunal to judge and condemn the president and his members of the government, accused of mismanagement, waste, and misappropriation of public funds. But this sovereign national conference was diverted to the benefit of the tripartite, a political maneuver in the service of the consolidation of Biya’s power.

1.7 The Deviation of the National Conference in Favor of the Tripartite

The restoration of multipartyism was preceded in some African countries by the organization of the so-called sovereign national conference. Considered a panacea, a premise for the restoration of democracy, this political offer was declined by the president in simple but harsh terms: the national conference is irrelevant for Cameroon.

In a radio and television message on the evening of October 11, 1991, Paul Biya announced the organization of a tripartite meeting which was held from October 30 to November 5 under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Sadou Hayatou.¹⁰ This meeting brought together on the one hand, the government represented by the Prime Minister and on the other hand, representatives of all political parties and independent personalities. What did this meeting consist of and how did it allow Paul Biya to control the course of Cameroon’s political history in the eruptive context aimed at driving him from power?

Indeed, the insurrectional nature of the opposition that forced the government to negotiate the tripartite was intended to ease the political atmosphere in order to re-establish internal peace and calmly prepare the rules of the game for the democratic future. It was rightly concluded on 13 November 1991 with a declaration concluded between the Prime Minister and the coordination of opposition parties, a declaration relating to «the easing of tensions in political life, constitutional reform, consensus as a means of adopting the decisions of the tripartite meeting and measures to suspend certain newspapers and ban certain associations» (Sindjoun L. 2004). If the tripartite allowed the opposition to enjoy a certain respectability, it will have contributed to deconstructing it.

The tripartite was the place where the division of the opposition was expressed. It all started with the U-turn of the NUDP and the UDC regarding their participation

⁹ For the first time, the RDPC has invested 324 candidates for 180 seats.

¹⁰ Sadou Hayatou died on August 1, 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland.

contrary to the decision of the Coordination and the Directory of the opposition. By inviting the leaders of the opposition and the members of the Coordination to leave the room hosting the work following the withdrawal of the floor to Pierre Flambeau Ngayap¹¹, the president of the NUDP, Samuel Eboua, noted that the members of his party from the North did not leave the room on the grounds that they did not «(...) come to the tripartite to slam the door. We came to negotiate, with maximum honesty, openness and flexibility, the real terms of a return to the easing of socio-political life» (Sindjoun L. 2004). This option reflects the dissensions within the NUDP. «In truth, it was not an exaggeration to think that the tripartite had not only dislocated the Coordination, but that it had above all destroyed the internal harmony of certain political formations, thus sounding the political death knell if not the decline of certain key players» (Claes and Frogner, 1985). In this vein, the tripartite that inaugurated the unequal political exchange (Claes and Frogner, 1985) will have been nothing more than «a trap» (Pigeaud F. 2011) for the opposition. «The tripartite will have indeed lived, carried away by the element that will have imposed it: the political situation. It will remain in history as a framework for letting off steam, for expressing the revolutionary thrust, for channeling the protest, to civilize it, emasculate it, exhaust it and extinguish it» (Olinga AD, 2008: 29). This moment was the beginning of the decrepitude of the opposition. The political maneuver in question favored the control of the years of embers.

1.8 Mastering the Years of Embers

The years of embers were brought under control thanks to a set of political and administrative measures deployed by the President of the Republic. At the forefront of these measures, we must remember the establishment of operational commands that designate all military operations aimed at restoring and strengthening the authority of the State. And it is here that lies the meaning and power of the authoritarian leadership retained as an analytical theory in the context of this work.

On May 16, 1991, a presidential decree appointed an operational commander in the provinces¹² of the Littoral and the North-West in the person of Brigadier General Jean-René Youmba. Two other operational

commanders were also appointed: General Oumarou Djam Yaya in the West and North-West provinces and General Nganso Sundji in the Adamoua, North and Far North provinces (Sindjoun L. 2002: 277). Thus, the national territory was militarily cordoned off. These military maneuvers dissuaded opposition actors from marching on the Unity Palace on July 5, 1991. Added to these operational commands was the state of emergency declared in the North-West province on October 27, 1992. The military maneuvers were coupled with administrative measures.

They consist of a set of measures taken by the president, the administrative authorities whose objective is dissuasion through the prohibition of the various demonstrations organized by political parties and associations on the national territory. As an illustration, Andze Tsoungui, Minister of Territorial Administration at the time, signed an order on June 18, 1991 noting the dissolution of the Coordination of the opposition on the grounds that this association was not legalized. The dissolution of this association aimed to politically weaken their demonstrations and the opposition in general.

Another maneuver was the rehabilitation of the post of Prime Minister and the appointment of Sadou Hayatou¹³ to this position. Indeed, following the failed coup attempt, Paul Biya had appointed Ayang Luc¹⁴ to this position which was abolished a year later. By appointing Sadou Hayatou, a native and prince of Lamidat of Garoua, the president wanted to break the NUDP which was strongly established in the North. This was a rational calculation whose objective was to obtain the sympathy of the natives of this region and to weaken the NUDP at the same time. The political turmoil that Cameroon has experienced has also been marked by the resignation of certain political actors.

Against all expectations, George Achu Mofor, Governor of the Eastern Province, resigned from his functions by addressing a letter on October 19, 1991 to the President of the Republic in these terms: «I have the honor to draw your very high attention to the following facts which put me in the difficulty if not the impossibility of continuing to exercise my functions as Governor of the Eastern Province...¹⁵» We should also remember that of Garga Haman Adjii¹⁶ who resigned from the government in the middle of

¹¹ He was and is currently the Secretary General of the UNDP. Today he is Secretary of the Bureau of the SENATE.

¹² The provinces were established as regions in 2009.

¹³ Sadou Hayatou died on August 1, 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁴ Ayang Luc is currently President of the Economic and Social Council.

¹⁵ Source: Ndjock Jean Aimé, Political elections and democratization in sub-Saharan Africa: the case of Central African States, Doctoral thesis in political science, University of Social Sciences of Toulouse I, May 4, 2001.

¹⁶ The latter was at that time Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reform.

the election campaign on behalf of the CPDM in 1992. And the private press, in its role as an amplifier of information, headlined in these terms: «Garga Haman Adjì strangles Biya». It was in this context of political effervescence that the first elections took place.

2. The First Legislative and Presidential Elections: A Risky Turn but Controlled by the CPDM

After the restoration of political pluralism, Cameroon organized legislative and presidential elections on March 1 and October 11, 1992, respectively. They were a real barometer of the performance of the

Table 1. *Distribution of seats by party (legislative elections of March 1, 1992).*¹⁹

Number of seats in competition	Number of seats obtained by party			
	CPDM	NUDP	UPC	LOL
180	88	68	18	06

From the data contained in this table, the CPDM obtained 88 seats, the NUDP 68, the UPC 18, and the MDR 6. The competition was thus tough for the simple reason that the former single party did not obtain the absolute majority of seats. However, it succeeded in obtaining it through the alliance with the MDR, which thus adopted a rational and clientelist posture.

Table 2. *Distribution of votes by party (presidential election of October 11, 1992).*²⁰

EI	EV	BN	SVEP					
			CPDM	homeless	NUDP	UDC	MP	RFP
4,195,480	3,015,448	60012	1,185,466 39.91%	1,066,602 35.96%	569,887 19.21%	107,411 3.62%	23,525 0.73%	12,545 0.42%

EI: Registered Voters; EV: Voting Electors; BN: Invalid Ballots; SVEP: Votes Validly Expressed by Party.

In view of the distribution of votes, the CPDM won this election by a narrow victory with a percentage of 39.91 to the detriment of the SDF which recorded 35.96, followed by the NUDP (19.218%), the UDC (3.622%), the Progressive Movement (MP) (3.622%) and the Regroupment of Patriotic Forces (RFP) (0.423%). Despite the contestation of these results, Paul Biya took the oath. However, the opposition did not give up the fight. It succeeded in demanding the revision of the constitution.

2.1 The First Revision of the Constitution: A Failed Hope for Political Alternation in Cameroon?

One of the opposition's demands was the limitation of the presidential term and the adoption of a two-round ballot for the legislative and presidential elections. However, the elections took place without this demand being taken into account. On the eve of the

new political formations.¹⁷ Having failed to obtain from the government the organization of the national conference, certain opposition parties, the SDF, the Union of Democratic Forces of Cameroon (UFDC), the Democratic Union of Cameroon (UDC) opted for the boycott of the legislative elections contrary to the NUDP,¹⁸ the MDR (Democratic Movement for the Defense of the Republic), the UPC (Union of the Populations of Cameroon), the Progressive Movement (MP) and the Movement for the Liberation of the Cameroonian People (MLPC). The organization of these elections gave rise to the distribution of seats as follows:

The presidential election of October 11, 1992 was also a competitive election. Unlike the legislative elections in which the SDF, the UFDC, and the UDC did not take part, it saw their participation alongside the CPDM, which won the game with difficulty by a close result, as evidenced by the information contained in the table below.

presidential election, the debate was brought to the National Assembly but did not result in the adoption of a two-round ballot. Law No. 92/010 of September 17, 1992 allowed the national representation to adopt a limited reform governing the election of the president within the framework of a single-round majority vote according to an English-style model.

In an effort to appease the situation, the government initiated a constitutional revision project that resulted in the extension of the five-year term to a seven-year term and the limitation of the presidential mandate. In the provisions of the law establishing the conditions for election and replacement of the presidency of the republic, article 6 paragraph 2 provides that: "the President of the Republic is elected for a term of seven (7) years, renewable once²¹» In this vein, a possibility of alternation or alternative was now possible in 2011, which constituted a real step forward

¹⁷It should be noted that the SDF and the UDC, leading figures of the Cameroonian opposition, did not take part in the legislative elections.

¹⁸The UNDP had initially also opted for a boycott of the legislative elections of 1 March 1992, but ultimately decided to take part.

¹⁹Source: Cameroon Tribune No. 5090 of March 12, 1992. We only included the parties that were able to represent themselves in the National Assembly.

²⁰Source: Cameroon Tribune No. 5247 of October 27, 1992.

²¹Law No. 96/06 of January 18, 1996 revising the Constitution of June 2, 1972.

for the Cameroonian political system. Paul Biya was re-elected in 1997 with 92.57% of the vote with a constitution preventing him from running again in 2011. But, due to another revision of the constitution, he was a candidate for his own succession and was still able to be elected.

2.2 The Adoption of the Single-Round Majority Voting System: The Locking of the Electoral System

The change in the voting method was one of the demands of certain political actors in favour of political alternation on the eve of the early presidential election of October 1992. However, a law²² allowed the national representation to adopt a limited reform, governing the election of the highest authority of the State within the framework of the single-round majority vote. Is this not an infringement of the right to vote of citizen voters and the establishment of democracy? But how did the national representation get to this point? And what was the impact of such a law on the possibility of alternation in Cameroon?

Although it was voted through, this law was the subject of controversy. The parliamentarians from the ranks of the CPDM, supported and supported in this by the members of the government, defended the single-round majority vote by evoking that the latter was less expensive, less complicated and easy to administer than a two-round vote.

Indeed, not having the majority in the National Assembly, the CPDM was able to obtain it thanks to the help of the leader of the UPC. However, the latter was one of the defenders of the two-round ballot. We can account for such a political act based on the theory of rational choice²³ and political clientelism in the analysis of the behavior of political actors. We are thus witnessing the materialization of one of the postulates of this theory, the postulate according to which individuals act in such a way as to maximize the net benefit resulting from their actions. Augustin Frédéric Kodock is said to have adopted utilitarian and strategic behavior (Crozier M. and Friedberg E. 1981) and we can therefore understand why he was promoted to Minister of State in charge of Agriculture following the presidential election of October 1992.

This defection of an opposition dignitary will have started the project of parliamentary resistance and opened the way to the control of the Cameroonian political system by the CPDM. However, nothing guarantees us that Kodock was the only one to behave in this way. The fact remains that the adherence to this political project was a breach of the democratic process in Cameroon, just like the role played by the opposition in general.

2.3 The Murky Role of the Opposition as an Asset in the Consolidation of Power

In Cameroon, the so-called radical opposition had as its main objective to conquer power. The slogan of the SDF Biya must go²⁴ says a lot. But, more than 40 years later, this ideal could not be realized because of the inability of this opposition to unite the other political forces around it. The political forces of the opposition are more divided than united.

This division begins with the distance that Jean Jacques Ekindi, former president of the CPDM section of Wouri, national president of the MP²⁵ observed vis-à-vis the coordination of opposition political parties and associations. The second moment of this division is marked by the birth of the Responsible and Republican Opposition (ORD) whose objective was to reject the confrontation and the maintenance of the demand for the holding of the national conference whose leaders were Louis Tobbie Mbida²⁶, Apollinaire William Ntseth²⁷ and Célestin Bedzigui.²⁸

By distancing itself from the so-called radical opposition, the ORD gives itself a brand and a political label whose interest consists in constituting itself as another political force. This is a strategic approach (Crozier M. and Friedberg E. 1981) aimed at downgrading those responsible for coordinating opposition parties and associations who were deemed irresponsible.

April 18, 1992 saw the birth of the Alliance for the Recovery of Cameroon for the National Sovereign Conference (ARC-CNS), a new label and name for the so-called radical opposition which is a sign of a division marking the beginnings of the decrepitude of the Cameroonian opposition.

²²Law No. 92/010 of December 17, 1992.

²³See on this subject the work of Downs Anthony, *An economic Theory of Democracy*, New York, Harper and Row, 1957. And Tullock G, *The political market. Economic analysis of political processes*, 1978.

²⁴This expression means that Paul Biya must be removed from power.

²⁵The latter resigned from his party to rejoin the RDPC on the eve of the presidential election in October 2018.

²⁶Louis Tobbie Mbida was President of the PDC (Cameroonian Democrats Party).

²⁷Apollinaire Guillaume Ntseth, Secretary General of the Socialist Party of Cameroon (PSC).

²⁸Bedzigui Célestin, First Secretary of the PAL (Liberal Alliance Party).

The division we are referring to can also be read and perceived through the change made at the head of the presidency of the NUDP and its participation in the legislative elections of March 1, 1992, elections to which we have alluded a little earlier. The NUDP had as its first president Samuel Eboua who was however disembarked after the return from exile of Bello Bouba Maïgari through its very first congress organized in Garoua from January 4 to 5, 1992²⁹.

Indeed, some political parties of the so-called radical opposition had opted to boycott these elections. Against all expectations, the new president of the NUDP, at the end of a meeting of the Central Committee of his party, announced his participation in the said elections.³⁰

The seeds of division were not absent in the other political parties. In the UPC, the divergence of political options was present between these leaders, Prince Dika Akwa, Ndeh Ntumazah, Augustin Frédéric Kodock. The disagreement concerned the participation of the UPC in the early legislative elections of March 1, 1992. While some advocated a boycott, Kodock wanted the UPC to take part in these elections.

All these struggles within political formations result from the fact that a political party is «A collective enterprise is therefore a space of competition or better a space of spaces of competition» (Gaxie D. 2003: 110). The murky role of the opposition to which we are referring was translated into action through the formation of the broad-based government which turned out to be a strategy of enlistment and annihilation of the opposition forces which could be analyzed from the theory of political clientelism. This is an approach or rather a political attitude which consists of providing support to the CPDM in exchange for political advantages.

Following the adoption of a series of laws aimed at liberalizing and democratizing the Cameroonian political field, legislative elections were organized

on March 1, 1992, elections at the end of which the former single party was put in difficulty by the newly created political parties, notably the NUDP, the UPC and the MDR. Following the results of these elections, Paul Biya formed a broad-based unity government calling on certain political actors from the opposition political parties.³¹ In our logic, namely, to show how the Biya regime, forced to resign, was able to dominate the political field, it is a question of establishing that the formation of a broad-based unity government through alliances³² was the cause of the beginning of the implosion of the opposition political forces.

The NUDP at its birth was considered a radical party refusing any concession with the regime in place just like the SDF and the UPC. The entry of the leading figures of this party, and those of the UPC and the MDR in the government of November 1992³³, in the aftermath of the first elections in the era of the restoration of political pluralism, was considered a betrayal on the part of activists and supporters because, «The compromises necessary for the constitution of a government coalition lead the parties to renounce part of their program and force their representatives to make speeches and take decisions which may disappoint citizens (...) or voters» (Gaxie D., 2003: 108).

This way of doing politics, which is not only the prerogative of Cameroon, has contributed to dispersing political actors from the opposition. We remember the political consequences of the entry of Hamadou Moustapha and Issa Tchiroma into the government of April 1992. Yes, the entry of Dakolé Daïssala and his political companions into the government contributed to avoiding civil war for Cameroonians and to establishing his party across the northern regions.³⁴ It is clear that this has rather weakened the MDR. For some of its activists, notably Toupouri, this act was described as selfish and rather aimed at denying them access to positions of power in order to consolidate its personal hegemony.

²⁹It should be recalled that Samuel Eboua did not take part in this congress. After a legal attempt to restore him as head of the UNDP, he ended up creating another political party called the Movement for Democracy and Progress (MDP), a party that was legalized on March 13, 1992.

³⁰We do not believe that the non-participation of this party in the legislative elections would have changed the course of Cameroon's political history, but it would have further discredited these legislative elections.

³¹In the Government of April 9, 1992, 4 portfolios were assigned to the MDR with a symbolic protocol distinction benefit of its president Dakolé Daïssala appointed Minister of State in charge of Posts and Telecommunications. 3 of his political companions Bava Djingoer, Pierre Souman and Dawaïrou were appointed respectively Ministers

³²On this notion read Owona Nguini Eric Mathias, *The imperative of alliances in democracy*, Yaoundé, Presses Universitaires d'Afrique, 2013.

³³The relative majority obtained by Paul Biya in the presidential election of October 1992 reinforced the need for an alliance with other political parties. Thus, in the government of November 1992, 3 other political parties were represented: the National Party for Progress (PNP) through its president Antar Gassagaye, appointed Secretary of State in charge of prison administration at the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC) through its Secretary General, Augustin Frédéric Kodock appointed Minister of State for Agriculture, Simon Ndjami, Secretary of State for Health, Simon Mbilla, Minister of Labor and the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) through Hamadou Moustapha, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Urban Planning and Housing, Issa Tchiroma, Minister of Transport.

³⁴The latter has always supported his point of view and considers himself a true republican alongside other political leaders.

By forming broad union or openness governments, Paul Biya managed to retain his power by “taking advantage of the dispersion or weakness of the opposition, by selectively integrating it or marginalizing it” (Daloz P., 1999). Several leaders of certain political parties have given up on the conquest of supreme power, preferring instead to contribute to its exercise through the occupation of certain ministerial portfolios. This situation gives free rein to the CPDM candidate and allows him to win the presidential elections with an absolute majority.

This is how, at the end of the October 1997 election, Paul Biya won the election with a score of 92.57%.³⁵ The CPDM candidate lost a few points to reach 70.29% in the presidential election of October 2004 and 77.98% in October 2011 through the manipulation of the fundamental law.

2.4 The Revision of the Constitution Which Removed the Lock on the Limitation of the Presidential Mandate: An Excess³⁶ Politics or a Constitutional Robbery?

Following the presidential election of October 1997, the second election of its kind in the context of the restoration of political pluralism, the President of the Republic was supposed to assure his last term. But, “On Friday, April 4, 2008, the President of the Republic transmitted to the National Assembly, convened in its ordinary session since March 12, 2008, the draft law n° 819/PJL/An amending and supplementing certain provisions of law n°96/06 of January 18, 1996 revising the constitution of June 2, 1972” (Olinga D. 2008: 3).

This project gave rise to debates among constitutionalists. It was the subject of many controversies in the Cameroonian political class but was adopted and promulgated on Monday, April 14, 2008.³⁷ While several provisions of this law have been revised, the one relating to the exercise of the presidential function has not. It has been amended by maintaining the mandate of the president at 7 years, renewable. We have gone, so to speak, from the limitation of the mandate to its unlimited. In short, «The President of the Republic is elected for a mandate of 7 years. He is re-eligible³⁸» Re-elected in 2011, he brought about the modernization of political institutions through the organization of senatorial elections. This was a step forward for democratization

but nonetheless remains a misappropriation of popular sovereignty.

2.5 The Senatorial Elections of April 2013: A Misuse of Popular Sovereignty

The modernization of political institutions is one of the elements of the political program of renewal. The creation of the Senate, the upper house of parliament, is in line with this concern. This is why the elections to elect Senators were organized in April 2013, only four months before the organization of municipal elections. The concern underlying the reflection in this section consists of demonstrating that the organization of senatorial elections is a diversion of the sovereignty of the people whose objective is to strengthen the grip of the power in place on the local and national political field, which is easily understood through the authoritarianism of the leadership.

Indeed, during the term of office of the municipal councillors 2007-2013 several of them died. The electoral body will have been thus dismembered of some of its municipal councillors. This electoral college, at the end of the elections organised four months later, should be renewed. Why not have waited for this renewal of the electoral body before organising these elections? It was simply a strategy aimed at controlling the national and local political field; a strategy based on the prudence which forever characterises the power in place. This demonstration is reinforced for the simple reason that, despite the electoral victories garnered during the legislative and presidential elections with scores reminiscent of the era of ratification elections, the electoral vote remains a single-round majority vote.

The misuse of sovereignty to which we refer can also be understood from the right of the President of the Republic to appoint thirty of the hundred senators in the upper house. Furthermore, only appointed senators can be replaced due to death or any other impediment.

All the above explanations account for what (Sindjoun L. 1996) calls “the last word complex” which consists of appropriating any initiative on the political field. The national conference declared without object was duplicated by the tripartite, the proposal to create an independent election observatory was duplicated by the creation of the National Election Observatory

³⁵In this competition, the opposition political parties SDF, UNDP and UDC abstained from taking part.

³⁶Overflow in sports vocabulary and specifically in football means the fact that a player goes around his opponent. We draw inspiration from this to explain

³⁷This is Law No. 2008/001 amending and supplementing certain provisions of Law No. 96/06 of January 18, 1996 revising the Constitution of June 2, 1972.

³⁸Article 6 paragraph 2 of the fundamental law of Cameroon.

(ONEL) which later became, (Elections Cameroon (ELECAM)). This tactic favors the mastery of the political game and made Paul Biya the main actor in the Cameroonian political field. We can understand why the effective establishment of political institutions such as the Regional Councils and the Constitutional Court³⁹ were the products of his own political discretion. The widespread competition due to political activity more than forty years after the restoration of multipartyism consecrates him as the winner of all political trophies.

3. Presidential Elections: Towards the Consecration of lifelong Power?

After the re-election of the President of the Republic in 1997, three other elections were held. The first was in October 2004.

3.1 The Presidential Election of October 11, 2004

The presidential election of 11 October 2004 was notable for the plurality of candidates: sixteen in total. Unlike the previous one, this one took place peacefully. The CPDM candidate curiously benefited from the support of his previous adversaries: Bouba Bello Maïgari, president of the NUDP, after having taken part unsuccessfully in the October 1992 election and boycotted that of 1997, declared the following: “The central committee of the NUDP met under my chairmanship in Yaoundé on 15 September. After reviewing the political, economic, social and diplomatic situation in our country and after deliberation, this body has resolved to support the

Table 3. *Distribution of votes by candidate (presidential election of October 12, 2004).*

Registered	Voters	Abstention	EVS	Distribution of votes by party			
4,657,748	3,830,272	827 476	3,759,221	CPDM	homeless	UDC	ADD
	,			2,665,259	654 066	168 318	14037
				(70.92%)	(17.40%)	(4.47%)	(3.73%)

SVE: Validly Expressed Votes

As we can see, Paul Biya won after having won 2,665,259 votes, a percentage of 70.92, thus far ahead of his opponents. He will also be victorious in the October 2011 election.

3.2 The Presidential Election of October 9, 2011

The presidential election of October 9, 2011 was marked by a particularity: the call of the people⁴⁵.

outgoing president, President Paul Biya, who has once again stood as a candidate. We intend to give him the support of the NUDP's militant base to clearly show that the commitments he made when announcing his candidacy are in line with what we want for our country.⁴⁰».

Dakolé Daïssala, the coordinator of the MDR, supported the candidate of the Movement for Democracy and Progress (MDP) in 1997. In 2004, he acknowledged that Paul Biya had many assets and demonstrated proven experience.⁴¹ and gave him his support.

Augustin Frédérick Kodok, on behalf of a fraction of the UPC, after having recognized the value of the candidate Biya and this, well before the convocation of the electoral body, had met the Prime Minister to inform him of the constitution of a new presidential majority.⁴² Paul Biya has based his political campaign under the slogan of the policy of great ambitions. Described as a man of peace by his supporters in a political context marked by civil wars in Africa, the candidate-president revealed the content of his policy during a trip to Monatéle⁴³ It was broken down into five points, namely: the pursuit of the modernization of the democratic system, the improvement of Cameroon's economic performance, the strengthening of social progress, the maintenance of peace and security, and the enhancement of Cameroon's image abroad.⁴⁴ Participation in this election gave rise to the results contained in the table below:

In April 2009, a memorandum decrying the socio-economic situation of the Beti community was sent to President Biya. Added to this was a report from the Catholic Committee for the Fight against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), a report denouncing the precariousness in which Cameroonians live. It seems like adding fuel to the fire, some French Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have accused

³⁹It was set up following the decree but under the name of the Constitutional Council.

⁴⁰Cameroon Tribune No. 8187 of September 22, 2004.

⁴¹Cameroon Tribune No. 8187 of September 22, 2004.

⁴²Cameroon Tribune No. 8188 of September 23, 2004.

⁴³Monatéle is the capital of the Lékié department, Central Region.

⁴⁴Cameroon Tribune, No. 8189 of Tuesday, October 5, 2004.

⁴⁵This is a compilation of motions of support addressed to the national president of the RDPC, motions solemnly urging him to stand as a candidate in the 2011 presidential election. Published in 9 volumes, this document was published by SOPECAM in 2009.

Paul Biya and his family members of possessing an illegal fortune, information relayed by foreign and national media. This situation has been likened to an attempt to «destabilize the regime⁴⁶» and thus opened the way for motions of support for Paul Biya: voices were raised here and there, voices inviting him to stand as a candidate in the said election « For the policy of peace, unity, progress, social justice, responsible democracy, unity and active diplomacy of President Biya, accompanied by thanks for his positive actions for the benefit of the community (...) encouragement for the cleaning up of public morals, as well as the condemnation of the enemies of the republic and their anti-republican methods; finally a call for candidacy for the future presidential election...⁴⁷».

The first call was that of the elites and notables of the Central region, gathered at the Mont Fèbé hotel in Yaoundé on July 7, 2009 under the presidency of René Sadi Emmanuel.⁴⁸ It seems like an alarm bell, all the different socio-political layers have taken up the refrain: the Central Committee of the CPDM, the Women's Organization of the Cameroon People's Democratic Rally (OFCPDM), the Youth Organization of the Cameroon People's Democratic Rally (OJCPDM), the general staff of the parties of the presidential majority, the deputies and mayors, the economic operators, the employees of the public and private sectors, the sections and subsections of the CPDM, the OFCPDM and the OJCPDM, the networks of women or youth, the vital forces of the entire territory and associations of traditional leaders, the cultural and traditional circles and independent personalities, the vital forces of the entire territory, all have called for support for the Head of State. They encouraged him to continue his policy of great achievements and asked him to run for the presidential election of October 2011. All these motions were compiled in nine volumes under the title: Paul Biya! The People's Call. After this call, all that remained was to choose him, hence the slogan of the presidential campaign of October 2011: Paul Biya! The People's Choice. It is in this context of reinforced legitimacy that Jacques Fame Ndongo speaks⁴⁹, that the CPDM candidate ran in the presidential election of October

2011, an election he won with an absolute majority against other candidates who only entertained the gallery. This is where the invocation of the theory of political clientelism is once again justified.

3.3 The Presidential Election of October 7, 2018

Three years before the expiry of the presidential term, a rumor was circulating about a draft constitutional revision with a view to restoring the position of Vice-President of the Republic, bringing forward the organization of the presidential election, a comeback to the five-year term and limiting the presidential term. The press, in its role as informant of public opinion and especially as an amplifier of information, widely echoed this in the Cameroonian public space. Nothing could happen from all this. When asked whether he would be a candidate in the October 2018 presidential election, a question posed by journalists during a joint press conference with his French counterpart François Hollande in July 2015, Paul Biya suggested that the framework was not appropriate to address such a concern. He will decide in due course. While waiting for the response of the one who is then described as a providential gift, a champion, God's chosen one, a man of experience, an exceptional great man, a historical figure..., calls to anticipate the presidential election, sometimes to pray to Biya to run again in this election have come from all regions of Cameroon under the label no longer of a call from the people but of a call for candidacy. Everywhere, it was the same symphony except that of the West which stood out from it from the speech of the Sultan of the Bamoun, Mbombo Njoya⁵⁰ Meetings, large meetings, mega meetings were the supports of these calls for applications, the last of which was organized in Maroua, capital of the Far North region on April 23, 2016 under the aegis of the President of the National Assembly, Cavaye Yeguié Djibril.

Calls for applications are not a specific feature of Cameroon, much less a novelty. In the aftermath of a controversial constitutional succession, calls have been made from everywhere; calls inviting the new president of the republic to organize and convene an extraordinary congress of the UNC. However, the countries in which this phenomenon has occurred

⁴⁶Paul Biya, *The People's Call*. SOPECAM, 2009, p. 31.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* pp. 28-29.

⁴⁸The latter was secretary general of the Central Committee of the RDPC before being promoted to head the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.

⁴⁹Minister of Higher Education, the latter is secretary for communication at the Central Committee of the RDPC and was promoted to the rank of Minister of State following the formation of the Government on January 4, 2019.

⁵⁰On analysis, the speech delivered by the King of the Bamoun stood out from other speeches. In his speech, he invited the president to choose the right key to Cameroon's history and to convene the CPDM congress in order to make decisions that affect the future of the party. The speech was broadcast in the newspapers. Read in this regard, *Le Soir*, No. 504 of Monday, February 22, 2016, Mutations No. 4089, of February 22, 2016.

do not have the same political system or the same democratic culture. In Cameroon, it is a political maneuver orchestrated by the political class that is part of the strategy of the actors discussed by Michel Crozier, a strategy that falls squarely within what Georges Balandier calls «the theatricalization of the political field» (Balandier G. 1980) which itself is part of the construction of a political action. Indeed, the call for applications is in most cases a construction on the part of the socio-political elite (members of the government, those of the political bureau and the Central Committee of the CPDM, those responsible for the basic structures of the CPDM, parliamentarians). In the Central region, for example, it is the work of Jean-Bernard Ndongo Essomba⁵¹, Bidoung Mkpatt⁵², Luc Magloire Antangana⁵³, Rene Sadi⁵⁴. In the South region, Jacques Fame Ndongo⁵⁵, Belinga Eboutou, are at the helm of this dynamic, just like the very wealthy businessman, Abbo Mohamadou⁵⁶, Baba Hamadou⁵⁷ and Ali Bachir⁵⁸. Cavaye Yeguie Djibrill⁵⁹, Ayang Luc⁶⁰, Hélé Pierre⁶¹, as well as Dr. Taïga⁶², Sali Dairou⁶³ are often at work in the Far North. Marcel Niat Njifendji⁶⁴, Nganou Njoumessi⁶⁵ and Jean Claude Mbwentchou Mbombo Njoya⁶⁶, Jean Kuette⁶⁷ play the role of organizers of the demonstrations in the Western region. Like a fashion phenomenon dubbed by the theory of social contagion, each dismemberment of society has engaged in this voice for fear of attracting any suspicion from the distributor of positions of power. As a popular African wisdom advises, «In a village where all individuals suffer from hernia, put on a calabash to give the impression that you also suffer from it.» In this way, you will avoid disapproving glances. In this situation, society loses its ethical bearings and its capacity for reflection due to the hostage-taking of the people by

a certain number of political actors. Unanimity sets in and gives way to self-annihilation which can be summed up in these terms: As long as Paul Biya is, I am not. We can therefore understand why Françoise Fonning⁶⁸, in answering a journalist's question about succession, will say: God will send another Paul Biya to Cameroonians, a question of not thinking about it for the moment. How is it possible not to think about an alternation at the head of state in the context of democracy?

It is possible to think that such a situation results from the overall lockdown of the Cameroonian political system. This lockdown does not give way to a debate of ideas. As for the CPDM, it is difficult to imagine a prospect of a democratic election of the president of this party. This is proven by the provision that states that the party's candidate in the presidential election is the president of this party. Although it is possible that the election of the party president will experience a plurality of candidates, it is however difficult for the incumbent president to be defeated. To circumvent any possibility of competition, the party congress that paves the way for the election is often organized after the presidential election.

The political history of this party supports the analysis relating to its locking. The former Minister of Territorial Administration of Ahmadou Ahidjo, Ayisso Mvondo will have tried the experience at his expense just like Titus Edzoa⁶⁹. From the locking of this system, we are witnessing the establishment of unanimity to which we alluded above. The choice of the slogan for the campaign for the presidential election of October 2011 «Paul Biya, the choice of the people» will not have been the result of chance. It is the result of a calculation and an analysis of the

⁵¹Died on March 17, 2023, he was president of the parliamentary group of the RDPC from 1992 to 1997 and from 2002 until his death.

⁵²He is currently Minister of Culture.

⁵³He is Minister of Commerce.

⁵⁴Currently, René Sadi is Minister of Communication.

⁵⁵Currently Minister of Higher Education, he is the communications secretary of the RDPC.

⁵⁶He was a member of the CPDM political bureau until his death in Türkiye on October 13, 2023.

⁵⁷The latter was Minister of Tourism from 2004 to 2011.

⁵⁸Ali Bachir was a Member of the National Assembly from 2002 to 2020.

⁵⁹He is the current president of the National Assembly.

⁶⁰Ayang Luc is the current president of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon.

⁶¹Hélé Pierre is currently Minister of the Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development.

⁶²Dr Taïga is Minister of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries

⁶³Former Minister of Civil Service, he is currently a member of the political bureau of the RDPC.

⁶⁴He is the current President of the Senate

⁶⁵He is the current Minister of Public Works.

⁶⁶Sultan of the Bamouns who died on September 27, 2021, he was a member of the political bureau of the RDPC.

⁶⁷Jean Kuette is the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the RDPC.

⁶⁸Fonning Françoise, a leading political actress, was a member of parliament during the 1992-1997; 1997-2002; 2002-2007 terms; member of parliament and mayor of Douala 5th (2002-2007). She was taken from life due to illness in January 2015 while she was head of the Douala 5th municipal executive for the 2013-2018 term.

⁶⁹The latter was Secretary General to the Presidency of the Republic and was Minister of Public Health at the time of the declaration of his candidacy for the presidential election of October 1997 after having been Minister of Higher Education.

political situation in Cameroon. While we were two years away from the organization of the presidential election of 2018, voices were raised; voices calling on the President of the Republic to stand as a candidate for his own succession.

Since the system does not offer any alternative, political actors adopt strategic-rational postures whose objective is to consolidate their position in the political apparatus of the State. Since it is not possible for me to become President of the Republic, it is better to be reassured to be Minister, Director General, Deputy, Mayor... This is the explanatory formula for the current political situation prevailing in Cameroon. In the aftermath of the restoration of political pluralism, one of the primary demands of which was the organization and holding of a sovereign national conference, the president declined the request and offer on the grounds that it was only a fraction of the people and that as such it could not be sovereign. The call of the people refers to which people? Is it not also one of its fractions? To speak of the people from one of its fractions is to divert it.

The presidential election of October 7, 2018 challenged all the assumptions of Cameroonians, assumptions relating to its postponement as was the case for the legislative and municipal elections. After convening the electorate on July 9, 2018, the electoral campaign was launched on September 22, 2018 and ended on October 6, 2018 at midnight. Well before the campaign began, ELECAM, the structure in charge of the electoral process, registered twenty-eight candidacies, nine of which were validated by the Constitutional Council.

At the end of this election, Paul Biya, candidate for his own succession, was able to win with 2,521,934 votes (71.28%) against 503,384 (14.23%) and 221,995 (6.28%) respectively for Kamto Maurice and Libii Ngue Ngue Cabral out of all 3,590,681 voters. The other candidates were unable to cross the threshold of more than 3% of the votes. If the president was re-elected thanks to his party, it must be recognized that he benefited from the support of several other political parties under the G20 label.⁷⁰ Other leaders of certain political parties also gave him their support: Dakolé

Daissala, coordinator of the MDR, Issa Tchiroma, president of the Front for National Salvation of Cameroon (FSNC). Jean Jacques Ekindi⁷¹, General Coordinator of the Progressive Movement (MP), formerly known as the lion hunter, decided through a press conference in Douala⁷² to support the CPDM candidate just like Célestin Bedzigui. If Paul Biya was re-elected, it must be acknowledged that the publication of the results was preceded by a procedural ballet made up of appeals for total or partial annulment without a favorable outcome for its authors⁷³. The swearing-in of President Biya was accompanied by protests from supporters of Maurice Kamto, president of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC). They led to arrests of some, some of whom were convicted by the courts and others acquitted. «All together, it is possible»⁷⁴ will not have been possible for Kamto Maurice just as for Ngue Ngue Cabral Libii who will not have been able to make Cameroon a «Cameroon which protects and releases energies»⁷⁵. «The power of experience»⁷⁶ will have prevailed and the National Daily⁷⁷ to headline its front page: «The power of victory»⁷⁸. Six months before the organization of the next presidential election in October 2025, Paul Biya, during his speech to the nation on December 31, 2024, suggested the following: «I can assure you that my determination to serve you remains intact and is strengthened daily in the face of the magnitude of the challenges we face.»

4. Conclusion

The Cameroonian political system under observation is locked by a political apparatus of which Paul Biya would be the only one in command. Having barely won the very first presidential election to the detriment of Ni Jhon Fru Ndi, he won all the other elections. The current political situation does not at all predict an alternation at the head of state, even less so within the Cameroon People's Democratic Rally. It would be risky to speak of the establishment of democracy in Cameroon but rather of a system of conservative adaptation (Sindjoun L. 1993). An ultra-dominant political party, the future of the CPDM remains uncertain. However, political actions remain marked by the seal of dynamism. The positions of political

⁷⁰The G20 refers to the grouping of 20 political parties that have decided to support Paul Biya's candidacy in the presidential election of October 7, 2018.

⁷¹The latter resigned from his party on April 30, 2020 to rejoin the RDPC.

⁷²Cameroon Tribune of September 21, 2018 No. 11684/7883.

⁷³18 appeals were registered by the Constitutional Council.

⁷⁴This was the campaign slogan of Kamto Maurice.

⁷⁵This was the campaign slogan of Ngue Ngue Cabral Libii.

⁷⁶This was the campaign slogan of the RDPC candidate.

⁷⁷Cameroon Tribune No. 11706/7905 of October 23, 2018,

⁷⁸Idem.

actors are never fixed. They oscillate according to the socio-political circumstances that underlie all human actions. If the Biya regime has not contributed significantly to improving the living conditions of citizens, the fact remains that the opposition political parties have not been able to take charge of the dissatisfaction of Cameroonians by knowing how to translate it into a political project likely to seduce. Multipartyism has not led to democratic alternation in Cameroon but has rather favored the longevity of the power of one man. However, it is indisputable not to minimize the changes induced by the electoral competition, even if it was marred by irregularities.⁷⁹Cameroon, however, has the merit of not having experienced the alternation of cannons and the crackling of weapons.

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⁷⁹Schatzenberg, *Power Legimacy and Democratization In Africa*, *Africa*, Vol. 63, 1993.