



Journal Homepage : -www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI :10.21474/IJAR01/10801

DOI URL : <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/10801>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CAMEROON'S SLOW PROGRESS ON ELECTIONS SINCE THE 1990s: A QUESTION OF TEXTS?

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 10 February 2020

Final Accepted: 12 March 2020

Published: April 2020

Keywords: -

Cameroon, Democratization, Elecram,
Elections, Electoral Code, Multi-Party
Laws

Abstract

This article has shown that Cameroon's electoral process in particular and democracy in general has been 'stalled' after the first two elections in the early 1990s. Compared to most sub-Saharan states that opened up the political arena in the '90s, Cameroon has made a giant leap backwards after a timid progress at the beginning. The reason for this backward movement is due to a political will and determination of the regime not to level up the political field. This political will in particular has been exhibited in the bad electoral texts that have been enacted since the '90s. The electoral gains at the beginning of the opposition was squarely due to the naivety of the regime at that time and which learned a lesson to avoid future 'embarrassing' results by developing sophisticated methods of fraud. The regime has turned a deaf ear to calls from the opposition, civil society and international partners to reform the electoral code. Due to this uncollaborative response from the regime, some opposition parties have boycotted some elections. Another clear evidence of the bad faith in the electoral process comes from the high number of petitions in each election. The article has in its first part analysed the events/processes that led to pluralism in the '90s and in the second a full analysis of the electoral texts since the '90s. The article has concluded that the only way forward is an overhaul of the electoral texts that ensure the complete independence of Elections Cameroon (Elecram).

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Introduction:-

The democratic wind that started blowing from Eastern Europe and across Africa after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the '90s did not leave Cameroon unshaken. This was the most turbulent political period in the modern sub-Saharan region (Ping, 2002, p. 81). Hitherto, there was no freedom of speech and the one-party state was ubiquitous in Africa.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and events in Eastern Europe broadcasted live on television and at a time most African states had national television stations, emboldened the people to stand up against dictatorial rule. It was like the lifting up of a lid of a boiling pot. Widespread demonstrations and in some cases very violent were rampant stretching the security apparatus to extremes. One can also describe this period as one of anarchy where the rule of law was contested on the streets with much anger. The events that took place in the 1990s in the sub-Saharan region were comparable to the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. This period according to many protesters, represented the African Revolution. It was time to do away with the past considered dictatorial and to start a new political system with the power back to the people. The African people were fed up with dictators that in

reality were placed there by the colonial masters. These leaders lacked the least legitimacy in the eyes of the governed and some of them were so cruel that even their words were considered as law.

Most of the leaders at that time were taken unawares and were in no situation to control these fervent calls for a change. Most of them, finally, succumbed to the peoples' calls for a sovereign national conference (mostly in former French colonies) where foundations of a new democratic state were to be laid. This was a new way to redefine the state along a democratic path. People were eager to have a taste of freedom of speech, association, respect for human rights and the possibility to compete for power. To sum up, it was a time that the monolithic doctrine of the one-party system was no longer tenable.

These demonstrations and calls for democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, free and fair elections, equality before the law and good governance was anathema to the dictators but then political power was slipping away from their hands. The response in some countries was to heed totally to the peoples' call and in others such as Cameroon, it was a situation to manipulate and divide the population or to summarily repress these "insurgencies". A look at the events that took place in the early '90s in Cameroon leading to the setting up of an electoral code for future elections follows.

The Multiparty & Liberty Laws of December 1990:

The general overview of the 1990s above concerning the sub-Saharan region did not spare Cameroon and its president Paul Biya. Events took a fast turn in Cameroon beginning the 1990s. These events met a standard and ready repression from the government. These were events without a precedent. The government at first thought intimidation and repression could be a solution, but to its greatest dismay, people were becoming more and more radicalized and determined to pursue with their demonstrations or demands for a change.

The first minor event with regards to multipartism in Cameroon was known popularly as the "Yondo Black Affair" which was the storming of the law office of Yondo Black (ex-president of the Cameroon Bar Association) in the economic capital of Cameroon, Douala, on February 19, 1990 by CENER (secret police) agents. The agents demanded Yondo Black to hand over material relating to the creation of a political party. All search yielded no fruits in his office and the agents accompanied him to his home to do more searching. At his home he handed over a draft document titled "Coordination Nationale pour la démocratie et le multipartisme" meaning National Coordination for Democracy and Multipartism (Author's translation). This document was addressed to the Cameroonian people. In it, the document criticized the one-party system and President Paul Biya's regime, lamented about the worsening economic situation in Cameroon and called for the reinstitution of multiparty politics in Cameroon (Postnewsline, 2010). An interesting passage in this draft document showed the defiant mood of the authors who did not see any more reason for fear to reign in the Cameroonian society. It stated: "At a time when the winds of freedom and its corollary, democracy, are blowing throughout the world, we have not [no] right to fold our arms and do nothing..." (Tande, 2010, para. 2). Yondo Black was immediately arrested and in a space of a week, 10 others were arrested for being part of the group intending to create a political party in Cameroon and for subversion (HRW, 1990). They were subsequently, sent to the maximum-security prison in Yaounde, the political capital. These arrests were widely covered by the international media such as the BBC, VOA, and RFI and condemned at the same time by international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The Cameroon Bar Association (CBA) also condemned the arrests and the CBA president then, Ben Muna described the arrests as "a symptom of a serious disease eating deep into the fabric of Cameroonian society. This disease, he argued, was the absence of human rights and democracy" (Tande, 2010, para, 11). The CBA further demanded that all those detained under the 1962 subversion ordinance be released immediately and unconditionally. Before their sentencing, Yondo Black declared:

Mine was not an act of bravery. I had a duty to use my knowledge to enlighten my fellow citizens. I wanted to initiate a political debate which the Cameroonian had been deprived of for too long. I assume my responsibilities. I am a democrat... I am not afraid to go to prison. I am a transparent and upright man and I have never cheated in my entire life (Tande, 2006, para. 1).

They were given prison sentences ranging from 2-5 years and others acquitted. The Yondo Black Affair brought in new political light, criticisms and a lot of questioning from the ordinary citizens who saw the ruling class and every institution functioning the wrong way. The Yondo Black Affair has been described as the "catalyst" for Cameroon's

democratization. The president was unable to contain the internal and international pressure to release these political activists, and a few months after their verdict, the president overturned the verdict and they were all released.

The major event that led to the re-introduction of multipartism in Cameroon can be no other event than the launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) on May 26, 1990 in Bamenda, the then provincial capital of the North West Province. In fact, the SDF through its charismatic Chairman, John Fru Ndi, had deposited an application with the local administration for the creation of political party on March 16, 1990 (Le Monde, 1990). There was every indication that the founding Fathers of the SDF wanted to carry out the launching of their party in a legal and peaceful manner though multipartism was still illegal. The SDF gave the Cameroon administration a deadline of two months after their application and in the absence of a response, they will go ahead with the implementation of their political programme (Ibid). To further boost the SDF cause for the legalization of multipartism, a group of 22 intellectuals representing the main ethnic groups in Cameroon called on the president for an "urgent" introduction of "democratic pluralism" (Ibid). On May 15, 1990, two months after the deposit of their application, the SDF came out with a communiqué on the decision taken by the party. Part of it read:

The Social Democratic Front (SDF) announces to its sympathisers and potential militants that following the application deposited in the Mezam senior divisional office in Bamenda, the launching will take place in Bamenda town on Saturday May 26, 1990 at 2 p.m. The launching will begin with a march from the City Chemist Roundabout up to the Bamenda municipal stadium where the launching speech will be delivered in the same time as the distribution of the SDF Manifesto (Bitee, 2009, p. 60).

In order to show the SDF's willingness for a peaceful launching and respect for other political parties, the above communiqué explained why May 26 was the chosen date. It said the date was chosen to "avoid disturbing ongoing elections of the CPDM and the respect for the feast of the National Day on May 20" (Ibid). This was a good strategy of the SDF, very much aware of the danger that laid ahead, to put all responsibility on the government for any violence that may result from its launching. It was another way to gain a favourable domestic and international opinion.

Still at this point in time, the president still believed in the use of the military and security personnel to clamp down on any threat to his authority. This has been the tool used since independence and the president inherited it from his former boss, Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first president of an independent Cameroon. The government officially banned the launching of the SDF and this decision was read over the national radio station and published in the government newspaper the Cameroon Tribune. The SDF through the independent newspapers and flyers started mobilizing the population for its launching slated for May 26, 1990. On that fateful day, six lives were lost, "trampled upon" according to government sources and "shot" by the security forces according to independent sources (Manyong, 2009a). It is said that the government mobilized about 2000 police and military officers to counter the almost 80,000 people that attended the launching (Bitee, 2009, p. 61). The manifestation in Bamenda went on along with a minor manifestation in the University of Yaoundé where 200-400 students took part (Ibid). The government through its newspaper, the Cameroon Tribune tried to mislead the national and international audience by putting up ridiculous claims. First it said there was no brutality on the part of the forces of law and order and that the students sang the Nigerian anthem (Cameroon Tribune, 1990, pp. 2-3).

All analyses show the government was bent to discredit this manifestation as genuine and domestic. The idea of students singing the Nigerian anthem was just ludicrous. Few if not no Cameroon student can really sing the Nigerian anthem. Most students cannot sing the Cameroonian national anthem in the first place. Why would they even sing the Nigerian anthem? This lie could have been brought up because most of the students who took part in the manifestation in Yaoundé were Anglophones and sang the Cameroonian anthem in English to the surprise of the francophone security forces that came to disperse them. However, other allegations proved that this was not an error. The government accused, Fru Ndi of "importing" 10,000 Nigerians and hoisting the Nigerian flag and causing chaos. State radio and television, CRTV, even claimed he had escaped to Nigeria (Manyong, 2009b). From every indication, repression of dissent was on top of the government's menu in the 1990s and the government found it hard to accommodate the new demands of the opposition. The SDF's stubbornness and defiance of the regime went well with the population and gave courage to others to demonstrate without an official authorization. On June 3, 1990, the Episcopal Conference of Bishops in Cameroon published a letter wherein they openly criticized government violence to democratic demands (Mbe, 2008). Another illustration of the government's repressiveness

and dislike for democratic political reforms was the killing of three people in the northern city of Garoua in January 1991 during a pro-democracy demonstration (Mbaku & Takougang, 2004, p. 80).

The Electoral Code of 1991 & 1992 and the Creation of ONEL in 2000:

The Tripartite Talks of October 30, 1991 came up with an electoral code for the March 1992 parliamentary elections. Like the previous electoral code, the government made sure that the new code did not slip off its control prompting the SDF and some other opposition parties not to sign the final document of the Tripartite Talks. The new law, Law No. 91-020 was adopted by the National Assembly on December 16, 1991 laying down the modalities of designation, voting system, voting requirements, eligibility, incompatibilities and candidacy requirements.

The 180-member parliament was to be directly elected and the 180 seats carved out from 58 departmental constituencies. A mixed voting system - where a simple majority in single-member constituencies will determine the winner and an absolute majority in constituencies where the list system applies. In the latter case, if no list obtains an absolute majority, the one with the highest number of votes is allocated half of the seats; the remainder is allocated to the other best-placed lists through proportional representation. The Lists of candidates that score less than 5% of the votes cast are not eligible for proportional distribution. Seats are awarded to candidates in the order in which they appear on each party list (IPU, 2018). Voting was reserved for Cameroonian citizens aged above 20 permanently domiciled or have been living in the said constituency for no less than six months. Eligible candidates were to be no less than 23 years old and of Cameroonian nationality and being literate in French or English. Members of government, the economic and social council; senior officers of the public or parastatal body; members of the armed forces, security and police officers during service were considered incompatible to stand. Aspiring candidates were expected to deposit a list 40 days before the polling day and pay a deposit of 150,000 FCFA per candidate reimbursable only if the party obtains a 5% vote cast at the national level (Ibid). This new law, however, still placed election-control under the ministry of Territorial Administration. The government did not heed to the National Democratic Institute (NDI)'s recommendation to adopt an electoral code that "stressed the principles of accountability, transparency and neutrality in election administration (NDI, 1993, p. 17)." The NDI recommendations report to the government noted that "perhaps the most important factor in promoting a free and fair electoral environment is the establishment of a system for administering the elections that will command the confidence of all the participants in the process..." (Ibid). The government, indeed, did not completely ignore the NDI Report but selectively applied recommendations that did not stand in their way of consolidating power. The government did a "cherry picking" exercise exposing its bad faith to free and fair elections in Cameroon. In so doing, neither the opposition nor the civil society was involved in the electoral process. The NDI's recommendations had been broadly welcomed across the political spectrum and many suggested that the implementation of the recommendations will take Cameroon's democratic process to a new high.

The government went ahead on September 17, 1992 to adopt a new electoral law (Law N° 92/10) to govern presidential elections, less than a month to the planned October 11, 1992 elections. This action did not only expose the bad attitude of the government towards the opposition, but also highlighted the incompetence and irresponsibility of the regime. The new electoral code contains amongst others the following dispositions under Law N° 92/10 governing presidential elections in Cameroon:

1. A polling station for a maximum of 600 electors;
2. The list of polling stations shall be published 8 days before election day;
3. No person shall be allowed to vote unless their name appears on the register of electors;
4. Counting shall take place at the end of voting in each polling station in the presence of electors who wish to and do not constitute a menace to the tranquillity desired;
5. Immediately after the termination of the counting, the results obtained in each polling station shall be proclaimed;
6. The results shall be established in as many copies as there are members present plus two copies;
7. All members present shall sign and the original copy shall be forwarded to the Divisional Supervisory Commission chairperson. Each member shall obtain a copy;
8. The Supreme Court may admit a claim lodged by any eligible person, political party or candidate requesting that the elections be cancelled;
9. The Supreme Court shall proclaim the results of the election on the basis of the report of the National

Commission for the Final Counting of Votes. This must be done latest 15 days following the end of the vote.

The elections of October 11, 1992 will go down the annals of Cameroon's electoral history as the worst ever. Not worst because the methods used had never been used, but worst because the irregularities and fraud were so obvious. The same fraudulent machine continued later with other elections but the government made it "sophisticated." The opposition, the civil society and Cameroon's international partners continued to put pressure on the government to ameliorate the electoral system. Though the government never put in place a good system, it however, went ahead with tailor-made adjustments to the electoral system.

The government's response to the calls for an independent electoral organ was to put in place the Observatoire National des Elections (ONEL), the National Election Observatory (NEO) in English on December 19, 2000 (PUA, 2002). NEO was not a birth from some sort of consensus between the government, opposition and the civil society. The government as usual decided everything alone and used its CPDM-dominated parliament to bless it. This was a copy to the Senegalese ONEL which had earlier been created in 1997. This was a move very unusual with the government which had in the past vehemently refused imported models for Cameroon. However, if it decided to import this time, it was certainly because the government had confidence that this organ will not be nefarious to its hold on power.

The Senegalese ONEL was made up of independent personalities and experts and presided over discussions grouping all political parties. The integrity of the committee members was crucial in the smooth and peaceful transfer of power in 2000 in Senegal, where the then President Abdou Diouf lost the elections to Abdoulaye Wade. According to the government, NEO was to be an impartial election watchdog body with the principal role to control and supervise all stages of the electoral process in Cameroon. Unlike Senegal, the government stripped NEO of its essential neutrality and political parties had little to do in its official duties. NEO's role extended to national referenda as well.

The opposition on its part, contested fiercely NEO's birth, arguing it was not independent enough to guarantee free and fair elections in Cameroon. They particularly pointed to the mode of nomination of its members – all nominated by the president without any consultation of any sort or vetting by any political supreme organ. During its first test as an organ to control and supervise elections in the legislative elections of 2002, it was reported that the then minister of communication, Jacques Fame Ndongo, encouraged the publishers of the government-owned Cameroon Tribune to "publish articles extolling the fairness and transparency of the electoral process, the presence of international observers during the election, and the National Election Observatory (NEO) in organizing the election"(Takougang, 2003, p. 424). Also, the regime was eager to promote the image of a free and fair election organized under the auspices of NEO, and took the unusual step to conduct runoff elections for 17 seats in nine electoral districts where the results had been contested for gross irregularities. In the end, the CPDM won 16 of the 17 seats, with the remaining seat going to the SDF (Ibid, p. 425). NEO's first president, Enoch Kwayeb, was a well-known CPDM militant, further ruining the impartiality image of NEO.

Decree N° 2001/397 followed Law N° 2000/016 to regulate the composition and operation of provincial and divisional structures of NEO. Institutionally, NEO had a chairman presiding over an 11-member team, all appointed by the president. NEO's chairman in turn, appoints provincial, divisional and council structures operational during elections. Law N° 2000/016 also specifies the powers and duties of NEO as "the management of elections and referenda in compliance with the constitution or relevant legislation." It is empowered to hear all claims and disputes concerning voter registration and candidate nomination and can order corrective measures after examination. NEO could as well instruct administrative authorities to take corrective measures in case of constitutional and legal infringements. In this position NEO took more the posture of an electoral ombudsman. NEO was 100% financed by the government. NEO prepared its budget and submit to parliament for approval. It was obliged to submit a report after each poll to the president who had the responsibility to publish it. However, it should be noted that NEO was created without any accompanying constitutional amendments to take account of its existence and role. This constitutional shortcoming and the continuous criticism of NEO by the opposition, the civil society and the international community pushed the government to go a step further in making election management in Cameroon "independent". The government finally opted for Elections Cameroon (ElecCam).

Elections Cameroon (ElecCam) and Its Powers:

ElecCam came as the third election governing body since the beginning of the democratic process in Cameroon in the 1990s. At the beginning, it was the ministry of Territorial Administration (interior) in charge of the organization and supervision of elections, then came NEO following the criticisms that the administration could not be a player and

the referee at the same time. The government went ahead and created NEO in 2000 with the hope of dissipating the suspicions and criticisms of the opposition. However, NEO itself became under heavy criticisms from the opposition, the civil society and the international community for its credibility deficit and the opposition continued to demand for an independent electoral body pushing the government to finally accept one in 2006. How independent Elecam is or should be, continues to draw emotional debates till date. Elecam will be fully dissected in this article by looking at the theoretical functions, its organization and powers, its shortcomings/criticisms and finally the “bicephalism” that rocks it.

Organization and Functions of Elecam:

Elecam’s “caesarean birth” appeared on paper as the panacea to the electoral headaches that have tormented all elections since the 1990s in Cameroon. The draft bill gave the impression that Elecam will be an independent electoral body. Specifically, its Article 1(2) states in unequivocal manner that: “Elections Cameroon is an independent organ charged with the organization, the management and the supervision of all electoral and referenda processes” (Ubal, 2018). Section 2 of the 2006 law as amended prohibits ELECAME members from seeking or receiving “instructions or orders from a public or private authority during the performance of their duties” (Ibid). In order to protect Elecam members or to guarantee their independence, Section 3 provides that ELECAME members are “immune from prosecution, investigation, arrest or detention in the performance of their duties, and save in cases of being caught in the act of breaking the law, shall not be prosecuted during their tenure in office” (Ibid).

The law organizes Elecam as a form of two-in-one organization. On the one hand, we have the Electoral Board (EB) and on the other hand we have the General Directorate of Elections (GDE). The EB is comprised of 18 members (including a chairperson, the incumbent Mr. Enow Abrams Egbe) and performs mainly supervisory duties while the GDE headed by a Director-General, (Dr. Abdoulaye BABALE), actually manages and organizes elections. According to ELECAME’s website, the EB is the “policy-making organ” while the GDE is the “executive organ”(ELECAME, 2017). The EB has one chairman and a vice. Article 8 (2) of Elecam’s law describes the attributes for the nomination of the EB members. It says: “Members of the Electoral Board shall be designated from among independent personalities of Cameroonian nationality, recognized for competence, moral uprightness, intellectual honesty, patriotism, neutrality and impartiality” (Ibid). They are appointed by Presidential decree “upon consultation with political parties represented in the National Assembly and civil society” (Ibid). The tenure of EB members is four years, renewable as appropriate, and expires in the following situations: non-renewal of mandate, resignation, and death (COG, 2012). The mandate of members may also be terminated in the following cases according to Articles 8(5), 9(1) and 11); physical incapacity, serious misconduct (notably the breach of oath), and where a penalty is imposed for a felony. Before assuming office, members of the Electoral Board shall take the following oath before the Constitutional Council according to LAW N° 2012/001 OF 19 APRIL 2012 RELATING TO THE ELECTORAL CODE, AMENDED AND SUPPLEMENTED BY LAW N° 2012/017 OF 21 DECEMBER 2012:

I swear to fully and faithfully discharge my duties and to exercise my office without fear or favour in accordance with the Constitution and laws in force, to ensure the confidentiality of proceedings and votes, to abstain from taking public positions and to decline any consultation on matters falling within the purview of Elections Cameroon (p. 6).

The law obliges them to declare their property and assets. Within the framework of its duties, the EB shall: adopt the by-laws of Elections Cameroon; submit reports and/or proposals to the relevant authorities on issues that fall within their competence; examine and approve draft budgets prepared by the Director General of Elections; approve the action programme prepared by the Director General of Elections; approve progress reports drawn up by the Director General of Elections; give its opinion or make suggestions on any election-related draft instrument submitted to it; on the proposal of the Director General of Elections, determine the organization and conditions of functioning of branches; hold consultations with the Administration, the Judiciary, political parties and where necessary, civil society within the framework of the management of the electoral process (ELECAME, 2017). The EB functions principally by holding four ordinary sessions convened by the chairperson. An extra-ordinary session shall take place if need arises or a request of two-thirds (2/3) of its members. In an election period, the EB shall meet as often as necessary. Decisions arrived at are taken on consensus or otherwise by a simple majority provided the quorum of two-thirds members are present (Ibid).

The Electoral Code of Cameroon (ECC), Section 22 of the Law No 2012/001 as amended affirms that: “The General Directorate of Elections shall be responsible for the preparation and material organization of election and

referendum operations, under the supervision of the Electoral Board” (p. 9). This role of the GDE distinguishes it from the role of the EB which is to “ensure compliance with the electoral law for all stakeholders for the purpose of guaranteeing regular, impartial, free, fair, transparent and credible polls” (Ibid, p. 4). The Director General of Elections (DGE) and his or her deputy are also “appointed by Presidential decree for a five-year term renewable as appropriate upon consultations with the electoral board.” The same procedure used in terminating the mandate of EB members also applies to the DGE and his/her deputy.

The DGE works under the supervision of the EB for all election and referendum operations, in particular: drawing up, managing, updating and keeping the national voters’ register as well as election documents and materials; procuring and distributing election materials and documents; drawing up electoral registers, in conjunction with the relevant joint commissions; publishing electoral registers; issuing voter cards; distributing voter cards, in conjunction with the relevant joint commissions; organizing or supervising the training of electoral personnel; preparing the annual draft budget of Elections Cameroon; preparing draft budgets of elections; executing the budget of Elections Cameroon and the budget of elections; managing sundry resources and equipment placed at its disposal; receiving and forwarding to the EB candidacy papers for presidential, legislative, senatorial, regional and municipal elections; receiving and forwarding to the EB applications to participate in referendum campaigns; distributing, within the statutory time-limit, samples of ballot papers to candidates or political parties taking part in the polls for election or referendum campaign purposes; coordinating the work of observers accredited by the appropriate national authorities; organizing polling stations; coordinating all bodies responsible for election operations; coordinating the forwarding of election reports and other election documents from polling stations to the head office of Elections Cameroon; forwarding election reports to the Electoral Board (ECC, Section 26 (1), p. 10)

In order to perform these vast duties, the GDE has support bodies. The organization and functioning of support bodies shall be laid down by the Electoral Board, upon the proposal of the Director General of Elections and the officials of support bodies shall be appointed by the Director General of Elections, upon the approval of the Electoral Board (Ibid, p. 11). Further functions of the GDE and Elecam contained in Law No 2012/001 follows here. The Director General of Elections shall recruit staff on behalf of Elections Cameroon, in keeping with the laws and regulations in force and during the election period, the Director General of Elections may hire temporary staff for the period required to perform specific duties (ECC, Section 29, p. 12). Elections Cameroon shall have branches at regional, divisional and council levels; the organization and functioning of branches shall be laid down by the Electoral Board, upon the proposal of the Director General of Elections; officers of the regional branches shall be appointed by the Electoral Board, on the recommendation of the Director General of Elections. The officials of the divisional and council branches shall be appointed by the Director General of Elections, upon the approval of the Electoral Board (Ibid).

Elecam is funded by the public treasury. It has an annual budget and an election budget in an election year. The DGE is the authorizing officer of the budget of Elecam and that of election in an election year. The above draft budgets are prepared by the DGE and approved by the EB (Ibid). The chairperson of the EB then forwards the draft budgets to the government for “concerted consideration” and tabling before parliament for adoption as part of the finance law. An auditor is appointed to Elecam by the minister in charge of finance for an office term of three years renewable once. The auditor at the end of each financial year submits a financial report of Elecam’s financial management. In addition, the accounts of Elecam are audited annually by relevant state services (Ibid, p. 14). The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the EB as well as the Director General and the Deputy Director General of Elections are entitled to monthly remuneration and benefits in kind. Members of the EB are entitled to session allowance during EB meetings and shall be reimbursed all expenses incurred in respect of such meetings upon production of supporting documents. Allowances and mission allowances are also granted to members of the EB.

The ministry of Territorial Administration ensures a liaison between the government and Elecam (Ibid, p. 15). In this regard, the latter submit copies of minutes and progress reports to the former. Finally, in the event of shortcomings or dysfunctions on the part of Elections Cameroon, the President of the Republic shall take the remedial measures he deems necessary (Ibid).

Criticisms and Shortcomings with the Elecam Text:

The greatest shortcoming of Elecam has been the low confidence many stakeholders behold against it. The government is at the origin of this low confidence when it violated the same law it enacted for Elecam. The law had stipulated for the nomination of “independent” personalities to Elecam which has a statutory mandate to discharge

its functions impartially and independently. Almost all the twelve members initially nominated by the president came from the ruling party, the CPDM. Eleven of the twelve appointed were members of the central committee and political bureau of the CPDM. Its then chairman, Dr. Samuel FonkamAzu'u, was a member of the Political Bureau of this party. In other words, the ruling CPDM became the de facto election management body, taking over this task from MINAT. One can say neither the opposition nor the civil society was consulted since none of their recommendations were taken into account before the nominations as stated in Section 12 (3), "The Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and members of the Electoral Board shall be appointed by decree of the President of the Republic upon consultation with political parties represented in the National Assembly and civil society" (p. 6). In reality, the government held discussions with political parties and the civil society – but this was just a show to entertain the gallery.

The SDF as well as other political parties and political analysts rebuked the government over these appointments. Xavier Puyol, the then head of the EU delegation in Cameroon condemned the appointments and said he understood the frustration of Cameroonians with the electoral system. He further urged the government to do something to boost voters' registration, "it's sad that Cameroon which has a population of close to 20 million inhabitants has never succeeded to register up to 5 million on the voter list. This could be worst in the 2011 election and that is not good for the country"(Abeng, 2009, para. 6). The government argued that the appointed members have renounced their membership with the ruling party and that the taking of Oath transformed them neutral.

Another violation of the law on Elecam, as it seems to be, was the Presidential Decree of December 29, 2008 naming the DGE and his deputy which did not follow the spirit of Section 24 (1) which states that the DGE and his deputy are appointed after "consultation with the EB" (p. 9). However, two decrees were signed on December 29, 2008, naming on the one hand the DGE and his deputy and on the other hand the members of the EB. This clearly shows the DGE and deputy were not products of a consultation between the government and the EB. This nomination of the DGE and deputy in form, came well ahead before the EB members had even taken oath to become legal members of the EB. These were not good signs to boost confidence in Elecam. Political actors and the Cameroonian civil society organizations multiplied their protests to this organ and claimed it was "openly partisan, illegal and illegitimate"(KahWallah, 2011).

Some of the amendments of Elecam's law in 2011 went further to weaken Elecam as an institution that has a final say in elections in Cameroon. Initially, Section 6 (2) of the Elecam law of December 26, 2006, gave Elecam the powers to "make public the trends recorded at the end of legislative, senatorial, regional and municipal elections." The new amendments have stripped Elecam of this power, transferring this role to the Constitutional Council. This transfer of competency to the Constitutional Council makes the detection of a possible fiddling of an election result difficult. The government's motivation to amend this section of the Elecam law must have come from lessons learnt from the Ivorian crisis of 2010. This was a bold and decisive step by the regime to prevent and avoid any unpleasant surprises.

The government still violated the Elecam law following amendments of section 8 which increased the EB membership from 12 to 18. In appointing the new six members, the president appointed Delphine Tsanga, a former minister and vice president of the opposition party UNDP. Amongst the six newly appointed, only two really did get public approval: WatioDieudonné of the Bafoussam Diocese and TitiNwel Pierre, an experienced personality in elections monitoring and management working with the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission (Emmanuel, 2011). Delphine Tsanga, though from the UNDP which considers itself an opposition party but has been in a government coalition with the CPDM without any condition for more than a decade, could not be considered independent. She is more likely to move on with the regime than go against it. So, on the one hand, she is a member of a political party and on the other hand she can easily move on well with the government and as such is not an independent personality.

The modification of Article 22 of the 2008 Law on Elecam which had as motive the complete transfer of all electoral processes to the GDE to the detriment of the EB diluted the independence of Elecam. The DGE is named by the president and does not take any oath as EB members and as such can work for the interest of the president. This modification was also a risk to Article 7 (2) of Elecam law which empowered the joint electoral commissions in the drawing up of electoral registers. For example, in the run up to the 2010 elections, these joint electoral commissions were not formed rendering these operations by Elecam illegal. What happens now if the DGE decides to eliminate these joint electoral commissions that opposition parties are members? These modifications are a

potential to an electoral hold-up to the profit of the ruling party. Cameroon needs modifications that go along the way to make Elecam as independent as possible creating the right atmosphere for free and fair elections. Elecam's independence vis-a-vis the government is also in question following Article 43 (2) which states: "The minister in charge of territorial administration maintains a permanent liaison between the government and Elections Cameroon. In this capacity, he receives from the latter, copies of session's minutes and working reports." This disposition gives the idea of a hierarchical relationship between the government and Elecam, where Elecam is apparently under the ministry of territorial administration. Such reports ought to be deposited in parliament where the peoples' sovereignty resides and not under a government department.

Still, the administration's power and influence in the electoral process is evident in the Law No. 2011/002 of 6 May 2011 (LC-Doc, 2011). In its Article 13, a representative of Elecam presides over the commission charged with the revision of electoral lists. This commission has as members; a representative from the administration designated by the sub-divisional officer, a mayor's representative who can be the mayor or a councillor designated by him and designated members of political parties. This commission is empowered to replace a non-designated member of a political party with a personality from the civil society. In the case of a non-designated member of the administration, the Elecam head of the commission is obliged to seize the senior divisional officer for him to designate the representative. This is purely discriminatory. Article 25 of this same law delegates Elecam to the third rank in the divisional supervisory commission. This new article replaces Elecam as the head of this commission with the president of the competent Court of First Instance. The three representatives of Elecam to this commission come after the three representatives of the administration designated by the senior divisional officer. In this posture, Elecam is certainly under the direction of the administration since they both have parity in members in this commission and we can say that under normal conditions, the president of the Court of First Instance will take the position of the administration. Elecam's independence is seriously questioned in this situation.

Another looming danger with Elecam is in its Section 44 (1) of Law No 2012/001 which states that: "In the event of shortcomings or dysfunctions on the part of Elections Cameroon, the President of the Republic shall take remedial measures he deems necessary" (15). This power of the president should have been transferred to the National Assembly or to the Senate. In Elecam's Law No. 2006/11 of 29 December 2006, Section 40 (1) it was the Constitutional Council that had the powers to ascertain the failures of Elecam but now the president has the exclusive powers to ascertain and take remedial measures. There is a huge risk of the president abusing his powers especially if Elecam is going against the president's interests. Section 44 (2) further gives him power to terminate the functions of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and members of the EB as well as the DGE and his deputy as the case may be. The truth is that, Elecam cannot be in crisis unless it is triggered by the government.

We now turn attention to the Cameroonian diaspora that has right to take part in elections in Cameroon – doing so in Cameroon's diplomatic or consular compounds. Decree No. 20011/237 of 8 May 2011 (President Cameroon, 2011) in its Article 4 states "The Commission charged with the Drawing Up and Revision of Registers of Electors shall be composed of a chairperson and 3 (three) members chosen from among Cameroonian citizens settled or residing in the countries concerned or in countries attached to the diplomatic representation where election or referendums operations are organized. One of the members shall represent the head of the diplomatic representation or consular post." Law No. 2011/011 of 13 July 2011 explains how these commissions are set up in Section 3 (2): "The electoral board of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) shall hold consultations with diplomatic representations, consular posts and political parties with a view to setting up the commissions provided for in sub-section (1) above (Commission charged with the drawing up and revision of register of electors; Commission charged with the issuance and distribution of voters' cards; Local polling commissions). In reality, this duty is carried out by the diplomatic service and Elecam only certifies it. This clearly puts the administration (through the embassies and consulates) and not Elecam as the election management body. This is further illustrated on how electoral registers and results of elections are transferred to Elecam. Article 8 (2) says the provisional register of electors shall be forwarded to the Minister in charge of external relations for onward transmission to the GDE. Article 13 (2) gives the DGE the power to transform the commission charged with drawing up the electoral registers to the commission charged with the issuance and distribution of voters' cards. These provisions are dangerous since Elecam has no personnel of its own deployed abroad. Why should the provisional lists and results of elections be forwarded first to the minister of external relations before being forwarded to Elecam and the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes in case of results? This procedure gives room for the administration to fiddle with the numbers and results. To mitigate such a potential threat, the voters' lists and results should be sent directly to Elecam bypassing the ministry of external relations.

“Bicephalism” within Elecam:

The texts organizing Elecam have made Elecam in a way that there is no absolute leader. In theory and practice, we can talk of two heads in Elecam. It seems it was designed to be as such so as to dilute its powers. On the one hand, we have the EB and the other hand we have GDE with functions superimposing each other. However, a careful observation and analysis of the Elecam text shows a disequilibrium of power to the advantage of the DGE. This has created tension and poor coordination in the discharge of duties between the EB and the GDE. A discussion on this confusion follows in the next paragraph.

The EB’s functions are spelt out in Section 7 of the Law N. 2012/001 (ECC) of 19 April 2012, the latest law that regulates all elections in Cameroon. It states “(1) Elections Cameroon shall be under the authority of the Electoral Board. (2) The Electoral Board shall ensure the smooth functioning of Elections Cameroon.”

In this regard, Section 10 enumerates the various duties of the EB. These duties are:

The Electoral Board shall ensure compliance with the electoral law by all stakeholders for the purpose of guaranteeing regular, impartial, free, fair, transparent and credible polls.

In this respect, the Electoral Board shall:

1. carry out any verifications and controls it may deem appropriate;
2. scrutinize candidacy papers and publish the final list or lists of candidates contesting presidential, legislative, senatorial, regional and municipal elections;
3. forward election reports to the Constitutional Council or bodies provided for by law;
4. ensure the timely publication and notification of the list of members of local polling commissions to the appropriate persons specified in the electoral law, notably representatives of lists of candidates or candidates;
5. control the preparation of election material and election documents within the deadlines laid down by law;
6. hear and determine claims and petitions regarding pre-election and election operations, subject to the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Council and appropriate courts or authorities;
7. order corrections warranted following consideration of claims or petitions filed in respect of elections or referendums (ECC).

These enormous duties entail a sufficient work force or personnel. In addition, to carry out these duties effectively the EB should be master and controller of the budget. But this is not really the case in Elecam. The duties of the GDE below will signal who is really in command in election management within the Elecam institution. The duties of the GDE, placed under a Director General and a deputy are explained in Section 22. It states unequivocally, “The General Directorate of Elections shall be responsible for the preparation and material organization of election and referendum operations, under the supervision of the Electoral Board.” Section 26 further illustrate these duties with respect to the EB, “The Director General of Elections shall be responsible, under the authority of the Electoral Board, for all election and referendum operations...” Some of the duties of the DGE that are in conflict with the duties of the EB are:

1. drawing up, managing, updating and keeping the national voters’ register as well as election documents and materials. He is in charge of the whole electoral process and the EB only receives documents necessary for certification in their area of competence.
2. executing the budget of Elections Cameroon and the budget of elections;
3. coordinating all bodies responsible for election operations;
4. He shall draw up the final report on the conduct of the poll

With all these attributes, it can be concluded that the DGE is the real Elecam. To further boost the DGE as the overall runner of Elecam, Section 29 (1) gives him the power to recruit staff on behalf of Elecam. Further diminishing the role of the EB, Section 32 (2) states: “The Director General of Elections shall be the authorizing officer of the budget of Elections Cameroon and of the elections budget.” Without access to budget on time, the EB cannot carry out the duties of running Elecam. The DGE can delay or even refuse to give out cash to the EB. Certainly, the EB looks inferior financially and can only carry out their duties on the mercy of the DGE. This is unfortunate for an organ that is appointed by the President to be controlling the budget alone and does not take oath as the EB. As will be seen later, this has not gone without problems within Elecam.

Section 30 (3) and 30 (4) pose a real direct conflict between the two organs. Section 30 (3) states: “Officers of the regional branches shall be appointed by the Electoral Board, on the recommendation of the Director General of

Elections” and Section 30 (4) states: “Officials of the divisional and council branches shall be appointed by the Director General of Elections, upon the approval of the Electoral Board.” In these two situations, who has the power of appointment? What happens if the regional officers are appointed without the recommendation of the DGE? What happens too if the DGE appoints officials at the divisional and council branches and the EB refuses to approve? The text provides no solutions in case such a conflict arises. There is real danger: that of an impasse and malfunctioning of Elecam if the two organs fail to coordinate. The text would have at least referred to the EB as the upper hand in case of a dispute between the two. It is simply inconceivable to give the duties enumerated above to the EB without accompanying resources and finance. In this situation, the EB becomes just a certifying body and one where its members will try to maintain good relations with the DGE just in order for their allowances and bonuses to be paid in time. Also, the DGE can use the power of the budget to divide the EB and as such the EB will lose the power to control and keep the DGE in check. The lack of political will on the part of the government is the only reason to account for this awkward nature of Elecam: an institution meant to be independent but is heavily dependent behind the curtain.

As earlier mentioned above, Elecam’s text has created issues between the EB and the DGE. The most conspicuous was on October 23, 2014 where the then president of the EB, FonkaAzu’u indicted the DGE for insubordination and disrespect for hierarchy (Mbom, 2014). He said the EB on a unanimous decision took Resolution No. 0159/ELECAM of 9 July 2014 appointing regional and divisional officials of Elecam and the DGE has not commissioned them. He further said the two previous sessions in 2013 (October 25 and December 31) had asked the DGE to propose replacements for some of the workers in the branches who were going on retirement, since they had attained the age of 60, the maximum age to work with Elecam (Ibid). This matter was on the EB’s agenda in the three previous sessions of 2014 (February 26, April 25 and July 9) and yet the DGE did not heed to the resolution. FonkaAzu’u in a move apparently to defend the EB’s decision to appoint officials without the DGE’s recommendation, said the Board waited for six months as a sign of respect to the DGE to submit proposals which he did not (Ibid). This power tussle in Elecam has not gone unnoticed by Cameroonian political actors. During the Sixth concertation meeting of Elecam on July 9, 2015, opposition politicians attacked the DGE of causing havoc in Elecam. The SDF chairman challenged FonkamAzu’u and Tanimou (then the DGE) to tell the assembly who actually was the boss of Elecam (Nsom, 2015b). The SDF chairman attacked the DGE for sanctioning some workers for attending a training seminar organized by the Elecam Chair (EB member) in Kribi. He said the “divided” Elecam was failing in its objective of giving credibility to the country’s electoral system (Ibid). Dr. Hilaire Kanga from the civil society also attacked the DGE, saying it was “inadmissible that one man thinks he could fight against 18 people.” One of the speakers even demanded that the DGE resigns so that peace can reign at Elecam. MbahNdam, a member of parliament, asserted that when the EB rejected some CPDM lists for irregularities, the DGE sent a lawyer to the Supreme Court to defend the lists (Ibid).

Prior to the concertation meeting of Elecam with election stakeholders as stated above, the DGE in a correspondence dated June 16, 2015 purportedly in response to a query, the EB chairman had given to him, told FonkamAzu’u that he was not his boss (Nsom, 2015a). He said Elecam was placed under the supervision of the EB, but that the Board is not equal to one man, be it the chairman. He in turn asked the chairman to respect the provisions of the law and the electoral code. The DGE said the EB was the supervisory authority but should not substitute the DGE and officials of Elecam branches in the country. He lamented the fact that EB members were carrying out field trips and stressed that their duties were purely attending Elecam session meetings. He told FonkamAzu’u that “they should stop carrying out field trips and disturbing delegates.” He emphasized that he has “responsibility to recruit, appoint, pay, transfer, and sanction workers at ELECAM” (Ibid), a clear reference that he is the boss of Elecam.

The government, certainly, embarrassed that the internal conflict at Elecam had gone public, took corrective measures to reassure the national and international community that Elecam is still an institution to have faith in. The then DGE, Mr. Sani Tabnimou, was promptly replaced after the July 2015 concertation meeting of Elecam with election stakeholders by a presidential decree on July 21, 2015 by Dr. Abdoulaye Babale, a former minister and member of the EB of Elecam (Mformi, 2015). In opting for an EB member, the government intended to have a DGE who will be less conflictual with the EB and its chairman. However, this replacement remains a cosmetic solution to power conflict that rocks the proper functioning of Elecam. For Elecam to be fully functional, effective and even credible, the text of Elecam needs to be revisited.

Conclusion:-

This article has demonstrated how bad texts have marred the electoral process in Cameroon since the 1990s. From independence up to December 9, 2000, election management was the exclusive duty of the Ministry of Territorial Administration (Interior), then came ONEL (I & II) and finally Law N° 2006/011 of 29 December 2006 creating ELECAM as an “independent” electoral organ to manage elections and referenda.

One problem has so far rocked elections in Cameroon: a confidence deficit in the organs in charge of managing elections. The naivety of the ministry of Territorial Administration in the early 1990s has gradually been replaced with sophisticated means of rigging or administrative tools to determine the outcome of elections. A vivid example was seen in the last municipal elections of February 9, 2020 where government administrators created unpleasant situations for opposition candidates to meet up with their files in time (JournalduCameroun, 2019). A careful observation shows there is a political will not to level up the political field for all participants. Government has remained deaf ears to opposition, civil society and international demands for reforms that can make elections credible in Cameroon. Such demands include; the use of a single ballot, the redistribution of electoral constituencies and the computerization of the electoral process (Crux, 2019). The greatest however, is making Elecama an independent organ. The text on Elecama needs to be revisited and electors need not only do biometric registration on the electoral registers but should also vote biometrically.

The high number of petitions in almost all the elections (Table 1) is clear proof that election results have never been accepted in Cameroon by all stakeholders since the re-introduction of multipartism. The table further shows how one party and one candidate have been dominating the political scene since the 1990s. The earlier competition amongst the parties has been gradually eroded to the extent that one can refer to Cameroon as a one-party state. Strangely, the ruling party and its leader has witnessed an extraordinary popularity if the results of the elections can be taken as the yardstick over these years. Politically, only one plausible explanation exists: a sophisticated closed electoral system. No wonder, Cameroon has negative results in the Freedom House democratic measurement index and the Mo Ibrahim Index of Governance. Cameroon scores 18/100 and is described as not free in the Freedom House Index of 2019 (Freedom House, 2020) and 46.2/100 on the Mo Ibrahim Index of 2017 (49.9/100 is Africa's average) occupying the 36th position out of 54 in Africa (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2018). One can conclude that democracy especially elections has stalled in Cameroon and the country needs an overhaul of its electoral texts.

Table 1:- Evolution of Parliamentary and Presidential elections since the 1990s.

Election	Date	Participation & Percentage	Winner	score	No of Parties/candidates	No. of Petitions
Parliamentary	01/03/1992	2,435,443 (60.59%)	CPDM	88/180	32	00
Presidential	11/10/1992	3,015,448 (71.9%)	Paul BIYA	39.9%	06	04
Parliamentary	17/05/1997	2,906,186 (75.6%)	CPDM	116/180	45	21
Presidential	12/10/1997	4,220,136 (83.1%)	Paul BIYA	92.6%	07	00
Parliamentary	30/06/2002	4,500,000	CPDM	149/180	42	130
Presidential	11/10/2004	5,830,272 (82.2%)	Paul BIYA	70.9%	16	08
Parliamentary	22/07/2007	3,410,000 (62%)	CPDM	153/180	45	103
Presidential	9/10/2011	4,951,434 (68.3%)	Paul BIYA	78%	23	20
Parliamentary	30/09/2013	5,481,226 (76.8)	CPDM	148/180	29	40
Presidential	07/10/2018	3,590,681 (53.9%)	Paul BIYA	71.3%	09	18
Parliamentary	09/02/2020	3,021,947 (43.8%)	CPDM	150/180	33	35

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