

A woman wearing a red hijab and an orange apron is holding up a ballot paper. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a chalkboard with some writing on it. The text 'Electoral Processes in French - Speaking Africa' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

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54



59

CONTENT

- 3 Editorial
- 4 Political Alliances In Francophone Africa: Lessons From The Senegalese Sonko-faye Model
- 10 Political Alternation In Cameroon, Between Boycotting Elections And A Closed Electoral System
- 14 The Contested Legal Provisions Of Cameroonian Electoral Law
- 18 The Role Of Civil Society During Elections In Cameroon
- 24 Equality Of Arms Between Candidates In Electoral Processes In Africa: Case Of Cameroon
- 30 CATTF 2024: A Catalyst For Empowering Independent Voices In Central Africa
- 37 Critical For Independent Voices To Be Expanded Across Central Africa
- 45 Democracy Awakening Notes on the State of America by Heather Cox Richardson - Commentary and review by Pooran Chandra Pandey
- 46 Electoral Fraud And The Weakening Of Cameroonian Democracy
- 50 Democratization Challenges: Women, Youth, And Electoral Dynamics In French-speaking Africa
- 54 Youth Participation in Democratic Processes in Francophone Africa
- 58 Electoral Processes And Issues Of Legitimacy In Francophone Africa
- 63 "Strengthening Economic Resilience in Francophone Africa: Does Having Reserves in the French Treasury Matter?"
- 68 The Nexus Between Elections And Public Health
- 74 Community Outreach And Support: Contribution Of The Denis And Lenora Foretia Foundation

Editorial



In Francophone Africa, there is the growing tendency for incumbent leaders and the ruling political parties to dominate the political scene many at-times using state resources. Opposition parties routinely face difficulties in times of elections partly because they may lack the resources and national media coverage. Analysts have equally talked of voting irregularities, including political parties buying votes and offering gifts to people. This is a scenario where the opposition regularly accuses the incumbent of corruption and vote rigging during and after the elections.

More specifically, young people and women are two important categories that are frequently under-

represented in the voting booth. Globally, young people are often under-represented in voting and political processes due to various factors, including disillusionment with political systems, lack of trust in politicians, and feeling that their voices are not heard. Similarly, women face barriers such as cultural norms, lack of access to education, and economic constraints that limit their political participation. Additionally, women in Francophone Africa face challenges due to traditional gender roles and limited access to resources.

While there have been efforts to increase women's political participation, progress is slow, and women are still significantly under-represented in political processes. In Cameroon for example, the gender of women MPs influence their participation in decision-making structures within parliament, party discipline and the executive-dominant political system more generally have a greater influence on the issues and policies that the parliament debates and votes upon.

The 29th issue of On Policy Magazine offers in-depth perspectives in its usual sections: governance and democracy, peace and security, economy, business and entrepreneurship and public health with a special focus on **Electoral Processes in French-Speaking Africa.**

By highlighting this issue, On Policy Africa commits to advocating for free, fair and inclusive electoral processes as backdrop for effective governance, peaceful societies and sustainable development.

Enjoy your reading

Lenora Ebule

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Political Alliances in Francophone Africa: Lessons from the Senegalese Sonko-Faye Model

POUOMEGNE KAMDEM P. FRANCHESSA

Introduction

Over the past ten years, the political landscape of Senegal has undergone a remarkable evolution marked by the unexpected rise of Ousmane Sonko and the emergence of Bassirou Diomaye Faye as key figures on the political scene (1). As these two individuals navigate the complex dynamics of power (2), alliances, and conflicts, questions arise about the future direction of Senegalese governance. Political alliances, as defined by Giovanni Sartori in **Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis**, refer to the strategic cooperation between members or factions of the same political party or between different political parties, aimed at consolidating power, influencing decisions, and achieving shared objectives (3). The objective of this article is to analyze the dynamics and implications of this political rise, focusing on the partnership between Ousmane Sonko and Bassirou Diomaye Faye, particularly their ability to mobilize voters, structure an alternative discourse, and influence a political trend. By examining their collaborative efforts and the challenges they have faced, the aim is to shed light on the mechanisms of their success and draw lessons for electoral processes in Francophone African countries. This article uses a qualitative research approach, drawing on a comprehensive review of literature, political analyses, and media reports to examine the trajectories of Sonko and Faye. Through content analysis and thematic synthesis, the article seeks to identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities in their political partnership. Its structure highlights a brief history of Sonko and Faye's political ascent, followed by an exploration of their partnership and the challenges they have faced. It then presents an analysis of their relationship and its implications for the Senegalese political system. Finally, the article concludes with practical recommendations to strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of elections in Senegal and the broader Francophone African region.

History of an Improbable Rise to the Presidency

The story of Ousmane Sonko's ascent and the emergence of Bassirou Diomaye Faye at the highest office of the Republic of Senegal is a political journey rich in twists and key moments. It all begins with Ousmane Sonko, who, after

being dismissed from his position as a tax and domain inspector, decides to intensify his political momentum. He indeed founded the Patriotic Movement of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity (PASTEF) party in 2014, but it is his dismissal in 2016 that truly propels him onto the political scene (2). This rupture with his previous employment gives him the aura of a dissident and reinforces his image as a defender of the rights of ordinary citizens (3). His participation in the 2017 legislative elections, where he was elected as a deputy to the National Assembly, provides him with a broader political platform. Two years later, in 2019, he runs for the presidential election and obtains a significant score of 15.76% of the votes, placing third. His political ascent is undeniable, despite the electoral defeat (4).

In January 2022, Sonko is elected mayor of Ziguinchor (5), further consolidating his position in the Senegalese political landscape. His use of crowdfunding to support the activities of his party demonstrates his ability to mobilize popular and financial support (6). However, his arrest in June 2024 and the dissolution of his party by the Ministry of the Interior represent major setbacks for his political ambition. Despite his efforts to maintain his candidacy for the 2024 presidential election, it is ultimately rejected due to a conviction for defamation (7), raising questions about the transparency and impartiality of the electoral process.

It is in this context of political crisis that Bassirou Diomaye Faye emerges as an unexpected figure. Designated by Sonko as a substitute candidate, Faye wins the 2024 presidential election in the first round with a score of 54.28%. His rapid rise from prison to the presidential palace in just ten days makes him the first President of Senegal to accede to the highest office without having previously held a ministerial or elective position (8).

While this electoral success is remarkable, it has been tainted by accusations of partiality, such as the exclusion by the Constitutional Council in January of several candidates, including Ousmane Sonko and Karim Wade, son of former President Abdoulaye Wade. Furthermore, debates have emerged regarding the credibility of the results and the obstruction of freedom of expression, notably with the withdrawal of the private television channel Walf TV from the airwaves on February 4 by the Minister of Communication for «incitement to violence»,

as well as the announcement of measures to restrict access to mobile internet for security reasons. These events have exacerbated the challenges related to the management of electoral conflicts (9).

Mechanisms of Building the Sonko-Faye Political Alliance

The relationship between Ousmane Sonko and Bassirou Diomaye Faye is complex and multifaceted, characterized by close political collaboration, deep personal ties, and a dynamic of mutual support. Ousmane Sonko, as the leader and iconic figure of the Patriotic Movement of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity (PASTEF) party, finds in Bassirou Diomaye Faye his right-hand man and the architect of the party, responsible for its doctrine and internal organization (9). Their alliance is based on shared values such as work, ethics, and fraternity, which motivate them to combine their efforts to promote these ideals within Senegalese society (10).

Their mutual support is a key element of their collaboration. For example, when Bassirou Diomaye Faye was arrested in April 2023 for criticizing the judges in the defamation trial of Ousmane Sonko, the latter publicly expressed his support for his comrade (11). Conversely, when Ousmane Sonko faced legal obstacles and his exclusion from the 2024 presidential race, Bassirou Diomaye Faye offered him his support and even benefited from his backing for his candidacy (12). Beyond politics, their relationship is strengthened by personal ties, as evidenced by the fact that Bassirou Diomaye Faye named one of his sons Ousmane Sonko. Their shared interests, such as a passion for martial arts, further strengthen their complicity, as illustrated by Bassirou Diomaye Faye's practice of Viet Vo Dao (13).

Together, their political ascent is inseparable. While Bassirou Diomaye Faye plays a key role in the organization and structuring of PASTEF, Ousmane Sonko embodies the party's charisma and leadership. The unexpected accession of Bassirou Diomaye Faye to the Presidency of Senegal, without prior ministerial or elective experience (14), highlights the impact of their political collaboration and their influence within Senegalese society.

Furthermore, this collaboration has had a significant impact on electoral dynamics. On the one hand, it has to some extent imposed a redefinition of PASTEF's electoral strategies, and on the other hand, it has modified voters' perceptions of the possibility of radical change in the Senegalese presidential election.

Key Factors for a Successful Political Alliance in Electoral Periods: Lessons from the Senegalese Case

The Sonko-Faye political alliance in Senegal offers a rich source of lessons on the dynamics and necessary conditions for a successful electoral coalition.

It first highlights the imperative of a common ideological vision from the outset of the collaboration. Indeed, their partnership was built on shared values and a common objective, which allowed them to overcome the political and legal obstacles they encountered. This solidarity was particularly evident during moments of crisis, where their unity of action and resilience in the face of external shocks strengthened their position on the political scene.

Furthermore, political alliances must be prepared to effectively face unforeseen events and adjust their strategies accordingly, while remaining true to their fundamental principles. Additionally, the inclusive and participatory leadership demonstrated here, marked by the active involvement of civil society and supporters, is a key factor in strengthening a political alliance. Sonko and Faye have been able to mobilize their supporters and involve civil society in their initiatives, which has reinforced their legitimacy and popular support (15).

This Sonko-Faye alliance can also be analyzed within the broader context of collaboration between political parties within a democracy. Indeed, political and electoral alliances are essential for the functioning of multiparty democracies. They promote governmental stability, enable broader representation of voters, and can increase the chances of electoral success (16). The example of Senegal

demonstrates that its success depends on many factors, including ideological compatibility, resilience, the ability to prioritize the political objective over individual interests, and participatory leadership.

It is also important to note that the absence of a unified opposition alliance can hinder political progress (17). When opposition parties fail to unite, they fragment their electoral support, which often benefits the incumbent regime. The example of Cameroon illustrates this reality, where difficulties in forming strong and lasting alliances have often weakened the opposition and maintained the political status quo (18).

Conclusion

This study has examined the political ascent of Ousmane Sonko and the emergence of Bassirou Diomaye Faye, as well as their partnership and the challenges they have faced. We have adopted a qualitative approach, analyzing political literature and media reports to assess the trajectories of Sonko and Faye. Our findings highlight the crucial importance of the Sonko–Faye alliance for Senegal’s future

governance and its impact on the political landscape. Their close relationship, characterized by strong collaboration and personal ties, demonstrates that their political rise is inseparable. This dynamic also underscores the need for strong popular support and active civil society involvement in political processes. We propose maintaining a common vision from the outset of the collaboration and promoting inclusive and participatory leadership. Alliances must be prepared to face the unexpected while remaining true to their principles. Inspired by the Sonko–Faye dynamic, other countries in the region could consider similar strategies to overcome political obstacles and foster meaningful and lasting change.



**Pouomegne Kamdem
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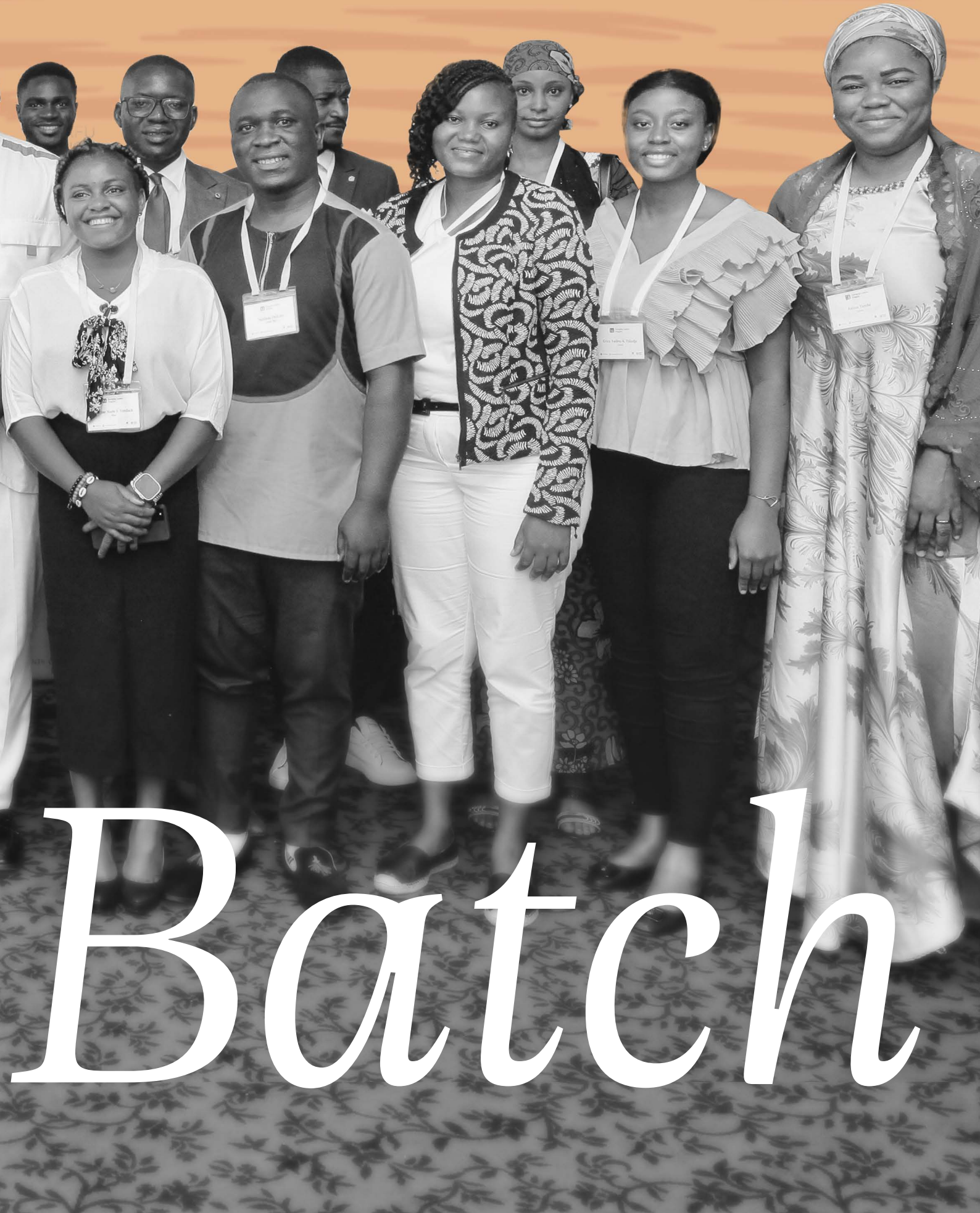


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Political Alternation In Cameroon,

Between Boycotting Elections And A Closed Electoral System

Prof. NGO TONG CHANTAL MARIE

The Cameroonian political scene opened in the early 1990s with the adoption of a law which established the legislative framework for political parties (1). The law of 19 December 1990 establishing the regime of political parties puts an end to the reign of the single party and brings clandestine parties out of the shadows. Thanks to this law, several political parties are legalized, including: the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC), the Union of Populations of Cameroon (UPC), the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), the Movement for the Defense of the Republic (MDR). These political parties are positioning themselves to confront the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in power since its creation in 1985 and until then the only party. Committed to the democratization process, Cameroon plans to organize legislative and presidential elections for the year 1992. The legislative elections are organized on March 1, 1992, and the presidential election takes place on October 11, 1992 in order to elect the President of the Republic of Cameroon. The UDC and the SDF will boycott the

legislative elections but will curiously run for the presidential election. In 1997, the UDC, like the SDF, participated in the legislative elections, but boycotted the presidential election. In 2019, after participating in the 2018 presidential election, the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC) decided to boycott the municipal and legislative elections. And in its current speech, this party calls for change, determined to compete for the presidential election of 2025. This inconsistency of the political parties in opposition to alternation is quite disconcerting. Whereas year after year, all those parties position themselves with a view to a possible future alternation. The issue of electoral deadlines whatever they may be (legislative, municipal, and presidential) is built around political alternation. But the strategies implemented, rather than leading to alternation, on the contrary strengthen the positions of the power in place and reduce the probabilities of democratic alternation. It seems that these opposition parties do not understand what political alternation is and how to build a political strategy to achieve a democratic alternation in the institutions of power that are the Presidency and



Credit: Alexis Huguet/AFP

Parliament. Based on this observation, how can we understand political alternation in a political system like that of Cameroon? And once political actors have understood the games and issues around political alternation, what strategies can they implement to achieve the objective of a democratic alternation?

The notion of political alternation

Specialists in electoral and institutional analysis use the notion of alternation to designate a change in government majority (2). In this perspective, “political alternation occurs when parties belonging to different political currents succeed one another in power” (3). It can occur either through the presidential election or through the legislative elections. Ousmane Diallo

(4) maintains that political alternation can only be effective in Africa under two conditions: a real political will of the outgoing President to organize elections considered credible by all, including the opposition. He takes President Goodluck Jonathan in Nigeria as an example. The second condition would be a single candidacy from all political opponents who are seriously seeking alternation in power. The example cited here is the candidacy of Macky Sall, the sole candidate of the opposition parties which allowed the latter to succeed Abdoulaye Wade as head of the Senegalese state. The case of Gambia in 2016 can also be cited (5). Upon observation, these two conditions have never been effective in Cameroon. Hence the difficulty of this State in experiencing political alternation.

Political alternation is a democratic requirement to

the extent that it is admitted that “political alternation [...] promotes quality democracy” (6). In this sense, it is important that the alternation be constitutionally organized. Of course, it is not an end in itself, but it appears to be “constitutionally necessary, insofar as it establishes the permanent presence of an institutionalized alternative to political violence” (7). In Central Africa, alternation is seen mainly, if not exclusively, as “alternation in the occupation of the presidential office” (8). The change at the head of state is posed in these states as “a major and not central condition for the democratization of the continent” (9). It is therefore easy to understand in this logic why political parties can find it «strategic» to boycott legislative elections but to invest in going in for presidential election. When political parties do not boycott legislative elections (1992, 2020), they boycott the presidential election (1997). These various boycotts have always served the interests of the party in power and undermined any possibility of an alternation.

The boycott of elections and its negative impact on political change

The boycott of elections, which is similar to “the politics of empty chair” (10), is a strategy implemented by opposition parties to block, sabotage or prevent the smooth running of elections. The obvious aim is to discredit the electoral process. The basis of this strategy is the denunciation of the non-transparent rules of the political game and an unreliable and unfair electoral process. What raises questions and highlights the inconsistency of those involved in the boycott is the fact that in the same electoral year, they boycott one election and participate in another even though the denunciations underlying their boycott were not taken into account. For example, in 1992, the SDF and the UDC boycotted the legislative elections in March under the pretext that the system for organizing elections was unreliable and did not guarantee transparency. But a few months later, in October of the same year, when no substantial

improvement had been made to their demands, they decided to participate in the presidential election. The same scenario occurred on the contrary in 1997. The two parties participated in the legislative elections and recorded very poor performances against a CPDM which had time between 1992 and 1997 to strengthen its ramparts and implement a strategy of doubly defensive and offensive conquest of power. After their participation in the legislative elections, they decided to boycott the October presidential election and did not participate, thus facilitating the re-election of outgoing President Paul Biya with a better score than that of 1992.

Since 2000, with the creation of the National Elections Observatory (ONEL) (11) and its subsequent modifications until the creation of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) (12), the demands of the opposition parties have always been fixed on the conditions of organization and conduct of elections. The improvements made are not satisfactory. The electoral code (13) adopted in 2012 is contested. But history repeats itself in 2018–2019. Despite the protests and denunciations of the inadequacies of the Electoral Code, the opposition parties decided to go to the presidential election of 2018. And during the legislative and municipal elections of 2019, the opposition party came 2nd in the presidential election decides to boycott the legislative and municipal elections on the basis of an electoral code unfavorable to transparency and alternation. And even though this electoral code has not undergone any amendment or modification, this party is repositioning itself to go to the 2025 presidential election.

The lessons of past boycotts have clearly not been learned. This strategy is ineffective and discredits not the process, but the opposition parties. It appears that if, as Ousmane Diallo has pointed out, political alternation is conditioned by the existence of a real political will of the party in power to organize credible elections for all, it is just as conditioned by the existence of a real political will of the opposition parties to work in synergy for political alternation.



Credit: Pan African Visions

Conclusions and recommendations

The opposition parties have fixated on the change at the head of the presidential office as the only possible path of alternation in the political system which nevertheless presents strong parliamentary overtones on the textual level. The system of Cameroonian democracy offers the opportunity for parliamentary alternation with a change of majority in Parliament. This alternation could have taken place in 1992 if the SDF and the UDC had not boycotted the legislative elections. A takeover of parliament by opposition parties would clearly have changed the course of history. But the boycott of the SDF and the UDC kept Cameroon for many years in the CPDM system. It is appropriate for current political actors to note that alternation is not simply a change of man, but of system and ideology; a change in political strategies and approaches to power. It can be done by the

presidential election or by the legislative elections. The results of the 1992 legislative elections revealed the importance of political alternation through legislative elections. That the actors of political alternation and those who aspire to it no longer limit themselves to the sole path of alternation through the presidential election, but that they explore and exploit the path of alternation through legislative elections by coalitions across the entire territory to have a majority in Parliament. The coalition is not only for a single candidacy in the presidential election, it can also be made for single candidacies of deputies in electoral districts during the legislative elections.



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The Contested Legal Provisions Of Cameroonian Electoral Law

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As Cameroon prepares to experience an intense electoral year in 2025, marked by legislative and municipal elections, the extension of the mandate of deputies has disrupted the initial calendar (1). Although this decision has a legal basis in laws and the Constitution in force, it has not failed to elicit contrasting reactions. While the government cites financial and logistical constraints to justify the postponement (2), civil society and opposition parties see it more as a political maneuver aimed at hindering the democratic process (3). Indeed, voices are being raised to denounce an electoral system tainted by partiality and a lack of transparency, where the rules seem to tilt in favor of the party in power. This apprehension towards the electoral process is not new, and the extension of current mandates only accentuates it. If the electoral legal framework is not intrinsically faulty, it is its application and the suspicions of its exploitation for political purposes which give rise to the current controversies. Faced with this observation, this reflection sets out to analyze certain provisions of the legal framework for elections which are contested by opposition parties and civil society in Cameroon. The aim is to identify the flaws and propose concrete solutions to guarantee free,

transparent and fair elections, essential conditions for a peaceful and inclusive democracy. Firstly, we will analyze the constitutional and legislative provisions that are subject to political interpretation, and their consequences for the conduct of elections (I). Secondly, we will explore solutions likely to guarantee the organization of free, transparent and fair elections in Cameroon (II).

Cameroonian electoral law under the critical gaze of the opposition and civil society in Cameroon

If there are several constitutional provisions which govern elections in Cameroon, only a few are, during the various elections, the subject of criticism from certain Cameroonian political actors. For example, Article 15 of the Cameroonian Constitution clearly provides for the extension of the mandate of deputies. Paragraph 4 of this Article provides that “*in case of serious crisis or where circumstances so warrant, the President of the Republic may, after consultation*



Credit: actucameroun

with the President of the Constitutional Council and the Offices of the National Assembly and the Senate, request the National Assembly to decide, by law, to extend or abridge its term of office... ” (4). The use of this provision is always contested each time it takes place. Although the power in place cites reasons such as the need to shorten the electoral calendar or the insufficiency of financial and human resources. (5), the opposition sees it more as an attempt to exclude certain political parties. In the case of the recent extension of the mandates of deputies, the opposition denounces for example a maneuver aimed at excluding the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC), the main opposition party, which has no representative in the National Assembly. This exclusion would be motivated by the requirements of the electoral law which conditions access to the presidential election on nomination by a party with elected representatives (6) .

Another constitutional provision which governs elections and whose application is often the subject of controversy, is Section 48, which provides in paragraph 1 that: “ the Constitutional Council ensures the regularity of presidential and parliamentary elections, as well as referendum operations ”. Although this provision establishes the judicial control of elections to the detriment of political control (7), it nevertheless raises questions about the independence and effectiveness of the Constitutional Council. Indeed, Article 51 of the Cameroonian Constitution provides that the members of this council are appointed by the President of the Republic. Consequently, other political actors generally question the independence of this body in the context of electoral disputes, believing that its decisions are tainted by the influence of the ruling party. Furthermore, the decisions of the Constitutional Council are not subject to any appeal (Section 50 of the Constitution of 18 January 1996); which makes it impossible for any appeal filed by the applicants



Credit: Jean Pierre Késsou/Xinhua/REA

to succeed. For example, during the post-electoral dispute of the presidential elections of 7 October 2018, the appeals of the leaders of the opposition parties, the MRC and the Social Democratic Front, were rejected by the Constitutional Council on October 18 of the same year. (8).

Beyond the Constitution, certain provisions of Law No. 2012/001 of 19 April 2012 on the electoral code are the subject of recurring challenges from opposition political actors and certain civil society organizations, who have been calling for a reform of this text for several years (9 , 10). The differences relate firstly to the amount of electoral guarantees set by the electoral code at 1 million FCFA for legislative elections and 50,000 FCFA for municipal elections (Articles 166 and 183). The opposition considers these sums excessive and pleads for their reduction to 500,000 FCFA and 25,000 FCFA respectively, in order to facilitate access to the candidacy and guarantee competitiveness. Secondly, the opposition is seeking a change in the terms of appointment of members of the body in charge of elections, Elections Cameroon

. This is in fact placed under the authority of the Electoral Council, which includes eighteen members (including the President and the Vice-President) all appointed by presidential decree (Article 12 of the Electoral Code). Consequently, all actions carried out by ELECAM to organize the elections, create polling stations and count the votes are *ipso facto* considered by the opposition as biased.

Finally, the opposition and civil society are calling for an extension of the duration of campaigns, which is from fifteen days in the Electoral Code (Article 82) to thirty days, to allow them to cover the entire territory. In fact, the opposition parties have difficulty covering fifty-eight departments in such a short time as the ruling party does not consider this campaign delay as an obstacle to its dynamics.

Thus perceived, the Cameroonian electoral legal framework, as it is designed and applied, presents for the Cameroonian opposition systematic biases which favor the maintenance in power of the party in place. It is therefore necessary to analyze reform options and propose lasting solutions likely to satisfy all stakeholders involved in the electoral process.

Solutions for an electoral legal framework conducive to true democracy in Cameroon

The legal framework for elections in Cameroon is mainly based on the Constitution and the Electoral Code of 2012. However, certain provisions of these standards are often interpreted in such a way as to limit the chances of the opposition. However, in any democracy, elections offer citizens at regular intervals the opportunity to choose their representatives (11).

It is necessary to make both institutional and behavioral changes. In this sense, if the profound reform of the Electoral Code as well as the revision of the Constitution demanded by the opposition and civil society remain the main way forward, we must

however go beyond just institutional change in a context where the separation of powers is struggling to materialize. It is therefore urgent to make magistrates aware of strict respect for the ethics of their profession, namely responsibility and neutrality, to guarantee their independence and put an end to any form of partiality linked to political loyalties. The Constitutional Council of Senegal offered a remarkable example in this sense, by invalidating the postponement of the presidential election unexpectedly announced by President Macky Sall on February 25, 2024 (12) despite the fact that its members are appointed by presidential decree.

As for the Electoral Council in Cameroon, it is necessary to reform the method of designating its members, in view of the famous formula according to which “*we do not organize elections to lose them*” (13). Indeed, in almost all African states, the creation of autonomous electoral commissions (CENA) as an independent administrative authority and body with real autonomy from the government (14) is a failure. To guarantee the impartiality of electoral commissions, it is crucial to rethink the method of appointing their members. In Cameroon, for example, the eighteen members of the Electoral Council could, like the members of the independent electoral commissions, be designated in various ways such as nomination by the executive and the political parties sitting on the board. National Assembly, in proportion to their political weight and civil society.

Furthermore, it is imperative to guarantee fair electoral competition in Cameroon. If the opposition calls for a reform of the electoral calendar, this request should be nuanced. Indeed, opposition political actors should be permanently active on the ground to anchor their project in the reality of citizens and therefore, their request for prolonging days for campaign is not relevant.

Finally, the question of electoral guarantees is worth considering in light of the multiple complaints

relating to it, during the national elections. Indeed, the exorbitant amount of one million FCFA constitutes a real barrier for many new potential candidates, thus limiting political plurality. By reducing this amount, we would open the competition to a wider range of candidates, thus encouraging the emergence of new political forces and strengthening the representativeness of institutions and different sociological components (notably women and young people). Thus, by facilitating access to electoral competition, we encourage citizens to base their choice on concrete political programs and credible propositions, rather than on superficial criteria such as ethnicity or the distribution of low-cost material goods. This would help to fight against practices which too often plague Cameroonian political life and to strengthen citizens' confidence in the democratic process. Finally, the legal framework for elections in Cameroon must be known to all citizens to guarantee informed participation, strengthen democracy and reduce the risk of conflict.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the legal framework for elections in Cameroon, although having evolved over the years, remains a multifaceted tool. It is both a vector of democracy, guaranteeing the expression of popular will, and an instrument of manipulation, when the rules are vague, the procedures opaque and the institutions weak. For Cameroonian elections to be less contested, it is imperative to pursue in-depth reforms, by strengthening the independence of the Constitutional Council, by strengthening the transparency of the electoral process and by promoting more active citizen participation in electoral processes.



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The Role Of Civil Society During Elections In Cameroon

JENGU JENGU GUY BEAUDRY

Introduction

In 2024, 19 African countries are organizing elections (1). More than half of these elections will take place during the last quarter of the year. In French-speaking African countries, more or less violent post-electoral crises (2) are quite common, and similar patterns observed. On one hand, the democratic openings of the 1990s either transformed single-party systems into ruling parties or brought former military personnel to power. On the other hand, the political landscape lacks robust policy platforms and ideological depth (3), and the vibrancy of civil society has rarely persisted past the 2000s. Yet, Cameroon currently has more than 50,000 entities claiming represent civil society (4). It is this civil society that is the focus of this analysis. First, the question of defining African civil society must be addressed, as its conceptualization outside of African democratic contexts and its ubiquitous usage in media make it a somewhat identifiable yet difficult to precisely define phenomenon (5). For the purposes of this work, civil society refers to an “autonomous associative sector, independent from the state” (6). Following Hegel, we distinguish it from political society, recognizing its intermediary position between prominent political actors

and families (7). How does civil society deploy itself in Cameroon during the electoral period? The electoral period is divided into three distinct periods: before the election, on the day of the election, and after the election. More than 30 years after the advent of pluralist elections and multipartyism, this work aims to analyze the political, institutional and social logics that inform the practices of civil society during these moments, based on the events of the last presidential election. The objective is to uncover the actual repertoire of action employed by civil society actors during electoral periods in Cameroon, in order to identify ways to promote civic and citizen-oriented behaviors.

A Diverse and Multifaceted Society

“Diverse” is the best descriptor for the heterogeneous nature of Cameroonian non-profit civil society organizations (CSOs) working for the public interest. These CSOs encompass human rights advocacy groups, community development associations, think tanks and research organizations, religious organizations, labor unions and professional associations, independent media, and youth and

student movements. In Cameroon, as per Article 2 of Law No. 90/053 of December 19, 1990 on freedom of association: “*an association is an agreement by which persons pool their knowledge or activities for a purpose other than the sharing of profits.*” Furthermore, associations in Cameroon have considerable autonomy in defining their objectives, which are established in their constituent documents. However, this freedom is not absolute and must be exercised in accordance with essential values such as: preserving public safety, maintaining the integrity of national territory, safeguarding the unity of the country, promoting social cohesion, and adhering to republican principles. In the day-to-day management of their regular affairs, CSOs have activities revolving around three main poles: citizen mobilization, monitoring of democratic processes, and improving living conditions for the population. During election periods,

the first two areas seem to occupy the majority of the associative scene in Cameroon.

Before the election, CSOs generally focus on citizen mobilization by encouraging voter participation and raising awareness among citizens about the stakes of the different electoral calendars. It was by doing this between May and August 2017 that the “11 million registered” movement (8) stood out to the point of eclipsing other similar initiatives, such as that of the women of the “Les Souverains” movement who traveled through the rural areas of the Lékié department in the Center region to encourage citizens to register on the electoral rolls (9). This phase of citizen mobilization is generally motivated in Cameroon by the perceived gap between the 6.5 million registered voters and the total population estimated at over 20 million (28 million according to the 2023 World Population Report (10)). Currently, since January 2024,



Credit: Jordi Perdigó - Anadolu Agency

under the impetus of CSOs such as the Active Youth and Citizenship movement, we are witnessing the proliferation of hashtags like #IRegister, #MyVoteCounts, #VoterCard on virtual platforms like Facebook. They are generally accompanied by the slogan: “Do you have your voter’s card?” (11) This call for electoral participation seems to have borne fruits, as the body in charge of elections announced last June that the electoral roll currently stands at 7,823,434 registered voters (12). This is the first time ELECAM has exceeded 7.5 million registered voters. However, during the electoral and post-electoral phases, the concerns of CSOs change.

Monitoring of democratic processes lies at the center of CSO activities during and after the election. Thus, on the eve of the 2011 presidential election, the CSOs Nouveaux Droits de l’Homme and Plate-Forme de la Société Civile pour la Démocratie announced the establishment of the Independent Citizen Electoral Commission (CECI) (13). Conceived as the “people’s ELECAM”, this CECI brought together nearly 400 executives, 9,930 election volunteers, and 93 civil society organizations involved in the process, and aimed to contribute significantly to the organization of a free, transparent, and fair election in 2011. The goal was to restore credibility to the electoral process to once again engage citizens in politics. Similarly, during the 2018

presidential elections in Cameroon, the CSO Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes deployed 32 young observers to monitor the entire electoral process. These observers were distributed across the seven subdivisions that make up the city of Yaoundé. On election day, their presence was noted in 122 distinct polling stations. Their activities were diverse and included assisting voters to guide them through the voting process, active participation in counting operations, as well as the compilation and recording of results. This approach enabled thorough citizen oversight of the electoral process (14). However, relying on 32 young people to monitor 122 polling stations in one day hints at the human resource challenges faced by CSOs.

A real need for financial and human resources

As we have seen, the Cameroonian associative landscape includes a multitude of CSOs. The scientific literature on the study of CSOs in Cameroon echoes the conclusions of the technical and financial partners who work in tandem with these CSOs to identify two main factors that limit their capacity for action: internal management difficulties and their limited capacities in terms of human and financial resources (15). Their limited financial capacities push them to compete for international funding (16). The direct consequence is their loss of autonomy following the alignment of their various agendas with those of generally Western donors (17). Indeed, the granting of funding is very often subject to the obligation to respect the themes proposed by the donors, even if they do not quite correspond to the initial field of action of the CSO.

Finally, when funds are often allocated, they are not always managed with transparency. Producing accounting documents or obtaining certified accounts as required by donors is not always easy. And some associations are not even legalized. They are confined to the community level and are hardly known to people other than their members and the beneficiaries of their projects. The problem with this way of proceeding is that it considerably reduces their visibility and influence at both the national and international levels. This limited reach affects their ability to establish connections, access resources, and exert influence beyond their immediate area of operation, which is very often where their headquarters are located (18).



Credit: @Photo Droits tiers

“CSOs face considerable difficulties in developing competitive responses to tenders

During a presidential election, this makes it impossible to monitor the 24,990 polling stations recorded by ELECAM.

Furthermore, in an increasingly connected world where social media networks constitute real spaces of mobilization where civil society actors operate (19), a cybersecurity assessment of a few CSOs revealed an urgent need for CSOs to improve their approach to protecting their assets, information, personnel, and systems. Among respondents who indicated they do not have a dedicated person or department for cybersecurity – nearly half of the participants – only 11% said they intend to create one. This percentage is alarming, especially since in the field of technological services, cybersecurity is now considered a strategic priority. This situation highlights a worrying gap between the current practices of these organizations and the digital security standards generally recognized as essential. It is crucial that these entities become aware of the importance of cybersecurity and implement adequate measures to protect their resources and activities in the current digital environment (19).

From all of the above, it is clear that CSOs face a serious problem in terms of the skills needed to properly manage and administer their organizations. The lack of competent

human resources explains all these shortcomings. These deficiencies are particularly visible in terms of monitoring and evaluation. These processes require expertise possessed by very few CSOs. This situation considerably limits their ability to obtain substantial funding. Indeed, many grants that could help strengthen the monitoring of democratic processes are inaccessible to them due to the low level of expertise of their staff. Furthermore, CSOs face considerable difficulties in developing competitive responses to tenders, further limiting their funding and growth opportunities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, Cameroonian civil society plays a crucial role in promoting citizen mobilization, monitoring electoral processes, and political education. These roles could be played more effectively if CSOs can overcome their difficulties in terms of finance and human resources, and if they can work collaboratively with each other and with public authorities.

To conclude, here are a few recommendations addressed to public authorities and CSOs:

To the public authorities, we recommend:

- Establishing an impartial mechanism to financially support CSOs that act in compliance with republican laws
- Considering CSOs as partners and facilitating their access to quality information
- To CSOs, we recommend:
- Ensuring transparency in the management of received funds
- Coming together in associative networks and favoring consortium work



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2024 Executive and Strategic Leadership Program for Think Tanks and CSOs from Central Africa Region



Equality Of Arms Between Candidates In Electoral Processes In Africa: Case Of Cameroon

Dr. THÉOPHILE NGUIMFACK VOUFO

Understood as a game, or even a process, election is above all a competition between political actors (1). From this point of view, the candidates must be subject to the same conditions of competition, as required by the democratic ideal at the heart of this modality of designating political leaders in modern States (2). This justifies the interest in analyzing electoral processes from the angle of equality, a principle inherent to the democracy in vogue in modern States. But equality in electoral matters has often been approached based on gender considerations, notably the representativeness of women or that of minorities (3). It seems equally interesting to adopt another approach, which is that of equality of arms between candidates during the electoral process. In this regard, it is important to emphasize the interactions between candidates, between them and the election administration or even the election judge.

However, it should be noted that equality of arms is anchored in procedural law where it has acquired the value of principle (4). In this area, it constitutes a foundation of the right to a fair trial. Its purpose consists of offering the litigant all the necessary means to have his case heard fairly, publicly and within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law (5). Transposed to electoral matters, equality of arms can be defined as the right for each candidate or political party to present its candidacy, its program, and to defend it publicly, fairly and independently before the people, other candidates, the body in charge of elections and the bodies in charge of electoral disputes. If there cannot be free, sincere and transparent elections in the absence of these requirements, it seems urgent to question the level of application of equality of arms in political elections in Cameroon.

While Cameroon is investing in strengthening its political system through increased democratization of institutions, the election remains an essential gauge by which the political modernization of the State can be assessed (6). Still fragile, the modernization of the Cameroonian electoral process has nevertheless made notable progress in terms of equality of arms between the protagonists of the electoral process (I), despite the gray areas which persist (II) and deserve to be addressed adequately (III).

The institutional reception of equality of arms in the electoral game

From the point of view of its institutional reception, equality of arms seems to be taken into account by the provisions of the Cameroonian electoral law, and implemented by the protagonists of the electoral process. Under the terms of the Electoral Code, equality of arms between candidates or political parties is manifested by their right to be represented in the different electoral commissions (7). Each candidate or political party has its own representative on preparatory election commissions, local voting commissions, departmental commissions and national commissions. It should be noted that this right implies that access is neither blocked nor made difficult for these representatives. Furthermore, the candidate or political party can only lose this right if they have been validly notified and have not shown up at the appointed time without valid reason. They must be able to express themselves independently on omissions, errors or useful observations and only be expelled for legitimate reasons.

During election campaigns, equality of arms gives each candidate or political party an equal opportunity to convince voters at meetings held to explain and comment on their programs and their political party's pledges. The Electoral Code provides for an equitable distribution of poster space, media schedules and the calendar of political meetings. To help candidates and political organizations bear the financial cost of these operations, the law provides for public funding to reduce the gap in resources between candidates. During voting operations, Section 100 of the Electoral Code

provides that, in each polling station, the number of ballot papers for each candidate or list of candidates, as well as envelopes, must be more than the number of registered voters. This measure implies the availability of ballots for all candidates. Their representatives must be able to freely participate in the vote count and receive a copy of the report of the results. In the event of a dispute, candidates or representatives of political parties are granted the right to appeal to the election judge without discrimination, but only under the conditions laid down by law. However interesting this institutional reception of equality of arms may be, restrictions are observed on their implementation.

Restricting the effects of equality of arms in electoral matters

Equality of arms does not exert the expected influence due to factors linked sometimes to the administration, sometimes to the body in charge of elections or to the election judge. With regard to administration, administrative authorities have extensive powers in their administrative districts to maintain public order and prevent disorder. However, this legitimate power must be used with tact and sensitivity. Otherwise, it can become a major obstacle to the expression of public freedoms, as they are necessary for



Credit: HCR/D. Mbalorem

“Equality of arms is the royal road to peaceful elections, since it is a guarantee of trust between the players in the electoral process.”

the effectiveness of the debate of ideas supposed to bring the candidates' program to the appreciation of voters. In practice, the administration showed little tolerance during this period and opted for bans on manifestations as a simple precautionary measure rather than taking action to regulate such events. More seriously, these bans seem more oriented towards opposition parties, as was observed during the 2018 presidential election (8). Likewise, several opposition parties encountered obstacles in compiling their candidacy files for the legislative and municipal elections organized in 2020 due to a lack of collaboration from administrative authorities (9).

With regard to the body in charge of elections, it is important to emphasize that its impartiality is a central element of the autonomy which has been granted to it to manage the electoral process in a transparent manner. However, *Elections Cameroon (ELECAM)* is regularly criticized for treating representatives of opposition candidates with

relative discrimination (10). This is the case with the implementation of its powers to police electoral campaign posters. This body leaves certain latitude to certain parties, notably the one in power, to produce posters in an anarchic and even excessive manner to the detriment of other candidates. As for the election judge, the dispute over the 2018 presidential election revealed that the Constitutional Council is not yet open to an extensive interpretation of its praetorian powers (11). However, this attitude of the election judge represents a major obstacle to the regulation of the electoral process, as the electoral law contains many unspoken elements, such that only an approach designed to complete the law could serve to ensure equality between candidates and the manifestation of the truth of the ballot boxes. In the end, the opposition parties' appeals are inadmissible not on substance, but on the grounds of lack of evidence, quality or deadlines, while the law itself seems obscure. From the above, it appears that many obstacles still hinder the materialization of equality of arms during the electoral process. In this regard, it seems useful to offer some recommendations.

Conclusion and recommendations

Equality of arms is the royal road to peaceful elections, since it is a guarantee of trust between the players in the electoral process. To reinforce its impact, we recommend

- Political parties should master the electoral law, in order to apply it and require its application in all circumstances;
- It is up to the administration to strengthen its neutrality during electoral periods, with civil servants and other public agents not having to act directly or indirectly on behalf of a political party;



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2024





CENTRAL AFRICA THINK TANK FORUM



CENTRAL AFRICA THINK TANK FORUM 2024: A CATALYST FOR EMPOWERING INDEPENDENT VOICES IN CENTRAL AFRICA

Interview with
Mr. Anthony Antem

Q- What inspired the creation of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum?

A- Thank you very much Claire for having me in this interview. It is quite a privilege for me to speak about the 2nd edition of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum. To start with, our vision for the Central Africa Think Tank Forum stems from a Pan African desire to find African solutions to African problems. My team and myself are committed to addressing challenges that are plaguing the Central African Region. Through the CATTF, we are gathering perspectives from multiple stakeholders to see how we can effectively map out African Solutions to these African problems. That is the first issue that prompts our vision for this event. But again looking at the bigger picture, The Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation from an organizational perspective has long been committed towards catalyzing Africa's Socio-Economic Transformation, through research, policy analysis and advocacy that translate to concrete actions geared towards enhancing human security and corporate well-being, and so this Forum lies as a bedrock that aligns to this vision. Again, if you look at it from a regional perspective, the Central African Think Tank Forum is a meaningful step championed by the civil society which equally aims to drive the African Agenda 2063 which further seeks to achieve the "Africa We Want", in other words, the perspectives or the ways we need to see and live in Africa by 2063. Finally, from a global perspective, you can equally look at the Central Africa Think Tank Forum as a platform for advocacy on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more specifically goal 17 which seeks to foster global collaboration and partnerships in achieving the SDGs. These are the multiple layers that prompt our vision for the Central Africa Think Tank Forum. You can then observe that the Forum from a strategic standpoint cuts across a multitude of issues and ideologies.

Q-How has it grown or changed since its inception last year?

A-Thank you very much, for this pertinent question. It gives me the opportunity to speak about how we have grown from the 1st edition last year. There are many ways to measure the growth of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum. Firstly, we can choose to look at it from a participant perspective. Last year we brought to Yaounde close to a hundred people across 11 countries from the ECCAS Region and beyond for the Central Africa Think Tank Forum, and this year it is certain to host much more than that because of the increasing interest we receive from people across different



... the Central African Think Tank Forum is a meaningful step championed by the civil society which equally aims to drive the African Agenda 2063 which further seeks to achieve the "Africa We Want".

regions. Since this forum aims to target think tanks first, we had close to 15 think tanks across all countries in the ECAS region. This year, the Forum promises to host between 15 – 22 think tanks still in Yaounde. That is a visible indicator of how we are growing in terms of engagement. Equally you can measure our growth in terms of the number of participants out of the region who manifest their interest

towards this event. I want to be specific on this because the Central Africa Think Tank Forum seeks to address challenges that are peculiar to the Central African Region but Africans across other regions have manifested interest to participate in this edition. This speaks to the fact that people out of the region are seeing the Central Africa Think Tank Forum as a valuable platform where we can have an exchange of knowledge and shared experiences. We can also measure the growth of the Forum in terms of donor engagement or how many donors are we able to bring to the table. Compared to last year which saw the presence of 3 donor agencies, this year promises to have more donors than we witnessed last year. So these are some indicators in which you can measure the growth of the Central African Think Tank Forum.

Q-What are the main goals for this year's event?

A- This year's forum specifically, seeks to identify and empower independent voices in the Central African Region, that is to us, the first goal. By independent voices, we are talking about individuals, thought-leaders, women and girls championing noble causes in their respective communities, we are talking about civil society organizations and grassroot communities that are operating within the Central African Region yet, are not visible enough. So our first goal is to empower these independent voices. I stress on the word empower because it is not just about bringing people to the table, but to collectively build their capacities and to exploit ways in which we can accompany them throughout the process so as to ensure their impact is visible across the region and globally. Secondly, we are in a continuous process to build a platform for continued exchange of knowledge, experiences and opportunities amongst key stakeholders. These are some of the main objectives that we have set aside for this year's edition.

Q-Why was this theme chosen?

A- Firstly, it is important to understand the current context of the Central African Region so as to better understand why this edition specifically seeks to empower independent voices. You see, the Central African region is faced with a lot of challenges, some of which are related to the repression of civic rights and civic liberties, for example, the repression of civilians, the torture, arrests and killing of whistleblowers and journalists, the repression of political parties or opposition leaders, if you would put it that way, and many more challenges that have to do with silencing voices

of individuals or corporate bodies that drive an agenda on ideology, likely to distort government functioning or national stability, and even in the media space, there is absolute censorship of the press. Meanwhile, these people and organizations who are being repressed have a role to play in shaping public policies, providing much needed support to advance government action and collectively contribute in enhancing sustainable development. Increasingly, the contribution of CSOs is being recognized even at the regional levels. In February 2023 for example, the African Union recognized the contribution of think tanks in advancing sustainable development, mainly in the areas of research, knowledge management and advocacy. That is what prompted the creation of the African Union Network of Think Tanks for Peace amongst many other networks that currently exist and so, there is this increasing awareness and recognition of the work that civil society organizations and think tanks are doing. In this edition therefore, our objective is to identify some of these independent voices, key opinion leaders and provide them with a platform where their voices could be heard and their impact felt. This further responds to the need of opening up the shrinking civic space which the central African region in particular has been deprived of for a long time. We believe that a platform like this is a timely opportunity for stakeholders to be able to speak about their challenges, enhance collaboration with policy makers and collectively map out mitigating strategies so as to build a progressive ecosystem which breeds human welfare. This is why we choose the theme Empowering Independent Voices in Central Africa.

Q-So, what are some of the highlights of the Forum. Who are the key speakers or sessions to look out for?

A-Well, if you agree with me that the value of each event lies on the quality of speakers convened, the relevance and articulation of the thematics being discussed, the facility with which information is made available to all participants, the inclusiveness and accessibility with which participants navigate all segments of the event, you will then understand why the Forum is generating much interest and promises to have great highlights. As much as I wouldn't like to let the cat out of the bag, this edition will host the presence of the Executive Director of the Institute for Security Studies Dr. Fonteh Akun, who will be one of our keynote speakers. Equally, we will be having in this edition Prof. Sarah Anyang, Former AU Commissioner for STEM, our very own globally reputed champion for women's participation in peace processes, Ms. Esther Omam from Reach Out Cameroon, will be

sharing her experiences gathered from the field, Dr. Jacob Kotcho, Director of the Common Market, ECCAS will be honoring us with his presence and not forgetting our own very Dr. Denis Foretia, the visionary behind the Central Africa Think Tank Forum, who will be sharing with us his reflections across multiple areas at this event. These are a few of the key persons who'll be animating conversations and I am sure that you will be excited to meet them at the Forum.

Q-How does the forum facilitate partnerships?

A- Well in terms of partnerships, first of all, the most important thing to retain is that the forum creates a platform where think tanks across the Central African region can meet, discuss and collaborate. There are many ways collaboration is going to take place, vertically and horizontally. Vertically, there is going to be collaboration between think tanks, donor agencies and policy makers and horizontally, you will have collaborations amongst other think tanks who work in the same space or in diverse spaces, overboard civil society organizations that are operating within the Central African region. So, the partnerships are going to be evident in terms of the platform created through breakout sessions, working groups, networking breakfast sessions and more in terms of the thematic issues that are going to be addressed so that, people get the opportunity to meet and discuss around areas of shared interests. We have particularly ensured that the forum has a lot of agile sessions for people to be able to have one on one conversations. These are some of the ways in which partnerships are going to be fostered in the course of the Central African Think Tank Forum.

Q-What is the potential impact of CATTF on policy-making in Central Africa

A- Well, the impact we are looking for in terms of policymaking can be examined at two levels. One in terms of policy formulation and the other in terms of policy implementation. You see, in Africa, we have a fundamental problem in terms of how our policies are formulated. In many contexts, it's a top bottom approach of policy formulation or an approach that meets the interests of the elite minority. This means that policies are not sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of people in the communities. It is our expectation that through this Forum, policy makers will be able to remind themselves of these approaches and proceed to make well-informed and evidence-based policies which will later on be translated into actionable programmes and projects.

In terms of implementation, we hope and expect policymakers to integrate multiple actors in the phase of policy implementation. Policies generally are made by state authorities, but in the implementation phase, we expect all actors in the community to feel a sense of ownership of these policies and process so that the implementation, monitoring and evaluation is a collective process. We are therefore hopeful that through the Central Africa think tank forum, sufficient evidence will be generated to be able to inform policies, to facilitate and integrate multiple approaches in terms of how these policies are being implemented across local communities and across the region.

Q-There is a saying that nothing good comes easy. So tell us, what are some of the challenges in organizing such an event in terms of logistic, political obstacles and other obstacles?

A- Organizing such an event could be quite a task as you may know but our motivation exceeds our perception of the challenges that we face. Before talking about the challenges, let me recognize here that we have had the necessary support from administrative authorities which is indispensable to pull such a gathering. We have the administrative clearance to organize with this event and this is sufficient proof that the forum is being endorsed by administrative authorities so, we are not faced with a lot of challenges at that level, but of course operational and logistical capacities are usually evident. We would have loved to have more seasoned experts and more influential persons across the Central African Region and even across the African region at large speaking at this event, but due to operational requirements, we will be unable to bring some of these key stakeholders. Equally in terms of donors, there are key donors who have manifested interest in issues peculiar to the region, which we would have loved to gather around this policy dialogue. Unfortunately, due to other commitments and divergent schedules we are unable to bring them to Yaounde this, but we are for the third edition which we are planning already, we will be able to mobilize more policymakers, more stakeholders, more donors, and of course, more civil society organizations to this wonderful opportunity where people can foster collaboration and exchange.

Q-What are some of the long term goals for this forum?

A- First I will talk about sustainability. It is our desire that the Central Africa Think Tank Forum is sustainable. Most

often while implementing such initiatives, people often focus on the moment forgetting to plan for the future. So in the long term, we expect to see the Central Africa Think Tank Forum sustained across the future and this will obviously require a collaborative approach. Equally, we are looking at the think tank forum as the GO TO platform where policy makers can convene annually to inform themselves and share perspectives as to how partnerships can be sustained. I want to stress on the fact that the



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Central Africa think tank forum brings together a wide community of researchers and civil society organizations who work by extension at the grassroots level. It is therefore an opportunity for policymakers who attend to be able to inform themselves of happenings at grassroots levels. Still in terms of goals, we are hoping to see some of the challenges that the Central African region is currently facing being effectively attended to. For example, the protection of citizens, a free and liberal media space, inclusion of diverse political actors in decision making spaces, freedom of exercise by civil society organizations etc. Across the next years we wish to see evident growth and multiplication of think tanks, a multiplication of civil society actors, in-depth collaboration across organizations and countries in the ECCAS region. So these are some long term goals that we have envisaged through the Central Africa Think Tank Forum.

Q-What do you have to tell potential participants and those willing to attend the Forum?

A- Well, I would like to tell potential participants to come with an open and expectant mind. Beyond the conversations, The Central Africa Think Tank Forum will be an opportunity to meet and connect with a network of resourceful intellectuals and influential policy makers. Though we restrict ourselves to focus primarily on the Central African region, I want to assure you that we will be exploring broader horizons of the African continent, and so we will be sourcing for new perspectives.

We have put in place the necessary operational and logistic requirements that are going to enhance the effectiveness of this forum at all levels and so we are ready to receive participants and hope that they are going to contribute to the continued success of the Central Africa think tank forum.

Thank you very much Mr. Antem for your valuable inputs and for making this interview a priority. We wish you and your team all the best and we look forward to the long awaited 2nd edition of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum.

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Dr. Denis Foretia

Executive President
Nkafu Policy Institute

We believe strongly that Cameroonians, and Africans, are perfectly capable of owning their destinies and driving the agenda that is best for their economic transformation.



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CRITICAL FOR INDEPENDENT VOICES TO BE EXPANDED ACROSS CENTRAL AFRICA

Interview with Dr Denis Foretia On The Central African Think Tank Challenge By Ajong Mbapndah L.

The Central African sub region could benefit from the expansion of independent voices, says Dr Denis Foretia, Co -Chair of the Foretia Foundation in Cameroon. Sharing insights on the work of the Foretia and the second edition of the Central African Think Tank Forum which runs from August 21-22, 2024, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, Dr Foretia says it is imperative to amplify Central African voices in policy discussions.

“This year, we will convene over 150 stakeholders from the think tank ecosystem and provide an unparalleled platform for networking, experience sharing, and learning best practices. Our team has worked tirelessly to secure

active participation from think tanks and researchers across the region, who are the primary focus of this forum,” Dr Foretia affirmed.

In bringing together think tanks from across the region, we’re fostering an environment where ideas can be shared, best practices can be exchanged, and collaborative projects can be initiated, says Dr Denis Foretia.

“The forum tackles one of the most pressing issues facing think tanks in our region: funding. According to the On Think Tank 2023 report, 86% of African think tanks believed that the funding context was either worsening or not improving between 2022 and 2023. By bringing

together think tanks and potential funders, including international organizations, we're creating opportunities for new partnerships and funding streams," says Dr Foretia.

By showcasing the work of regional think tanks and researchers, we're challenging the perception that quality policy research can't come from our region. This visibility is crucial for influencing both national and international policy agendas, Dr Foretia says in the interview which also covers the ground breaking work of the Foretia Foundation across Cameroon and the Central African Sub Region.

May we start by introducing the Foretia Foundation and its core programs for us?

Thank you so much for this opportunity to talk about our work. As you know, the Foundation was established over a decade ago, in 2012, with the mission to catalyze economic transformation by providing independent, in-depth, and insightful policy recommendations through evidence-based research. We focus on social entrepreneurship, science and technology, innovation, and public health to directly touch the

lives of the population. We also tackle the crucial issues of governance, democracy, peace, and security in the Central Africa region. These different areas of our work are addressed through well-structured programs and projects, all implemented by our team of skilled professionals from various backgrounds.

Over the years, we've been leveraging both in-country and international expertise to conduct high-quality research which forms the basis of our advocacy, allowing us to push for policy changes. Our ultimate aim is to promote the implementation of progressive policies that create economic opportunities for all Africans.

In the 12 years of the Foretia Foundation, what are some of the signature achievements you can share and what impact would you say the work of the Foundation has had on the socio-economic landscape of Cameroon?

Where do I start? I mean, over the past 12 years, the Foundation has had many significant achievements that have positively impacted Cameroon's socio-economic

landscape. At the very basic level, we are very happy every time our team is able to directly change the life of one citizen. The young leaders we have empowered through our Emerging Leaders program is a good example. I think of young students who have been part of our STEM Prize competition, directly promoting investments in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in the country.

Another key achievement has been the establishment of the Small Business Entrepreneurship Center (SBEC) which has become a vital player in the business incubation landscape, helping numerous small businesses, especially those owned by women and youths, transition into formal, sustainable entities. The impact of SBEC on local entrepreneurship and job creation has been substantial.

We are not even talking about the transformative work that the Nkafu Policy Institute has done in conducting research and advocating for evidence-informed policy making across a broad spectrum of issue areas. We're proud to say that Nkafu is changing perceptions about think tanks in the Central Africa region. Through high-quality research and evidence-based recommendations, we're demonstrating the crucial role think tanks can play in shaping policies and improving lives. Our regular convening of stakeholders from decision-making spheres to discuss critical issues has enhanced our advocacy efforts.

As an organization, we've grown into a robust institution with over 40 permanent staff members across four technical and operational departments. Our programs and projects cover a wide range of areas including entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovative technologies.

The foundation is also known for the quality of its publications including policy briefs, op-eds, articles, and diverse thematic reports which are available on the Nkafu website on www.nkafu.org and the On Policy Africa monthly magazine available on www.onpolicy.org.

What were some of the serious challenges faced by you and your team in building the Foretia Foundation to the formidable machine that it is today?

Building the Foundation in general and setting up the Nkafu Policy Institute in particular is a dream come true.

We looked at the landscape of civil society organizations in Cameroon at the time and wanted to implement an independent organization, a think tank to be precise, that would work to catalyze economic transformation across Africa. As you know, a lot of policies implemented in our country are somewhat externally generated and we don't like that. We believe strongly that Cameroonians, and Africans, are perfectly capable of owning their destinies and driving the agenda that is best for their economic transformation. That's what we set out to do. It hasn't been easy, but we have made significant progress.

Some of the challenges we faced included a policymaking environment that was, and in fact, is somewhat hostile to in-country generated ideas and policy options. There is obviously a deficit of talent at the highest level, as public policy making is not something that is readily thought in our universities. And there was, and still is, the issue of capital, of funding, to maintain independence. But we have made progress in overcoming many of these by collaborating widely with various stakeholders and ensuring that whatever we do is done at the highest quality level. This has become an area of real pride for all of us at the Foundation.

We noticed social entrepreneurship was only fairly developed within the civil society space or geared toward political activism. We wanted to change this narrative because we believed and still do, that the much-expected change could be achieved otherwise, precisely by informing decision-making through evidence-based research. So, the Nkafu Policy Institute stands as an innovative response to a long-standing issue: the need for change in all its ramifications.

Of course, there were challenges, there still are. Salient among these is the repressive nature of the civil society space in Cameroon, which makes it difficult to maintain independence and hence neutrality. But this is something we cannot barter with because our independence is what determines our neutrality and shapes the quality and impact of our work, without which we lose credibility in the face of our funders.

You may want to know that On Think Tank's 'Think Tank State of the Sector 2023' reports that 33% of think tanks in Africa say it is harder to operate, while 41% complain of a worsening political context. Another challenge that is still very vivid today is instilling the culture of think tanks as a force of proposition in the African policy-making ecosystem. Some regions like Southern and Eastern Africa are quite advanced, while Central Africa lags. Last but not least of the challenges is the deeply rooted perception within some State institutions, the media, and general citizens, that civil society organizations in general and think tanks in particular are the visible hand of invisible Western States or organizations trying to destabilize political regimes.

Despite these hurdles, we've persevered because we believe deeply in our mission. We're proud of what we've built, but we're also acutely aware that our work – and the challenges that come with it – is ongoing.

How are preparations going for the second edition of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum that the Foretia Foundation is a core organizer?

Preparations for the second edition of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum (CATTF) are in full swing, and we're excited about the progress we've made. As you know, the Central Africa region is undoubtedly the most challenged region on the continent. From weak institutions, closing civic space, limited interregional trade to poor economic performance.

Last year, we established the Central Africa Think Tank Forum to bring together policy makers, researchers, think tankers, and funders from around the region to a common platform with the goal to deepen understanding of common challenges, and to empower independent voices in the Central African Region. Building on last year's success, we've been working diligently to ensure this year's forum is even more impactful.

This year, we will convene over 150 stakeholders from the think tank ecosystem and provide an unparalleled platform for networking, experience sharing, and learning best practices. Our team has worked tirelessly to secure active participation from think tanks and researchers across the region, who are the primary focus of this forum. Also participating will be policymakers from government agencies, civil society organizations, international donors, and diplomatic missions.

Based on lessons from the first edition that took place last year, what are some of the changes that participants should expect from this year's edition?

One of the very exciting things about this year's program is that attendees will meet, get to know and interact with our 2024 class of Emerging Leaders. These 20 dynamic young leaders are a force to be reckoned with, and we cannot wait to see the learning and friendships that come from the Forum.

Also, we have improved the participant experience this year, and have rolled out a user-friendly event app providing participants with every information they will need about the forum. We've engaged resource persons from within the region to provide keynote speeches and share civil society perspectives on how CSOs can contribute to solving development challenges. There will also be many breakout sessions for participants to engage deeply with specific themes and actively collaborate.

In terms of participation, may we get some insights on some of the big names, participating organizations, partners and demographic spread of participants within the Sub Region for the 2024 CATTF?

We've brought together many organizations and their leaders. These include Institute for Security Studies (ISS), REDHAC, African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), IDRC, Canadian High Commission, GIZ, and many others.

Compared to the rest of Africa, there is a perception that Central Africa scores low on issues from democracy, civil society, business, entrepreneurship, and more, how do you think initiatives like the CATTF can turn things around for the sub region?

You're right to point this out, and it's one of the key reasons why initiatives like the Central Africa Think Tank Forum are so crucial for our region.

To give you some context, the 2020 Global Think Tank Index ranking didn't feature a single think tank from Central Africa among the world's top institutions. The statistics are quite telling: Central Africa has only 63 classified think tanks, compared to 102 in South Africa alone, 64 in Kenya, and 52 in Nigeria. These numbers reflect the challenges our region faces in terms of research capacity and policy influence.

The CATTF aims to address these issues head-on. First and foremost, it provides a platform for networking and collaboration. By bringing together think tanks from across the region, we're fostering an environment where ideas can be shared, best practices can be exchanged, and collaborative projects can be initiated.

Secondly, the forum tackles one of the most pressing issues facing think tanks in our region: funding. According to the On Think Tank 2023 report, 86% of African think tanks believed that the funding context was either worsening or not improving between 2022 and 2023. By bringing together think tanks and potential funders, including international organizations, we're creating opportunities for new partnerships and funding streams.

Moreover, the forum serves as an amplifier for Central African voices in policy discussions. By showcasing the work of regional think tanks and researchers, we're challenging the perception that quality policy research can't come from our region. This visibility is crucial for influencing both national and international policy agendas.

While we don't expect to solve all these issues overnight, we believe that initiatives like the CATTF are vital for gradually shifting the narrative and improving the capacity of Central African think tanks.

What post event mechanisms do you have in place to monitor the success and impact of the CATTF as it enters into its second year, is this a confirmation that the Forum is here to stay and will be held annually?

Yes, we have every intention to have this as an annual forum. This is critical for expanding independent voices across the entire Central Africa region and to ensure that think tanks and civil society organizations become stronger and stronger. This is absolutely important if we are to stimulate and sustain the type of economic development we've seen in other regions of the world. So, our key metric from this Forum, is how much collaboration from participating institutions can we generate that will be mutually reinforcing. Because the real goal of this forum is to push for institutional collaboration, knowledge-sharing and strategic partnerships. We already have initiatives for mutual capacity- building both on the technical side and on the organizational side. I would be remiss if I do not thank our key supporters most notably, OSF-Africa, IDRC, Templeton World Charity Foundation, the Atlas Network and GIZ.

Post forum, the key concerns or questions should be: how many policy formulations are we able to effect in terms of policy change? One of the evaluations will be to assess how think tanks can effectively contribute to policy formulation in the Central African region and across the African ecosystem. What percentage of women or young people are increasingly involved in decision- making spaces or represented in the political space? These are all issues trending in the Central African region which we want to thematize in the course of this forum. We will be monitoring to see how many of our recommendations post the forum will be taken into consideration by policymakers as well as funders. Bear in mind that many areas are still not funded, perhaps because donors don't see an interest in these areas. So, we hope to bring these areas into the limelight and highlight the pressing societal challenges in these areas while raising awareness for funding.

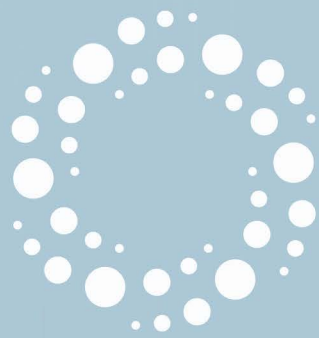
Any last sales pitch you may want to make to governments within the sub region, to potential participants, and international and local partners on the merits of joining and taking the CATTF seriously?

The Central Africa Think Tank Forum offers a unique and valuable opportunity for all stakeholders in the region's development. For governments, it's an opportunity to engage with their countrymen and women on policy solutions on Central Africa's challenges. For researchers and policy professionals, it's an unparalleled platform for networking, learning, and amplifying their work. Our international partners can gain fresh perspectives on regional issues and identify new collaborators, while local partners can contribute to building a more robust civil society.

Ultimately, this forum is about harnessing our collective expertise to address the complex challenges facing Central Africa. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, each with unique insights, we're fostering an environment where evidence- based policy-making can thrive and independent voices can drive positive change. We invite you all to be part of this important initiative and help shape the future of our region.

Back to the Foretia Foundation where we started, how do you envision the future, any broad outlines on what should be expected in the years to come?

Despite the challenges facing think tanks and independent voices in Central Africa, we want to remain optimistic about the expected change in the narrative that CSOs are a vital development vehicle in any society and deserve an enabling space to work towards achieving this noble mission. We look forward to a time when the policy and decision-makers in Central Africa will stop considering independent voices as threats but as strategic development partners. This is our dream, and we are devoted to working towards achieving it. Of course, our goal is to sustain strategic initiatives like this. We definitely need everyone's hand on deck.



CENTRAL AFRICA
THINKTANK FORUM



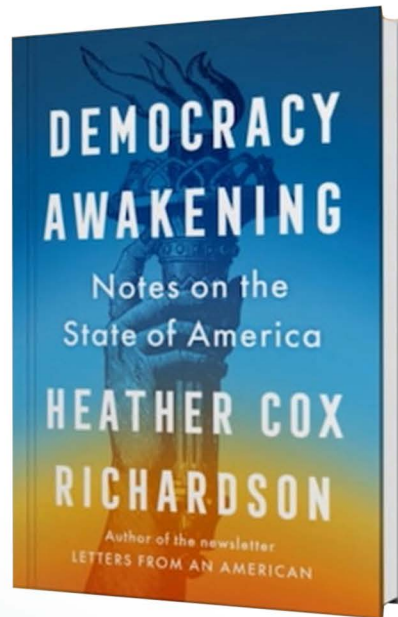
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Democracy Awakening Notes on the State of America by Heather Cox Richardson

*Commentary and review by
Pooran Chandra Pandey*



In *Democracy Awakening*, Heather Cox Richardson, Professor of History at Boston College, presents a compelling narrative about future of democracy and what may lie ahead on path to its protection. By disinformation and weaponizing language, a small group of Native Americans led public into authoritarianism — spurring a disaffected population into horrific actions and then promising to recreate an imagined post truth era with a false sense of history.

She further argues that taking America back starts by remembering the elements of the nation's true history that marginalized Native Americans have always upheld. Their dedication to the principles on which America was built has enabled them to revitalize their commitment to democracy in the past. Richardson sees this history as a roadmap for the nation's future and its targeted actions for its body politic.

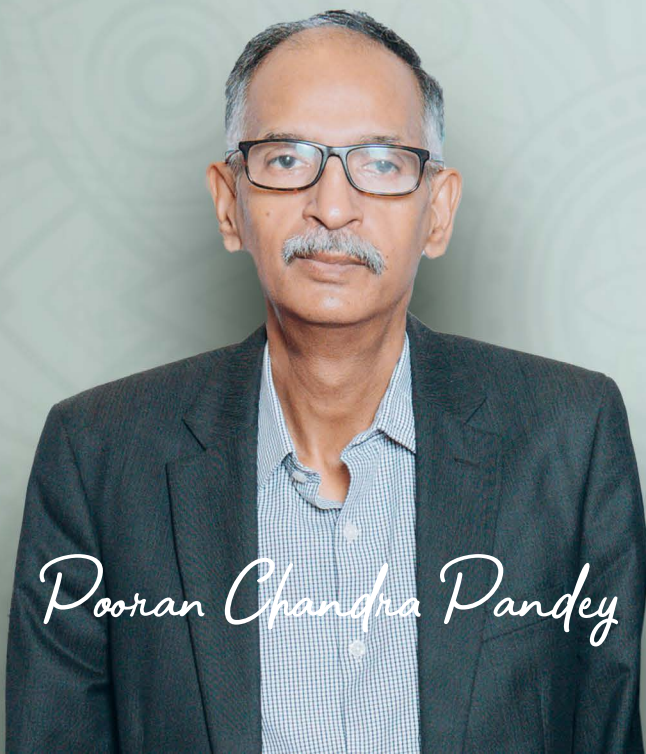
Richardson's overall narrative is built around media and news feed and how these when misrepresented could lead to disastrous consequences while highlighting people's ability to decipher the truth. Intent is vital but so are results and outcomes for controlled actions based on precedents and likely paths that may potentially lie ahead.

Democracies will and can survive if we fight for it and road to resilience is hard and long. She also appears to be hopeful about the future of democracy. Her deep insights into the history, media and a teacher allow her to pivot effortlessly from historiographical analysis of events to lingering fears of uncertain future.

Democracies in current day and age stand challenged in ways that was never imagined earlier in variety of forms and shapes. Fragility of democratic ethos and institutions appear apparent and even the best and most defined democracies are backsliding for diverse reasons through manifestations that are not the good news for rule of law, civility and liberal order and values all intertwined up together. The largest and oldest democracies are trying to defend themselves with divided opinions and fractured public mandates.

Elections in the US going to be held this November hold the tenuous thread to restorations of ethos and values under the shadow of democracy, this time, US elections hold a historical significance for restoration to and belief in democratic principles both of the ruler and its subjects by long margins.

In normal course of descriptive narrative, many books tell us what has happened over the years, *Democracy Awakening* however explains how we got to the perilous point, what the history really tells us and what the future of democracy can potentially be, at long last.



Pooran Chandra Pandey

Electoral Fraud and the Weakening of Cameroonian Democracy

Dr. JOSEPH THIERRY OKALA EBODE

The resurgence of democracy in Cameroon, mirroring trends across Francophone sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s, was characterized by electoral system reforms and the introduction of multiparty elections (1). However, the outcomes of these reforms and subsequent elections have often fallen short of expectations. The March 1992 multiparty legislative elections saw opposition parties secure a majority (92 out of 180 seats), yet they were unable to assume power. Since then, despite numerous presidential and local elections, the country has seen neither a transfer of power at the highest levels of government nor the local-level changes citizens have long desired. This aspiration for political alternation continues to be thwarted by a system that consistently reinstates the same leadership. Paradoxically, despite a proliferation of political parties (2), the influence and significance of the opposition continue to wane. This diminishing role of the opposition, coupled with growing democratic disillusionment (3), can be largely attributed to electoral fraud (4). Electoral fraud encompasses any illegal actions aimed at favoring particular candidates or party lists at the expense of others. This raises a critical question: How does electoral fraud, an illegal practice, lead to the disengagement of members of the opposing political landscape, the general public, and particularly the youth, from the political process? To address this, our analysis will focus on two main areas: first, examining fraudulent

practices that operate within legal loopholes, and second, investigating overtly illegal fraudulent activities.

Legal Fraud, or the Construction of an Unequal Electoral System

The sociopolitical evolution initiated in Cameroon during the 1990s raised significant hopes for legal transition, particularly in the realms of constitutional and electoral law. This transition was expected to incorporate citizen participation as a crucial factor in the creation of law. Indeed, Mathieu B. Mebenga posits that *“the concept of participation emerges as a polite fiction designed to validate the definitive integration of citizens into the process of legitimizing the creative power of law.”* This new modality of law creation, which is not only an act of interpretation but also an act of will, should give rise to a new social contract. This contract should be based on *“the pursuit of a normative and institutional balance reflecting sociopolitical changes [...] capable of serving as a regulatory factor in the political system.”* However, as years of electoral practice have unfolded, it has become evident that one of the most significant obstacles to realizing this vision is the lack of consensus in the creation of electoral law.

Indeed, the practice of seeking consensus in Cameroonian electoral law only truly began in 1996 with the constitutional revision carried out in the National Assembly through a questionable process. Following the promulgation of this constitutional law, Cameroon affirmed its commitment, following the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, to develop the necessary legislative and policy frameworks for establishing and strengthening a culture of democracy and peace. (ACDEG, Chapter 5, Article 11). Furthermore, Cameroon set itself the objective of initiating appropriate legislative, executive, and administrative actions (ACDEG, Chapter 10, Article 14) to align its electoral corpus with its international commitments.

Despite these international commitments, the electoral system in Cameroon is far from being the result of a consensus among various political entrepreneurs and civil society actors. Instead, it appears to be the product of the governing party's will alone. Indeed, in Parliament generally and the National Assembly in particular—the custodian of the electoral regime and the primary forum for consensus-building—the adoption of laws is highly contentious. This is evident in Law No. 2012/001 of April 19, 2012, establishing the Electoral Code, as amended and supplemented by Law No. 2012/017 of December 21, 2012, as well as Law No. 2006/011 of December 29, 2006, on

the creation, organization, and functioning of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM). This lack of consensus leads to the crafting of rules that benefit certain political actors, notably the President of the Republic and his supporters. This is characterized by the partiality of ELECAM, over which the President exercises control, as well as over the judicial apparatus in general and the Constitutional Council in particular—the body tasked with making first and final rulings on electoral disputes. It also systematically incites pre- and post-electoral disputes that can jeopardize peace and social cohesion.

In addition to the lack of consensus characteristic of Cameroonian electoral law, there persists a unilateral process that leaves the President of the Republic—himself a major actor and stakeholder in the process—with the discretion to maintain ambiguity regarding election dates and the delineation of electoral constituencies (5). As with all legislative and municipal elections, the President of the Republic is the sole custodian of the electoral timetable, which he can use to catch his opponents off guard. These prerogatives vested in the President mean that electoral aspirants are never certain of the dates or the preservation of constituencies. Consequently, he keeps his adversaries in a state of constant alertness, hindering their optimal preparation for electoral participation.



Credit: Africa Center for Strategic Studies



Regarding voter registration, the major challenge for citizens is obtaining a national identity card (6). It is a well-known fact that Cameroonians struggle to obtain national identity cards; this is even more difficult for populations in rural areas where they also face issues with civil registration

Fraud on the Margins of Legality as a Barrier to Participation

The fraudulent practices that can be considered on the margins of legality primarily relate to voter registration, the control and issuance of voter cards, the display of voter lists, the distribution of voter cards, and finally, the selection of polling centers and stations. These fraudulent practices create an unequal playing field among candidates and severely limit the participation of a large number of citizens in the electoral process in general and in the actual election in particular.

Regarding voter registration, the major challenge for citizens is obtaining a national identity card (6). It is a well-known fact that Cameroonians struggle to obtain national identity cards; this is even more difficult for populations in rural areas where they also face issues with civil registration (7). While ELECAM organizes campaigns to stimulate voter registration, it makes no particular efforts to encourage registered citizens to collect their voter cards (8).

The selection of polling centers and stations is unilaterally decided by ELECAM. Despite the existence of voter list revision committees formed around the organization's local branches responsible for managing the electoral process, stakeholders are not involved in this phase. We should acknowledge the application of Article 96, Paragraph 4 of the Electoral Code, which stipulates: "all polling stations must be located in a public place or a place open to the public." Consequently, polling stations previously located in private residences, traditional chieftaincies, and military barracks, where access was contingent on voting orientation, have been relocated (9). Despite this progress, military personnel and other law enforcement forces have not been spared from intimidation at polling stations where they were meant to exercise their right to vote. This is evident, for instance in Yaoundé, at polling stations relocated from the headquarters brigade to Lycée Leclerc.

Regarding the display of voter lists and polling stations, this is systematically done late—in some cases the day before, or even on the voting day itself—in flagrant violation of the provisions of Article 83, Paragraph 2, which states: "The commission shall register the voter on the list which is published no later than four (04) days before the date

of the poll.” Article 97, for its part, stipulates that “the list of polling stations shall be transmitted to the communal branches of Elections Cameroon for display at least eight (08) days before the date of the poll.”

This practice is compounded by the unequal distribution of voters across polling stations. This approach involves assigning more voters to polling stations located in voting centers where the electorate is more favorable to the incumbent president. During the 2018 presidential election, this practice significantly benefited voting centers identified in villages on the outskirts of Yaoundé, otherwise known as the rural zone, where the number of registered voters often doesn’t align with the voting-age population.

In some centers, according to consistent testimonies, the voter list was only displayed in the early hours of election day. The reason given by ELECAM officials was the fear that these lists might be vandalized. However, mobilizing law enforcement forces could have, in a collaborative effort, deterred any inclination toward destruction. Given the number of polling stations set by ELECAM’s general management, all could have been secured without limiting the intervention capabilities of the associated police and gendarmerie.

In contravention of the recommendations in Article 91 of the Electoral Code, paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, there was a disproportionate and imbalanced campaign display favoring the incumbent president. His posters and campaign materials saturated the country’s cities, while those of his competitors were scarcely visible.

Public funding allocated to candidates is not immune to fraud. Indeed, the first installment of public campaign financing, as per Article 286 of the Electoral Code, was deemed insignificant and ignored by some candidates during the 2018 presidential election. Consequently, candidates without substantial resources struggled to campaign effectively.

Regarding media access, equitable access for all candidates was not truly achieved, especially as news coverage during broadcasts was dominated by reports on direct or indirect activities of the ruling party and its candidate.



Credit: In On Africa

Conclusion

Electoral fraud thus appears as a serious violation of the rights of peoples and citizens to self-determination. Whether cloaked in legality or operating on its margins, these practices irreparably taint the regularity, transparency, honesty, and legitimacy of both the electoral processes and system. In Cameroon, they lead to a greater weakening of the social contract and political climate without providing any real gain in terms of legitimizing power.



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A group of young women are shown in a close-up, slightly out-of-focus background. They are holding up Namibian identification cards. The woman in the foreground is wearing a red cap and a black shirt. The ID cards are white with a rainbow-colored logo at the top left, a small portrait photo on the right, and a large black QR code at the bottom. The text on the cards includes 'Republic of Namibia' and 'Namibia'.

Democratization Challenges: Women, Youth, and Electoral Dynamics in French-Speaking Africa

AURELIA NJOMO ENDELEY

Women and youth are positioned at the center of African development according to Aspiration 6 of the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 (1). Specifically, youth make up over half of Africa's population. The AU estimates that there are about 400 million people between the ages of 15 and 35 (2). However, they are disregarded in electoral and political processes. Participation in elections is essential to a functioning democracy. It guarantees the inclusion of public opinions in government decisions. Nonetheless, there are notable differences in election participation across the globe. African nations that speak French have a difficult time maintaining their democratic systems. Weak political structures were frequently left behind by the colonial history of these countries (3). The sudden shift from colonial to independent authority left many countries with political structures that were either underdeveloped or ill-adapted to their particular circumstances (4). The shift from colonial control to economic instability, coupled with high rates of poverty and unemployment that compound political instability, has resulted in coups, civil wars, and protracted conflicts in many Francophone African nations. For instance, there have been several political upheavals in the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. (5).

Young people and women are two important categories that are frequently underrepresented in the voting booth (6;7). Globally, young people are often underrepresented in voting and political processes due to various factors, including disillusionment with political systems, lack of trust in politicians, and feeling that their voices are not heard (8;9). Similarly, women face barriers such as cultural norms, lack of access to education, and economic constraints that limit their political participation. Despite progress in some areas, women remain underrepresented in political offices and voting booths (10). Women in Francophone Africa face additional challenges due to traditional gender roles and limited access to resources. While there have been efforts to increase women's political participation, progress is slow, and women are still significantly underrepresented.

The statistics on women and youths' political participation and their contributions to Francophone Africa's democracy are presented in this policy brief. It also examines the significance of women and youths' widespread voting in

Francophone Africa and makes recommendations for bridging the participation gap and increasing engagement. In addition, it looks at how the under-representation of women and young people obstructs democracy and offers policy recommendations to encourage more participation in it.

Some practical aspects of young people and women's democratic involvement in francophone Africa

Overall women constitute about 24% of parliamentarians in Africa, with 25% in lower houses and 20% in upper houses (11). Rwanda leads globally with 61.3% of parliamentary seats held by women (12), Senegal women hold approximately 43% of seats in the National Assembly (13), Burkina Faso Women's representation in parliament is around 11% (14), Ivory Coast, women occupy about 15% of parliamentary seats (15) while Cameroonian women hold roughly 31% of seats in the National Assembly. The youth population in Africa is significant, with over 60% of the continent's population under 25 years old (16). However, their representation in governance is minimal. Many young people feel disconnected from the political process and believe that their participation will not lead to meaningful change. Youth voter turnout tends to be lower compared to older age groups. For instance, in many Francophone African countries, youth voter turnout is often below 50% (17). Despite lower voter turnout, young people are active in other forms of political engagement, such as protests and social media activism (18).

In Senegal, youth participation in elections has been increasing, with significant involvement in recent presidential elections. However, many young people still feel marginalized by the political system. Youths in Burkina Faso played a pivotal role in the 2014 uprising that led to the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré (19). Their participation in protests and civil society movements is notable. In Ivory Coast youths face challenges such as unemployment and political disenchantment persist.

Similarly, youth in Cameroon participation in politics is relatively low, with many young people expressing distrust in the electoral process and political institutions (20). For instance, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) has taken steps to boost the number of young people registered on electoral lists, although it should be highlighted that young people do not always use their right to vote at the various electoral events (21). This is because African youth politicians are generally corrupt and whoever associates with them is bound to be corrupted. Further, the opportunity cost of voting by the youths is higher than adults as they have a less flexible employment timetable and insignificant financial pay scale, which reduce their likelihood of taking time off to vote. (22) More often than not, African youths have resorted to alternative ways of expressing their dissatisfaction, as most of them have turned to violence and civil disobedience. Additionally, when it comes to the allocation of elective roles, women and youngsters represent the “social cadets.” In the Senate, local and regional governments, and the National Assembly, young people are either nonexistent or disproportionately represented

Why Women and Youth Matter

There has been an attempt to encourage women to participate in politics and elections. Several countries have implemented quotas for women in parliament. Rwanda is a leading example, boasting the highest percentage of women parliamentarians globally (over 60%) thanks to its quota system. Senegal also has a quota system, aiming for a 30% minimum representation (23). Civil society activists’ advocacy has resulted in legislative frameworks that uphold the rights and participation of women. Women are still underrepresented in parliament and in positions of decision-making, notwithstanding global advancements in countries like Chad and Gabon have less than 10% of women representation in parliament (24). Stereotypes about gender roles and societal expectations are obstacles (25). Over the past 20 years, women’s political participation in Africa has increased. From 9% in 2000 to 25% in 2020, there was an increase in representation in parliament (26; 27).

Youth (those between the ages of 15 and 35) are a politically marginalized demographic. When compared to other age groups, their voting turnout is frequently the lowest. Many countries across Francophone Africa experience lower voter turnout among youth compared to older demographics. A study by Afrobarometer (28) found that youth voter turnout can be 10–20 percentage points lower than older citizens in countries like Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. The 2019 elections in Senegal saw a significant disparity in voter turnout, with youth participation much lower than older demographics. This led to movements like “Y en a marre!” (We’ve had enough!), a youth-led movement demanding change and increased youth political participation (29). Similar patterns of low youth voter turnout were observed in the 2020 elections in Burkina Faso. Frustration with a lack of economic opportunities and political representation among youth is a growing concern. While youth participation is increasing slightly, Côte d’Ivoire still struggles with a gap between youth demographics and those holding political power. Movements like “On bouge” (We’re on the move) advocate for greater youth inclusion.

Although opinions on what constitutes “youth” differ among nations and areas, youth participation is nonetheless vital to influencing modern politics (30). Achieving development goals in Africa requires acknowledging the youthful population of the continent as well as the leadership and active engagement of young people, particularly women.

Democracies are strengthened in a number of ways when women and young people participate more actively. Increased inclusion of women and youth ensures that policies take a broader range of experiences into account and brings a variety of goals and viewpoints to the table. Since their engagement will make policy relevant, elected officials are held more accountable when these populations are actively involved in problems that affect them. Since women and young people account for a sizable share of the population, their involvement guarantees that policies are pertinent to their demands (31).

Challenges to Participation

Notwithstanding the advantages, a number of obstacles prevent young people and women from actively participating in elections. First of all, societal expectations and gender stereotypes may deter women from seeking public office or casting ballots (32), and financial limitations may make it more difficult for young people to engage in campaigning or turn out the vote (33). Similar to this, youth voter participation may be low due to disillusionment with political processes, since some may have little to no faith in the system. Women and young people may find it extremely difficult to participate if they have limited access to information and are unaware of the registration, voting, and candidate platform processes (34).

Policy Recommendations

- **Promote Gender Parity:** Implement quotas for women's representation in political parties and government positions. Provide resources for women's leadership training and campaign funding.
- **Youth Political Participation:** Develop civic education programs that target youth, encouraging them to register and vote. Create youth parliaments and mentorship programs to foster political engagement.
- **Inclusive Political Parties:** Encourage political parties to adopt quotas and training programs for women and youth candidates. Support internal party reforms that promote diverse voices and address their policy priorities.
- **Secure Electoral Processes:** Invest in security measures to ensure safe and peaceful elections, particularly in areas prone to violence. Implement campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of peaceful participation.
- **Empowering Civil Society:** Support civil society organizations (CSOs) working on voter education, mobilization, and leadership development for women and youth. Encourage collaboration between CSOs and political institutions.

Conclusion

Expanded involvement of women and youth in politics is crucial to the development of dynamic and inclusive democracies in French-speaking Africa. By putting these policy proposals into practice, we can ensure that voters' opinions are heard and that obstacles to their participation are removed. Better policies that take into consideration the interests of all citizens and guarantee a more active and transparent democracy will result from this, eventually bolstering these democracies.



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Youth Participation in Democratic Processes in Francophone Africa

Dr. PIPPIE HUGUES

Introduction

Youth participation in democratic processes in Francophone Africa varies significantly across countries, influenced by socio-economic factors, political dynamics, and historical contexts (1). Here are some key aspects to consider, many Francophone African countries have histories of authoritarianism or single-party dominance, which can discourage youth engagement in formal political processes. High levels of unemployment and limited economic opportunities can lead young people to prioritize immediate survival over political engagement (2). Limited access to quality education and political information can hinder youth understanding of democratic processes and their ability to engage effectively. The younger population has always been a crucial group for political mobilization during elections in Africa. With the continent experiencing a significant increase in youth population, many of whom are struggling with unemployment and underemployment, winning the support of this demographic has become increasingly vital. Despite their large numbers and the significance of

generational identities in the region's history, there remains a lack of understanding regarding the political engagement of Africa's youth (3). The media and digital platforms play a critical role in providing information about democratic values and election procedures, fostering safe spaces for young people to participate in the political process, and reducing calls for boycotting elections and using violence to keep young people away from disobedience. This paper examines the reason for youths reluctance to participate in democratic processes in Francophone Africa and the UN/global perspective. The paper ends with the role of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and policy recommendations.

Reasons for Youths Reluctance to Participate in Democratic Processes in Francophone Africa

Youth engagement in elections and democracy has been precarious in several countries. Planning for inclusive



Credit: AFP/Guy Peterson

growth is hampered by the rise of populism and greater migration, which frequently cause xenophobia and socioeconomic divergence to rise (4). Moreover, the integrity of democratic institutions is threatened by corruption, state capture, backsliding, and inequality, all of which erode young people's confidence in the sustainability and stability of democratic governance (5). Youth must be included in policy-making processes that aim to enhance political inclusion, accountability, inclusive representation, and transparency because they are an invaluable resource for governments' development planning. It has been established that voter apathy is rampant within the youth of Francophone Africa who contributes to the majority of the regions population (6).

The United Nations Perspective

It is important to highlight that on 24 September 2018 the United Nations (UN) launched the 2030 Strategy and Global Partnership Initiative for Youth (7). This initiative is modeled after Security Council Resolution

2250 (2015), which encouraged Member States to include more young people in decision-making processes at all levels, and Resolution 2419 (2018), which emphasizes the importance of including more young people in the process of negotiating and carrying out peace agreements. The Strategy's action plan consists of five priorities, the most pertinent of which is the fifth one to the Community-organized panel discussion: Building Peace and Resilience: Encourage youth to act as agents of peace, security, and humanitarianism. September 25, 2018, a panel discussion on "The Role of Youth in Democratic Resilience" was organized by the Community of Democracies (CoD) and took place outside the 73rd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. The side session gave member states of the Governing Council (GC) a chance to discuss openly the difficulties facing youth engagement in democracies and potential coordinated responses to these difficulties. At the side event, young leaders from Romania, El Salvador, and Syria were among the panel speakers, along with high level members of the Community's Governing Council. The panel covered frequent obstacles to youth civic

involvement, the role that youth play in bolstering democracy, and effective strategies for raising youth political participation. These are issues which are of paramount importance within francophone Africa.

Francophone Africa's Youth and Democratic Representation and The Global Perspective

A democracy cannot function properly without representation because representation enables representatives to fairly represent the interests of the people they represent and to implement laws and decisions that advance the goals of the group as a whole. On the other hand, when representation is not incorporated into democracy, legislators and other decision-makers make judgments based on presumptions and function without taking into consideration the plight of the populace, being utterly disconnected from the concerns of the underrepresented. Most decisions taken this way are not successful, since they reflect, not the needs of the many, but the assumptions of a single person, or a few people (8). To this effect, while genuine consultations might have been an enormous challenge within francophone African community, it has now been eased dramatically by digitalization as well as social media, which is where youths spend most of their time. Decision-makers and representatives could weight on the natural capacity of youth on the digital space to design and collect the youth's views on issues that are of direct relevance, through youth-friendly digital platforms. These platforms could serve, not only to collect their voices, thereby ensuring representation, but also to educate youth on how a particular issue is of relevance to them (9).

In most Francophone African countries, women and youths are frequently disregarded when it comes to making decisions and participating in politics (10). Although the majority of people on the African continent are young, the elderly hold positions of leadership, and decisions are frequently made without taking the hopes and dreams of the younger generation into account (11). States institutions have a responsibility to teach the public, those in positions of authority, and young people



The younger population has always been a crucial group for political mobilization during elections in Africa.

the value of involvement. All humans are involved in politics because we must make decisions that affect both the society and ourselves. What is democratic process participation? Who is eligible to take part, and how should things proceed? We constantly ask ourselves these important issues within our societies.

The Role of Electoral Management Bodies in Promoting Youth Participation within Francophone Africa

Democracy is centered on elections. Therefore, ensuring youth inclusion in and contribution to the democratic process of which elections is an integral part requires adequate engagement in electoral processes. Encouraging youth participation on election day has been a primary goal for electoral management bodies (EMBs) for many years. Within the francophone Africa, EMBs have continuously call out youths to get involve, but the response is very low due to voter apathy.

With one-third of the population between the ages of 15 and 35, Africa's young population is rapidly growing⁽¹¹⁾. Youth also have a tendency to be disenfranchised from the democratic process. Young people continue to be underrepresented in electoral management roles, vote less frequently, and run for office less frequently. Therefore, it is essential that young people actively participate in the democratic processes taking place in their individual countries, rather than just getting involved⁽¹²⁾. By this, they can better be abreast with leadership skills in order to take up the mantle in the nearest future. The position in Francophone Africa is not different from the rest of world. The number of youths involved in decision making process in Francophone Africa is below 30%⁽¹³⁾. The decision making arm of most African governments is the legislative and the executive. In these two arms of the government, the youth representation is way below expectation as we can count the number of youths in parliament, both at the Lower and Upper Houses, we can equally count the number of youths occupying ministerial positions most of these countries.

Africa's youth population is too big to be excluded from the democratic process. EMBs need to implement programs with multiple facets and begin considering more inventive ways to involve young people. In particular, EMBs should begin proactively interacting with young people as voters, candidates, and electoral administrators. This, in turn, requires EMBs to engage more effectively with key partners on youth-related issues. Political parties and civil society organizations are two particularly significant actors. Political parties' control over the submission of electoral candidate lists continues to be a major impediment to youth engagement in decision-making organizations and elections. As a result, EMBs ought to think about encouraging inter-party discussion to develop more comprehensive understandings around the necessity of promoting young people running for office. Furthermore, EMBs are more likely to succeed in their efforts to encourage young people to vote if they collaborate with youth-led or youth-focused civil society organizations.

In order to encourage youth involvement in the administration of electoral processes, EMBs must also examine their own internal structures and regulations. Regional organizations and networks can provide a good platform for promoting the work carried out by EMBs in this field. Building on existing platforms of exchange, EMBs should be given the space to share experiences and



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Electoral Processes and Issues of Legitimacy in Francophone Africa

Dr. PRIMUS M. TAZANU

This article addresses electoral processes and the subject of legitimacy in Francophone African countries, focusing on elements that challenge the legitimacy of governments in some of these states. The arguments in this piece are supported by reports from multiple sources that draw attention on crucial issues of electoral frauds, the incumbent political leadership's tendency to dominate the political scene, weak political and electoral institutions, lack of transparency, and the silencing of the media, etc. A key question that pulls the argument together in the article is why Francophone African countries require electoral reforms. Policy recommendations in line with this question are that these countries should improve their economic performance, respect the rule of law, respect human rights and political institutions, be politically accountable and tolerant, as well as the freedom of the media.

Francophone Africa

A shaky relationship exists between legitimacy and elections; one can never assume that an elected government is necessarily legitimate. It is essential to understand the power dynamics undergirding elections, especially in the Francophone countries in this write-up. Contentious issues of governance in Francophone Africa often revolve around electoral processes and legitimacy of governments. Some common themes and challenges related to elections and

legitimacy cut across these countries, even as the countries are diverse, with each having its unique political specifics.

Among the many shared aspects cutting across these countries are a common history of French colonial rule, which in turn has had an influence on their political structures and processes. Secondly, most of these countries have encountered difficulties switching from one-party rule to multiparty democracy [1]. Related to the last point has been the issue of elections irregularities partly because the dominant ruling parties' proclivity to monopolize electoral processes, often with (suspected) French influence [2]. Elections fraud and lack of transparency are recurrent events in some of these countries. Compounding these developments is a worrying tendency of some leaders in Francophone Africa to manipulate the constitution, extending their time in office, thus undermining one of the core democratic principles – the term limit [3].

Electoral Trends in Francophone Africa

In Francophone Africa, there is usually the tendency of the incumbent leaders and the ruling political parties to dominate the political scene using state resources. Opposition parties routinely face difficulties in times of elections partly because they may lack the resources and national media coverage. That aside, analysts have talked



of voting irregularities, including political parties buying votes and offering gifts to people [4]. This is a scenario where the opposition regularly accuses the incumbent of corruption and vote rigging during and after the elections.

We are also witnessing increased demands for democratic reforms in the Francophone countries; people are demanding that the electoral processes should be fair and transparent. As such, they talk of respecting human rights and independent electoral organizations. This invites analysts to scrutinize the legitimacy of the state [5]. Social media is further playing significant roles during elections periods in these countries. Young people are using social media to share opinions, influencing political agendas and the domains of political discourse. However, another growing trend is that the governments in some of these countries shut down the internet during elections [6]. Lastly, and by no means the least, regional blocs such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have demonstrated their relevance, making their importance felt throughout the elections period and in the post-election era; they have mediated post-elections conflict situations, all with the aim to promote democracy and stability [7].

Issues of Legitimacy: Why Francophone Countries Require Electoral Reforms

How could reforming electoral processes and institutions benefit Francophone African countries? In democratic societies, elections and electoral institutions are vital to political stability and transition. Put differently, electoral processes and institutions carry with them aspects of legitimacy and consent. Legitimacy has much to do with the government being legal while consent is more about approval from the populace. These facets of democracy are inbuilt in vibrant democracies and the democratic process. To improve on elections and for governments to gain acceptance, electoral processes and institutions should be conceptualized as broader political processes with enduring capabilities; they are not just events that legitimize power. In some cases, regular elections usually indicate a vibrant democracy. In fact, fair electoral processes in some African countries 'have facilitated the emergence of democratic government', says International Peace Institute [8]. People can judge a country's democracy by looking at its electoral process and institutions, so to speak.

However, a worrying trend in some Francophone African countries is a tendency of pre- and post-elections disputes and claims that usually interrupt political transitions, sometimes leading to national division along political and ethnic lines. Fuelling these disputes are the deep suspicion, mistrust, and loss of faith in the electoral process and institutions. This boils down to the question of transparency, which Afrobarometer says is vital for preventing conflict [9].

Looking at some of the Francophone governments that supposedly came to power through elections, one realizes that there is a treacherous issue of legitimacy when the military takes over these government with wide societal support. Since 2020, there have been eight military coups in some of these Francophone countries [10]. Some of these military regimes are supported by the people even as they did not come to power through free and fair elections [11]. What is at stake here is confusing if one were to look at legitimacy strictly in terms of elections.

A major take away in the previous paragraph is that elections and elected governments do not necessarily translate to legitimacy. What then is legitimacy and how could it contribute to political stability in the Francophone African countries? For a long time, elections in some of these countries have been described as nothing but window-dressing, a cosmetic political show aimed at galvanizing the inability of the power structure to institute meaningful democracy [12].

Of concern here is whether elections should be used as a yardstick to determining the legitimacy of the government. In other words, does winning an election make a government legitimate? One must contend here that there is more to a government being legitimate, and this is not necessarily connected to an election. Particularly in weak and fragile states, the government, struggling to legitimize itself through state institutions, might resort to finding different strategies to stay legitimate in the eyes of the citizens [13]. They may use violence as a means to draw popular acceptance. Whether it works in the short and long-run is a totally different question. One can only affirm that oppressed people have a way of rebelling against oppressive systems and they are more than ready to use the least opportunity to vent their anger and frustration at

a regime that apparently keeps them in bondage.

Legitimacy is more linked to the proper functioning of the state and its institutions. Some analyst have used the term fragile state to describe countries with multiple developmental challenges. This means they may in turn appear illegitimate or only semi-legitimate in the eyes of the citizens. The African Development Bank defines fragile countries using indicators such as weak institutions, poor governance, economic and geographic isolation, economic challenges and insecurity [14]. To this must be added some of the IMF's indicators, which are 'poor quality of policies, institutions and governance [that] substantially impairs economic performance [and] the delivery of basic social services' [15]. State fragility is important in the analysis of legitimacy in that poor governance and weak institutions make the state appear distant from the citizens. As such, a government that wins an election but governs poorly or does not respect state institutions may not be perceived as legitimate by the citizens.

Policy Recommendation

In some cases, problems of legitimacy are an expression of poor economic performance. Francophone African countries could thus gain legitimacy through better economic performance. This includes the government's ability to respond to the needs of the citizens, which in turn reduces political opposition as well as limit political crises [16]. Legitimacy and democracy are related in the sense that there are many other issues at stake relating to the rule of law, human rights, respect of the constitution, creating an enabling environment for political conversation and freedom of association. These indicators remain very much disputed in many Francophone Africa countries [17].

- ✓ Thus, Francophone African countries must do some introspection, examining themselves from the inside to see how they could fix the relationship between the state and the citizens. These states should try to impart in people a feeling of national belonging. Issues of civil liberties and equality before the law must naturally be on the agenda, without which, citizens may feel alienated from the political systems and processes.

- ✓ It is also recommendable that states invest in developing credible institutions such as elections governing bodies and free media. Elections would be seen as more legitimate if the political environment is calm, with different political parties campaigning and conducting their activities freely. The general tendency of the incumbent governments intimidating opposition through excessive use of state resources often tip the elections balance in favour of the ruling party. It is needless to emphasize this practice deepens the disparity, reducing the oppositions' ability to participate in elections on an equal basis.
- ✓ The case of free (social) media deserves a special attention. In many African states, including most



Credit: Luc Gnago, Reuters

Francophone countries, there is a tendency for the government to shut down social media for political motives. Internet shutdown and throttling during elections period have become all too common. These politically-motivated shutdowns are supported by many arguments amongst which are concerns over national unity, to prevent post-elections violence, to curb misinformation, to make sure the elections has integrity, etc. [18]. A report by French Development Agency, reveals that as of mid-2023, 21 of the 26 Francophone African countries had shut down or tampered with the internet for political reasons since 2017 [19]. This is very concerning considering that the media is often considered as the fifth arm of the government. Interrupting the media platforms is an intentional way of limiting citizens' participation in politics and political processes. Thus, Francophone African countries could improve on the electoral processes through ensuring media freedom.

Conclusively, addressing the subject of electoral processes and legitimacy in Francophone Africa requires manifold approaches, amongst which is the strengthening of democratic institutions, upholding transparency, and nurturing a culture of political tolerance and accountability. Furthermore, regional blocs, the media and civil society organizations can play instrumental roles in legitimizing electoral processes in these countries.



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Colonialism
has left a
strong legacy
of economic
integration
between
Francophone
Africa and
France

Prof. Kelly Mua Kingsley

“Strengthening Economic Resilience in Francophone Africa: Does Having Reserves in the French Treasury Matter?”



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Conversation

What is the purpose of foreign exchange reserves in an economic system?

Foreign exchange reserves are assets held in foreign currencies or gold by central banks. These reserves generally take the form of foreign government treasury bills and bonds, which generate interest. Monetary authorities use these reserves to regulate exchange rates, stabilize their economies, maintain the value of their currency and pay for essential imports. Foreign exchange reserves therefore play a crucial role in economic stability and growth. A country holds several types of reserves, often held in the central bank, which are broadly referred to as the official reserve assets of a country. These comprise international reserves, the so-called foreign exchange (FX) or forex reserves, and can be complemented by monetary reserves that may or may not be in local currency. The primary function of these FX reserves, in general, is to maintain international liquidity, i.e., maintain the ability to pay for the country's international obligations; to provide confidence to investors in the case of capital account problems or to protect against capital account problems, maintaining the value of the country's value vis-à-vis other currencies and providing liquidity to the foreign exchange market. The composition of reserves, including the allocation between different currencies and assets, can also be subject to careful consideration and periodic adjustments based on evolving economic conditions and objectives.

What are the main historical arguments for francophone African countries to hold their foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury?

Colonialism has left a strong legacy of economic integration between Francophone Africa and France. A notable characteristic of Francophone Africa (the eight states that chose to remain French African units (AOFs) at the time of their independence in 1960 and five others which secured independence between 1960 and 1981) is their deep rooted and intricate economic dependence on France. This dependence, which encompasses visible and invisible connections, manifests in various formal and

informal channels. The Franc Zone was created in the late 1930s, on the eve of the Second World War. It comprises 14 countries in West and Central Africa and the Comoros, linked by a policy of monetary cooperation designed to ensure financial stability.

The franc zone is made up of three independent regional economic groupings, each with its own central bank: the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA): Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Togo and Senegal. Central African Monetary Union (UMAC): Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Comoros: Using the Comorian franc. The franc zone is based on four major principles: Fixed parity with the euro: €1 = CFAF 655.957 (parity unchanged since 1994). Unlimited convertibility: The CFA franc can be converted into euros by France without restriction. Pooling of foreign exchange reserves: Between 50% and 65% of foreign exchange reserves are placed with the French Treasury, depending on the region. Freedom of transactions: Current transactions and capital movements are free within each region.

Since its establishment, the French Treasury has historically been a safe place for international reserves, partly to stabilize the exchange rate between francophone African countries and France. French Presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac recently stated their openness to changing the status quo, while French President Emmanuel Macron first questioned the necessity of this reserve arrangement in 2019. Still, about half of the eight countries surveyed on a CFA related mechanism in 2015 held their central bank reserves in their reserve accounts. They did so, in part, to use it as an alternative to holding reserve assets for currency management that have become available much more recently. Moreover, Franc Zone and Franc Zone Asia members get slightly lower funding costs than comparative countries, possibly because France operates as a co-guarantor. However, there are also costs from participating in the Franc Zone because more excellent exchange rate stability is associated with higher sovereign bond yields and domestic inflation. These costs are not sensitive to changes in the amount of central bank reserves that members elect to hold in the French Treasury.

In your opinion, do foreign exchange reserves held with the French Treasury help make economies less vulnerable to economic shocks, particularly those associated with high price volatility on world markets?

Since 1962, most African countries in the Franc Zone created as a way to safeguard their macroeconomic stability to hold part of their own foreign reserves in the French Treasury. Firstly, it may enhance macroeconomic resilience if countries can use the reserves to smooth external shocks. Voluntary accumulation of reserves gives an opportunity to build international FX buffers. A wider literature argues, in contrast, that capital flow volatility discourages countries from accumulating reserves as they provide fungible insurance. The flip-side of the argument is that reliance on a foreign jurisdiction hampers countries' economic autonomy. Holding foreign exchange reserves in the French Treasury could indeed be a de facto form of insurance against balance of payments crises. Available data on external assets and liabilities in public balance sheets provide a basis for inquiring the virtue of intra-zone accumulation of foreign exchange reserves in the French Treasury compared to other forms of accumulation.

Findings suggest that countries holding non-fungible assets abroad choose to obtain extra-assurance by placing part of their official foreign exchange reserves in the French Treasury. Consequently, the ability of the French Treasury to disburse reserves in times of need can be said to be magnified by other categories of foreign exchange reserves held by central banks, at least according to the yardstick of voluntary/excess reserve holdings, which can itself be questioned. Expanding upon this, it is important to note that the decision of countries to hold non-fungible assets abroad can be attributed to various factors. These factors may include the need for diversification of their reserve holdings, the desire to mitigate risk, or the objective of maximizing returns on their investments. By opting to place a portion of their official foreign exchange reserves in the French Treasury, these countries aim to enhance the security and stability of their reserve portfolios. The French Treasury, renowned for its strong financial standing and reliable performance, provides an additional layer of reassurance to these nations.

Furthermore, the presence of other categories of foreign exchange reserves held by central banks further amplifies the ability of the French Treasury to disburse reserves in times of need. These reserves, held voluntarily or in excess, serve as an additional cushion that enhances the overall liquidity of the French Treasury. In times of economic turmoil or unforeseen circumstances, these additional reserves can play a crucial role in addressing financial challenges and ensuring stability in the global market. The measurement and evaluation of reserve adequacy are complex processes that require careful analysis and consideration of multiple factors. While these categories of reserves may provide an indication of a country's ability to withstand economic shocks, they do not inherently guarantee absolute financial security. In conclusion, findings suggest that the decision of countries to hold non-fungible assets abroad and place part of their official foreign exchange reserves in the French Treasury is a strategic move aimed at bolstering the stability and resilience of their reserve portfolios. The presence of other categories of foreign exchange reserves held by central banks further strengthens the capacity of the French Treasury to address financial needs in times of crisis. Nonetheless, it is crucial to approach the evaluation of reserve adequacy and the significance of voluntary/excess reserve holdings with caution, recognizing the complexities involved in assessing and ensuring financial security.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of these monetary arrangements with France in terms of the economic stability and resilience of francophone countries?

Having reserves in the French Treasury entails a number of advantages. First, it secures against balance of payment crises. Reserves held at the French Treasury are anti-crisis assets equivalent to Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and can thus be used as collateral to obtain foreign exchange from the French central bank in case of a balance of payments crisis, but also from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as part of the rights to borrow accumulation agreed in December 2019 in the 15th General Review of Quotas. Thus, if a sudden stop occurs, reserves in the Treasury will reduce the adjustment needed and the impact on the real economy. Also, they contribute to keep financial linkages with the outside world under the control of national authorities. This control over financial linkages ensures

stability and allows for effective management of economic fluctuations. However, therefore, this advantage is also in part a disadvantage, as these reserves are at the same time equivalent to a debt relationship towards the French central bank, somewhat subordinating the freedom to conduct monetary policy. This debt relationship introduces a level of dependency on the French central bank's policies and can limit the flexibility in responding to domestic economic conditions.

Nevertheless, the benefits of holding reserves in the French Treasury outweigh the potential drawbacks. The ability to secure foreign exchange in times of crisis provides a crucial buffer for the economy, shielding it from the full impact of external shocks. It also allows for a smoother adjustment process, minimizing disruptions and ensuring the stability of the real economy. Furthermore, the control over financial linkages ensures that the country's economic policies align with its national interests, protecting domestic industries and promoting sustainable growth. In conclusion, while there are trade-offs involved in holding reserves in the French Treasury, the advantages greatly outweigh the drawbacks. The ability to secure foreign exchange and maintain control over financial linkages provides essential safeguards for the economy, enabling effective crisis management and long-term stability. Despite the potential limitations on monetary policy independence, the strategic importance of reserves in the French Treasury cannot be overstated. As a critical tool in managing balance of payment crises and maintaining economic sovereignty, these reserves play a vital role in safeguarding the French economy.

Moreover, there are two main reasons that could explain why accumulating reserves at the French Treasury may fail at offering the same protection of monetary policy autonomy. First, contrary to a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF), the reserves are salted away in the form of a deposit in risk-free assets in a single location rather than diversified across various investment vehicles. This lack of diversification can limit the effectiveness of the reserves in providing financial stability. Second, when the peg is abandoned, the parametric reserves are usually partly held in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), which are not collateralize assets. As a result, their utility is limited in crisis scenarios. A crisis scenario could take the form

of a major loss of financial accumulation – be it reserves stored at the Banque de France or at the French Treasury. Such a loss could occur due to either losing the liquidity needed for conducting operations and for maintaining the peg or because there has been a cancellation of overdrafts through “wars of attribution”. In either case, the lack of a diversified reserve portfolio or an insufficient SDR-related financial buffer may leave the French Treasury vulnerable to economic shocks and instability.

What role can regional economic communities play in strengthening the resilience of economies to shocks in the absence of foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury?

The role of the regional economic communities in strengthening the resilience of the economies of French-speaking Africa to exogenous shocks, in the absence of an accumulation of reserves in the French treasury, is twofold. Firstly, there would be the negotiation of monetary cooperation with the EU. In this sense, the central banks of the CFA zone should establish a direct relationship with the European Central Bank, rather than with the French Treasury, in order to strengthen monetary independence and economic integration. Next, a common currency should be created. To this end, the monetary zones could develop a common currency based on a basket of international currencies (Dollar, Euro, and Yuan) and envisage a single monetary zone for the WAEMU countries and the rest of the ECOWAS members.

What policy options can be proposed to strengthen the resilience of francophone African economies without the need for large foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury?

It is noteworthy to mention that the large currency reserves (stocks) that have been accumulated by the countries of the African Franc Currency (CFA) do not merely generate the usual benefits of reservations in terms of reduced costs when borrowing by the governments of the CFA. Instead, it can be concluded that the chief appeal of such significant reserves lies in their ability to function as a cushion, specifically in smoothening the trajectories of public debt and strengthening fiscal revenues in the face of unexpected

shocks. As is evidenced by the considerably faster reversion to normalcy experienced by oil exporters and countries that invest in more volatile instruments, it becomes clear that there is minimal advantage to be gained from actively building up reserves in the short-term. Therefore, it would be wise for the authorities to adhere to a “liquidity benchmark” for the majority of their reserve holdings, up to an upper limit.

The intelligent allocation of reserves can also support economic development and promote sustainable growth. By investing in strategic sectors such as infrastructure, technology, and education, countries can enhance their productive capacity and foster innovation. This not only improves the quality of life for citizens but also strengthens the overall competitiveness of the nation. Moreover, the careful management of reserves can contribute to financial stability, which is vital for attracting foreign investments and maintaining investor confidence. By ensuring that the reserves are utilized effectively and efficiently, countries can demonstrate their commitment to sound economic policies and prudent fiscal management.

It is essential to consider the potential benefits of regional cooperation in reserve management. By collaborating with neighboring countries, economies can pool their resources and achieve economies of scale. This enables them to better withstand external pressures and effectively address common challenges. Furthermore, regional cooperation can foster trade integration and enhance economic integration, leading to increased market access and improved competitiveness. Consequently, countries can leverage their combined reserves to support regional development initiatives and promote sustainable growth. In conclusion, the prudent management of large currency reserves presents numerous opportunities and benefits for countries. By adhering to a liquidity benchmark and diversifying their investment portfolio, governments can enhance financial stability, support economic development, and promote regional cooperation. These measures not only strengthen the resilience of economies but also contribute to long-term prosperity and wellbeing.

Additionally, it is imperative to carefully evaluate the way forward and plan meticulously for building up future reserves, ensuring a robust and resilient financial

framework. In order to accomplish this, Francophone leaders must engage in a comprehensive reassessment of the likely accountability costs at every margin of their deposit. This thorough evaluation will help determine whether the fraction that is to be ‘externalized’ should be either lowered, raised, or even maintained at the current level. By proactively engaging in this process, Francophone leaders can effectively optimize their deposit management strategies and ensure the utmost efficiency and effectiveness in their financial operations.

Finally, we can make a specific policy proposal to Francophone African central banks that we believe has promise: diversify your reserves out of the French Treasury. This is likely akin to a no-brainer piece of advice for most central banks or Treasuries, but it is a more relevant question for Francophone African economies. The potential benefits are multivariate. First, having reserves “locked” inside the French Treasury means that countries cannot access them in times of duress, as made poignantly clear with COVID-19. By diversifying their reserve portfolio, African central banks can explore investment opportunities that align more closely with their specific economic needs. For instance, they could seize the chance to invest in private debt, thereby stimulating local businesses and fostering economic growth. Moreover, a diversified reserve structure acts as a safeguard against wealth redistribution attempts within the government. Diversification of reserves could also potentially serve as a powerful incentive for the French authorities to engage in a more thorough examination and analysis of proposed monetary policy creations. This process would necessitate collaboration and communication among the relevant stakeholders, including governments, central banks, and international organizations. Transparency would be key in order to ensure confidence and trust in the proposed diversification plan. Additionally, the timing and pace of implementation should be carefully assessed to minimize disruption and allow for a smooth transition.



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The Nexus Between Elections And Public Health

Dr. GHYSLAINE BRUNA DJEUNANG DONGHO, Dr. ODETTE KIBU, SOLANGE DABOU, Dr. RONALD GOBINA

Elections, as democratic processes, are fundamental to good governance [1]. The year 2024 in Africa is filled with several elections, ranging from presidential to parliamentary, in 19 countries. Majority of these elections are taking place in a context where a single party has long dominated despite the multiple existing parties within the country. The timing and nature of these elections will determine the future of governance and security in the region [2]. Elections and public health are inextricably linked. The policies and priorities set by elected officials directly impact the health and well-being of a population [3]. Successful elections, characterized by high voter turnout, accurate vote counting, and peaceful transitions of power, contribute to a healthy and stable society. Conversely, electoral crises, marred by violence or fraud, can disrupt essential health services and undermine public trust in institutions [4]. This policy brief explores the intricate relationship between elections and public health, highlighting key areas of concern and providing recommendations for mitigating them.

The Impact of Elections on Public Health

Public Health in Africa has gone a long way to fight against several threats and most countries on the continent are yet to achieve Universal health coverage [5]. However, the

manner in which elections are conducted can significantly impact public health [6]. Elections, characterized by mass gatherings, heightened tensions, and increased mobility, can create conditions conducive to the spread of infectious diseases [7]. Additionally, electoral processes can disrupt essential health services, and political instability arising from elections can exacerbate existing health vulnerabilities [1]. Understanding the relationship between Elections and Public Health highlights the clear impact Elections could have on health outcomes.

- **Infectious Diseases Transmission:** Elections present a unique environment for infectious disease transmission. Large gatherings, campaigns, and voting day activities can facilitate the transmission of infectious diseases and lead to disease outbreaks. The close proximity of people with increased human contact, often in poorly ventilated spaces and inadequate sanitation at polling stations, creates ideal conditions for the rapid spread of pathogens [7]. This could lead to increased morbidity and mortality.
- **Worsening of health disparities:** Election-derived activities such as investments in health infrastructures and equipment can divert resources and personnel, then increasing inequalities in the delivery of essential health services. This could lead to decline in



Credit: SIPHIWE SIBEKO / REUTERS

immunization coverage and other preventive health services, exacerbation of maternal and child health challenges, and delays in the management of chronic diseases [3, 8]. A study conducted in 14 African countries shows that, 40% to 48% of the aid received from China was more likely to be allocated by the Government, to areas with the highest concentration of their voting supporters [9]. Thus, creating more opportunities for healthcare personnel in the funded areas and disadvantaging regions with less or no funding.

- **Political Instability and Health:** Electoral disputes and violence can result in physical injuries, deaths, and psychological trauma, disrupt healthcare systems, displace

populations, and create conditions of insecurity that negatively impact mental health and overall well-being [10].

Indirect Impacts

Beyond the immediate impact of elections on public health, the policies and decisions implemented by elected officials have long-term consequences.

- **Socioeconomic factors:** Economic instability, displacement, and food insecurity resulting from elections could negatively impact public health [1]. Indeed, conflicts arising from political instability in sub-Saharan Africa in the 2000s led to an increase of 12% in infant mortality



Credit: Illustration by Rose Wong

- and a decrease of more than two years in life expectancy in affected regions [11].
- Governance and Policy: Election outcomes could influence policies and resource allocation such as decisions on access to clean water, environmental regulations, and other health determinants [12]. This could lead to a long-term impact on health systems and human development. Additionally, the ability of Governments to respond effectively to public health crises is shaped by the strength of their public health infrastructure, which is often influenced by political priorities [1, 10].
- Social cohesion: Election-related tensions could erode social cohesion and trust in health institutions [13]. A study conducted on the 2020 US presidential elections in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that public health behaviors are linked to political identities, thus reflecting societal divisions [14].

Public Health Crises and Electoral Processes

Public health crises could significantly disrupt electoral processes, influencing voter turnout, campaign strategies, and overall election outcomes.

Case study: COVID-19 and Elections

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical interplay between elections and public health. Elections held during the pandemic required innovative approaches to ensure voter safety while maintaining democratic principles. This included measures like early voting, mail-in ballots, and social distancing protocols at polling stations [15]. Moreover, between February 2020 and August 2021, 42% (106/251) of the elections scheduled worldwide were postponed due to COVID-19. The postponed elections concerned more than 42 countries and were both sub-national and national. By the end of the study period 28% (30/106) of the postponed elections had not taken place; among which 37% (11/30) did not have a new date yet [15].

Mitigating the Impact of Elections and Public Health Interplay

After diving into the complex relationship between elections and public health, a step-by-step approach to limiting the negative impact of Electoral processes on Public Health is suggested as follows:

- **Pre-Election Planning:**
 - Conduct a comprehensive risk assessment to identify potential public health threats.
 - Develop a detailed election health plan that outlines roles and responsibilities.
 - Strengthen surveillance systems to monitor disease outbreaks and other health indicators.
 - Promote healthy behaviors through mass media campaigns.
- **Election Day Management:**
 - Ensure adequate hand-washing facilities and sanitation at polling stations.
 - Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for election officials.
 - Implement crowd control measures to maintain physical distancing.

 Elections are essential democratic processes, but their impact on public health cannot be ignored. Elections are not merely political events; they are crucial determinants of public health outcomes

- Mobilize health workers to provide emergency medical services.
- **Post-Election Period:**
 - Conduct rapid assessments to evaluate the impact of the elections on health services.
 - Restore essential health services and address any service gap.

- Provide psychosocial support to affected populations.
- Strengthen early warning systems for disease outbreaks.

Overall, to consistently minimize the negative health consequences of elections over the long term, a multi-sectoral approach is essential. Key strategies include:

- Strengthening health systems to respond to election-related health crises
- Promoting peaceful elections and conflict prevention
- Integrating public health considerations into election planning and implementation
- Enhancing collaboration between health and electoral stakeholders
- Investing in research and data collection on the impact of elections on public health.

Elections are essential democratic processes, but their impact on public health cannot be ignored. Elections are not merely political events; they are crucial determinants of public health outcomes. By implementing effective strategies, governments, health authorities, and election management bodies could mitigate the risks and protect the health and well-being of the population. Moreover, understanding the complex relationship between elections and public health, could help policymakers to ensure that democratic processes contribute to a healthier and more equitable society. Collaboration and coordination among all stakeholders are crucial for achieving successful health outcomes.

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Community outreach and support: Contribution of the Denis and Lenora Foretia Foundation



Credit: Foretia Foundation

The Denis and Lenora Foretia Foundation works to implement progressive policies that together create economic opportunities for all. In the year 2018, Dr Denis Foretia, Co-chair at the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation and Team, in cognizance of the different socio-economic and political issues affecting our country and the necessity to consistently contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (4), most particularly, SDG 3 (*good health and well-being*), SDG 2 (*zero hunger*), and SDG 6 (*clean water and sanitation*), instituted the “*Community day program*”. This program aims to increase the foundation’s outreach and support to the needy and less privileged in Cameroon through charitable, educational, and social activities carried out by our Staff.

Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), declared on November 20, 2023, International Orphans Day: “*We must do better – by promoting inclusive education, equal access to jobs, self-determination and an environment where everyone is respected. And in doing so, we will also recognize the role of families, caregivers and support networks.*”



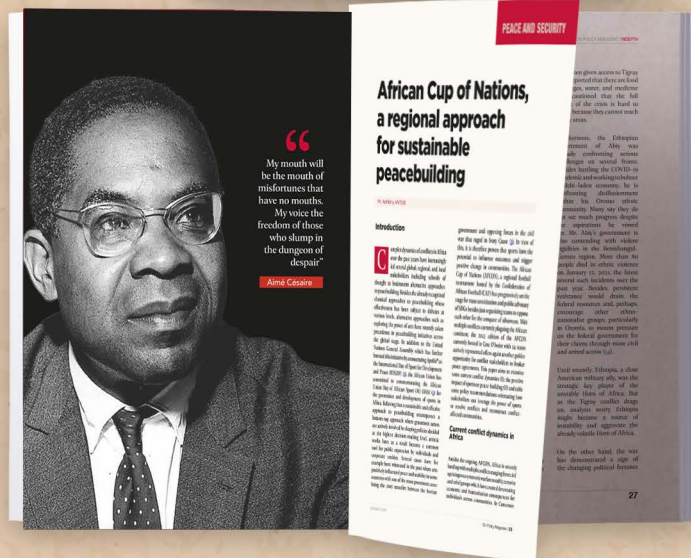
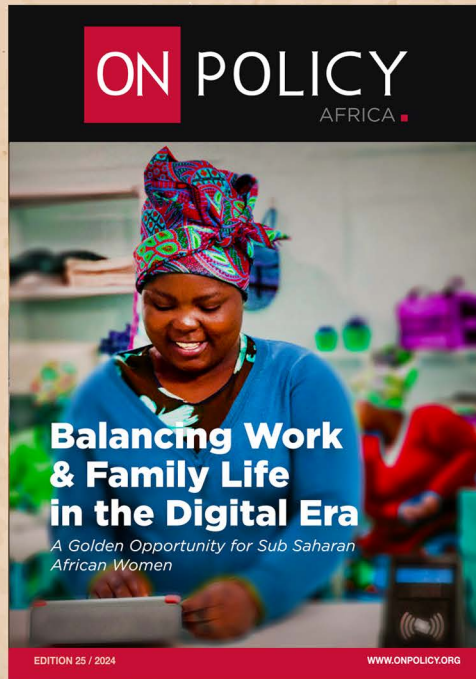
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Director of Programs and Strategy
Denis and Lenora Foretia
Foundation



Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation's monthly Community Day at **Centre d'Accueil Good Shepherd**, July 2024

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