

COUNTRY FACT SHEET

CAMEROON

April 2007

Research Directorate
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Official name

Republic of Cameroon.

Geography

Cameroon is found on the west coast of Africa and is sometimes called the "hinge" of Africa. It is bordered by Nigeria to the west, Chad and the Central African Republic to the east, and the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and Gabon to the south. Cameroon's total area is 475,440 km². The climate varies from tropical on the coast to semi-desert and hot in the north.

Population and density

Population: 17,340,702 (mid-2006 estimate).

Density: 33.7 (2004) per km².

Principal cities and populations

(Census 1987 unless otherwise indicated)

Yaoundé (capital city) 649,000; Douala 1,858,000 (mid-2003 estimate); Garoua 142,000; Maroua 123,000; Bafoussam 113,000; Bamenda 110,000.

Languages

English and French are the official languages. Twenty-four African languages are spoken, including Fang, Bamileke and Duala.

Religions

Christianity 53%, traditional religious beliefs 25%, Islam 22% practiced mostly in the north.

Ethnic groups

Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigritic 7%, other African 13%, non-African less than 1%.

Demographics

Population growth rate: 2.04.%.

Infant mortality rate: 63.52 deaths/1,000 live births.

Life expectancy at birth: 48 years.

Fertility rate: 4.6 children born/woman.

Literacy: 79% of persons over the age of 15 can read and write.

Currency

Communauté Financière Africaine franc (CFA).

CFA 430.66 = CAD 1.00¹.

National holidays

2006: 1 January (New Year's Day), 10 January (Festival of Sheep), 11 February (Youth Day), 14 April (Good Friday), 17 April (Easter Monday), 1 May (Labour Day), 20 May (National Day), 25 May (Ascension Day), 15 August (Assumption), 23 October (Djoulde Soumae, end of Ramadan), 25 December (Christmas), 31 December (Festival of Sheep).

2007: 1 January (New Year's Day), 11 February (Youth Day), 6 April (Good Friday), 9 April (Easter Monday), 1 May (Labour Day), 17 May (Ascension Day), 20 May (National Day), 15 August (Assumption), 13 October (Djoulde Soumae, end of Ramadan), 20 December (Festival of Sheep), 25 December (Christmas).

Head of state and government

Chief of State: President Paul Biya (since 6 November 1982).

Head of Government: Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni (since 8 December 2004).

Form of government

Cameroon is a multi-party presidential republic. The prime minister is appointed by the president. The president appoints the cabinet on the advice of the prime minister. The president also appoints the governors of each of Cameroon's 10 provinces.

Legislative structure

The president holds executive power and is elected for seven-year terms, with a maximum of two terms. The national assembly holds legislative power and is composed of 180 members who are elected to five-year terms. A December 1995 constitutional amendment created an upper legislative chamber, the Senate which is not yet functional.

Administrative divisions

Cameroon has 10 provinces: Adamaoua, Centre, Est, Extrême-Nord, Littoral, Nord, Nord-Ouest, Ouest, Sud, Sud-Ouest. Each province is headed by a governor and is further divided into regions and districts.

Judicial system

Cameroon's constitution enshrines the independence of the judiciary. The Supreme Court is the court of last appeal. It upholds the constitution, rules on the admissibility of laws, and considers administrative complaints. Supreme Court judges are appointed by the president. The High Court of Justice, provincial magistrates and court of appeal form the rest of the judiciary. Judges sitting in the High Court of Justice are elected by the national assembly.

Elections

Universal suffrage is 20 years. Members of the national assembly are elected for five-year terms, which the president can shorten or extend. The last election was held on 23 June 2002.

Popular vote:

Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) (Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounaise, RCDPC), also known as the Democratic Rally of the Cameroon People (RDCP): 133 seats

Social Democratic Front (SDF): 21 seats

Cameroonian Democratic Union (UDC): 5 seats

Other parties: 21 seats.

Defence

The Cameroon Armed Forces consists of the army; the navy and naval infantry; and the air force. In 2005, the divisions of the armed forces had a total of 12,500 army, 1,300 navy and 300 air force personnel, for a total of 23,100 service members which included 9,000 paramilitary forces.

Military service is voluntary and the minimum age of recruits is 18 years. In 2005, the defence budget was CFA 160,000,000,000.00 or roughly CAD \$375,680,000.00².

Cameroon and France share a bilateral defence agreement.

Media

The constitution of Cameroon provides that freedom of expression, communication and the press "shall be guaranteed under conditions fixed by law." However, censorship of the press has occurred in Cameroon and censorship legislation is in force.

Cameroon's principal news agency is CamNews. Telecommunications are regulated by the Telecommunications Regulation Agency. Agencies include Cameroon Telecommunications (CAMTEL), Mobile Telephone Networks Cameroon (MTNC), and Société Camerounaise de Mobiles. Cameroon has nine FM, two AM and three shortwave radio stations, as well as provincial radio stations at Abong Mbang, Bafoussam, Bamenda, Ebolowa and Maroua. There is one television station, run by the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Camerounaise (CRTV).

The Cameroon Tribune is a government-run daily newspaper published in French (66,000) and English (20,000). *The Cameroon Post* is an English weekly (50,000). French newspapers include the twice-weekly *La Gazette* (35,000), and the bi-weekly *Le Messenger* (34,000). Other newspapers include *Le Combattant*, *Cameroon Outlook*, *Politiks*, *Mutations*, *La Révélation*, and *L'Action*.

In 2003, there were roughly 580,000 televisions in Cameroon. In 2004 there were 160,000 personal computers with 167,000 Internet users.

United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and Country Rankⁱ

Value: 0.506/1 (2004).

Rank: 144 of 175 countries (2006).

ⁱ The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are: 0.800 and higher (high human development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low development index). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value.

United Nations Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Country Rankⁱⁱ

Value: 0.497/1 (2004).

Rank: 109 out of 175 countries (2004).

Population below the national poverty line

40.2% (1990-2003) (UN HDI).

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)ⁱⁱⁱ

Score: 2.3/10.

Rank: 138 out of 163 countries surveyed.

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)^{iv}

Political parties 4.3, parliamentary legislature 4.2, business/private sector 4.2, police 4.7, legal system/judiciary 4.4, media 3.6, tax revenue 4.0, medical services 4.1, educational system 4.1, the military 4.3, utilities 3.2, registry and permit services 3.8, NGOs 3.1, religious bodies 2.9.

[Information compiled from: *The Europa World Year Book 2006 2006, 1022-1039; Political Handbook of the World (PHW 2007) October 2006, 197-204; Political Parties of the World 2005, 105-108; Transparency International 2005; UN 2005; US 19 December 2006; US October 2006]*

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to World War I, Cameroon was a German protectorate, then it was divided into French and British administered territories under UN trusteeship.³ French-administered Cameroon became an independent republic on 1 January, 1960.⁴ In 1961, part of British-administered Cameroon voted to join Nigeria; the other part voted to join French Cameroon.⁵ Subsequently, on 1 October, 1961, Cameroon became a federated republic.⁶

Cameroon's first president, Amadou Babatoura Ahidjo, served for five successive terms until, in 1982, he named Prime Minister Paul Biya as his successor.⁷ In 1983, Biya dismissed the then prime minister, Maigari Bello Boubba over an attempted coup that allegedly implicated the first president of the republic.⁸ In 1985 the President survived a second attempted coup.⁹ In 1990, the government responded to pro-democracy demonstrations with violence, but following local and international pressure, President Biya conceded to introducing a multi-party system.¹⁰ As a result, most political parties in Cameroon became formally recognized in 1991.¹¹ Several of these parties boycotted the 1992 legislative elections, in which Biya's Cameroon People's Democratic Movement

ⁱⁱ The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Transparency International CPI is based on composite survey data from 16 polls and 10 independent institutions. The data reflects the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (163).

^{iv} The Transparency International GCB is a public opinion survey used to gauge people's perceptions of corruption within their own state.

(CPDM) (Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounaise, RCDPC) party, also known as the Democratic Rally of the Cameroon People (RDCP), won a majority.¹² Presidential elections in 1992, in which Biya was re-elected, were denounced by international observers and were followed by protesting and the declaration of a state of emergency in one region.¹³ Biya was re-elected in 1997 amid boycotting over the government's failure to establish an independent electoral commission, and international observer concerns about "blatant irregularities and ... violent intimidation."¹⁴ Biya was re-elected in 2004.¹⁵ A 1995 constitutional amendment extended the presidential term of office to seven years but reduced the maximum permissible number of terms to two.¹⁶ The amendment also established a second legislative chamber, the Senate, though as of early 2006 it had not become operational.¹⁷

3. POLITICAL PARTIES

Governing and Government-Supportive Parties:

Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) (Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounaise, RCDPC): Also known as the Democratic Rally of the Cameroon People, The ruling CPDM succeeded the Cameroon National Union (UNC) in 1966 following the merger of the Cameroon Union (UC) and five other political parties.¹⁸ In 1990 the CPDM passed a political pluralism law in the National Assembly¹⁹ and won the subsequent legislative elections in 1992 and 2002.²⁰ The leader of the CPDM is Paul Biya.²¹

National Union for Democracy and Progress (Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès UNDP): The UNDP was created in 1991 as a vehicle for supporters of Cameroon's first President since independence, with a largely Muslim support base.²² At first, the UNDP boycotted the 1992 legislative elections but then ran and won 68 seats out of 180, only 20 fewer seats than the ruling CPDM.²³ It then joined a coalition with the CPDM and other parties.²⁴ In 1997 the UNDP won 13 sets in the national assembly but boycotted presidential elections in the same year.²⁵ In 2002 the party won a single seat in legislative elections.²⁶ The leader of the UNDP is cabinet minister Maigari Bello Bouba.²⁷

Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (Union des populations camerounaises, UPC): Also known as the Cameroon People's Union, the UPC is a Marxist-Leninist party originally formed in 1948, that was outlawed in 1955 for "attempted revolution."²⁸ It was legalized again in 1991.²⁹ In the 1992 legislative elections the party formed part of the opposition, but sought greater cooperation with the ruling party in 1996.³⁰ The party is split into two factions led by two different leaders.³¹ The factions are known as UPC(N), for those that support cabinet minister Henri Hogbe Nlend, and as UPC(K) for those that support cabinet minister Augustin Frederick Kodock.³²

Opposition Parties:

Social Democratic Front (SDF): The SDF is a member of the Socialist International and has support from both Cameroon's francophone and anglophone voters.³³ In 1992 the SDF convened an alliance of 10 parties in opposition to the RDPC/CPDM coalition government.³⁴ In 1997, the SDF won 43 seats in the National Assembly but boycotted presidential elections in the same year.³⁵ In the 2002 legislative elections the SDF won 22 seats.³⁶ The leader of the SDF is John Fru Ndi.³⁷

Democratic Union of Cameroon, Union Démocratique du Cameroun (UDC): The UDC became a recognized political party in 1991.³⁸ In 1992 it boycotted the national assembly elections along with the Social Democratic Front (SDF).³⁹ The party won five seats in the 1997 legislative elections but boycotted presidential elections in the same year.⁴⁰ The leader of the UDC is Adamou Ndam Njoya.⁴¹

Other parties:

Action for Meritocracy and Equal Opportunity Party (AMEC), Alliance of Progressive Forces (AFP), Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM), Democratic Progressive Party of Cameroon, Democratic Rally of People without Frontiers, Integral Democracy of Cameroon, Liberal Democratic Alliance (LDA), People's Solidarity Party, Popular Development Party, Progressive Movement, Social Democratic Movement (SDM), Social Democratic Party of Cameroon, Social Movement for New Democracy, Social Programme for Liberty and Democracy, Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Union of Democratic Forces of Cameroon, Union of the Forces of Progress,⁴² Movement for the Liberation of Cameroonian Youth, Movement for the Liberation and Development of Cameroon, Allies' Front for Change, Liberal Democratic Party, Movement for Democracy and Progress, Cameroonian Party of Democrats, National Convention of the Cameroonian Opposition, Progressive Movement, National Progress Party, Alliance for Development and Democracy, Justice and Development Party (JDP), African Movement for New Independence and Democracy.⁴³

Regional Groups:

The Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) is a secessionist anglophone party based in former British Cameroon.⁴⁴ The South West Elite Association (SWELA) was reportedly re-established in 2000 with the government's alleged support in order to counteract the SCNC.⁴⁵

4. ARMED GROUPS AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS

National Liberation Front of Cameroon (Fronte de la Libération Nationale du Cameroun, FLNC). The leader of the FLNC fled from Cameroon in 1984 after being indicted for an attempted coup.⁴⁶ In 1997, reports indicated that the FLNC had reached an understanding to coordinate its activities with anti-government rebels in Chad.⁴⁷ The FLNC's leader is Mbara Guerandi.⁴⁸

5. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

President Biya was most recently re-elected in 2004 for a seven-year term⁴⁹ which ends in 2011.⁵⁰ Legislative elections are scheduled for June 2007.⁵¹ Municipal elections are also scheduled for 2007.⁵² Social unrest in Cameroon is prompted by poverty and faltering health and education systems.⁵³ According to *The Economist* Intelligence Unit, Public disquiet may increase should socio-economic conditions not improve, now that Cameroon has completed the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative run by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁵⁴

¹ Canada 10 Jan. 2006.

² Ibid. 10 Apr. 2007.

³ *Political Handbook of the World* (PHW 2007) 2006, 197.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 198.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 105.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 106.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Political Handbook of the World* (PHW 2007) 2006, 201; *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 106-107.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 106.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 105.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 107-108.

⁴³ *Political Handbook of the World* (PHW 2007) 2006, 202-203.

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- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 203.
⁴⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 202.
⁴⁷ Ibid., 203.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ *Political Handbook of the World* (PHW 2007) 2006, 199.
⁵⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). N.d.
⁵¹ International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES). N.d.
⁵² Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). N.d.
⁵³ Ibid.
⁵⁴ Ibid.

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