



Freedom in the World 2017 - Cameroon

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Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 24 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 6.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 6 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 6 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 24,400,000

Capital: Yaoundé

GDP/capita: \$1,217

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

OVERVIEW

President Paul Biya has ruled Cameroon since 1982. His Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has maintained power by rigging elections, using state resources for political patronage, and limiting the activities of opposition parties. The Boko Haram insurgent group, based in northeast Nigeria, continues to attack civilians in northern Cameroon. Cameroonian state security forces responding to the insurgency have been accused of committing human rights violations against civilians.

Key Developments in 2016:

- The Boko Haram conflict continues to affect northern Cameroon. Boko Haram insurgents use suicide bombings and other tactics to kill civilians. State security forces in the region have been accused of carrying out arbitrary detentions and torture.
- A new penal code was approved and enacted in July. It banned genital mutilation, but also prohibited political protests on university campuses, and left intact the country's ban on same-sex relationships.
- Protests in late November and early December linked to a teachers' strike in the country's Anglophone regions were violently repressed by security forces.

Executive Summary:

In 2016, Cameroon's government continued to grapple with a persistent Boko Haram insurgency in the north. Meanwhile, authorities continued to suppress the political opposition, including by banning some opposition meetings and arresting members of opposition political parties. The country lacks an obvious successor to the 83-year-old Biya, whose presidential term is scheduled to end in 2018.

Although Boko Haram has been weakened since 2014 by the combined military efforts of Cameroon, Nigeria, and several other countries in the region, the insurgent group's attacks continued to affect

Cameroon's Far North region, particularly the areas around Mora and Fotokol. As of September 2016, Cameroon was hosting some 350,000 refugees who had fled the Boko Haram insurgency or Central African Republic conflict, with an additional 100,000 people displaced internally. State security services and local defense militias have carried out abuses against civilians as they fight against Boko Haram. In July 2016, Amnesty International reported that hundreds of people suspected of aiding Boko Haram had been arrested arbitrarily by security forces, that detainees had been tortured while in custody and denied access to legal representation, and that some suspects had been sentenced to death in military courts after being convicted in flawed trials.

Despite the limitations on citizens' ability to protest or organize opposition movements, strikes are regularly organized by workers' unions. Strikes in 2016 included those by some public workers, and by truck and taxi drivers. In November and December, a strike by teachers in the country's Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions gave way to protests that were violently repressed by state security forces. Four protesters were reportedly killed.

Journalists face pressure and the possibility of being detained or arrested while working. Ahmed Abba – a Nigerian reporter who was arrested in the Far North region in 2015 in connection with his reporting on Boko Haram – remained in jail at the end of 2016. In June, a radio reporter in Douala was reporting on problems at a public hospital when she was forced by officials to strip off her clothes in a public place, supposedly as part of a search.

Biya approved a new penal code in July 2016. The new code bans political protests at public buildings, schools, and universities, and forbids same-sex sexual relations and includes prison sentences of up to five years for those convicted. It also banned genital mutilation.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Cameroon, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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