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Cameroon: Voter's card and identification of citizens for electoral purposes

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Introduction

The following note describes the identification of Cameroonian citizens for the purpose of voting. Likewise, the note contains a short description of the voter's card.

The note is based on interviews conducted in Yaoundé in March 2019 and is one of several NIDC notes about Cameroonian documents.

The administrative structure in Cameroon

Cameroon has been a Presidential Republic since 1996. The country is divided into four levels of governance: the government as the highest administrative level, 10 regions, 58 divisions (*fr. départements*) and subdivisions (*fr. arrondissement*) as the lowest administrative level. Subdivisions correspond to councils.¹

"Elections Cameroon" (abbr.: ELECAM) is the administrative unit dealing with the organisation, management and supervision of all elections and referendums in Cameroon.² ELECAM has been tasked with identifying and registering Cameroonian voters since its establishment in 2006. It became officially operational in 2009 and is partially financed by the European Union.³

ELECAM has branches in 360 councils, 58 divisions and 10 regions. ELECAM's headquarters are based in Yaoundé.⁴

Voter registration takes place at council level. Regions collect raw data with the purpose of producing statistics while divisional offices keep record of the voters.

¹ Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2019, p. 43.

² Electoral Code, Law n. 2012/001 of 19 April 2012, amended and supplemented by law n. 2012/017 of 21 December 2012.

³ Head of division, Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁴ Head of division, Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

ELECAM's headquarters in turn issues voter cards, publishes electoral registers, identifies and eliminates multiple identities.⁵

Data collection and electoral rolls until 2011

Voter registration took place manually at council level until 2011. At that time, a person could submit a number of different documents for the purpose of identification and not necessarily an ID card.

Electoral rolls contained 200 pages with room for 20 people per page. Every page of the book used to have a carbon copy containing the personal information; name, residence and ID-card number. The carbon copies were sent to the territorially competent divisional center, where personal details were transferred to a computer.⁶

The divisional offices sent the information to the headquarters in Yaoundé in order to verify all entries and eliminate multiple identities. In the meantime, electoral rolls were stored in the archive of the council that performed the registration.⁷

[illegible]

Image 1: Appearance of electoral rolls in use until 2011. (NIDC reference material)

⁵ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019; Electoral Code, Law n. 2012/001 of 19 April 2012, amended and supplemented by law n. 2012/017 of 21 December 2012, section 30, p. 12.

⁶ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁷ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

The image displays two versions of electoral cards from Cameroon, used until 2011. Each card is divided into two main sections: a data collection sheet on the left and a registration receipt on the right.

Data Collection Sheet (FICHE DE COLLECTE DE DONNEES / DATA COLLECTION SHEET):

- Header:** Includes the text "FICHE DE COLLECTE DE DONNEES / DATA COLLECTION SHEET" and "Code et numéro de série : / Code and Serial Number".
- Antenne Communale / Council Branch:** A field for the local administrative unit.
- Quartier ou village / Quarter or village:** A field for the specific neighborhood or village.
- Nom et Prénoms / Names in full:** A field for the voter's full name.
- Date et lieu de naissance / Date and place of Birth:** A field for the voter's date and place of birth.
- Nom du père / Mother's name:** A field for the father's name.
- Sexe / Sex:** A field with checkboxes for Male (M) and Female (F).
- Profession (Occupation):** A field for the voter's profession.
- Bureau de vote / Polling Station:** A field for the designated polling station.
- Date / Date:** A field for the date of collection.
- Donnée Collectée par / Data Collected by:** A field for the collector's name.

Registration Receipt (RECEPISSE D'INSCRIPTION / REGISTRATION RECEIPT):

- Header:** Includes the text "RECEPISSE D'INSCRIPTION / REGISTRATION RECEIPT" and "Code et numéro de série : / Code and Serial Number".
- Noms et prénoms / Names in full:** A field for the voter's full name.
- Date et lieu de naissance / Date and place of Birth:** A field for the voter's date and place of birth.
- Antenne Communale / Council Branch:** A field for the local administrative unit.
- Bureau de Vote / Polling Station:** A field for the designated polling station.
- Date / Date:** A field for the date of registration.
- Signature / Cachet du responsable / Signature / Stamp of Official:** A field for the official's signature or stamp.

The cards are marked with a large red "ELECAM" stamp, indicating they are from the Elections Cameroon Directorate General of Elections.

Image 2: Appearance of electoral cards in use until 2011. (NIDC reference material)

Data collection and electoral rolls since 2012

The legal age for voting in Cameroon is 20 years.⁸ Voter registration takes place between 1 January and 31 August. From 1 September until 31 December, the applications are processed. Voter's cards are issued in this period.⁹

Biometric voter registration was implemented in Cameroon between 2012 and 2013. Since then, Cameroonians have been required to submit an ID card in order to enroll as voters.¹⁰

Personal data is collected at council level using a registration kit that contains a laptop with a webcam and a thermic printer for registering fingerprints (see image 3 below).

Fingerprints and facial images are captured at the time of registration and new electoral rolls differ from the old ones, as they also contain a photo of the voter in order to minimize risks of double and multiple registrations.¹¹

⁸ CIA World Factbook, N/A.

⁹ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁰ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹¹ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.



Image 3: Voter registration at a council in Yaoundé by mean of “registration kit”, March 2019.



Image 4: Appearance of electoral rolls in use since 2011. (NIDC reference material)

Every first of September, all data is transferred on a USB stick and uploaded into a computer. From there, the data is sent via VPN to the offices at regional level and to ELECAM’s headquarters in Yaoundé. In the central office, an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) is set up with the purpose of detecting multiple identities. Whenever this happens, older registrations are automatically discarded by the system and only the newest remain.¹²

Voter’s card

In 2012, a voter’s card was introduced. As of March 2019, the design is unchanged. The card contains the voter’s photo and fingerprints. A unique 8-digit document number and a 19-digit registration number are also added to the card.

The 19-digit registration number may be read the following way:¹³

- Digits 1-2: indicate the region
- Digits 3-4: indicate the division

¹² Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹³ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

- Digits 5-6: indicate the council
- Digits 7-8-9-10: indicate the number of the kit used for registering that voter
- Digits: 11-12: year of registration
- Digits: 13-19: indicate the sequence number of each registration conducted using that registration kit. The number of registrations are forthcoming.

Cards do not contain an expiration date. New cards can be issued upon application if the person changes address and moves under the jurisdiction of another council. In this instance, the old card is handed in at the office.¹⁴

Cameroon's biometric national register of voters

Voter's cards are registered in a database, which is a standalone system not linked to the police database over identity card and passports.¹⁵ For this reason, the registration number and document number from the voter's card cannot be found on passports or ID cards. Information about registered voters are kept in archives and can be verified later. The personal information is updated on a regular basis at the headquarters where multiple identities are detected and names of deceased people are removed from the database.¹⁶

Double and multiple identities

According to ELECAM, some people still attempt to register themselves with different identities by going to different councils and giving different details every time. Double and multiple identities are detected at ELECAM headquarters in Yaoundé by mean of AFIS and, since 2018, by mean of facial recognition.¹⁷

According to ELECAM, approximately one third of all registrations are multiple. At the elections of 2013, the system registered about 5,000 multiple registrations.¹⁸



Image 5: Voter's cards, March 2019. (NIDC reference material)

¹⁴ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁵ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁶ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019; ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, Biometric Voter Registration in Cameroon, N/A.

¹⁷ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁸ Elections Cameroon, Directorate General of Elections, Yaoundé, March 2019.

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