

# The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon

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These authors focus on one of the most controversial issues of Cameroon nation building: Anglophone problem. The article focuses on how the post-colonial state has attempted to preserve national unity in Cameroon amidst an increasing clamour by the Anglophones for federalism or an independent Southern Cameroons. The authors trace the roots of the crisis from the Anglo-French partition of the country and its incipient legacies especially as reunification of the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon did not provide equal partnership and moreover failed to preserve the cultural heritage and identity of the Anglophones. This, they argue gradually led to an Anglophone consciousness of the feeling of being marginalised, exploited and assimilated. With the use of very lucid and robust analysis the authors trace the origins of Anglophone quest for nationhood. The political liberalisation of the landscape in the 1990s was used by the English-Speaking elites to openly protest against the subordinate position of the Anglophones. Initially, their request was federalism but with the persistent refusal of the government to discuss constitutional reforms with the Anglophones forced some of them to adopt a secessionist tendency. However, the government took several steps to safeguard the unitary state like creating a schism among the Anglophone elites, compensating some of the elites who support the government with political appointments and repressing all actions designed to change the status of the Southern Cameroons.

In order to analyse the above-mentioned objectives of the work, the authors partition the study into several broad headings: constitutional background, socio-economic and political factors, the growth of Anglophone opposition, the international implications, and the reactions of the Francophone dominated state. The article addresses the constitutional reforms in 1961 dubbed the Fumban Constitutional Conference. They argue that the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon on 1 October 1961 was the result of British Southern Cameroons reunification with the Republic of Cameroon as a result of

the 11 February 1961 plebiscite. The 1961 conference was an important milestone in the history of Cameroon as it laid down the foundation of the Anglophone problem. They defend the above thesis by stating some of the ramifications of the Fumban Constitutional Conference like the lack of bargaining power of the Southern Cameroons because of geopolitical factors, the desire of President Ahmadou Ahidjo for a strong unitary state, the institution of a single party system in 1966 and the referendum of 20 May 1972, which eclipsed the federal system and instituted a unitary state in Cameroon.

The study outlines the socio-economic and political factors that fostered the growth of Anglophone nationalism. It illuminates on the arguments put forward by the Ahidjo government for the establishment of a unitary state like federalism fostered regionalism and impeded economic growth. They examine the major grievances held by the Anglophone against the unitary state like under-representation of Anglophones in the government, lack of participation in the decision-making process, and attempts at 'Frenchification' among others. This led to the formation of the All Anglophone Conference in 1991 and the establishment of the Buea Declaration which contained all the grievances of the Anglophones. Nevertheless, the authors also point at the divide between the Anglophones when West Cameroon was split into two by the 1972 decree. The Coastal of forest region was named Southwest province and the grasslands region was named Northwest province. This has always played a very crucial role as the elites of both regions have always been at loggerheads thus serving as an important capital for the government in power.

The article explores the various ways Anglophones have opposed the repressive, corrupt and inefficient regime of President Paul Biya. The liberalisation of Cameroons political landscape led to birth of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in 26 May 1990, which was a turning point in the history of Cameroon. This led to the formation of several political parties and pressure groups among others in Cameroon. The study discusses the role of the SDF, especially its leader John Fru Ndi and his transformation of the Anglophone provinces into a veritable hotbed for demonstrations and civil disobedience. However, the political party has shown half-hearted support for the Anglophone problem and has always advocated 'devolution of power' or 'decentralisation'. Side by this party, other Anglophone elites and pressure groups have been formed to champion the Anglophone cause. Fon Gorji Dinka established the Ambazonia Movement which had a secessionist agenda, the Cameroon Anglophone Movement canvassed for federalism and the AAC, Teachers Association Cameroon and the Cameroon Parents' Teachers Association mounted pressures on the government which led to the establishment of the Cameroon General Certificate Board in 1993.

The article identifies the key role of major Anglophone elites in the quest for an identity. These include Sam Elad Ekontang, Simon Munzu, Benjamin Itoe and Carlson Anyangwe. These leaders defended the Anglophone cause in the Yaoundé Tripartite Conference in 1991. They were also instrumental in the establishment of the Buea Declaration which was born out of the AAC. The second AAC in Bamenda voted to replace the AAC with a new association called the Southern Cameroon's People Conference and later it was re-baptised as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). The impact of this pressure group has been far reaching. The major strategy has been to create a federal or an independent state in Cameroon or gain international recognition. In this light, the association has always sent delegations to the United Nations Organisation to protest

against the marginalisation of the Anglophone minority. It has also written several petitions to the UNO and the Commonwealth of Nations especially contesting Cameroon's membership in the Commonwealth. This has not gone unnoticed by the Biya government, it has decided to reward some Anglophone elites who support the regime and Biya has always stressed the importance of a unitary state just like his predecessor. He states that federalism breeds or incites ethnic and regional sentiments. Biya concedes more on decentralisation.

By and large, the authors address some of the setbacks of the Anglophone movements. This is exemplified with the deep divide between the Northwest and Southwest elites. They explore the causes of this divide and acknowledge the role of the government in playing each faction intelligently against the other. The Southwest elites, in particular, sympathise with the Biya regime and have established elite associations to promote her interests. In this regards, some of the elites have been rewarded with political appointments in top-ranking positions both within the government and the ruling party and some cases even to some key positions which were formerly reserved for French Cameroonians. This has greatly neutralised the Anglophone movement as the SCNC has been banned from demonstrations and even existence with a lot of repression from the government. The authors conclude that the constant refusal of the Biya government of the existence of an Anglophone problem could trigger a crisis with very debilitating effects on Cameroon. Although these authors present very illuminating facts with a wealth of evidence about the Anglophone problem other issues are obscuring. The term Anglophone itself is very ambiguous because Cameroons' cultural heritage is not completely Anglo-Saxon, in fact, the British Southern Cameroons from 1916-1954 was administered by the British as an integral part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The civil service was even dominated by the Nigerians, hence Southern Cameroons cultural heritage maybe termed Anglo-Nigerian.

