



## SEARCH FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE PROBLEM OF SEPARATIST AGITATIONS IN CAMEROON: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The primary objective of this paper is to examine the intensified resurgence of the Ambazonia separatist movement in Cameroon amidst the search for political development and its implications for Nigeria. The narrative describes the political upheaval of Cameroon as "the mistake of 1961" and blames the negative fallout of pro-Ambazonia activities on the unequal union of Anglophone and Francophone Camerouns, which does not guarantee the colonial legacies of the former, but its assimilation by the latter. Through Anglophone analysis on the Social Exclusion Theory and relying on qualitative data from secondary sources, the paper argues that pro-Ambazonia activities have far-reaching implications on Cameroon, which spillover to Nigeria due to the country's porous border security, with harmful effects. A dialectic table discussion comprising both parties' legal, religious, and political leaders on constitutional restructuring is recommended to achieve sustainable political development and stability.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Political Development, Pro-Ambazonia, Separatism, Cameroon, Constitutional Restructuring.*



## INTRODUCTION

National unity and national consciousness and the overall issue of nation-building in Africa have become a thing of intense debate among scholars in the continent who have, on different occasions, traced its root cause to the 1884/85 Berlin Conference that resulted in the unprecedented scramble for and partition of Africa. This consequently distorted and eroded the traditional political settings in Africa and created artificial boundaries. Thus, it became a problem for post-independence African governments to nod the bud on nation-building and national integrity and satisfy the multifaceted demands of their citizens due to the diversity of the peoples, natural resource endowment, and demographic disparities coupled with the existing plurality background of their people. These arguably created feelings of mistrust, acrimony, and fear of collective victimization by sections of different political units among the majority groups, minority groups, and even between the minority groups, and these have resulted in the unending quest for self-determination in the continent by different groups.

Recently, the centrifugal forces generated by Cameroon's ethnocultural diversity have reignited and intensified the issue of separatism and self-determination from the country, which without a doubt have grievous ripple effects on the political development of the country and the overall stability of Africa. The narrative, therefore, blames the negative fallout of Ambazonia separatism on the "mistake of 1961" when the Anglophone parts and Francophone Cameroon were yoked by an unequal marriage which, according to Alo et al. (2020), is characterized by a culmination of perceived marginalization and suppression of English-speaking Cameroon. Yonmo and Ebiotubo (2020) also described the struggle for a separate Ambazonia State as the expression of frustrations held in common by collective members of relatively homogeneous societies.

From the foregoing, the paper is saddled with the responsibility of examining the intensified resurgence of the Ambazonia separatist movement in Cameroon amidst the search for political development and its trajectories on African stability. Since most literature on the issues of separatism and secessionist activities in Cameroon are only concerned with analyzing the political and historical dynamism of the conflict without linking its implications to other countries, the paper, therefore, interrogates the political, socio, and economic consequences of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon on Nigeria while also looking at Nigeria's government responses. It is, therefore, argued that a dialectic table discussion is summoned by the Paul Biya-led government comprising Ambazonia nationalists, religious leaders, and legal luminaries of the English and French people on a constitutional restructuring of the country which can be a panacea to sustainable political development and stability.

For a better understanding, the paper is structured into five parts, with the above introduction as part one. The introduction deals with the background to the study, the purpose of the study, and the problems of the study (i.e., threats posed by separatist agitations on the political development of Cameroon). The second part examines the contending perspective on separatist agitations in Cameroon from a historical view. Its forays into the stimulant factors and strategies adopted by different pro-Ambazonia militias. The third section dovetails into the implications of secessionist movements, the government's responses, and the search for political development in Cameroon. It also captures the consequences of the conflict in Cameroon on Nigeria. The fourth part, "Theoretical perspective," expressly discusses the research methodology and the theory used in underpinning the bases of the study. The



concluding remarks are contained in the fifth section of the paper, and it defines the way forward by recommending solutions that can quell the hot political atmosphere in Cameroon.

### **Contending Issues on Separatist Agitations in Cameroon**

To appreciate the dynamics of the current political endemic in Cameroon, it is necessary first to clarify the keywords: separatism, self-determination, and political development. Ebiotubo and Yonmo (2020) interchangeably used the term separatism with autonomism, secession, and secessionism to describe "an attempt by a group of people in a region to break away from a politically integrated body." The above definition suggests that separatism connotes both loosening and/or breaking away of the knot, which ties the part to the whole by a people of relatively homogeneous groups. Thus, separatism has broadly been defined to cover greater regional autonomy and secession (Zacchaeus, 2017). Ebiotubo and Yonmo (2020) (see Osaghae et al., 2007) opined that separatist movements manifest from grievous and social discontent against dominant practices, behavior, and conduct in the political economy, such as exclusion, marginality, and inequality. To Boyle and Englebert (2006), groups feeling discrimination often resort to separatist violence and call for a political understanding of "separatism" as an act of state formation. Thus, the current political crisis in Cameroon is an offshoot of the apparent acts of perceived discrimination, marginalization, and social exclusion of English-speaking Cameroon by the francophone community.

**Political Development:** Considerable confusion exists over the concept of political development among students and teachers of political science. The disorder is complicated by the disagreement among Western and Third World scholars about what should be the actual indices or parameters for measuring first development and then secondly, political development. However, a few definitions by scholars shall be examined, and their application to the study shall also be reviewed. Rostow (1960) defines development as a process of induced economic growth, a social change in an internally stratified world. Rodney (1972), on the other hand, sees development as the improved living condition of a people. In his words, "development is the improvement of the living conditions of the people." Despite the ambiguous nature of the development concept, some identifiable characteristics are worth mentioning. And they are: (i) adequate social infrastructure such as stable electricity supply and good road networks, etc. (ii) a high level of employment, and (iii) good governance and political stability. Ankie (1978), collaborating with the definitions of Rodney and Rostow, defined political development to mean the evolution of a political system that is characterized by (i) advanced political culture, (ii) structural or role differentiation, (iii) equal political representation, and (iv) good governance, which according to him are all necessary for state-building, nation-building, economic growth, and political stability. The absence of some artifacts of political development, such as equitable allocation of resources to meet the citizenry's demands, good governance, and non-corrupt and effective public administrations, which affects all sections of the Cameroonian State, awakens the feeling of national consciousness among the English speaking people who now agitate for a separate, and independent state of Ambazonia that will guarantee them equal representation in the political system.

**Self-determination:** The right to self-determination and the methods for achieving it suffer from the contextual framework among scholars and applicability under international law which, according to Muhammad (1965), is mainly due to the foreseeable juxtaposition of the concept with the principles of territorial integrity. The implication of this is that territorial



protection of a state against internal and external aggression is regarded as a state's national survival, and that a state can go to any length to protect its national survival/security. Thus, any attempt by any section of a state to distort the already existing border structure can be dealt with and regarded as an act of felony and treason by the state. However, despite the complexities of arriving at a generally accepted definition and applicability, a few explanations have been provided, which shall be examined. Yinka (2023), in his article titled "Contested Sovereignty of Ambazonia and its Right to Self Determination," defines self-determination as the process by which a group or community decides to form its state and government with their imposed rules and regulations. The International Court of Justice, in settling the dispute between Morocco and Spain, defines self-determination to capture three essential features vis-à-vis (i) occurrences as a sovereign independent state, (ii) integration with a pre-existing sovereign state, and (iii) free association with a sovereign state (Western Sahara Advisory Opinion, 1975).

The right of people to self-determination has been triggered by a large number of agitators in the continent of Africa. It is therefore unsurprising that the people of Southern Cameroon sort of have a new nation of their own due to the feelings of collective victimization held against La République du Cameroun, resulting in differences in historical and political trajectories.

The agitation for self-determination and separatism by Southern Cameroon, which is regarded as a political endemic in the words of Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997), is known as the "Anglophone Problem." According to them, the endemic poses a significant challenge to the efforts of the post-colonial state to forge national unity. They traced the Anglophone problem to 1961 when the political elites of two territories with different colonial legacies agreed on the formation of a federal state which, contrary to expectations, turned out to be merely a transitory phase to the total integration and assimilation of the Anglophone region into a strongly centralized unitary state. This, according to them, breeds feelings of marginalization and exploitation by the Francophone-dominated state.

The origin of Cameroon is one laced with the similitude of separatist agitations as the English-speaking parts used it as a veritable tool for self-determination and expression of political frustration against the Francophone community, resulting from the colonial and historical experiences of the two territories. Cameroon, formerly known as Kamerun, was a German colonial territory that was disproportionately divided in 1918 between France and Britain as a trusteeship mandate after her defeat in World War II. France governed its portion of Cameroon as an autonomous part of its colonial empire. At the same time, British Cameroons were administered as parts of the Northern and Eastern regions of its Nigeria colony (Osuntokun, 1975; Eyongetah & Brain, 1874; Ngoh, 1996). This resulted in significant differences in political culture. As English was the official language spoken in British Cameroon, the legal, education, justice systems, and norms were modeled after the British.

In contrast, French was spoken in France territory. France's social, legal, and political norms shaped the French part (International Crisis Group, 2017). France Cameroon in 1950 gained independence as La République du Cameroun. After an organized United Nations plebiscite in 1961, British Cameroon reunited with La République du Cameroun (Ngang, 2019). Thus, the narrative of the paper blames the negative fallout of Ambazonia separatism on the 'mistake of 1961' when the Anglophone and Francophone Cameroons were yoked on an unequal marriage that could not guarantee the autonomy of Anglophone parts nor preserve their colonial legacies but saw to the marginalization, social exclusion and assimilation of the latter by the former.



From the foregoing, it is safe to say that the root cause of the political endemic in Cameroon emanated from the reunification of the Anglophone and Francophone parts (or the "mistake of 1961").

More recently, Ambazonia separation has worn a new look as more social bodies have resurfaced and strategically intensified the movement. Following the limited political liberalization of President Paul Biya in the 1980s, prominent Anglophone activists led by Fon Gorji Dinka responded and forcefully launched the Social Democratic Front (SDF) on May 26, 1990. This act created many other pressure groups, such as the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM), the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM), Southern Cameroon Restoration Movement (SCARM), the Southern Cameroon Youth League (SCYL), the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), the Southern Cameroon Liberation Movement (SOCALIM) and many bodies which solemnly defended and are still defending their interests (Fonchigong, 2013; Ebiotubo & Yonmo, 2020).

Pro-Ambazonia agitators adopted both violent and non-violent mediums in their quest for a separate, independent state. For instance, Anglophone students in 1982 boycotted classes and demonstrated peacefully against the government's order to modify the Anglophone General Certificate of Education to make it similar to the French Baccalaureate. Civil unrest (ghost towns) campaigns and strikes held by the Anglophone activists forced president Biya in 1991 to hold a bicultural convene called the Tripartite Conference to redress the political unrest in the country. The Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF), in order to achieve its goal, has over the years employed various array of tactics (Okereke, 2018), including industrial actions by Anglophone lawyers and teachers, which persisted till November 2016. Pro-Ambazonia activists also conduct peaceful demonstrations and marches to different Embassies and High Commissions in Africa and beyond to project their just course. The activist also adopts radical tactics, which include attacks on military and security personnel between 2017 and 2018. On 22nd September, 2017, more protests were staged in towns and villages of the Anglophone community demanding separation from Cameroon (Okereke, 2018). In the wake of the foregoing, Paul Biya's government has continuously denied the existence of an Anglophone crisis in Cameroon and has responded to the peaceful protests with suppression and other tactics that have negatively affected the country politically, socially, economically and culturally, and have also contributed to the continuous escalation of more tension in the state.

### **Ambazonia Agitations and the Problem of Political Development in Cameroon**

Pro-Ambazonia agitations, no doubt, have ripple socio-economic and political implications, especially on the political development of Cameroon and on the stability of Africa. Political development, an aspect of a state's existence, has been jeopardized by the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon since politics is concerned not only about the making of development but also its sustenance. Cameroonian society is said to be void of this phenomenon as the Francophone government no longer enjoys popular legitimacy, lacking the efficacy to maintain law and order through solid and functional institutions. The absence of periodic free, fair, and credible elections, transparency in political leadership, respect for the rule of law as well as political stability, which are essential artifacts of political development, are all consequences of the Ambazonia movements.



Economically, the numerous civil unrest (ghost town) campaigns and industrial strikes held, as well as the demonstrations and protests by members of pro-Ambazonia groups, disrupted economic activities around the cities and villages where they were carried out. Agitations for Ambazonia also have security implications: the chances that peaceful mobilization of protesters could escalate into armed violence as deterrence to government suppression through police brutality, which is tantamount to worsening the current insecurity levels of the country and invariably disrupting the stability of Africa in general, and national integration in Nigeria is high, since development cannot thrive in an unfavorable environment laced with insecurity and be separated from economic activities. The agitations for Ambazonia thus have far-reaching implications on the political development of Cameroon and the overall stability of Africa in general and a greater level of consequences for Nigeria as an immediate neighbour.

In the wake of the foregoing, President Biya's government has done little or nothing tangible to de-escalating possible armed conflict in the country as he uses tough measures in responding to pro-Ambazonia activists in the state. Following the declaration of Ambazonia's independence in 2017, President Biya immediately declared war on the separatists. Okereke (2018) quoted Boys as saying in November 2017

*"It is now clear that Cameroon was at war and under attack by terrorists making (themselves) as secessionists."*

Consequently, all security measures were deployed to the area to restore peace forcefully. Not surprisingly, the government also adopts other dubious and crafty ways at different times in responding to the crisis in the country. These include the continued denial of the existence of the Anglophone crisis, trivialization of the problem, and divide-and-rule tactics. These strategies, rather than decreasing the political tension in the state, have sustained its menace.

### **Pro-Ambazonia Activities in Cameroon and Its implications for Nigeria**

Though Nigeria's security architecture has recently suffered so much sabotage and been undermined by bandits, militants, the Boko-Haram sect and Fulani herdsmen, the spillover of the Ambazonia separatist movement in Cameroon also has far-reaching implications for the country. Regarding security, Africanews (2022) claims that Cameroonian security forces and secessionist agitators care little for the territorial integrity of their neighbour and have carried out cross-border raids, attacks, and illegal arrests even in Nigeria. Since 2018, Nigerian media have reported the incursion into several villages in Cross River by Cameroonian soldiers. The above poses a threat to Nigeria's national survival.

The political crisis in Cameroon has also caused acute humanitarian and refugee problems for Nigeria. The table below shows the number of Cameroonians fleeing the country to Nigeria for safety.



**Table 1: Reported cases of refugees in neighbouring Nigerian States resulting from Ambazonia separatist movements in Cameroon**

S/N	Dates	States in Nigeria	Local Settlements	Incidence	Remarks
1	January 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	Cross River	Calabar municipal	An estimated 10,000 registered Cameroonians in Cross River	According to a UN report, women and children constituted 80 percent of these registered Cameroonians
2	February 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	Akwa Ibom state	Anua-Offor community in Uyo municipal	The killing of one of Mrs. Agnes Epelle mother and children by a Cameroonian soldier during a protest	A Lutheran Church cared for Mrs. Agnes Epelle and other children who escaped the violent protest by Ambazonia agitators
3	May 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	Akwa Ibom State	At Uyo, Esit Eket, and Oron Local Government Areas	About 1,200 Cameroonians fled to Akwa Ibom	Precarious refugees settlement were created for both males and females with inadequate food, water, shelter etc
4	June 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	Benue State	Abasse, Anyake, and Abande communities in Kwande Local Government Area	About 4000 Cameroonians were refugees in Benue; 2,310 people at Abande and 1,690 in the Abasse community refugee settlement. Most of whom were vulnerable women and children	The refugees' conditions at those places were deplorable as hunger, water, and inadequate shelter were the recurring challenges faced by them



5	July 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	Cross River	At Boki, Akamkpa, Obanliku, Ikom, and Etung refugees settlements	Many of the settlers were unregistered Cameroonians who were mainly women and children, according to a UN report	The Cameroonian government's repressive policies against the Anglophone separatist movement were the causational factor
6	July 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	Benue State	Atikpo refugee settlement	35-year-old Dorathy Offum fled from the Southwestern province of Cameroon into Nigeria with her seven children, two grandchildren with, two other children	President Paul Biya's government was infuriated by violent demonstrations of pro-Ambazonia

**Sources:** (Cavalcanti, 2018), (Onuegbu, 2018), (United Nations High Commission on Refugees, 2018) as cited in Onuoha and Okafor (2019)

The implication of the humanitarian and refugee crisis of the Cameroonian crisis for Nigeria is that it exposes the country to high-security risks. It can also cause an increase in organized trans-border crimes for both Nigeria and her immediate neighbours. It can also increase the problems of illegal arms and drug smuggling in and out of the country.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Qualitative research using an instrumental case study approach was adopted through a thorough desk work review of extant literature, relying on secondary data sources. The study focuses on a particular experience of the phenomenon of separatist agitations, depicting a real-life context for further explanation of the indicators of human security, self-determination, and political development and stability. The subject therefore provides an insight into the centrifugal forces of Ambazonia agitations. The scope of the study is limited to Ambazonia agitations in Cameroon amid the search for political development and its implication for Nigeria.

### Social Exclusion Theory

The Collins dictionary defines social exclusion as making certain groups of people within a society feel isolated and unimportant: the failure of society to provide specific individuals and groups with those rights and benefits usually available to its members, such as employment, adequate housing, education, etc. The theory was propounded by Dr. Lynn Todman and is used





to depict a situation in which people or groups are ostracized in their entirety (Alo, Ibietan & Adedeji, 2020).

The theory is a multidimensional mechanism through which people are deliberately excluded from participating in the political, social, cultural, and economic activities of their country and are denied access to essential services like jobs, healthcare, housing, and civil engagements, which are akin to national integration. According to Jehael and Vrooman (2007), the social exclusion theory is operationalized as a combination of material deprivation, insufficient access to social rights, a low degree of social participation, and a lack of normative integration. The difficulty of reaching a consensus among scholars on what parameter to be used in measuring the definition and adverse effects of social exclusion has become a shortcoming of the theory. There is still contention among theorists based on poverty upon which social exclusion is measured.

The theory, however, has found strong relevance in analyzing the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. The theory therefore holds that the systematic deprivation of Anglophone members from holding key political offices brings the feeling of marginalization, exploitation, and assimilation to the Francophone community. As Ted Gurr (1994) in Alo, Ibietan and Adedeji (2020) puts it, this deprivation leads to a revolt of the Anglophone community as epitomized by the desire for a separate Ambazonia State.

### **The Way Forward**

The search for political development in Cameroon must start from conscious recognition that the current structure of the country is an aberration and failure of the original purposes upon which the two territories were reunified in 1961. It therefore needs conscious, deliberate efforts of the leaders of both regions to discuss the footage upon which the country's federation can be restructured, on two equal state bases with each unit independent and autonomous of the other. In other words, since federalism, according to Watt (2015), is a goal-oriented, practical, and prudential technique, federalism should therefore reflect the country's goal, equal representation and participation of both parties.

The paper also suggests a dialectic round table discussion comprising the Ambazonia nationalists, religious, legal, and political leaders of both communities on a constitutional restructuring of the country and other issues of national importance, which is a panacea to sustainable political development.

The paper also recommends conscious collective efforts of the Africa Union, France and Britain, and the United Nations to urgently play a more pragmatic active role in managing the crisis. There is also the need for a regime change as Paul Biya's government has overstayed in office.

### **CONCLUSION**

The reunification of the English and French-speaking Cameroons in a union of unequal marriage in 1961, which the narrative of this paper termed "the mistake of 1961," appeared to be the genesis of the political endemic in Cameroon since the union could not guarantee the independence and autonomy of the Anglophone community but saw to its eventual assimilation



into the Francophone dominated state creating the feelings of being marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation. Thus, the quest for self-determination becomes a veritable tool in the hands of the Anglophone community as an expression of frustration against political exclusion and domination. The paper therefore concludes that a dialectic round table discussion comprising critical leaders of both territories be summoned on constitutional restructuring and issues of national importance as a panacea to sustainable political development and stability as contained in the way forward section.

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