



Cameroon — Va-PoReg Country Report

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07/14/1884 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany]: From 07/14/1884 on, Cameroon was a protectorate of Germany. Regarding the form of rule, we classify it as a case of a colony because Germany controlled all external and internal affairs of Cameroon. Germany set up an administration for the colony first in the capital Buea and later in Youndé and subjugated local rulers. From 01/01/1901 the country was named Cameroon.

08/06/1914 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Electoral Democracy; France, Electoral Democracy; Belgium, Electoral Democracy]: During World War I, the Kamerun campaign took place in the German colony of Kamerun in Africa. British, French, and Belgian forces invaded the colony from August 1914 to March 1916, with additional skirmishes in British Nigeria. By spring 1916, the majority of German troops and the civil administration fled to the neutral colony of Spanish Guinea. Ultimately, the campaign ended in Germany's defeat and the partitioning of its former colony between France and Britain.¹

07/20/1922 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy; France, Electoral Democracy; Belgium, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as International Mandate, United Nations trust territories]: Cameroon was under a League of Nations mandate until 12/13/1946 and afterwards a United Nations trust territory. Regarding the de facto form of rule, we classify this regime as a subcase of a colony under an international mandate. For the entire colonial period neither LIED nor V-Dem list Cameroon in their data.

01/01/1960 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as International Mandate, United Nations trust territories]/Start Electoral Autocracy: French Cameroon became independent as Republic of Cameroon. Independence started under a system that was formally democratic (Lansford 2021: 260). Universal suffrage was granted by the constitution of 1960 (Marshall 2018f).² On 05/05/1960 Ahmadou Ahidjo became president.³ However, one of the largest anti-colonial parties, the UPC, was outlawed both before and after independence, and repression was extensive. On 10/01/1961 after unification with southern part of British Cameroon the Federal Republic of Cameroon was established with Ahidjo as president and John Ngu Foncha, prime minister of the former British region, as vice president (Lansford 2021: 260). Ahidjo's strategy of cooptation of the remaining opposition parties changed gradually into forced merger and the arrest of peaceful opposition leaders by June 1962 (LeVine 1971: 103-105, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 52). LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as absent for this period. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

09/01/1966 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date, the Cameroonian National Union (Union nationale camérounaise, UNC) was formed through a merger of the Cameroon Union (Union Camerounaise) and the Kamerun National Democratic Party, the major political parties, respectively,

of the state of west Cameroon and the state of east Cameroon, and four smaller parties.⁴ On 08/22/1983, a power struggle between former president Ahidjo, who remained leader of the sole party, and President Biya, who had succeeded him as president the previous year, ended in Ahidjo's resignation and exile. While the coalition that supported Ahidjo and from which officials were drawn was multi-regional and multi-ethnic, while Biya narrowed the group with political influence and concentrated power in his own ethnic group (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 52).⁵ While different from GWF the narrowing down of the ruling group does not mark a regime change according to the coding rules of this dataset the subtype changes on this date to one-party (Personalist) autocracy. In 1985 the UNC was renamed the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. In 1990 opposition parties were legalized. According to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. Any election up to this point is scored as not really free or fair by V-Dem's EF&FI and as not clean by their CEI. As classified by FH for the regime period until 1975, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. From 1976 onward the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Political liberties remained absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI declares them as absent until 1989 and as ambiguous until 1992. From 1967 and 1971, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. Between 1972 and 1981, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. In 1982 and 1983, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power. Between 1984 and 1987, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations. Since 1988, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

03/01/1992 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, the first multiparty elections were held, which were won by Biya.⁶ However, these elections were criticized by European and US observers for alleged manipulation of the presidential balloting (Lansford 2021: 262). Biya also won all subsequent presidential elections in 1997, 2004 and 2011, amid persistent claims of widespread fraud in all cases (Turner 2022: 255). Biya won the 2018 presidential election with 71.3% of the vote. The election was marred by violence and low voter turnout (Turner 2022: 256) and described as a „farce” (O'Donnell/Gramer 2018). According to FH, military tribunals wield authority over civilians in instances of civil unrest or organized armed violence, and several intelligence agencies operate without being held accountable.⁷ Routine practices include torture, ill-treatment of detainees, and the common occurrence of indefinite administrative or pretrial detention. In fact, military troops are recurrently deployed to stop opposition supporters from protesting against Biya.⁸ While 1992 does not mark a regime change according to the coding rules of GWF because it was before and after a personalist regime by Biya the multiparty elections 1992 constitute a regime change according to the coding rules of this dataset. While there is a strong personalist element in the rule of Biya the coding rules of a personalist regime of this dataset are not fulfilled. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. From 1992 on, the V-Dem EF&FI score fluctuates between no and ambiguous freedom and fairness. LIED classifies all elections as not competitive. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. LIED classifies political liberties as absent in the entire period, however, V-Dem's PCLI's classification fluctuates between indicating an ambiguous state of political liberties and pointing into the direction that they are somewhat present. In light of our observations and other indicators V-Dem's PCLI seems surprisingly positive in a comparative perspective. As per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Mehler 1999a, Wache 1991)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamerun_campaign

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Cameroon

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Cameroon#Independence_and_the_Ahidjo_era_\(1960-1982\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Cameroon#Independence_and_the_Ahidjo_era_(1960-1982))

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameroon_People%27s_Democratic_Movement#Cameroonian_National_Union

⁵ <https://cameroonpostline.com/how-an-idyllic-ahidjo-biya-transfer-of-power-turned-sour>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Biya

⁷ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a6452c8c.html>

⁸ https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-deploys-military-thwart-opposition-protesters/6195960.html

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