

Anglophone Identity in the Cameroonian Body Politic: Perceptions and Political Agitations Since 1961

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Abstract

This study examines Anglophone identity and political agitation in the Republic of Cameroon since reunification in 1961, focusing on the historical origins of Anglophone consciousness, perceptions of marginalization, and the evolution of political resistance within the Cameroonian body politic. Using a qualitative historical methodology based on primary and secondary sources, the study reveals that the distinct colonial experiences of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun created divergent legal, educational, and political traditions that shaped Anglophone identity after reunification. The abolition of the federal system in 1972 and the increasing centralization of political power intensified perceptions of exclusion and cultural assimilation among Anglophones, leading to organized political agitation ranging from constitutional advocacy and civil society activism to protests and armed resistance. The study further finds that although Anglophone agitation has succeeded in preserving collective identity and attracting national and international attention to issues of governance and representation, it continues to face challenges such as political repression, internal fragmentation, militarization, and limited institutional reforms. The study concludes that the Anglophone crisis is deeply rooted in historical and structural factors associated with colonial legacies, identity politics, and centralized governance, and recommends inclusive dialogue, constitutional reforms, protection of Anglophone institutions, equitable development, and democratic governance as necessary measures for sustainable peace and national integration in Cameroon.

Keywords: Anglophone identity, body politics, Cameroon, prescription, political agitation

1. Introduction

The reunification of British Southern Cameroons with the already independent Republic of Cameroon on 1 October 1961 marked a decisive turning point in the political and historical trajectory of the Cameroonian state.¹ Conceived as a union of two distinct colonial legacies-British and French-this moment laid the foundation for a complex and often uneasy coexistence within a single polity. While the federal arrangement initially adopted at reunification appeared to recognize the cultural, legal, and administrative particularities of the Anglophone minority, subsequent constitutional and political developments gradually eroded these guarantees.²

This evolution has generated enduring debates over identity, belonging, and power within the Cameroonian body politic. Anglophone identity in Cameroon is rooted in the specific historical experience of British colonial administration, which left behind distinctive institutions, notably the common law system, an Anglo-Saxon

¹ Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2003). *Negotiating an Anglophone identity: A study of the politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon*. Brill.

² Fanzo, V. G. (2014). *Cameroon history for secondary schools and colleges: Vol. 2. The colonial and post-colonial periods*. Macmillan.

educational framework, and particular forms of local governance.¹ These features have come to constitute not merely administrative differences but markers of a collective identity among the populations of the North West and South West regions. Over time, however, many Anglophones have perceived their identity as marginalized within a state increasingly dominated by Francophone political culture, especially following the abolition of the federal system in 1972 and the subsequent centralization of power.²

The tensions arising from these developments have found expression in various forms of political agitation since reunification. From early constitutional debates and demands for federalism to more recent protests led by lawyers, teachers, and civil society groups, Anglophone grievances have consistently revolved around issues of political representation, cultural preservation, and equitable resource distribution.³ The resurgence of protests in 2016, which escalated into a broader socio-political crisis, underscores the persistence and intensification of these concerns within contemporary Cameroon.⁴

This article situates Anglophone identity within the broader historical context of state formation and nation-building in Cameroon. It seeks to critically examine how identity has been constructed, contested, and mobilized as a tool of political negotiation and resistance from 1961 to the present. By adopting a historical approach, the study interrogates the interplay between colonial legacies, constitutional transformations, and political agency in shaping Anglophone consciousness and agitation. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on minority identity, postcolonial governance, and the challenges of national integration in plural societies.

2. Conceptual Clarification

There are some concepts associated with study. Each of them shall be examined seriatim.

2.1 Anglophone Identity

Anglophone identity in Cameroon refers to the collective historical, cultural, linguistic, legal, and political consciousness shared by the English-speaking populations of the North West and South West regions of the Republic of Cameroon. This identity emerged from the British colonial experience in the former Southern Cameroons and is distinguished by institutions such as the common law system, the Anglo-Saxon educational model, and the use of the English language in administration and public life.

Scholars view identity as a socially and historically constructed phenomenon shaped by shared experiences and collective memory. According to Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2005),⁵ identity in postcolonial African societies often develops through struggles for recognition and belonging within the state. In the Cameroonian context, Anglophone identity has evolved not merely as a linguistic category but as a political consciousness rooted in perceptions of marginalization, exclusion, and the desire to preserve institutional distinctiveness.

Historically, Anglophone identity became more pronounced after reunification in 1961 and intensified following the abolition of the federal system in 1972. Over time, it transformed into a mobilizing force for political action, advocacy, and resistance against perceived assimilationist policies. Thus, Anglophone identity in this study is understood as both a cultural heritage and a political expression shaped by historical experiences and state-society relations.

2.2 Body Politics

Body politics refers to the structure, organization, and exercise of political power within a state or political community. It encompasses the processes through which authority, representation, resources, and decision-making are distributed and regulated within society. In political science, the concept is closely linked to governance, state power, and the relationship between institutions and citizens.

Harold Lasswell (1936)⁶ conceptualizes politics as the process of determining “who gets what, when, and how,”

¹ Chem-Langhè, B. (1995). *The paradoxes of self-determination in the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration: The search for identity, well-being and continuity*. University Press of America.

² Eyoh, D. (1998). Conflicting narratives of Anglophone protest and the politics of identity in Cameroon. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16(2), 249–276.

³ Nkwi, P. N. (2006). *Voices from the margins: A study of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon*. Langaa RPCIG.

⁴ International Crisis Group. (2017). *Cameroon's Anglophone crisis at the crossroads* (Africa Report No. 250). International Crisis Group.

⁵ Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2005). *Africa's media, democracy and the politics of belonging*. Zed Books.

⁶ Lasswell, H. D. (1936). *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. McGraw-Hill.

emphasizing the allocation of power and resources within society. Similarly, David Easton (1965)¹ defines the political system as the authoritative allocation of values within society. These perspectives collectively explain body politics as the institutional framework through which political authority and societal interests are managed.

Within the Cameroonian context, body politics refers to the manner in which political authority is centralized, exercised, and contested within the postcolonial state. It includes issues such as representation, governance, participation, constitutional arrangements, and access to national resources. The concept is particularly relevant to the Anglophone question because perceptions of exclusion from the national body politic have contributed significantly to political agitation and identity-based mobilisation.

2.3 Perception

Perception refers to the way individuals or groups interpret, understand, and give meaning to social, political, and historical realities. It involves the formation of opinions, beliefs, and attitudes based on experiences, observations, and interactions within society. Perceptions may not always reflect objective reality, but they significantly influence behaviour, political attitudes, and social responses.

According to Walter Lippmann (1922),² people respond not directly to reality itself, but to the “pictures in their heads” constructed from social experiences and public narratives. In political contexts, perceptions shape how communities understand governance, inclusion, discrimination, and power relations.

In this study, perception refers specifically to the way Anglophone populations in Cameroon interpret their position within the state. These perceptions are shaped by historical experiences of reunification, constitutional change, political representation, economic distribution, and cultural preservation. Perceptions of marginalization, exclusion, and assimilation have played a central role in the emergence and intensification of Anglophone political agitation since 1961.

2.4 Political Agitation

Political agitation refers to organized efforts aimed at influencing political opinion, challenging existing political structures, or demanding political, constitutional, or social change. It often involves activities such as protests, advocacy, demonstrations, political campaigns, public criticism, and collective mobilisation intended to draw attention to grievances and influence state policies.

Ted Robert Gurr (1970)³ argues that political agitation often emerges from feelings of relative deprivation, where groups perceive a gap between their expectations and actual political or socio-economic conditions. Such perceptions of injustice can generate frustration and collective political action.

In the Cameroonian context, political agitation refers to the various forms of resistance and mobilization undertaken by Anglophone populations in response to perceived political, cultural, and economic marginalization. Since 1961, this agitation has evolved from constitutional advocacy and elite negotiations to mass protests, civil society activism, and, in some cases, armed resistance. Political agitation in this study is therefore understood as both a reaction to perceived inequalities and a mechanism through which Anglophone communities seek recognition, representation, and institutional reforms.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a historical research design to examine the evolution of Anglophone identity in the Cameroonian body politic and the associated political agitations since 1961. The historical approach is appropriate because it enables the interpretation of long-term political and social processes, particularly those related to postcolonial state formation, governance, and identity construction.⁴

The research is primarily qualitative in nature and relies on documentary and archival methods. Secondary sources constitute the main body of evidence and include scholarly books, journal articles, and historical analyses focusing on Cameroon’s political development and identity dynamics. These materials are essential for reconstructing the historical trajectory of Anglophone consciousness and its political expressions over time.⁵ In addition, official documents such as constitutional texts, government policy statements, and reports from international organizations are used to trace key institutional transformations in the Cameroonian state, particularly the transition from a federal to a unitary system in 1972 and its implications for governance and

¹ Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.

² Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.

³ Gurr, T. R. (1970). *Why men rebel*. Princeton University Press.

⁴ Ngoh, V. J. (1996). *History of Cameroon since 1800*. Pressbook.

⁵ Le Vine, V. T. (2004). *Politics in francophone Africa*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

regional identity.¹ These sources help situate political grievances within broader structural changes in the postcolonial state.

The study also employs historiographical analysis, which involves critically engaging with different scholarly interpretations of Cameroon's postcolonial political evolution. This approach allows for a comparative examination of competing perspectives on identity formation, state centralization, and regional marginalization, thereby strengthening analytical depth and balance.²

Where available, oral historical accounts and recorded testimonies are used as supplementary sources. These provide insight into lived experiences, political mobilization, and collective memory, approaches. The thematic approach identifies recurring issues such as identity construction, political exclusion, resistance, and governance challenges, while the chronological approach ensures that developments are situated in their correct historical sequence from 1961 to the present.

The significance of this methodology lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive and historically grounded understanding of Anglophone identity and political agitation in Cameroon. By integrating historical design, qualitative interpretation, documentary evidence, and historiographical comparison, the study ensures a balanced reconstruction of events and meanings. It strengthens the reliability of findings through triangulation of sources, avoids one-dimensional explanations, and captures both structural transformations and lived experiences. Ultimately, it offers a nuanced explanation of how colonial legacies, state policies, and identity politics have interacted over time in shaping Cameroon's political landscape.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on a combination of postcolonial theory, social identity theory, and relative deprivation theory as complementary analytical lenses for understanding the evolution of Anglophone identity and political agitation within the Republic of Cameroon since 1961.

First, postcolonial theory, which gained prominence in the mid-20th century-particularly through the works of Frantz Fanon in 1961 and Edward Said in 1978-provides a foundational framework for interrogating the enduring impact of colonial legacies on state formation and identity construction.³ This perspective examines how colonial administrative systems, cultural hierarchies, and imposed boundaries continue to shape power relations in post-independence states. In the Cameroonian context, the coexistence of British and French colonial legacies created dual institutional and cultural identities, which have remained sources of tension. Postcolonial theory thus explains how Anglophone identity emerged as a response to perceived domination, marginalization, and the assimilationist tendencies of the postcolonial state.

Second, the study draws on social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel in 1979 (with John Turner), to analyze how group identity is formed and mobilized in political contexts.⁴ This theory posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-worth from their membership in social groups, leading to in-group cohesion and out-group differentiation. Applied to Cameroon, Anglophone identity can be understood as a collective consciousness shaped by shared language, legal traditions, and historical experiences. The theory helps explain the persistence of Anglophone solidarity and the mobilization of this identity in response to perceived exclusion from national political and economic structures.

Third, relative deprivation theory, systematically articulated by Ted Robert Gurr in 1970, is used to explain the emergence of political agitation and protest movements.⁵ This theory argues that feelings of deprivation arise when there is a perceived gap between expectations and actual conditions. In the case of Anglophone Cameroon, expectations of equality and autonomy at reunification have, over time, contrasted with experiences of political marginalization, underrepresentation, and cultural erosion. This perceived disparity has contributed to grievances that fuel protests, resistance movements, and demands for structural reforms.

The relationship between these theories is complementary and mutually reinforcing. Postcolonial theory provides the historical and structural foundation by explaining how colonial legacies created the conditions for identity differentiation. Social identity theory builds on this by explaining how these differences are internalized and transformed into a shared group consciousness. Relative deprivation theory then explains how this consciousness translates into political action and agitation when perceived inequalities persist.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2005). *Africa's media, democracy and the politics of belonging*. Zed Books.

³ Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press. Gurr, T. R. (1970). *Why men rebel*. Princeton University Press.

⁴ Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict.

⁵ W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.). (1979). *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.

The significance of these theories to this study lies in their collective ability to provide a multidimensional understanding of the Anglophone problem. They allow the study to move beyond a purely descriptive historical account to an analytical explanation of why Anglophone identity emerged, how it has been sustained, and why it has led to recurrent political agitation. By integrating structural, psychological, and political perspectives, the framework enhances the explanatory depth of the study and provides a coherent basis for analyzing the interaction between colonial legacies, identity politics, and state governance in Cameroon.

5. An Overview of Anglophone Identity and Body Politics in Cameroon

Anglophone identity in Cameroon is historically grounded in the bifurcated colonial experience that followed the defeat of Germany in 1916 and the subsequent partition of Kamerun between Britain and France under the League of Nations mandate system. The British-administered Southern Cameroons evolved under a system of indirect rule closely linked to Nigeria, while French Cameroun developed under a centralized assimilationist administrative framework. These divergent colonial trajectories produced distinct institutional, legal, and political cultures that would later shape postcolonial identity formation.¹ The reunification of British Southern Cameroons with the already independent Republic of Cameroon in 1961 thus represented not simply a territorial merger, but the integration of historically differentiated political communities.

The federal constitution of 1961 attempted to accommodate this duality by granting a degree of autonomy to the federated states. However, as argued by Victor Julius Ngoh (1996), the arrangement concealed structural imbalances in political power. The 1972 referendum, which abolished federalism in favor of a unitary state, marked a critical turning point in the reconfiguration of state power. This shift accelerated the centralization of authority and contributed to the gradual erosion of Anglophone institutional distinctiveness, particularly in the legal and educational spheres.²

Anglophone identity has since evolved as both a cultural and political construct, shaped by shared historical experiences and reinforced through perceptions of marginalization. According to Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2005), identity in postcolonial African states is often negotiated through claims of belonging and recognition, particularly where state structures privilege certain linguistic or cultural groups. In Cameroon, this has led to the consolidation of Anglophone consciousness as a form of political resistance to perceived assimilationist pressures.³

The concept of body politics is essential for understanding how these identity dynamics intersect with structures of power. In political science, body politics refers broadly to the organization and exercise of power within a political community. Harold Lasswell (1936)⁴ conceptualizes politics as the process of determining “who gets what, when, and how,” thereby emphasizing the distributive nature of power within the state.

Similarly, David Easton (1965)⁵ defines the political system as the authoritative allocation of values in society. Together, these perspectives provide a clearer and more precise foundation for understanding body politics as the institutional and procedural framework through which power, resources, and representation are distributed.

Within the Cameroonian context, body politics encompasses both formal institutions—such as the executive, legislature, and judiciary—and informal mechanisms that regulate access to power. As Dieudonné Eyoh (1998)⁶ observes, the state has historically exhibited centralizing tendencies that limit pluralistic participation. For Anglophones, this has translated into grievances over underrepresentation in national decision-making bodies, the imposition of Francophone administrative practices, and the perceived erosion of the common law system.

These institutional concerns are reinforced by economic dimensions of marginalization. The Anglophone regions, despite their contributions to national revenue, have often been perceived as receiving unequal levels of public investment and infrastructural development. This perceived imbalance strengthens feelings of exclusion and contributes to political mobilization.⁷

Historically, Anglophone political agitation has evolved through distinct phases. The immediate

¹ Johnson, W. R. (1970). *The Cameroon federation: Political integration in a fragmented society*. Princeton University Press.

² Le Vine, V. T. (1964). *The Cameroons: From mandate to independence*. University of California Press.

³ Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2003). *Negotiating an Anglophone identity: A study of the politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon*. Brill.

⁴ Lasswell, H.D. (1936). *Politics: Who gets What, When, and How*. McGraw-Hill.

⁵ Easton, D. (1965). *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. Wiley.

⁶ Eyoh, D. (1998). Conflicting narratives of Anglophone protest and the politics of identity in Cameroon. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16(2), 249–276.

⁷ Takougang, J., & Krieger, M. (1998). *African state and society in the 1990s: Cameroon's political crossroads*. Westview Press.

post-reunification period was dominated by elite negotiations and constitutional debates. The reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s marked a second phase characterized by organized identity-based movements such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), which advocated for federalism or secession.¹ The third phase, beginning in 2016, has been marked by mass protests and escalating conflict, reflecting a deepening crisis of governance and legitimacy.

In analytical terms, the interaction between Anglophone identity and body politics reveals the structural tensions inherent in postcolonial state formation. It underscores how historically rooted institutional differences, when coupled with perceived political and economic exclusion, can generate enduring identity-based conflicts. The Anglophone question therefore remains central to broader debates on governance, inclusion, and national integration in Cameroon.

6. Effectiveness of Anglophone Political Agitation Since 1961

The effectiveness of Anglophone political agitation in Cameroon since 1961 may be evaluated through its impact on identity preservation, political consciousness, state response, and national discourse within the Republic of Cameroon. Although the movement has faced considerable limitations and has not fully achieved many of its core political objectives, it has nonetheless played a significant role in shaping debates on governance, representation, and national integration in Cameroon.

One major area of effectiveness has been the preservation and consolidation of Anglophone identity. Since reunification, political agitation has contributed to sustaining a distinct Anglophone consciousness rooted in the common law system, Anglo-Saxon educational traditions, and the historical experience of British colonial administration. Through continuous advocacy and mobilization, Anglophone actors have prevented the complete assimilation of these institutions into the dominant Francophone political culture.² In this regard, agitation has served not merely as political resistance but also as a mechanism of cultural and institutional preservation.

Another significant achievement lies in the ability of Anglophone movements to transform what was initially perceived as a regional grievance into a nationally and internationally recognized political issue. During the 1990s, organizations such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) succeeded in articulating demands for federalism, autonomy, and recognition in ways that attracted scholarly, diplomatic, and international attention. According to Dieudonné Eyoh (1998),³ Anglophone agitation exposed structural weaknesses within the centralized Cameroonian state and compelled broader discussions on inclusion and democratic governance.

The reintroduction of multiparty politics also demonstrated the growing effectiveness of political mobilization within the Anglophone regions. Political parties and civil society groups increasingly used democratic platforms to express grievances and challenge centralized governance structures. This period witnessed the strengthening of regional solidarity and collective political awareness among Anglophones, particularly concerning issues of representation and equitable resource distribution.⁴ The 2016 protests represented perhaps the most visible demonstration of the effectiveness of Anglophone political agitation. Initially led by lawyers and teachers, the protests successfully drew global attention to grievances surrounding the legal and educational systems in the Anglophone regions.

International organizations, foreign governments, and human rights groups began to engage more actively with the crisis, thereby internationalizing the Anglophone question.⁵ The government also responded with certain institutional measures, including the creation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism and limited decentralization reforms.

Despite these achievements, the effectiveness of Anglophone agitation has remained limited in several important respects. The movement has not succeeded in securing a return to federalism, achieving constitutional restructuring, or obtaining independence for the Anglophone regions. State centralization remains largely intact, and many Anglophones continue to perceive political and economic marginalization within national institutions.⁶

Furthermore, internal fragmentation within Anglophone movements has weakened their overall effectiveness.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2003). *Negotiating an Anglophone identity: A study of the politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon*. Brill.

³ Eyoh, D. (1998). Conflicting narratives of Anglophone protest and the politics of identity in Cameroon. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16(2), 249–276.

⁴ Takougang, J., & Krieger, M. (1998). *African state and society in the 1990s: Cameroon's political crossroads*. Westview Press.

⁵ International Crisis Group. (2017). *Cameroon's Anglophone crisis at the crossroads* (Africa Report No. 250).

⁶ *Ibid.*

Differences in ideology, strategy, and leadership have often undermined cohesion and negotiation capacity. While some groups advocate federalism and dialogue, others pursue separatist objectives, making it difficult to present a unified political agenda. This fragmentation has complicated efforts toward sustainable conflict resolution and reduced the movement's bargaining strength.

State repression has also significantly constrained the effectiveness of political agitation. Arrests, restrictions on civil liberties, and military responses to protests have limited open political engagement and contributed to the radicalization of some factions. Consequently, although agitation has succeeded in raising awareness and strengthening collective identity, it has also contributed to prolonged instability and conflict in the Anglophone regions.

In historical perspective, the effectiveness of Anglophone political agitation since 1961 can therefore be described as partial and evolving. The movement has been effective in preserving identity, generating political consciousness, and compelling national and international attention to issues of marginalization and governance. However, it has been less effective in achieving structural political transformation or resolving the deeper constitutional questions at the heart of the Anglophone problem. This mixed outcome reflects the broader challenges of negotiating identity, power, and inclusion within a centralized postcolonial African state.

7. Challenges of Anglophone Political Agitation in Cameroon Since 1961

Anglophone political agitation in Cameroon since 1961 has faced numerous structural, political, and socio-economic challenges that have limited its capacity to achieve lasting constitutional and institutional transformation within the Republic of Cameroon. These challenges have shaped both the direction and intensity of the movement across different historical periods.

One of the principal challenges has been the highly centralized character of the Cameroonian state following the abolition of the federal system in 1972. The concentration of political authority within the central government significantly reduced regional autonomy and weakened mechanisms through which Anglophone concerns could be institutionally addressed. According to Victor T. Le Vine (2004),¹ the postcolonial Cameroonian state developed around a strong central executive structure that limited pluralistic political participation and reinforced administrative dominance from the center.

Another major challenge has been political repression and restrictions on dissent. Over the years, Anglophone activists, journalists, lawyers, and civil society actors have frequently encountered arrests, intimidation, and limitations on political expression. Such responses have constrained peaceful political engagement and contributed to deepening mistrust between the state and Anglophone communities. Nicodemus Fru Awasom (2004)² argues that the inability of the state to adequately address constitutional grievances contributed to the radicalization of sections of the Anglophone movement.

Internal fragmentation has equally undermined the effectiveness of political agitation. Anglophone movements have often been divided over ideology, leadership, and political objectives. While some factions advocate federalism and constitutional reform, others demand outright independence for the former Southern Cameroons. These divisions have weakened strategic coordination and reduced the movement's negotiating strength. As observed by Mark W. DeLancey (1989),³ fragmented opposition movements within centralized African states often struggle to sustain unified political pressure against entrenched state systems.

Economic and infrastructural limitations have also constrained Anglophone political mobilization. Many Anglophone regions have experienced perceptions of uneven development, poor infrastructure, and limited state investment compared to other regions of the country. These conditions have affected both the organizational capacity of advocacy groups and the socio-economic stability necessary for sustained civic engagement. Such disparities have reinforced perceptions of exclusion and marginalization among local populations.⁴

Another challenge has been the limited level of international intervention and recognition. Although international organizations and foreign governments have expressed concern over the Anglophone crisis, most external actors continue to prioritize Cameroon's territorial integrity and regional stability. As a result, international responses have generally focused on mediation, humanitarian assistance, and calls for dialogue rather than support for

¹ Le Vine, V. T. (2004). *Politics in francophone Africa*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

² Awasom, N. F. (2004). The reunification question in Cameroon: Was the bride an enthusiastic or a reluctant one? *Africa Today*, 50(1), 99–121.

³ DeLancey, M. W. (1989). *Cameroon: Dependence and independence*. Westview Press.

⁴ *Ibid.*

separatist demands.¹

The militarization of parts of the Anglophone movement after 2016 has further complicated the struggle. While armed resistance emerged partly in reaction to state repression, it also transformed the crisis into a prolonged security conflict. This development led to widespread displacement, economic disruption, school closures, and humanitarian suffering within the North West and South West regions. The escalation of violence shifted attention from constitutional grievances to security concerns, thereby complicating possibilities for peaceful negotiation and reconciliation.

Historical and demographic realities have also posed challenges. Anglophones constitute a minority within Cameroon's broader population, limiting their influence within national electoral and administrative structures. In addition, differing political loyalties among Anglophone elites have weakened collective bargaining efforts, as some elites remained integrated within state institutions while others aligned themselves with opposition movements.

Furthermore, the absence of sustained and inclusive dialogue mechanisms has prolonged tensions. Attempts at negotiation have often been undermined by mistrust, inconsistent implementation of reforms, and the exclusion of certain stakeholders from peace initiatives. This has limited opportunities for consensus-building and durable conflict resolution.

In historical perspective, the challenges confronting Anglophone political agitation reflect the broader difficulties of negotiating identity, representation, and autonomy within centralized postcolonial African states. These obstacles continue to shape the trajectory of the Anglophone question and its implications for governance, political stability, and national cohesion in Cameroon.

8. Perception and Political Agitation Since 1961

The evolution of Anglophone political agitation in Cameroon since 1961 cannot be fully understood without examining the underlying perceptions that have shaped collective consciousness and political behavior within the Anglophone regions. These perceptions—rooted in historical experience, institutional change, and socio-political realities—have played a critical role in transforming identity into organized political action within the Republic of Cameroon.

In the immediate aftermath of reunification in 1961, Anglophone perceptions of the union were largely characterized by cautious optimism. The federal arrangement was widely viewed as a safeguard for the preservation of Anglophone identity, particularly in relation to the common law system, educational structures, and administrative autonomy. However, this perception gradually shifted as centralizing tendencies within the state became more pronounced. The 1972 abolition of the federal system marked a turning point, leading to growing feelings of betrayal and marginalization among Anglophones.²

During the 1970s and 1980s, political agitation remained relatively subdued, largely confined to elite circles and expressed through limited constitutional discourse. However, underlying perceptions of exclusion continued to deepen. According to Victor T. Le Vine (2004), the increasing concentration of political power at the center contributed to a sense of political invisibility among minority groups, including Anglophones. These perceptions were further reinforced by administrative practices perceived as favoring Francophone norms, particularly in the legal and educational sectors.

The reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s marked a significant shift in both perception and political agitation. Anglophones increasingly began to articulate their grievances in terms of systemic marginalization and cultural erosion. This period witnessed the emergence of organized movements such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), which framed the Anglophone problem as a question of identity, rights, and self-determination.³ As Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2005) notes, perceptions of exclusion can serve as powerful catalysts for identity-based mobilization, particularly in contexts where institutional channels for redress are weak or ineffective.

From the 2000s onward, these perceptions became increasingly entrenched and widespread across different segments of Anglophone society. Grievances were no longer limited to political elites but extended to professionals, students, and civil society actors. The perception of being second-class citizens within the state gained prominence, reinforced by issues such as underrepresentation in public institutions, perceived neglect in

¹ International Crisis Group. (2019). *Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: How to get to talks?* Africa Report No. 272.

² Eyoh, D. (1998). Conflicting narratives of Anglophone protest and the politics of identity in Cameroon. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16(2), 249–276.

³ *Ibid.*

infrastructure development, and the erosion of Anglophone cultural and legal systems.¹

The 2016 protests represented a critical escalation in Anglophone political agitation, driven largely by professional groups such as lawyers and teachers. These actors protested against the perceived imposition of Francophone legal and educational practices in Anglophone regions. The state's response to these protests further shaped perceptions, with many Anglophones interpreting it as evidence of systemic repression and unwillingness to address legitimate concerns. As a result, the agitation evolved from reformist demands-such as a return to federalism-to more radical calls for autonomy or independence.

Over time, the interaction between perception and political agitation has created a self-reinforcing cycle. Perceptions of marginalization fuel political mobilization, while state responses to agitation often reinforce those same perceptions. This dynamic has contributed to the persistence and intensification of the Anglophone crisis, making resolution increasingly complex.

In historical perspective, Anglophone political agitation since 1961 can thus be seen as a continuum shaped by shifting perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, and identity within the Cameroonian state. What began as a cautious engagement with a federal system has evolved into a sustained and multifaceted struggle for recognition, representation, and autonomy. Understanding this interplay between perception and agitation is essential for any meaningful analysis of the Anglophone question and its implications for governance and national integration in Cameroon.

9. Conclusion

The question of Anglophone identity and political agitation in Cameroon since 1961 remains one of the most significant and enduring issues in the historical and political evolution of the Republic of Cameroon. Emerging from the unique colonial experiences of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun, Anglophone identity developed as a distinct socio-political consciousness rooted in differences in language, legal traditions, educational systems, and administrative culture. Although reunification in 1961 was envisioned as a framework for coexistence and national unity, subsequent political developments-particularly the abolition of federalism in 1972 and the increasing centralization of state power-contributed to growing perceptions of marginalization and exclusion among Anglophone communities.

Over the decades, these perceptions evolved into organized political agitation expressed through constitutional advocacy, civil society mobilization, and, more recently, armed resistance. The Anglophone struggle has therefore reflected broader debates surrounding identity, representation, governance, and state legitimacy in postcolonial Africa. While Anglophone political agitation has succeeded in preserving collective identity, raising national and international awareness, and challenging the structures of centralized governance, it has also faced serious obstacles including state repression, internal fragmentation, limited international intervention, and the militarisation of the conflict.

Historically, the Anglophone crisis demonstrates the enduring influence of colonial legacies on postcolonial state formation and national integration. It reveals the difficulties associated with managing diversity within centralized political systems where minority identities perceive themselves as politically, culturally, and economically marginalized. The persistence of the crisis further underscores the limitations of coercive approaches to governance and highlights the importance of inclusive political dialogue, constitutional accommodation, and equitable representation in sustaining national cohesion.

Ultimately, the future of Cameroon's unity and stability depends significantly on the ability of the state and relevant stakeholders to address the root causes of Anglophone discontent through genuine institutional reforms and inclusive governance mechanisms. Without meaningful engagement with historical grievances and identity concerns, the tensions surrounding the Anglophone question are likely to persist. The study therefore concludes that the Anglophone problem is not merely a regional dispute, but a fundamental challenge to nation-building, democratic governance, and political integration in Cameroon.

10. Summary of Findings

This study examined the evolution of Anglophone identity and political agitation in Cameroon since 1961 within the broader framework of the Cameroonian body politic. The findings reveal that Anglophone identity emerged primarily from the distinct colonial experiences of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun, which produced different legal, educational, administrative, and political traditions prior to reunification. The 1961 reunification, though intended to foster national unity, instead created structural tensions arising from the coexistence of two historically divergent political cultures within a centralized postcolonial state.

The study further found that the abolition of the federal system in 1972 significantly intensified Anglophone

¹ *Ibid.*

perceptions of political and cultural marginalization. The gradual centralization of power weakened institutional protections previously associated with Anglophone autonomy and contributed to growing dissatisfaction among Anglophone populations. These perceptions of exclusion became central to the development of a collective Anglophone consciousness and identity.

Another major finding is that political agitation evolved progressively over time. Initially, Anglophone grievances were expressed mainly through constitutional debates and elite negotiations. However, the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s expanded the scope of agitation, leading to the emergence of organized movements advocating federalism, greater autonomy, and, in some cases, secession. The study also established that the 2016 Anglophone crisis represented a major turning point, transforming long-standing constitutional grievances into a broader socio-political and security crisis.

The research additionally found that Anglophone political agitation has achieved partial effectiveness. It succeeded in preserving Anglophone identity, increasing political consciousness, and drawing national and international attention to issues of governance, representation, and marginalization. Nevertheless, the agitation has faced significant challenges including political repression, centralization of state authority, internal fragmentation within Anglophone movements, limited international intervention, and the militarization of the conflict.

Furthermore, the study established that the Anglophone problem reflects broader postcolonial challenges associated with nation-building, identity management, and political inclusion in Africa. The persistence of the crisis demonstrates the enduring influence of colonial legacies and the limitations of centralized governance structures in accommodating cultural and political diversity.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Anglophone crisis is not merely a regional or linguistic issue, but a historically rooted political question closely connected to governance, constitutionalism, representation, and national integration in Cameroon.

11. Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to address the persistent challenges surrounding Anglophone identity and political agitation in Cameroon and to promote sustainable national integration within the Republic of Cameroon.

11.1 Inclusive Political Dialogue

There is a pressing need for sincere, inclusive, and sustained political dialogue involving government authorities, Anglophone leaders, civil society organisations, religious authorities, traditional rulers, youth groups, women's associations, and representatives of displaced populations. Such dialogue should move beyond symbolic consultation and focus on addressing the fundamental constitutional, political, and historical grievances underlying the Anglophone crisis. Constructive dialogue would help rebuild trust between the state and Anglophone communities while creating avenues for peaceful conflict resolution and national reconciliation.

11.2 Constitutional and Institutional Reforms

Meaningful constitutional reforms should be undertaken to address long-standing concerns regarding excessive centralization of political power. Greater decentralization or a reconsideration of aspects of federalism could provide regional institutions with more administrative, political, and financial autonomy. Such reforms would strengthen local governance, encourage broader political participation, and create a greater sense of inclusion among Anglophone populations. Institutional reforms should also ensure fair representation of Anglophones in national decision-making bodies and public institutions.

11.3 Protection of Anglophone Legal and Educational Systems

The preservation of the common law system and the Anglo-Saxon educational model should be treated as a national priority. These systems constitute essential components of Anglophone historical and cultural identity. The government should ensure that legal and educational policies respect the bilingual and bicultural nature of the state by recruiting qualified common law magistrates, maintaining English-language educational standards, and avoiding administrative practices that undermine Anglophone institutional traditions. Effective bilingualism should be implemented practically rather than remaining a symbolic constitutional principle.

11.4 Equitable Economic Development

The government should prioritize balanced economic development and infrastructural investment in the North West and South West regions. Many Anglophones perceive economic neglect as evidence of political marginalization. Improved road networks, healthcare facilities, schools, electricity supply, water systems, and employment opportunities would contribute to reducing socio-economic frustrations and restoring confidence in state institutions. Development programs should also focus on empowering local communities, supporting

agriculture, and encouraging private investment in conflict-affected regions.

11.5 Promotion of National Integration and Cultural Inclusion

National integration should be built on mutual respect, equality, and recognition of cultural diversity rather than assimilationist tendencies. Educational curricula, civic education programs, and media initiatives should promote awareness of Cameroon's dual colonial heritage and encourage intercultural understanding between Anglophone and Francophone communities. Government policies should actively combat discrimination, stereotypes, and exclusionary political practices that undermine national cohesion.

11.6 Protection of Human Rights and Civil Liberties

The protection of fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms is essential for lasting peace and stability. The state should uphold freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to peaceful assembly. Excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and censorship often intensify grievances and contribute to radicalization. A more democratic and participatory political environment would encourage peaceful civic engagement and reduce the appeal of violent resistance.

11.7 Peacebuilding, Disarmament, and Reintegration

Comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives should be implemented to address the humanitarian and security dimensions of the crisis. Efforts toward disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of armed groups are necessary for restoring stability within affected communities. In addition, psychosocial support, community reconciliation programs, and rehabilitation of displaced persons should be prioritized in order to rebuild social trust and repair the long-term effects of conflict.

11.8 Strengthening Historical and Academic Research

Scholars, historians, and researchers should continue objective and interdisciplinary studies on the Anglophone question. Historical scholarship plays a crucial role in uncovering the origins, evolution, and implications of the crisis. Universities and research institutions should encourage studies focusing on constitutional history, identity politics, governance, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution in Cameroon. Such research would contribute to informed policymaking and deepen public understanding of the historical roots of the Anglophone problem.

11.9 Strengthening Democratic Governance and Accountability

The government should promote transparency, accountability, and good governance at both national and regional levels. Corruption, political favoritism, and lack of accountability weaken public trust in state institutions and intensify political frustrations. Strengthening democratic institutions, judicial independence, and electoral credibility would help create a more inclusive political environment where grievances can be addressed peacefully through constitutional mechanisms.

Overall, the implementation of these recommendations would contribute significantly to peaceful coexistence, democratic governance, constitutional stability, national cohesion, and long-term peace in Cameroon.

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