

2011 Cameroonian Presidential Election Report

The address given on the 20th of October, 2011 by the SDF Presidential Candidate Ni John Fru Ndi, before the Supreme Court of Cameroon—sitting as Constitutional Council over Post-Election Petitions, opened with a general analysis of the 2011 presidential elections,

“I have sat down and watched democracy being murdered in Cameroon. I watched Justice, Your Lordships, being crucified in Cameroon. I saw the knife of injustice pierce the side of justice, and the blood dropping on the ground of Cameroon to nourish tribalism...”

This opening to a speech addressing a petition filed by 10 Cameroonian presidential candidates, requesting that the Supreme Court discard the results of the election due to fraud and corruption, is a dramatic expression of the very real concerns had by the Cameroonian and international community regarding the transparency of October 9ths elections.

While armed gunmen blocking a major bridge in Cameroon’s largest city of Douala on Sept 23, 2011 betrayed some of the tension that was felt throughout the country as it neared the election day of October 9, violence was the exception rather than the rule. The weeks leading up to the election were instead filled with reports of corruption and fraud, and demands for transparency made by the opposition, while an apathetic public continued about their days knowing the results of the election were inevitable.



Incumbent Paul Biya’s campaign billboards on display in Douala. Source: MySanAntonio

Even before the campaign period officially started (on September 24), public billboard space all over the urban centers of Cameroon were filled with CPDM (the ruling party, headed by chairman and current president Paul Biya) posters. Nigeria’s Vanguard News reported that the CPDM “...had booked all public billboards all over the country long before the date of the presidential election was announced.” Since the president has authority to decide on election dates, he had a significant

advantage over the opposition when it came to campaigning. The government furthered Mr. Biya's advantage by not distributing the 15 million francs allotted to each accepted candidate for campaigning until a week into the 14-day campaign period—leaving the candidates with 7 days and no billboard space to get their message to Cameroon's diverse population. At the same time, Biya used many times the allotted amount to fund his own campaigning, producing (in addition to the billboards and posters) printed fabric, hats, shirts, buttons, and television commercials—all of which were delivered throughout the country (Mr. Biya himself was abroad for most of the election period).



SDF candidate Ni John Fru Ndi, pictured here at a campaign rally, hotly contested the inconsistent election results on October 24 in front of the Cameroonian Supreme Court. Source: YellFire

The inconsistencies and controversy continued on the election day—with reports of people voting multiple times, as well as dead people being listed on the voter registration (and, in fact, voting). A particularly compelling instance of this is the case of Andze Tsoungui Gilbert, a former deputy prime minister, who, despite having passed on in 2007 was still registered to vote in the 2011 election, and in fact “...voted not only once but four times. The late Forchive equally voted there and voted as many times as his ghost allowed him to” according to Fru Ndi's address to the Supreme

Court. In the same breath, the opposition leader discussed the issue of multiple voter cards, saying that in the north he met someone who had 40 in his name.

While some people (some dead) voted multiple times, many Cameroonians did not vote at all. Voter turn-out was extremely low—the AFP (Agence France Presse) reported that lists from several polling places in the Douala area “...indicated low turnout, with 11 out of a total 163 registered voters turning out at one, 56 of 203 at another and 19 of 106 at a third.”

The World Bank says the population of Cameroon is 19,598,889 people. The African Elections Database reports that for the 2011 election there were 7,251,651 registered voters (roughly 36% of the population). Of that 36%, only 4,951,434 votes were cast (including multiple votes cast by the same person, and votes cast by dead people). 114,185 of those votes were deemed invalid or were left blank, and although it is arguable as to whether or not that number of invalid votes is accurate, it left Cameroon with 4,847,249 valid votes to represent a country of 19,598,889 people; assuming each

of the votes were placed by an individual voter of their own free will, just 24% of the population was responsible for electing the head of state for the next seven years.

"I have no time for politics. All what you call an election is a masquerade. Everyone can see that there's already a winner," The Cameroon News quoted a 26-year-old Cameroonian in Yaounde, Donal Borogue. This sentiment echoed the feelings of many Cameroonians, who know through experience that regardless where they cast their ballot (or not), the winner will inevitably be the same.

After the results were announced, with Biya winning by 77%, there was outrage expressed by the opposition and some international watchdog groups, but there was no violent outcry in the country at large. Most people didn't watch the election results, read over a period of six hours, only in French (despite Cameroon being a bilingual country).

Despite said international and opposition outcry, and regardless of how he came to and remains in power, Biya was sworn in on Oct 28 for his sixth term as President of the Republic of Cameroon. For most of the country, all that means is that nothing has changed.

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