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Presidential Elections in Africa after 1990: How and Why the Incumbent is Almost Always Reelected, Evidence from Cameroon

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Abstract:

After 1990, several presidential elections on a multiparty platform were held, and in most of them, the incumbent president was successful. Explanations of incumbent success and opposition failure in presidential elections are critical to understanding the political process of struggling democracies of Africa. In Cameroon, of the four presidential elections held, incumbent Paul Biya was victorious with varying scores. However, scientific explanations to the causes of presidential victories and losses have not been adequately explored to give us a clearer picture of the dynamics of presidential elections in the continent. This paper seeks to partly fill this gap. It investigates comparative study of presidential elections in Africa with a focus on Cameroon, from the comparative analysis perspectives. It tries to find out the causes and consequences of presidential victories and losses by explaining why the opposition consistently losses to the incumbent. It finds that incumbency advantage significantly explains the consistent success of incumbent in presidential elections.

Keywords: *Incumbency advantage, presidential elections, opposition, challengers*

1. Introduction

Presidential elections are among the most critical political activities that continue to engineer debates about the extent of multiparty democracy in emerging democracies. They have always been turbulent and at extreme cases violent, compared to other elections such as council, parliamentary and senatorial elections. After 1990, several presidential elections on a multiparty platform were held, and in most of them, the incumbent president was successful. Explanations of incumbent success and opposition failure in presidential elections are critical to understanding the political process of struggling democracies of Africa. Unfortunately, the dominant explanation has revolved around the irregularity paradigm according to which incumbent reelection is a consequence of the irregularities that characterize the entire electoral process. Although the cornerstone of competitive elections and democracy is free and fair election, the reelection of incumbent under conditions of irregularities does not mean that incumbency advantage was not a determining factor. The credibility and legitimacy accorded an election victory is determined by the extent to which the process is free and fair (Garuba, 2007; Bogaards, 2007)¹, but the reelection of incumbent does not significantly mean that elections were not free and fair. Yet, from an observation of the reactions from public opinion and election stakeholders, the impression is that free and fair elections only corroborate positively with the defeat of incumbent. This is as if to say that no incumbent defeat, no free and fair election. Or no free and fair election, no incumbent defeat. There is no doubt that free and fair election serves the purpose of legitimizing a government, but the reelection of incumbent in conditions of free and fair election means at least one of two things: the incumbent was more powerful than the challengers or that challengers were weaker than incumbent. Incumbency advantage offers the most plausible explanation to incumbent reelection during elections organized and supervised by an independent body, in the strictest sense of the term. If an incumbent president who is eligible for re-election attempts to utilize all means necessary to win an additional term, there are no concerns if electoral rules are followed.²

In Cameroon, of the four presidential elections held, incumbent Paul Biya was victorious with varying scores. However, scientific explanations to the causes of presidential victories and losses have not been adequately explored to give us a clearer picture of the dynamics of presidential elections in the continent. This paper seeks to partly fill this gap. In trying to do so, it asks the following questions: why does the opposition losses? Why does incumbent always win presidential elections, in spite of the multiparty system, with strong political adversaries capable of making a difference? The basic assumption is that opposition losses because it does not possess an advantage similar or equal to incumbency advantage. This paper is divided into two main parts. The first part explains the

¹ For details see Bogaards, Malhijis (2007). Elections, Election Outcomes, and Democracy in South Africa. *Democratization*. Vol. 14. No1. 73 – 91, and Garuba, Dauda (2007). Transition without Change: Elections and Political (In)stability in Nigeria. In Jega Attahiru & Ibeanu, Okechukwu (eds), *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*, Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA).

² See details in Edwin Odhiambo Abuya. *Can African States Conduct Free and Fair Presidential Elections?* 8 Nw. J. Int'l Hum. Rts. 122 (2010). <http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njihr/vol8/iss2/1>

conceptual clarifications theoretical and paradigmatic frameworks. The second part explores Cameroon's experience in incumbency advantage through statistical presentation and analysis of 1992, 1997, 2004, and 2011 presidential elections.

2. Conceptual Clarifications, Theoretical and Paradigmatic Frameworks

This part seeks to clarify and contextualize the major concepts introduced such as incumbency/incumbency advantage, challenger/opposition, presidential/presidential system and elections. These concepts are examined in a paradigmatic framework that emphasizes the relevance of incumbency advantage as opposed to the irregularities paradigm.

2.1. Presidential System

Because this paper is dealing with presidential election, it is important to clarify the concept of presidentialism or presidential system. According to Ayanda and Odunayo (2015)³, a presidential system of government is "a type of government in which most executive powers are vested in the president who is the chief executive". Garner's elaborate definition talks of a presidential system as that in which, the executive (including both the Head of the State and his ministers) is "constitutionally independent of legislature in respect to the duration of his or their tenure and irresponsible to it for his or their political policies". In such system, the chief of the state is not merely the titular executive but he is real executive and actually exercise the powers which the constitution and laws confer upon him (Garner, 1955).

A presidential system is understood as that in which the presidency and the president are the most powerful institutions of the State, and enjoy overriding powers over all other institutions including the judiciary and the legislative. The sovereign advantages of the president are in no way comparable to the advantages embedded in other State institutions. In a presidential system, the chief executive is effectively a chief executive, with a wide range of discretionary powers to appoint and dismiss State and governmental officials such as ministers, including the ability to influence the election of public office holders such as members of parliament and senators. In a presidential system, the "President is both the chief executive and the head of state. The President is elected independently of the legislature. The powers invested in the President are usually balanced against those vested in the legislature".⁴ According to Zilágyi (2009) there are presidential republics that have a full presidential system (e.g. the USA), semi-presidential system (e.g. South-Africa), and executive presidency (e.g. France) linked to a parliament.⁵ In Cameroon, the presidential system is much closed to the French model i.e. it is an executive presidency in which the executive is unipersonal with members of the cabinet serving at the pleasure of the president and must carry out the policies of the executive and legislative branches, although presidential systems frequently require legislative approval of bills. It is expected that in a presidential system the president enjoys a wide range of powers that place in a favourable position ahead of challengers during elections.

2.2. Election

One of the clearest manifestations of the increasing institutionalization of political power in Africa is the increasing importance of elections. Basically, an election is an instrument used to recruit leadership in political systems. In its proper sense, election is a process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organisation or group by the vote of its qualified members (Nwolise, 2007:155).⁶

Whereas political power used to change hands principally through violence, it now changes hands principally in accordance with instituted electoral rules. Whereas leaders used to exit power at a time and in a way of their own – or, quite frequently, a coup plotter's – choosing, they now do so at a time and in a way dictated by a set of impersonal constitutional rules that they do not control.⁷ Elections have been held in Africa since the independence era, albeit sometimes only intermittently and with varying degrees of contestation. However, both the total number of elections held per decade and the share of elections that are meaningfully contested have risen over time, particularly since the early 1990s.⁸

2.2.1. Trend of Elections and Incumbent Reelection in Africa

In only 2 of the 26 presidential elections held in Africa in the 1960s did the incumbent actually face an opponent. The vast majority of presidential elections during this period were little more than plebiscites or grassroots mobilisation exercises in which the head of state stood no risk of losing power. By the 1990s, however, over 90% of presidential elections were contested, and by the 2000-2005 period this share had risen to 98%. This dramatic change reflects the growing recognition by African leaders that, to maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of both their own citizens and the international community, they must subject themselves to elections in which an opponent has at least a theoretical possibility of unseating them.⁹

During the entire period between 1960 and 1990, only one African president lost an election. This was Aden Abdullah Osman of Somalia, who was defeated by challenger Abdirashid Ali Shermarke in 1967. Since 1990, the incumbent loss rate has risen to a modest but nonetheless meaningful 14% (incumbents lost 14 times in 100 opportunities). African presidents today are thus more than

³ Ayanda, Araba Akeem and Odunayo, Braimah Joseph, (2015). Comparative Study of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, Volume XV Issue VII Version I, 48-54.

⁴ Zilágyi, M. S. (2009). Presidential versus parliamentary systems. *AARMS LAW*, Vol. 8, No. 2. 307-314.

⁵ Ibid. p.1.

⁶ Nwolise, O.B.C. (2007). Electoral violence and Nigeria's 2007 elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 6(2).

⁷ Posner Daniel N. and Young Daniel J. (2006) The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa. *Draft Paper*.

⁸ Ibid. p.6.

⁹ Posner and Young, p. 7.

twice as likely to lose power if they subject themselves to contested elections than they were before 1990, when the loss rate was just over 6% (1 electoral defeat out of just 16 contested elections).¹⁰

Nevertheless, the reality on the field points to a different trend. Ncube (2014, 1) shows that in Africa, within the period 1960 and 2010 the incumbent wins with no contestation 64%, forms a coalition 6%, and result in a standoff 2%.¹¹ The incumbent loses and accepts defeat 16%, coalition 12%, and standoff 0%. Of 51 actual elections outcomes for the period (2006-2011+Eritrea 1993) in Africa for the various cases, the incumbent won 34, the challenger won 17.¹² However, of the 34 wins, 21 were uncontested, 11 caused standoff, and 2 resulted in a coalition. Of the 17 losses, the incumbent conceded defeat in 11, 0 caused standoff, and 6 caused coalition.¹³

With regards to presidential elections the findings of Ncube (2014) still indicate a high trend of incumbent reelection. Of the 354 presidential elections, the incumbent president won 207 without contestation. On the other polar opposite, in 52 cases, the incumbent lost and conceded defeat. In 95 cases, the election results were contested by the loser. The incumbent lost, rejected the results and formed a coalition in 48 cases. The challenger lost, contested the results and formed a coalition with the incumbent in 40 cases. Seven elections resulted in a standoff.

Outcomes	Legislative		Presidential		Total	
	freq	%	Freq	%	Freq.	%
incumbent loses, accepts defeat	53	17	52	15	104	16
incumbent loses, contestation, coalition	32	11	48	14	80	12
incumbent loses, contestation, standoff	-	-	2	1	2	0
incumbent wins, contestation, coalition	2	1	40	11	42	6
incumbent wins, contestation, standoff	3	1	5	1	8	2
incumbent wins, no contestation	210	70	207	58	417	64
Total	299	100	354	100	653	100

Table 1: Classification of African election outcomes (frequency and percentage): 1960 – 2012.

Source: Ncube (2014:9)

Overall, the table shows that incumbent tend to win elections they organize with a 71% probability but when they incumbent loses, he tends to reject the results (79% of the time). The challenger tends not to contest the results (contestation occurs in only 7% of the cases). However, the challenger's contestation rate is higher for presidential election (12%) than for legislative elections (2%).

2.3. The Challenger/Opposition

Challengers are those who stand to compete with the incumbent in organized presidential elections. In Cameroon, they are also referred to as the opposition. According to Ngwane:

- The circumstances that led to the emergence of Opposition parties in Cameroon were predicated on the twin phenomena of challenge and change. Challenge was based on the need for the establishment to reform itself and give access to alternative voices while change was the political agenda that meant to reverse the ruling oligarchy in favour of a new dispensation (regime change).¹⁴

The opposition was determined to oust the incumbent and this was reflected in the slogan 'Biya must go'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, three categories of opposition existed according to their perception of the incumbent and their relationship to government. These include the opposition of liberation characterized by a zero compromise with the regime, threats of protest and boycotts, as well as deep seated disagreement and conflict.¹⁶ John Fru Ndi and his party the SDF, represent this category. John Fru Ndi is not only a major opposition of liberation who denies any form of compromise with the regime but he is also the major challenger of incumbent Biya who is prepared to use radical means to overpower his rival. This category combines strategies that range from electoral to non-electoral means such as election boycotts and radical demands for the reform of the electoral framework.

The other two categories following the classification of Ngwane are the opposition of cooptation characterized by the desire to share power and the prebends or spoils of power with the ruling party, and the opposition of proposition characterized by a strong ideological outfit, working more on ideas rather than revolutionary propaganda. In the second category, parties include the NUDP, MDR, MLJC and UPC whose mind-set is based on a win-win situation or in the slogan 'Biya must share'. The opposition of the third category includes the Progressive or Modernist wing of the CPDM, which is a splinter group but more often than not stays within as mainstream members disagreeing at their own risk and peril, with party focus.¹⁷ They adopt a strategy known as 'Biya must change'.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ncube, Mthuli. (2014). Elections and Political Fragility in Africa. *African Development Bank Group*.

¹² Ibid. p.6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ngwane, G. The opposition and their performance of electoral power in Cameroon (1992-2007) available at <http://www.nngwane.com>, accessed April 15, 2017.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

2.4. The Irregularity Paradigm

The irregularity paradigm emerged against the backdrop of increasing criticisms over the heavy/single hand of incumbent in the management of elections. It comprises a set of election malpractices such as unconstitutional constitutional changes, election rigging, electoral corruption, and so on. This paradigm has been used by public opinion and civil society as well as some electoral stakeholders to explain the victory of incumbent. Cameroon has had a troublesome electoral history with successive elections being marred by serious irregularities and controversy- particularly in the conduct of its electoral commission. This has led in some cases to the collapse of democratic experiments and the often-truncated belief that the irregularities have favoured incumbent. Indeed, if there are any irregularities, these should be to the favour or disfavour of all the political players. In any case, the irregularities have nevertheless failed to rekindle public confidence in the electoral and democratic process of the country and the willingness of government to genuinely democratize. Free and fair elections are therefore considered as vital and indispensable for determining the democratic nature of a political system. When election is not managed quite satisfactorily, it can pave the way for deeper ethnic and regional divisions, loss of legitimacy of elected authorities, protest, violent contestation, social explosion, and doubt about institutions, violence, and instability or even threaten the entire democratization process. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) was accused of not being able to organize free and transparent elections. It was typically perceived as a pro government/incumbent agency. And so, it was believed that it will work for the incumbent. In some way, this assumption found favour as a result of the fact that, all elections it organized were won by incumbent. Permitting a challenger to run in the election is not, however, the same thing as putting oneself at real risk of losing power. In many cases, report Posner and his colleague, African leaders who bowed to popular or international pressure to hold contested elections found ways of rigging them so that the contests never brought a meaningful risk that they would be unseated.¹⁸ But again, this argument is weak because no serious evidence has ever demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that so called government-run election management body (EMB) was effectively partisan. Indeed, its elections might have been marred with irregularities, but also, the irregularities were not necessarily meant to re-elect the incumbent. In reality, if the irregularities were considered as a part of the rules of the game, then, it meant that all were entitled to take advantage of it, without exception.

2.5. Incumbent and Incumbency Advantage Paradigm

This is a situation whereby incumbents have, on average, higher quality than challengers (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita 2008).¹⁹ This has been referred to as the quality preference model.²⁰ Voters elect candidates whom they like on some dimension (e.g., ability or trustworthiness), so, compared to the average challenger, candidates who have won in the past are relatively more attractive on that dimension.²¹ Mathematically, incumbency advantage is the extent to which an incumbent's probability of defeating a challenger is greater than one half.²² Incumbency advantage typically refers to the electoral margin a candidate enjoys on account of her status as an incumbent running for reelection.²³ Gordon and Landa (2017) talk of environmental sources of incumbent advantage which are reflected in the following models: The first two models consider two sources typically associated with direct officeholder benefits: what they call the campaign discount, which corresponds to mechanisms that, make it less costly for an incumbent to run for reelection than for a challenger to mount a campaign, and pro-incumbent endorser bias, which may emerge from the unique opportunities officeholders have to cultivate relationships with influential interest groups or elites in an electoral constituency. The third model considers ideological heterogeneity and constituency partisan bias toward an incumbent. By convention, the term incumbency advantage has come to refer to an electoral edge enjoyed by in-office persons, not by in-office parties.²⁴ Though mostly about the United States, a large literature has investigated the degree to which holding office affects a candidate's electoral prospects. These efforts have yielded two sets of empirical facts. First, incumbents enjoy significant advantages compared to their non-incumbent competitors. In terms of the raw probability of re-election, incumbents in national congressional elections are fifty percent more likely than similar non-incumbent peers to be re-elected (Lee, 2001).²⁵ Second, the margin of victory of incumbents has increased significantly over time. However, these conclusions sharply contrast those of Linden (2004)²⁶ according to which incumbents in Indian national parliamentary elections starting in 1991 are at a disadvantage compared to those candidates that do not hold office prior to contesting an election, and the notable exception of Miguel and Zaidi's (2003) investigation of national

¹⁸ Posner and Young, *Ibid.* p.7.

¹⁹ Ashworth, S and Bueno de Mesquita, E. 2008. Electoral Selection, Strategic Challenger Entry, and the Incumbency Advantage. *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 4, October 2008, 1006–1025.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1010.

²³ See Gordon S. C. and Landa, D. Do the Advantages of Incumbency Advantage Incumbents? available at <http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/2790/incumbencyID.pdf>, accessed February 15, 2017.

²⁴ Mayhew, D. (2008) Incumbency Advantage in U.S. Presidential Elections: The Historical Record *Political Science Quarterly* Volume 123 Number 2 2008.

²⁵ Lee, David (2001). The Electoral Advantage to Incumbency and Voters' Valuation of Politicians' Experience: A Regression Discontinuity Analysis of Elections to the U.S. House. *NBER Working Paper* #8441.

²⁶ Linden, L.L (2004) Are Incumbents Really Advantaged? The Preference for Non-Incumbents in Indian National Elections. *Job market paper*, available at <http://www.leighlinden.com/Incumbency%20Disad.pdf>, accessed March 10, 2017.

elections in Ghana in which they find no evidence to support an incumbency advantage.²⁷ These exceptions do not cancel the empirical fact that incumbency reelection has increased tremendously even in an 'advanced' democracy like USA, where, according to Friedman and Holden (2007) now stands at more than 98%.²⁸ This paper supports the view that incumbency advantage is far from being an underestimated factor in the reelection of incumbent.

3. Cameroon's Experience of Incumbency Advantage

In this part, an attempt is made to examine incumbency advantage with regards to Cameroon. It presents the incumbent and challengers, their performance in elections and an analysis of the performance.

3.1. The Stakes of Presidential Elections for Incumbents and Challengers

Presidential elections are becoming important as a mechanism to select leaders in Africa. Mathieu Kérékou and Nicéphore Soglo of Benin alternated as president following wins and losses in national elections. There is a stake in presidential elections for incumbents and challengers. The alteration of presidents in Cameroon is a result of popular choice. For incumbents, elections hold them in a high standard of duty. Incumbent President Paul Biya certainly needs elections to maintain his position therein and to even ascertain a margin of legitimacy. In the 1992 presidential election, Paul Biya was poorly elected having been rejected by 61% of the electorate. This made his legitimacy to rest on a shaky foundation. For him therefore, next rounds of presidential elections represent a chance to score an uncontested victory or "achieving a percentage score that should give absolutely no room for him to qualify as a poorly elected president."²⁹

Challengers see in presidential elections as a gateway to the affirmation of presidential office. The elections serve as a moment to express dislike for the current state of affairs. According to Stephen Skowronek, presidential elections for candidates implicitly authorize winner to secure a place in history: that is to make name and fame by using affirmative action to discredit the past.³⁰

Challengers like John Fru Ndi need presidential elections to dislodge incumbent elite and even destroy the institutional arrangements that support them; thereby paving the way for something entirely new (his major political slogan is focused on the idea of 'change'). As a challenger, John Fru Ndi calculated that the decreasing popularity and legitimacy of Paul Biya in the context of 'democratic transition' opened avenues for him to use the 1992 presidential elections to become the new Head of State. In this light, elections offer him the opportunity to uphold rhetoric promising to lead Cameroonians to a promised land.

3.2. The Personality and Prerogatives of the Head of State

Presidential candidates scramble for public support because of the very position, personality and prerogatives of the President of the Republic as enshrined in the constitution.³¹ The figure of the Head of State in Cameroon is the most powerful, a position to be envied by aspirants. The Head of State has the powers to get things done. Political parties can sometimes have a limited influence on the president's action. Through personal struggles, presidents can impose an authoritative definition on their respective historical situations.³² Also, other arms of government such as the legislative and judicial arms of government can sometimes be overridden by presidential action.

In Cameroon, the prerogatives of the Head of State and government are concentrated into the hands of a single personality. By virtue of these prerogatives, the President of the Republic is elected popularly by the whole nation. He is symbol of national unity, he defines the policies of the nation, ensures respect for the constitution, ensures arbitration, the proper functioning of public authorities; he guarantees national independence, territorial integrity, permanency and continuity of the State, respect of international treaties, agreements and engagements among others.³³ The most significant to all is that she/he detains discretionary powers: powers to appoint and dismiss almost freely civil and military personnel, the powers to define the policy of government which he forms and dissolves. He is not answerable to parliament whose agenda she/he sets including powers to guarantee the independence of the judiciary and finally, the powers to amend the constitution with the 'symbolic' approval of parliament.

This aura of power and authority which the Head of State incarnates is a bone of contention among presidential hopefuls and it 'may be' legitimately and legally obtained by participating and winning presidential elections. The stake of presidential elections is situated within this framework. A candidate proclaimed president as a result of elections is certainly (except otherwise) sure and assured of enjoying these prerogatives; why not increase them! George W. Bush's distinctive personality and decision style in taking decisions

²⁷ Miguel, Edward and Farhan Zaidi (2003). Do Politicians Reward their Supporters? Public Spending and Incumbency Advantage in Ghana, UC Berkeley Mimeo.

²⁸ Friedman, John N. and Holden, Richard T. (2007) The Rising Incumbent Reelection Rate: What's Gerrymandering Got to Do with It? available at <http://www.mit.edu/~rholden/papers/Incumbents.pdf>, accessed March 24, 2017.

²⁹ Ecumenical Service for Peace, (1998) *The Cameroon elections: Elements of the final observation report*, Yaoundé, Service Humanus, p. 122.

³⁰ Skowronek, S. (1993) *The politics presidents make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush*, Massachusetts, London, Harvard University Press, p. 23.

³¹ See the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon of 18 January 1996, Article 8.

³² Skowronek, Ibid., p. 50.

³³ The Constitution, *op. cit.*, Article 8, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

beyond the limits of his advisers and some senate members left many with the impression that he had expanded the scope of his administration.³⁴

Nevertheless, once elected, the Head of State also has some constraints. The office of chief executive faces some challenges as well. For example, economic globalisation constricts policy makers' capacity to make autonomous decisions.³⁵ They are vulnerable to public opprobrium in times of crises. In times of unmanageable crises, they endorse the responsibility and are held accountable. However, these challenges and constraints do not overshadow the advantages that come with holding presidential office. That is why individuals scramble and will keep scrambling for presidential office. For the competitors, the conquest and mastery of presidential powers and prerogatives will determine their future, that of their supporters and sympathizers, and that of Cameroon. John Fru Ndi has been battling to conquer presidential office by deploying various strategies. Paul Biya has also been battling to keep it. Amongst the strategies, one of them is to meet the requirements for eligibility.

3.3. Eligibility and Nomination of Presidential Candidate

There are a good number of conditions to fulfill to be eligible for nomination as president. According to the law, any Cameroonian who is 35 years and older may be eligible for nomination to the position of President as long as he or she possesses complete citizen rights. In addition, to stand in a presidential election he or she must declare his/her candidature through a declaration bearing his/her authenticated signature. Such a candidate may either be nominated by a political party, or stand as an independent. However, an independent candidate must be presented by at least 300 dignitaries from all ten regions with 30 signatures from each region by Members of Parliament or the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, Municipal Councillors or First-Class Chiefs.

Nomination papers must be submitted to MINATD/ELECAM - the body responsible for approving candidates and publishing the final lists of candidates contesting presidential (and other) elections. According to Section 55 of the 1992 Act as amended governing Presidential elections, candidates were to submit their nomination papers to ELECAM within five days following the convening of the electorate (that is, the announcement of the election date). However, and according to a Commonwealth observer report of the 2011 presidential elections, the election date was announced on 4 September 2011, following much public speculation on whether or not the election would be held in the first place.³⁶ This caused some political parties to complain that their candidates barely had time to prepare their submissions.³⁷ In any case, under Section 54 (2), candidature documents must include certified copies of birth certificates not more than three months old, national identity cards, non-conviction certificates, tax clearance certificates, a residence certificate showing that prospective candidates had resided in the country for upwards of five years, and a certificate attesting to the payment of the required deposit (CFA 5,000,000). These conditions notwithstanding, becoming an independent candidate has never occurred in Cameroon. The reason could be linked to the difficulty of fulfilling the condition of obtaining the approval of at least 300 dignitaries, most of who are enrolled in the ruling party.

3.4. Presidential Elections Back Through 1990s

In this section, results of electoral performance of the incumbent in comparison with challengers in presidential elections are presented, followed by an analysis that focus on incumbency advantage as the most plausible explanation to reelection of the incumbent. It examines multiparty presidential elections back through 1990 because it was from then that elections became democratically meaningful. Prior to that, elections were held without meaningful contest in the sense that the elections were one-way without a challenger. It should be noted that only the first four to five challengers are presented because they are considered as somewhat credible challengers owing to the results of their performance compared to those of others which are relatively insignificant.

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Paul Biya (Incumbent)	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)	1 185 466	40.0
John Fru Ndi (challenger 1)	Social Democratic Front (SDF)	1 066 602	36.0
Bello Bouba Maigari (challenger 2)	National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP)	569 887	19.6
Adamou Ndam Njoya (Challenger 3)	Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU)	107 411	3.6
Jean Jacques Ekindi (Challenger 4)	Mouvement Progressiste (MP)	23 525	0.8
Emah Otu	Regroupement des Forces Patriotiques	12 345	0.4
Invalid votes		50 012	
Total		3 015 448	100

Table 2: Presidential election of 11 October 1992: incumbent and challenger performance

³⁴ In an article, Stephen Benedict Dyson makes the point that in spite of popular protest, George W. Bush unilaterally refused to withdraw American troops from Iraq in 2006. He ignored the views of his advisers and, relied on his personality and decision style to take action. See S.B Dyson, "George W. Bush, the Surge and Presidential Leadership", *Political Science Quarterly*, The Academy of Political Science, Winter 2010-11, pp. 557-585.

³⁵ See Hay, C. (2007) *Why we hate politics*, Cambridge, Polity Press. Colin Hay argues that disenchantment for politics is caused by the assumption people have about decision makers. People consider policy makers as instrumental and self-serving utility maximizers who act without any consideration of their behavior to others.

³⁶ See Report of the Commonwealth Expert Team, Cameroon Presidential election 9 October 2011. *Commonwealth Secretariat*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Paul Biya	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)	3 167 820	92.57
Henri Hogbe Nlend	Union des populations du Cameroun (UPC)	85 693	2.5
Samuel Eboua	Mouvement pour la défense de la République	83 506	2.44
Albert Dzongang	Parti populaire pour le développement	40 814	1.19
Joachim Tabi Owono	Action pour la méritocratie et l'égalité des chances	15 817	0.46
Antoine N'Demannu	Rassemblement Democratique du Peuple sans Frontière	15 490	0.45
Gustave Essaka	Démocratie Intégrale du Cameroun	12 915	0.38
Invalid votes cast		84 890	
Total		3 506 945	100

Table 3: Results of 12 October 1997 presidential elections: incumbent and challenger performance

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Paul Biya	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)	2 665 359	70.92
John Fru Ndi	Social Democratic Front (SDF)	654 066	17.40
Adamou Ndam Njoya	Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU)	168 318	4.48
Garga Haman Adji	Alliance pour la démocratie et le développement (ADD)	140 372	3.74
Twelve other candidates		130 106	3.46
Total		3 758 221	100

Table 4: Results of 11 October 2004 presidential elections: incumbent and challenger performance

Candidate	Party	Percentage (%)
Paul Biya	CPDM	77.99
John Fru Ndi	SDF	10.71
Garga Haman Hadji	ADD	3.21
Adamou Ndam Njoya	CDU	1.73
Paul Abine Ayah	Parti d'Action des gens(Populaire)	1.26

Table 5: Results of 11 October 2011 presidential elections: incumbent and challenger performance

Candidate/party	Year			
	1992	1997	2004	2011
Paul Biya (CPDM)	40.0%	92.57%	70.92%	77.99%
John Fru Ndi (SDF)	36.0%	Boycott	17,12%	10,71%
Bello Bouba (NUDP)	19,6%	Boycott		
Adamou Ndam Njoya (CDU)	3,6%	Boycott	4,71%	1,73%
Henri Hogbe Nlend (UPC-H)		2,50%		
Samuel Eboua (MDP)		2,44%		
Edith Kah' Wallah (CPP)				0,72%
Other candidates		2,49%	2,94%	2,82

Table 6: Synthesis of presidential election results 1992-2011

Source: Author's compilation, 2017

3.5. Presentation of Results

Of the four presidential elections organized after 1990, incumbent president Paul Biya won with varying scores. The major challenger was John Fru Ndi who appeared second in three of the elections he participated. The opposition put together obtained a 58.81% as opposed to 39.98% for the ruling party of President Paul Biya in 1992. In 1997, the opposition put together scored a dismal percentage of 7.42 as opposed to 92.57% for the ruling party. The election was boycotted by three main opposition parties – the SDF, NUDP, CDU and a small Party, The Union of African Population (UPA). This boycott has been used to explain the poor performance of the opposition.³⁸ In 2004 the Opposition put together scored 29% as opposed to 70.92% by the Ruling party and in 2011; Biya scored 77.99% against 16.91% for the opposition put together.

3.6. Explaining the Results: The Incumbency Advantage of President Paul Biya

Posner and Young find that despite the trend of increasing competitiveness, however, the more important point to underscore is that African leaders who want to stay in power are usually able to do so, even if they subject themselves to competitive elections. Incumbent presidents in Africa today still win re-election more than 85% of the time. The advantages of incumbency are so great that elections alone – even free and fair elections – are not enough to provide meaningful limitations on presidential power.³⁹ There is an

³⁸ Ngwane, Ibid. p.3.

³⁹ Posner and Young, Ibid. p.8.

electoral advantage to incumbency – that winning has a causal influence on the probability that the candidate will continue to run for office and eventually be elected.⁴⁰ A central empirical implication of this argument is that incumbents should be more responsive to public demands when the potential for electoral competition is higher.

According to Ncube (2014) an incumbent government facing elections choose a multiplicity of strategies. Before the election it can ensure that the country becomes productive, it can fight with the challenger (opposition), or it can produce public goods. After the election, it can accept the election result, it can form a coalition with the challenger, or it can refuse to leave office causing a standoff with the challenger. In reality, incumbents combine pre-andpost-election strategies to guarantee potential for reelection. For example, incumbents who want to increase their chance of staying in power through elections take advantage of the fact that their parties control more than two thirds of the seats in parliament. Presidents Deby, Bongo, Nujoma, and Eyadema were able to accomplish this by taking advantage of the fact that their parties controlled more than two thirds of the seats in parliament.⁴¹ President Museveni lacked the supermajority required to change the constitution but was able to use his control of state resources to buy the parliamentary votes he needed to pass the third term amendment.⁴² According to Lee (2001) incumbents act in ways to raise their chances of re-election and to further their political careers. For example, incumbents may influence tax and expenditure policy or monetary policy, use the office to sell political favors in exchange for campaign contributions, or vote on legislation in a way that reflects the ideological make-up or economic interests of their constituencies; these things are done in order to influence voters to support the irre-election bids.

Ever since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s President Paul Biya in power since 1982 has been reelected president. His party, the CPDM has also been successful in nationwide elections into the parliament and councils. The absolute majority of the ruling CPDM in parliament has enable the incumbent to amend the constitution without any meaningful opposition. His capacity to mobilize resources other than the traditional resources for stability is an advantage that earns him credit as incumbent. Cameroon's relatively strong and professional military has at times played an important role in peace building, security maintenance and stability not only in Cameroon, but in the Central African sub region and this has earned President Biya the role of main contributor to peacekeeping, as well as the bulwark against terrorist networks in the region. Factors in his favour include: support from the armed forces, a relatively stable economy, the need for continuity, as well as his influence and diplomatic prowess.

The current state of the economy may have a positive impact on Biya's bid for office. There seems to be no particularly alarming economic difficulties, and many Cameroonians are reportedly benefitting from the country's increase in foreign, investment in oil, and public expenditure on infrastructure.

Biya's experience in State affairs gives him both the resources and ability to rally the country's strategic institutions behind his candidacy and win upcoming elections. He embodies continuity, and enjoys more visibility as the incumbent. He may also be credited for having instituting peace and stability after the tumultuous years of the mid 1980s with the failed coup attempt, and the economic crises of the second half of the 80s. Thus, the majority of Cameroonians may still be seeing a guarantor of peace in Biya, and vote him in office.

There is also a security and geopolitical dimension to Biya's potential for reelection. Cameroon's geopolitics has always given presidential elections a paramount significance regarding internal and regional security. Two factors are particularly noteworthy in this regard: (1) Cameroon's role in peacekeeping missions in the region, and (2) its role in containing the militant extremist Islamist group Boko Haram. Cameroon's presence in neighbouring States may primarily serve the benefits of said States, but it is also beneficial to its own security. Its large presence within AMISOM allows Cameroon to play an important role in containing the expansion of the Nigerian-based Boko Haram. It is still active in regional efforts to hunt down Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau whose Islamist fighters continue to operate in parts of the Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Mali. Also, its presence in the ongoing conflicts in the Central African Republic (CAR) ensures that Cameroon does not face the spill-over effect.

Biya has also won credit as a result of the fact he is a civilian and not a military leader and he came to power not through a coup but through constitutional means. In an analysis by Ncube, it is shown that if the incumbent is not from the military, but receives military support in terms of loyalty, the probability of reelection is incontestably high. On the other way round, if the incumbent is from the military the probability of the incumbent losing and contestation increases by 0.12. This result can be explained by the fact military incumbent are more likely to come to power through political coup and govern by force causing voter discontent in the long run. To legitimize their power and demonstrate their popularity to the international community, military incumbents often organize "democratic elections". Voters are likely to express their discontent through the ballot and the incumbent is likely to lose. Because the incumbent did not expect to lose and want to hold power, he will not concede defeat. So far, Cameroon's incumbent Biya enjoys the benefits that come with the status of a civilian ruler in terms of national and international legitimacy.

3.7. The Exception to Incumbency Advantage: Opposition Weakness

There is an exception to incumbency advantage as a political resource to incumbent victory. This exception is rooted in the weakness of the opposition itself. The opposition weakness has only gone a long way to favour the incumbent. The weaknesses include poor internal organization, in addition to Ngwane's lack of internal democracy, lack of opposition leadership consensus, broken strategic alliances, disconnection with democratic development, and lack of linkages with activist elements of civil society. Form a comparative perspective, the opposition is relatively less organized than the ruling party. The opposition suffers from policy inconsistency and this jeopardizes the harmony that should exist between party militants and officials. For example, the SDF is notorious for always being

⁴⁰ Lee, 2001:5.

⁴¹ Posner and Young, p.8.

⁴² Ibid.

indecisive when it comes to run for elections or not. It boycotted the 1992 parliamentary elections, yet participated in the 1992 presidential, living its militants often confused, particularly in the absence of a reasonable reason for election boycott. In addition to this factor, it has been discovered that there is a deficiency of power at helm of the opposition with all the founders still holding power even after decades of the creation of the party. This lives grassroots militants as well as in-party challenges limited chances of ever ousting the party chairman.

The major opposition SDF party and its leader is yet another example. Fru Ndi, among other opposition leaders is not of the caliber to unseat the long-serving leader. Although he has been able to split the ruling party's votes, he has committed a series of what many people see as political blunders which discredited him in the eyes of many as a credible leader. His refusal to run for the 1992 parliamentary elections, his 'arbitrary' sanctions within the party, his closeness to the ruling government, his failure to lead a national opposition coalition, are all factors that contribute to discredit the chairman of the SDF. As Ngwane puts it apart from the tenacity syndrome of its leader, Article 8.2 of the party's constitution raises controversy on the notions of dissent versus debate and discipline versus dictatorship.⁴³ Also on several occasions, he signed a protocol to create a platform with the aim of aligning a unique candidate to challenge Biya in election, but he failed to be nominated as the opposition's unique candidate to face Biya. His energy has mostly been wasted in condemning the conduct of elections as well as election management bodies as bias against the opposition, and yet accepts to participate in the election which makes of him an ever-controversial political figure. Fru Ndi might have built a reputation as a real and most influential opposition leader, and still commands large support among Cameroonians but the fact that he has lost elections on three occasions, has seriously downplayed his image as a potential leader.

4. Conclusion

Defeating a ruling party and an incumbent President, let alone the CPDM and President Biya who has been in power for three decades, may prove a difficult task in the context of African politics. Biya appears set to win another presidential term in next year's election. He is in total control of the armed forces, which play an invisible but vital role in the country's politics, in terms of peace building and security. There is relative calm and peace in most parts of Cameroon and Cameroonians may still trust their veteran leader for the sake of continuity. Nevertheless, Biya may be going for the next elections in a tumultuous context with the emergence of an Anglophone crisis which his political adversaries, particularly his long-time challenger, John Fru Ndi, as well as new challengers, may take advantage of. But again, in terms of political factors additional mandates in power only go a long way to increase the probability of the incumbent winning outcome. This is in line with the fact that the appetite for power increases with the time spend in power. If the opposition is strong, the incumbent is less likely to cling to power or win without contestation as expected since the cost of electoral fraud and results rejection are high. Unfortunately, again, the opposition appears to be weak than expected. In this context where incumbency advantage is being hailed as the most plausible explanation of incumbent reelection, what then is the alternative for opposition winning office? Incumbency advantage is taking the continent to a situation where succession at helm of the state is expected to be decided by incumbent through negotiation. This implies that elections offer less chance for incumbent defeat. Nevertheless, there is still hope. Posner and his colleague provide evidence that across Africa formal institutional rules are starting to constrain leaders' behaviour and to shape political actors' strategies in new ways. In this context incumbents will not be expected to cling to power when they lose election.

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