

Age and Parliamentary Politics within the Opposition and Ruling Parties in Cameroon's North West Region, 1992-2013: Interrogating the Bases for Youth Marginalization

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Abstract

The recent years has witnessed a general decline in youth participation in politics all over the world. While some scholars blame the phenomenon on youth's cynical attitude towards politics, others have maintained that youths are interested in politics but party regulations and constitutions have been unfriendly to their involvement. From this basic premise, this paper maintains that the North West Cameroonian youth is both politically savvy and interested in parliamentary discourse. However discriminatory investiture mechanisms and constitutional bases have conspired to frustrate youths' desire to engage parliamentary politics especially within the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) parties. Through a study of the Parliamentary Lists of these parties in the North West Region (NWR) from 1992 to 2013 as well as other official documents, the paper argues that there has been a repeated cycle of particular names being invested by these parties while the new entrants particularly the youths are left in oblivion with attendant repercussions. The paper thus calls for the need by these parties to create fora for generational integration in Cameroon's parliament.

Key Words: Youth, Political Parties, Parliamentary Politics, Marginalization, North West Region.

Introduction

Every society is basically made up of three sociological groups including the men, the women and the youths. It follows that, any society that carefully combines the men's wisdom, the women's tender-heartedness and the youth's energy is likely to develop faster (Budi, 2016: 1). On the contrary, most societies around the world have witnessed a decline in youth participation in politics particularly in parliamentary discourses. This has animated scholarly debates across

the globe since the end of the Cold War (Robertson, 2009; Esiri, 2016; UNDP, 2012; Mbenga, 2012; Breakfast, 2009). Some scholars argue that the youth are interested in politics but are cynical of the political system (Booyesen, 2015) while others maintain that youths' interest in politics is hampered by country's legislations as well as other factors. Ostensibly, this low representation of youths in politics has been one of the causes of instability on the African continent. A case in point is what became known as the "Arab Spring" of 2010-2011 (Shamma, 2014; Siegle, 2011).

Though it is hard to have a consensual definition for "youth", for the sake of this paper, we would define a youth as someone of both sexes between the ages 15-35 years inclusive.¹ According to Shamma (2014: 2), the average age of parliamentarians in the world is 53 (50 years old for women parliamentarians). In Europe, in 2013 youth in general constituted 17.9% of the total population. According to Eurostat (2013), the percentages of youth between the age of 15 and 29 years old in Europe in 2013 were as follows: Greece 16.8% - Italy 15.4% - Portugal 16.5% (*Ibid*: 3). The European case epitomizes the situation in Africa and elsewhere around the globe. In Cameroon, according to BUCREP (2010) population figures, the youth constitute about 60% of the country's total population. In spite of this massive presence, the youth were conspicuously absent from politics in general and parliamentary discourse in particular. This situation was very glaring in the North West Region (NWR) of Cameroon since the opening up of the country to competitive politics in 1990.

The reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon in 1990 invariably increased the youth's interests in politics in the country at large (Acha, 2011: 10-12) and the NWR in particular. This was because their political choices were widened and they could gradually be involved in the political activities of the country. According to Ballo (2005 cited in Acha, 2011: 10), having interest in politics increases the propensity of the youth to take part in elections. This has been enhanced not just by political plurality but also by the social media which has afforded the youth the opportunity to be involved in political activities. The NWR of Cameroon is made up of a highly politically savvy youth population which began to be manifested since the colonial period and more overtly in the 1990s (Budi, 2016: 82). During the launch of the SDF party in

¹ See The African Youth Charter, Adopted by the Heads of States and Governments of the African Union in Banjul, the Gambia on 2nd July, 2006.

Bamenda on May 26, 1990, Six (6) youths of the Region were shot and killed in cold blood at the Liberty square.² In fact, “after the launch (of the party), jubilant mobs of youngsters surged through the streets chanting songs of freedom. The soldiers were infuriated by the taunts of the youths” (SDF, 2015: 16, 17). These youths included, Juliette Sikod a student who hailed from Bali in Mezam Division, Fidelis Chosi Mankam (corn mill operator), Asanji Christopher Fombi (student), Nfon Edwin Jatop (tailor) Tifuh Mathias Teboh (student) and Toje Evaristus Chatum (student).

The interest of the youth in politics was also manifested through political parties, notably, the SDF and the CPDM all of which have youth wings. In the CPDM, there is the *Organisation des Jeunesses de Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounaise* (OJRDPC or the YCPDM- the English acronym). The SDF on its part has the Socialist Youth as its youth wing (Budi, 2016: 83). These youth wings operate strongly on the ground in the NWR of the country. Other political organizations that have regrouped Cameroonian youth included the President Biya’s Youth (PRESBY), *Promo Jeunes*, and the Chantal Biya’s Active Youth (JACHABI) to support the activities of the Status quo (Dze-Ngwa, 2008: 34). These were indicators that youth were not only interested in politics but were actively involved in the various youth wings and other associations to register their supports for the parties. On such grounds, George Ngwane who addresses the issue of generational boundaries on the African Continent recommends that;

Youths who form a greater percentage of the continent’s population must be actively involved [...], the youths must be given the machinery and mechanism to dream their own dreams. Youths in the chapter of any history want an independence of vision, [...]. Youths must be seen to be responsible and mature persons who can lead their countries through pragmatic policies, whether they are revolutionary or evolutionary, whether gradual or radical. The bottom line is that the policies should be reformatory (Ngwane, 1996: 221-222).

And that;

A rainbow coalition of women, youths and the rest of the people, involved in nation building [...] would produce a new social, economic and cultural order

² The Liberty Square is a popular square in Bamenda Town, Capital of the NWR. It is known within the SDF circles as the Liberty Square because the six youths who were killed are considered to have used their blood to pay for the liberty in the country. That is why during all SDF Anniversaries, the party militants in the Region usually march to the Square where they say prayers before processing to the ceremonial grounds. However, the Junction is commonly known in the region as City Chemist Roundabout.

based on peace, peace with dignity, a peace with commitment, a peace which is a gift to the peoples and the generation to come (*Ibid: 222*).

In spite of such recommendations, youth effective participation in parliamentary politics in Cameroon's NWR was stalled by constitutional constraints as well as difficult investiture.

From this background, the paper avers that the youth of the NWR of Cameroon have over the years shown interest in political involvement. However, constitutional bases and investiture mechanisms within the SDF and the CPDM parties have often frustrated such hopes of the youth. Such frustrations have developed in them a certain degree of incuriosity towards politics. While some scholars argued that youths were apathetic to politics, others maintained that they were interested but cynical of its practice. This paper fills a void that exists betwixt and between these two positions. It argues that the youth were interested in parliamentary politics but their zeal was dampened by constitutional provisions and investiture mechanisms. The paper uses the example of Cameroon's ruling party, the CPDM and the main opposition party, the SDF to anchor its argument. The country's Constitution and Electoral Code, the Constitutions, Rules and Regulations and Basic Texts of these parties as well as their investiture mechanisms will also be examined.

Age-Personality Composition of Parliamentary Lists in NWR, 1992-2013

The reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon in the 1990s seemed to have created dominance by the older generation of politicians as far as parliamentary representation in the NWR was concerned. Arguably, since 1992, the CPDM and the SDF parties invested almost the same Candidates (with only minor changes) in the NWR for parliamentary elections.

The 1992 Legislative Elections (Fifth Legislative Period)

The 1992 Legislative Election was the first multiparty legislative elections organized in the after the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990. Before the organization of these elections, Cameroon's National Assembly was a One-party Assembly (Acha, 2011). The Elections alone was intended to boost Cameroons democratic image. The SDF, the main political rival of the CPDM party in the NWR boycotted these elections on grounds that they wanted an independent Electoral Commission (Ngoh, 1996: 312). Therefore, the lone contender for the 20 (twenty)

parliamentary Seats in the Region was the CPDM. It filed in Candidates and ultimately won all the Seats.

For the Bui constituency, Ni John Tata (56), Fonka Shang Lawrence, Mme Lawong B. Kelen and Nsabam Evariste were elected. In Mezam, Achidi Achu Simon (58), Nyock S.K., Shu Salomon, Akenji S.A. and Siko G.B. won the bid. Momo Division had Akum Fomum, Fombi Ephraim and Echobei Jethro. On its part, Menchum Division got Ngah Francis Chia, Ihims Jacob Annie (54), Ndim Albert Waingeh, Mme Tumasang Veronica (56) while Donga-Mantung Division had as Members of Parliament, Tamfu Samuel Ngeh (57), Ntoi Joseph Kay, Talla Kwalar (52) and Anderson B.K. Voh (MINAT, 1992: 60-64). The CPDM list for the NWR featured names of individuals who had been active in politics since the Ahidjo Regime. Examples of them included Simon Achidi Achu, 58 years (Bulletin de l'Afrique Noire, 1977: 1,033) and Samuel Ngeh Tamfu, 57 years old who had been in Politics since 1959 (Yembe, 2012). Besides, Ihims Jacob Annie of the Menchum Constituency was 54 years old besides others. This was indicative that the nascent democracy had already chosen the path of gerontocracy which continued into the Sixth (6th) legislature in 1997.

The 1997 Legislative Elections (Sixth Legislative Period)

The 1997 was the second legislative elections and the Sixth Legislative period in the Country's Legislative history. The Elections took place on May 17-18, 1997. The Elections saw the participation of the SDF party which filed in Candidates in the different Constituencies of the NWR. In these Elections, the SDF won 19 (nineteen) of the 20 (twenty) Parliamentary Seats of the Region. The Candidates were; in Boyo Division, Jua Paulinus Toh (38) and Chia Emmanuel Ngam (44) were invested by the SDF party. In Bui Division, Shey Ndze (55), Bandzeka Michael Tah (65), Konglinyuy Kwi Joseph (58) and Mbikar Ngong Michael (58) emerged victorious on the SDF list. In Donga-Mantung, Awudu Cyprain Mbaya (45), Tansah Jones Ndzi (39), Chemo Sama Eyikeshi (43) and Bungong Jinka Jonathan (58) won the elections. Meanwhile in Menchum, Asah Barnabas Asane (45) and Aka Amuam Joseph (46) were voted as the representatives. Those elected on the SDF list in Mezam were Akonteh Andrew Bengkuh Babila (47) Tasi Ntang Lucas (53) and Nsoh Zamcho Clement (57). Similarly, in Momo Division, Mbah Ndam Joseph Njang (42), Fonso Peter Cho (60) and Mbang Reuben Awuh (45) were invested and elected. Ngo-Ketunjia North had Yoyo Mohmbakah Emmanuel (46) and Ngo-Ketunjia

South saw Fon Doh Gah Gwanyim III (43) elected on the CPDM platform (Cameroon Tribune, 1997: 2-3; MINAT, 1997: 55-62).

Though the CPDM won one (1) of the twenty (20) Parliamentary Seats in the NWR in 1997, it had invested Candidates to run for Elections in all the Constituencies. These included, Boyo, Bui, Donga/Mantung, Mezam, Menchum, Momo and Ngo-Ketunjia (Cameroon Tribune, 1997: 2-3). Interestingly, in some of the Constituencies, the same lists that were invested during the 1992 legislative elections were simply “re-invested”. This was the case with Ntoi Joseph Ekombo Kay, Tamfu Samuel Ngeh, Talla Kwalar, Voh Anderson B.K. for Donga/Mantung, Waingeh Albert Ndim (who in 1992 was under the Menchum Constituency) was re-invested for the Boyo Constituency and Echobei Jethro for Momo also bounced back. The “investing” and “re-investing” of the same Candidates in different elections by the CPDM and the SDF in the NWR had become a tradition that was to endure for years to come. This also became a factor that hindered the entrance of new faces particularly the youths into parliamentary politics.

The 2002 Legislative Elections (Seventh Legislative Period)

In the June 30, 2002 Legislative Elections in the NWR, the CPDM and the SDF filed in and won Seats in the different Constituencies. The SDF Party grabbed the Parliamentary Seats of Mezam, Boyo, Bui, Donga/Mantung, Momo and Ngo-Ketunjia North. The respective Candidates were, Mezam, Ngwasiri C.N. (53), Tasi Ntang Lucas (58) and Neba Aaron (46) were elected. In Boyo Division, Paulinus Jua (43) and Bangsi Emmanuel were invested while in Bui, Benadzem Joseph Lukong (50), Nsanyuy Audu (37), Fai Mbu Yang Daniel and Ngoran Lawrence (60) emerged as the Members of Parliament. Donga/Mantung saw the emergence of Awudu Cyprian Mbaya (50), Tansah Jones Ndzi (44), Bungong Jinka Jonathan (63) and Chemo Sama Eyikeshi (48) as MPs. Elections in Momo Division produced Mbah Ndam Joseph Njang (47), Fonso Peter Cho (65) and Anyangwe A. Christopher as the MPs while Ngo-Ketunjia North saw the election of Yoyo Momhmbankah Emmanuel (51) as the SDF MP. On the other hand, the CPDM ruling party won the Parliamentary Seats of Menchum and Ngo-Ketunjia South. These positions were filled by Nji Fidelis Muh Ziah (59) and Chuo Cyprian Akwo and in Ngo-Ketunjia South, Fon Doh Gah Gwanyin III (48) was the party’s flag bearer for Parliament. (Cameroon Tribune, 2002: 35-62; Ecumenical Service for Peace Reports, 2003).

Once again, the political parties “re-invested” some of their Candidates in the Elections as can be seen in the various Divisions and Constituencies. In the Mezam Constituency on the SDF list, Tasi Ntang Lucas bounced back. The SDF list in Boyo saw Toh Paulinus resurfacing while the CPDM list for Donga/Mantung saw the re-occurrence of Ntoi Joseph Ekombo Kay while the SDF list virtually remained the same as that of the 1997 Elections. Same was the case with the Menchum CPDM list where Nji Fidelis Muh Ziah and Chuo Cyprain Akwo remained untouched while on the SDF list, Aka Amuam Joseph came back. In Momo, the SDF list saw two bigwigs of the party maintained, these were, Mbah Ndam Joseph Njang and Fonso Peter Chuo while the CPDM list saw the re-appearance of Tumasang Napoleon. In Ngo-Ketunjia, both the SDF and the CPDM maintained their respective Candidates including, Yoyo Momhmbankah Emmanuel and Fon Doh Gah Gwanyin III.

The 2007 Legislative Elections (Eighth Legislative Period)

The Legislative Elections of 2007 took place on the July 22. These Elections like the previous were twinned with the Municipal Elections. (MINAT-D, 2008: 47-62). Those who were invested and/or emerged victorious during these Elections in both the SDF and CPDM lists in the NWR included Njong Evaristus Ndim (45) and Mubun Ntam James (57) for Boyo Division, Benadzem Joseph Lukong (55) for Bui Center and Ngoran Lawrence (65) for Bui West on the SDF list. In Donga/Mantung, Awudu Cyprian Mbaya (55) and Ngala Esther grabbed the SDF position for Donga/Mantung Center while in Mezam, Fobi Nchinda Simon (60), Bujung Bede James (57) and Paul Nji Tumasang won on the SDF list in Mezam Center, North and South respectively. In Momo East, Mbah Ndam Joseph Njang (52) and Fonso Peter Cho (70) won SDF list. The CPDM on the other hand won the Bui West and South Constituencies where it had invested Kwei Andrew Mngo and Wirngo Bouba Kibo respectively. The party also took the Donga/Mantung East with Genesis Mbucksek (47) and West with Fuh Calistus Gentry (44) as its Representatives. In Menchum North and South, Nji Fidelis Muh Ziah (64) and Wallang Richard Ebua (35) emerged victorious on the CPDM list while Enwe Francis (36) grabbed the Momo South Seat on the CPDM platform. Ngo-Ketunjia North and South were won by Njingum Musa Mbutoh and Banmi Emmanuel Dingha (39) all of the CPDM party. (MINAT-D, 2008: 47-67).

The 2007 Parliamentary Elections still showed a re-occurrence of some names on both the SDF and the CPDM tickets in the different Constituencies. In Bui, Benadzem Joseph Lukong

and Ngoran Lawrence of the SDF list re-surfaced. In Donga/Mantung, Awudu Cyprian Mbaya of the SDF and Genesis Mbucksek of the CPDM list in Donga/Mantung East came back. Meanwhile Menchum, Nji Fidelis Muh Ziah came back on the CPDM list for Menchum North. The SDF list consisting of Mbah Ndam Joseph Njang and Fonso Peter Cho in Momo was re-invested this time around in the Momo East Constituency.³ However, some relatively young members were elected including Wallang Richard (35), Enwe Francis (36) and Banmi Emmanuel (39).

The 2013 Legislative Elections (Ninth Legislative Period)

It should be noted that, the September 30, 2013 twin Elections were belated. This is because during an Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly on May 4, 2013, Cameroon's parliamentarians voted for their term to be extended to July 21, 2013. This was the third time that the National Assembly's five-year term was been extended. The term officially ended in August 2012 and was extended by six months (until February 2013), then by three months (until May 2013), followed by another two months which lasted until July 21, 2013 (Rahman and Pestaina, 2013: 4). In like manner in 2012, the five-year mandate of Municipal Councilors, also due to end in August 2012, was extended by one year. The official reason for the extension was the need to overhaul the electoral registers, which was widely perceived as outdated and unrepresentative of the electorate. However, since the registration process could not be completed in time for a vote in July 2012, the mandate of Municipal Councilors was extended to the end of March 2013. Following deferral of both Legislative and Municipal Elections, the President announced on July 2, 2013 that both sets of Elections would be held jointly on September 30, 2013 (*Ibid*). In fact, 2013 was a very decisive year in Cameroon as far as the Legislature was concerned. This was because triple elections were organized in the Country that year. These included, the Senatorial Elections of April 14, 2013 (holding for the first time ever in the history of the Country), and the twin Legislative and Municipal Elections of September 30, 2013. During this year's Elections also, the new Electoral Code went in to force.

³ It has been noted that the Constituencies or its names have been changing in almost all the legislative elections. This can be explained by the fact that, though a division constitutes an electoral constituency with one or more seats to be filled, however, some electoral constituencies are delimited by presidential decree on specific grounds. As such, a decree by the President of the Republic fixes the number of members representing each constituency. See Section 149 of the *Electoral Code* of April 2012, p. 44.

The new Electoral Code stipulated certain changes and compelled the various political parties vying for Seats in the National Assembly to respect.⁴ The 2013 Elections in the Country also saw the introduction of Biometrics in the electoral process from registration of voters to compilation of results. These changes undoubtedly affected the outcome of the results in the NWR. The SDF and the CPDM still competed for and grabbed Seats in the NWR during these Elections. As far as the SDF Party was concerned, it won the two seats in Boyo where Njong Evaristus (51) and Wainanchi Negtoh Honorine emerged winners. In Bui, Benadzem Joseph Lukong (61) and Mbiybe Caroline won the two Seats in Bui Center Constituency while Wirba Joseph Mbidzenyuy grabbed the Bui South Seat on the SDF Platform. In Donga/mantung Division, Awudu Cyprian Mbaya (61) and Ngala Esther Ntala won the Donga/Mantung Center Constituency for the SDF party while in Menchum North, Ndong Larry Hills emerged victorious. The SDF also grabbed all the three seats in the Mezam Center, North and South represented by Fobi Nchinda Simon (66), Fusi Naamukong and Paul Nji Tumasang respectively while in Momo East, Mbah Ndam Joseph Njang (58) and Edena Enih Mbah won for the SDF. Similarly, the CPDM's Kwei Andrew Mngo won in Bui West while Genesis Mbucksek (53) and Abe Michael Ndra won in Donga/Mantung East and West respectively. Wallang Richard Ebua (41) grabbed the Menchum South Seat for the CPDM while Enwe Francis Abi (42) was CPDM MP for Momo West. Finally, the CPDM also won in the Ngo-Ketunjia North and South Constituencies been represented by Njingum Musa Mbutoh and Banmi Emmanuel Dingha (45) respectively. (Cameroon Tribune, 2013: 13).

Despite the innovations introduced by the new Electoral Code, the SDF and the CPDM still succeeded to re-invest some of the candidates they had been investing over the years. The forgoing facts and figures attest to this assertion. In the Boyo Constituency, Njong Evaristus of the SDF was re-invested while in Bui, Benadzem Joseph Lukong re-surfaced on the same list. In Donga/Mantung, Awudu Cyprian Mbaya and Ngala Esther remained unchanged while Genesis Mbucksek was maintained on the CPDM list. In Menchum, Wallang Richard Ebua of the CPDM was untouched and in Mezam, Fobi Nchinda Simon and Paul Nji Tumasang of the SDF bounced

⁴ Some of the changes as spelt out in Sections 151 and 152 included "Each list shall take into consideration the various sociological components of the constituency concerned. It shall also take into consideration gender aspects. Members of Parliament shall be elected through a mixed single round ballot, comprising a majority system and a proportional representation system. However, in constituencies having only one seat, there shall be a majority uninominal voting for a single candidate". Sections 151 and 152 of *the Electoral Code*, 13th April, 2012. pp. 45-46.

back. In Momo, Mbah Ndam Joseph of the SDF and Enwe Francis of the CPDM were the “untouchables” while in Ngo-Ketunjia, Njingum Musa Mbutoh and Banmi Emmanuel Dingha re-emerged after the difficult investiture procedures.

From these analyses, it is clear that as time unfolded, the more difficult it was for the younger generations of politicians to be invested for parliamentary elections on the lists of these parties especially in the NWR. This was because as time passed, the older generations of politicians had their political roots deeply entrenched with “kingdoms” built around them, which almost completely barred the way for the young to enter politics. It was common place in the NWR to easily associate particular names to particular parties and posts in the Parliament because of their re-occurrence and longevity. What was even dangerous, for the future, was that these “political Kings/Chiefs” were not mentoring the younger ones who could take over their positions in future, probably because they had no dreams of ever ceding those positions to anyone. They often worked hard with the complicity of their parties to remain in their positions while the youths watch on and were being comforted with entreaties of “youths are the leaders of tomorrow”. This phenomenon was also visible in the Country’s Senate which was the Upper House of Parliament.

According to its Article 20 (1-4), the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon states unambiguously that;

The Senate shall represent the regional and local authorities. Each region shall be represented in the Senate by 10 (ten) Senators of whom 7 (seven) shall be elected by indirect universal suffrage on a regional basis and 3 (three) appointed by the President of the Republic. Candidates for the post of Senator and personalities appointed to the post of Senator by the President of the Republic must have attained the age of 40 (forty) by the date of the election or appointment. Senators shall serve a term of 5 (five) years (Law No. 96/06 of January 18, 1996).

Following this Constitutional injunction and in keeping with the provisions of Law No.2012/001 of April 19, 2012 relating to the Electoral Code, the Election was organized following the publication of Decree No. 2013/056 of February 27, 2013 convening the Electoral College (Rahman and Pestaina, 2013: 3). After the elections, the CPDM party swept a cross section of the Seats, winning 56 of the 70 Seats contested in the new Upper House of Parliament. The main opposition party, the SDF won 14 Seats in the Senate. On May 8, 2013, President Biya, appointed Cameroon's remaining 30 (thirty) Senators paving the way for the Upper House's first

Session, which held on May 14, 2013. His appointments included 9 (nine) former Ministers, 10 (ten) Traditional Rulers and 3 (three) Women. Twenty-six of the appointed Senators were widely perceived to be associated with the ruling party (*Ibid*).⁵

The Senate, even more than the National Assembly exhibited greater evidence of generational boundaries particularly in the NWR. The region is represented by 10 (ten) senators all of whom are members of the CPDM party, appointed and elected. The SDF ran for the 7 (seven) elected seats for the NWR and failed. Therefore the Candidates that represented the NWR in the Senate included, Achidi Achu Simon (79), Wallang David Akwo, Dinga Ignatius, Mme Eno Lafon Emma Vergele, Wanlo Chiamua John, Awanga Zacharie, Njikong Stephen (68) were elected while those appointed included, Fon Doh Ganyonga III, Nkwain Francis (82) and Fon Teche Njei II. Most of these Senators were former Ministers who had served for so long and had been on retirements for as long as five years and more. Their ages ranged from 55 to 85. In fact during this Election, the CPDM list in the NWR was headed by Simon Achidi Achu (79). Some observers doubted if the CPDM would succeed because of the age of the list Leader whom many wondered if he could speak or tour the regions for campaigns as captured in this statement;

How can an old man who does not even know how to speak and whose health is failing; in fact, who recently suffered a stroke which affected his speech, think he can compete with a vibrant sweet-talking personality like Fru Ndi? (Nghah, 2013).

It should be mentioned that while Simon Achidi Achu, Head of the CPDM list in the NWR was almost 80 at the time of Elections, his main political rival, Ni John Fru Ndi, Leader of the SDF list was 73. Cameroon's Upper House of Parliament was thus a showcase of generational boundaries more than any other institution in the Country. Youths virtually had no place in this institution. Generally, the game of politics in the NWR had for long been monopolized by the older generation of politicians leaving the youths with a feeling of neglect and marginalization. However, one thing that hindered the youths of the NWR from being invested by the SDF and the CPDM was the thorny, complicated and nebulous question of investiture in these parties which largely ran along ethnic, family and generational lines.

Mechanisms of Investiture within the SDF and CPDM parties

⁵ Following the appointments on May 8, Mr. Marcel Niat Njifenji, (80 years old), one of the appointed Senators from the West Region was elected President of the House.

As discussed earlier, the mechanism of investiture within the SDF and the CPDM parties was very complicated for an ordinary young Cameroonian to understand let alone being favored by it. As far as the SDF party was concerned, it usually got Candidates for different Parliamentary and Municipal Elections through primaries. The primaries gave the grass root militants of the party the opportunity to choose those they would like to represent them in Parliament. However, there was the National Investiture Committee⁶ within the party that scrutinized the Candidates retained after the primaries have been organized at the level of the different Electoral Districts. According to Section 6(a) of the Internal Rules and Regulations of the SDF party,

A Constituency shall form one single Electoral District for the purpose of nominating Candidates for elections into the National Assembly. Aspirants seeking nomination shall together with their respective Alternates submit themselves to the Electoral District Conference specially convened for that purpose. The Aspirant together with Alternate who obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast shall be considered duly nominated. The composition of the Electoral District Conference shall be in accordance with the provisions of Section 9(b) of the Constitution.⁷

However, despite these provisions, the party's investiture processes usually raised a lot of controversies and dissents. This was because some militants would always have their primaries victories invalidated by the National Investiture Committee in favor of those that were specially chosen by the Chairman and they were usually of the older generation. In this way, the party's nominations for parliamentary elections continued to run along generational lines.

A case in point where the masses nursed and manifested grievances due to the invalidation of their primaries was in the Boyo and Mbiame Constituencies during the September, 2013 twin Elections. According to the *Cameroon Journal*, Ntam James, won the primaries in Boyo but was dropped in favor of Njong Evaristus (*Cameroon Journal*, 2013) who was the Chairman's favorite because he doubled as the Provincial Chairman of the party in the

⁶ According to Article 11:5(M) of the Constitution of the SDF, The National Advisory Council shall be the National Investiture Committee of the Party. Files of aspirants seeking investiture for elections and/or nomination shall be presented and defended by the respective Regional Chairpersons. The Constitution of the SDF was adopted in meeting in Bamenda on the 3rd day of February, 1991 and amended by the Conventions of Bafoussam (1993), Buea (1996), Yaoundé (1999), Bamenda (2001, 2006 and 2012).

⁷ This Section of the Internal Rules of the party was adopted during a Convention that held in Bamenda from the 11th to 14th of October, 2012.

North West.⁸ This situation caused a lot of outcries and groaning within the party and others even threatened mass resignations to join the CPDM. According to the *Cameroon Journal*, Fru Ndi's (Chairman) intervention to salvage the situation was futile as the people simply told him to "take back his SDF to Bamenda if a Fundong man is not good enough to be a parliamentarian". (*Ibid*). In another expression of grievance, a Boyo SDF National Executive Committee (NEC) member, speaking on condition of anonymity questioned;

If Fru Ndi wants to sacrifice the SDF in Boyo to salvage Njong, then let us know so we can contribute our efforts in killing the party, so we see where Njong will remain to be a Parliamentarian. What has Njong given Fru Ndi that he thinks he is indispensable to the SDF? (*Ibid*).

In Nkum/Mbiame Constituency, a similar situation arose. As reported by the *Cameroon Journal*,

Militants of Nkum/Mbiame Constituency in Bui Division are reported to have stormed Fru Ndi's Ntarinkon Residence Monday, July 15, with placards and peace plants chanting songs in which they asked Fru Ndi to respect the will of the grassroots as a show of democracy. Placards were littered around his residence with messages that read; The SDF is a social anti-democratic party, we want Madam Ruth Ngando, etc. (*Ibid*).

Other militants cried out "if the party's Investiture Committee is so strong that it has powers to overturn results from the grassroots, why then go for primaries? They should have just opted for selection like the CPDM did". (*Ibid*). Such complicated investiture procedures within the SDF invariably deterred ambitious youth from participating in Parliamentary Politics. The situation was more or less the same with the CPDM party.

Within the CPDM Investiture for Parliamentary and Municipal Elections had always been an opportunity or forum for positioning family members and friends (Eyene, 2014: 4). This has left the younger generation with nothing but regrets such as expressed by Vera Nyuy-yuver;

As a youth, I don't think the CPDM is a good nursery for future politicians [...]. How can you be nursed for future politics when you will not be given the opportunity in the first place? The party is dominated by a few male elites up there who will do everything to remain in their positions or cede them only to their family members and progenies. When I see those youths that are suffering in the so-called youth wing of the party, I just pity them (Nyuy-yuver, 2014).

⁸ It should be mentioned that since the transformation from Provinces to the Regions took place in 2008, the SDF has maintained the appellation "province" because according to them, the transformation was not followed by the expected administrative, constitutional and political changes that go with Regions.

Furthermore, a Cameroonian civil servant at the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, Yaoundé, speaking to us on condition of anonymity lamented the issue of investiture within the CPDM party vis-à-vis the marginalization of the youths in these words;

For a youth to be invested for the parliamentary elections is as difficult as being appointed to a public office. It is the same cycle. People leave the Ministries to the National Assembly and then to the Senate while cumulating other positions. What happens in the Parliament is just a reflection of what happens in the government since the CPDM is the ruling party. It is dominated by the old at all levels. There is no hope for the youths under the CPDM-led government in Cameroon. (Anonymous, 2014).

This was clearly the basis of generational boundaries within the CPDM party as far as investiture for parliamentary/legislative elections were concerned. The youths were thus blocked on every side by the older politicians within the CPDM from pursuing their political ambitions. This situation was particularly serious in the NWR which was usually the theater of heated politics especially during times of elections.

In fact, the SDF and the CPDM parties were so similar in their investiture mechanisms that some political observers challenged the SDF Party Chairman to also work on improving his image and that of the party if it must regain its pristine position in the 1990s. This is captured in an online News Magazine, *Pan African Visions* in the following words;

Just as Biya is challenged to beef up his legacy, Chairman Fru Ndi must be urged to work on his. After providing courageous leadership in the early 90s, the Chairman must ensure that the party gets back on track with sound democratic principles, and a potential to lead Cameroon better than the CPDM has.

As a matter of fact, it remained that within the SDF and the CPDM parties, the question of investiture favored largely particular names and barred the way for new entrants and the youths. The tight nature of investiture within these parties was a hindrance to the young people's efforts to get involved in politics in the region. (Neba, 2014). Within the NWR therefore, and as far as the SDF and the CPDM parties were concerned, investiture was just a euphemism for selection. This selection largely disfavored a cross section of the population because the people's choices were usually sacrificed on the altar of the Chairman's wish. More specifically, the selection of Candidates in these parties for parliamentary/legislative elections was a mere "recycling" of names of former parliamentarians and ministers and/or former high profile personalities in

government and faithful acolytes of the party leaders. This made it more and more difficult for the youths and new players to enter the game of politics.

Constitutional bases for youth marginalization

According Article 20 (3) to the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon, “Candidates for the post of Senators and personalities appointed to the post of Senator by President of the Republic must have attained the age of 40 (forty) by the date of the Election or Appointment” (Law No. 96/06 of January 18, 1996). This provision is corroborated by Section 220 of the Electoral Code of Cameroon.⁹ These constitutional provisions formed the basis for generational boundaries in the Legislative arm of the government. This was because, according to Akoson, setting the age floor for Senators (elected and appointed) at forty (40) violates International Law to which Cameroon adhered and duly ratified as spelt out in the African Youth Charter. (Akoson, 2013: 4). In fact, Senate effectively side steps a huge segment of the youths. At 23 (twenty-three), one is eligible age-wise to become Member of National Assembly. Conversely, one must have turned 40 to become a Senator (*Ibid*). This effectively means that the Constitution barred the way for youths to become Senators in Cameroon. That is why the Senate remains a “gerontocratic” institution with names of former ministers in their sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties (Yembe, 2014).

Similarly, Law No. 2012/001, relating to the election of Members of the National Assembly states that eligibility for Parliamentary Election is reserved to,

any Cameroonian Citizen of either sex, who enjoys the right to vote and is entered on the electoral register, is aged 23 (twenty-three) years at the date of elections and can read and write either English or French can be nominated as candidate for elections to the National Assembly (Electoral Code, 2012).

Section 166 of the same Law stipulates that “the Substantive Candidate and his Alternate shall both pay a deposit into the State Treasury in the amount of 1,000,000 (one-million) CFA Francs according to the form and terms of Section 124(2) of this Law”.¹⁰ (*Ibid*). Therefore, while the

⁹ This is the Law that governs all elections in the Country. It was deliberated and adopted by the National Assembly during the First Extraordinary Session of the 8th (eight) Legislative period held in Yaoundé on Friday, 13th April, 2012.

¹⁰ It may be worthy of note here that, this term of the Law adopted by National Assembly in April 2012 initially put the deposit at 3,000,000 (three million)Francs CFA but was revised on 19th December, 2012, following the

age floor is conducive and favors the target age group, the financial obligation is largely unfavorable for many youths in the country. In actual fact, with the current economic situation of the country, many Cameroonian youths especially of the NWR cannot afford to raise 1,000,000 (one-million) CFA Francs even in years.¹¹ This automatically and naturally renders them ineligible for the competition to the National Assembly. The youngest Members of the National Assembly are in their 40s (forties) (Mafum, 2014).

Whether these clauses were consciously or unconsciously introduced into the Country's Constitution and the Electoral Code, what was clear was that, they contributed in widening the already existing generational gap in the Country's Parliament. It followed, invariably, that only those who would have amassed a lot of wealth from many years of service in a particular office could afford to raise the amount required for deposit. Celestine Atanga agrees that the greatest challenge they face as young people was the fact that many youths in their Party, the SDF could not afford the non-refundable deposit required of them to vie for parliamentary positions (Atanga, 2014). From this background, Charles Ateba Eyene¹² puts the blames squarely on the doorsteps of poor governance systems in the Country. He argues that "All decisions are guided by influence-peddling, nepotism, magic, sects, para-normality etc". In such situations, the youths found it difficult to be inserted in the political system. This was because appointments or investiture for Parliamentary Elections ran along generational and family lines such that those appointed or invested for elections in both the SDF and the CPDM were the contemporaries or close relations of the leaders in place. In this submission, Robert Anyangwe admits that;

Be it within the SDF or the CPDM, investiture/nominations for Elections must follow the wishes of the party Chairpersons. Interestingly, the leaders of these parties are in their 70s and 80s. It follows that, they can only accept to invest or appoint those of that age group. This may not necessarily be out of bad faith but just because they are those they understand better and have worked with for many years. [...] of course, you don't expect the Chairman, Ni John Fru Ndi or President Paul Biya to think that the youths can do better...even if they can, he

President's call for its revision. Accordingly, the amount required for deposit was reduced to 1000 000 (one-million) Francs CFA.

¹¹ It should be mentioned here that the NWR is largely dependent on peasant Agriculture. The Region lacks industries and tertiary activities which makes the economic situation very difficult for the ordinary youth to survive. Many youths of the region have migrated to other towns of the country especially Douala, Yaoundé and Limbe in search of a means of livelihood.

¹² Charles Ateba Eyene was himself a Central Committee member of the CPDM party from the South Region of the Country. He submitted his candidacy for the Senatorial Elections but it was rejected by the investiture committee.

needs to be convinced. They would rather prefer their contemporaries that they master better to work with. (Anyangwe, 2014)

Arguing in support of the absence of the youths from Parliamentary Politics within the SDF and the CPDM parties in the NWR, Lucas Azouh rather responds with these rhetorical questions;

Is it only in the NWR that youths are absent from politics? Is it only in parliamentary elections that youths are absent? Between someone who came to the house first and the other that came in later, who knows the house better? These questions constitute part of the answer to your questions. (Azuoh, 2014).

Azouh's argument seems to justify the current situation of the old generation's dominance of politics in the country. However, this paper advocates the need for generations to integrate especially as far as parliamentary politics is concerned. Within the CPDM and the SDF parties in the NWR, there was no Framework to support youths involvement in politics especially elections into the Parliament. The absence of any Framework meant there was no obligation within these parties to consciously commit to involve youths in active political participation and representation. (Neba, 2014). Unlike the case with the women where these parties were compelled by the Electoral Code of 2012 to ensure the respect of a quota for women, no such commitment was made with regards to the youths. There were equally no strong Youth Advocacy Programs for their active participation in parliamentary politics in the region. In cases where they existed, their influence was greatly limited.¹³ These factors mystified politics to the youths who were made to think that only the old could succeed in politics. Parliamentary Politics almost entirely became the monopoly of the old. The situation created a phenomenon of people "retiring into politics" (Ndoh, 2014). Investiture mechanisms and constitutional constraints had greatly limited youth active participation in Parliamentary discourse especially on the SDF and CPDM platforms in the NWR of Cameroon. This phenomenon had far reaching attendant repercussions on the Country.

Implications of Youth Marginalization in Parliamentary Politics

¹³ It should be noted that there exist advocacy programs for the promotion of women's active involvement in politics in the NWR. A case in point is the COMINSUD which works for the promotion of Women's involvement and representation in politics in the Region.

The attendant repercussions of generational boundaries are legion and far reaching. It posed a threat to peace, development and democracy. Charles Ateba Eyene captures this view when he says;

There is a serious threat to peace in the country: gerontocracy. Cameroon resembles a battlefield where all the youths are dead and only old people remain. The youths are angry and this creates hatred for the old people....it is necessary for generations to be integrated [...]. This is what caused war in Egypt. Egyptians were tired of seeing the same faces coming back over and over. When the youths are angry in this country, all these people will run away. Is this the time? I do not know. But people need to know that the youths are not happy, intimidation is over. All dictatorship will fall. No dictatorship can resist. (Eyene, 2013).

This vividly summarized the effects of generational boundaries in Cameroon. Re-echoing this view, Kwalar Rene Ali, The National President of the Cameroon Baptist Convention Youth Fellowship (CBCYF) in an address during the National Youth Camp held in Ndu from June 28 to the July 2, 2014 avers that;

Among the challenges facing us the youths in Cameroon today is generational gap; the difference between the older and the younger generations which has created a subtle enmity between both groups. The old do not demonstrate enough patience in understanding the youths while the youths consider the old as enemies to their envisaged plans in life. The gap must be bridged and a forum for understanding established so the youths will be able to gain from the wealth of experience the old people have to offer. (Kwalar, 2014).

The peace of the Country was thus at stake due to the “subtle enmity” that existed between the youth and the older generation. A similar situation in the African Continent resulted in what became known as the “Arab Spring”. It was the lack of freedoms, high rates of unemployment and dictatorship of the “old regimes” that caused general outbreak of revolutions in North Africa in 2010/2011. Ban Ki Moon, addressing African countries in late May 2011, from this background reiterated; “[...] led young people to take to the streets demanding change and fulfillment of their legitimate aspirations for better lives” (Takor, 2011: 9-11; Siegle, 2011).

Another imposing outcome of the generational gap is the development of apathy for schools among the youth which has resulted to deviant behaviors among people of this age group. According to Henry Kah Jick youths out of frustration;

[...] no longer love schooling [...], they leave the house in the morning for school in uniforms but have other dresses in their bags that they put on, on the way to

school-with very short skirts and trousers hanging midway their buttocks in the name of fashion. They then go to the Cyber Cafes where they search the internet “for husbands and friends”. They go to video clubs and Gambling houses instead of going to school. This is the generation that will take over the future of Cameroon. (Jick, 2011: 281).

This frustration-created irresponsible behavior of the younger generation was not healthy for the Country’s stability and growth. Some of the youths who were qualified by virtue of education and training to take up public offices resorted to rough and irresponsible lifestyles such as smoking, drinking, burglary, gambling, and other social ills since they were not given the chance to show their worth. (Yembe, 2014). As a matter of fact, the gulfing generational gap in parliamentary politics removed the motivation for studies among the youth.

Generational boundaries in parliamentary politics have also robbed the country of invaluable potentials that could be harnessed for socio-economic and political development. These potentials were found in the youths. This group constituted the backbone of the economic development of the country. The youths also formed a vital economic force which needed to be developed and effectively used for the development of the NWR and the Country at large. Besides, generational boundaries resulted in widespread voter apathy especially among the women and the youths.¹⁴ Even after the putting in place of such measures like free establishment of the National Identity Cards to facilitate registration on the voter rows, many youths remained largely feet-dragging as far as the elections were concerned. Some who duly registered to vote found no reason voting because according to them, their age group was not represented in administration or invested for parliamentary elections by the parties concerned. Thus staying out of voting was a way of sanctioning the “old regime” that has no retirement age.¹⁵ Logically speaking, many youths could advance even more of such reasons because their age brackets were largely absent from the investiture lists of the SDF and CPDM in the NWR during the past legislative and parliamentary elections.

Conclusion

¹⁴ This view is embodied in a song by a Cameroonian named Awilo, entitled *Elections 2011* sung in 2011. He argued that, youths were not involved in the country’s electoral process due to frustration created by the old generation’s refusal to cede power to them.

¹⁵ This view was reflected by a group of young people in Bamenda in an informal discussion with the author as we watched people scrambling to collect their voter Cards from an ELECAM agency in Bamenda.

The paper set out to unveil the manifest reality of the absence of youth on the SDF and CPDM parliamentary lists as testified by the 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007 and 2013 parliamentary elections. A study of these lists demonstrated that since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon, the SDF and the CPDM parties repeatedly invested particular candidates for parliamentary elections in the NWR of the Country. This practice was informed by their discriminatory investitures and constitutional bases. This relegated the youth of the region to the background as far as parliamentary activities were concerned. This situation imposed outcomes that were antithetic to peace, democracy and development in the NWR and the Country at large.

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