



In public perception, Cameroon is characterized by two major conflicts: the separatist war of secession and the fight against Boko Haram.



However, the PEACEption study shows that all ten regions are affected by deep-rooted conflicts: farmer-grazer conflicts, inter-tribal and inter-community conflicts, conflict over the exploitation of water, mineral deposits and forest reserves, conflicts over political power and participation.



If methods of conflict transformation other than repression and military operations are not found, these prevailing conflicts threaten to merge into a scenario that could have drastic consequences for Cameroon and the entire Central African region, but also beyond.

PEACEPTIONS

SEEKING PEACE IN A CONTEXT OF MULTIPLE WARS

Cameroon

Sabine Kurtenbach, Susan Bamuh Aparu, Nina Netzer

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Cameroon experiences a variety of armed conflicts, in a highly centralised and authoritarian political system with a government downplaying violence and conflicts. Armed conflict is related to the specific patterns of state formation such as porous borders in the North and the denial of minority rights to the anglophone population.

Notions of peace are related to personal security, tranquillity, and respect. Context sensitive peace-building strategies should include religious and traditional authorities, women groups, and civil society organisations as important entry points. However, the context of an authoritarian regime either coopting or repressing these actors, limits and threatens these possibilities.

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1

INTRODUCTION – THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH OF PEACEPTIONS

The PEACEption project is a collaborative and participatory project between the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Berlin, various national FES offices and many local researchers and partners. The overall aim is to identify and analyse who peace is understood perceived by different actors and the general population in the six countries participating in the study (Colombia, Venezuela, Cameroon, the Philippines, Tunisia and South Sudan).

It was Willy Brandt who coined the famous saying, *»Peace is not everything, but without peace everything is nothing«*. Many political sermons, national and international policy documents postulate »peace« as a goal. This is nothing new; it permeates time and space. However, there are differences in the underlying definitions and concepts of peace, as well as in the answers to the question of how to achieve and maintain peace. Understandings of peace and related goals differ between external and internal actors at the international, national and local levels, as well as between different population groups. Understanding these differences is key to developing context-specific strategies for sustainable peacebuilding.

The project follows a common methodology, using the same key concepts to set the necessary scientific standards to allow comparability of country studies.

The core of the project is to provide a conceptual framework within which different conceptions of peace can be highlighted and their differences analysed in order to formulate concrete proposals for peacebuilding. The concept of peace is based on three basic functions that any society must accomplish across time and space and across historical and cultural boundaries: security, i.e. physical integrity; participation, i.e. individual and collective human rights; and a set of norms and values that enable constructive conflict transformation. However, the specific forms these three pillars take vary, depending on historical and cultural legacies as well as political and economic developments, among other factors. From this perspective, peacebuilding is a non-linear and multi-scalar process, shaped by local, national and international developments and dynamics and a variety of actors.

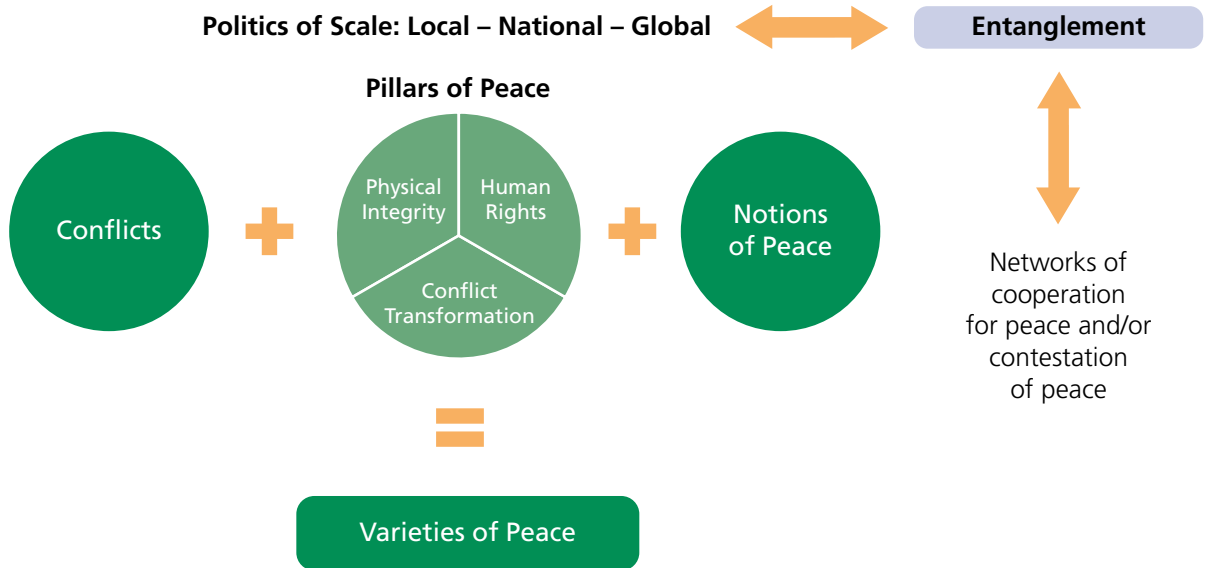
The case studies use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. As a first step, the key conflicts (and their actors) are analysed at different levels (Birke Daniels and Kurtenbach 2021; López Caldera and Kurtenbach 2023). Qualitative and quantitative data on the three pillars of peace make it possible to identify deficits but also provide opportunities for peacebuilding. Quantitative data is drawn from international sources to make results comparable across case studies, with available national and subnational data used to complement and deepen the analysis. Qualitative case studies from local contexts of varying degrees of peacefulness provide nuanced information on specific conflicts, actors and contexts. The picture is rounded off by a survey of the prevailing notions of what peace means to different groups of actors (see Figure 1). The survey serves as a baseline for the needs and preferences of the respective society.

The project's overarching aims are thus

1. to understand peace by analysing the underlying conflicts and peace concepts of different actors and levels within and between societies on the basis of a consistent framework;
2. to assess peace by comparing the status of the three main pillars of peace at the national, subnational and transnational levels and their interconnections;
3. to promote peace by developing policy recommendations that can bridge different meanings and conceptions of peace in the cases analysed and more generally for the FES and other actors.

In addition to the policy level, the results of the project can also be useful for the strategic planning of the FES offices involved. They help to analyse the interrelationships and trade-offs between different areas of FES work at the country level and the development of peace as an overarching goal.

Figure 1:
The PEACEptions methodology



Source: Kurtenbach (2021: 345).

2

THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT IN CAMEROON¹

Located at the crossroads of West and Central Africa, Cameroon is one of the most diverse and resource-rich countries in Africa. With a population of over 25 million (2009 census), it is home to 250 ethnic groups and has French and English as its official languages (Grimes 1996:185–215). Cameroon's political development is closely linked to its complex colonial history. First a German colony (1884–1916), then divided between France and Britain by the League of Nations, Cameroon gained independence from France in 1960 and from Britain in 1961. The two regions under British control were able to vote to join either Nigeria or the former French colony. Independence was not on the ballot, and with the promise of certain rights under a federal constitution, the English-speaking territories joined the Republic of Cameroon. In 1972, the federal constitution was replaced by a unitarian constitution. By 1966, Cameroon had become an authoritarian one-party state characterised by high levels of state repression and police violence. In 1982, Paul Biya – the former prime minister of President Ahidjo – took power and has been president ever since, though not unchallenged. In 1984, a failed coup attempted to remove President Biya from power. Between 1986 and the early 1990s, a severe economic crisis led to increased poverty, unemployment, social crisis and security challenges, characterised by civil disobedience and ghost town operations designed to ruin the economy and drive Mr Biya from power. There were calls for a national conference to resolve the crisis in the country. The result was multi-party elections (1992), after which Mr Biya remained in power, although his party fell short of an absolute majority, and a revision of the country's constitution in 1996.

The preamble to the 1996 constitution emphasises the country's linguistic and cultural unity in diversity, notes that its natural resources are to be used to improve the lives of the Cameroonian people, and states that the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter are to be upheld. The preamble also echoes the human rights values found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. However, there is a gap between words and deeds. Political tensions have persisted ever since. Over the

past decade, Cameroon has experienced various manifestations of violence and war, resulting in thousands of deaths, massive displacement and gross human rights violations. Perpetrators of violence include government defence forces and non-state armed actors.

Cameroon is a country of great variation and local diversity in terms of conflicts, levels of violence, human rights guarantees and the existence of formal and informal institutions for constructive conflict transformation. This complexity and diversity were the focus of the selection of the local case studies:

- Intensity of conflict before and at the time of the interviews and surveys: level of violence, human rights violations and presence of armed actors (government forces, non-state armed groups (NSAGs)).
- Causes, manifestations, consequences and dynamics of conflicts: political, social, economic and ethnic.
- Local institutions of conflict transformation: presence of the central state, community action, Civil Society Organisation (CSO) action, presence of peace initiatives.

The specific context of peacebuilding in Cameroon is thus characterised by a multitude of violent conflicts, a highly centralised and authoritarian political system that leaves little room for manoeuvre for reform-oriented actors and peacebuilding, and a government that tries to play down violence and conflicts. The following section analyses the three main lines of conflict that shape the violent landscape.

¹ This report draws heavily on the qualitative and quantitative reports of the Heritage Higher Institute of Peace and Development Studies and the quantitative report on the survey by the National Institute of Statistics. Over 500 qualitative interviews and focus groups were conducted in all regions of the country to complement the survey results.

3

MAIN LINES OF CONFLICT

Violent conflict has spread along two main lines over the past decade, both of which are linked to specific patterns of state formation. First, the porous borders in the Far North and the border region with the Central African Republic facilitate the entry of NSAGs such as Nigeria's Boko Haram, which seeks to establish a caliphate against Western education and practices. While it started in Nigeria, it has spread significantly to other countries and, since 2012, increasingly to Cameroon. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies² notes that in 2020 Boko Haram was more active in Cameroon than in Nigeria, looting, attacking and forcibly recruiting people. Also related to the transnational spillover is the high number of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) to the east, which according to an UNHCR briefing note of 15 December 2022³ numbered over 355,000, leading to socio-economic pressures due to limited access to resources, land and water, and recurrent conflicts between farmers and herders in the affected areas. Both conflicts are transnational and increasingly affect the Cameroonian population.

The most prominent internal conflict in Cameroon is over the borders and political system established after independence – the so-called Anglophone crisis in the North-West and South-West, where the English-speaking regions that were part of the British colony are seeking secession. The broken promise of a federal state and the increasing centralisation of power and control over resources in the capital and in the person of the president have fuelled resistance. In 2016, lawyers, students and teachers protested against the marginalisation of Anglophone institutions. The government responded to the protests with repressive measures at first, and later with conciliatory gestures that addressed some of the grievances, but not enough to quell the unrest. The crisis escalated into a full-blown war for the independence of »Ambazonia«.

Thus, the main lines of conflict are related to specific patterns of state formation and political regime, exclusion and marginalisation of specific ethnolinguistic groups, such as the English-speaking population. Other patterns of violence are related to elections, which are neither free nor fair. Beneath and alongside these major conflicts, there are a number of

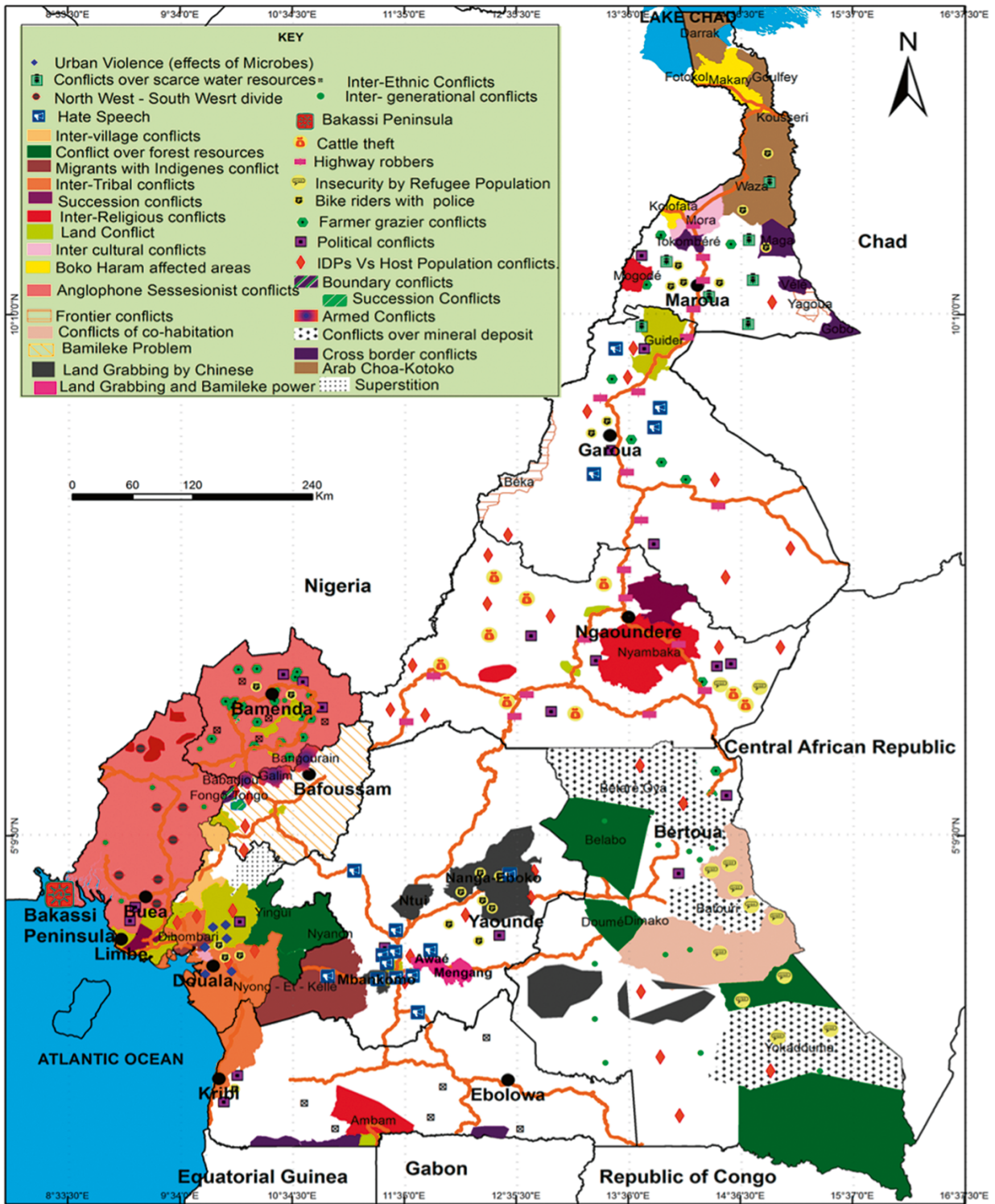
other partially overlapping conflicts with the potential for violent escalation (see map). These relate to land grabbing, land tenure, problems between farmers and herders, conflicts over scarce water resources, crime and urban violence. Some of these conflicts are confined to specific areas of the country. For example, intertribal warfare between the Arab Choa and the Kototos and intercommunity conflicts between the Arab Choa, Mousgoum and Massa in the Far North region. There is the conflict over the exploitation of mineral resources and forest reserves in the East Region. In the Centre and South regions, there are border conflicts between Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, xenophobia and hate speech, etc. (Sangmelima Bulu traders and the Bamouns, social media statements).

Conflicts and violence have serious consequences for the population, such as the deterioration of fragile education and health infrastructures that have been destroyed in conflict areas. In the Far North, North West and South West regions, some young people have not attended school for several years due to Boko Haram and secessionist conflicts. Even where schools do exist, there is a high crime rate due to the use of drugs and small arms by pupils, some of whom have killed their teachers and classmates. Many victims, especially young people, are internally displaced in search of work, education and a livelihood. Social challenges have pushed some into prostitution, indecent work and crime. Some government structures and CSO groups are reaching out to the youth, but the support is not sufficient to enable them to make a living. Unemployment remains very high and young people continue to be exposed to many ills that could attract them to terrorism and violent extremism.

² See <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/boko-haram-violence-against-civilians-spiking-in-northern-cameroon/> (last accessed on 2.9.2024).

³ See <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-multi-stakeholder-dialogue-refugees-november-2022> (last accessed on 2.9.2024).

Figure 1:
General Conflict Map of Cameroon



Source: Shape files from the National Institute of Cartography (NIC) and field data. Designed by Dze-Ngwa & Dimla Ernest. Qualitative Report 2022, p. 62

4

THE THREE PILLARS OF PEACE AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Cameroon exhibits great variation and local diversity in terms of conflicts, levels of violence, guarantees of human rights and the existence of formal and informal institutions for the constructive transformation of conflicts. This section presents the main findings of our analysis of the three pillars of peace.

4.1 PHYSICAL INTEGRITY

Over the past decade, patterns of violence have increased in Cameroon (see Figure 2 below). State violence and unilateral violence were the main causes of violent deaths, while violence by NSAGs had little direct impact.

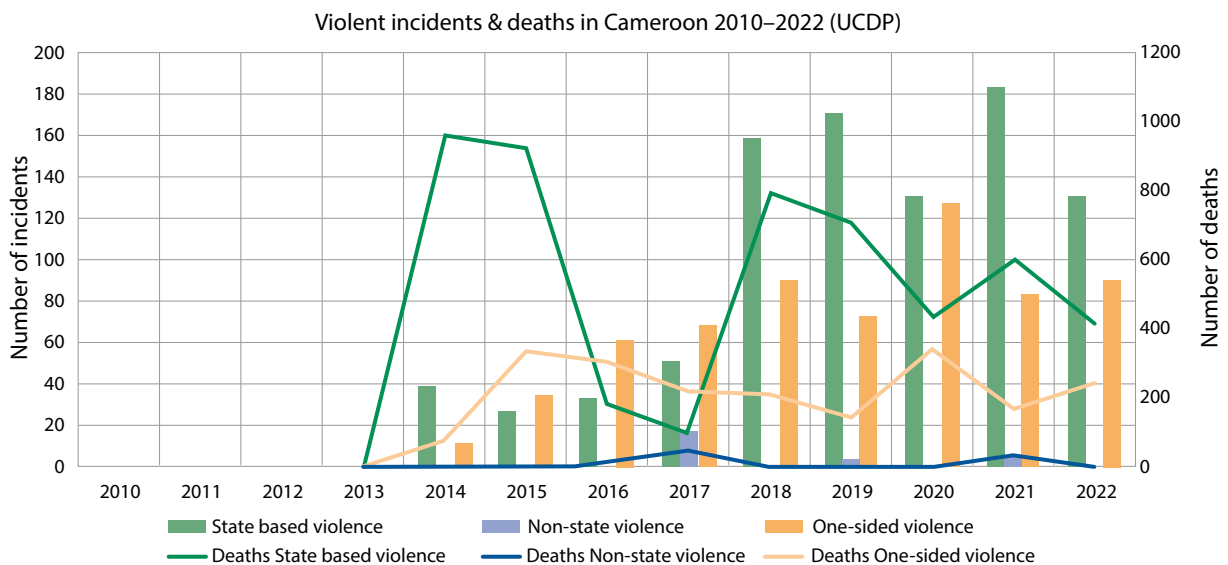
Regarding homicides, we see a slight decrease over the last decade. The qualitative findings show that physical violence is the most common form of violence in communities, especially in contexts where active conflicts affect daily life, such as the terrorist activities of Boko Haram, the secessionist conflicts in the North-West and South-West regions, farmer-herder conflicts, kidnappings and cross-border insecurity. Verbal and psychological violence is experienced by civilians in con-

flict-prone areas and by internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been forced to migrate as a result of conflict. There is sexual violence, as cases of rape are recorded in such communities with active conflicts. Gender-based and emotional violence is common, but most respondents choose to remain silent about it. Irrespective of the specific manifestations of violence, warring parties (non-state and state) and dissatisfied individuals were identified as the main perpetrators.

The qualitative interviews on the various violent conflicts all highlighted the fact that young people are particularly affected. Commenting on the terrorist activities of Boko Haram in the Far North region, a traditional authority in Kolofata said,

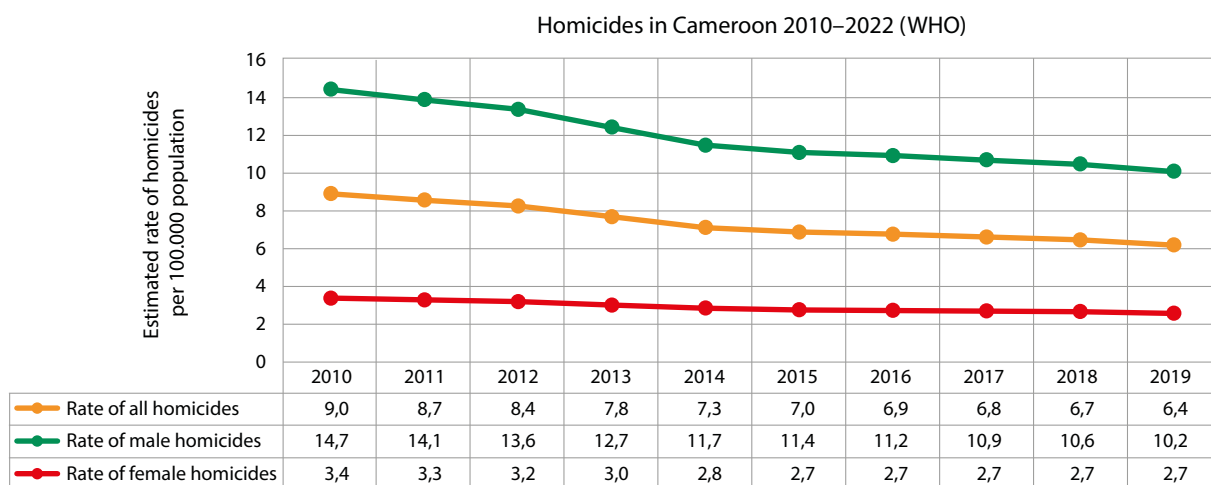
»The Boko Haram ideology was imposed on the Far North Region from North-East Nigeria, but due to unemployment, hunger and poverty, some youths were lured into the phenomenon with the hope of improving on their livelihoods. Others have embraced the ideology for religious reasons, considering Islam as a superior religion, which must be imposed on every-

Figure 2: Violent Incidents and Deaths in Cameroon 2010–2022 (UCDP)



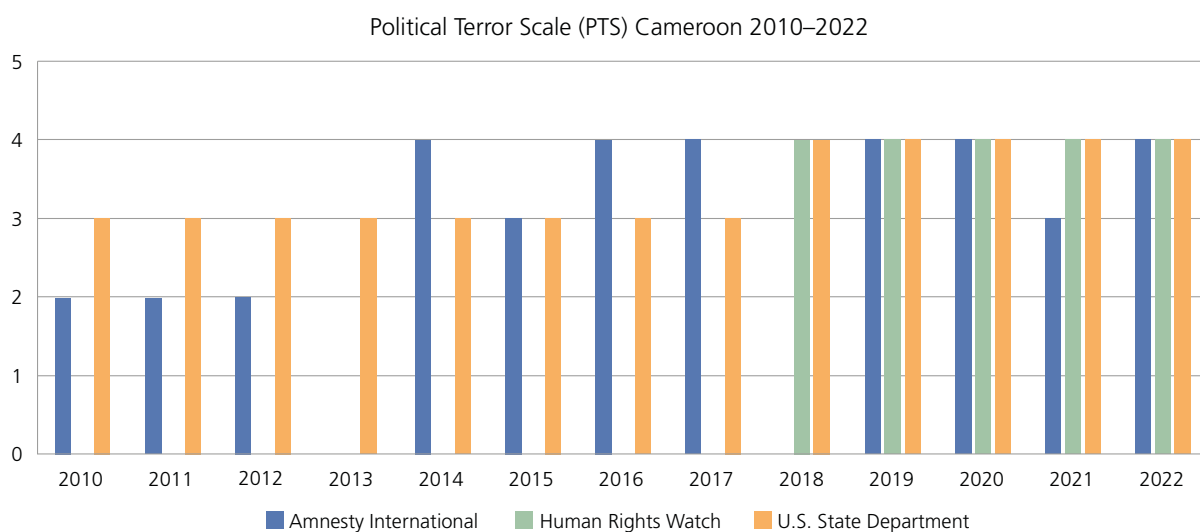
Uppsala Conflict Data Program (retrieved on 5.9.2023) UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia: ucdp.uu.se, Uppsala University.

Figure 3:
Homicides in Cameroon 2010–2022 (WHO)



Source: World Health Organization. (9.2.2021). Estimates of rates of homicides per 100,000 population. Retrieved 25.9.2023, from <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/estimates-of-rates-of-homicides-per-100-000-population>.

Figure 4:
Political Terror Scale (PTS) Cameroon 2010–2022



Source: Gibney, Mark, Linda Cornett, Reed Wood, Peter Haschke, Daniel Arnon, Attilio Pisanò, Gray Barrett, and Baekkwon Park. 2022. The Political Terror Scale 1976–2021. Retrieved 30.9.2023, from the Political Terror Scale website: <http://www.politicalterror scale.org>.

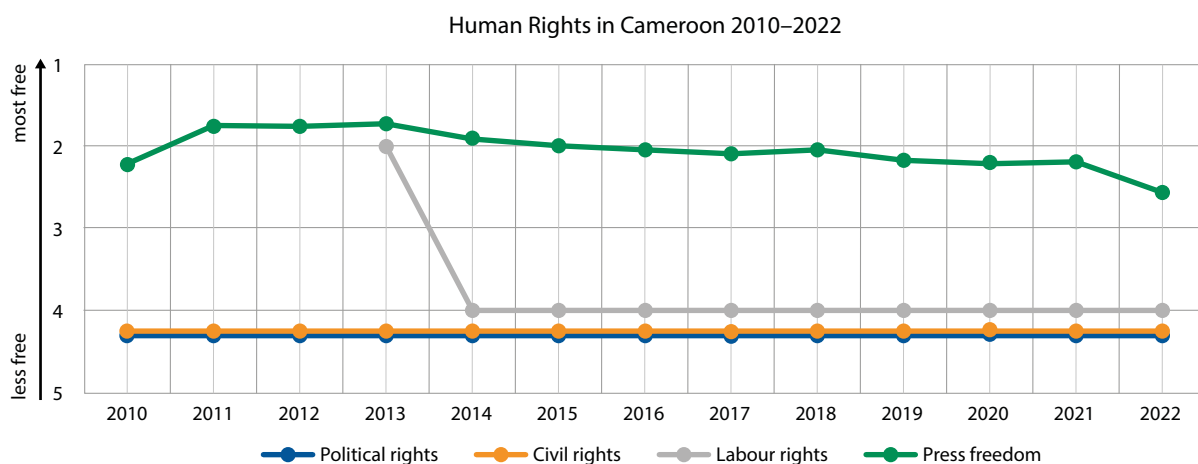
one. Some youths even threaten and kill their parents for trying to prevent them from joining this terrorist group. Unfortunately, in the search to stamp out these terrorist activities, the administration sometimes considers all Muslims in this region as sympathisers of the sect. This has led to the arrest and killings of innocent loyal citizens. Some have been bundled and sent to far off prisons in Kondengui (Yaounde) with no one to take care of them (give them food). It has also led to the settling of scores among rival political groups, and families, which try to gain favours from the Central government. Fortunately, with the determination of the local population in forming vigilante groups and supporting the actions of the government and the Multinational Joint Task Force, the attacks have

reduced and we can now live normal lives, except for some sporadic attacks in the border communities.»

Regarding the bitter rivalry between the Arab Choa and the Kototos in the Far North Region, one youth leader said during his interview:

»There have been many coup plots against the regimes in Chad. During such times, dissident soldiers from Chad cross into the Logone and Chari Divisions in the Far North Region and mingle, and in fact live among us with dangerous weapons. Sometimes our rich and influential elite hire the services of these armed foreigners when crisis erupt between the Arab Choa and the Kotoko. The government cannot pretend that

Figure 5:
Human Rights in Cameroon 2010–2022



Sources: Freedom House (2023). Freedom in the World Country Report. Retrieved 9.25.2023, from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>.
International Trade Union Confederation (2023). Global Rights Index. Retrieved 9.25.2023, from <https://www.globalrightsindex.org/>.
Reporters Without Borders. (2023). World Press Freedom Index [Cameroon/Africa]. Retrieved 9.25.2023, from <https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index>.

they do not know about this. It is regrettable that the various governments of Cameroon have been using the policy of divide and rule to stay long in power.»

According to a military source from the South West region,

«The Anglophone secessionist war has claimed several thousands of lives, including over 1500 military. Unfortunately, the government has been playing down on the number of casualties to just 3000, yet we continue recording deaths in our ranks. Something has to be done, and urgently, to stop the senseless killings of our young people. If Cameroonians actually knew the killings going on in the North West and South West regions, there will be a revolution. Both the government forces and the Anglophone rebels (Ambaboy) are engaged in these senseless killings and there are no signs that the war will end any time soon.»

4.2 HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights in Cameroon are limited and the implementation of laws and international frameworks is difficult. The conflicts in Cameroon are interconnected, as evidenced by the high level of threats and killings of human rights defenders and community leaders. Torture, indiscriminate and targeted killings, abductions, rape, gender-based violence, forced and early marriages, illegal arrests and detentions and extreme violence are recurrent. Both government forces and non-state actors are guilty of serious human rights violations. Journalists have been victims of human rights abuses, as in the case of Samuel Wazizi⁴ and, more recently (2023), Martinez Zogo,⁵ who were tortured and killed. CSOs, activists, the

media and trade unions play the role of whistle-blowers, but their actions are stifled.

There is a state-controlled National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (established by decree in 1990 and by law in 2004) and many human rights associations that report and denounce these violations through protests, marches, traditional and social media. Cameroonians generally distrust the structures controlled by the government and the judiciary. Most Cameroonians are aware of the constitution and other laws that protect them and guide their political participation. However, they disapprove of the implementation of these laws. International human rights data on individual and collective human rights reflect these perceptions (see Figure 5).

It is important to note that all of the human rights violations mentioned have recurred in all of the conflicts identified, and those most severely affected are mostly women, children and the physically disabled. Local perceptions of conflict-related human rights violations include the right to life, education, property, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and association, injustice, arbitrary arrest, detention and imprisonment, forced migration (IDPs and refugees), poor prison conditions, economic exploitation.

There are also identity crises, intercommunity tensions, the North West-South West divide which, according to an informant, «stems from ungratefulness, insolence and antagonism by stranger populations of the North West and West Regions and even people from Oroko villages.»⁶ According to a renowned human rights activist and peacemaker, Dr. (Mrs) Martha Agbor, «The North West-South West divide is very dangerous and could have very serious consequences if not

⁴ <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20201102-mort-journaliste-samuel-wazizi-cameroun-affaire-embli%C3%A9matique> (last accessed on 2.9.2024).

⁵ <https://www.fidh.org/fr/regions/afrique/cameroun/assassinat-du-journaliste-martinez-zogo-au-cameroun-appel-a-l> (last accessed on 2.9.2024).

⁶ Interview with informant in Buea, July 2022.

handled in time.«⁷ This divide has led to hate speeches and abuse of the people of the North West Region in particular as »invaders«, »come-no-gos«, etc.

The situation is even more complicated when it comes to collective rights. Cameroon is a society with an active civil society, including trade unions, media and human rights defenders. They work to defend the rights of workers and vulnerable groups, and to combat electoral fraud, bad governance and policies, and are threatened, killed, arrested and imprisoned. In terms of identifying the perpetrators and institutions of human rights violations in their community, two thirds of the participants said that NSAGs play a significant role in undermining human rights, followed by over 40 per cent who mentioned the forces of law and order and/or the administrative and political authorities.

4.3 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION INSTITUTIONS

The World Justice Project's 2022 Rule of Law Score ranks Cameroon 134th out of 140 countries surveyed. The rule of law score is not only a legal one, but has also declined in recent years (see Figure 6). Nevertheless, research in the field shows that the state and its law enforcement institutions play a very important role in conflict management. The state is also mentioned, albeit inadequately, as playing an important role in ensuring peace and security and facilitating dialogue. With regard to the institutions that can successfully bring about constructive conflict transformation, the interviews and focus groups revealed that for many Cameroonians, constructive conflict transformation can first be realised by

traditional institutions, the forces of law and order, the state or the government. In addition to these three institutions, which were mentioned with high frequency, interviewees also mentioned other institutions that have a significant impact on constructive conflict transformation, such as religious institutions, community-based institutions, the family institution, civil society organisations and social services. The prominent mention of traditional authorities in most regions of Cameroon seems to be related to their function as custodians of the customs and traditions of the people. They are closer to the people and understand their concerns better, and they are auxiliaries to the administration. But the same cannot be said for some of the traditional rulers in the areas affected by the Anglophone crisis. For example, some prominent traditional rulers who had become partisans of government policies have lost credibility with their communities. They have fled their palaces and are displaced in other towns in Cameroon. A traditional ruler in the capital of the South West Region has killed many youths suspected or labelled as separatists.

In assessing the role of religious authorities in transforming conflicts, field research shows that religious authorities play a very important role in raising awareness, facilitating dialogue and providing peace education. Religious authorities also play an important role through conflict mediation, reconciliation and prayers for peace. Religious authorities are said to be involved in religious sensitisation, facilitation of dialogue, to have a strong capacity for peace education, and to work in mediation and reconciliation. However, some of those interviewed mentioned that some conflicts, including religious conflicts, are difficult to resolve because of different belief systems. Traditional and religious leaders are also among the most trusted in Cameroon (see Table 1).

⁷ Interview with Dr. (Mrs.) Agbor Martha in Buea, July 2022.

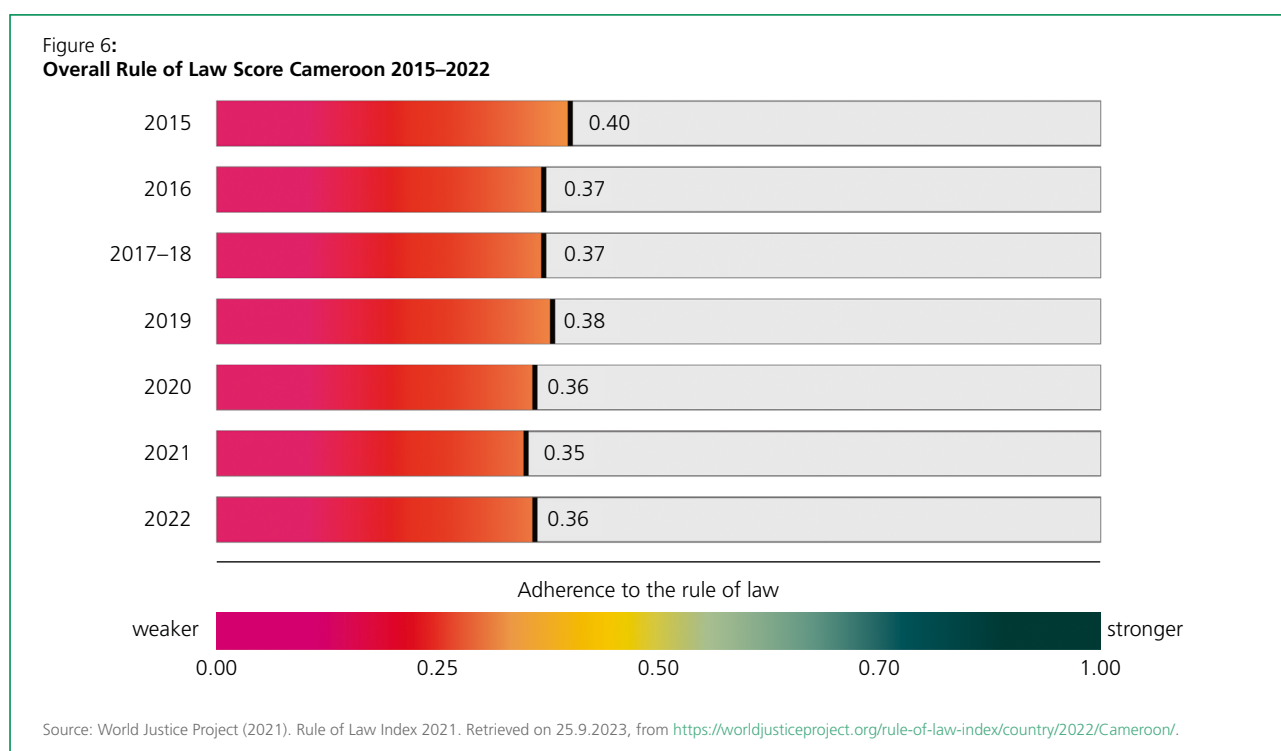


Table 1:
Trust in Institutions (Afrobarometer)

Trust in	a lot		some		little		none	
	2011/13	2021/23	2013	2021/23	2013	2021/23	2013	2021/23
President	30.7	25.6	25.3	29.8	20.6	26	15.9	17.9
Parliament	16	10.7	25.8	25.2	23.2	34.9	25.4	28.2
Police	12.4	19.3	27.5	25	25.9	30	29.1	25.6
Armed Forces	32	33.6	23.8	26.3	20.6	22.4	17.0	17.4
Ruling Party	13.9	10.2	14.1	22.7	24.2	32.9	36.6	33.4
Opposition Political Parties	6.1	6.1	12.4	23.8	26.3	35	44.6	33.7
Traditional Leaders	–	23.6	–	31	–	32.3	–	12.7
Courts of Law	13.7	10.8	28	25.4	27.7	33.5	23.2	30
Religious Leaders	–	35.9	–	27.9	–	25.3	–	10.5

Source: Afrobarometer. <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

During the interviews, a retired civil administrator from the Far North region of Cameroon made the following statement:

»The insecurity in this region is very dangerous because it is difficult to distinguish the various Muslims who arrive this area and the reason for their mission. Some are Nigerians; others are Chadians, while some come from other regions. Sometimes, armed robbers come in from these areas, carry out their operations and rush back across the frontier without any major resistance. This has worsened the insecurity in this region.«

During a focus group discussion in Maroua on 21 July 2023, one informant identified religious tensions as a very serious conflict situation that is hardly talked about, but which, according to him, is a time bomb waiting to explode. He argued that:

»The Muslim populations of the Far North Region derogatorily refer to the non-Muslims as Kirdi, (unbelievers). Each time we bring up this issue in our meetings, it raises tension amongst us. The political, economic and social interactions in this region are structured along these religious lines. In Bogo for example, there are no drinking spots at the centre of the town because Bogo is predominantly Muslims. In some communities, there are separate neighbourhoods for Muslims and Christians. Inter-marriage between the Muslim and non-Muslim is very challenging. This makes religious cohabitation in the region complicated.«

Over the past decade, there have been a number of inadequate or failed attempts to transform violent conflicts. The approaches have been neither inclusive nor have they addressed the root causes of the conflicts. International processes (Swiss and Canadian) did not take place due to suspicion, lack of trust and failed diplomacy between the

partners. The best-known process in Cameroon was the response to the Boko Haram conflict led by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) with the support of Chad and special units of the Cameroonian military rapid intervention units 2015. Following its success, this structure put in place a recovery and stabilisation strategy to establish peace in the Lake Chad Basin.

Regarding the Anglophone «crisis», many residents of the regions called for a return to the federal model of government that existed after independence, where they felt power was more equitably shared between the Anglophone and Francophone populations; others called for outright secession from Cameroon. Meanwhile, skirmishes erupted between government forces and separatists in the region and increased in frequency after 1 October 2017, when some separatist leaders symbolically declared independence for the two Anglophone regions, calling the new state «Ambazonia». According to Ni John Fru, leader of the once influential Social Democratic Front (SDF), the conflict situation in Anglophone Cameroon in particular, and the country as a whole, is due to the excessive concentration of power in the hands of the executive. He opines that

»It is unfortunate that Mr. Biya's government has allowed the situation to degenerate to where we find ourselves today. The grievances expressed by the so-called ambaboyas are justified, but the methods used to attain their objectives are unjustified, especially as they try to compel everyone to go their way. This is very wrong. I have told them so and that is probably why they want my head. However, we strongly believe that a return to federalism that should promote local governance will bring back some internal cohesion. This arrangement could only be arrived at through an inclusive genuine dialogue.«⁸

⁸ Interview with Ni John Fru Ndi in Yaounde, February 2023.

Speaking to one of the secessionist leaders in jail in the Yaounde Nkongdegui prison during the research, he insisted that for sustainable peace to return to Cameroon:

»The government of La Republique du Cameroun should stop playing for time. Peace can only return if the people of Southern Cameroon are free. There is only one way out, the restoration of our country or nothing. We shall fight for our freedom until the last man standing. The regime barons are playing for time. They talk with us at night for negotiations but disown us by day. They are dribbling the international and national opinion. Even if we die in prison, our great-grandchildren will continue the fight. The international community is playing double standards as usual, hoping that time will heal the wounds. Peace will only return if we separate and live as friendly neighbours.«

Conversely, Cameroon's central government argues that too much attention is being paid to the grievances of the secessionists. The official government position is that things have returned to normal in the North West and South West Regions. One interviewee argued that:

»The armed secessionist should drop their guns, return to the DDR [disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration] centres, and ask for forgiveness. It is pure nonsense to think that the government should engage in any dialogue with criminals who have taken up arms against the state. The Major National Dialogue showed the great concern of the Head of State to the people of the North West and South West regions in particular and Cameroonians in general. Many reforms are being put in place through the different commissions created after the Dialogue. For peace to return to those regions, the criminals must drop their guns and return to the fold. Their sponsors and friends in the Diaspora should stop dreaming of any imaginary state of Southern Cameroon. It will never happen.«⁹

Against this background of rather repressive attempts to end the violence, it is important to analyse the notions of peace that prevail in Cameroon.

⁹ Interview with a politician in Yaounde in March 2023.

5

PERCEPTIONS OF PEACE

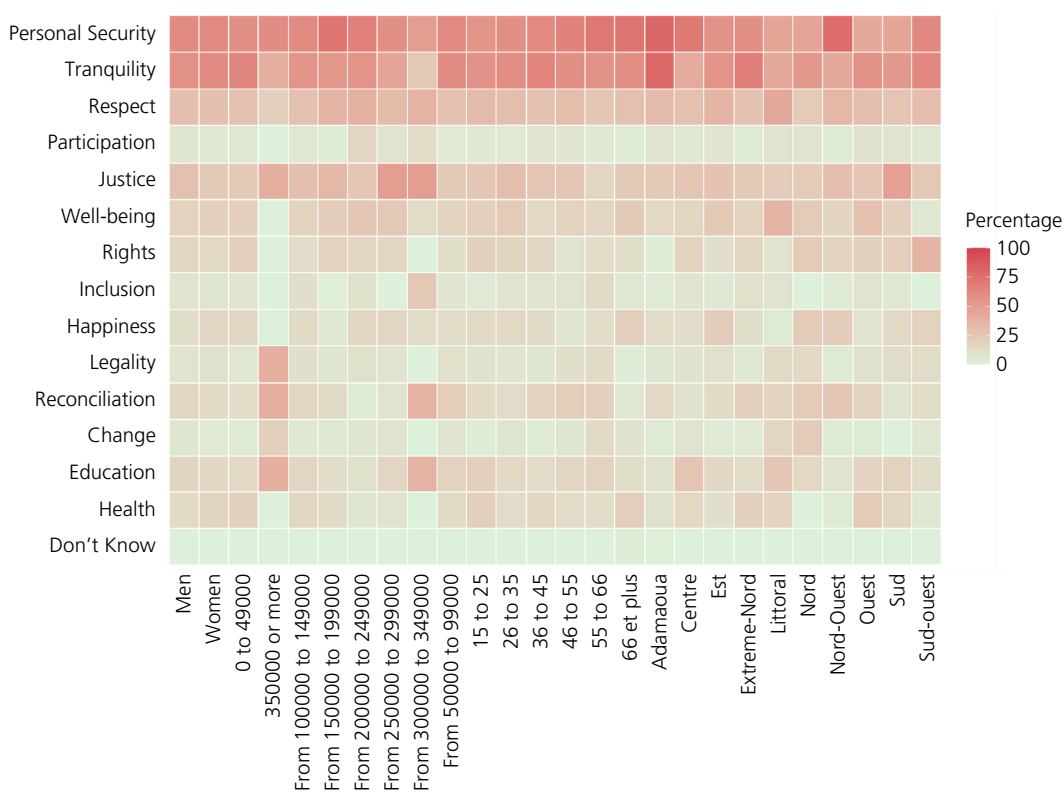
Although peace can be defined in many different ways, in our survey most respondents (31%) saw tranquillity as the essence of peace; 27.2 per cent saw the absence of war as the core element of peace. When the main elements of peace mentioned are broken down by region, three main groups of regions emerge.

- Group 1, comprising the Far North, North, Littoral and West regions, defined peace as tranquillity, stability, absence of war and harmony.
- Group 2, made up of the Adamawa, North West and South West regions, said peace was first the absence of war, then tranquillity and stability, and finally harmony.
- The third group, made up of the Centre, South and East regions, defined peace as harmony, then tranquillity and finally the absence of war.

If we compare these notions of peace with the violence that people experience on the ground and in their daily lives, tranquillity and stability and the absence of war in the first two groups, with higher levels of violence than in the third, seem to reflect this.

The results of our survey are quite similar to those of our other case studies. When asked about the most important elements of peace, people emphasise the importance of personal security, tranquillity and respect. There are few differences between gender, age and location, but we do see some differences between income groups.

Figure 7:
Heatmap



An interesting point of comparison emerged in the qualitative study when people were asked what peace means in their customs and traditions (see Table 2). Some of the core concepts such as ›calmness‹, ›love‹, ›harmony‹, and ›tranquillity‹ seem to be deeply rooted in culture and history.

Table 2:
Meaning of Peace, Traditions, and Customs

Region	What does peace mean in your tradition or custom?							Total
	Calmness	Forgiveness	Harmony	Love	Respect	Stability	Tranquillity	
Adamaoua	8	0	14	3	0	0	0	25
Centre	21	0	16	12	0	1	5	55
East	9	0	10	27	0	0	4	50
Far North	17	5	5	26	0	0	22	75
Littoral	8	3	13	20	0	0	11	55
North	7	0	9	1	5	4	4	30
Northwest	41	0	16	10	1	0	7	75
South	0	0	5	21	0	0	2	28
Southwest	46	0	14	14	0	0	1	75
West	18	0	14	4	1	0	13	50
Total	175	8	116	138	7	5	69	518

Source: Fieldwork, National Report 2022, p. 89

6

KEY ACTORS IN PEACEBUILDING

A variety of actors in Cameroon and at the international level have been involved in peacebuilding initiatives. CSOs have used their capacity to facilitate access to information. They also play an important role in the provision of assistance and in the design of constructive and capacity-building initiatives. In addition to these three crucial and frequent roles, the role of civil society can also be seen in its ability to mobilise resources for effective conflict transformation.

Over the past decade, there have been some concrete steps taken by both national and international actors in Cameroon. The response to the violent activities of Boko Haram in the Far North Region has been military repression, as Boko Haram is considered a terrorist group. This led to the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in February 2015. The Government of Cameroon and many international partners have been heavily involved in humanitarian operations and a reconstruction plan throughout the Far North *Region*. While violent extremism is on the decline, pockets of resistance and sporadic attacks still occur in the affected areas, particularly in communities bordering Nigeria and Chad. The government has established the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC) to deal with Boko Haram ex-combatants.

In light of the armed secessionist conflicts in the *North West* and *South West* regions, both the government and the international community have undertaken several peacebuilding efforts. The government organised the 2019 *Major National Dialogue*, which resulted in the establishment of several commissions to address the various root causes of the conflict. These include the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism and the Commission for the Reconstruction of the *North West* and *South West* regions. There has also been a strengthening of the special status of the *North West* and *South West* regions, the establishment of regional councils, the creation of the House of Chiefs for the *North West* and *South West* regions, and judicial reforms with the translation of the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) laws into English, etc. Ex-combatants also have access to the NDDRC. However, the government of Cameroon appears to be relying on the military option for a lasting solution to the conflict. This has led to serious human rights and humanitarian crises and the situation remains very worrying.

At the international level, several initiatives have been launched, including the Swiss-led peace talks (starting in 2019) and the Canadian initiative for dialogue (starting in 2022). Unfortunately, both initiatives were led by the Cameroonian government, which withdrew from the process in the case of the Swiss mediation and officially stated that it had never given a mandate to a third party in the case of the Canadian initiative. The European Union, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Francophonie and other organisations and national governments (France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, China, South Korea, etc.) have all called for a genuine and inclusive dialogue to resolve the conflict situation in the country.

Despite all this, we note that the situation has not changed much. The populations of the *North West* and *South West* regions continue to suffer from the humanitarian consequences of the crisis; some schools have remained closed for several years, causing huge displacements from the conflict areas in search of education. Parents with insufficient resources and no relatives outside the affected areas simply had no choice but to keep their children out of school. Clashes between the military and non-state armed groups continue, and civilians continue to be caught in the crossfire, forcing hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees to migrate. There are many cases of human rights violations (rape, torture, abductions, prolonged detention, destruction of property, lack of freedom of speech and movement, etc.). Indeed, the armed secessionist conflict in the *North West* and *South West* regions is considered one of the most under-reported and ignored by the international community.

In the *East Region*, the problems of refugees are being addressed with great attention by both the government of Cameroon and the international community, particularly the UNHCR, although there are some security and humanitarian challenges in the area. Again, many other conflicts in the *East Region*, particularly those over mineral resources, land grabbing by multinational companies and the ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders, are largely ignored and under-reported.

In the case of border conflicts, we find that border conflicts and border insecurity are inadequately addressed. The border conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula has resurfaced with fears of escalation if

not properly addressed by the countries concerned in particular and the international community in general. There are also border issues with Equatorial Guinea and Gabon in the Kye-Ossie of the South Region. The spillover effects of the conflict in the Central African Republic have had a major impact on border insecurity in the East Region of the country. The borders in the Far North, North West and South West regions remain porous and insecure, facilitating arms smuggling.

Political tensions and conflicts between farmers and herders persist. Several of the identified political conflict situations are not properly addressed through concrete action on the ground. The electoral laws are considered poor by most opposition political parties in the country. Most political parties are ethnically based and reflect negative ethnicity within the political parties, which is counterproductive to democracy. The political, economic and social structure remains very fragile and requires immediate action to return to peace and harmony.

Among the key actors is a women's platform created in 2021: the 1st National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon.

The National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon (Women's Peace Convention) is the largest national platform of women peacebuilders in Cameroon. It was established in January 2021, and is a constellation of 76 organisations representing all ten regions of Cameroon and 25 social categories, including women in academia and law, science and medicine, sport and the armed forces, bayam sellam (petty traders) and domestic workers, prisoners and sex workers. They are Anglophone and Francophone, religious and atheist, educated and uneducated. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Office for Cameroon and Central Africa is acting as the Convention's secretariat. As in all crises around the world, women suffer greatly in Cameroon's armed conflicts—especially from horrific sexual and gender-based violence. At the same time, women are the main peacemakers in communities and families. Yet they are largely excluded from official peace-building processes.

The Convention presented three groundbreaking events that Cameroon has never seen before.

- In July 2021, the first-ever National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon brought together 1,800 women from all ten regions and all 58 departments of Cameroon. The Convention was organised around a carefully balanced programme of art for peace, testimonies, expert discussions and a unique psychosocial village. The Convention produced a Call for Peace on behalf of all Cameroonian women, which was solemnly proclaimed and ceremonially presented to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family.
- In July 2022, the Convention took its message of peace to the National Assembly of Cameroon, which is plagued by an eternal spirit of stagnation and inertia. In a country where dissent is discouraged and criticism stifled, the

women of the Convention threw down the gauntlet to deputies and senators in their own chamber. The women demanded that parliamentarians use their power, privilege and unique opportunities to work for peace in Cameroon and not waste them on a lack of initiative, a strong desire to maintain the status quo and a corrupt attachment to daily allowances.

- In September 2022, the Convention organised the first ever National Women's Negotiations for Peace in Cameroon, a simulation of official peace negotiations. After months of training, intensive practice and thorough research, members of the Convention brought together all the key players in potential official peace negotiations in Cameroon. The simple but powerful idea was to subject real issues to robust debate and discussion, as if the roleplayers were in real peace negotiations. Running the real risk of being banned or arrested, this activity brought the President of Cameroon to the table with separatist leaders and shocked the nation, showing that negotiations, dismissed and derided by both sides as impossible, were in fact possible. It planted in the minds of the Cameroonian people the idea that they can demand that their government and the separatists, despite their sometimes vastly different views, talk to each other – with the help of neutral mediators.

The Women's Peace Convention was awarded the German-Africa Prize 2023.

7

SPECIFICS OF PEACEBUILDING AND LESSONS LEARNED

In Cameroon, context-sensitive peacebuilding strategies have to take into account the diversity and complexity of the underlying conflicts and the involvement of local, national and international actors. Within Cameroon, religious and traditional authorities, women's groups and CSOs in general appear to be important entry points for peacebuilding. However, the context of an authoritarian regime that either co-opts or represses these actors limits and threatens these opportunities. While elections in Cameroon are neither fair nor free, the fact that the 91-year-old president is unlikely to run for re-election and that opposition parties are trying to select a single candidate may provide a window of opportunity. This could be a window of opportunity for change and conflict transformation, as it would allow peacebuilding actors to refer to and strengthen existing legal mechanisms for human rights and conflict transformation. The continuation of a number of initiatives that have not been able to reach their full potential, such as the National Dialogue and the National Development Plan, could initiate a process of change.

But there are also serious limitations. First of all, the government does not seem committed to working with traditional and religious authorities. The economic crises in some regions, the lack of prospects for young people and the proliferation of small arms and weapons are a dangerous mix in all violent conflicts. In the English-speaking regions, the fact that there is no single armed separatist group, but rather an increasingly disorganised and competing collection of groups, makes the situation—and possible paths to peace—extremely challenging. The risk of atrocities will continue if the root causes of the conflict, including poor quality of public services, weak governance and the marginalisation of parts of the population by a highly centralised state, are not addressed.

A number of solutions have been recommended for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the government and the non-state armed groups. These include continuing dialogue between the parties to achieve effective reconciliation, promoting negotiations, continuing disarmament, honouring commitments made, ending confrontation, respecting and protecting human rights, releasing detainees, improving the living conditions of the population, creating jobs, increasing awareness and strengthening security for people and property. Notwithstanding these positions, in

a one-on-one interview, international peace crusader and renowned lawyer, Ntumfor Barrister Nico Halle, suggests that

»What destroys peace in Cameroon is the inability to equitably distribute the God-given natural resources to the people. For sustainable peace to return to Cameroon there should be justice and equity. The solution to all the conflicts in the country is dependent on TRUTH. Stakeholders must identify, analyse and share the truth on the causes of the conflicts. If we continue hiding the causes of the conflicts, then we shall be making prescriptions for what does not exist. However, there can be no truth without LOVE. Once the truth is identified and carefully analysed, the following fundamental core moral values should naturally ignite peace. They include transparency, accountability, patriotism, integrity, justice, equity, empathy, dignity, honour, truth and the fear of the lord. Take away all these and everything collapses.«

Sustainable peace in Cameroon requires, first and foremost, the political will of the government and the participation of all stakeholders. The international community, which tends to invest most of its resources in the Sahel, should also get involved in peace-building.

In order to restore peace, all key actors in the conflicts should commit themselves to taking concrete and immediate action to

- End hostilities immediately and permanently, thus giving meaning to the African Union's campaign to 'Silence the Guns' in Africa;
- Pursue a sustained and inclusive dialogue that addresses core issues of peace, solidarity and shared humanity in Cameroon;
- Ensure the equal and permanent participation of women peace mediators and negotiators in peace processes at all levels, while ensuring their protection at all times, in accordance with the four pillars of UN Resolution 1325;
- Establish additional and strengthen existing psychosocial support and trauma healing centres;
- Make existing DDR centres functional and responsive to existing conflicts.

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About the Authors

Sabine Kurtenbach is a lead researcher at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies in Hamburg and a honorary professor at the Center for Conflict Research at Philipps Universität Marburg. Her research interests include peacebuilding, violence, institutions and youth in postwar societies of the Global South.

Susan Bamuh Apar is an independent research consultant in Yaounde - Cameroon. Her main areas of interest are: conflict resolution, peace building, human rights and humanitarian communication, with vulnerable populations especially women and youths.

Nina Netzer has been Director of the FES Office in Yaounde, Cameroon, from 2019 to 2024 and is co-founder of the Women's peace platform »1st National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon«, recipient of the German Africa Prize 2023. Her interests reach from political leadership and party politics to the role of women in peace building and the dynamics of peace negotiations and mediation.

Cameroon Team Members:

Nina Netzer (FES – Cameroon Office)
Susan Bamuh Apar (Coordinator)
Sabine Kurtenbach (GIGA)
Prof. Willibroad Dze Ngwa (lead researcher qualitative study; The Heritage Higher Institute for Peace and Development Studies)
Vicky Djeukwi Nana (Sr. statistician consultant)
Carla Kienel (GIGA)
Prof. Pahimi, University of Maroua
Prof. Mamoudou, University of Ngaoundere
Dr. Holy Anagho, University of Buea
Dr. Emmmanuel Y. Sobseh, University of Bamenda
Dr. Laive Fru Awah, ANICHR, Yaounde
Dr. Gilbert Ngimndoh, University of Douala
Dr. Kalla Koloba, Lycee de Garoua
Dr. Ezekiel Kikoh, Lycee de Bafoussam

Imprint

Published by:

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V.
Godesberger Allee 149 | 53175 Bonn | Germany

Email: info@fes.de

Issuing Department:

Division for International Cooperation / Global and European Policy

<https://www.fes.de/referat-globaleund-europaeische-politik>

Responsibility for content:

Johann Ivanov | Peace and Security

Contact / Order:

Christiane.Heun@fes.de

Editing: Ciaran Cronin

Design / Layout: Melanie Fischbach /Ludger Stallmeister

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ISBN: 978-3-98628-604-0

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