

Opaque organization of votes, manipulation of identities and electoral conflict in the Mayo-Louti Division since 1990

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Abstract

The economic and political failure observed in Cameroon around the 1980s meant that the democracy that occurred in the early 1990s was enthusiastically welcomed by the population. It was perceived not only as another form of liberation of the peoples, after those of the country in 1960, but also as a response to the challenges of poor governance observed in the territory during the period of Ahmadou Ahidjo. However, the adoption of democracy has rather generated conflicts and violence during the electoral process. These political rivalries are caused by the poor organization of the polls and above all by the instrumentalisation of ethnic, tribal and religious identities, the characteristics of which are the erosion of ethno-religious alliances, the threat to social order, economic underdevelopment and difficulties of national integration. Therefore, it is a question in this work of showing that the opaque organization of elections and the manipulation of identities during electoral periods are the foundations of conflicts and political violence in a democratic context in Cameroon since 1990. The realization of this work is based on the exploitation of written, oral and iconographic data. The use of the multidisciplinary approach and the empirical deductive method led to the following results. At first, the rigging observed around the organization of the polls by the bodies in charge caused electoral conflicts in several cities of Cameroon such as Mayo-Louti, Ngaoundéré and Maroua. In a second part, it emerges that the politicization of religions and ethno-community groups are identified as the foundations of electoral violence in Cameroon in a democratic context.

Keywords: democracy, votes rigging, synchrony, electoral disputes, Mayo-Louti

Résumé

L'échec économique et politique observé au Cameroun vers les années 1980 a fait à ce que la démocratie survenue au début des années 1990 soit accueillie dans l'enthousiasme par la population. Elle été perçue non seulement comme une autre forme de libération des peuples, après celles du pays en 1960, mais aussi comme une réponse aux défis de la mal gouvernance observée dans le territoire pendant la période d'Ahmadou Ahidjo. Toutefois, l'adoption de la démocratie a plutôt engendré des conflits et des violences pendant les échéances électorales. Ces rivalités politiques sont causées par la mauvaise organisation des scrutins et surtout par l'instrumentalisation des identités ethniques, tribales et religieuses, dont les caractéristiques sont l'effritement des alliances ethno religieux, la menacer l'ordre social, le sous-développement économique et les difficultés d'intégration nationale. Dès lors, il est question dans ce travail de montrer que l'organisation opaque des élections et la manipulation des identités pendant les périodes électorales sont les fondements des conflits et des violences politiques en contexte démocratique au Cameroun depuis 1990. La réalisation de ce travail est basée sur l'exploitation des données écrites, orales et iconographiques. L'usage de la démarche pluridisciplinaire et la méthode empirico déductive ont conduit aux résultats suivants. Dans un premier temps, les trucages observés autour de l'organisation des scrutins par les organes en charge à causer des conflits électoraux dans plusieurs villes du Cameroun comme Mayo-Louti, Ngaoundéré et Maroua. Dans une seconde partie il ressort que la politisation des religions et les regroupements ethno communautaires sont identifiés comme les fondements des violences électorales au Cameroun en contexte démocratique.

Mots clés : démocratie, trucage des votes, synchronie, conflits électoraux, Mayo-Louti

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Introduction

In Africa, elections are the main feature of representative democracy. For the people, it is a means that allows the masses to choose their leaders according to their political programs (Garrigou, 1993: 80). In Cameroon specifically, elections have become a central element of popular participation in the management of public affairs. However, in practice, we see that elections are rather at the origin of conflicts in a State, when they are not managed in a constructive way. This is the case, for example, in Cameroon, where during election periods there are conflicts and violence of all kinds that threaten social order, economic development and living together. The causes of these political rivalries are the poor management of the elections by the administration and the services in charge of organizing the polls such as ONEL or ELECAM (Garrigou, 1993: 85). It also emerges that in a democratic context in Cameroon, antagonisms between elites or political leaders are fueled by the instrumentalisation of identities, that is to say the insertion of religion in political affairs and the formation ethno-tribal communities in electoral games. This observation makes us to question and highlights the causes of electoral conflicts in Cameroon, by focusing on a particular study on the Mayo-Louti Division. Specifically, this work shows that the opaque organization of elections and the instrumentalisation of identities (religious or ethnic) are at the origin of conflicts or electoral violence in the Mayo-Louti Division in a democratic context. The realization of this study required the use of oral, written and iconographic data. To these data is added the multidisciplinary approaches and the empirical deductive approach. This methodology makes it possible to say that the electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division are explained by the rigging of votes, the stuffing of ballot boxes and the manipulation of minutes on one hand and also by the instrumentalisation of religions and ethnic groups in the political game on the other hand.

1. Opaque organization of polls and electoral conflicts in Mayo-Louti since 1990

In the Mayo-Louti Division, the election period is always characterized by the abundance of captivating speeches, promises made by politicians, the tension between voters and party leaders or elites. The rivalries observed in the run-up to the elections are explained by the bad maneuvers observed around the organization and conduct of the polls. Instead of being places for the exchange of ideas, ideological experiences and the choice of true leaders for the development of the locality, electoral periods have become rather moments of conflict or violence. This study describes the specificity of the causes of electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division, emphasizing the opaque organization of elections by bodies such as ONEL/ELECAM.

1.1. Marginalisation of voters and electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division since 1990

In Cameroon in general and in the Mayo-Louti Division in particular, the organization and conduct of elections are determined by constitutional rules which define the parameters of political competition with a view to the accession to power of each candidate. Unfortunately, these rules are influenced by demographic, cultural and social characteristics which open the way not only to unfair competition between candidates of different political parties, but also to conflicts and violence of all kinds. The synthesis and analysis of oral and written data shows that political conflicts and electoral violence are evidence of the existence of fraud around the organisation of elections that have not been resolved by the institution in charge (Mbembe, 1996: 5). Even if the electoral systems in Cameroon grant the possibility to all citizens of different ethnic groups to present themselves as candidates for different votes, the reality shows rather polls marked by the marginalisation of certain candidates, the rigging of elections or the

stuffing of ballot boxes. This therefore explains the main causes of violence and electoral conflicts in certain localities of Cameroon such as Guider, Mayo-Oulo, Figuil and Mousgoy.

Indeed, in the Mayo-Louti Division, there have been no prior concerted efforts by elites or public authorities to inform and educate the population on electoral systems that broaden representation, recognize diversity and respect the principle of equality and majority rule, while protecting minorities. Thus, in some cases, considerations related to justice and the consolidation of peace are not taken into account in the electoral game by the population. The fact that the conscience of the population is not prepared for democracy, there is a serious risk that the public authorities will fail to control the people in the face of the increase in conflicts and violence linked to the elections (Sindjoun, 1996: 60).

Then, it should be noted that the opacity in the organization of the elections in the Mayo-Louti Division is also justified by the fact that the registrations on the electoral lists are made in a partisan way, which is between the administration and the ruling party. We see through the words of some of our informants like Magilva Baima that people who do not share the ideals of the party close to power are not easily registered on the electoral lists. It sometimes requires the intervention of the administrative authorities (Divisional officer or Sub-divisional officer) to be registered. The refusal of other activists of the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP) to be able to register on the electoral list led to disputes between officials of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) and leaders of political parties (Rothschild et Olorunsola, 1983: 32). The most visible manifestation of this rivalry between members of different political parties over registration on electoral lists in certain villages such as Libé, Matafal, Mousgoy or Gorom is insults and beatings.

The various militants of the political parties know that the need to be registered on the electoral list in order to be able to vote is a condition for participating in political life. It is for this reason that they use all means, even violence, to be registered on the voters list. The list or register of electors is in fact a list of citizens who have the quality of elector, that is, they meet the conditions of nationality (or citizenship), age and residence. In the mentality of all voters in the Mayo-Louti Division, the list constitutes an essential element of each electoral process and any doubt of irregularities in its establishment can lead to division, conflicts and electoral violence. Therefore, it is urgent to understand that the list of voters or the electoral register is of paramount importance in Mayo-Louti, in the sense that the Constitution itself frequently provides for the establishment, maintenance and control of the list of electors (Rothschild et Olorunsola, 1983: 33). However, we see that before the advent of biometrics, there are activists who can be found on several lists and sometimes some lists are lost during the votes. It was this poor organisation in the context of voter registration around 1994 that led to conflicts or electoral violence in Mayo-Oulo and Guider in 1996.

According to information collected from certain informers such as Abdoulaye Moussa, the setting of short deadlines for registration on the electoral roll with a centralized or distant place of registration of the population in certain localities of the Mayo-Louti Division and the implementation a complicated registration procedure also contributed to electoral violence. Indeed, this type of provision naturally limits the number of voters, especially people who are in the political party that is not close to the ruling party. The will of the militants of the parties such as the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP) and the Social Democratic Front (SDF) to win the elections in this Division at all costs, will lead the populations to be in permanent conflict. For them, it is a maneuver implemented by the public authorities, in particular the National Observatory of Elections (ONEL) or Election Cameroon (ELECAM) to limit the number of voters, especially people who will not vote for the party of the Democratic Rally of the Cameroonian People CPDM) (Garrigou, 1993: 80).

In addition, the choice of polling station officials in a partisan manner is also part of the causes of conflict and electoral violence in the Mayo-Louti Division. Since the establishment of democracy in this part of the country, the choice of polling station officials is always made in an opaque way. According to the opinion of the NUDP activists, it is generally the people who can truly support the CPDM, considered rightly or wrongly as the ruling party, during the polls who are chosen as president of the polling station. For this reason, during the legislative, municipal, senatorial or presidential elections that took place in Cameroon, we saw that, conflicts and violence are observed, when the population revolts to protest the choice made by the public authorities on the president of the polling stations (Mulo Farenkia, 2011: 1490).

Indeed, the election is strictly framed by the electoral code and verified by the Constitutional Council. As a citizen, every voter has the right and the duty to report irregularities when they notice them in their polling stations. But with the opaque choice of the president of the polling stations and certain members, it is difficult to report certain irregularities observed for fear of reprisals or for fear of being removed from their post of service. Those who have the courage to denounce this kind of irregularity are victims of insults or beatings to certain extents. The poor practices observed during voters' registration in Mayo-Louti relate both to the limited registration of voters and to the consensual choice of persons who supervise the elections. It is all these elements that led to electoral violence.

1.2. Troubled game of the administration/ ONEL/ELECAM in the organization of the elections in Mayo-Louti

In Cameroon, institutions such as ONEL and ELECAM have the role of revising electoral lists, controlling the establishment and distribution of electoral cards, and then organizing elections. These institutions in charge of the organization and management of elections are chaired by a representative of the Administration appointed by the divisional officer. However, in practice, it is the sub-divisional officer, their deputies and the heads of district who assume this responsibility. They exercise it according to a schedule developed unilaterally and therefore the execution depends entirely on their will. It is therefore a highly controlled process whose direction ultimately depends on the authorities concerned. It is indeed a troubled game established between the administration and the bodies in charge of the organization and management of the polls to commit fraud during the elections. This troubled game is therefore at the origin of conflicts and violence in the electoral context in Cameroon. From this observation, it should be said that in Cameroon in general and in the Mayo-Louti Division in particular the complicity between the leaders of certain political parties such as the CPDM and the administration is a variable which explains the basis of violence and electoral conflicts in this locality (Mulo Farenkia, 2011: 1490).

The troubled game of ONEL or ELECAM in the organization of elections is justified in the words of several of our informants. According to the opinion of some of our informants like Amadou Saidou, the birth of the National Observatory of Elections (ONEL) in Cameroon was perceived as a body that should put an end to nine years of controversial management of electoral consultations in Mayo-Louti while amply nourishing the political debate and controversy in this locality during the year 2001. But one notes rather that it is an organ which creates conflicts around the elections through the stuffing of ballot boxes and the falsification of minutes².

Promulgated on December 19, 2000 by the Head of State, the law establishing this body was handed to the National Assembly. A vote that the opposition political parties have massively boycotted because they believe that it is a body created to favor political parties close to power. In the localities of Dourbey, for example, the boycott of ONEL is manifested by the

²Interview with Asta Yvone on June 17, 2021 to Guider.

uttering of insults against officials, the beating of certain people appointed by ONEL to supervise the elections and sometimes killings through magic practices. What we remember from the 09 years of existence of ONEL in the Department of Mayo-Louti is that it actively participated in the preservation of conflicts and violence during elections in several towns and villages. It is in particular because of electoral fraud, which is characterized by the stuffing of ballot boxes and organized fictitious votes that we are witnessing rivalries and antagonisms between the leaders of political parties (Tatah Mentan, 1998).

Indeed, ONEL is a body responsible for the organization, management, and supervision of the entire electoral and referendum process in Cameroon. For many political leaders like Asta Yvone, PM in Mayo-Louti, the establishment of these bodies is part of a political awakening in this country. However, since the deployment of the ONEL in the field during the electoral consultations, organized on July 22, 2007 by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, there has been a lack of interest of the population for the political thing, and hence a pronounced abstention from political leaders. During elections, there are constant clashes between political party activists and members of ONEL, the main cause of which is the manipulation of the elections in favor of the CPDM to the detriment of the UNDP. This is the case, for example, in the sub-division of Guider or Figuil where there are clashes between members of different political parties on one hand and between officials of the ONEL and militants of opposition parties such as the NUDP on the other hand. These clashes during the elections are explained by the fact that the people who are appointed by the ONEL to supervise the elections in the villages such as Matafal, Libé, Larbac, Gorom and Mousgoy have organized fraud to favor the political parties which offers more money³.

In view of the persistence of fraud, the activists of the various political formations in competition in the Mayo-Louti Division believe that special assistance must be provided to the Department of Political Affairs of ONEL or ELECAM, through its Unit electoral assistance, so that it can ensure more efficient and effective coordination of electoral observation and assistance to avoid conflicts between populations. And according to NUDP activists like Abdoulaye Djaligué, CPDM leaders do not hesitate to put their hands in their pockets to recruit voters during votes in complicity with ONEL or ELECAM agents. When other NUDP or SDF activists challenge this practice, we see conflicts and violence of all kinds. Thus, it appears that the conflicts and electoral violence result from the poor organization of the polls by the structures in charge of the organization of the votes⁴.

The problem of duplication, the stuffing of ballot boxes, and the fake filling of the minutes and the absence of electoral material in certain polling stations are the forms of fraud around the elections that we observe in Cameroon in general in the Mayo - Louti Division in particular. Specifically, in Cameroon there are several forms of fraud that are the bases of violence and electoral conflicts. Voter fraud is a violation to electoral system's rules, so as to secure or promote a desired outcome (Tatah Mentan, 1998).

In the Mayo-Louti Division, these frauds are most often manifested by the problem of double counting during the votes, the stuffing of the ballot boxes, and the erroneous filling of the minutes and the absence of electoral material in certain polling stations. All of these counter fake make it possible to understand, from a socio-historical and diachronic perspective, the basis of the conflicts and violence during the course of the elections, whether senatorial, legislative, communal or presidential. One of the markers of electoral violence are fights, insults, burning of homes. In many of the polling stations in the Mayo-Louti Division, we see that the leaders of parties like the CPDM, in collaboration with ELECAM, manage to stuff the ballot boxes to win the elections. It is indeed the people who are not able to vote who are

³ Interview with Hamadou Issa on June 17, 2021 to Guider.

⁴ Interview with Assana Deli on June 22, 2021 to Gorom.

substituted by the others. This is how we are witnessing the revolt of certain activists from other parties such as the NUDP, FNSC, SDF, CDU, NADP and many others⁵.

According to article 102, paragraph 1 of the Cameroonian electoral code, “No one can be admitted to vote if he is not registered on the electoral list of the polling station concerned”. However, practically this law is not respected in Cameroon. In Mayo-Louti, for example, we are witnessing the stuffing of ballot boxes and the erroneous filling in of reports by the authorities in charge of organizing or managing the elections. These frauds used in the context of elections explain the violence and conflicts in the electoral context. For the specific case of ballot box stuffing, it is characterised by the fictional and inaccurate signatures of voters. During the votes, we sign fraudulently in place of people who are known to be officially absent during the ballot⁶.

Indeed, the polling station in some villages of the locality does not close at 6 p.m. as provided by law. Generally, it is towards the end of the hour that fraud is observed in the various polling stations. To do this, the people who stuff the ballot boxes in a fictional way make sure that the voter whom he has "voted" will not come to claim afterwards. Aware of this situation, the populations of certain opposition parties who are marginalised by those responsible for the polling stations manage to avoid fraud by all means. It is in this sense that we are witnessing an opposition between the different protagonists which results in conflicts and violence (Briquet et Sawicki 1998: 66).

This method of ballot stuffing is observed in several polling stations in the Mayo-Louti Division. According to the opinion of some of our informants like Dawai Emmanuel, it consists in affixing signatures in advance on the signature book of people whose absence is known. The signature books are never checked by the members of the polling station before the ballot. We observed this kind of fraudulent practice of voting in the locality of Lakawar and Chevi where the populations ended up burning down the polling stations and the storage places of the ballot boxes or the minutes. In the same circumstance, several people are victims of beatings, including those responsible for polling stations (Sindjoun, 1996: 60).

In view of the foregoing, it appears that the opaque organization of elections in Cameroon is at the origin of conflicts and electoral violence in Mayo-Louti Division since 1990. The opaque management of elections is characterized by the marginalisation of voters during registrations on the lists, the partisan choice of the members of the polling stations, the troubled game of the administration and the frauds in the conduct of the polls. To deal with its electoral maneuvers, political leaders use several strategies, including violence (Briquet et Sawicki 1998: 44). It is in this sense that the opaque management of the ballots is identified as one of the fundamental causes of electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division. In addition to electoral fraud, the manipulation of identities is also at the origin of rivalries and antagonisms between populations during voting periods in this locality.

2. Manipulation of identities by political leaders and electoral conflicts in Mayo-Louti Division since 1990

The political and ethnic tensions observed during electoral periods in Cameroon can be explained by the transposition of identity issues into the political field. The populations are always in a posture of contesting the results of the votes raising the reasons of identity. In the Mayo-Louti Division in particular, activists from different political parties come together according to ethnic or religious belonging during elections to defend their interests. This is how we sometimes witness the proliferation of hateful speeches, ethnic tensions that tend to take

⁵Interview with Hamadou Issa on June 17, 2021 to Guider.

⁶Interview with Mbirvi Kilvit on June 22, 2021 to Gorom.

root in the minds of the population. This part of the work analyses the ethnic and religious instrumentalisation in the electoral game as the basis of political conflicts.

2.1. Instrumentalisation of ethnic groups as a cause of electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division

The transparent management and the phlegmatic conduct of the elections are conditioned by the respect of the constitutional rules which define the parameters of the political competition for the access to power. However, in the Cameroonian political space, the bodies in charge of organizing elections have difficulty in applying these rules because of the instrumentalisation of ethnic groups by the leaders of political parties and local elites. In Cameroon in general and in the Mayo-Louti Division in particular, the experiences of recent presidential, legislative, municipal or senatorial elections show that most of the conflicts and violence observed during the polls are closely linked to the rise of ethnicity and tribalism. From this point of view, it is necessary to understand that in the Mayo-Louti Division, the ethno-tribal groupings that form in the electoral systems, in order to satisfy regional, ethnic and tribal needs, rekindle the flames of conflicts and violence around the polls. It is in this order of idea that tribal or ethnic alliances are identified by political elites as the main causes of violence and political instability.

Electoral conflicts that result from ethnic or tribal groupings can be explained by the fact that, concerted efforts are not made by the public authorities to sensitize the population on electoral systems that integrate the representation of social strata, the recognition of diversity, respect for the principle of equality and observance of the rules of the majority, while protecting minorities. Since the 2000s in this administrative Division, a trend towards the adoption of an arrangement and sharing of power between ethnic or tribal groups has been observed between political leaders. But more and more we notice the marginalisation of certain ethnic groups for the benefit of others (Larry, 2002: 25). This is how we are witnessing the proliferation of hateful speeches, pushing ethnic groups or tribes to rise up against each other during elections. Most often, there are always altercations between the Guidar and the Daba, between the Falis and the Fulani at each electoral deadline. This opposition is sometimes manifested by hateful speeches which aims at showing that the Mayo-Louti Division is mainly made up of Guidar peoples and therefore it is the political party supported by this tribe which is supposed to be the winner of all the polls.

Moreover, through the formations of ethnical or tribal communities in Mayo-Louti, it must be said that considerations related to social justice and the consolidation of peace cannot take root in the minds of populations of this locality when the elections are announced. This is what has led politicians like Pabame Emmanuel to say that:

“ [...] there is a serious risk that this Department will escape all control and thus become a political tool used to manipulate the democratic process and to ignore popular choice during elections in view of the rise of ethnico-tribal groupings” (Larry, 2002: 27).

Such developments tend to weaken public confidence in democratic institutions and lead to low voter turnout. Through this statement, we therefore understand that the conflict or violence over the election in the Mayo-Louti Division is caused by ethnic and tribal problems. To overcome these problems, public awareness is needed from public authorities, local elites and political leaders, who are to some extent identified as instigators of the troubles. In reality, it is the absence of this behavior on the part of local elites that generates conflict and electoral violence in this part of the country. As large-scale electoral violence becomes a main issue in the Cameroonian landscape, bilateral and ethnic actors were to be more indispensable at each

stage of the electoral cycle in terms of funding and assistance and therefore it is to them that comes the task of fighting against electoral violence (Mbembe, 2005: 33).

In the Mayo-Louti Division, the beginning of democratic transitions was marked by the gradual development of political parties with common programs and objectives. Political parties are essential in the process of democratization, because they are the main structures of participation, giving meaning to competition and offering the electorate perspectives and alternative visions of growth. However, for the populations of this locality, democratic practices and norms have not been consolidated, giving way to ethno-tribal groupings. In most villages, political parties have become instruments of ethnic or tribal protest. Everyone thinks that through political parties we can achieve objectives, the most noticeable of which are ethnic hegemony or even the size of one tribe to the detriment of others. It is in this perspective that certain political parties are perceived by activists as an opportunity to weaken enemies or the place of identity battles (Prunier et Chrétien 1989: 56).

Through the political parties, the electoral field has become like a place of settling scores, the most visible of which are the ghost towns, armed conflicts between the different tribes and violence of all kinds in the Mayo-Louti Division towards the 1990-1991. This is the place to remember that after these incidents, many political parties were banned in this locality, it took them a long time to regain their strength and resume their activity.

In recent years, elections in Mayo-Louti have tempted to generate significant controversy, with some candidates contesting the results. Activists who lost the election not only contest the results of that elections, but resort to violent means to express their dissatisfaction vis-à-vis the organisation of the elections and other ethnic groups. In this case, we see that the rise of ethno-community fragmentation in political life proves rather that voting periods are opportunities for settling scores⁷.

It appears from the synthesis of oral sources that the various sociological groups in the Mayo-Louti Division are often subject to conflict during electoral periods due to the rise of ethnicity, tribalism, identity withdrawals and community fragmentation in the conduct of the elections. Thus, the conflicts which arise at the time of the elections constitute a threat to the construction of the population and to the social harmony between the ethnic communities which lived in peace for a long time before the advent of democracy⁸.

Ultimately, it is then understood that although electoral disputes can arise at any time during the votes, they tend to worsen during the course of the votes. This situation is due to the fact that elections are a source of political protest because of the instrumentalisation of ethnic groups in political games. The stakes of such protest tend to be very high when elites and administrative authorities do not take steps to regulate ethnicity or tribalism in electoral contexts. Alongside the instrumentalisation of ethnic groups, the politicization of religions in the political game also contributes to the establishment of conflicts during the elections.

2. Politicization of religions as the basis of electoral violence in Mayo-Louti Division

Electoral conflicts and political violence have particularly characterised the Mayo-Louti Division at the time of the adoption of democracy by the Cameroonian people. This violence results not only from weaknesses in the management of elections and in the strict application of the rules with a view to healthy political competition, but also and above all from the politicization of religions, that is, the involvement of religion in political affairs. In localities like Lakawar, Mandama, Dourbey, Mayo-Oulo or Mousgoy, the leaders of political parties like Bouba Magara show that political and electoral violence occurs in these localities because of

⁷Interview with Boubakari Dawai on June 25, 2021 to Mayo-Oulo.

⁸Interview with Aissatou Bassoro on June 25, 2021 to Mayo-Oulo.

the manipulation of religions during electoral campaigns. In most cases, the Muslim or Christian elites always rely on the religious factor to carry out electoral campaigns. This is how the populations set themselves up against each other under the auspices of religious identities during the course of the elections. This is undoubtedly what justifies the application of conflicts and violence during and after the elections between Muslims and Christians in the district of Guider and Mayo-Oulo (Prunier et Chrétien 1989: 56). This electoral violence occurs at different stages of the electoral process when religion is highlighted in the political game. They are characterised by the multiplication of the number of electoral disputes leading to acts of violence such as fights, killings, beatings and insults of all kinds. The place of religion in electoral disputes also finds its justification in the words of Bouba Monglo who thinks that:

“The instrumentalisation of religion by the elites of the Department presents itself as significant factors in electoral disputes. This contestation most often leads to conflicts and violence. Added to this is the fact that elections lead to conflicts and violence, in addition to causing loss of human life and the destruction of property, raises questions not only with regard to the organisation and management of elections, but also in relation to their long-term impact on the consolidation of political competition” (Monga, 2000: 730).

Through this thought, it emerges that any form of violence which, at any stage of the electoral cycle, results from the opposition between people who do not share the same religious convictions. During the electoral campaigns, groups of people have been formed, the most prominent of which are the “group of Christians” and the group of Muslims” to use the terms of Bouba Monglo. These are in fact the so-called “Islam Peul” or “Islam Fulani”⁹ groups of the Muslim religion and the so-called “Kirdi”¹⁰ group, which is mainly made up of populations who practice the Christian or animist religion. On the ground, the elites rely on his religious affiliations to divide the militants. It is the instrumentalisation of religious identity by political leaders that is a source of conflict or electoral violence (Olaxale, 2011: 111).

The opposition between Islamo-Peuls and Kirdi manifests itself in the use of threats and intimidation during registration on electoral lists, the deprivation of part of the population of their rights, attacks and assassinations during the electoral campaign and the boycott of the elections. Thus, with the politicization of religion in the democratic context, political parties resort to certain forms of violence to seize power and stifle, once and for all, the democratic process. In this logic, we notice all the same that, electoral and political violence in Mayo-Louti also continues in the aftermath of the elections. This is a violent challenge that aims to question the legitimacy of the results. Violence, whether in the urban center or in the villages, negatively influences social stability, thus causing division between families (Bayart, 1989: 34).

Around 1995, with the experience of democratic processes in Cameroon, conflicts and electoral violence were caused by the determination of political parties in competition and in opposition to win at all costs. It is in this sense that several forms of bad practices are highlighted by the various political actors. In this fragile phase of the democratization process, the political parties are unable to admit and recognize the contribution and legitimacy of the opposition forces present. Therefore, violence occurs when electoral candidates seek to

⁹ “Islam Peul” or “Islam Fulani” is a name resulting from the deformation of the word "Peul" and "Islam" which designate in a pejorative or ameliorative way the "Muslim" as opposed to the faithful Christians or the "pagans". In Cameroon, from the Adamaoua region to Kousserie, there is a wide variety of Muslim ethnic groups who have been practicing the Islamic religion for 60 years.

¹⁰ “Kirdi » is a name resulting from the local deformation of the name “Kurds” which designate in a pejorative way the “pagans” as opposed to the faithful of Islam. In the mountains of Cameroon from the region of Garoua to Mora there is a wide variety of non-Muslim ethnic groups who for 60 years have been converting in a dispersed order to Islam or Catholic missionaries. The main ethnic group, the mafa, practice a form of monotheism tinged with animism, with a single creator god cohabiting with spirits.

mobilize the electorate using all available means, in particular the instrumentalisation of religions (Moulin, 1998: 120).

Furthermore, when political party leaders face intense pressure from the administration, they resort to violence to create unrest in order to manipulate the electoral process and its results. They exploit or exploit religious, ethnic and sometimes identity issues to position themselves. Thus, the political and electoral violence perpetrated by political parties in the Mayo-Louti Division is characterised by physical aggression, attacks with knives, and the destruction of ballot boxes and the arbitrary detention of leaders.

Moreover, the manipulation of the electoral process in Mayo-Louti is intimately linked to the rise of ethnicity, tribalism and identity. In addition to these variables, we can also list as significant causes vote buying, voter intimidation, fraud and the destruction of ballot boxes, which are generally practiced when religion is instrumentalised. In some cases, the spiral of violence throughout the electoral process forced opposition parties to reconsider their strategies in relation to the winning parties, especially in situations where organized violence succeeded in limiting the organizational skills of young parties fragile¹¹.

The instrumentalisation of religion for political purposes in the Mayo-Louti in an electoral context is accompanied by claims, contradiction of point of view and uprising of the people. For some NUDP activists, all Muslims must join this party because it is Muslim. In the surrounding villages of the district of Mayo-Oulo, several women are victims of beatings and repudiation by what they have chosen to militate in the bet of the CPDM. For heads of families, the CPDM is a party of Christians and can only join non-Muslims¹².

The positioning of religion as a factor of conflict and electoral violence is explained by the reluctance of party activists not to accept pluralism and political competition as legitimate during the election period. Thus, the deep ethnic and religious divisions existing in most of the villages in the Mayo-Louti Division have contributed to political and electoral violence, in the sense that the stakes involved in failing or winning elections are often essential for the well-being of communities (Bart, 1995: 230).

With the politicization of ethnic and community identities, in the district of Figuil or Mayo-Oulo, to win an election, we see that winning an election for the populations of the different political parties has become a question of survival. It is in this order of idea that electoral violence, which is intimately linked to community, ethnic or religious conflicts, is perceived as a strategy and above all as a means to achieve the objective. The best-known cases of electoral violence in these localities are the participation of elites from different ethnic groups using their respective partisan and sectarian interests to turn elections into a zero-sum struggle. These forms of mobilization, in turn, provoked backlash from competing regional and ethnic groups, and sparked violence during and after the elections (Banégas, 2003: 66).

In localities such as Lam, Konkon, Biou and Figuil, ethno-community fragmentation and religious divisions have contributed to the generalization of violence and electoral conflicts. In these localities, each electoral period witnessed identity withdrawals and opposition between Christians and Muslims. The Christian populations who are in the majority in these localities tend to marginalize the Muslims, who in turn are supported by the elites. These extreme situations of opposition manifest themselves in ethnic cleansing, balkanization, acts of sabotage, expulsions and mass displacements of Islamo-Peul populations¹³.

The consequences of the violence resulting from religious opposition in a democratic context are the deprivation of electoral rights of populations belonging to Islamo-Peul groups, minorities in the localities of Lam, Konkon or Bidzar and the permanent struggles between

¹¹ Interview with Tizi Bernard on June 28, 2021 to Figuil.

¹² Interview with Garba Moussa on June 28, 2021 to Figuil.

¹³ Interview with Asmaou Bouba on June 28, 2021 to Fiful.

different families. The violence and conflicts did not allow candidates from the NUDP, FNCS, NADP or CDU parties to benefit from the conditions necessary to participate in the electoral process. In the areas of Mayo-Oulo, Dourbey or Mandama, forms of marginalization and deprivation of the right to vote continued even in the post-election stages, where so-called kiridi groups and communities, attached to the Christian religion, suffered deprivations, economic privileges, because of their support for the CPDM. The marginalization and exclusion of certain ethnic groups from the political scene are the visible manifestation of the conflicts and electoral violence that results from the instrumentalisation of religion¹⁴.

In view of all the above, it should be said that the political and electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division are caused by the manipulation of ethnic groups and religions by political leaders to achieve their objective. Aware of the fact that the instrumentalisation of identities can lead to conflicts, local elites do not fail to practice it during electoral campaigns. This is the case, for example, during the municipal and legislative elections of 2018 where the elites held tribal and hateful speeches vis-à-vis the Islamo-Peuls in certain villages and towns such as Mayo-Oulo or Dourbey or even Guider. The behavior of elites during the campaigns contributed to the formation of groups that felt marginalised. To make their voice heard, this group has taken up arms against ethnico-religious groups who consider themselves superior to others.

Conclusion

In short, the main question in this work is analyzing in a socio-historical perspective the causes of electoral conflicts in the Mayo-Louti Division. From the synthesis of the oral or written data, it appears that the poor organization of the polls, the instrumentalisation of ethnic groups and the politicization of religions are identified as fundamental causes of conflicts and electoral violence in Mayo-Louti. Specifically, it should be understood that the opaque organization of the electoral process is electoral fraud. These include problems of duplication, stuffing of ballot boxes, and erroneous filling of the minutes and the absence of electoral material in some polling stations. It is all these maneuvers that explain the violence and conflicts linked to the legislative, communal, presidential or senatorial elections in this locality. In addition to these factors, it is also necessary to take into account the instrumentalisation of ethnic groups and the politicization of religions which make it possible to explain in depth the basis of certain pre-electoral conflicts, during the votes and after the elections.

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1/ Oral Sources

N°	Full names	Ages	Ethnicity	Religion	socio-professional Status	date and place of interview
1.	Assana Deli	50 years	Daba	Christian	Member of ONEL	June 22, 2021 to Gorom
2.	Aissatou Bassoro	55 years	Fali	Muslim	CPDM activist	June 25, 2021 to Mayo-Oulo
3.	Asmaou Bouba	(NA)	Goudé	Muslim	Member of ELECAM	June 28, 2021 to Fifiuil
4.	Boubakari Dawai	45 years	Peske	Christian	Councilor at Mayo-Oulo town hall	June 25, 2021 to Mayo-Oulo
5.	Garba Moussa	30 years	Guidar	Muslim	President of the polling station in Biou	June 28, 2021 to Fifiuil
6.	Hamadou Issa	56 years	Peul	Muslim	FNCS activist	June 17, 2021 to Guider

¹⁴Interview with Bouba Monglo on June 28, 2021 to Fifiuil.

7.	Mbirvi Kilvit	70 years	Daba	Christian	SDF activist	June 22, 2021 to Gorom
8.	Tizi Bernard	60 years	Guidar	Christian	NADP activist	June 28, 2021 to Figuil

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