



Statistical Stagnation and Submergence in Cameroon

Kijem Joseph Yuh

ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to show that the Cameroon Government and some Cameroonians are not taking statistics or statistical issues seriously. This unfortunate situation is noticeable in population, housing, livestock and agricultural censuses; electoral issues; etc. Stakeholders in Cameroon's statistical realm (the government; statistical institutions and experts; social groups using statistics; etc) should meticulously address this problem in conferences, seminars, workshops, sensitization and communication campaigns, evaluation exercises, etc.

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Background

Statistics play a very significant role in projects, programmes, institutions, communities, countries, etc.¹They guide individuals and institutions in terms of

retrospective, introspective and prospective exercises. When they are not given due attention, trouble would rear its ugly head. This is the case in Cameroon as concerns agricultural, livestock, housing and population censuses; elections; government reaction to some important issues

¹ Vocabulary.com, "Statistical"

Available at: www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/statistical

Consulted on: 15/7/24

The definition of the term *statistical*, as provided by *vocabulary.com*, automatically gives us the meaning of the term *statistics*. *Vocabulary.com* defines the term *statistical* as a word that refers to numbers, e.g., statistical population.

as well as the handling of statistics in social and other groups, activities, institutions, etc (schools, offices, businesses, families, traditional groups and the public service).

A) Censuses

The basic reason for organizing population censuses (as presented by Alfred Sauvy) is not taken seriously in Cameroon in terms of the recruitment of staff for the various stages of census operations.² This fact is illustrated by the 2005 Population and Housing Census and the ongoing Population, Housing, Livestock and Agricultural Census. Their recruitment criteria were flouted by cases of tribalism, nepotism, favouritism, etc. No serious recruitment board or structure was set up for the recruitment of staff for these two censuses.

The scheduling of the various phases of census operations in Cameroon leaves much to be desired. It does not hinge on a reliable availability of financial resources for funding these phases. It is in this light that there are always delays in the realization of the said phases, delays which tamper with the credibility or reliability of the activities and results of these phases in various aspects.

The realization of census activities in the field is problematic to some extent. In this connection, many Cameroonians do not cooperate with census workers; they are unwilling to be available for these activities. Furthermore, a good number of these workers do not apply themselves to their enumeration duties. This lack of cooperation and application has considerably affected census results in Cameroon.

Data analysis pertaining to census operations in Cameroon is marred by the irregularities noticed during the recruitment of census staff, the scheduling of the various phases of census operations and the realization of field activities. This damage is so enormous that it cannot be significantly handled or addressed by operations or activities aimed at countering it such as post-enumeration surveys.

The delay in publishing the results of the 2005 Population and Housing Census is illustrative of Cameroon Government's levity in the handling of

statistical operations. These results were published in 2010 instead of 2005! Consequently, they were based on projections (they hinge on a 2.6 percent average annual growth rate), projections which could not obviously provide a suitable basis for the implementation of policies and the realization of projects.³

The said projections are not even implemented by the Cameroon Government. Just like the results of many surveys, studies, etc carried out in Cameroon, they are not used in the various domains of life in Cameroon. The said government behaves as if their implementation would expose some hidden destructive facts, facts which may compromise its political, economic, social and financial stability.

B) Elections

The Cameroon Government does not handle the registration of voters with fairness and care. Its elections management body (ELECAM) is not honest in some of the aspects of voter registration. In this connection, it was reluctant to register potential voters as evidenced by the lateness noticed in the start of the 2024 registration process abroad. It embarked on this registration process under pressure from opposition parties and civil society organizations.

ELECAM is not willing to publish the national lists of registered voters as provided for by the law.⁴ It is dishonestly struggling, in complicity with government officials, to ensure that the number of registered voters in Cameroon does not go beyond a certain number which may be detrimental to the ruling party's stay in power. This situation has created a spirit of animosity and suspicion between ELECAM and opposition parties, a spirit which renders genuine reconciliation (as perceived by Thomas Buergethal) very difficult.⁵

The organization or management of elections in the field exposes Cameroon's ruling party's malaise and dishonesty as far as statistics are concerned. In order to protect its electoral interests (in terms of statistics), it ensures that most of the heads of polling stations are individuals who sympathize with it (civil servants, business persons, university lecturers, traditional leaders, etc) in terms of its inordinate quest to stay in power.

² Alfred Sauvy, *La Population*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1961, p. 9

Alfred Sauvy provides the basic reason for organizing population censuses. He asserts that population censuses stem from the need to know the number of inhabitants in a country and their distribution.

³ BUCREP, *World Population Day (2022)/A World of 8 Billion Inhabitants: Towards a Resilient Future. Making Use of Opportunities and Securing Rights and Choices for All*, Yaounde, BUCREP, 2022, p.15

This magazine mentions Cameroon's average annual population growth rate (2.6 percent).

⁴ These lists have to be published at the end of each year.

⁵ Thomas Buergethal, *International Human Rights (In a Nutshell)*, Minnesota, West Publishing Co., 1998, p.179

In this book, Thomas Buergethal presents a genuine form of reconciliation in the following words:

Reconciliation generally takes place through discussions which end in a consensus, leaving neither winners nor losers

Furthermore, the Cameroon Government does not care about the inconsequential numbers of voters who participate in elections organized or managed by ELECAM. It cares only about its final victory. This fact is exemplified by the 2018 Presidential Election in the North-West and South-West regions, an election which was heavily boycotted by some voters mainly due to security reasons.⁶

The vote-counting commissions in Cameroon which are meant to count the votes obtained during presidential elections are instruments which contribute to ensuring the victory of the ruling party. They always ensure that most or all of the electoral statistics which are in favour of this party are maintained irrespective of genuine complaints from these commissions' members who represent opposition parties.

The handling of electoral disputes exposes the statistical dishonesty of the Cameroon Government and its ruling party. The manner in which Cameroon's Constitutional Council tackles such disputes is quite illustrative of the said dishonesty.⁷ It is very partial. Its decisions or verdicts (in terms of statistics) are always in favour of the ruling party irrespective of the principle of fairness and justice.

C) Government Reaction to Some Important Issues

⁶ Freedom House, "Cameroon"

Available at: freedomhouse.org/country/cameroon/freedom-world/2021
Consulted on: 12/7/24

In this article, Freedom House highlights the considerable boycott of the 2018 Presidential Elections in Cameroon. It states as follows:

In the Anglophone North-West and South-West Regions, separatists called for an election boycott, and armed militants used threats and intimidation to keep voters away from the polls. Out of 2 300 polling stations in the North-West Region, only 74 opened on election day. Approximately 15 percent of the registered voters cast ballots in the South-West Region, while turn-out was only 5 percent in the North-West Region.

⁷ Most of the members of this council are "former" members of the ruling party.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Cameroon (Events of 2023)"
Available at: www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/cameroon
Consulted on: 11/10/24

Human Rights Watch spotlights an example of a statistical piece of information to which the Cameroon Government

The Cameroon Government has been reacting with a lot of acrimony and animosity to some statistics provided by national and international institutions in terms of issues (development, corruption, governance, sports, education, health, conflicts, etc) concerning Cameroon, statistics which are often negative. It forgets to take into account the fact that any reaction of acrimony and animosity concerning these statistics simply worsens the ugly picture presented by them.⁸

The Cameroon Government has also been reacting with a lot of levity to a good amount of thought-provoking statistics in various domains of life in Cameroon. It does not seriously take into consideration the gravity of the situation presented by these statistics. This is the case of statistics concerning the North-West and South-West Regions as well as the state of poverty in Cameroon.⁹

Monotony is one of the characteristics of the lack of seriousness exhibited by the Cameroon Government in terms of statistics. In a good number of cases, its officials and institutions (ministers, ministries, specialized bodies, directors, experts, etc) keep on reacting in a monotonous manner to heart-rending statistics which call for a dynamic reaction, a reaction aimed at improving or remedying the sad situation presented by these statistics.

Mediocrity is glaringly present in a lot of statistical operations in Cameroon. To this end, many government field workers of these operations are mostly interested in the huge amounts of money they obtain

reacts with acrimony and animosity (this type of reaction simply exacerbates the bad situation presented by the said fact). It states as follows:

At least 6 000 civilians have been killed by both government forces and separatist fighters since the violence started in late 2006.

⁹ Peter Atemkeng, "Understanding the Southern Cameroons Question", *The Post Magazine*, Edition No. 0001, Buea, 2019, p.7

Peter Atemkeng provides an example of a worrisome statistical fact which the Cameroon Government takes lightly, a statistical fact which indirectly presents a worrisome situation. He states as follows:

Anglophones must note that they were at least 50 percent responsible for what La République du Cameroun (LRC) did to them in the past 57 years. They were too gullible, credulous, complacent and condescending! And LRC wrongly took advantage of it.

from these operations in terms of mission or outstation allowances, fuel or transport allowances, salaries, etc. They unfortunately take field work very lightly, thereby violating a good number of the terms of reference of this work.

There is a lot of stupidity in some of Cameroon's statistical activities. A glaring example of this stupidity is found in the organization or management of censuses dealing population, housing, livestock and agricultural issues. The State invests a lot of money in the various phases of these censuses without bothering about the need to carry out an evaluation of the use of this money. Similarly, it does not care about assessing the other aspects of these phases (administrative, technical, etc).

History, in terms of statistics, is not given its right place in many government institutions in Cameroon. In other words, the archives departments of these institutions do not seriously take the need to store statistics for posterity. This deplorable situation substantially affects the running or management of the said institutions since statistics play a crucial role in the welfare or progress of institutions.

Social and other Groups, Institutions, Activities, Etc

Statistics are not given due importance in many Cameroonian schools as far as some school or educational issues are concerned. In this connection, these schools do not keep or have reliable statistics in the health, discipline, staff, sports, club and other domains, statistics which are supposed to be recorded and well preserved monthly, yearly, etc. Consequently, the said schools are not able to carry out reliable statistical assessments of their institutions, assessments which could pave the way for a brighter future in these institutions.

Statistics are not also given their important place in Cameroon's offices (private and public sector offices). The managerial teams or heads of these institutions do not deem it necessary to regularly collect and store significant statistics concerning management, the purchase of equipment or materials, the recruitment of staff, discipline, intra-staff relationships, cleanliness, social activities, social security issues, etc. This situation

does not permit these institutions to progress based on solid statistical foundations.

Statistics are relegated to the background in Cameroonian families. This fact is discernible in many domains of Cameroon's family life. One of them is that of childbirth. Many parents miss, do not know and do not care about the period during which every child born in Cameroon has the right to own a free birth certificate.¹⁰ Furthermore, many Cameroonian children do not have birth certificates, a situation which does not enable the State, schools, churches, hospitals, sports clubs, etc to have a clear picture of statistics dealing with their ages, years of birth, etc.

Statistical data are not fairly treated in some Cameroonian business circles or milieux. This is especially the case of small or informal businesses such as stores, kiosks, etc. Significant statistics (percentages, amounts, numbers, etc) concerning losses, profits, supplies, demand, etc in these businesses are neglected or not recorded, thereby leading to the poor management of prospective issues concerning the said businesses. There is no possibility to establish reliable statistical targets.

Statistical data are not taken seriously in many aspects of Cameroon's public service. In this connection, statistical data relating to ages are handled with a lot of levity. Many Cameroonians fighting against unemployment (in Cameroon's public service) are involved in age cheating.¹¹ They reduce their ages so as to meet the age requirements of public service competitive examinations and have access to public service jobs. Their genuine or real ages mean nothing to them when they are faced with public service employment opportunities.

Statistical data in Cameroon's cultural groups (village, tribal and ethnic groups) do not have a prominent place. The ones concerning the registration of members, loans, debts, gender, investments, births, deaths, marriages, divorce cases, elections, discipline, inter-group cooperation, cultural training, communication, etc are not well preserved and assessed, thereby depriving these groups and their members of a good number of opportunities which could lead to their progress.

¹⁰ Priscilla Ofori-Amanfo (UNICEF/For Every Child/Eastern and Southern Africa), "Birth Registration in Cameroon (A Mother's Wish to Protect Her Child's Rights)"

Available at: www.unicef.org/esa/stories/birth-registration-cameroon

Consulted on: 14/10/24

In this article, Priscilla Ofori-Amanfo clearly states that in most cases, Cameroonian parents miss the ninety days period (immediately after birth) during which every baby born in Cameroon has the right to own a free birth certificate.

¹¹ Mbih Tosam (Academia), "The Ethical and Social Implications of Age-cheating in Africa

Available at: www.academia.edu/70855294/The_ethical_and_social_implications_of_age_cheating_in_africa

Consulted on: 14/10/24

In this article, Mbih Tosam asserts that in Cameroon, age-cheating is one of the several corrupt means Cameroonian citizens use to fight unemployment...

In a nutshell, it could be inferred that Cameroon's statistical realm leaves much to be desired in terms of censuses; elections; government reaction to some statistical issues as well as the handling of statistical matters in some social and other groups, activities, institutions, etc. This situation has to be addressed in conferences, seminars, workshops, etc by the stakeholders (ministry officials dealing with statistics, election management authorities, census management workers, family members, school authorities, leaders of cultural groups, business persons, etc) of the said realm within the confines of David Spiegelhalter's significant perception of statistics.¹²

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¹² Bookey, "30 Best The Art of Statistics/Quotes With Image" (this article mentions quotes found in the book "The Art of Statistics", written by David Spiegelhalter)
Available at: www.bookey.app/quote-book/the-art-of-statistics
Consulted on: 15/7/24

Quotes from the book "The Art of Statistics", written by David Spiegelhalter
David Spiegelhalter spotlight statistics in the following terms:

- 1) *Statistics are the backbone of research.*
- 2) *Statistics are the tools for making sense of the world around us.*
- 3) *Statistics play a crucial role in shaping public policy and decision-making.*
- 4) *Statistics enable us to make informed decisions based on evidence, not just intuition.*
- 5) *Statistics are essential for understanding the world in which we are.*
- 6) *Statistics are the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe.*
- 7) *Statistics are the bridge between data and knowledge.*
- 8) *Statistics are the lens through which we view the world.*
- 9) *Statistics are the weapons with which we fight ignorance and uncertainty.*
- 10) *Statistics are the language of truth in a world of uncertainty.*