

DONOR-PATRONS AND AID CLIENTS: THE CASE OF FRANCE AND CAMEROON

Nikolas G. Emmanuel
Oklahoma State University
nikolas.emmanuel@okstate.edu

Abstract: Under a political conditionality approach donors use foreign assistance to leverage liberal-democratic reforms in their aid recipients. However, such efforts are frequently undermined by donor self-interest. This paper attempts to illustrate this general point by examining the “donor-patron” relationship between Cameroon and France during the early 1990s.

Key Words: political conditionality, development assistance, democratization, France, Cameroon

Résumé: Sous une approche de conditionnalité politique, les pays donateurs utilisent leur aide pour faciliter les réformes démocratiques. Cependant, ces efforts sont fréquemment réduits par le donneur lui-même. Cette recherche essaie d'illustrer cette hypothèse en examinant la relation proche entre le Cameroun et la France pendant les années 1990.

Mots clés: conditionnalité politique, aide au développement, démocratisation, France, Cameroun.

Introduction

Donors can have a significant impact on their aid recipients, far beyond the development projects they finance. This influence can be used to encourage reform, or it can be deployed to shield aid recipients from change. As a part of this process, a political conditionality approach can support moves in aid beneficiaries towards better governance and democratization. Such an effort to invoke political change using aid as a tool flourish in an environment where donors and domestic actors work together in a coordinated effort to achieve a common goal (Emmanuel Nikolas, 2008). Donors and recipients, however, frequently have mixed motives in their relations. These partners’ complex, sometimes intimate relationships frequently impede the application of the type of pressure associated with conditionality. As will be made clear in this paper, international support for genuine democratic change, through the conditionality process, is being seriously eroded by the behavior of what will be called the “donor-patron”.

This study investigates how realist impulses can undermine the application of political conditionality, specifically on the part of the donor, the dominant actor in the aid “partnership”. In doing so, I will examine the close ties between Cameroon and France in the early 1990s. With this Central African country, a political conditionality framework was undermined by the behavior of the country’s principal aid provider, France. Instead of contributing to the efforts of other donors by encouraging democratic reform, France dramatically increased its aid in an effort to shield the regime of President Paul Biya from this international pressure. Deep realist self-interest and historic patron-client relations

hampered the ability of Paris to pressure its close ally in Africa, dashing any attempt to encourage meaningful democratic reform in Cameroon. These actions blocked any attempt to apply political conditionality, and had lasting consequences on the evolution of Cameroon's political system. This case illustrates a general rule frequently evoked in the conditionality literature: "where bilateral relations are close, tied up with donors' own strategic or economic interests, then the effectiveness of aid conditionality is compromised" (Crawford Gordon, 2001:204; Stokke, 1995:44).

It is not new to argue that the realist interests of rich donor countries get in the way of more lofty ideals such as democracy promotion or human rights. The very notion that donor self-interest dominates foreign aid allocations is almost axiomatic in the scholarly literature on the subject (Morgenthau, 1962: 301-309; McKinlay, 1979: 411-463; Hook, 1995; Alesina & David, 2000:33-63; Schraeder & al, 1998: 294-323). Furthermore, recent empirical tests demonstrate that donors are highly self-interested and they frequently use their economic and military aid to reward their friends in return for their support on critical. UN votes, trade, security links, etc. (Moon 1983 : 317-320; Lebovic, 1998: 115-135; Meernik & al, 1998 :63-85; Schraeder & al., 1998). Some go so far as to posit that the strategic interests of donors fundamentally dominate the direction and the amount of aid flows (Schraeder et al, 1998: 297; Black, 1968; Eberstadt, 1988). Donors are clearly quite tempted to shelter a friendly client regime from the storm of conditionality applied by other international aid providers. This undercuts conditionality.

The concerned donor-patron acts to guard its own interests, especially from the intrusion of other donors in their perceived spheres of influence. It is not always in the interest of a donor-patron to exercise its leverage and force an aid recipient to undergo political change. This could potentially destabilize a beneficial relationship, and be counterproductive. Far from desiring to impose conditionality, the donor-patron may plainly wish to block the efforts of other aid providers and protect the regime in power. Cameroon and France provide an excellent example of this close donor-patron relationship. Furthermore, most of the scholarship on French foreign policy argues that its aid disbursements have been overtly oriented towards meeting Paris' major foreign policy goals for quite some time. (Quinn & al, 2006: 295; Hayter, 1966; McKinley & al, 1978: 459-478; Lancaster, 1999; Tint, 1972; Kolodziej, 1974; Aldrich & al, 1989). This study focuses on the case of Cameroon because it so clearly illustrates this point.

In the face of the fraudulent elections and widespread government repression in Cameroon, the deployment of political conditionalities was limited to a handful of secondary aid providers. The United States and Germany were the only openly critical donors of the violence and irregularities surrounding the 1992 Cameroonian elections and the only to impose aid sanctions. (*Africa Confidential*, 4 December 1992, vol. 33, n° 24: 6). To protect its ally, Paris countered these moves and dramatically augmented its grants and loans, bolstering the Biya regime and emboldening the Cameroonian leadership to stand firm against domestic and international pressures. Put in more general terms, the countervailing economic and strategic interests of important bilateral donors can blunt the effectiveness of conditionality (Crawford Gordon, 2001 : 203).

This paper adopts a case study approach and will be divided into three sections: the first examines Cameroon's domestic political evolution in the early 1990s and the elections of 1992; the second explores donor reactions to events in Cameroon during that period; and a third and final section focuses on the critical relationship between France and Cameroon and how it undermined the application of aid conditionality and the push for democratic reform by domestic and international actors. The overarching goal is to use France's behavior towards Cameroon to illustrate a more general point about how critical donors can negatively impact political conditionality by giving in to their own self-interests. This issue goes far beyond the case presented here and is a significant problem for the success of a conditionality approach. However, generalizing about the impact of the donor-patron will be left to future research.

PART I: CAMEROON IN THE EARLY 1990s

Almost simultaneously with the falling of the Berlin Wall, much of the sub-Saharan African political landscape began to undergo a dramatic transformation. Single-party regime after single-party regime across the continent (the regime choice *par excellence* for much of the developing world since the mid-1960s) fell under the combined weight of domestic and international pressures for political liberalization. Cameroon began to feel these historic winds of change in the early months of 1990.

Deeply inspired by the spectacular political openings of the national conference movement sweeping across the Francophone countries such as Benin, Niger, or Congo-Brazzaville, a group of dedicated Cameroonian political activists gathered in early 1990 to form an opposition party, something illegal in the country at the time. (Eboussi Boulaga, 1993; Vittin, 1991). This group of activists, including the former president of the national bar association, Yondo Black, were arrested on February 19, 1990, by security forces and charged with subversion (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1990, n° 154:85).

Their trial, held in front of a military tribunal nonetheless, grabbed the attention of the entire country (Mehler, 1997: 97). The court rapidly came to a verdict on April 5, 1990, and found Yondo Black guilty of "holding clandestine meetings" and "distributing political tracts hostile to the regime". (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1990, n° 155:88). Somewhat smaller sentences were handed out to the other members of his group of so-called co-conspirators. This seemed extremely excessive considering the momentous political changes that were taking place worldwide at the time.

The challenges to the government's monopoly on power would not stop there. In early April, shortly after this first challenge, members of the opposition formed the Social Democratic Front (SDF), without of state permission. Similar to earlier efforts, several key SDF militants, including their leader John Fru Ndi, were quickly arrested and put on trial for subversion, again, in front of a military tribunal. Eleven of the activists were found guilty on April 5, 1990, only a handful of days after the opening of the trial. Their sentences numbered in decades. These trials again demonstrated that President Paul Biya was unwilling to allow a similar level of political liberalization seen elsewhere in Africa and the world at the time (*Africa Confidential*, March 1990, vol.30 n° 22).

This second legal decision, against the SDF activists, led to widespread public outrage in Cameroon, especially in opposition bastions. The group's remaining free leaders, now part of an illegal organization in the eyes of the regime, clandestinely called for demonstrations against the guilty verdicts to be held in Bamenda, the capital of the North-West province, against the guilty verdict. Some several thousand demonstrators showed up to protest the regime in Bamenda, on May 26. (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1990, n° 155:88). Immediately, as Africa Confidential points out, "[t]he government was terrified that antigovernment demonstrations could spread, East German-style" (*Africa Confidential*, 15 June 1990, vol. 31, n° 12:5). To prevent such a contagion the Cameroonian security forces deployed massively in an attempt to quickly control and disperse the gathering. However, as the regime's apprehension led them to believe, events quickly slipped out of their control. The Rubicon of Cameroon's political liberalization had been crossed when security forces violently responded to stone-throwing youths with live ammunition, killing several of them. Through this over-reaction it quickly became apparent that Paul Biya and his clique had lost the support of many Cameroonians for good. The president's sway in the country would be further eroded by events in the months that followed the Bamenda protests.

After several extremely tense weeks involving regular antigovernment demonstrations, President Paul Biya in late June began to waver. In a surprise move he informed the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), in their annual congress that the country should be prepared for multiparty competition (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1990, n°156:312). Biya appeared to be caving into the widespread domestic and growing international pressures on the regime.

Interestingly, this unexpected announcement came only a week after the Franco-African summit at La Baule, France. At this meeting, then-French President François Mitterrand argued for a link between political liberalization and access to future development aid from donors. This veiled threat appeared to have a clear impact on Paul Biya's behavior. Donors can clearly have a significant influence on their aid recipient's conduct. The question remained, would France back this move up with credible action?

Just following La Baule, Cameroon's ruling party in addition to permitting opposition parties, moved to end press censorship, and reduced limitations on freedom of movement and association. These shifts laid the groundwork for the establishment of opposition parties. In a further move, the government released the political prisoners held in the Yondo Black and SDF affairs (*Africa Confidential*, 15 June 1990, vol. 31, n° 12:6). Was this the signs of real liberalization or were they designed to buy the Biya regime some breathing room vis à vis an increasingly restless Cameroonian populace and international community?

After extensive debate and some resistance from hardliners within the ruling party, Biya's initiative led to fundamental changes in the Cameroonian political system. The process of liberalization became official on December 6, 1990, as the parliament adopted a law permitting "pluripartisme intégral" (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1991, n° 157: 77). This historic legislation ended the dominance of the single-party state in Cameroon, set forth the guidelines for the creation of opposition parties, and laid the groundwork for their participation in the coun-

political system (Takougang Joseph, 2003: 431-432). This new political order was immediately put into action with the legalization of the first officially permitted opposition party since 1966.

This political opening did have its limits, however. Although the regime had announced multiparty politics, shortly after this declaration the government responded harshly to opposition political meetings and demonstrations, arresting journalists and opposition leaders, banning demonstrations, and using police powers to restrict the newly won political freedoms of association and assembly (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997: 110). From such confusing behavior, Cameroonians began to ask themselves if this new political order was not just simply a new guise for the old one. Some began to desire to challenge the reality of these new reforms. The months that followed would see how far the regime was truly willing to go.

The first major test of these constitutional changes did not come from opposition political parties, but from the domestic press. The new media law passed by the Cameroonian National Assembly allowed for increased freedom of expression. However absurdly, the government maintained the right to censure the press at any time (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1991, n° 158: 84). This contradiction was immediately challenged. The most significant confrontation between the press and government came just before the end of 1990 in the form of an editorial published in Cameroon's main daily, *Le Messager* (*Le Messager*, 27 December 1990, n° 209), by one of the newspaper's most celebrated columnists, Célestin Monga. In the article, Monga accused President Biya of being overly certain about his hold on power. He also denounced the way Biya had patronizingly addressed the deputies of the National Assembly several days before (Mehler, 1997: 110). The government intervened and ceased the printed copies of the edition (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1991, n° 158: 84). Furthermore, Pius Njawe, the editor of the publication, and Monga were both arrested and sentenced to six months in prison for defaming the President. The subsequent trial served to raise tensions in the country and caused many to further question the seriousness of the reforms put into place by the regime. Many concluded that if the press could not openly be critical of the president, who could?

These events quickly grew beyond their initial scope, and became a critical turning point in Cameroon's political reform process. Unanswerable questions were raised about how far these changes would be allowed to go. This uneasy situation forced the largest opposition group (not yet a legal political party), the Social Democratic Front, to immediately present the government with an ultimatum: "either legalize us or we will behave as if we are legal" (Mehler, 1997: 97). From here, the ruling party's attempt to control the course of events would begin to fail.

As domestic discontent grew, 1991 would prove to be an extremely testing and bloody year for Cameroon. The process of political liberalization that had begun in 1990 with some trepidation on the part of the government blossomed into widespread popular revolt by the early spring of 1991. Demands for a national conference along the lines of what happened in Benin and elsewhere, open to opposition political forces and all currents of civil society, were flatly brushed aside by Biya who viewed this option as potentially being

the last nail in his coffin. The public reaction to the dismissal of such a constitutional conference was far from positive. The ruling party would have nothing to do with this alternative and began to feel significant resistance from the population. These popular demands for change would be met with a heavy hand.

Antigovernment demonstrations began to spread in earnest throughout the country in late April. Talk of a national conference and Biya's removal was spreading like wildfire. By early May, massive nationwide protests paralyzed the country. Furthermore, Cameroon's economy was brought to a standstill by a succession of widely followed general strikes supporting the protests, referred to as "*opérations villes mortes*". These actions virtually emptied the streets in all of the major cities and towns in the country. The government did not take lightly to these protests, however. The result was heavy in human life, as opposition demonstrators at times engaged in pitched battles with government security police and army troops, which were deployed *en masse* to quell the disruptions, frequently using lethal force. Estimates put civilian deaths at around 300 in the spring of 1991 alone (Mehler, 1997: 100). This chaos forced the government to take the extraordinary measure of putting seven out of the country's ten regions under direct military control (Mehler, 1997: 100). As the summer of 1991 approached, many believed that the Cameroonian regime had its back against the wall, and that its total collapse was eminent (*Africa Confidential*, 26 July 1991, vol. 32, n°15:5).

However, Paul Biya and his entourage proved to be much more resilient than many had expected. The president was able to maintain control of the crisis with several cards up his sleeve: 1) the overwhelming loyalty of the security forces, 2) an adept manipulation of ethno-regional and political cleavages, and most importantly 3) the unwavering support of the France, Cameroon's donor-patron. As Biya's hand played out, the second half of 1991 would go to the advantage of the regime. According to Susan Dicklitch, "The campaign of civil disobedience ended in mid-october 1991 following government repression and detention of opposition members and protestors" (Dicklitch Susan, 2002:171). Paul Biya at this time looked to consolidate his position in his speech to Cameroonian people on 11 October 1991. In this declaration Biya announced the conveying of the Yaoundé Tripartite Meeting to discuss a limited number of issues, access to the media for political parties and the electoral code. The meeting, from 30 October 1991 to 6 November 1991, brought together the key political parties but fell far short of the sovereign national conference demanded by numerous opposition parties and wide swaths of civil society. The lack of progress on concrete politico-constitutional reform caused the opposition Social Democratic Front to walk out of the meetings, declaring that they would only return if their demands for deomocratic change were met (Social Democratic Front, "Press Statement on the Yaoundé Tripartite Meeting", 11 November 1991).

Biya took advantage of his momentary tactical superiority over his opposition adversaries to announce the holding of parliamentary elections only several months later in March 1992, to be followed by presidential elections in October 1992. He hoped that this announcement would finally put an end to the demonstrations that had paralyzed the country for months. His optimism, however, was short-lived. Having counted on opposition exhaustion, Biya was

amazed that his announcement of elections was followed by a demonstration of some 50,000 protestors on the streets of Douala, the largest city in Cameroon and the economic capital of the country (*Africa Confidential*, 25 October 1991, vol. 32, n°21:2-3). The opposition complained that there was not enough time to organize fair elections.

Faced with tremendous domestic and international pressure for meaningful political reform, President Biya saw the 1992 legislative and presidential elections as an opportunity to restore his legitimacy and quiet his opponents. However, these hopes were put into question by the decision of the main opposition party, the SDF, to boycott the elections. The SDF underlined three reasons for this decision (Takougang, 1996:57)

First, they felt that opposition parties were at a disadvantage because of the short amount of time given to organize an effective election campaign. Second, the SDF leadership contended that the electoral districts had been drawn to give an advantage to the ruling CPDM party. Third, the new electoral system for the legislature was changed from a proportional regional list system to a first-past-the-post, plurality one, undermining the chances of smaller parties of being represented in the National Assembly.

The boycott by the SDF effectively meant that the new parliament would represent a distorted picture of Cameroon. English-speakers and more particularly the Bamileke, the primary supporters of the SDF, would be severely underrepresented, if represented at all. Given this reality, the ruling CPDM party began increasingly to appear as the front for Biya's ethnic constituents, the Beti, and the other peoples of the South (*Africa Research Bulletin*, March 1992:10497). Regardless of the Social Democratic Front's boycott, Cameroon's first multiparty election since the 1960s took place on March 1, 1992. The price to this point was high: human rights organizations say the security forces had killed up to 400 antigovernment protesters since demands for multiparty democracy were first raised in early 1990 (*Europe Information Service*, 1992). However, the results of the election would come as something of a surprise to many domestic and international observers.

In a clear indication of the government's unpopularity, the ruling CPDM party secured only a plurality of the electorate, winning a total of just 88 seats in the 180-member National Assembly (or 48.9%) (see figure 1). The regime was unable to secure an outright majority. Amazingly, this clear defeat of the CPDM came regardless of a boycott by the SDF, and in the face of evident government manipulation of the electoral process. The conditions had seemed perfect for a victory by Biya's forces, but none was to be had. This reality meant that in order to secure a majority and pass legislation the incumbent CPDM would need the support of at least one opposition party. However, this was not a problem for Biya's domestic patron-client machine.

The main opposition party in the election, the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) captured 68 seats (or 37.8%) of the vote mainly in the Muslim North of the country, while the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) won 18 seats (10%) primarily in the Littoral and West provinces, among the Bassas ethnic group. Instead of turning towards these relatively large formations, the CPDM entered into a coalition with a smaller Northern-based party, the Movement for the Defense of the Republic (MDR),

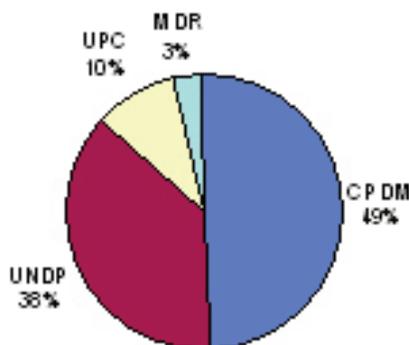
which won only 6 seats in the poll. This was enough to put Biya's party into the majority with minimal concessions, however. Together the CPDM and MDR

Figure 1: Cameroonian Legislative Elections (March 1, 1992)

(60.6% participation)

Source: African Elections Database,

http://africanelectionstripod.com/cm.html#1992_presidential_Election



formed a narrow majority by only 4 seats (94 of 180 seats or 52.2%). To cement the deal between the two parties, Biya used patronage to win over the support of key individuals, offering ministerial posts to their partners in the coalition (Dicklitch Susan, 2002:165). In handing out these favors, Biya was forced to dramatically increase the size of his executive cabinet, from previously 25 seats to 37. This was done to pay back clients who were crucial for maintaining a majority in the legislature, not to mention as a boost to Biya's questionable post-election legitimacy among the country's political elite. However, the president's authority and legitimacy would be even more dubious after the presidential elections.

In a further blow to the ruling clique, the incumbent, Paul Biya, won an anemic plurality in the October 11, 1992, presidential contest, garnering only 39.98% of the Cameroonian electorate (*Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1992:10745). This time, the candidate from the SDF, John Fru Ndi participated, and almost won the poll (3). In the end, just fewer than 120,000 votes separated the winner, Biya, (with 1,185,466 votes) from the runner-up, John Fru Ndi, (with 1,066,602 votes). (*African Elections Database* http://africanelections.tripod.com/cm.html#1992_Presidential_Election).

The results closely followed the regional, linguistic, and ethnic lines seen in the parliamentary poll. Biya's support focused in the Center, South, and East provinces, mainly around the Beti people. John Fru Ndi secured the vast majority of his votes from the Northwest, Southwest, as well as from the Littoral and West provinces (Takougang, 1996:60 & *Cameroon Tribune*, 27 October 1992:10-

11). However meager, even these weak results were still enough for Paul Biya to win with only 39.9% of the vote, given that the presidential electoral law called for a single round, winner-take-all, plurality system.

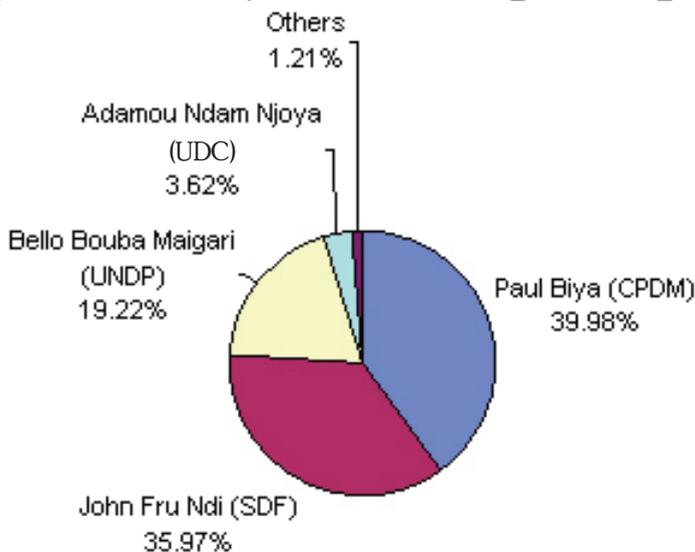
Biya's victory was not without contestation. The day following the poll, John Fru Ndi, among others, alleged widespread fraud and denounced the elections as having been rigged. He "claimed the government had stuffed ballot boxes, altered electoral lists and distributed inadequate ballot papers for the opposition" (Financial Times, 12 October 1992). Shortly after the announcement of the winner, demonstrations and some rioting broke out across the country (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1993, n° 165:71).

Figure 2: Cameroon Presidential Elections (October 11, 1992)

(71.9% participation)

Source: African Elections Database,

http://africanelections.tripod.com/cm.html#1992_Presidential_Election



These protests were met with the declaration of a state of emergency and the deployment of thousands of troops. This crackdown led to massive wave of arrests of opposition activists, journalists, and any demonstrators caught protesting the election results Bamenda (*Afrique Contemporaine*, 1993, n° 165:72). In the process, security forces killed three protestors in the city of Bamenda (*Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1992: 10494). In a further crackdown, the SDF, leader, John Fru Ndi, was placed under house arrest after having called for popular protest of the election results (*Africa Research Bulletin*, November 1992: 10778).

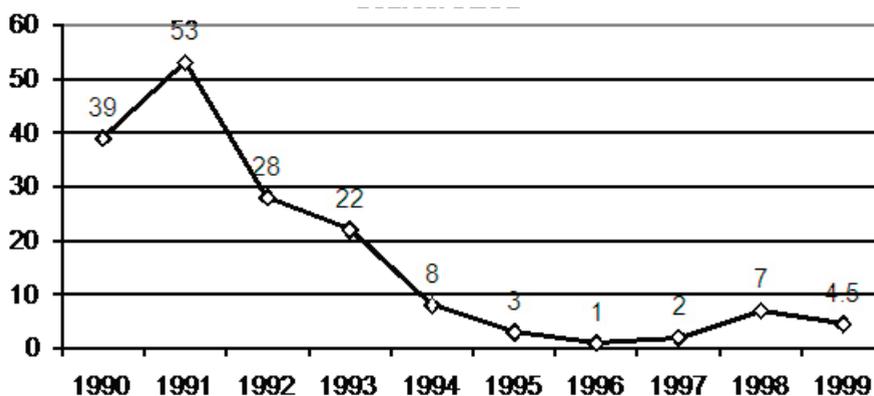
Unlike a year before, in 1991, these demonstrations did not generalize across the country. For the most part, protesting was contained to SDF strongholds and was short-lived. As one scholar points out, "there was no sustained countrywide protest after the 1992 elections. Certainly the ability of

the Biya regime (aided by French aid) to withstand the *villes mortes* campaigns deflated opposition hopes of ... unseating Biya.” (Dicklitch Susan, 2002: 165). It appeared that all hopes were dashed for an East German or a Béninois-style popular overthrow of Biya, or even an electoral coup (Dicklitch Susan, 2002: 172). However, several new actors would pick up the mantle of criticizing the Biya regime and its behavior where domestic opposition left off. That is the international donor community. Their reaction was dominated by concerns that the Cameroonian government had resorted to substantial fraud and repression to ensure electoral victory (*Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1992: 10744).

PART II: THE IMPACT OF DONORS ON CAMEROON’S POLITICAL EVOLUTION

The German parliament decided on November 9, 1992, to be the first donor to suspend some of its bilateral aid projects with the Biya government because of the above mentioned behavior (Agence France Presse, 9 November 1992). Germany reduced its aid from \$50 million in 1992 to just over \$30 million in 1993, a drop of some forty percent (*Africa Confidential*, 4 December 1992, vol.33 n°24). They expressed their disquiet over “President Biya’s actions against the opposition ... and ... fraud during the recently-held presidential elections” (*Africa Research Bulletin*, November 1992:10802). Germany also attempted to influence the European Union’s assistance, but France blocked these efforts. In the end, the EU only made “veiled threats but took no action” against Cameroon (Crawford Gordon, 2001:178). Several weeks after Germany moved to sanction its development assistance, the United States decided to exercise its own conditionality approach towards the Cameroonian government.

Figure 3 : US Bilateral ODA to Cameroun
(Millions of Current US \$)
Source: OECD



During much of the 1980s, United States economic assistance to Cameroon mirrored the amounts of that country’s primary donor, France, at approximately \$50 million annually. The events of the early 1990s would dramatically change this pattern.

Because of the regime's behavior, the United States imposed aid sanctions in line with a conditionality approach on Yaoundé shortly after the 1992 presidential poll. As demonstrated in Figure 4 above, the actions of the Biya regime in the early 1990s had a significant impact on U.S. economic aid disbursements to Cameroon. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the economic assistance to the Central African state from the United States was reduced from \$53 million in 1991 to \$28 million in 1992 (or a decline of 47%). American aid virtually ended after 1993, except for an extremely limited amount of humanitarian assistance given directly to NGOs. U.S. economic and military aid to Cameroon would remain virtually nonexistent for the remainder of the 1990s. Furthermore, in 1994 the USAID liaison office in Cameroon was closed permanently (4). In its reasoning for the dramatic reduction in relations, the U.S. State Department cited its "concerns over human rights abuses and the pace of political and economic liberalization" (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm>).

The Clinton Administration decision to impose political conditionality came after a group of U.S. election observers from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) reported a "number of serious problems" with the October 11, 1992, presidential elections. They concluded that the poll was far from free and fair (*Africa Research Bulletin*, November 1992:11060). More specifically, the NDI "accused the Biya regime of systematic fraud to secure victory for the ruling Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM)" (Huband Mark, 1992). According to the election monitoring group the Cameroonian government had created a situation in which the elections guaranteed that Paul Biya would win, regardless of the true outcome (*Africa Research Bulletin*, November 1992:10778). In all, the NDI detailed a series of allegations of irregularities surrounding the presidential election. They accused the ruling party of: the packing the National Electoral Committee with members of the ruling-party; not completing voter registration process; issuing multiple voting cards to certain individuals; creating major imbalances for access to state-owned media (142 minutes of TV for ruling party and only 12 minutes for all 6 opposition candidates); altering the location of polling stations just before the election; a shortage of ballot papers at polling stations; not opening voter registers to observers; and unreasonably delaying the vote counting process (*Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1992:10744).

Following the elections, then U.S. State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, issued a stern warning concerning this situation, accusing the Biya regime of "using intimidation to strengthen his position, after the presidential election which was beset by fraud" (*Africa Research Bulletin*, December 1992:10802). Accompanying its deployment of political conditionality, Washington asked the Biya regime to immediately end the state of emergency and to release the SDF opposition leader John Fru Ndi from house arrest. If this was done, the U.S. would recommence normal bilateral relations (Agence France Presse, 29 November 1992 & *Africa Research Bulletin*, December 1992:10839). As can be imagined, this seriously soured relations between Washington and Yaoundé. In response to the American condemnation, Cameroon withdrew its ambassador to Washington, Paul Pondi, and the Foreign Minister Roger Booh Booh summoned the United States ambassador Frances

Cook to complain about American interference in Cameroon's domestic affairs, leading some to say that she openly supported John Fru Ndi during the elections (Agence France Presse, 29 November 1992).

This conditionality approach applied by Germany and the United States only had a limited impact on the Biya regime. The related aid sanctions by these secondary aid providers were nothing more than a symbolic drop in the bucket when compared to the colossal inflows of economic assistance from France in the period 1992-1995. As will be demonstrated in the next section, only one donor is truly important in Cameroon's policy-making calculations – France. The important question is why does Cameroon matter to France?

PART III: THE FRENCH DONOR-PATRON AND CAMEROON

Even after nearly a half century since independence, France remains very much present in Africa south of the Sahara. As Hook indicates,

“France still swaggers in Africa ...it is the only colonial master that never went home ... French civil servants manage African government ministries. French businessmen are building skyscrapers, the ports, the industry. It is possible in a dozen African cities to sit in a café on a boulevard named de Gaulle and scan a copy of *Le Monde*” (Hook Steven, 1995:55).

Similar to the United States' Monroe Doctrine, and its perceived historic hegemony in Latin American affairs, France preserves extremely tight bonds with a number of its former colonial dependencies in Africa and dislikes any outside interference in the affairs of its clients. France views its ex-colonies in Africa as its “*pré carré*”, critical to its overall foreign policy. Countries such as Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, the Côte d'Ivoire, etc. are also commonly referred to in French policy circles as their own personal “*chasse gardée*”, or private hunting reserve, underlining the deeply patrimonial links that still exist between the former metropole and its “*periphery*”. French aid is also concentrated in maintaining these ties. For decades after independence “the top ten African recipients of French aid... were all former French colonies or protectorates” (Schraeder Peter & al, 1998:317).

It is clear why some lesser-developed countries might want to maintain relations with a rich donor like France. But, why should France care about these relatively marginal players on the international scene? It is because Paris is keen on “...maintaining a political clientele [that] has proved useful to France, in international institutions, because it has given it the rank and the prestige of a medium size power ...” (Conte Bernard, 1997:141). These African clients allow France to play a larger role in the world than it would otherwise be able to without them. This is why countries like Cameroon matter in French foreign policy.

French foreign aid is an integral part in maintaining these relationships. Some have even argued that Paris' cooperation policy practiced under the Fifth Republic is the main instrument of French power politics (Bayart Jean-François, 1984 & Adda J. & Smouts Marie-Claude, 1989). “ODA has become an important tool in reviving the country's status abroad. French leaders concentrated on their existing spheres of influence in the Third World, particularly in franco-phone Africa...” (Hook Steven, 1995:51). Furthermore, the literature suggests

reign aid constitutes one component of a remarkably integrated system of economic relationships ... that was predicated on maintaining and enhancing a network of ties within the francophone world.” (Schraeder Peter & al, 1998:301). Aid greases the wheels of a deeper patron-client alliance.

While France has favored friendly regimes in its ex-colonies with substantial aid flows, since the 1990s Paris has increasingly concentrated its scarce assistance resources on several pivotal allies, most notably Cameroon, Senegal, and the Côte d’Ivoire (regardless of its recent instability) (Conte Bernard, 1997:139). These relatively large regional powers in sub-Saharan Africa have received much more attention than smaller former French colonies on the continent, such as Bénin or Mali (both excellent examples of successful transitions to multiparty democracy), for example. This concentration of resources is out of the desire to maintain political stability among its close allies on the continent, which is critical to France’s relationship with Africa. The loss of an important friendly regime has real costs for French diplomacy. Cameroon falls flatly into this category, and pressure to democratize threatens the bond between Yaoundé and Paris, which is facilitated by the Biya regime.

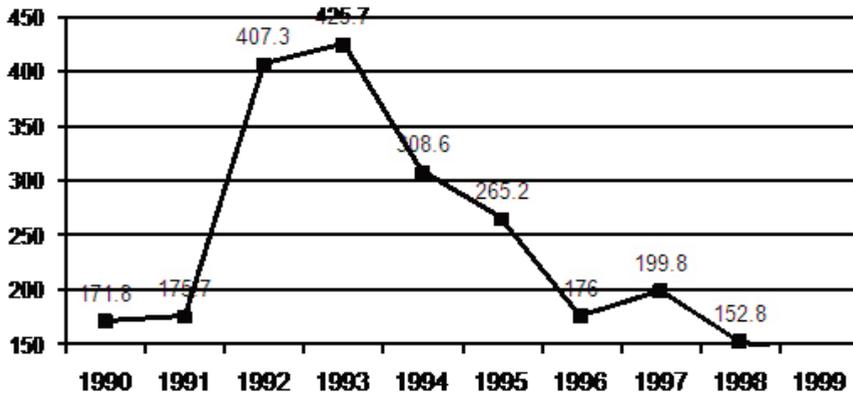
More than just state-to-state relations, it must be added that French leadership holds close personal relationships with certain African elite. These friendships facilitate interactions between capitals. Elite in each country can draw on these contacts in an emergency or when a new business deal is in the works. A friendly voice in the Elysée Palace is only a phone call away. Some have gone even farther to call these relations between France and Africa as part of a much larger patron-client system frequently referred to as “la Françafrique” (Verschave François-Xavier, 2003 & 2000). Such bonds clearly played an important role in the democratic reform crisis in Cameroon, and this case raises more general questions about the France’s role in Africa. Paris’ massive support during the period in question shows their acquiescence to a particular style of rule, and more centrally to a particular group of leaders. In essence, through its extensive aid to Cameroon, France condoned the behavior of the Biya regime and significantly helped it maintain control.

As Cameroon came under intense domestic and international pressure to open the country’s political system to multiparty competition beginning in 1990, Paris moved in to help its friend and client. While other bilateral donors were pulling their aid out and investors were fleeing the instability in droves, Paris reacted to shore up the position of its long-time ally, President Paul Biya, by dramatically increasing its foreign aid, forgiving outstanding debt, paying off creditors like the World Bank, and convincing the IMF to increase Cameroon’s country quotas. Some go so far as to claim that “France holds the key to political developments in the country: if Paris closes the financial pipeline, few believe Biya’s government would survive.” (*Africa Confidential*, 4 December 1992, vol. 33, n° 24:6). Clearly, Biya was able to maintain his hold on power and resist domestic and international pressure because of French economic assistance.

However, France’s behavior in Cameroon severely contradicted the policies laid out by Francois Mitterrand at the Franco-African Summit in June of 1990. There, the former French president argued for a conditionality approach, saying that Paris would focus its foreign aid on those countries which were

engaged in democratization (i.e., reducing it to those not undertaking reform) (McKesson J.A, 1993:58). Yet, when confronted with concrete foreign policy choices, French leaders were much more willing to prop up their friends and allies on the continent than to defend the abstract idea of multiparty democracy that could potentially undermine such close relationships (Smith Stephen, 2006:70). As Schraeder points out, “In essence, as long as authoritarian leaders continued

Figure 3 : French Bilateral ODA to Cameroon
(Millions of Current US \$)
Source: OECD



to underscore their commitment to close ties with France, they were unlikely to find themselves under heavy pressure from Paris to democratize.”(Schraeder Peter & al, 1998:318). This behavior seriously undermined the use of political conditionality in Cameroon and elsewhere. Furthermore, Cameroon exemplifies the Elysée Palace’s retreat from what Mitterrand argued for at La Baule (*Africa Confidential*, 5 March 1993, vol. 34, n°5:4). While France had been at the forefront in demanding change in Africa at the end of the Cold War, Cameroon showed the world that the Parisian foreign policy circles were more interested in symbolic rather than real political change.

Biya, a reluctant reformer to say the least, certainly benefited from France’s help, and probably maintained power because of Paris’ double-talk and money. Amazingly, even significant human rights abuses and rampant electoral fraud could not deter his French backers. As the bi-monthly *Africa Confidential* indicates, “Regardless of Biya’s behavior there appears to be no diminution in French support.” (*Africa Confidential*, 6 March 1992, vol. 33, n°5:4). More importantly, “when Cameroon’s economy was nearly crippled and the regime seriously threatened, it was France that moved quickly to provide financial support for the regime, thus preventing it from collapsing.” (Takougang Joseph, 2003:432). Mitterrand acted as kingmaker in Cameroon during the chaos of the early 1990s. He preferred to maintain his personal friend, Paul Biya, in power instead of the uncertainties of multiparty democracy and the potential victory of unfriendly, non-francophone, forces. For these reasons, France is the only international actor

the international community (led by the U.S. and Germany) was calling the 1992 presidential election a farce, France's foreign ministry sent a letter congratulating Paul Biya's victory (Huband Mark, 1993; Krieger Milton, 1994:625; Gros Jean-Germain, 1995:118).

In regards to bilateral aid flows, the French reaction to the instability of the early 1990's in Cameroon was dramatic, to say the least. The massive wave of economic assistance from France, as seen in the previous figure, submerged the relatively small trickle of funds coming from the secondary donors like the United States or Germany (even before sanctions). For much of the early 1990s, France's aid distributions to Cameroon represented the second most important destination of French aid worldwide, slightly behind that of the Côte d'Ivoire. Paris was by far the number one donor to Biya's Cameroon, granting \$2.4 billion between 1990 and 1999 (with over half of that being allocated in the critically tumultuous period of 1992-1995) while other donors were suspending their aid. The French Republic's assistance dwarfed that of the next most important provider, the United States, by some five and one half times. Furthermore, France reacted to the instability surrounding Biya's reign by more than doubling its annual aid, which increased from \$175 million to \$407 million. In the four years between 1992 and 1995, Paris disbursed \$1.4 billion, or about \$106 per Cameroonian (given a population of 13.2 million). But France did much more than this. As Takougang indicates,

“Since 1992, France has also manifested its support for the Biya regime in several other ways, including a 1994 financial package to help the administration meet its obligations to the IMF, and strong public support for the administration by various French government officials. A major reason for French support for the Biya regime was the fear that a victory by the SDF led by Fru Ndi, an anglophone – since the SDF posed the most threat to President Biya and his ruling CPDM – might deprive France of its economic dominance in Cameroon by forging a much closer relationship with the United States, Britain, and other European nations.” (Takougang Joseph, 2003:432; Fonchingong T.N., 1998: 130; Gros Jean-Germain, 1995:123; Young Crawford, 1998: 341-358).

Without a doubt, French aid resources helped Biya's regime to maintain control during the extremely chaotic early 1990s. Not only was this extraordinary external support useful in fending off the widespread domestic demands for his removal, but it also allowed the Cameroonian president was to ignore the pressures from other donors like the United States. “The primary reason for the dramatic increase in French aid was to ensure Biya's victory, especially as the most popular opposition candidate was John Fru Ndi, an anglophone politician perceived as a threat to French interests in Cameroon.” (Schraeder Peter, 2000:395; Agir Ici et Survie, 1996).

Generally speaking, the actions of donor patrons, like France, have undermined the efforts of the international community, which over the past decade has increasingly sought to use a conditionality approach in an effort to leverage liberal democratic change in authoritarian regimes such as Biya's Cameroon, a country that remains ranked with some of the most authoritarian and repressive regimes on the planet, including Equatorial Guinea, Myanmar,

and North Korea. (Freedom House, “Cameroon: 2002 Country Report) & (Freedom House, “Political Rights Scores”).

Conclusion

It appears obvious, from the preceding discussion, that Cameroon’s reform process was not positively influenced by the application of political conditionality, primarily because of the behavior of the donor-patron, France. Cameroon did not experience real, deep democratic change. That is to say, all of the internal struggles and external interventions that took place in the Central African country in the early 1990s amounted to nothing, and France’s behavior should squarely take part of the blame.

Yet, however responsible France may be, it must be pointed out that in the end the real responsibility for Cameroon’s lack of democratic reform must be placed upon the Biya regime itself. It’s willingness to resort to fraud, massive use of corruption, and repression all combined to make Cameroon’s political liberalization a deeply flawed process. The policy choices taken in Yaoundé are at the root of this failure. However, external actors, such as the United States, tried to warn Cameroon that its behavior was outside the acceptable norms of the international community.

Some donors did condition their aid because of the above-mentioned reasons. This did result in reductions in their economic assistance to Cameroon. These aid providers hoped that this action would encourage change in the authoritarian nature of the regime by sending a clear signal of disapproval. Yet, these secondary actors lacked the necessary leverage to persuade President Paul Biya to facilitate a true democratic opening in the country. This limited influence was magnified by the behavior of France, which played an extremely corrosive role in Cameroon’s abortive liberalization process. The massive influx of aid and other forms of support provided for the Biya regime thwarted the efforts by Cameroon’s domestic political opposition and the donor community to encourage real, lasting democratic reform.

If there is one lesson that is to be learned from the case of Cameroon concerning the application of political conditionality, it is that donors must coordinate their activities as widely as possible with domestic actors, and especially with aid providers that are close to the recipient, the so-called donor-patrons. Furthermore, for a conditionality approach to work, donors must be able to overcome their realist impulses. However, as France demonstrated in the case of Cameroon, it is hard to turn your back on a client regime in which you have significant reciprocal interests. Clearly, when donors “continue to allow neo-mercantilist or neorealist criteria to dominate aid allocation decisions, the chance that aid will induce positive ... outcomes diminishes” (Quinn James and David Simon, 2006: 312).

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(1) The CPDM is the only legally recognized party in Cameroon. Cameroon became a de facto one-party state in 1966 and was dominated by the country’s most powerful political party, the Cameroon National Union, a grouping of six different political parties. The Cameroon Nationa

the CPDM. Paul Biya has been the president of the party, since his ascendancy to the position of chief executive in 1982. The CPDM has existed as an appendage of Biya's political machine, facilitating cooptation and his patron-client network.

(2) Literally, "dead city" operations, consisting of massive strikes in which people refuse to leave their homes.

(3) Some say that he actually did win and was denied victory because of electoral fraud.

(4) Officially the USAID office was closed by the Clinton administration for "budgetary reasons".

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