

Cameroon

Ethnicity in Cameroon

Group selection

Regarding the group list there is one paramount question: Should the Anglophones be listed as one politically relevant ethno-linguistic group? In principle, one could see good reasons to proceed in this way. Anglophone West Cameroon joined the Francophone Republic of Cameroon separately in 1961 and was first a state of its own within the so-created federation. In 1972, it was practically annexed into the new unitary state, which led to a certain subjugation under the francophone-dominated central state. As a result, the anglophone community came to feel marginalized both politically and culturally (670; 671; 672; 673; 674). Particularly with the political liberalization at the beginning of the 1990s, many Anglophone leaders complained about this perceived injustice and marginalization, and several pressure groups were formed to fight for the “Anglophone cause”. A return to the federal system or even secession were postulated (675; 676; 677; 678).

However, although there certainly is an “Anglophone question” in Cameroon, the Anglophone group has been far from politically homogeneous. In contrast, there is quite significant ethnic division between the coastal/forest people of the Southwest Province and the grassfield people in the Northwest Province (which are, in fact, culturally closer to the French speaking people of the Western Province). This ethnic division has resulted in a political rift dating back to the time even before the unification with French Cameroon (679; 680; 681; 682). The first Southwest political pressure group was founded in the 1960s already and succeeded by both southwestern and northwestern separate lobbies in the course of democratization (683; 684; 685). The Francophone center was able to take advantage of this division and to pit the two regions and their leaders against each other (686; 687; 688; 689). Thus, the Anglophone group very seldom acted as a united political bloc, and that bit of joint political action it was able to take was always hampered by regionalism, mutual suspicion, and internal elite power struggles. For this reason, the **Anglophones** are not listed as a united ethno-linguistic group, and instead are divided into two politically relevant groups, corresponding to the two cultural and administrative regions.

The **Fulani** culturally and politically dominate the Muslim north (690). The smaller northern Muslim ethnic groups, which can be seen

⁶⁷⁰ [DeLancey, 2000]

⁶⁷¹ [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁶⁷² [Konings, 1997]

⁶⁷³ [Mehler, 1993]

⁶⁷⁴ [Takougang, 1997]

⁶⁷⁹ [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁶⁸⁰ [Konings, 1997]

⁶⁸¹ [Mehler, 1993]

⁶⁸² [Nkwi, 2006]

⁶⁸³ [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁶⁹⁰ [Mehler, 1993]

as associated with the Fulani, are thus included into one politically relevant ethnic group named Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples). Note that non-Islamic peoples that also live in the north are not included here.

The group **Bassa/Duala** also refers to the Littoral region and, hence, is sort of an ethno-regional marker. (As already mentioned in the case of the Anglophones, ethnicity in Cameroon is very much linked to regions and regionalism.) Like the Bamileke, the Beti, the two Anglophone groups and the northerners, the Bassa and Duala have formed their own ethnic association (SAWA) that politically represents their interests (⁶⁹¹; ⁶⁹²).

Groups of the east (e.g. the Maka) are ethnically related to the **Beti** group of the center/south region (⁶⁹³), which is why they are listed as a combined group (led by the most relevant Beti).

Due to a lack of comprehensive figures, different sources are used for the group size estimates. The **Bamileke** are said to make up roughly 25% of the population (⁶⁹⁴), a figure close to an estimate of the 1960s (⁶⁹⁵). The combined group of Fulani and other northern Muslim peoples constitutes about 14% according to the U.S. State Department Background Notes (not available online anymore), which is close to the 15% that Takougang estimates (⁶⁹⁶). For the Beti and the Bassa/Duala groups, the estimates of Morrison et al. and Fearon (⁶⁹⁷; ⁶⁹⁸). (Note that these group sizes refer to those time periods that already include the Anglophone groups. Thus they were adjusted proportionately for the first time period 1960-61.) Finally, for the two Anglophone groups, group size estimates also relied on Fearon (⁶⁹⁹) figures. 12% for the NW and 8% for the SW seem realistic as the whole Anglophone population makes up 20% of Cameroon's population (⁷⁰⁰; ⁷⁰¹), and the NW is more populous than the SW (⁷⁰²).

Power relations

Periodization refers to the delimitation of the periods after the inclusion of anglophone Cameroon and, particularly, to two crucial events in Cameroon's history: the abolition of the federation in 1972, and the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1990. According to my assessment, both events did not significantly change the ethno-regional power structure of the country. In the case of the former, it needs to be pointed out that from the very beginning, the Cameroonian federation was a highly centralized construct - with the Francophone part clearly having the upper hand - and not a partnership between two equal sides, despite the existence of a separate legislature and a prime minister for the Anglophone part (⁷⁰³). Thus, already before 1972, the Anglophone provinces could not be more than "junior partners" anyways - and, as explicated below, over the years they were always more or less equally included in executive power at the center.

In the case of the latter event, it seems clear to me that although the introduction of multiparty democracy altered the political land-

⁶⁹¹ [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁶⁹² [Nkwi, 2006]

⁶⁹³ [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁶⁹⁴ [Countries and Their Cultures]

⁶⁹⁵ [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁶⁹⁶ [Takougang, 1997]

⁶⁹⁷ [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁶⁹⁸ [Fearon, 2003]

⁷⁰³ [Konings, 1997]

scape of the country, it did not lead to any significant changes in the actual distribution of power. Paul Biya has managed to stay in power, and behind him is the same national party (the former unity-party RDPC) with the more or less same party barons that represent the country's widespread political elite (very similar, thus, to the case of Gabon and Bongo's regime). Political liberalization has led to the emergence of political parties along ethnic lines (⁷⁰⁴; ⁷⁰⁵). Also, some groups apparently are more prone to vote for the opposition parties, especially the SDF (e.g. the NW Anglophones, the Bamileke etc.) (⁷⁰⁶; ⁷⁰⁷; ⁷⁰⁸). However, such ethno-political cleavages are not clear-cut and absolute and, above all, the RDPC remains a multi-ethnic national party (again similar to Gabon's PDG) (⁷⁰⁹; ⁷¹⁰; ⁷¹¹). Thus, two periods are inserted which correspond to the terms of Cameroon's two presidents (Ahidjo until November 1982, Biya since then).

Regarding the power status of the ethno-regional groups, again there is diverging information. Several sources speak of the marginalization (or even exclusion) of certain groups and of the dominance of others. For instance, the Bamileke (⁷¹²), the Anglophones as a whole (⁷¹³; ⁷¹⁴; ⁷¹⁵), or the southwestern part of them (Konings/Nyamnjoh 1997; ⁷¹⁶) are mentioned by some sources to have been politically marginalized, whereas the Beti are sometimes said to exclusively dominate politics under Biya (⁷¹⁷; ⁷¹⁸). However, these very same sources also speak of a system of "ethnic balance", of the "co-optation of ethno-regional factions" etc., thus contradicting themselves somewhat. A different view holds that Cameroonian politics - both under Ahidjo and Biya - is characterized by a highly sophisticated neo-patrimonial system of ethnic balance and "divide and rule", and a very much multi-ethnic (party) elite including representatives from all parts of the country (⁷¹⁹; ⁷²⁰; ⁷²¹).

This second view seems much more convincing because it can draw on clear examples of co-opted elites and concrete figures of ethno-regional representation in the government. The ethno-regional power-sharing in Ahidjo's first cabinets is demonstrated by figures in the literature (see e.g. ⁷²²). According to Mehler (⁷²³), Ahidjo followed a careful proportional representation in ethno-regional terms regarding the allocation of important posts, particularly cabinet posts. Gabriel (⁷²⁴) explicitly distinguishes Cameroon under Ahidjo from the case of Nigeria which developed a "tradition of northern primacy" that could not be observed in Cameroon. Although the distribution of power clearly altered under Biya, none of the important ethno-regional groupings has been neglected. Mehler's (⁷²⁵) recording of the regional distribution of cabinet seats in all of Biya's governments gives a clear picture of inclusion and representation of all parts of the country. Although the regions are not homogeneous, almost all of them are dominated by one specific ethnic group (e.g. the Western Province by the Bamileke, the Center by the Beti etc.). Decisions in favor of a region are thus seen as decisions in favor of that region's dominant ethnic group. Overall, Gabriel (⁷²⁶) states

⁷⁰⁴ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷⁰⁵ [Nyamnjoh, 1999]

⁷⁰⁶ [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁷⁰⁷ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷⁰⁸ [Takougang, 1997]

⁷¹² [DeLancey, 2000]

⁷¹³ [DeLancey, 2000]

⁷¹⁴ [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁷¹⁵ [Konings, 1997]

⁷¹⁶ [Nkwi, 2006]

⁷²² [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁷²³ [Mehler, 1993]

⁷²⁴ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷²⁵ [Mehler, 1993]

⁷²⁶ [Gabriel, 1999]

that both the Fulani and the Beti, when in power, always shared power with other ethnic groups. Also the unity-parties UNC and RDPC contained/contains elites from all ethno-regional groups (⁷²⁷). On the whole, the case of Cameroon reminds me strongly of Gabon under Bongo: a national unity-party with a very much multi-ethnic elite, a politically clever personalistic leadership with the president as “father of the nation” who distributes resources to all parts of the country and co-opts all important elites into his neo-patrimonial system of “divide and rule”, giving each ethnic group its “fair share”.

This share, of course, varies over time and is thus a basis for complaints by groups and their elites in many instances. Every group (to a lesser degree even the Beti, see ⁷²⁸) feels the need to lobby for a bigger share at some point – by complaining about its marginalization. However, these complaints symbolize the momentary disappointment about a reduction of the share and the demand for a bigger “piece” in the next “round”, rather than a serious protest against total exclusion. (And many times this strategy is successful as the regime reacts by allocating more appointments to the complaining group.) It seems that some of the sources mentioned above reflect such expressions of relative dissatisfaction of groups rather than the actual situation. The Beti under Biya also remind me of the Baule in Cote d’Ivoire during Houphouet-Boigny’s rule. They, too, were sometimes accused of dominating Ivoirian politics in that period. Although holding the most powerful political posts, both the Baule in Cote d’Ivoire and the Beti in Cameroon share(d) their power with other groups. Therefore - in the light of all these impressions - Cameroon’s political system was coded as a power-sharing arrangement with a national, multi-ethnic unity-party and a multi-ethnic co-opted elite.

Bamileke: Some of the above sources state that the Bamileke group dominates the economy but has been kept out of political power. This claim is strongly disputed by others. Gabriel (⁷²⁹) holds that the Bamileke have always been politically included, both under Ahidjo and Biya, and that there has always been a co-opted Bamileke elite – even after the introduction of multiparty democracy. Already Ahidjo incorporated Bamileke representatives into his governments, for example as finance ministers (⁷³⁰). According to Morrison et al. (⁷³¹), they even constituted a plurality in Cameroon’s cabinets in the first years after independence, holding 40% of all government seats. The UPC rebellion in the 1960s, which was mainly based on the Bassa and Bamileke groups (⁷³²), seems not to have influenced that. And Mehler’s (⁷³³) figures also show a constant inclusion of the group in Biya’s governments. Therefore, the Bamileke are coded as “junior partners” in both periods.

Beti: Together with the Fulani they form a successful north-south political alliance (⁷³⁴). Biya was prime minister under Ahidjo before he succeeded him, and other Beti were appointed to important posts (⁷³⁵). Thus, the Beti are coded “junior partner” in the first period. Under Biya, elites of the group have clearly been promoted and now

⁷²⁸ [Nyamnjoh, 1999]

⁷²⁹ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷³⁰ [Mehler, 1993]

⁷³¹ [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁷³² [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁷³³ [Mehler, 1993]

⁷³⁴ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷³⁵ [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

control the most important positions in the government, as Biya has increasingly relied on their loyalty to safeguard his power (736; 737; 738). Hence, in the second period, the Beti are coded “senior partner”.

Fulani: With Ahidjo as president, the Fulani were the country’s leading ethnic group (739). They were favored by the president, and an important part of political power was held by Ahidjo himself (740). Thus, the Fulani should be considered “senior partner” in the first period. In the second period, their position deteriorated somewhat (741) – especially after the failed 1984 coup attempt which was apparently “northern-inspired” –, yet they are still included in executive power (742). After the political transition of the 1990s, several northern leaders – for example, of the UNDP, a party that is based in the north – were co-opted into Biya’s governments (743; 744; 745). Overall, the north has always had a disproportionate share of political power since independence (746). Therefore, the Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples) are coded “junior partner” in the second period.

Bassa/Duala: According to the figures provided by Morrison et al. (747) and Mehler (748), and based on other information (749), the Bassa/Duala groups have also been included into the governments under both Ahidjo and Biya. After the elections of 1992, for instance, a political agreement was achieved between the RDPC and the UPC, a party rooted in the Littoral Province. UPC leader Kodock became minister (750). Therefore, the Bassa/Duala are also coded “junior partners” in both periods.

Northwestern and southwestern Anglophones: The Francophone part is clearly dominant in Cameroonian politics and society, already because of its demographic advantage. There are claims by the Anglophone community of political and cultural marginalization, and within it, southwestern complaints of northwestern supremacy. However, as explained above, the evidence points in another direction. Leaders of both regions have been included into governments and sometimes appointed to important posts like that of the prime minister under both Ahidjo and Biya (751; 752; 753). I thus decided to code both Anglophone groups as “junior partners” in both periods, despite playing an inferior role compared to the Francophone groups as a whole.

Biya’s rule remains based on the same stabilizing pillars of a clientelistic distribution of resources, the co-optation of a multi-ethnic elite and the principle of “divide and rule” as in the periods before – mirrored in an overbloated cabinet consisting of about 60 ministers. His personalist, neo-patrimonial rule has made Cameroon one of the most corrupt countries in the world. On the other hand, through this system of ethnic clientelism, he has also ensured an ethnic balance in his regime despite ongoing claims of marginalization from different ethnic groupings (see e.g. 754, 2006-2010; 755; 756). His prime ministers, for example, were always Anglophones during these four years: Inoni, a Bakweri from the southwest, until June 2009,

⁷³⁶ [DeLancey, 2000]

⁷³⁷ [Konings, 1997]

⁷³⁸ [Mehler, 1993]

⁷³⁹ [Takougang, 1997]

⁷⁴⁰ [DeLancey, 2000]

⁷⁴¹ [Takougang, 1997]

⁷⁴² [Mehler, 1993]

⁷⁴³ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷⁴⁷ [Morrison, Mitchell Paden, 1972]

⁷⁴⁸ [Mehler, 1993]

⁷⁴⁹ [DeLancey, 2000]

⁷⁵⁰ [Takougang, 1997]

⁷⁵¹ [DeLancey, 2000]

⁷⁵² [Fonchingong, 2005]

⁷⁵³ [Gabriel, 1999]

⁷⁵⁴ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2003-2016]

⁷⁵⁵ [IRIN Africa, 2004]

⁷⁵⁶ [IRIN Africa, 2007]

and since then, Yang from the northwest. Also the Fulani (and other northern Muslims) have been included into the central government (⁷⁵⁷). Overall, and like before, Biya's Beti group enjoys the greatest access to political (and military) power among all of Cameroon's ethnic groups (⁷⁵⁸, 2006-2009; ⁷⁵⁹, 2007), holding about one third of all cabinet positions (⁷⁶⁰, 2006-2010).

⁷⁵⁷ [IRIN Africa, 2004]

Reelection of Biya in 2011. Still, the Beti are reported to be over-represented in the cabinet, but not at the expense of a total exclusion of other ethnic groups considered to be politically relevant (⁷⁶¹, 2012). The Northwestern Anglophone Yang was reelected as Prime Minister. After the elections, Biya reshuffled the cabinet, without however breaking up his old alliances with the Northern, muslim parties NUSDP, NADP, and FSNC, or excluding previously included ethnic groups (⁷⁶²; ⁷⁶³).

⁷⁵⁸ [US State Department, 1999–2016]

⁷⁶¹ [US State Department, 1999–2016]

As of 2017, Paul Biya, member of the Beti ethnic group, is still president, and the Northwestern Anglophone Philémon Yang still acts as prime minister. No exclusion of specific groups has taken place, all of them are still represented in the overblown cabinet, albeit more or less proportionally (⁷⁶⁴; ⁷⁶⁵, 2014-2016). The president's CPDM, which is, however, not an ethnicity-specific party, is clearly overrepresented and retains power, amongst other things, due to patronage, bribes and control over local elections (⁷⁶⁶, 2015).

⁷⁶² [Reuters, 2011]

⁷⁶³ [Africa Review, 2014]

⁷⁶⁴ [Cameroon Government, 2017]

⁷⁶⁵ [US State Department, 1999–2016]

During the last few years, the dissatisfaction among parts of the Anglophone population has grown. Activists call for the separation of the anglophone parts of the country (the Northwest and the Southwest region) called Ambazonia. Deadly confrontations between activists and the government have been taking place and the crisis, which erupted in 2016 after a strike against the imposition of the French language in schools, has not been resolved until today. In fact, the grievances voiced by the anglophone population are not only grounded in language cleavages, but also in economic underdevelopment and deprivation. The distribution of investments within the country seems to be strongly unbalanced. The anglophone regions achieve far less than the others, while the president's ethnic constituency, the Beti's territory, receives disproportionately high amounts of resources (⁷⁶⁷). These considerations point out that the peace in Cameroon is very vulnerable and that ethnic differences might in fact play a role. However, if we can speak of the Anglophone groups being discriminated, then these facts rather point to economic and social discrimination than to political discrimination. Politically, as mentioned above, the anglophone people are included into the government by ministerial and other key positions. As mentioned, the prime minister is even an anglophone. However, it should also be noted that the prime minister's position is not as significant as one might think - it is the fourth position in state control, after the head of state, the president of the senate and the speaker of the national assembly, which are all francophones (⁷⁶⁸). (The head of senate has been Marcel Niat Njifenji since 2013, a politician coming from Cameroon's West region and therefore assumingly representing

⁷⁶⁶ [Freedom House, 1999-2017]

⁷⁶⁷ [Quartz Media, 2017]

⁷⁶⁸ [Quartz Media, 2017]

the interests of the Bamileke. The head of state is, as mentioned, Paul Biya, a member of the Beti ethnic group. The president of the National Assembly is Cavaye Yeguie Djibril, belonging to the Mada, a northern muslim group.)

Despite of these critical developments, there is no indication strong enough to legitimize a change of the coding of Cameroon as a power-sharing regime. It is thus concluded to prolong the coding of the years since 1983 up to 2017, with the Beti being "senior partner" and the other groups being included in the government as "junior partner".

According to a survey by the OECD, Cameroon was defined a "decentralized unitary country" in the constitution of 1996, consisting of 10 regions and 374 councils. Decentralization is, however, still an on-going process in Cameroon. Only in 2004, several laws have been set which define some transfers of power to the regional level, including, for example, social care, health care or education. Until 2010, half of these competences have been effectively transferred to these regions. Many mandates are unfunded and the means are not sufficient to make sure the regional competences can be upheld (⁷⁶⁹). Furthermore, the local leadership positions are assigned and controlled by the president, which indicates that the local executive might not necessarily be members of the ethnic group living in the respective areas (⁷⁷⁰, 2015). Therefore, it is decided not to code regional autonomy status for all ethnic groups.

⁷⁶⁹ [OECD, 2015]

⁷⁷⁰ [Freedom House, 1999-2017]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Cameroon

From 1960 until 1961

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamileke	0.3125	JUNIOR PARTNER
Beti (and related peoples)	0.225	JUNIOR PARTNER
Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	0.175	SENIOR PARTNER
Bassa/Duala	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1962 until 1982

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamileke	0.25	JUNIOR PARTNER
Beti (and related peoples)	0.18	JUNIOR PARTNER
Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	0.14	SENIOR PARTNER
Northwestern Anglophones (Grassfielders)	0.12	JUNIOR PARTNER
Bassa/Duala	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southwestern Anglophones (Bakweri etc.)	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1983 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamileke	0.25	JUNIOR PARTNER
Beti (and related peoples)	0.18	SENIOR PARTNER
Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	0.14	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northwestern Anglophones (Grassfielders)	0.12	JUNIOR PARTNER
Bassa/Duala	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southwestern Anglophones (Bakweri etc.)	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER



Figure 124: Political status of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1960-1961.

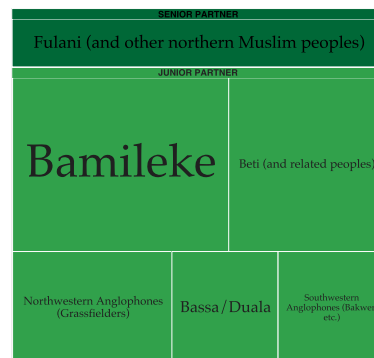


Figure 125: Political status of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1962-1982.



Figure 126: Political status of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1983-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Cameroon

From 1960 until 1960

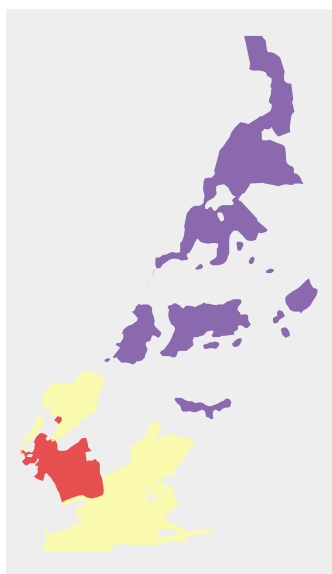


Figure 127: Map of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1960-1960.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	81 606	Regionally based
■	Beti (and related peoples)	50 627	Regionally based
■	Bassa/Duala	17 175	Regionally based
■	Bamileke	14 052	Regionally based

Table 39: List of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1960-1960.

From 1961 until 1961

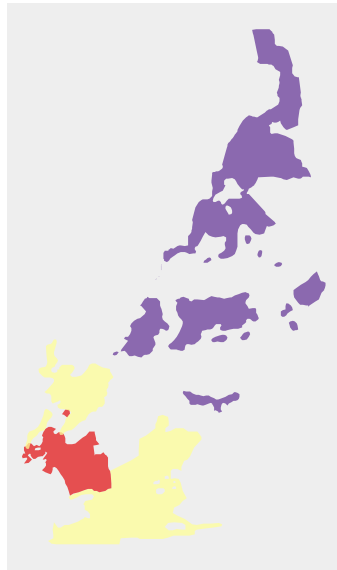


Figure 128: Map of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1961-1961.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	81 606	Regionally based
■ Beti (and related peoples)	50 627	Regionally based
■ Bassa/Duala	17 787	Regionally based
■ Bamileke	17 628	Regionally based

Table 40: List of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1961-1961.

From 1962 until 2017

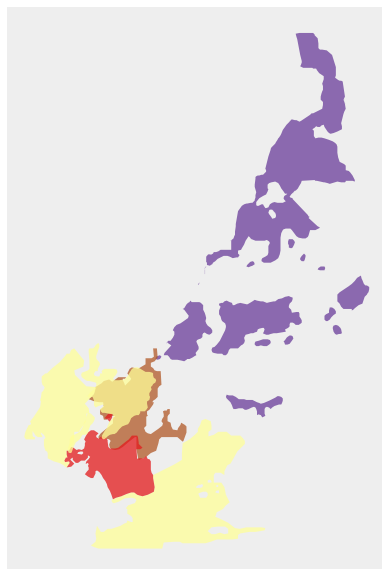


Figure 129: Map of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1962-2017.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	81 606	Regionally based
■	Beti (and related peoples)	50 627	Regionally based
■	Northwestern Anglophones (Grassfielders)	23 896	Regionally based
■	Southwestern Anglophones (Bakweri etc.)	22 483	Regionally based
■	Bassa/Duala	17 787	Regionally based
■	Bamileke	17 628	Regionally based

Table 41: List of ethnic groups in Cameroon during 1962-2017.

Conflicts in Cameroon

Starting on 1957-09-29

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	UPC		1957-09-29			

Starting on 1960-01-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cameroon	UPC	Bassa/Duala	1960-01-30	No	Yes	Yes
Government of Cameroon	UPC	Bamileke	1960-01-30	No	Yes	Yes
Government of Cameroon	Military faction (forces of Ibrahim Saleh)	Fulani (and other northern Muslim peoples)	1984-04-05	Presumed	Yes	
Government of Cameroon	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad		2015-01-11			

Starting on 1994-02-17

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cameroon	Government of Nigeria		1994-02-17			

Starting on 2015-03-18

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cameroon	IS		2015-03-18			