

Enjoying the Booty and Compromising the Future: The Metaphor of *Salt Voters* in the Political Landscape of Mamfe during Elections in Cameroon Since 1990

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Abstract

The political landscape in Cameroon in the 1990s witnessed a transition to multiparty democracy from a single party system. This new era came with its own positive as well as negative virtues of political participation. The fragile nature of democracy which was characterized by the lack of good will to create institutions that will guarantee fair play and a level playing ground for all the political party contenders paved the way for electoral fraud and other vices that are repugnant to the democratic culture. Parties were not formed based on ideology but on regional, ethnic and other undemocratic principles. The government even played a major role in ensuring that some pro-government opposition parties were created so as to penetrate and weaken the strength of the opposition. This was just one of the awful mechanisms that were put in place by the government to offset the balance, jeopardize the foundation of democracy and to maintain the status quo in favour of the incumbent. Apart from granting sponsorship to some opposition leaders the government and the ruling party in some circumstances out rightly bought the people's conscience in some areas. The government and the ruling party are used inter-changeably in this paper because it is difficult to separate the government from the ruling party particularly when it comes to distinguishing government funds from party funds. It is the use of money to buy voters in certain areas that have encouraged this researcher to come up with the metaphor of salt voters. This researcher heavily relied on the participant/observer approach and the collection of primary data through oral interviews. Random sampling was conducted across party lines to be able to gather data.

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Introduction

Situating Mamfe in the Political Landscape of Cameroon

The choice of Mamfe for the current research was not by mistake rather it was by design because of the peculiar political features of the town. And it is not as if Mamfe is the only area with this kind fraudulent political participation. Talking about its peculiar features, the choice of Mamfe was elected by the historic significance of the Town in the making of what is today the Republic of Cameroon. Mamfe is important in the history of the Country because it hosted some of the important conferences that were organized to determine the future of what later became the nation-state of Cameroon.² Mamfe is equally very important because it is a junction and major border town that separates Cameroon from Nigeria. The Germano-British colonial boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria separated people of the same stock (the people of the Cross River). There were people like the Bokis, the Ejaghams, the Ijaws and some other ethnic principalities in the Upper Banyang community that are found on both sides of the Cameroon/Nigeria borders.³

This kind of homogenous peopling of borderlands creates an atmosphere where it can be difficult to streamline and scrutinize electoral participation based on nationalities. It is certain that efforts are made by the government of Cameroon to maintain national identities like for example one must be in possession of a computerized national identity card before registration in the voter's list but the corrupt nature of the Cameroon police force and other officials has made it possible for foreigners to have access to these cards especially along the border settlements. The country suffers from endemic corrupt practices that are not only affecting the economy but it has ripple effects on the political setup.⁴ It takes a foreigner just his/her financial strength to secure Cameroon nationality and this has affected the country's political landscaping negatively. The double identity of these border Landers have made it possible for some of them to participate in elections in Nigeria and at the same time move across the borders to take part in elections in Cameroon.

² M.W. Delancey. 1989. *Cameroon: Dependence and independence*. Boulder, C.O.: Westview pp.13.

³ *Ibid.*,

⁴ C.M. Fombad .2000. "Endemic corruption in Cameroon: Insights on consequences and control" in K.R. Hope, S \$ B.C. Chikulo, eds. *Corruption and Development in Africa*. New York: Palgrave, 234-60.pp 241-247.

It is this border location of Mamfe that makes it unique in terms of the political participation and electoral consultations in Cameroon since the re-introduction of political pluralism in the 1990s.⁵ In analyzing electoral problems in Cameroon as a whole and the problem of “bought over voters” in particular, it is important to mention that since the re-introduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s, the country has been split by the need for dialogue over issues of new democracies into different groups representing different approaches to achieving pluralism. The debate very quickly moved from that of the simple necessity for social dialogue to that of a Sovereign National Conference because it was believed this broad base conference representing all interest groups was going to lay a foundation for a solid democracy.

The question was why was this so? The Social Democratic Front that championed the call for this conference argued that it was the only way to open up to social dialogue and frankly chat the way forward for a genuine all encompassing democracy.⁶ A further argument was that in countries where the sovereign national conference system was well established, very little massive fraud was recorded.⁷ On the contrary, in certain countries where this sovereign call was detested, several cases of fraud were recorded. In Ivory Coast for example declaration of results was delayed for over a week for reported cases of fraud and this has been a common feature of elections in Africa. The Cameroon government was adamant to the call for a Sovereign National Conference and the argument was that nothing in the National Plan justified the call for a grand convention as amendments to the existing constitution and structures were expected to address all the worries at a limited cost and within a short time.⁸ This position adopted by the government partly contributed to the wrong take off of democracy in Cameroon and explains the fragility of the institution.

Mamfe which is our area of focus is densely populated with so many villages that constitute Upper and Lower Banyang Country. This area in the history of Anglophone Cameroon remains a major political force because of the important politicians and key members of government that it has produced over the years like the E.T. Egbes, Agbor Tabis, Tanyi Mbianyos, Mengots, Effioms, the Tabe Tandos and a host of others.

⁵ Fanso, V.G. “Traditional and Colonial African Boundaries: Concept and Functions in Inter-group Relations” *Presence Africaine*, 1986, 139, 3:58-75.

⁶ T.N. Fonchingong, (1998). “Multipartyism and democratization in Cameroon”. *Journal of Third World Studies* 15,2: 119-36.PP127

⁷ S.A. Alao. “Elections and Electoral Systems in the Democratization Process in Africa” *Democratization in Africa: African Perspectives*. Vol.1 P.169.

⁸ T.N. Fonchingong, (1998). “Multipartyism and democratization in Cameroon”. *Journal of Third World Studies* 15,2: 119-36.PP127

Ironically, this area has remained enclave because of the poor road network that connects this historic town and the other major towns in Anglophone Cameroon. The promise to tare the Mamfe-Kumba road remained a major campaign slogan for the ruling party and some of the opposition parties west of the Mungo over the years. In the past it was common place to see the government station caterpillars along the Mamfe road prior to parliamentary and presidential elections as a means to win over popular support but these caterpillars were often removed shortly after the elections with no work done. Thus situating Mamfe in the context of Cameroon politics is quite very relevant so as to know the stakes of the voters in this part of the country. But talking about voters and political participation, it is important to note that the area under study has over the years been characterized by a high level of voter's apathy just like many other areas of Cameroon.⁹

Informed Political participation in Mamfe and Voter's Apathy

The level of political participation in Mamfe just like in many other part of Cameroon is low and stagnating because of suspicion and the fact that the incumbent ruling party has dominated the political landscape over the years whether genuinely or through electoral maneuvers. For example Takougang argues that several factors contributed to the dominance of the ruling party in the political scene and that among these factors is the skilful use of power by the incumbency to forestall the democratic process.¹⁰ In the 1990s when Cameroon experienced the resurgence of multiparty politics, the key demands of the opposition were the holding of a Sovereign National Conference and the creation of an independent electoral body.¹¹

It was believed that only these independent electoral bodies can guarantee fair play and ensure transparency in the running of elections in Cameroon. The reluctance expressed by the government to grant this independent body created an atmosphere of suspicion and contributed towards voter's apathy and the laying of a weak and faulty foundation for democracy in the entire country with Mamfe inclusive. The creation of the National Election Observatory (NEO) and later Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) has been taken with a lot of mixed feelings and uncertainty of the political future.

⁹ Ndeh martin Sango, Participant/Observer data collection 2007 Legislative Elections.

¹⁰ Joseph, Takougang. " The 2002 Legislative Elections in Cameroon: a retrospective Cameroon's stalled democracy movement." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41,3 pp.421-435 pp.421.

¹¹ Interview with Ni John Fru Ndi, the main opposition leader on the occasion of the visit of Buea Historical Society to the Social Democratic Front Headquarters at Ntarikon, Bamenda. June 2008.

A cross section of the informants that were contacted made it clear that it was needless getting involved in politics as a whole and elections in particular because according to them participation or no participation will not change anything since the results of every election were known to favour the incumbent ruling party even before the elections were conducted.¹² This statement alone could immediately tell the level of voter's apathy and their resignation to fate. The view presented by these informants was to the effect that no matter the circumstances, the ruling party will always win because they have the *yam and the knife* in front of a powerless electoral commission that cannot impinge on free and fair elections. In line with this kind of thought, the Mamfe area that was an opposition strong hold in the 1990s gradually slipped into the hands of the ruling party because the people argued that it was better to join the winning train and be able to rip some small benefits rather than stay with the opposition that will hardly win any election and remained abandoned and enclave in terms of development needs.

It was the frustrations of not being able to institute any meaningful change that pushed some of the inhabitants into mortgaging their future for some immediate inconsequential benefits like salt and rice (salt votes). *The foregoing actually led to the political analogy that "give rice and salt to the Mamfe people so that they could eat and forget about the distress of not having a good road"*. Hence the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has won almost all elections organized in Mamfe in the post multiparty era not because the party is very popular in the area but as a result of the frustrations of the electorate and the fraudulent machinery of the incumbent ruling party. From the above analysis it is evident that Cameroon since the 1990s has experienced an unprecedented level of voter's apathy and the Mamfe area is no exception to this trend that can summarily be attributed to poor democratic institutions, ineffectiveness of the opposition parties, the fraudulent mechanisms that are put in place to protect the interest of the incumbent and lack of sustained support for genuine democratic change in Cameroon from France and other Western industrialized nations.¹³

The Government and the Ruling party Vs the Opposition Parties in Elections in Cameroon since 1990

The democratization process and electioneering in Cameroon has over the years been characterized by lots of problems.

¹² Interview with Tambe Manyi Patrick, a militant of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) during the 2007 Legislative Elections.

¹³ Joseph, Takougang. "The 2002 Legislative Elections in Cameroon: a retrospective Cameroon's stalled democracy movement." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41,3 pp.421-435 pp.421.

These problems range from voter's apathy to problems of registration, lack of fair play and post election contestations and violence. The first ever multiparty elections in 1990 were marred by sporadic incidences of violence that rocked almost all the major cities in Cameroon. This violence was staged by the opposition parties in contest of election results that were deemed not credible. Among the myriad of problems plaguing the electioneering process in Cameroon is the gross imbalance that exists between the ruling party and the opposition in terms finance, media allocation of campaign time and other advantages.¹⁴

It is difficult to separate the finances of the ruling party and the state treasury. The dominance of the incumbent ruling party can be attributed to the fact that the party uses every government facility for its electoral campaign at the detriment of the opposition parties. It is common place to see government vehicles and media houses being used for the campaign of the ruling party. While in advance democracies political parties go out to raise funds from the business class and party sympathizers, in Cameroon the ruling party is the government and the government is the ruling party in terms of control of state resources. The party militants instead of contributing financially to the party so as to guarantee success, they depend on the party giving them incentives in exchange for their vote and this explains why the state treasury is emptied prior to election campaigns.

The rigging of elections in Cameroon can be mapped out not only in terms of ballot stuffing, selective registration of voters or deliberate displacement of voter's names in the voter's register but it could also be seen in terms of the outright buying of votes. The rigging of elections in Cameroon begins at the level of registration as earlier mentioned.¹⁵ The registration is either selective or names are haphazardly arranged, making it difficult to trace a name on the register; the names of the dead are hardly removed from the register and there are incidences of multiple registration resulting in bloated registers far in excess of the registrable population.¹⁶ These are all measures that are deliberately crafted to play in favour of the ruling party. Among all these strategies, the outright buying of votes remains the surest instrument of election rigging in Cameroon. Some of the opposition party leaders like Ni John Fru Ndi of the Social Democratic Front have argued that their inability to get to power can be attributed to the fact that the incumbent ruling party has the money to buy the conscience of the Cameroon electorate directly and/or indirectly.¹⁷

¹⁴ Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2002. "Cameroon: over twelve years of cosmetic democracy", *News from the Nordic Africa Institute* 3:5-8 also available at www.nai.uu.se

¹⁵ The Post Newspaper Wednesday 18th June 1998, p.5

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Ni John Fru Ndi Television interview over Equinox Television June 2011.

According to those who hold this school of thought, the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) is voted not because of the ideology of the party or the positive contributions of the party to nation building but because the party has the financial power to be able to buy over the electorate and to appoint die heart party militants into positions of responsibility. It is evident from the interviews conducted in the field that the incumbent has several instruments that are employed to maintain party loyalty within the CPDM and to offset the political balance. As a civil servant in Cameroon, one of the ways to guarantee upwards mobility at your job site is your militancy and loyalty to the ruling CPDM Party which is not to be.

Even when you are not a militant of the ruling party, the moment you are appointed into a position of responsibility, you immediately join the band wagon of the ruling party as guarantor of your position.¹⁸ In this kind of system where appointments to duty post are informed by loyalty to the ruling party, very few individuals can earn appointments based on meritocracy and contributions to the development of the sectors in which they are employed. Rather their appointments are based on the positions they hold in the ruling party and their ability to move back to their constituencies and galvanize grassroots support for the ruling party during elections. Therefore appointment of civil servant into duty positions is a way of ensuring loyalty to the ruling party. An advantage that cannot be enjoyed by the opposition parties, instead opposition militants working with the government are victimized through transfers to enclave areas, delay of their promotions and their outright removal from appointed positions. This kind of system that operate on clientelists principles leaves the survival of the state machinery in the hands of a few individual (the Head of State and his client-patronage network) who has the prerogative to determine who is appointed to any particular position or not.

Electoral fraud and manipulations have been very visible in the many elections that have taken place in Cameroon since the resurgence of multiparty politics in the 1990s. It is common for Civil Servants to abandon government offices for political campaigns thus causing inertia that directly impacts on the economy. It is equally common to find government vehicles fueled using government petrol coupons in the field campaigning for the ruling party. This supports the view of this researcher that the ruling party is not different from the government just like the government is not different from the ruling party. According to the statistics gotten from the field, the ruling party has won almost all the elections that have been organized in the Mamfe area whether at the municipal, parliamentary, or presidential levels. Going to the field, this researcher had in mind that the weak base of the opposition parties in this area accounted for this gross imbalance in electoral consultations.

¹⁸ Ndeh Martin Sango, Eye Witness Account.

From the sources contacted in the field, the argument amongst others is that it is not personality imbalance or ideological differences on party lines that has been responsible for this great disparity between the ruling party and the opposition but some of the informants attributed it to the ability of the ruling party to use state funds to impose itself on the masses and to corrupt voters in the field. As earlier stated, in Cameroon it is common to hear that the state treasury is empty and certain projects put on the hold because all money has been diverted to campaigns. It was the impunity with which state resources were diverted to campaign for the ruling party that the opposition parties started arguing that the state should also finance the campaign of opposition parties during elections so as to give the parties an equal opportunity.

It was following this call from the opposition that before the 2007 presidential elections, the parliament voted a bill introducing a kind of sponsorship of opposition parties during elections in Cameroon.¹⁹ The criterion for giving money to these parties still remained a major problem because it still worked to the interest of the ruling party. Amongst the laid down conditions to qualify for support from the government were the number of seats each party had in parliament, the number of councils that each party had under her control and the national base of the party in terms of constituencies. Putting all these parameters in place, the ruling party still had an edge over the opposition parties because she had used state funds in the past to be able to establish dominance in all these sectors.

The Domineering of Elections by the Incumbency in Mamfe

Talking about Mamfe in particular with regards to elections, it can be established that the dominance of the ruling CPDM party over the years has been overwhelming. This explains why almost all the councils in that area are CPDM Councils and the members of parliament are of the ruling CPDM party. Apart from using intimidation and the appointment syndrome, one of the strategies used by the ruling party to win elections in Mamfe is outright buying of votes (salt voters). Prior to every election, the politicians from this area belonging to the ruling CPDM party take it as an obligation to move back to their constituency and canvas for support for the incumbent.²⁰ These politicians, male or female belong to different traditional societies that they use for campaigns.

¹⁹ Interview with Honourable Tasi Tang Lucas, Former Member of Parliament for Santa Area in the North West Region of Cameroon. June 24th 2016 Bamenda.

²⁰ Fombad, C.M. & J.B. Fonyam. "The Social Democratic Front, the opposition and political transition in Cameroon, in J.M. Mbaku & J. Takougang, eds. *The Leadership Challenge in Africa: Cameroon under Paul Biya*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

It is not as if the opposition parties cannot also embark on these strategies. What offset the balance are the so many advantages and benefits that are enjoyed by the ruling party in this area to the disfavor of the opposition. One of such advantages is that the ruling party has the financial backing to be able to corrupt voters leading to the metaphor of salt voters.

The Symbolism of Salt in the History of Mamfe and the notion of Salt Voters

In Mamfe and other areas of the Cross River Basin, the production and sale of salt in the pre-colonial era was a vibrant industry involving numerous people and trading communities.²¹ Salt was considered a very important commodity in Mamfe. It was extracted from the Ejagham area and other villages like Mbakang, Ayukaba, Baje, Nkemechi, Ebinsi, Tabo, Egbekaw and Ekok.²² This priceless commodity was extracted from salt ponds and brine springs from these areas by inhabitants and sold to middlemen who in turn marketed the salt in the hinterland markets and in the Cross River Region in Nigeria.

The cultural value of this commodity could not be measured as it was used for cultural celebrations and marriages. It was given as a gift destined for nursing mothers or procured to dowry wives. This condiment enriched many, especially by way of employment. Salt was an important relish. This commodity and palm oil were combined, rubbed on a goat as seasoning before roasting.²³ When a woman gave birth in her father's compound in Anyang Country as in other grassland Fondoms of Cameroon, she was only brought to public view after the father had been given a present of salt and food.²⁴ This tells you the regard the people had for salt. The woman's companions taking her to the husband's compound were given this condiment from the husband.²⁵

Economically, many middlemen exchanged salt for other commodities notably livestock. In the Mamfe area and the Cross River Basin, livestock came from the Bamenda and Bamilike Regions. Salt also served as a medium of exchange for other commodities. Those who were involved in its exploitation received remuneration in return. In fact, salt was very highly valued in different communities because of its scarcity and the fact that it was even used to appease a discontented party. Salt was preserved by notables and chiefs who had direct influence over its exploitation.

²¹ Henry Kam Kah. *A Priceless Commodity: The Politics of Salt Production and Commercialization in the Cross River Basin of Cameroon, 1916-1961*. African Studies Monographs, pp 3-5, 2006.

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ NAB, File No.1469/23, Af 31, Mbo Tribe Mamfe Division, Cameroons Province 1923.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁵ NAB, File No. 512 Af 4, Assessment Reports, Anyang-Manta Tribes, Mamfe Division, 1924.

In the Mamfe region of Cameroon, the commercialization of salt was regulated by the royal household in what became known as royal trade, (Nkwi, 1987:117-118). Given the importance of this commodity, the exploitation of the salt ponds was regulated by the village authorities. The villages blessed with salt ponds received royalties from the neighbouring villages that participated in their exploitation.²⁶

The Metaphor of Salt Votes and Elections in Mamfe Area

The use of salt voters in this work is a kind of descriptive analogy to say that voters in Mamfe actually sold their votes for basic necessities like salt, rice and drinks. Salt here is used to symbolize what the people could actually sacrifice their votes for and at the same time mortgaging their future. The use of salt here is to tell you how much the people valued this commodity and the significant role it played in the history and culture of the area. This condiment was used alongside other basic commodities to buy voters particularly by the ruling CPDM Party. Salt is therefore used in this paper to represent the petit items that were used to buy votes from the poor villagers in Mamfe even including money.

Talking about the buying of voters, some of the basic necessities that were used to buy over voters include salt, magic, rice, drinks and in some areas fiscal cash. The electorates in these areas could afford to sell their votes and conscience because of the sky-rocketing levels of unemployment and poverty. These are poverty stricken communities where even to secure these basic needs remains a major problem not to talk of having access to medication and other social amenities. In some areas the people were not even given these items but were tricked to vote through vain promises of development of their road infrastructure, provision of pipe born water and electricity. In normal circumstances, the provision of these services is a right to the citizens and should not be use as means to win voters.

From the field work that was conducted in the Mamfe area, some of the electorates testified that they actually collected bags of salt, magi and rice in exchange of their votes. Others even mentioned that in addition to these items that they were given 1000Frs CFA and a bottle of drink after presenting the ballot papers of the opposition parties as an indicator that they voted the ruling party. The idea of mortgaging their future in exchange of petit items is worse than the *politics of the Belly* described by Jean Francois Bayart because collecting these items; the people were looking at the immediate satisfaction without considering the long term implications. This kind of political participation that was informed by grabbing of petit items could tell the level of poverty that characterized these communities.

²⁶ NAB, file No. Ce (1918) Ossindinge Divisional Annual Report .

In some instances the ruling CPDM Party even used party fabrics like T-Shirts and specially designed loin-cloths carrying the effigy of the Chairman of the ruling CPDM to solicit for voters in the Mamfe area. This fabric alongside the petit items was distributed to meeting houses and community based organizations as a campaign strategy. These petit items that are used to win over voters were handed to party big wigs who intend distributed them to close family relations and other party militants as means of winning voters. The distribution of these items was done through political elites who penetrated the heartlands of Mamfe during political campaigns. Prior to elections, this political elite class visited both male and female meeting houses with bags of salt and other items that were used to win over voters. Usually those who constituted this class were sons and daughters of Mamfe that because of their loyalty to the ruling party had gained appointments into government. Some of the informants contacted testified that these items in some occasions got to them through the presidents of their meeting groups. This is to say that another way in which the ruling CPDM got to the masses was through the president of various meeting groups. In this light the group leaders were given huge sums of money to be able to convince their members to vote the ruling party.

To a commoner in Mamfe who is living below the poverty margin the fabric and other basic items was enough to convince him/her to mortgage the future. This explains why the people of this area have often voted the ruling party massively but the area has remained enclave with a poor road network system, a high level of unemployment and degrading levels of poverty. The people even complaint of a high level of under scholarization because even the public schools that are created by the government are either without infrastructure or without teachers. When these schools are politically created as a means of winning the loyalty of the people or a campaign strategy, the development of the newly created schools becomes the pre-occupation of the over-burdened masses who cannot even afford three square meals a day. The creation of schools as a campaign strategy is not something that prevailed only in the Mamfe area but in the entire republic. There are several schools that have been created in many other areas without a single classroom and the development of these schools has become the responsibility of the Parent Teacher's Association.

From the foregoing it can be said that there is gross imbalance between the incumbent ruling party in Cameroon and the opposition in terms of instruments of control, finance and other electioneering instruments. In this case the saying that *he who blows the piper dictates the tune* holds. The institutions that are suppose to guarantee fair play are inextricably attached to the government and the ruling party, a phenomenon that is very common in Africa as a whole.

Free and fair elections entail much more than counting of votes and pronouncing results because fairness goes with the entire electoral process from the registration of voters to the campaigns and voting itself. For fairness to be attained there must be a credible electoral system and a level playing ground for all the actors in the game.

Building Confidence in the Electoral System in Cameroon

Against the background of the widespread suspicion and mistrust that has resulted in voters apathy in Cameroon as a whole and Mamfe in particular and the issues that have made the faith of democracy in Cameroon doubtful, it can clearly be seen that there is enormous task in trying to create confidence in the electoral system in Cameroon. And yet there is need to do so if the results of the elections are to be credible as representing the real choices of Cameroonians in the eyes of the people and the international community. Accordingly, any attempt to establish the integrity of the electoral process should begin with the putting in place of an independent election commission (INEC). The creation of this commission will instill confidence that will go a long way to avert voter's apathy.

Accordingly, towards establishing the integrity of the electoral process, the first move will be to put in place independent, credible institutions that will be granted full powers to manage elections. Should this happen, the next important issue will be to train election staff with the aim of minimizing or completely eliminating deficiencies of voter's registration and improve on the quality of elections as a whole. The independent election management body should equally be able to carry out public education on the election process beyond its normal function of familiarizing voters with the voting procedure.

To achieve this, the commission should be able to publish and widely circulate three public documents- a guide to political parties, a guide to the candidates and guide to the voters. These booklets should contain the relevant laws and rules and regulations in a form and language easily accessible to the general public. Another factor that can guarantee credibility in the election procedure is INEC's supervision of the national congresses of the political parties so as to avert grassroots fraud. Above all a modernized biometric system of elections should be introduced so as to avoid situations of double registration, multiple voting and other fraudulent manipulations like ballot stuffing.

Conclusion

The winds of democratic reforms that blew across Cameroon in the 1990s consequent on the unprecedented movement towards democracy in the Soviet Bloc and other parts of Africa were welcome developments. The fragility of democratic institutions and the lack of good will to implant these institutions made the take off of democracy in Cameroon as whole and Mamfe area in particular daunting task. The different categories of elections that have been conducted in the Mamfe constituency have been marred by cries of electoral fraud.

The ruling party over the years has employed different mechanism to stay at the front seat of electoral processes in this area. Among the several mechanisms are faulty voter's registers, instances of multiple voting and the outright buying of voters. It is this outright buying of votes that informed this researcher's perception of salt voters. The drive towards democracy in Mamfe and other areas of Cameroon has been very slow and stagnating because of voter's apathy that is occasioned by suspicion and the dominance of the incumbent ruling party.

In the face of political pluralism, the ruling party has dominated the political landscape through orthodox and unorthodox parameters. The use of state funds to manage the incumbent ruling party has put all the opposition parties at a disadvantage. This has resulted to unprecedented imbalance in favour of the ruling party. The use of basic necessities to buy over the conscience of voters is because the ruling party can afford the money. This fraudulent political participation orchestrated by the government has pushed the poor communities in Mamfe to mortgage the development of their communities for immediate inconsequential benefits. This has casted doubts on the integrity and credibility of the electoral processes in Cameroon as whole and the Mamfe area in particular.

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