

Cameroon - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Cameroon, officially the Republic of Cameroon, is a country in Central Africa. It is bordered by Nigeria to the west; Chad to the northeast; the Central African Republic to the east; and Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo to the south. Cameroon's coastline lies on the Bight of Bonny, part of the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. The country is often referred to as "Africa in miniature" for its geological and cultural diversity.²

Official language: French and English

Ethnic groups: 31% Cameroon Highlanders; 19% Equatorial Bantu; 11% Kirdi; 10% Fulani; 8% Northwestern Bantu; 7% Eastern Nigritic; 13% other African; <1% non-African

Government: Dominant-party presidential republic

- President: Paul Biya
- Prime Minister: Philémon Yang

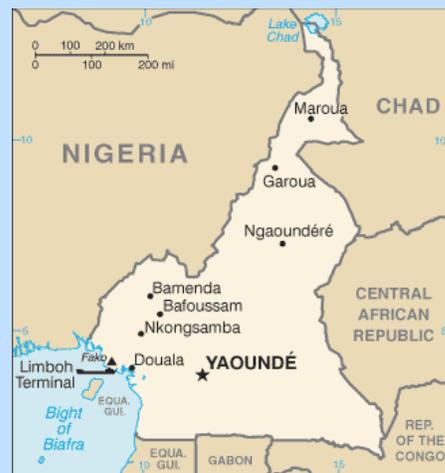
Death penalty: Abolitionist in practice

Population: 23,130,708

Life expectancy: 57.35 years

Under-5 mortality: 55.1 deaths per 1,000 births

Adult literacy: 71.3 percent



Section 1: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Largely disrespected ³

There are reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. The government generally investigates and sometimes disciplines those responsible for such killings.

Freedom from disappearance



Partially respected ⁴

There are no reliable reports of politically motivated disappearances during the year.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ⁵

The constitution and law prohibit torture and other brutal practices, but security forces reportedly torture, beat, harass, and otherwise abuse citizens, prisoners, and detainees. Security forces also reportedly subject women, children, and elderly persons to abuse.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely disrespected ⁶

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, security forces continue to arrest and detain citizens arbitrarily. Impunity is a major problem. Citizens often prefer to take the law into their own hands rather than call the police.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Partially respected ⁷

The law provides for a fair public hearing, without undue delay, in which the defendant is presumed innocent, but authorities act arbitrarily. Although there is no jury system, defendants have the right to be present, consult with an attorney and appeal a conviction.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Largely disrespected ⁸

The constitution and the law prohibit such actions, but there are credible reports that police harass citizens, conduct searches without warrants, and open or seize mail with impunity. Police sometimes detain family members and neighbors of criminal suspects.

Section 2: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)⁹



Score: 39.63, Rank: 133 / 180 – Partially controlled, limited or intimidated¹⁰

The government enforced media regulations irregularly, disbursing official funds to support private press outlets as well as to outlets less critical of the government. Many of these news outlets were instructed to provide reporting favorable to the government.

Freedom from academic censorship



Partially respected¹¹

There are no legal restrictions on academic freedom, but state security informants operate on university campuses. Many professors argue that public criticism of the government and membership in opposition political parties can have a negative impact on professional opportunities.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Largely disrespected¹²

The law provides for freedom of assembly and association, but the government restricts these rights in practice. The government often refuses to grant permits to persons or groups critical of the government and uses force to suppress assemblies for which it has not issued permits.

Freedom of religion



Partially respected¹³

The constitution protects religious freedom, but religious groups must register in order to function. There are no reports of discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, but in 2013, the government shut down dozens of Pentecostal churches, calling them a security threat.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Respected¹⁴

The government provides refugees (over 100,000) the same rights to basic services as the host population. The government cooperates with the UN and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{15 16}



6 / 7 – Not free¹⁷

The constitution guarantees free speech, but genuine freedom of expression remains elusive. Freedoms of assembly and association, while legally protected, are subject to significant restrictions, including a requirement that organizers notify the government before assemblies take place.

Section 3: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc..

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)¹⁸



6 / 7 – Not free¹⁹

Despite having almost 300 political parties, Cameroon remains essentially a one-party state controlled by the president. Several political rivals have been imprisoned on corruption charges. The Baka people are not represented in either house of parliament or in the top levels of government.

Section 4: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²⁰



Score: 27%, Rank: 136 / 175 – Highly corrupt²¹

Corruption remains systemic and pervasive at all levels of government. The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but officials engage in corrupt practices with impunity. The judiciary is known to protect political and business interests from prosecution.

Section 5: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Largely disrespected²²

Government officials repeatedly impede many local human rights NGOs by harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening violence against NGO personnel. Human rights defenders and activists receive anonymous threats frequently.

Section 6: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Rights of women (World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index)²³



Score: 65.6%, Rank: 100/ 136 – Very unequal rights²⁴

Cameroon's laws remain deeply discriminatory towards women and have negative effects in their prospects as entrepreneurs and employees. The law allows a husband to deny his wife's right to work as well as end his wife's right to engage in commercial activity.

Rights of Children (KidsRights Index Overall Score)²⁵



Score: 46%, Rank: 138 / 165 – Slightly vulnerable²⁶

Child abuse is a major problem. According to a 2011 survey, 76 percent of children reported being hit frequently at home. Reports often cite children as victims of kidnapping and mutilation. Many births are unregistered and there are no statistics on the prevalence of child marriage.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Largely disrespected²⁷

The law does not specifically address discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities. Society largely treats persons with disabilities as outcasts, and many believe that providing assistance is the responsibility of churches or foreign NGOs.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Largely disrespected²⁸

There are frequent and credible allegations of discrimination based on ethnic lines. Ethnic groups tend to give preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices. Members of the Beti/Bulu ethnic group hold key positions in government and businesses.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{29 30}

Consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by a prison sentence of six months to five years. Discrimination against the LGBT community is rife. LGBT individuals regularly face social stigmatization and mob violence, which sometimes results in their deaths.

Section 7: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Largely disrespected³¹

Trade unions, strikes, and collective bargaining are permitted, but subject to government interference and numerous restrictions. The provision of laws allowing persons to strike does not apply to civil servants, who are required to negotiate grievances directly with ministers.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Largely disrespected³²

Forced labor is widespread. Although the constitution prohibits all forms of forced and compulsory labor and extends culpability to accomplices and corporate entities, there are credible reports of Fulani continued enslavement and servitude of Kirdi in some chiefdoms in the North Region.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Largely disrespected³³

The law generally protects children from exploitation in the workplace and sets the minimum age of 14 for child employment, yet child labor is widespread. As a result, the government has placed renewed emphasis on street children, considered most vulnerable to child and forced labor.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Partially respected³⁴

The law sets a minimum wage in all sectors, a premium pay for overtime, a standard workweek of 40 to 48 hours, and at least 24 consecutive hours of weekly rest. The government sets health and safety standards, but the ministry lacks the funds for comprehensive inspection programs.

Right to employment



4.2% - Reasonable unemployment³⁵

Cameroon's unemployment rate between 2011 and 2014 remained relatively constant, hovering between 3.8 and 4.2.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: "Death sentences and executions in 2013." Amnesty International. March 24, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/>.

³ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Cameroon." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 179 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (25 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (29 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (32 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (49 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (42 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹⁰ "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2015. Accessed May 19, 2015. <https://index.rsf.org/#!/index-details/CMR>.

¹¹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Cameroon." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹² "Cameroon." World Report 2014: Cameroon. January 1, 2014. Accessed May 13, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹³ "Cameroon." International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁴ "Cameroon." World Report 2014: Cameroon. January 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹⁵ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁶ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed May 19, 2015.

<https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>.

¹⁷ "Cameroon." Freedom in the World 2015: Cameroon. January 1, 2015. Accessed May 19, 2015. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/cameroon#.VVtjEOua9ho>.

¹⁸ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed May 19, 2015. <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>.

¹⁹ "Cameroon." Freedom in the World 2014: Cameroon January 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/cameroon#.VVtjEOua9ho>.

²⁰ Transparency International (TI) publishes a “Corruption Perceptions Index” annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²¹ "Cameroon." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www.transparency.org/country#CMR>.

²² "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Cameroon." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²³ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁴ "Cameroon." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR13/Cameroon.pdf>.

²⁵ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

²⁶ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Score." The KidsRights Index. January 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/Portals/5/pdf/Pdf-documenten%20juli%202014/The%20KidsRights%20Index%20-%20overall%20score%20-%20juli%202014.pdf>.

²⁷ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Cameroon." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

²⁹ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁰ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³¹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Cameroon." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country.

³⁵ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed May 19, 2015. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.