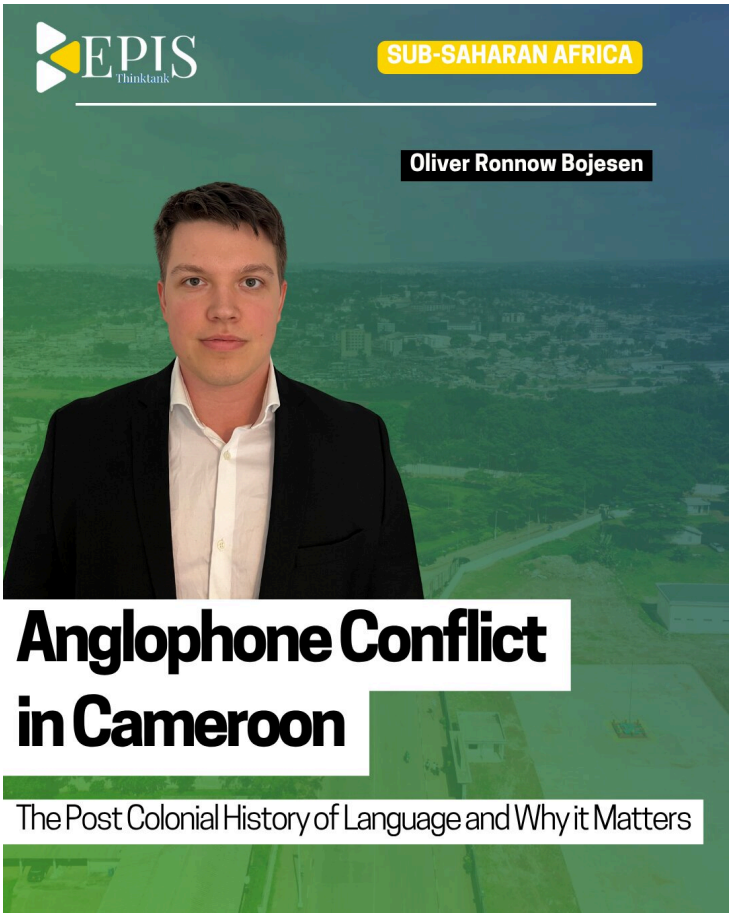
Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon

30 APRIL 2026

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Introduction

Conflicts in the Sub-Saharan area are often unevenly represented in Western and global media. The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon is a clear example of an underreported conflict. In the late 2016, protestors in Cameroon's Anglophone regions (the North-West and South-West) took to the streets to denounce what they saw as a growing marginalisation of Anglophone linguistic, cultural and educational traditions and systems in various areas, and the failure to improve Anglophone representation in pol-

itics. Some demonstrants also called for greater autonomy or secession for the Anglophone regions. The demonstrations were in large part peaceful, and strikes were initially led by lawyers, teachers and students, and eventually involved a wider section of the population. The authorities responded with violence.

Historical background and cause

The Anglophone conflict is deeply rooted in Cameroon's colonial history and postcolonial state formation. After WW1 Cameroon was divided between Britain and France under League of Nations mandates. 80 percent of the territory was administered by France, while remaining 20 percent known as British Cameroons was governed as part of Nigeria. This division led to the emergence of distinct political, legal, and educational systems, which later formed the basis of Anglophone and Francophone identities.

The immediate catalysator of the conflict came in 2016, when Anglophone lawyers and teachers protested against the imposition of French speaking judges and teachers in their regions. The government's violent response radicalised the movement, transforming initially peaceful protests into an armed separatist struggle seeking the creation of an independent state, often referred to as "Ambazonia".

Why the Conflict is Underreported

Despite its severity, the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon has received remarkably limited international attention. Since the escalation of violence in 2017, the conflict has resulted in more than 6000 civilians killed and the displacement of over 700,000 people, with tens of thousands seeking refuge in neighbouring Nigeria. Approximately 2.2 million are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, including the education sector being disrupted, with hundreds of thousands of children affected by prolonged school closures.

A central reason for this underreporting lies in the complex and fragmented nature of the conflict, which involves multiple actors and overlapping forms of violence. The Anglophone regions is effectively caught between three main forces: the Cameroonian defence and security forces, armed separatists' groups, and local militias particularly those associated with Mbororo Fulani communities.

All parties have been implicated in serious human rights violations. Armed separatist groups, including factions such as the Ambazonian Defence Forces and regionally based militias, have carried out killings of civilians, abductions for ransom, and the destruction of homes. Furthermore, Cemeroonian defence and security forces, including elite units such as the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), have been responsible for unlawful killings, village burnings, arbitrary arrests, and acts of sexual violence.

Militias further complicate the conflict landscape. Often linked to local self-defence groups and sometimes supported or tolerated by state authorities, especially Mbororo Fulani have carried out reprisals, killings, and destruction of property, often rooted in long-standing land disputes that have been exacerbated by the crisis, which creates a highly decentralised and diffuse pattern of violence which receives less sustained coverage.

Also, structural constraints on information flow play a decisive role in its underreporting. The Cameroonian authorities have repeatedly restricted access for journalists, imposed internet shutdowns, and limited reporting from conflict-affected areas. In addition, both state forces and separatist groups have actively intimidated journalists, human rights defenders, and activists, contributing to a climate of fear that discourages documentation of abuses.

This silencing extends to legal and international oversight. The government has restricted access for international and regional human rights bodies seeking to conduct mission, while also using judicial measures such as military trials of civilians and arbitrary detention to supress dissent.As a result, both information production and accountability are significant weakened, further constraining to the invisibility of the conflict.

Involvement of international actors

The role of international actors highlights an additional dimension of underreporting. Despite documented human rights violations, several external partners including countries such as France, the United States, and the United Kingdom have continued to provide military assistance, training or equipment to Cameroon. This support is largely framed within the context of regional security cooperation, particularly Cameroon's role in combating insurgent groups such as Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. However, the same military forces receiving international support are also actively engaged in the Anglophone regions, where they are fighting against armed separatist groups seeking independence under the banner of "Ambazonia". This overlap creates a significant contradiction: while international partners justify their engagement through counterterrorism objectives, their support risks enabling forces implicated in human rights violations within a domestic conflict. As a result, external actors may be less inclined to criticise the Cameroonian government openly, contributing to the relative silence surrounding the Anglophone crisis. This dynamic not only affects international responses but also reinforces the broader underreporting of the conflict by limiting political incentives to draw attention to it.

The continued military cooperation between Cameroon and its international partners also raises important questions regarding compliance with the international legal framework of Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The ATT requires states to assess the risk that exported arms could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights law or human-

itarian law, and to refrain from transfers where such risks are substantial. In the case of Cameroon, there is significant evidence indicating that these standards are not fully upheld. Amnesty International documents repeated instances in which Cameroonian defences and security forces have been implicated in unlawful killings, destruction of property, and acts of sexual violence in the Anglophone regions.

While it cannot be conclusively determined whether international partners such as France, the United States, and the United Kingdom are in direct violation of the ATT, the continued provision of military assistance to Cameroon, despite documented human rights abuses, raises serious concerns about whether adequate risk assessments are being conducted.

Conclusion

The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon demonstrates how severe and protracted conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa can remain marginal in global awareness despite their significant humanitarian consequences. What began as largely peaceful protests in 2016 has evolved into a complex and fragmented conflict involving state forces, separatist groups, and militias, all of which have contributed to widespread violence against civilians.

However, as this report has shown, the limited international attention given to the conflict is not simply a result of its scale, but rather the product of structural and political factors. Restricted media access, the silencing of journalists and critics, and the decentralised nature of violence all contribute to the difficulty of capturing the conflict within clear and compelling narratives. At the same time, international actors, through continued military cooperation and strategic security interest, play an indirect role in sustaining this low level of visibility.

The consequences of this underreporting are significant. It not only limits humanitarian and diplomatic engagement but also contributes to a distorted global perception of conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, where crises are either generalised or overlooked unless they align with broader geopolitical priorities. In this sense, the Anglophone conflict highlights that global attention is not determined solely by the severity of violence, but by the political, structural, and media dynamics that shape which conflicts are seen, and which remain largely invisible.

The case of Cameroon illustrates that underreporting is not merely a lack of coverage, but a form of marginalisation, with real consequences for both international response and the populations affected by the conflict.