

The Protection of Freedom of Speech and Press in Cameroon: A Legal Appraisal

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Abstract

Freedom of speech and press is a pertinent issue in most countries around the world but is a very critical situation in Cameroon. With the evolution of things in Cameroon, freedom of speech and press remains a very fundamental issue in that society, as such the citizens are skeptical whenever it comes to issues about freedom of speech and press. That as is attributed to the fact that they know the consequences of freedom after speech which makes them doubt if the state of Cameroon adheres to the protection of same. However, the Cameroonian government has put in place measures through legal and policy framework to protect its citizens. This paper therefore seeks to assess the protection put in place by the government of Cameroon for its citizens. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology with thematic content analyses of primary and secondary data. The ensuing result reveals that there is inadequate protection of freedom of speech and press in Cameroon which is a violation of the constitutional right of its citizens. As a result, we recommend that the government set up supervisory body tasks to ensure that the rights of its citizens are guaranteed even after expressing their views regarding any subject matter.

Keywords

Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, Legal and Policy Framework, Protection of Citizens' Rights, Cameroon

1. Introduction

Freedom of speech has a very long history in Cameroon. It all started in ancient Greece where citizens of Athens enjoyed considerable Freedom of speech in the 400BC (Takougang, 1995). Freedom of speech though was a central issue between religion and politics in European history, including the reforms of the 16th century that gave rise to a new religious tradition. Speech restrictions issued by Kings

James I led to a Declaration of freedom by parliament in 1621 (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). During enlightenment in the 17th and 18th century, speech was considered a natural right. Influential philosophers of England and France stressed the importance of the individual with each person having a right to speak freely and participate in Government's freedom of expression, thus, became an important factor in the French Revolution leading to the declaration of two men which provides that "Men are born and remain free and equal in right" (Ngwe Ali, 2017).

The colonist was aware of the English tradition of suppressing speech and press. In forming a democracy, the founders considered free speech necessary. They reasoned that freedom of belief would have little meaning if thought could not freely be expressed and shared. In fact, a tradition of robust and rowdy expression was prevalent during the framing of the constitution. The drafters reasoned that, if the government was to be governed by the people, then government can only be effective as the citizens are informed (Takougang, 1995). Influenced by the French declaration of 1789, the framers raised the issue of freedom of speech and press to yet another level involving constitutional law, more compelling than a declaration. In the end, the colonies struck a balance between absolute freedom and the English form restricted freedom (Tiako Ngangum, 2019).

Following the organization, in 1791, the First Amendment on Freedom of speech on the 15th of December as part of the Bill of Right was done by the United State of America confirming the fundamental rights of citizens (Human Rights Watch, 1992). This amendment guarantees the right to express ideas and information. Freedom of expression; the right to express opinions without government restriction is a democratic ideal that dates to ancient Greece. The Bill of Right protects individual liberties. However, it also provides the limit to freedom of speech and press in Cameroon. The French declaration of Freedom of speech is contained in Article 11. It provides for "the free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, therefore, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law". (Tiako Ngangum, 2019) Freedom of speech grants Americans the liberty to criticize the government and speak their mind without fear of being censored or prosecuted. The First amendment of the bills of right reads thus "the congress shall make no law restricting and establishment of religion; to assemble and to petition the government for s redress of grievances" (Ngange et al., 2023).

Cameroon is the pang of this crucial transition. It was subjected to a quarter century of stern dictatorship under Ahmadou Ahidjo. This continued his successor Paul Biya until political agitations in the 1990s forced him out the one-party slumber onto the multiparty bandwagon. A crucial factor in this evolving democratization process is freedom of expression, which is the spirit of liberal society (Takougang, 1995).

Freedom of speech and press is also protected at the international level. Freedom of expression is recognized as a Human Right under article 19 of the Univer-

sal Declaration of Human Right [UDHR] (United Nations, 1948). Freedom of expression and press is also recognized by international covenant on civil and political rights [ICCPR]. Article 19 of the UDHR states that “everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference and everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice” (Human Rights Watch, 1992).

Despite the above protection of human right, of freedom of expression, freedom of press, there still seems not to be any freedom of expression or speech and freedom of press in Cameroon as the government continues to limit the enjoyment of these rights in practice (Ngange et al., 2023). Though the Constitution of 1996 ended publication censorship, the African Charter’s Article 17 gives officials the power to ban publications deemed to be a threat to “public order” (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). Defamation continues to be a criminal offence and judicial harassment; arrest and prosecution of journalists and writers have engendered self-censorship (Greenslade, 2011).

The three independent television stations avoided criticizing the government and generally relayed government information to the public (Takougang, 1995). Security forces continue to restrict press freedom and otherwise harass print media journalists (Ngwe Ali, 2017). The government seized print runs of private newspaper distribution. Created in 1990 by the presidential decree, the National Communication Council [NCC] is the country’s media regulator and its powers span from frequency allocation to arbitration on Defamation cases sanctions including bans on media outlet (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). Now creates doubt if freedom of press really exists (Reporters Without Borders, 2025).

2. The Concepts of Freedom of Speech and Press

When it comes to freedom of speech and press in Cameroon, it is a very important concept due that freedom all the society is based on freedom of speech and press (Takougang, 1995). The aspect of freedom of speech and press is a fundamental concept in a way that everything we report should be related freedom of speech and press in Cameroon. This point on freedom of speech and press in Cameroon is to the point that the citizens are in fear of expressing themselves and aspect to report press interview and in that light the society is in fear of expression and its very wrong for that instance so as such freedom of speech and press needs to be protected and taken into consideration by the state to his people and taken care by the state to the society (Ngwe Ali, 2017).

2.1. The Meaning of Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech in Cameroon, is a principle that Supports the freedom of an individual or a community to articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or legal sanction. The right to freedom of expression has

been recognized as a human right in the universal declaration of human rights and international human right law by the United Nations. Many countries especially Cameroon have constitutional law protecting freedom of speech (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). However, in a legal sense, the freedom of expression includes any activity of seeking, receiving, and imparting information or ideas, regardless of the medium used (Human Rights Watch, 1992).

2.2. The Meaning of Freedom of Press in Cameroon

According to the constitution, freedom of press in being that act of free information by the media to its people from which in that light people from the press should be allowed to pass information freely to help the citizens in that light (The 1996 Constitution of Cameroon). This instance of freedom of press is to the light that those of from the journalism profession are out to pass information. Freedom of press is simply that aspect to that information should be passed in the country without any fear, which the information passed is going to help the society greatly as such freedom of press must prevail (Ngange et al., 2023).

Freedom of press in Cameroon by its laws have that aspect that it deals with the free give of information to the society and which when information is been given now, we can talk of freedom of press. As journalist freedom of press should be our priority in that light very effective to that we should try and respect those values of freedom of press and in Cameroon freedom of press is very much not present since the is the panic of disappearance by those of the journalism profession (Greenslade, 2011). But now what has the government put in place measures to protect this journalist against such violations which they have no option than to be silent about event happening to pass it upon to the media for transmission of information (International Press Institute, 2025).

2.3. Abuse of Freedom of Speech and Press in Cameroon

The Cameroon constitution has put in place guarantees when it comes to freedom of speech and press, but looking at it in a practical sense the government threats especially when it comes to press freedom which the government prevents opposition viewpoints from appearing in print, especially in the government-controlled press (Takougang, 1995). Censorship and harassment of journalist in Cameroon are common (Ngwe Ali, 2017), which under the 1990 law, the judiciary is associated with pre-publication censorship making it a requirement for copies to be submitted to the state counsel two hours prior to publication and appeals could be made to the presiding magistrate on arbitrary censorship, to this effect, we can say that freedom of speech and press in Cameroon is in violation (Tiako Ngangum, 2019).

This concept about freedom of speech and press in Cameroon is as a result to that the is a high abuse of freedom of speech and press in Cameroon. Especially in the domain of freedom of press, which information cannot be passed without that fear from journalist in Cameroon due to that they can be arrested or killed

(International Press Institute, 2025). This therefore makes them to think and have a different mindset about the violations of their rights as journalist to which in that light as journalist it is very necessary to promote information to the general public and which this information cannot since people from the press are very much afraid in that light to do due that it will be very bad and again due to their fears (Ngange et al., 2023).

Notwithstanding the facts that in Cameroon the journalists are very much afraid due that they make disappear into the atmosphere by their publications, to which the law is out there to protect its citizens and that it should be respected by irrespective of their ranks in the society, but we see most journalist been tortured or arrested when they oppose the government and some killed when they want to expose the truth about what is happening in our country (Greenslade, 2011).

It is a fundamental concept that we should look at freedom of speech which is seen that freedom of speech is that to talk freely without any intervention by any party. As before been enshrined in the constitution, the right to freedom of speech and press was consecrated by Law No 90/046 of December 19, 1990 that repress whatever is consider as subversive (Takougang, 1995). The 1990 liberty laws safeguard the right to freedom of expression and opinion and grant individuals the latitude to hold opinion and grant to express their ideas freely. As such it is right to ask if freedom of speech truly exist in Cameroon without any of it violation, which the is equally the aspect about freedom after speech in Cameroon making many citizens to ask if truly freedom of speech do exist and what next after the freedom of speech indirectly if the freedom after speech (Ngwe Ali, 2017).

3. Frameworks on Freedom of Speech and Press

When it comes to the frameworks put in place to mitigate on freedom of speech and press in Cameroon is a very big effort (Takougang, 1995). As such in this nation when we talk of freedom of speech and press, we refer to the right of expression and that right towards information from the media in that light very important when capitalizing about that access to freedom of speech and press in the nation of Cameroon (Ngange et al., 2023).

In Cameroon, as frameworks on freedom of speech and press we have the citizens, the courts, the constitution, and the government (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). In that light the is the protection about freedom of speech and press in Cameroon having that so right and power in the country, so all these frameworks serves as that moving instruments as to concern with the so priority of the its citizens and as such freedom of press in a very important and necessary aspect in every nation which makes the freedom of expression reliable to that extent that is covers the whole territory (Human Rights Watch, 1992). It is very essential when talking of freedom of speech and press due to that freedom of expression is a fundamental right of all citizens to enjoy merged with the right to information from the media as such the journalists are then the keepers of information that it depends solely on them for information (Ngwe Ali, 2017).

The aspect that concerns freedom of speech and press in Cameroon is to that level which should be respected by all in the nation to that as a very essential and fundamental minds it need the corporation of the people and the government in particular since it has to deal with the big mind set of each so freedom of speech and freedom after speech is a very big mind blow and to which is very important (Reporters Without Borders, 2025).

3.1. Institutions and Policy Frameworks Protecting Freedom of Speech and Press in Cameroon

3.1.1. National Institution Protecting Freedom of Speech and Press in Cameroon

The institutions when it comes to freedom of speech and press in Cameroon is to the level that we all citizens are to take upon us as that the society (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). As institution protecting freedom of speech and press in Cameroon it is there to protect the citizens to that they feel relax in their nation, which the society at large in this legal aspect is very much important in our society due that freedom of speech is a basic principles of the society which we need to be guided that we are at that the aspect of freedom of speech is a cardinal point due that citizens need to be active in the society at large to portray that point about freedom of speech in our nation (Ngange et al., 2023).

The protection of those national institutions is to the extent that those legal institutions especially are out to guide the citizens when it comes to speech and the citizens are very much protected to that level that they are have that liberty in the society to expression because liberty of expression is a fundamental principles of human right that needs to be respected and protected (United Nations, 1948).

When it comes to freedom of press in Cameroon, the media have some laws which are very much protected and as such the media is well protected due that when it comes to the information sector and for such matter the media sector is a sector to which it comes with so many laws (Takougang, 1995).

3.1.2. Legal Values of Freedom of Speech and Press in Cameroon

When it comes to the legal values relating to freedom of speech and press in Cameroon, it is a result that the moral lessons behind freedom of speech and press are very much ready that beside the law these moral values are very much good (Ngwe Ali, 2017). The law is very much interested in these concepts of freedom of speech and press, which it is due that in Cameroon all this serve like a great rule in front of the law.

The legal values are very memorable to that when it comes to freedom of speech the 1996 constitution has put in place several aspects which are out to promote the freedom of expression of the citizens (The 1996 Constitution of Cameroon). The cardinal aspect with regards to freedom of expression in Cameroon, is due to the facts that it is a fundamental right in Cameroon with regards to such a right, that is why even the Cameroon constitution has greatly outlined such aspects that freedom of speech is very necessary as in it is that core area of human right which

the law does not joke with (Tiako Ngangum, 2019).

As regarding the aspect of freedom of press when it comes to Cameroon, it is due to the facts that it is very important to be informed as such the legal value will stand at the aspect of information due to that the press world in Cameroon has so much legal values that we are allowed to have a clue about the press world (Ngange et al., 2023).

3.1.3. Policy Frameworks Protecting Freedom of Speech and Press in Cameroon

Cameroon has that basic aspect of protecting its citizens when it comes to freedom of speech and press in their national territory (Reporters Without Borders, 2025). The aspect of this policy framework is to the extent which the national territory needs since it is a fundamental aspect of life and must be respected in all directions and all angles (Human Rights Watch, 1992).

Behind the freedom of speech, it is very factual to the extent that it is a very common way that as a fundamental requirement of life it is very necessary to be part in all directions of life (Tiako Ngangum, 2019). This is in line with that in Cameroon it is that fundamental aspect or area of which the law has looked upon it being a very good way of promoting our country.

The area of freedom of press in Cameroon is equally a vital role since the is that aspect of the need for information due that as citizens we have the right to be informed to the high level and this has made policy framework been solid in the way in such a way that it is very strategic and very cardinal aspect (Ngange et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

The aspect about freedom of speech and press in Cameroon, it is as a result to the extent that it is a cardinal point and useful area in our society to which in every society freedom of expression and freedom of press are very important cardinal aspects in our society (Takougang, 1995). That the point about freedom of speech and press are very relevant to which it is a fundamental rule of law that freedom of expression and press must be relaxed to that the citizens have even a common way to respect that, to which we are faced with in our society and should be able to stand on our ground to fight for our right of expression and right of information (Ngwe Ali, 2017).

In summary, the right over freedom of speech and press in our country is a very big step which in our society at large which the universal declaration on human right and the Cameroon constitution together with the 1990 press law are being violated on day-to-day bases (Human Rights Watch, 1992; Reporters Without Borders, 2025).

5. Recommendation

In other to ensure the protection of citizens over freedom of speech or expression and freedom of press, the government should provide enforceable security to the

citizens not to be afraid about freedom after speech and even the media sector to permit them give effective and concrete information without any fear (Tiako Ngangum, 2019).

Again, on the other side, the government need to put in place extra measures for the protection of the journalist in Cameroon which will permit them to have that liberty to fight for the truth and give required information about the country and which will help the media sector to function as one (International Press Institute, 2025), which the media sector is one which need effective protection due that we have seen so many cases of death and others of the journalist which should be protected by the government in Cameroon and even stipulated by the Cameroon constitution (Ngange et al., 2023).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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