

THE SIMILARITIES IN THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON AND GABON

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Abstract

Through a reflection on the similarities between Cameroon and Gabon in terms of women's political participation, the analysis aims to contribute to the understanding of women's political representation in Central Africa. In fact, women's political representation in the two states in question is framed by national, international, and regional instruments, although its implementation depends on internal policies in each state. As a result, the problem that can hold our interest is knowing: How do institutional and structural contexts influence the similarities in the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon? We applied the comparative method and constructivism theory to this problem. Constructivism theory has demonstrated that women's political engagement in Cameroon and Gabon is driven by ideas, norms, and identities in addition to material interests. In order to make it easier to comprehend the realities under study, the comparative method allowed for the identification of the reference models of political representation in the two states in question, emphasising their commonalities. Using this theoretical and methodological framework has made it possible to highlight all of the institutional and structural measures put in place by these two states.

Keywords: *Similarities, political representation, women, Cameroon, Gabon*

Résumé

En s'appuyant sur une analyse des ressemblances entre le Cameroun et le Gabon en ce qui concerne la participation politique des femmes, l'objectif de cette étude est d'apporter une contribution à la compréhension de la représentation politique féminine en Afrique centrale. En réalité, la représentation politique des femmes dans les deux pays concernés est encadrée par des instruments nationaux, internationaux et régionaux, bien que sa mise en œuvre soit tributaire des politiques internes de chaque État. Par conséquent, la question qui peut susciter notre intérêt est de savoir : Comment les contextes institutionnels et structurels influencent-ils les similitudes dans la représentation politique des femmes au Cameroun et au Gabon ? Nous avons utilisé la méthode comparative et la théorie constructiviste pour aborder ce problème. La théorie constructiviste a prouvé que l'engagement politique des femmes au Cameroun et au Gabon est stimulé par les idées, les normes et les identités, en plus des intérêts matériels. Pour faciliter la compréhension des réalités analysées, la méthode comparative a permis de repérer les modèles de référence en matière de représentation politique dans les deux pays concernés, en soulignant leurs similitudes. L'usage de ce cadre théorique et méthodologique a permis de mettre en évidence toutes les mesures institutionnelles et structurelles similaires mises en place par les deux États en question.

Mots clés : *Similitudes, représentation politique, femmes, Cameroun, Gabon*

Introduction

In this analysis, the idea of similarities in the context of the study of the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon could be interpreted in several ways and differently. First of all, in the sense of work on developmentalism concerning the similarity of advanced industrial societies, the impacts (results) of economic

policies or the evolution of the welfare state in this context, the similarity could be analysed in terms of ex post results of public policy implementation. Secondly, similarity can involve the implementation of similar public policies in different states, and then focuses essentially on the content of the implemented public policies. In the present analysis, similarity refers to the dynamic process through which the public policies implemented by the Cameroonian and Gabonese political systems regarding women's political representation tend to converge. This similarity is not limited to the content of public policies, but also includes all implementation mechanisms. According to Heichel et al, the similarity can manifest itself in various ways, notably through the decrease of the variance between public policies (sigma convergence), the gradual catching up of some states with others (beta convergence), and narrowing the gap with a specific model (delta convergence)¹. To this end, the issue likely to catch our attention is that of knowing: How do institutional and structural contexts influence the similarities in the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon? To address this issue, we used the theory of constructivism and the comparative method. This theoretical and methodological framework allowed us to build our analysis around two main parts which consist of presenting the institutional (I) and structural similarities between the Cameroonian and Gabonese political systems regarding women's political representation.

¹ Stephan HEICHEL, Jessica PAPE and Thomas SOMMERER, "Is There Convergence in Convergence Research? An Overview of Empirical Studies on Policy Convergence", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 12, N° 5, 2005, pp. 817-840

I- The Identical Institutionalisation of Political Representation of Women in Cameroon and Gabon

Defined as "a process which infuses an organisation's code of conduct, mission, policies, vision and strategic plans into action template applicable to the daily activity of its workers"², the institutionalisation seeks to examine the core principles and goals that define women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon. However, institutionalisation might be viewed as a collection of choices, regulations, and procedures meant to ensure women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon. In order to implement and oversee the implementation of decisions, rules, and practices, it considers the organisational structures devoted to their growth. For two reasons, institutionalisation is more suitable for examining the similarities between Cameroon's and Gabon's systems of women's representation in their respective political spheres. On the other hand, the two states have very similar policies that allow a rapprochement between them. Thus, the policies adopted by Cameroon and Gabon show converging dynamics at several levels. This part aims to decompose the ways of convergence between the Cameroonian and Gabonese political systems in terms of integrating women into the management of politics. To this end, the institutionalisation that is also one of the major

² Adesina OSHO, "Institutionalization: A Contemporary Perspective of the Old and New Institutionalism for Managers", *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, Vol. 5, Issue 4, 2017, p. 447.

determinants of similarities between Cameroon and Gabon in the political representation of women could be analysed cognitively and politically (A) and through its agenda in the two states in question (B).

A- Cognitive and isomorphic similarities between the Cameroonian and Gabonese systems in terms of political representation of women

Beyond a homogeneous consensus, the majority of studies on the cognitive approach were born in the years 1980-1990 thanks to the work of various authors including Yves SUREL, who tried to transcend certain constraints linked to previous theoretical debates³. In Cameroon and Gabon, the similarity could be addressed in the political representation of women in several ways, including cognitive (1) and isomorphic similarities (2).

1. The cognitive dimension

Adopted in the 1980s and 1990s by authors such as Peter A. Hall, the use of the "cognitive public policy" approach allows particular emphasis to be placed on the importance of knowledge factors, ideas, representations or social beliefs in the design of public policies⁴. It is a method that entails examining the convergence of viewpoints in the formulation of issues, the definition, classification, and accomplishment

³ Yves SUREL, « Approches cognitives », *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, 2019, p. 90.

⁴ Peter A. HALL, "Policy Paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain" *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, N° 3, 1993.

of goals, as well as the strategy for achieving them. The cognitive dimension of the resemblance between the two systems in the study of women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon seeks to take into account global logics and mechanisms. In order to do this, it is interested in the development, prioritising, and legitimisation of policies used by Cameroon and Gabon to implement women's political representation. From a normative and institutional perspective, women are represented in politics in Central Africa, particularly in Cameroon and Gabon. The role of women in carrying out public policies in general and in politics in particular is acknowledged in the two states in question and is founded on comparable ideologies. Women's political empowerment is therefore crucial to the continued growth of Cameroon and Gabon's political systems. According to their various strategies, Cameroon and Gabon have predicated women's political presence primarily on gender promotion and equality. Strategies that can help achieve this goal and national and international institutional frameworks that support women's political empowerment are the foundation for women's political growth, whether in Cameroon or Gabon.

Women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon shares cognitive similarities in that they seek to improve governance by making gender one of the fundamental principles and pillars of change, in line with point 5.5 of the Development Goals, which refers to women's political participation, and to eradicate discrimination against women in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women mandates that States Parties end discrimination against women in their nation's public and political spheres. They must be guaranteed the same rights as men, including the ability to vote in all public elections and referendums, be eligible for all publicly elected positions, take part in the formulation and execution of governmental policies, hold public service positions, and fulfill all public duties at all governmental levels⁵. Cameroon and Gabon have similar gender-related public policy goals when it comes to sustainable development. In fact, they want to guarantee women's full and active involvement and give them equal access to positions of decision-making in the public, political, and economic domains at all levels⁶. Women's representation in the national assembly, the Senate, decentralised local authorities (regions and municipalities), political parties, electoral institutions, government, etc. are the primary indicators of how women's political participation is growing within comparable institutional frameworks in both states.

Furthermore, the perception of women's status in the relevant states could be used to address the cognitive approach to the similarities in political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon. Women in Cameroon and Gabon suffer from social, cultural, religious, and patriarchal influences in Central Africa. A woman's worth is determined

⁵ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article 7 a, b, c.

⁶ Colleen LOWE Morna and Susan TOLMAY (co-ed.), *Participation politique des femmes-Baromètre Afrique 2024*, Stockholm, IDEA International, 2024, p. 7.

by her roles as a wife and mother. A number of proverbs are meant to discourage women from taking part in decision-making. It is often believed in culture that women should be led, not the other way around. The evolution of women's political engagement is influenced by traditional views on gender equality. The burden of domestic work and unequal access to higher education also restrict women's ability to enjoy the opportunities and benefits associated with citizenship on an equal basis with men in politics. Lack of financial resources is a major barrier to women's political engagement. Political parties are inherently patriarchal, constituting entities under male domination, and their transformation is slow⁷. Cameroon and Gabon have extremely low ratings, ranking 112th and 101st out of 139 countries in the SDG for 2024's gender index⁸. The issue of women's political representation persists despite social and political changes in Cameroon and Gabon, rendering the female population a naked power. Two states that seem to discourage women from entering the political sphere are Cameroon and Gabon. In Cameroon and Gabon, women are viewed as mothers whose primary role is to cook meals and protect the welfare of children, despite the fact that women make up more than half of the population in each state. In these communities, they serve as men's subordinates. Women's empowerment is currently a national concern, and efforts by the government to involve women in

⁷ <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2021-resume-executif-fr.pdf> consulté le 24/04/2025.

⁸ DANESSA LUNA & al., « Résultats de l'Indice de Genre des ODD 2024. Un avenir égalitaire en matière de genre en crise ? », *Equal Measures 2030*, 2024, p. 13.

the process of development have not always been successful. The National Population Institute of Cameroon reports that women and girls make up 52% of the nation's total population. They make up less than 8% of the country's political and decision-making apparatus, though. Poverty and other social problems continue to disproportionately affect women and girls. The majority of unpaid domestic work is undervalued and unevaluated, and women continue to shoulder the burden of caregiving. Women make up just 8% (33 out of 360) of. Only 33.5% (61 out of 180) of members of parliament are women, and no women govern the regions⁹.

2. The isomorphic dimension

The translation of practices between the two states in question is referred to as isomorphic similarity in the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon. DiMaggio and Powell define isomorphism as an approach to standardising organisations and their practices, characterised by a convergence of formal and informal rules and behaviors¹⁰. Mimetic isomorphism is the primary similarity between the political systems of Cameroon and Gabon in terms of women's political representation. Mimetic isomorphism takes the form of organisations mimicking the most obvious or widely used behaviours that are accepted in

⁹ Germaine Bienvenue NOUKIO, « Cameroun : Contribution Des Femmes Dans Le Domaine Politique », *East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature*, Vol. 2, Issue 6, 2020, p. 242.

¹⁰ Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields" *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, pp. 147-160.

a particular field¹¹. Politics in Central Africa today can be examined through the lens of colonial mimicry. The similarities between Cameroon and Gabon in terms of women's political representation may be explained by their shared colonial past and colonial zone of influence.

At the mimetic level, women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon is "copy and paste" due to formal and informal similarities, political copies, the restoration of colonial-era systems, and conditions for the implementation of gender-based policies. In terms of institutional practice, women's representation in political spheres is comparable in Cameroon and Gabon. In Central Africa, women's political representation is based on their participation in elective and non-elective positions.

The 1996 Constitution and the Electoral Code of April 19, 2012, have made it possible to guarantee women's political participation in Cameroonian decision-making bodies. The Cameroonian Constitution's preamble states that all men and women have equal rights and responsibilities and are required to contribute to public offices in accordance with their qualifications. Article 151 paragraph 3 of Law No. 2012/001 of April 19, 2012, which relates to the Electoral Code, stipulates that the creation of each list must consider the different sociological aspects of the constituency in question. Gender must also be taken into account. The provisions pertaining to the election of senators, regional councilors, and municipal councilors

¹¹ *Ibid.*

highlight this clause¹². Due to the electoral law's requirement that gender be taken into account in order for candidate lists to be validated, gender has become a significant factor in Cameroonian electoral litigation. The political representation of women in positions of political decision-making in Cameroon has improved as a result of these various measures and the political will of the Cameroonian government.

The constitution and the law establishing the quota system for political and administrative positions serve as the foundation for women's political representation in Gabon. In fact, Gabon's political representation policy seems to be based on the 1990 constitution's introduction of the idea of equality for all without regard to gender or religion. The Gabonese government is determined to successfully continue its fight against gender disparities, as evidenced by the Constitution adopted on January 12, 2018, which promotes equal access for men and women to electoral posts as well as political and professional functions. Law 009/2016, which sets quotas for women to enter politics and occupy senior government positions, aims to increase women's direct and active participation in public administration and politics. guarantees that women are represented in the state's elected assemblies, municipal councils, parliament, and high-level positions. In addition to promoting women's active involvement and representation in politics and decision-making bodies, this clause seeks to fortify the

¹² Law n° 2012/001 of 19 April 2012 relating to the Electoral Code, article 151 paragraph 3, articles 178 to 3, article 218 and article 246.

democratic system. There are deliberate parallels between the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon due to these disparate constitutional provisions and electoral laws¹³.

As a result, when it comes to women's political representation, Cameroon and Gabon have similar institutional environments (they both belong to the CEMAC sub-region), exhibit isomorphic behaviour, and choose similar organisational practices. In Central Africa, organisational practices are subordinated to political integration, which results in institutional isomorphism in women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon.

B- The agenda setting of the women's political representation: an element of convergence between Cameroon and Gabon

The topic of agenda setting in women's political representation is critical in understanding the policy developments and shifts in governance within African nations. It would therefore be necessary to analyse the concept of the agenda setting (1), and, focusing on Cameroon and Gabon, we can examine the convergence between these two states by highlighting their common challenges and aspirations to improve women's political representation (2).

¹³ <https://www.institut-concorde.org/la-gouvernance-inclusive/> accessed 03/05/2025

1. The concept of agenda setting

The purpose of the agenda study is to elucidate how and why certain issues are developed and identified as deserving public attention and government intervention. The “agenda setting” is a strategic approach that typically involves striving to make an issue sufficiently compelling, meaningful or pressing to attract the interest of major stakeholders including political actors, media and public opinion. Developed by McCombs and Shaw¹⁴, it refers to the ability of an actor to choose topics deemed significant or pertinent or to shape how these topics are presented, debated and understood in order to define or impact issues on the public agenda¹⁵.

Indeed, the agenda can be implemented in several phases. Firstly, the identification and definition of the problem so as to facilitate its understanding and relevance to a large number of the public; the collection of evidence, framing the problem, and clear articulation of messages. Subsequently, stakeholder engagement on the issue is done through different communication and advocacy tactics, such as lobbying of policy makers, public involvement, media awareness, participation in public discussions, and more. Finally, once an issue is on the agenda, it is generally the task

¹⁴ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media”, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, N° 2, 1972, pp. 176-187.

¹⁵ Jana BACEVIC and Terhi NOKKALA, “Agenda Setting and Policy Development, Higher Education”, In: *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, 2018.

of stakeholders to keep attention on it and guide how it is dealt with and resolved. This may require participation in policy formulation, advocacy for specific resolutions, monitoring their implementation and requiring adjustments if necessary.

In the management of public policies, social issues, and political issues, agenda-setting is a crucial strategy. It is the process of bringing a problem to the attention of decision-makers, public authorities, or stakeholders in general so that it is taken into consideration. This agenda is essential to shifting political and social priorities. Setting an agenda helps politicians and decision-makers focus on a particular problem or issue. This encourages raising awareness and reaching consensus on a variety of topics, including public health, gender equality, social justice, and global warming. For instance, putting women's political representation on the agenda increases government interest in gender policies and inclusion. Highlighting social injustices and disparities that are frequently disregarded or undervalued by public policies is one of the agenda's primary goals. Prioritizing these problems and putting policies in place to address them are made possible by careful planning. The agenda has made it feasible to alter the institutional and normative frameworks for advancing public policies and to take practical steps to guarantee women's full participation in political life.

When certain issues are put on the political agenda, this gives stakeholders an opportunity to discuss, influence and guide policy resolutions in support of social demands. The agenda therefore allows crucial issues to move beyond

theoretical debates into tangible action. Actions to promote women's political representation have been crucial for the advancement of women's rights globally. These initiatives aim to ensure meaningful and equitable representation of women in decision-making areas, including in parliaments, governments and international institutions. This is a summary of the major initiatives, their approaches and the impact of their work to strengthen women's political representation. This is the case, for example, of the global feminist movement¹⁶, which has long advocated gender equality, and one of its main demands has been the political representation of women. The goal of this movement is to guarantee that women have equal access to political opportunities at all decision-making levels. Setting an agenda has the power to drastically alter social, political, and economic systems. By placing a particular topic on the agenda, we are highlighting the necessity of reevaluating or updating current systems that might not be in line with modern circumstances. In many states, including Cameroon and Gabon, putting women's political representation on the agenda has had a significant impact on public policies. It has prompted institutional and legislative changes, such as gender quotas, electoral reforms, and parity policies, to guarantee women's fair and equal participation in political. Adding issues to the agenda draws attention to social

¹⁶ According to Horn, feminist movements are initiatives that conform to feminism as a political doctrine and seek to challenge the disparities and injustices between women and men, presenting them as a challenge to patriarchy and patriarchal power relations. Read for this purpose J. Horn, (2013), *Gender and Social Movements - Overview Report (Genre et mouvements sociaux - Rapport général)* (Brighton, Institute of Development Studies), p. 14

groups' issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. This gives underrepresented and minority groups a chance to actively engage in political discourse and produce tangible outcomes. The history of feminist movements and the creation of laws intended to ensure equal rights have both revolved around the issue of women's civil rights. It is beneficial to draw attention to the structural obstacles that women encounter and take action to guarantee their fundamental rights when a topic like the inequality of women's civil rights is placed on the political agenda. Additionally, it gives them a platform to assert rights and needs-specific protections.

2. Convergence in the agenda setting of women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon

A number of similarities in legislative strategies, obstacles encountered, and initiatives taken to encourage women's political participation in these two states demonstrate the convergence of women's political representation agendas in Cameroon and Gabon. These two states have similar objectives and approaches for advancing gender equality in politics, despite differences in their political and social environments. This convergence is apparent on a number of levels:

- Legislation in favour of parity and quotas

To increase the representation of women in elections, laws based on the gender quota system have been introduced in Cameroon and Gabon. Although quotas were

included in Cameroon's 2012 electoral code, their application is not as in Gabon. Nonetheless, the nation has ratified numerous international agreements that support gender representation and equality, raising awareness of the significance of women's inclusion. Political parties in Gabon are required by the 2011 Parity Law to include a minimum of 30% of women on their election lists¹⁷. This legislation is part of initiatives to involve women in the state's political processes. Thus, both states initiated a legislative process to include women in politics through gender quotas. However, Gabon has adopted a more systematic and rigorous strategy with its quotas set at 30%.

- Similar cultural and social challenges

In Cameroon and Gabon, the agenda of women's political representation presents convergences in terms of cultural and social challenges, translated mainly by patriarchal traditions, violence and intimidation against women that characterises the political fields of Cameroon and Gabon. In both states, patriarchal traditions and gender stereotypes represent significant barriers to women's political engagement. Women are often seen as less qualified to hold positions of power, due to male dominance in decision-making bodies. In Cameroon and Gabon, women running or elected face social pressures and various forms of political violence,

¹⁷ Pamphile EBO, "Quota obligatoire : 30% de sièges pour les femmes, 20% pour les jeunes », *TV plus Afrique*, 06 janvier 2025. Online: <https://tvplusafrique.com/index.php?page=detail-article&article=6343&titre=QUOTA+OBLIGATOIRE+%3A+30%25+DE+SI%C3%88GES+POUR+LES+FEMMES%2C+20%25+POUR+LES+JEUNES> accessed 04/05/2025.

including physical, psychological and violent threats¹⁸. This may deter women from pursuing careers in politics. According to the analysis, both states share social barriers that limit women's access to leadership and decision-making positions, primarily as a result of political violence and cultural ideologies.

- Women's political participation and female leadership roles

Women's representation in parliaments is still comparatively low in Cameroon and Gabon, despite institutional and political reforms. For instance, women hold nearly 33.9% of parliamentary seats in Cameroon¹⁹, but only about 30% of seats are reserved for women in Gabon. Women continue to hold comparatively few ministerial and leadership positions in Cameroon and Gabon²⁰. Although some progress has been made, particularly with the appointment of some women to important positions, the proportion of women in ministries is still lower than that of men, though these circumstances are frequently still uncommon. Though women's representation in politics has gradually increased in both states, progress has been slow, and there are still gaps in the distribution of political positions.

¹⁸ La source, "Droits des femmes au Cameroun : avancées et défis », *AFRICACOEURNEWS*, 08 mars 2025. En ligne : <https://africacoeurnews.com/2025/03/08/droits-des-femmes-au-cameroun-avancees-et-defis/> consulted on 04/05/2025.

¹⁹ <https://data.ipu.org/fr/parliament/CM/CM-LC01/data-on-women/> consulté le 04/05/2025.

²⁰ Pamphile EBO, *Op cit*,

- Collaboration with international Organisations
Cameroon and Gabon collaborate with international organisations such as the UN, the African Union and the European Union, which provide their support for gender equality in politics²¹. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Union's Agenda 2063, which advocates for greater integration of women in political processes, are just two examples of the actions and legislative changes that these organisations have contributed to Cameroon and Gabon. Both states adopted international instruments on women's rights as a result of external commitments, which helped bring up the topic of female political representation in their agendas.

- Programmes and initiatives to support women's political engagement

In order to help women better understand the political process, get ready for elections, and increase their representation in political parties, both states have set up training and mentoring programmes. These initiatives aim to combat the lack of funding for women's election campaigns, dispel false information, and inspire more women to participate in politics. Women's participation in politics is being promoted by regional feminist organisations like the

²¹ Cameroon and Gabon have ratified the majority of international, regional and community conventions and treaties relating to the defense and promotion of women's rights. Efforts to better integrate gender issues into the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 were observed, recently implemented. The new UNSDCF 2022-2026 was approved in September 2021, with gender mainstreaming and an independent gender outcome.

Association of *Gabonese Women and the Network of Women Leaders in Cameroon*. These citizen initiatives have increased public awareness and exerted pressure on decision-makers to enact more inclusive political reforms. These two states gain from increasing civic engagement to improve women's political representation, which is bolstered by training initiatives and partnerships with international organisations.

The inclusion of policies, laws, and initiatives that promote women's participation in political processes at all levels is referred to in the analysis as the institutionalisation of women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon. These two states have put in place a number of mechanisms to guarantee a more equitable representation of women in politics, despite the distinct situations and contexts of each. A convergent trend in the institutionalisation of women's representation is indicated by these processes. From a cognitive perspective, women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon refers to the alignment of beliefs, attitudes, values, and priorities regarding women's participation in these two states' political processes. It concerns the way in which political actors, institutions and civil society view and address issues of women's political representation, as well as the impact of these perceptions on public policies and implemented initiatives. Isomorphism in the context of women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon refers to structural similarity or alignment of processes, policies and strategies in both states aimed at improving women's participation in

politics. However, putting the political representation of women on the agenda in Cameroon and Gabon is a key aspect of convergence, because it defines the process by which the issue of gender disparity in politics becomes a priority on both states' political agendas. This convergence is manifested both in legislative reforms, institutional strategies and the involvement of political and social actors to promote women's participation in decision-making bodies.

II- Structural convergence in the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon

The term "structural convergence" in women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon refers to parallels between these two states' institutional frameworks and social and political policies, which have resulted in comparable programmes to promote women's participation in political processes. Legislative changes, institutional support programmes, and similar structural issues that impact women's political representation in both states are examples of this structural convergence. The methods used to carry out equality policies and the initiatives undertaken exhibit some similarities despite the unique features of each state. At the structural level, the convergence between Cameroon and Gabon in terms of political representation could be analysed through the establishment of common institutional support mechanisms (A) and similar political systems and governance structures (B).

A- The establishment of common institutional support mechanisms

The creation of institutional support systems for women's political representation in Cameroon and Gabon is a reflection of these states' efforts to guarantee equal representation of women in decision-making bodies and to encourage women's inclusion and participation in political processes. By removing institutional, cultural, and societal barriers, these mechanisms are crucial for promoting and facilitating women's involvement in politics. Although each state has adopted specific approaches, there are similarities in the establishment of support structures for women politicians, including the creation of networks of women leaders and feminist organisations (1), and the implementation of similar training programme for women in politics (2).

1- The creation of networks of women leaders and feminist political organisations

In terms of institutional support, Cameroon and Gabon have created organisations and structures specifically designed to encourage women's involvement in politics; this indicates a structural convergence in the ways these states handle the problem of female representation. The two states in question have demonstrated their shared desire to empower women, increase their political participation, and advance

gender equality by establishing networks of female leaders and feminist political organisations. Additionally, it serves as a tactical tool for bolstering women's representation in decision-making bodies and emphasising the need to change social and political structures. For political representation, Central Africa lacks a sub-regional cooperation network. Nonetheless, a number of institutions and programmes are actively promoting women's leadership and empowerment in Central Africa, organisations like the Network of Young Feminists of Central Africa (REJEFEMAC) and the Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD). The RFLD is essentially a pan-African feminist organisation whose goals are to support and raise awareness of women entrepreneurs, advocate for women's causes with public authorities, and advance the rights of African women and girls, contributes to the defense of women's rights and their involvement in decision-making bodies, and helps state and non-state actors form development partnerships²². Young women from Central African nations—Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Central Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—form the regional platform REJEFEMAC. Beyond the borders of the member states of the aforementioned sub-region, it is a collective network that works to defend women's rights in Central Africa. Nonetheless, it aims to create a society in which women and girls have complete rights, their voices are heard, and their potential is fully utilised. Building a fair and balanced Central

²² Florence ENIAYEHOU et al., *Declaration de capacite*, RFLD, 2025.

Africa is crucial, where young feminists' combined power can spur social change²³.

Nonetheless, there are numerous networks of female leaders and feminist groups in Cameroon that strive to educate and advance women in politics. Among these organisations is "More Women in Politics," which aims to increase women's political involvement in Cameroon through awareness-raising, training, and advocacy campaigns. In fact, by removing sociocultural and structural obstacles that keep women from achieving positions of power, this structure seeks to promote women's active and equitable participation in political processes. Through advocacy, awareness-raising initiatives, and training, it aims to strengthen women's voices and advance inclusive policies that consider the needs of the whole population²⁴. Additionally, Women Leaders Cameroon (FELECA), a Cameroonian organisation and part of the international network "Femmes Leaders Mondiaux," unites women in leadership roles across a range of industries. Through conferences, training, and women's advocacy, this organisation seeks to advance women's leadership. According to the analysis, this association seeks to unite all individuals who are able and willing to value women's roles in society, regardless of their unique circumstances. This is to maximise the harmony between men and women and to

²³ <https://www.rejefemac.org/> consulted on 13/05/2025.

²⁴ <https://djourm-orphelinat-site-voila.com/> accessed 13/05/2025

encourage all types of exchanges, both domestically and internationally, for greater efficiency²⁵.

Additionally, there are feminist networks and organisations in Gabon that aim to empower women politically. For instance, the National Network of Women Leaders of Associations in Gabon (RNFLAG), which was established in 2024 and consists of female association leaders from every province in Gabon, aims to support vulnerable girls and advance women's empowerment. The National Network of Women Leaders' Associations in Gabon seeks to bring all of the nation's women together around a shared vision of solidarity and social engagement in order to contribute to the development of a strong and prosperous Gabon. This new entity aims to strengthen the place of women in the process of socio-economic and political development of the country²⁶. The Network of African Women Leaders (AWLN), which was established in Gabon in 2020 in association with the African Union and UN-Women, is another feminist organisation. Through the empowerment of rural women, female leadership, political engagement, the advancement of security and peace, etc., this structure seeks to solidify the position of women in African society. In keeping with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the 2063 Agenda for Africa, it seeks to strengthen women's leadership roles in Africa's transformation²⁷. The

²⁵https://www.mediatorre.org/docactu_Sm9lb6xlX1BhbG1pZXJpL2RvY3MvYnJldmUtcHJlc2VudGF0aW9uLWZlbgVjYS0yMg==_5.pdf accessed 13/05/2025.

²⁶ MANFOUMBI, « L'Association FAVE OSSOU au cœur du Réseau National des Femmes Leaders du Gabon : Un Engagement pour la Solidarité et le Développement », *Afriqueactualité*24, 24 janvier 2025.

²⁷ <https://fondationsounga.org/le-awln/> accessed 13/05/2025.

establishment of these networks and feminist support organisations in both states shows a similar structural approach, aimed at informing, training, and supporting women in politics, and reducing barriers that limit their access to active politics.

2- The implementation of similar training programme for women in the political field

In Central Africa, such as Cameroon and Gabon, there are several comparable training programmes for women in politics. These initiatives seek to improve women's abilities so they can participate more actively and significantly in political processes. The Yaoundé Civic and Political School is one of the most prominent political education programmes in Cameroon for women. This programme offers training to increase women's political potential. The International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) arranged the 10th regional meeting of the Yaoundé Civic and Political School, which was held from April 3-5, 2019. This gathering encouraged contemplation of the prerequisites for enhancing high-caliber female leadership via, the empowerment of women and adolescent girls. She addressed topics such as girls' right to education, leadership and political commitment for development²⁸. Local organisations' training programs are another. In fact, organisations like "Femination" host training sessions for women under 35 to

²⁸ https://www.francophonie.org/cameroun-lenqagement-politique-des-femmes-219?utm_source=chatgpt.com accessed 14/05/2025.

help them participate in politics. These classes are designed to help women become more adept at political communication, leadership, and election strategy²⁹. The "More Women in Politics" network also strives to promote women's involvement in politics. It hosts training sessions, seminars, and awareness-raising events to inspire women to participate in politics and assume leadership roles. Similar training programs to those in Cameroon are being established in Gabon to support women's political empowerment³⁰.

Cameroon and Gabon collaborate within the ECCAS Commission to promote women's political participation, despite the national nature of the mechanisms. This allows for the sharing of experiences and exemplary initiatives. The execution of these programmes in Cameroon and Gabon demonstrates the two states' determination to encourage women's participation in politics and enhance their leadership roles in decision-making processes, as well as the convergence of their support networks for women's political representation.

²⁹ https://femination.fr/femmes-en-politique-cameroun/?utm_source=chatgpt.com consulté le 14/05/2025.

³⁰ Gabon, Plan décennal pour l'autonomisation de la femme gabonaise 2015-2025.

B- The implementation of a similar governance in Cameroon and Gabon in terms of political representation of women

Cameroon and Gabon have similar governance systems in place to improve women's political representation. Although these approaches are individual, they pursue a common goal of empowerment and greater involvement of women in decision-making processes. The similarities in governance regarding women's political participation in the two states in question could be analysed through the establishment of similar national institutions and processes: the national policy of Cameroon (1), and then to Gabon in terms of gender (2).

1- Cameroon's national gender policy

The primary goal of Cameroon's ten-year National Gender Policy is to advance equity and equality between men and women at the national level in specific areas and sectors by 2030. This aligns with the deadlines established by the National Development Strategy 2020-2030. It also considers the 2030 Agenda's objectives to greatly lessen gender inequality nationwide and enhance population quality of life. In line with Cameroon's long-term vision for 2035, the National Gender Policy (2020-2030) aims to contributing to the development of an emerging, democratic, and diverse Cameroun where men and women, girls and boys,

have equal rights, opportunities, and chances³¹. From a sustainable standpoint, gender equality emerges as one of the key pillars of Cameroon's development. Gender policy in Cameroon is based on the principles of equity, equality, national solidarity, good governance, shared responsibility, and social justice. It seeks to advance a democratic, inclusive, and fair society that is founded on human rights for all, including women's political rights. In both the public and private sectors, it seeks to advance equitable, sustainable, and participatory development. In order to achieve this, the plan's overarching goal is to foster an atmosphere that is favourable to the growth of Cameroonian populations, regardless of gender, gender identity, or gender identity³².

Seven (7) strategic axes will be used for the PNG's implementation in order to accomplish the aforementioned goals, taking into consideration the difficulties noted by the gender profile and the examination of previous and present policies. These will eventually be transformed into priority programmes and intervention areas that complement one another. Among these axes are the enhancements of the institutional framework for the advancement of gender in public policies, including the political representation of women (Strategy 7), and the expansion of women's participation and representation in governance at the

³¹ Ministère de la promotion de la femme et de la famille, évaluation de la mise en œuvre de la déclaration et du programme d'action de Beijing (2019 - 2024), Rapport de l'Etat du Cameroun, Octobre 2024.

³² Ministère de la promotion de la femme et de la famille, évaluation de la mise en œuvre de la déclaration et du programme d'action de Beijing (2019 - 2024), *Op cit.*

national, local, and community levels as well as in decision-making bodies (Strategy No. 5).

Nonetheless, the Government of Cameroon places a high priority on integrating gender-based women into all facets of national development in compliance with its international, regional, and national commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment. In fact, national development plans, such as the Vision towards Horizon 2035 and the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (SND 30), as well as other important national documents in this area—of which the National Gender Policy holds a prominent position—concretise the government of Cameroon's declared commitment to advance equality, which is documented in the constitution of January 18, 1996. By pledging to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals, Cameroon is exhibiting a strong commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda and the African Union 2063 Agenda. Gender equality is the most important of these goals and is clearly acknowledged as a necessary condition for achieving other objectives. The Cameroonian Constitution's preamble emphasises that every citizen has an equal right to participate in the governance of their country, regardless of whether they hold official positions or take on informal leadership roles. It emphasises the significance of women's participation in executive, legislative, and judicial decision-making bodies through public administration and civil society through networks, representative groups, and community organisations for women. The fight against gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, and the representation of women in

political and decision-making bodies are just a few of the difficulties associated with putting the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) into practice. In fact, it's crucial to recognise that not all facets of society have made equal strides toward gender equality. Women from marginalised communities, young women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women frequently experience additional forms of discrimination.

2- National gender policy in Gabon

Similar to Cameroon, Gabon has a national policy on gender governance that focuses on implementing several strategic projects and programmes that advance gender equality and end disparities between men and women. Among the various components of this national policy are the programmes for women's empowerment and awareness. In fact, the Gabonese government has implemented programmes to increase awareness of gender issues and women's empowerment with the help of its external partners, including the African Development Bank (ADB). Training workshops for female politicians and association leaders are a key component of this component's programme³³.

Through the National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity (SNEEG) launched in 2010, Gabon is trying to improve

³³ Ministère des affaires sociales et des inclusions, *Le Gabon en action pour l'égalité des genres : une nouvelle stratégie décennale ambitieuse (2024-2033)*. En ligne : https://www.affaires-sociales.gouv.ga/273-presse/274-actualites/1723-le-gabon-en-action-pour-legalite-des-genres-une-nouvelle-strategie-decennale-ambitieuse-2024-2033-/?utm_source=chatgpt.com accessed 16/05/2025.

women's participation in politics. Women made up 40% of the Gabonese Senate and 19% of the National Assembly in 2023. Eleven (11) ministerial departments in the interim administration established in January 2024 were led by women. The Gabonese government's dedication to increasing women's political participation is demonstrated by this representation. Similar to Cameroon, Gabon's national gender strategy is predicated on a ten-year framework that pledges it to carry out a number of programmes targeted at enhancing gender equality and women's political participation opportunities. This is the new 10-year strategic framework's goal for 2024-2033.

Furthermore, when it comes to promoting women's political representation in particular and managing gender in general, Cameroon and Gabon share similar political systems. For Cameroon, these organisations are the Ministry for the Women Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), which is made up of the Parliament and decentralised territorial authorities; for Gabon, it is made up of the Parliament and local authorities.

Therefore, a number of historical, institutional, cultural, and political factors are intrinsic to the convergence of governance structures in terms of women's political representation in Gabon and Cameroon. However, there are some differences in how women are politically represented in Central Africa, particularly between Cameroon and Gabon, which will need to be examined.

Conclusion

There are significant parallels between the political representation of women in Cameroon and Gabon, two central African nations. This representation in Cameroon and Gabon is influenced by political systems that, despite their inherent differences, have certain things in common. In fact, an analysis of the relationships between the political systems in Gabon and Cameroon reveals dynamics that, despite their apparent similarities, exhibit notable differences. The levels of citizen participation and political representation differ between the two nations. For instance, a concentration of executive power frequently characterises governance in Gabon, impeding political competition and exposing flaws in the democratic. In order to encourage true political representation and improved inclusion of women in decision-making processes, this analysis emphasises the necessity of reevaluating governance models. Examining electoral procedures in relation to political representation reveals intricate dynamics in nations like Cameroon and Gabon. In fact, electoral processes affect women's dedication to democratic institutions as well as the legitimacy of governments. Research indicates that in Gabon, the regularity and quality of elections can significantly affect the public's acceptance of the current government by bolstering the connection between democracy and economic growth. At the same time, an analysis of political elites

highlights how they interact with institutions to shape the political landscape in both Cameroon and Gabon. Thus, understanding the electoral processes is essential for understanding the challenges of women's democratic representation and aspirations in these two countries.

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