

The Effects of the Anglophone Conflict on the Mbororo Indigenous Minority in Cameroon

Researchers

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- Research partners in Cameroon who have to remain anonymous for their safety.

Research

Mission: The goal of our study was to assess how the Anglophone Conflict affects the lives of members of the Mbororo ethnic minority. The Mbororo are an agro-pastoralist sub-group of the Fulani people and have been recognised as an indigenous group. Most Mbororo in North West Cameroon live in remote settlements and rely on cattle rearing for their livelihoods. Due to cultural distinctions the Mbororo cannot be lumped together with the broader Anglophone population when it comes to their position in the Anglophone Conflict.

Methods: We worked with a combination of quantitative and qualitative data: Our Cameroonian collaborators collected quantitative survey data for 807 households on material losses, kidnappings, and killings experienced by the Mbororo community in the North West region between September 2017 and January 2021. Additionally, our collaborators conducted 34 semi-structured interviews with Mbororo individuals from May 2020 to December 2020 which we transcribed and analysed using MAXQDA.

Key findings

1. The Mbororo are especially affected by violence from Ambazonian separatists.

While the general Anglophone population is affected by violence from both Ambazonian armed groups and/or the military, the Mbororo are almost exclusively targeted by the Ambazonian groups and have expressed little to no fear about encounters with the military. Yet, the scope of the Mbororo losses is comparable to the Anglophone population at large (e.g. the rate of people killed amounts to 0.11% of the Anglophone population and 0.13% of the Mbororo population). To arrive at such numbers, Ambazonian groups must be attacking Mbororo more frequently and/or more intensely than non-Mbororo communities.

2. Violence against Mbororo is concentrated in regions with previous and current conflicts over land.

The data demonstrates that the Mbororo have been more affected in areas that previously saw conflicts over land between farmers and herders. In addition, remote and inaccessible areas along the Cameroonian-Nigerian border have emerged as hotbeds of violence, as they are both home to Mbororo herders and allegedly serve as transit zones for the import of arms by Ambazonian separatists.

3. The Anglophone Conflict re-ignites interethnic tensions and biases against Mbororo.

As a result of the status of the Mbororo as an ethnic and cultural minority it is generally assumed by Ambazonian supporters that, in order to protect their cattle wealth and land rights,

Mbororo will side with the Cameroonian government. Even though loyalties are actually less clear-cut, our interlocutors reported that their relationships with non-Mbororo neighbours have been interrupted by suspicion and mistrust. We therefore expect the Anglophone Conflict to take a considerable toll on interethnic relations in Cameroon that will take years to repair.

4. Online hate speech against Mbororo correlates with a sharp rise in separatist attacks.

Following the circulation of audio and video messages from well-known Ambazonian leaders decrying the Mbororo as undeserving foreigners and traitors to be removed from the land, we recorded a sudden increase of violence against Mbororo, including cases of torture, executions, and arson attacks. Although subsequent messages from leaders in the diaspora were aimed at deescalating the situation (and this may have helped), the safety of the Mbororo seems largely at the whim of Ambazonian leaders. We see the potential for a further increase in atrocities.

5. Aggrieved or displaced Mbororo report having received little to no material or psycho-social support.

Despite several Cameroonian and international NGOs and the Cameroonian state vowing to provide aid for victims of the conflict, most interview partners said that the promised support never arrived. Whilst this can be attributed in part to the high demand for aid, it is worth noting that the Cameroonian state has a long history of allegedly embezzling funds intended for aid campaigns. Additionally, our interlocutors suggest that Mbororo are often left out of the distribution of goods because the distributors favour members of their own ethnic community. The same is true for psycho-social services for trauma survivors: Where these are offered, they target the Christian majority population and are not attuned to the cultural needs of the Mbororo as a Muslim minority group.

Recommendations

1. Mbororo from Cameroon should be eligible for asylum

Members of the Mbororo ethnic minority are at an especially high risk of being targeted by Ambazonian armed groups. Although the willingness to flee is low, those who are staying in the conflict zone or are forced to return to it, have to expect persecution, including kidnappings and extortions, arson attacks on their compounds and targeted executions. Mbororo refugees are thus dependent on being granted asylum to ensure their safety.

2. Material and psycho-social support should be provided to the affected population at large.

More attention should be paid to the ethnic inclusivity of the services provided and transparency in the distribution of material goods and services. We recommend collaborating with local NGOs that have a track record of promoting ethnic integration to ensure that funds are used efficiently and provisions match the needs of the target groups.

3. We recommend planning for long-term interethnic re-integration projects during the reconciliation process.

To avoid protracted conflict between the Mbororo and their ethnic neighbours, we advise investing in research and intervention projects in collaboration with local communities and organisations to accompany the broader peace process. These could include projects that develop culturally attuned psycho-social and economic support measures as well as interventions that promote dialogue between farmers and herders.