***Patterns and Challenges of Democratization and Political Representation among the Fulani in the Menchum Division of Cameroon***

Original Research Article

**Abstract**

This study examines the complexities of democratization and political representation for indigenous communities, focusing on the Fulani in Menchum Division, Cameroon. Despite a long history of cohabitation and contributions to local development, the Fulani have faced significant limitations in political representation due to factors such as a lack of political organization, discrimination, and limited awareness. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this research examines the historical context of the Fulani presence and recent trends and obstacles to their political participation. Findings revealed that while their representation has increased between 2013 and 2023 through political alliances, active engagement, and population growth, it remains constrained by systemic challenges such as discrimination and insufficient political organization. To enhance Fulani involvement in local, national, and international politics, the study underscores the need for empowering initiatives, fostering national unity, promoting political awareness, and reducing marginalization.

***Keywords****:*Discrimination, Democratization process, Fulani people, Menchum, Political inclusion.

1. **Introduction**

Democratization and political representation are crucial components of a functioning and inclusive society (Huntington, 1991). In many parts of the world, marginalized groups struggle to have their voices heard and their interests represented in the political sphere. This is particularly true for the Fulani community in rural Cameroon, specifically in the Menchum Division of the North West Region. Despite constituting a reasonable proportion of the population, for over a century, no Fulani ever occupied the position of a Minister, Governor, Senior or Divisional Officer, Parliamentarian or even a Council Mayor (Davis, 1995). They face numerous challenges in accessing political representation and participating in the democratic process. According to recent statistics, the Mbororo/Fulani communities in Cameroon, like many other marginalized groups around the globe, faces significant barriers to political representation (Mouiche, 2011). A study by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, 2015) found that only a small percentage of Fulani individuals hold political office in Cameroon at large. This lack of representation not only hinders their ability to advocate for their self-interests but also perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and exclusion.

The issue of political representation for the Fulani community in Cameroon is not unique to this region. Globally, marginalized groups such as women and indigenous groups in Middle East, Latin America and South East Asian countries face similar challenges in accessing political power and representation in decision making processes. The United Nations' Agenda 2030 emphasizes the importance of inclusive and participatory governance as a key component of sustainable development. Its goal 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries noted that there is no such thing as a society without inequality. However, if social inequalities become too great –for example, because members of low socioeconomic layer of the society are no longer able to participate effectively in social, political and cultural life –it poses a problem for all society (Bilfinger *et al.,* 2019). If the prospects of weak and vulnerable groups like women, disable persons and indigenous groups are restricted too much, not only will social cohesion suffer, but society’s capacity for integration and innovation will be compromised as well.

Similarly, the African Union's Agenda 2063 aims to promote democratic governance and political inclusion across the continent through indigenous people and women participation in politics and decision making process of their societies through financial assistance, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs. Norris’s work (1997), titled “Political representation and legitimacy in the European Union” lays a foundation for this global project as he stated that, political representation is essential for ensuring that all citizens have a voice in the decision-making process and that their interests are taken into account by the government. In line with these global initiatives, the 2030 Cameroon National Development Strategic paper also highlights the need for increased political representation and participation for marginalized groups, including women, disabled groups and the indigenous community through voter education campaigns, supported community-based initiatives, and lobbied for policy reforms and instituting quotas for women and minority groups in electoral processes. While there have been some positive developments, significant challenges remain, and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that all groups have equal access to political power and decision-making. Regardless, the issue of political representation for the Fulani community is particularly complex.

Globally, we are still a long way from complete treatment of men and women including indigenous groups, considering for example their minimal share in leadership position. In line with achieving the UN 2030 Goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, western nations like Germany have made significant progress when compared to some other countries where many women live in complete dependence on their husbands and fathers. Education is a key factor in attending gender equality and inclusive society. Despite some positive development that have been made, particularly in primary education over the past 15 years, we must note that gender inequality persist worldwide. Women represent a smaller proportion of students at higher levels of education. This can be linked to a lower proportion of women and indigenous groups holding higher level of occupational position. Public and private decision making processes are still dominated by men and people from other ethnicity worldwide. Although, the proportion of national parliamentary seats held by women and indigenous communities have significantly increased by 15% or more since 2000 especially in Britain, Algeria, South Africa, Rwanda, Somalia and Indonesia. It is striking that in Southern Africa and Central America in particular, a large increase in women national parliamentary seats has been recorded since 2000 unlike in any other region of the world. However, Asia and North America continue to stagnate at a low to medium level.

Cameroon's history of colonialism and ethnic divisions has created a political landscape that is often fraught with tension and inequality (Pelican, 2008). This has resulted to marginalization leading to a sense of disenfranchisement among the Fulani community and other marginalized groups in the region (Nkwi, 2005). There are also opportunities for increased political representation and empowerment for the Fulani community in Cameroon. The government has taken steps to promote inclusivity and diversity in political leadership, including the establishment of quotas for women and minority groups in some political positions. Additionally, civil society organizations and international partners are working to support the political participation of marginalized groups, including the Fulani community.

Despite constituting a significant portion of the population in North West Region of Cameroon and in Menchum Division in particular, the Fulani people face challenges in achieving equitable political representation due to low level of formal education, lack of a geopolitical space, historical factors of colonialism which lead to marginalization and the failure of transition to democracy in the early 1990s which aimed to offer hopes for political representation for all groups. The transitional period to democracy was particularly disadvantageous to minority group like the Fulani of Menchum who struggle to find strong political platform that represent their interest despite the institution of the 1996 contitution which calls for inclusive participation of all groups including the Fulani people in the decision making processes of the country. Tandem to these was also the issue of ethnic and inter communal violence which poses significant threat to Fulani political inclusion in Menchum Division. Clashes with local farmers over access to land and resources have unfortunately become common place couple with the socio-political crisis in the Anglophone regions of north west and South West Regions of Cameroon which officiated in 2016 (Human Right Watch, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2019). These entire volatile environments through harassment, killings, migration, displacement and vulnerability could discourage Fulani political inclusion in the political process.

There is a lack of in-depth research specifically focusing on the political participation and representation of the Fulani community in Cameroon and the Sub Saharan Region in particular. Existing studies including Victor (1975); Kweteke (2009); Joseph (1987) only provide general overviews of political dynamics in the region without investigating the specific experiences of marginalized groups like the Fulani. Research on the Fulani community history, socioeconomic, political, culture development often focuses on their ethnic identity (Nketia, 2012; Ndimele, 2017). For instance, Tchoumbou (2005) focuses on the socioeconomic aspects of Fulani life in Cameroon, including their pastoralism practices, land use, and economic challenges. It provides valuable insights into the Fulani people's livelihoods and their relationship with the broader society. However, it's crucial to examine how other factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and religion, intersect with ethnicity to shape their political experiences and representation. Furthermore, understanding the historical context of Fulani settlement and interactions with the colonial administration is essential for analyzing their current political situation. The legacy of colonialism may also have lasting impacts on marginalized groups' access to political power and resources. Research is therefore urgently needed to identify specific challenges faced by Fulani voters and candidates during elections, such as voter registration, access to polling stations, and electoral violence which are often limited due to marginalization. Significantly, comparing the experiences of the Fulani community with other marginalized groups in Cameroon and other Sub Saharan African countries like Nigeria can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges they face and potential strategies for addressing them.

This study therefore aims to shed light on the complexities and experiences of the Fulani people in the democratic processes of Menchum Division, Cameroon, with specific focus on the historical dynamics of Fulani presence in the area, their representation patterns, challenges and policy recommendations to enhance their political inclusion. This study would contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for achieving more inclusive and equitable representation. This align squarely to goal 5, 10, 16 and 17 of UN Agenda 2030 on reducing inequality, ensuring peace, justice and strong institution and partnership through policy implementation, best practices, fair political representation, conflict resolution, inclusive institutions and collaboration. This will significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of inclusive and equitable democracy in diverse and often marginalized indigenous communities. Furthermore, Fulani has long history of cohabitation and contributions to local development, however, they have limited representation and were marginalize. However, by identifying the barriers they encounter, this research seeks to promote policy changes that address their specific needs and concerns, ultimately enhancing their political participation and representation as well as contribute to a more inclusive and peaceful society in Cameroon and beyond.

This section introduced the background of the study, highlighting the significance of the study for policy formulation and practice. It also explored the background of the study, with a critical focus on diverse literature reviews from various authors and organizations on minority inclusion in decision making process in developed, developing countries, including Cameroon. Finally, the section presented the purpose and objectives of the study. The subsequent section delved into the literature review, which underpinned the analysis of how Fulani discrimination determines differential access to their political and democratic representations.

**2.0 Literature Review**

Democratization is a process through which a society transitions from authoritarian rule to a more democratic form of governance. This involves the establishment of democratic institutions, such as free and fair elections, separation of powers, and protection of civil liberties. According to Huntington (1991), democratization is a complex and multifaceted process that requires not only changes in formal political structures, but also shifts in societal attitudes and behaviour towards democracy. Political representation on the other hand, it refers to the process through which individuals or groups that are able to have their interests and preferences represented in the decision-making processes of a political system.

According to Pitkin (1967), political representation involves both descriptive representations, where representatives share the characteristics of those they represent, and substantive representation, where representatives act in the best interests of their constituents. Political representation is essential for a functioning democracy, as it ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are taken into account in the policy-making process. At its core, democratic representation is about bridging the gap between the people and the government (Dahl, 1971). It operates on the principle that citizens delegate their authority to elected representatives who act on their behalf and make decisions that reflect the will of the people (Katz & Mair, 1995). In this way, representation serves as a link between the governed and the governing, ensuring that the government remains accountable and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the citizens. Effective democratic representation requires mechanisms for citizen engagement beyond elections. This includes avenues for public deliberation, participation in policy-making processes, and opportunities for citizens to express their views and concerns (Fung & Wrigth, 2003). Democratic representation should therefore strive to be inclusive and encourage broad participation. It should provide opportunities for citizens to engage in political processes, express their concerns, and contribute to policy formulation (Pitkin, 1967). Inclusive representation ensures that the voices of marginalized groups, women, youth, and other underrepresented sections of society are heard and taken into account.

According to Olusanya (2010), Nigeria is one of the most Africa’s’ populous nation. It has a very complex and diverse ethnic landscape. The Fulani according to the author is a semi-nomadic pastoralist people and a significant ethnic group concentrated in northern Nigeria with an estimated population of between 25 to 40% of the region. They are primarily found in other parts of West Africa, particularly in countries such as Nigeria, Mali, and Niger. The Fulani's have a rich cultural heritage and are known for their cattle herding and trading activities. Despite their size, they face significant challenges in achieving political representation commensurate with their large number (Falola, 2005). According to scholars such as Ibrahim (2016), the Fulani have faced challenges in terms of political representation and inclusion in the political processes of their respective countries. This has led to tensions and conflicts between the Fulani's and other ethnic groups, as well as with the government authorities. Studies have shown that the Fulani people are often marginalized and excluded from political decision-making processes in Cameroon. According to Diouf (2003), this marginalization is rooted in historical factors, such as the legacy of colonialism and the imposition of centralized governance structures that have marginalized minority ethnic groups like the Fulani.

Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the role of political elites in perpetuating the marginalization of the Fulani community. According to Aisha (2015), political elites in Cameroon often use ethnic divisions to consolidate their power and exclude minority groups from political participation. This has led to a lack of representation for the Fulani people in Mechum Division, despite their significant population in the region. This has been corroborated by (Belichi, 1982; Last, 1989) where they highlighted that, during the colonial period, the Indirect Rule System of the British offers preexisting Hausa authorities more powers which further hinders Fulani political influence. In terms of democratization, the Fulani community in Mechum Division faces challenges related to access to political institutions and processes. Studies have shown that the Fulani people often lack the resources and networks needed to participate effectively in democratic processes. According to Leonardo Villalón (2000), democratization in Africa has often been characterized by elite capture and exclusion of marginalized groups. Moreover, scholars have highlighted the importance of addressing structural inequalities and discrimination to promote democratization and political representation for minority groups like the Fulani. According to Tripp (2015), democratization efforts in Africa must focus on addressing social and economic inequalities that perpetuate the marginalization and exclusion of minority groups.

This section presented the literature review which explains how Fulani discriminatory systematic complexities affect their political and democratic representations across local, national and sub regional levels. The subsequent section outlined the study's methods, including the study area, data sampling and techniques, data collections sources and procedures data analysis employed.

**3.0 Research Methods**

**3.1 Study Area**

Menchum is one of seven divisions (Boyo, Momo, Mezam, Bui, Donga-Mantung and Ngo-Ketunja) that make up the North-West Region of Cameroon (Figure 1). It lies between Latitude 6°20' and 6°4 0'N of the Equator and Longitude 10°50' and 11°20'E of Greenwich Meridian. It shares borders with Nigeria to the West and South West, Donga-Mantung Division to the North and North East, and Boyo Division to the South and South East. The division has a total population of over 643,000 inhabitants in 2022 growing at a rate of 3% per year (National Institute of Statistic Cameroon, 2022). Menchum Division covers a total land surface of 4489 km2 with an average population density of 36 person/ km2 making it the largest division of the region. Specifically, Furu Awa Sub division has a total land surface of 1157.6 km2, Menchum valley sub division, 1040.5km2 and Wum central Sub Division covers a total land surface of 256.4 km2 respectively. It is home to a diverse population, consisting primarily of indigenous ethnic groups such as the Aghem, the Aku Fulani, Weh, Zhoa, Esu, Hausa, Fang, Echimbi, Befang, and the Bu communities. The population also includes migrants from other regions of Cameroon and neighbouring countries. It is renowned for its rich cultural heritage. The various ethnic groups have distinct traditions, languages, and customs that contribute to the socioeconomic, political and cultural diversity of the region. It is made up over 50 major villages ruled by chiefs and a host of sub villages.The economy is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture the mainstay of the population. The primary crops cultivated in the region include maize, beans, potatoes, yams, plantains, and coffee. Livestock rearing, especially cattle, goats, and poultry, also plays a significant role in the local economy (Wum Council Development Plan, 2011).

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**Figure 1: The Study Area in Menchum Division, North West Region of Cameroon**

Source: Adopted from the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing, (1994)

**3.2 Sample, Collection and Analysis**

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the trends, determinants and challenges of democratization and the political representation of the Fulani’s in Menchum Division. In-depth interviews were carried out with key stakeholders in the four division of Menchum (Wum, Benakuma, Fungom and Fur-Awah) including 40 males and 10 females between the ages of 30 years and above between 3 August and 2 October 2023 until data saturation regarding the issues of democratization and political representation of Fulani were included in the sample. The interview questions were based on the democratization and the political representation of the Fulani in Menchum focusing on patterns of political representations, factors influencing and hindering their representations and challenges they faced. A total of 50 interviews were purposively conducted in the four divisions in the following proportions, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with municipal councilors from the four councils, 08 with local authorities, 10 with members of the Aku Cultural Development Association (ACUDA) and the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA); and 04 with Fulani Ardos and 08 Fulani Educated Elites with each informant carefully selected for their particular expertise and potential contribution to the study. The descriptive analysis of this representation is presentation on Table 1.

Table 1: Categories and Proportions of Respondents Interviewed

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Frequency | Wum | Zhoa | Bonakuma | Furu-Awa |
| Municipal Counselors | 20 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Local Authorities | 8 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Fulani Associations | 10 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Ardors | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Fulani Educated Youths | 8 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 50 | 14 | 13 | 10 | 13 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

During site visits, data were collected via audio recordings of stakeholders in suitable rooms and conference halls of the local councils and Fulani leaders. An interview guide served as a rough outline for the in-depth interviews. Questions were posed in a value-free and open-ended manner to allow informants to share their own thoughts. With the explicit written consent of each respondent, interviews were audio recorded whenever feasible, and later transcribed for analysis. At the first stage, the data obtained as a result of the interview were transcribed down. Firstly, the interviews that were recorded on the audio recorder were transformed to the computer, the recording was listened to and they turned into a written document in the word document format. After this stage, the content analysis was use to code the data, finding relevant themes, organizing the results and interpreting the resulting codes and themes. The codes were created by the interviewer with the assistant of a data analyst by reading the entire document twice from the beginning to the end. These codes, which were created to reach thematic categories, were compared in terms of similarities and differences and themes were determined. As a result of content analysis, diverse themes emerged relating to the determinant and challenges of Fulani democratization and political representations which were presented in narrative text while other analysed data obtained from interview guide were presented using tables and figures. The program Nvivo was used to perform both inductive and deductive thematic content analysis. Before the study was conducted, written permission was obtained from the Divisional Officer (SDO) of Menchum and the Divisional President of MBOSCUDA where the study was conducted and approval was obtained from these authorities. The participants were informed about the purpose of this study, that the information obtained in the study would not be used outside the study and that the confidentiality of their personal information would be protected.

This section outlined the research methods, including the study area matrix and characteristics, as well as the research methods employed. The subsequent section presented the results derived from the analysis of field data as well as their discussions in line with the works of other authors.

**4.0 Results and Discussions**

This section discusses the results of the study. It begins with a description of historical contexts of Fulani presence including understanding the patterns of political landscape and trends of their representation and democratization in Menchum. This was followed by their determining forces, challenges and the way forwards to enhance their involvement in local, national, and global political affairs for sustainable development.

**4.1 The Historical Context of the Fulani Presence**

The Fulani have a long and complex history in Africa, dating back to the 8th Century CE, when they migrated from the Middle East to West Africa (Lombard, 1990). Over the centuries, the Fulani established themselves as one of the dominant ethnic groups in the region, and played important roles in the political, social, and economic development of many African societies (Mouiche, 2019). However, the Fulani also faced discrimination and persecution from other ethnic groups, particularly in the context of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism (Boesen & Højlund, 2019). In the contemporary context, the Fulani continue to face a range of challenges and opportunities related to their identity, livelihoods, and political statuesque. One of the most pressing challenges is the increasing competition for land and resources between Fulani herders and the local farming communities.

In Cameroon, the Fulani are primarily found in the northern regions of the country, comprising around 10% of the population. Historically, the Fulani have been nomadic pastoralists, relying on cattle, sheep, and goats for their livelihood. They have traditionally moved their herds across long distances, often following seasonal patterns in search of grazing land and water sources, (Interview with a Counselor in Wum, 2024). This activity saw them settling in the grass fields of the North West Region like Menchum Division where they are holding a strong hold. In an interview with a local authority, he mentioned that *“the Fulani’s are generally referred to as indigenous or minority people because of their social, political*, *demographic and economic status.”* Indigenous people in Cameroon live in a state of extreme marginalization and poverty. A marginalization that stems from the colonial era and today reinforced by the native populations who are more enlightened (Fulani Elite, 2024).

The Fulani’s migrating to the Menchum Division as early as the late 18th Century from neighbouring Nigeria and the Adamwa Region of Cameroon in search of grazing land for their cattle. The German Colonial Ordinance of 1898 established the Principle of ‘*’Effective Occupation’’* which recognized the right of the Fulani, who were already present in the division. Given their economic activity of cattle grazing however, the Fulani’s lived in isolation and on the hills and only move down valley during transhumance. This made them not to venture in securing permanent settlements like most farming communities which has made them to be seen as strangers or intruders by the locals. The main migratory patterns of the Fulani’s were from Nigeria precisely from Kano, Yola, Kaduna, Jos, and Plateau states (Aloysuis, 2015). The Fulani established themselves as the dominant force in the region in as early as late 19th Century, with some Fulani leaders becoming very influential in politics and trade. By the 1950s, the Fulani’s have established permanent settlements for themselves in many settlements in the Menchum Division like in Wum, Weh, Esu, Zhoa, Fur-Awa Sub Divisions and the Bu community, but abstained from education or any political life which they considered a western idea. Between 1900s and 1960, the German and the British Colonial powers recognized the Fulani in Menchum as a distinct ethnic group and granted them certain privilege such as control over land.

The British Ordinance of 1924 confirmed the rights of the Fulani to the land and established the Native Lands Trust which in it Section 3(1), states: ‘*’The commissioner shall, as soon as practicable after the commencement of this Ordinance, cause to be demarcated and defined the boundaries of the native lands in each division, and shall cause to be prepared and kept up to date a register of such lands, showing the names of the native authorities and the native owner thereof.’’* It is important to note that this Ordnance in particular recognized the Fulani as native owners of the Land in Menchum.

The post-colonial era (1960s to present) noted the continued impotence of the Fulani in the Division and the North West Regions’ economy in particular and politics with many Fulani holding positions of power in national and local government and business. Hence, they are today integral part of the economy, social and cultural fabric, with many maintaining their traditional way of life while also adapting to modernization. The theory of modernization suggests that the traditional societies transition to modernity through economic, political and social changes (Rostow, 1960). Hence, the Fulani in Menchum Division experienced these changes through colonialism, leading to conflicts (inter-ethic and farmer grazer) and adaptations that continue to shape their relationship with the indigenous communities and population as well as the government.

**4.2 The Political Landscape and Trends of Fulani Representation in Menchum Politics**

The political landscape of Menchum Division is complex, with various ethnic groups and interest at play. These multi-ethnic communities in the region consist primarily of the Aghem, the Aku Fulani, Weh, Zhoa, Esu, Hausa, Fang, Echimbi, Befang, and the Bu communities. However, despite the historical marginalization, persistent conflicts and exclusion by the indigenous communities, the Fulani have been making strides towards greater political participation and representation. They significantly have traditionally held significant influence in the region with their leaders (Ardos) playing important roles in local governance and conflict resolutions. Results from this study revealed that in recent years, there have been significant improvements in Fulani representation in Menchum's political institutions due to the emergence of new political parties that are more open to the participation of minority groups. For example, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) has made a concerted effort to recruit Fulani candidates, and has had some success in doing so particularly in Fungom sub-division. The Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM), the ruling party, has in the last 30 years since the birth of Multi-Party Democracy in 1990s has traditionally held sway in Menchum Division, with many Fulani supporting the party.

The Fulani have started wining positions for themselves in the decision-making stages in their municipality. Hence, the Fulani representation in politics as a minority ethnic group has been a subject of debate for many decades despite leading to enormous benefits in terms of local governance (mediation and conflict resolutions), influencing decision making, forming voting bloc with politicians seeking their support and influencing the local economy through cattle headers and traders. Their representation in local government council governance has seen fluctuations over time, with some noticeable changes over the years. Menchum Division as an administrative division is made up of four municipalities with each having 25 municipal councilors, except for Furu-Awa council that has 35. This gives a total of 105 municipal councilors who champion local decision making for this ethnically divided division as presented on Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Proportion of Councilors in Menchum Division**

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

During the 2002-2007 municipal mandates, only the Wum council had 02 Fulani representatives giving a percentage of 8% representations in their entire Division. In the 2007-2013 municipal years, the division witnesses a slight increase in the number of Fulani councilors with a proportion of 16% of the sampled respondents for Wum Municipality. Hence, only two (02) municipalities had Fulani representatives between 2002 and 2007. In the 2007-2013 Municipal year, the Wum council had 04 Fulani representatives out of 25 while Zhoa had 03 with a proportion of 12% of sampled respondents from only 1 in 2002-2007 Municipal years. This gave a 16% political representation of the Fulbe’s in Wum and 12% in Zhoa Municipalities respectively as shown on Table 2.

**Table 2: Trends of Fulani Representation in Menchum Division between 2002 and 2025**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Municipality | Number of Councilors | Number of Fulani (%) |
| 2002-2007 | 2007-2013 | 2013-2018 | 2018-2025 |
| Wum | 25 | 2 (8) | 4(16) | 4(16) | 5 (20) |
| Benakuma | 25 | 0(0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0(0) |
| Zhoa | 25 | 1(4) | 3 (12) | 3 (12) | 5(20) |
| Fur-Awa | 35 | 0(0) | 0(0) | 0(0) | 1(2.8) |
| Total | 105 | 2.8 | 6.6 | 4(16) | 10.47 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

In the 2018-2025 municipal mandate, there was a notable increase in the number of Fulani councilors, with the total rising from 7 to 11 out of 110 councilors in the four municipalities from 2013 and 2018 Municipal Year as indicated in the Table 2. From Table 2, it is clear that, the numbers of Fulani representation are slowly increasing. Only Benakuma council is still without a Fulani representative. Wum moved from 4 to 5, Zhoa from 3 to 5 and Fur-Awa had their first ever Fulani representative. This increase reflects a growing presence of Fulani individuals in the local government leadership positions. Figure 3 present the proportion of Fulani and Non-Fulani Councilors from 2002 to 2007.


F**igure 3: Number of Fulani and Non Fulani Councilors from 2013-2018**

Fieldwork 2023

Results presented on Figure 3 on the number of municipal councilors from 2013 to 2018 in the study area revealed that the periods 2013 to 2018 have witnessed an increase in the Fulani representation. This period corresponds to the duration of mandate for each councilor to be voted for representation into the municipal council by the population. From Figure 3, only 2 of the 4 councilors have Fulani representatives with Wum having 04 and Zhoa 03. Fur-Awa and Benakuma have no representatives from the Fulani community during this period. This number remained limited compared to the population of the Fulani people in this division. The 2020 Municipal mandates saw an increase in their representation as illustrated Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Number of Fulani and Non Fulani Municipal Councilors From 2018-2025**

Fieldwork, 2023

Figure 4 represents the data on Fulani representations at the different Councils in Menchum Division with the current council mandate 2018-2025. From these periods onwards, more trends of Fulani representation in politics became evident with the Fulanis’ securing 11 councilors from the total of 110 in the division. Wum and Fungom have 05 each and Fur-Awa having just 01 representative. Benakuma remains the only municipality without any Fulani councilor. The increase in Fulani representation from 7 to 11 out of 110 councilors suggests that the Fulani are gaining more political influence and representation in Menchum Division. These have been achieved through various means, such as forming political alliances, active participation in electoral process, or advocating for their interest. Figure 4 shows that the Fulani have become more engaged in the political process and have been successful in gaining more representation at the Councils in Menchum Division. Despite this trend, the increase in Fulani councilors in the political arena of the study area is weak compare to the indigenous communities as evidence on Table 3 where the numbers of indigents as councilors are three times far more than the number of the Fulani councilors.

 **Table 3: Data on municipal councils’ councilors between 2002 and 2025**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Council** | **No. of Councilors** | **No. of Indigents** | **% of Indigents**  | **No. of Fulani's** | **% of Fulani Representation %** |
| Wum | 25 | 10 | 9.1 | 15 | 55 |
| Benakuma | 25 | 25 | 31.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Zhoa | 25 | 13 | 16.2 | 12 | 14.8 |
| Fur-Awa | 35 | 35 | 43.8 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **110** | **80** | **100** | **27** | **69.8** |

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

This low and somehow absent in the participation and representation of the Fulbe’s in this division as on Table 3 is undoubtedly a wakeup call to the different stakeholders if meaningful representation can be attained as revealed in the Table 1 in order to ensure even distribution of resources and benefits and conflict resolution. This reveals the low level of education and sensitization, the high level of subject or parochial culture (Almond & Verba, 1963) in the Fulani communities. Most of the respondents revealed high participation of the Fulbe’s during elections but questions why they are under-represented in the decision-making processes within their different council areas. The council of Wum Council noted the following reflection during our interview: *“During the different elections (Municipal, Parliamentary and Presidential Elections), we always witness a high voter turnout of the Fulani population both educated and uneducated. Most politicians or parties secure their wins from the Fulbe (Muslim) dominated areas like Ukpwa, Echuan, Sangwa, Ngoh and many other places”.* Even though voting in elections is a more direct indication of political participation, political representation is arguably another side of the coin which gives democracy a full meaning. This is corroborated by Huntington & Nelson (1976: 3).

This result is also similar to the national trends in Cameroon's political history characterized by periods of both democratic progress and setbacks. The country has experienced both authoritarian rule and periods of greater political openness. The election board (ELECAM, 2023) noted that in recent years, there have been some signs of progress in terms of marginalized group participation. This includes the adoption of a new constitution in 1996, which established a multi-party system and guaranteed certain rights to minority groups. Additionally, there have been efforts to increase the representation of women and other marginalized groups in government and decision-making bodies. Despite these positive developments, marginalized groups including the Fulani in Cameroon continue to face significant challenges in accessing political power and participating meaningfully in democratic processes. These challenges include discrimination, poverty, lack of education, and limited access to resources.

**4.3 Determinants of Fulani Political Representation**

Many factors have accrued to determine the levels and extent of Fulani representation in politics in Menchum Division. These factors include population growth, political consciousness and mobilization, resources mobilization and motivation.

***Population Growth***

The Fulani people are one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in Cameroon. According to the 2005 population census, the Fulani people make up about 10% of the Cameroonian population. Specifically, the Menchum Division had a population of approximately 643,000 inhabitants growing at a rate of 3% (National Institute of Statistic Cameroon, 2022). In 1987, the population of the division was estimated at 240,000 inhabitants. It rose to 393,000 inhabitants in 2005 and to 513,000 inhabitants in 2015. The proportion of the Fulani population however rose from 28,000 inhabitants in 1987 to 58,000 inhabitants in 2005, 92,000 inhabitants in 2015 and 123,000 inhabitants in 2022 growing at a rate of 4.5%, 1.5% more than the growth rate proportion of the Division (MUSCUDA, 2020). The reason for high growth rate among the Fulani in the past decade in the Division is due to their high fertility rate. The increase in the Fulani population has led to increase political representation, inclusive governance, resource allocation and conflict due to marginalization.

***Political Consciousness***

The Fulani people have become more politically conscious in recent years. This has been attributed to the increase in the number of educated Fulani people and the availability of information through social media (Mohamadou, 2016). The Fulani people have also become more aware of their rights and the need to be politically represented. This has led to an increase in the number of Fulani political representatives in Menchum Division.

***Political Mobilization***

Political mobilization has played a significant role in the increase in Fulani political representation in Menchum. The Fulani people have formed political groups and associations that aim to represent their interests. These groups have been instrumental in lobbying for Fulani political representation in Menchum. One such group is the Aku Cultural and Development Association (ACUDA) founded in 2008 representing the highly underserved Aku-Fulani Community of Menchum and MBOSCUDA. These associations not only work to preserve the disappearing cultural heritage of the Fulbes’, mitigate rampant human rights violations, encourage education, and open spaces for integration of the Fulbe’s, but also strive to see how they are taking up political positions in order to take part in decision making processes to defend the interest of the Fulbe’s and engage them into mainstream local governance of the municipalities. They have been at the forefront of advocating for the rights of the Fulani people and have played a significant role in the increase in Fulani political representation in Menchum. In an interview conducted with Fulani elite in Wum who doubles as president of ACUDA, he recounts that:

 “… over the years, we have been actively organizing meetings with our fellow Fulani brothers to sensitize them of their civic and political rights. We have been pushing them not only to register in the electoral lists but also to take part in political positions for the general good of the community and tribe in particular. Our efforts have been positive since 2013 as more Fulani’s are been voted as counselors…” (Interview with Municipal Councilor of Wum on the 16th of January, 2023).

***Resources and Motivation***

To clearly formulate the political participation of the Fulani people in the study are, the model of Nie *et al.* (1969) on the causal model of political participation was used to explain the logic of their participation in politics (Figure 5). To participate in politics, the model noted that citizens need resources and motivation. In Menchum Division, the Fulani have historically been known for their ability to manage and control cattle, which provide them with a valuable source of income and livelihood. In Menchum Division, the Fulani have access to large tracts of land where they can graze their cattle, which gives them a certain level of economic power and influence. This economic power can translate into political power, as they are able to fund political campaigns and gain the support of other groups by offering economic incentives or making alliances with other interest groups. The Fulani have a long history of political involvement though at a passive level, and they are known for their ability to organize and mobilize politically. They have a strong sense of community and are often able to work together to achieve political goals (Interview with a Municipal Counselor in Fungom on February 18th, 2024). Additionally, one Fulani elite noted that:

*“The Fulani often face discrimination and marginalization in Cameroon, which has motivated them to become more politically active in order to secure their rights and interests. They are also aware of the importance of political representation in order to have a voice in the decision-making process and to ensure that their interests are taken into account. Their access to resources and their motivation to participate in politics have contributed to their significant political representation in Menchum Division.”*

Their economic power and ability to mobilize politically is beginning to give them a strong foothold in local politics, and they are able to advocate for their interests and secure political representation for their community.



**Figure 5: A Causal Model of Political Participation**

**Source: Adapted from Nie *et al.* (1969)**

From Figure 5, it is clear that resources and motivational attitudes are those unique personal and social characteristics which enable a citizen to exercise his political rights.

***Electoral Reforms***

Electoral reforms have also contributed to the increase in Fulani political representation in Menchum Division. The electoral laws in Cameroon have been revised to ensure that there is equal representation of all ethnic groups in politics. The introduction of the proportional representation has giving minorities like the Fulani more voices through which they can integrate and influence policies to their favour. The Constitution of Cameroon of January 18, 1996 states that, *“The state shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law”.* Convention No.111 was ratified by Cameroon on 13 May 1988. It provides an important framework to promote the right of indigenous men and women to equality and decent work in the spirit of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous People. To this therefore, Cameroon restructured its legal arsenal in 1990 to include legislations relating to individuals’ civil and political liberties, freedoms of associations, trade unions and others before being enshrined in the 1996 constitution. Implicit in these efforts is the notion that representation at both the local and national stages of the political process is necessary to adequately serve the needs of minority citizens.

**4.4 Challenges of Fulani Political Representation**

The Fulani in the Menchum Division of the North West Region of Cameroon have faced a number of challenges in their efforts to participate fully in the country's political processes, local governance and community development. From our field work, some of the main challenges include:

***Limited Political Organization***

As a historically nomadic group, the Fulani have not had the same opportunities to develop political structures as sedentary groups. This has made it difficult for them to mobilize and advocate for their interests in political decision-making processes. However, their statements echo the remarks of Nkwi and Nformi (2016) who suggest that the Fulani’s have been unable to successfully advocate for their interests due to their limited political organization. They argue that the Fulani’s have failed to use their position as a minority and indigenous group to form coalitions with other marginalized communities, thereby limiting their political influence. Sir Harcourt the one-time Assistant District Officer for the Bamenda Division in 1948 was all along right when he referred to them as “a people without any interest in politics and were only interested in tending their cattle” (National Archives Buea, Cb (1938) 1).

There are several scholarly sources that discuss the lack of political organization of the Fulani people. In his book "The Foulahs of Central Sudan and the Soudan," E.W. Bovill writes that the Fulani in Cameroon were "a people apart" and were often viewed with suspicion and hostility by other ethnic groups. He notes that the Fulani were used by the French colonial authorities as "an instrument of domination" and this has made it difficult for them to be politically organized (Bovill, 1968).

***Marginalization***

Marginalization is a significant challenge faced by the Fulani in Mechum Division in terms of political representation. According to interviews conducted with some local authorities and educated elites in the area, the Fulani people are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes due to their ethnic background. One counselor mentioned that "the Fulani community is often overlooked when it comes to political appointments and representation, despite being an integral part of the local population." This marginalization not only hinders the political participation of the Fulani people but also perpetuates a cycle of exclusion and underrepresentation.This is sometimes partly due to their nomadic lifestyle, which makes it difficult for them to engage fully in the country's political processes. Several of our Fulani interview partners mentioned marginalization as a roadblock to Fulani political representation in Menchum Division. One Fulani elite, for example, recount his experience with his grass fielders during the municipal campaigns of 2018.

*“I think we the Fulani’s to a large extent are being openly marginalized when it comes to political representation. In most cases, we are often seen as outsiders, strangers, intruders etc by the ethnic groups we have been living with even before independence of Cameroon, which make it difficult for us to gain political power. During the last Municipal Elections for example, I was openly told by someone that, I don’t deserve any post in this council because I am a stranger here”* (Fulani elite and a teacher by profession in his late 40s, 08.06.2023).

Similarly, an Ardo describes how deeply marginalization has amplified lack of confidence, low self-esteem and political apathy of the Fulbe’s in the Division.

*“Unlike the natives, marginalization by the very people we live with has caused many Fulani people to distance themselves from politics. They see us as inferior and unfit to hold political positions. This has made many Fulani’s although fit and deserving to abandon all dreams of engaging into politics and even running for political positions to focus in controlling their cattle which is their economic back born”* (Interview with a Fulani Ardo in his early 50s on the 11/06/2023).

Also, an elderly native admits that, “Marginalization has played a crucial role in the Fulani community’s limited political representation from independence period to present. They have historically faced marginalization and discrimination which mostly manifest in restricted access to political participation and decision-making processes. This has created barriers for Fulani individuals aspiring to engage in politics, thereby limiting their representation at various levels (….)”. Also, Konings & Nyamnjoh notes that the Fulani have been marginalized in Cameroon's political system since independence. They note that the government has been dominated by the Beti ethnic group, which has excluded the Fulani and other minority groups from positions of power (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2005). He highlights that,

“Generally speaking, the Fulani have a complex relationship with the state and with other ethnic groups. During the colonial era, the Fulani were often employed by the French as tax collectors and administrators due to their trust worthiness and knowledge in Arabic reading and writing. This gave them access to education and other opportunities that were not available to other ethnic groups. This has led to resentment from other groups, who perceive the Fulani as having an unfair advantage.”

Mari Tripp in "Women and Leadership in West Africa: Mothering the Nation and Humanizing the State," writes that the Fulani in Cameroon were excluded from positions of power and influence after independence, despite their contributions to the anti-colonial struggle. She notes that the government viewed the Fulani's nomadic way of life as a barrier to development, and attempted to settle them in permanent villages (Tripp, 2012). As response to the interview on the question of whether the Fulani are represented in local, regional, or national government and whether their interests are adequately represented and often excluded in political decision making process?, The Ardo of Wum noted that: *"While there have been a few Fulani representatives, I don't feel that they adequately represent our community's interests. They often seem more concerned with their own personal agendas or the interests of the dominant groups in the region."* The Ardo further noted that "Yes, I have experienced discrimination firsthand. When I try to participate in political discussions or meetings, I often feel excluded or ignored. It's as if my voice doesn't matter. “These responses reflect potential challenges faced by the Fulani community which also related to current national and regional realities.

***Lack of representation***

Lack of representation is a significant barrier that has historically hindered the political participation of the Fulani ethnic group in various countries in Africa, particularly in Cameroon. This lack of representation has prevented the Fulani people from fully engaging in the political process and having their voices heard in decision-making processes. To gain a more profound understanding of this issue, conducted interviews with a counselor, a Fulani elite, and a local authority to gather insights into the challenges faced by the Fulani community in achieving political representation, the respondents provided valuable perspectives on the impact of the lack of representation on Fulani political participation, as well as potential future developments in addressing this issue.

The Fulani are often underrepresented in Cameroon's political institutions, including parliament and local government. This means that their voices are not heard in the political decision-making process, and their interests are not adequately represented. The Fulani were not interested in the political affairs of their local communities. This is because they were regarded as strangers and an inferior race (Tem, 2018). Jabiru Muhammadou, (2017) also noted that, unlike the majority of grass fielders, Mbororo generally distanced themselves from party politics.

For a long time, the Mbororo are generally characterized by their apathy, acknowledged as much within the communities as outside of them. As one Mbororo informant said, “It is not fair to say that a man from the Mbororo is addicted to fighting (political rivals). This complements the view held by the non Mbororo informant who describes the Mbororo stereotypes as *“A people who are more interested in their cattle than to take part in politics. They are not politically ambitious because of their economic activity strongly attributed to culture and their high level of lack of education.”* Even the Ardos appear nowhere in the organizational charts of the administration or politics (which do, however, include other traditional authorities). They are not notable among the local chiefs, let alone “chiefs of the third degree”, like all the village leaders. Even worse for the Fulbe’s, an ardo, no matter how important, remains under the authority of the “native” village chief of the respective territorial administrative unit. This has also contributed to their political subordination.

In an interview with a Counselor, he highlighted the psychological and emotional toll that the lack of political representation has on the Fulani community. According to him, the Fulani’s feels marginalized and excluded from political processes, which has led to feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement. The counselor also pointed out that lack of representation has perpetuated a cycle of inequality and further exacerbate social divisions within the community. Similarly, one Fulani elite shared personal experiences of facing discrimination and prejudice in the political arena due to their ethnic identity. They highlighted the challenges of gaining access to political positions and having their voices heard in decision-making processes. The Fulani elite also expressed concerns about the limited opportunities for Fulani individuals to participate in the political system and the need for greater representation to address the issues affecting their community. A local authority on his part, discussed the structural barriers that hinder Fulani political representation, such as lack of access to education and resources. They acknowledged the need for targeted policies and initiatives to promote inclusivity and diversity in political spaces. The local authority also highlighted the importance of building trust and fostering dialogue between the Fulani community and government institutions to address the underlying issues contributing to the lack of representation.

***Limited access to or low level of education***

Generally, the Fulani has limited access to education, which can make it difficult for them to participate fully in the countries or local political processes. Without education, the Fulani may lack the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in political activism and advocacy. Many Fulani individuals lack access to quality education, which limits their ability to actively participate in political processes and advocate for their rights. An educated elite in the area highlighted that "the lack of education among the Fulani community hinders their ability to effectively engage in political discussions and make informed decisions about their representation." This lack of education not only affects the Fulani people's political representation but also perpetuates their marginalization within the society.In an interview conducted with a non-Fulani man in Benakuma, he describes the total absence of Fulani representation in this municipality “their political apathy is evident in this council area. They are only interested in controlling their cattle. They don’t complain of lacking basic social amenities in their communities. They do not take part in political meetings and most of them are not even registered in the Electoral College because of their lack of education. In my experience as a counselor here, they were not even included on any of the contesting lists (CPDM and SDF)”.

Similarly, when asked about the challenges faced by the Fulani’s in terms of political organization and representation, Mohamadou noted that:

*“A significant limitation is the relatively low level of education within the Fulani community. Limited access to quality education and educational infrastructures in many parts inhabited by the Fulbes has hindered the development of necessary skills and political awareness among the Fulani population. This educational gap often translates into a lack of political engagement and representation within formal political processes”.*

A local authority mentioned that "the Fulani community lacks adequate representation in key political positions, due to their educational awareness which limits their ability to influence policies and decisions that affect their lives." This lack of representation not only undermines the political voice of the Fulani people but also perpetuates their marginalization within the political system.

This section presented a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the patterns and challenges of Fulani political and democratic representation in Menchum Division of Cameroon, drawing on the insights of diverse authors and organizations. The final section summarized the key findings of the study and offered practical and policy recommendations and guidelines to enhance sustainable and inclusive political participation for all groups.

**Table 4: Participation leads to different forms of Empowerment**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Empower to Gain** | **Empower To** | **Empower With** |
| Self-Efficiency | Challenge Marginalization | Collaboration |
| Self Confidence | Influence Decision Affecting Them | Solidarity |
| Recognition | Hold Authorities Accountable |  |
| Dignity, Worth and Strength | Realize Their Rights | Shared Understanding |

**Source: Authors, 2024**

**5.0 Conclusion and Policy Implications**

The Fulani in Menchum Division have navigated a complex historical landscape, from colonial era settlements to modern day political representations. Despite facing challenges such as marginalization, cultural differences and demographic changes, the Fulani made strides in political representation resulting to more empowerment national cohesion and unity, local development and increase political participation. Trends show increasing participation and representation. But disparities persist with profound implications on indigents and the Fulani people alike and the entire region and Cameroon at large in terms of limited awareness and conflicts. The causes of under-representation of the Fulani in the study area include limited access to education, economic opportunities and cultural barriers, demographic factors, political and resource mobilization and awareness among others. Some efforts to address these challenges include inclusive governance, education initiatives and community engagement. Hence, moving forward, it could be essential to promote inclusive representation through national integration, dialogue, effective communication and citizen participation and political representation.

Overall, the situation of political representation for the Fulani is complex and multifaceted, with a long history of conflict and cooperation with other ethnic groups, as well as ongoing challenges related to environmental degradation, economic development, and political apathy. Further research and analysis are needed to fully understand the current context and future prospects for the Fulani in Cameroon. Furthermore, as a policy implication to enhance Fulani political inclusion for better community and country, stakeholders like government ministry of decentralization should consider the empowerment of the Fulani Community. Through this initiative, Fulani should be able to have a voice in the decision-making process while advocating for their rights. This is important and instrumental in lobbying for their development given their long history of marginalization. The state should be able to secure funding for social services like education, healthcare, and infrastructure projects to enhance the capacity development of the Fulani through skills acquisitions and strategies to change the status-quo of their people.

Moreover, empowering from within the Fulani can lead to self-efficiency, confidence, recognition, dignity, and strength. Significantly, empowerment in this type of community will lead to challenging the course of their problem which resonated from marginalization and discrimination. This could potentially influence decision making as they will have a participation in decision making process, be able to hold authorities to account and release their right. Ample empowerment of the Fulani might also enable then collaborate freely with the local communities, be able to develop a scene of community solidarity and shared understanding as presented on Table 4.

The increase in Fulani political representation in Menchum Division as recommended by this study could also promoted a sense of national unity as it will enable more Fulani’s participation in the decision-making process which could contribute to the local and national development of the country. This may help to bridge the gap between different ethnic groups in Cameroon and promote national unity in consonant with the sustainable development goals of the UN 2030 agenda.

Also, an increased in the political participation of the Fulani people in decision making processes of their communities may lead to a more inclusive political system which will give the Fulani people a sense of ownership in the political process. Significantly, a reduction in Fulani communities’ marginalization should be ensured through better inclusions of advocacy for their different basic rights including secured funding, access to education, employment, job opportunities and control of resources. Finally, the inclusion of Fulani people in the democratic process could ensure national integration by fighting political repressions which often leads to tension among groups and resentments. This could be achieved through dialogue, conflict resolution and effective communications.

Consent

As per international standards or university standards, respondents’ written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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**Conflict of Interests**

Authors have declared that no actual or potential conflict of interest exists.

Authors’ contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. All the authors designed the review and managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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