

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Probing into the Vibrancy of Journalists' Trade-Unions in a Competitive Authoritarian State: A Study of the Martinez Zogo Case in Cameroon

Floribert Patrick C. Endong¹ Isidore Agem Abah²

¹ University of Dschang, Cameroon; Email: floribertendong@yahoo.com

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1893-3653>

² University of Buea, Cameroon; Email: ashlyisidore@gmail.com

Article History

Received 2025-11-27

Revised 2026-01-09

Accepted 2026-02-13

Published 2026-03-02

Keywords

Amplitude FM

Authoritarianism

Democratisation

Journalists Trade Union

Social Responsibility

How to cite

Floribert P.C.E. & Isidore A.A. (2026) Probing into the Vibrancy of Journalists' Trade-Unions in a Competitive Authoritarian State: A Study of the Martinez Zogo Case in Cameroon. *Adom Social Science and Humanities Journal*, 2(1): 572-589

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Abstract

The brutal killing of Cameroonian journalist and director of *Amplitude FM*, Arsene Salomon Mbani Zogo (aka Martinez Zogo), has triggered not only massive international condemnations but also a huge wave of civic movements, razzmatazz and judiciary actions. These movements have sought to bring the journalist's assassins to justice and denounce the security and political risks journalists encountered in Cameroon, in the exercise of their reportorial duty. Although these movements have caught the attention of many commentators, very little, or no attention has specifically been devoted to the role of journalists' trade-unions in the huge civil campaigns engendered by Zogo's assignation. Meanwhile, addressing this understudied issue may help one see the extent to which journalists trade-unions are vibrant in the democratisation process in Cameroon. Using documentary analysis and critical observations, this paper seeks to fill the gap mentioned above. The paper attains three main objectives. In the first place, it examines the security and political risks encountered by journalists in Cameroon thanks to the country's political system. In the second place, the paper addresses the extent to which these trade-unions have tackled issues pertaining to the (in) security of journalists in the country; and in the last instance, the paper explores the level of vibrancy of the unions using Martinez Zogo's killing as case-study.

Introduction

Journalism is arguably considered one of the world's most dangerous professions. This is in part due to the fact that journalists daily face a plurality of mortal threats in the exercise of their watchdog role in many countries across the world, particularly nations with a low or no democratic culture. These threats include political intimidation, arbitrary imprisonment, death threats, physical aggressions and even assassination among others (International Federation of Journalists 2023, De la Brosse & Frere 2012). With close respect to the Eastern European experience, the Human Right Foundation (2023) observes that journalists who refuse to be silenced by authoritarian regimes generally face violence, intimidation and harassment. In tandem with this, the UN cultural agency UNESCO affirms that 62 journalists were killed in the world in the year 2020 just for doing their job (UN News, 2021). In the same vein, the International Federation of Journalists (2023) claims that, from 1990 to 2020, over 2658 journalists were killed in the world. These killings were accentuated in countries chafing under authoritarian regimes.

This undemocratic culture of using violence to silence journalist has not exempted Africa. In effect, at least 19 journalists are killed each year on the continent for reasons directly related to their watchdog function (Awuni, 2023). A case in point is Cameroonian journalist and director of *Amplitude FM*, Arsene Salomon Mbani Zogo (aka Martinez Zogo), who was killed in the later part of January 2023, for reasons many observers partly associate with the journalist's bloodhound reportorial culture¹ (Human Right Watch, 2023; Reporters without Borders, 2023; Tsafack 2023).

As a leading investigative journalist in Cameroon, Martinez Zogo constantly exposed corruption in his works. His French radio program christened "Embouteillages" (Traffic Jam) used to be a forum where he mostly denounced embezzlers of public funds, mentioning them by their names (Tsafack 2023). This adversarial journalistic culture earned him the wrath of some government officials and powerful institutions in the country. He regularly faced threats from influential politicians and some social forces in the country. The journalist constantly mentioned these threats in the programs he presented over *Amplitude FM*. The threats evolved to his disappearance on January 17, 2023, a time when he was investigating and denouncing issues of fund embezzlement allegedly perpetrated by a powerful businessman named Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga. The disappearance soon caught the attention of both security forces and the general public. However, efforts made by the forces of order to know the whereabouts of, and eventually liberate the journalist yielded no fruits.

¹According to Merlin-Haggis (1997), the bloodhound journalist is one who has a passionate interest in enlightening unsatisfactory conditions in society. To him or her, journalism is mainly about scrutinizing injustices and the elite class in society. Mostly viewed as tough and unafraid, the Bloodhound journalist tends to employ ruthless methods in his or her search for the truth.

Martinez Zogo's body was finally found on January 23, 2023 in Ebogo, a suburb of Cameroon's capital city Yaoundé. According to various sources, the body was in an advanced state of decomposition. It showed signs of serious torture: a broken foot, cut fingers, laminated ears, and a malformed tongue. Additionally, his body showed that the reporter was forced to eat his faeces and had been electrocuted before his death (Human Right Watch 2023; Tsafack 2023; Kindzeka 2023). A communiqué released by Cameroon Ministry of Communication, indicates that the journalist had "endured significant bodily harm" (Sadi 2023). It was clear to many critics in and outside Cameroon that the gruesome murder of Martinez Zogo was driven by motives which go beyond settling political scores. Human Rights Watch researcher, Lewis Mudge underlines this truism thus: "the heinous killing [of Martinez Zogo] sends a chilling message to all other journalists in Cameroon" (Human Right Watch 2023). In the same line of thought, *Guardian Post* reporter Patrick Mua opines that "It is rather unfortunate that journalists have become targets especially by politicians and people who think that journalists should not exercise their duties as they are supposed to do. They expect that journalists should operate according to their whims" (cited in Kindzeka, 2023, p.6).

Early investigation into the case revealed that some members of the Cameroonian intelligence services and high-profile politicians and businessmen were involved in the assassination of the journalist. In early February 2023, a Yaoundé military tribunal charged business Tycoon and media mogul Amougou Belinga, Lieutenant-Colonel Justin Danwe and police commissioner Leopold Maxime Eko Eko with complicity in the torture that culminated in the death of the journalist. The revelation and high level arrests mentioned above motivated a number of observers to even associate the killing of the journalist with state corruption. Nkafu Policy Institute senior researcher, Tsafack Delmas (2023) for instance, contends that the journalist's assassination is a clear proof that state security is not guaranteed in Cameroon. "The involvement of the intelligence services in this assassination amounts to a state crime. The fragility of the intelligence services and their privatization for hidden purposes, as in this case, could lead to a coup de force against the institutions of the Republic. The question arises as to how counter-intelligence services can participate in such a crime on behalf of a private individual" (Tsafack, 2023, p.2).

The killing of Martinez Zogo, triggered not only massive national and international condemnations but also a huge wave of civic movements, razzmatazz and judiciary actions. These movements have sought to bring the journalist's assassins to justice and denounce the security and political risks journalists encountered in Cameroon, in the exercise of their reportorial duty. Although these movements have caught the attention of many commentators, very little, or no attention has specifically been devoted to the role of journalist trade-unions in the huge civil campaigns engendered by Zogo's assignation. Meanwhile, addressing this understudied issue may help one see the extent to which journalists trade-unions are vibrant in the democratisation process in Cameroon. Using documentary analysis and critical observations, this paper seeks to fill the gap mentioned above. The paper attains three main objectives. In the first place, it examines the security and

political risks encountered by journalists in Cameroon thanks to the country's political system. In the second place, the paper addresses the extent to which these trade-unions have tackled issues pertaining to the (in) security of journalists in the country; and in the last instance, the paper explores the level of vibrancy of the unions using Martinez Zogo's killing as case-study.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored in the authoritarian media theory. According to this theory, all communications in a given country are under the control of the governing elites and authorities or influential bureaucrats. The idea behind authoritarianism is that control or censorship is imperative to check national threat that may arise from wrongful use of the media of mass communication. Although this defence of media control, may at first sight, appear laudable, authoritarianism most often breeds a system where the media instead constitute a strategic tool that facilitates the ruler's government or power in the country. In authoritarian media system, freedoms and other democratic cultures are most often restricted by the government to silence challenges to their rule (Freedom House, 2023; De la Rose & Frere, 2012). The system aims at an illegal regime where power is concentrated in a single despot or party which is not subjected to democratic electoral traditions and is supported by a plurality of repressive security agencies.

Thus, threats against journalists and institutions that advocate media freedoms are recrudescing in an authoritarian media system. In such system, journalists and media workers face arbitrary imprisonments, physical violence, poisonings and assassination among others. In effect, imprisoning, intimidating or killing journalists for reporting the news is the hallmark of authoritarian regimes. Even transnational repression against adversarial reporters or rights defenders is deployed by authoritarian regimes (Serhan, 2023).

In competitive authoritarian regimes where political competition is real but unfair, journalists' trade-unions, political critics, civil society organisations and other right defenders are usually allowed to operate. But their civic activities are most often subtly curtailed, diluted or hampered by various government strategies. Authoritarian governments usually seek to co-opt the leaders of journalist syndicates in view of rendering their political activism less vibrant or innocuous (Bishara, 2016). Authoritarians also use tools such as repression, violence and threat to render these journalists associations fragile, if not, pro-government. In a study devoted to journalists' civic activism in Ukraine from 2010 to 2014, Pleines and Somfalvy (2022) found for instance that protests by journalists' syndicates only played a marginal role in the country's protest dynamic. These journalists' protests technically posed no threat to regime stability in the short term. In a similar studies conducted in China (Liang & Hui, 2022), and Hong-Kong (Mung 2022) underline issues of reduced vibrancy of Chinese trade unions in general and journalists' syndicates in particular. This reduced vibrancy of trade unions in authoritarian regimes has been theorised by Bellin (2002) in his book titled *"Stalled democracy"*, which is devoted to under-developed authoritarian countries. Bellin actually observed that the conditions in some less developed authoritarian countries is such that,

many unions – including journalists’ syndicates – depend on the state for financial support. In such a situation, collaboration, rather than confrontation characterise the state-unions relations. Bellin (2000) also affirmed that: “The peculiar conditions of late development, the greater need for and availability of state sponsorship, the change in political discourse and its implications in the context of mass poverty, can thus disjoin the material interests of capital and labour from the cause of democratization and discourage these social forces from playing a leading role in the campaign for democracy” (p.155).

It should however, be underlined that competitive authoritarian countries – like the majority of sub-Saharan countries – do differ to some extent in terms of political culture. Thus, the level of vibrancy of journalist’ trade-unions is likely to vary from one authoritarian country to another.

Methodology

This paper is based on the descriptive research design. By definition, this design aims to systematically obtain relevant information to describe a situation, a phenomenon or a population. Descriptive papers specifically answer the what, where, when and how questions regarding the research problem. In line with this, the present paper describes the political and security context in which (investigative) journalists operate in Cameroon as well as the mechanisms put in place by journalists trade-unions to bring violators of journalists’ rights to justice. The paper thus focuses on the extent to which journalists trade-unions contribute to democratisation in Cameroon, using the civic movements around the killing of Martinez Zogo as case study. The paper hinged on two principal methods of data collection namely documentary analysis and critical observations. The documentary analysis consisted in gathering information from relevant secondary sources namely journal articles, encyclopaedias, official reports, newspaper articles, working papers and online contents among others.

The second method of data collection and analysis (critical observation) consisted in gathering relevant information from recent happenings surrounding the Martinez Zogo case in Cameroon. These recent events include police investigations, media reporting, the international community’s reaction to the incident and local right organisations’ attitude towards the journalist’s assassination. The data collected through the aforementioned methods were organised in sub-themes related to the central objectives of the paper (see the subheadings in subsequent parts of the paper). Insights collected from the secondary sources mentioned above were used to buttress points presented in analyses.

Cameroon: A Dangerous Place for Journalists

The fourth wave of democratisation that swept across Africa in the year 1990s did not exempt Cameroon. The nation has to some extent embraced multi-party elections and political pluralism. In addition, the country has adopted a number of media bills – such as the Liberty Laws and Prime Ministerial Decree No. 2000/158 of March 2000 – which have, at least on

paper, enabled freedom of expression in its territory. Deregulation has enabled the country to presently enjoy a diverse media landscape composed of over 650 newspapers, 200 commercial and community radio stations and 100 televisions for a population of about 26 million inhabitants (Nfongwa, 2018; Muluh 2017). Compared to previous regimes, the present government is credited to have been friendly to a number of democratic cultures (Tumi 2006, Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Mokam 2012). In spite of these efforts, various forms of authoritarianism have for decades persisted in the country: over the years, presidential elections have been marred by serious irregularities; there has not been a state of law in the country, right defenders and many political critics have been persecuted and corruption has been ripe in the country. In addition to these, media workers have been attacked, censored, threatened and jailed on anti-state criminal charges and similar offences. A 2022 Barometer Survey (cited in Bertetsmann Stiftung, 2022) reveals that over 50 percent of Cameroonians believe their country is not democratic.

According to observers such as Human Right Watch (2023), Reporters Without Borders (2023) and Freedom House (2023), the country's media is still partly free. The media has been operating in an alarmingly punitive environment. In line with this, authors have deployed a variety of concept to theorise the state-media relations in the country. Ngomba (2010) for instance used the term "democratic authoritarianism" to refer to these relations. Other terms such as "competitive authoritarianism" could as well be appropriate to describe the nature of government-media relations in the country. According to Levitsky and Way (2010), a competitive authoritarian state is one in which: "Formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents". Levitsky and Way (2010) add that "such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of incumbents" (p.5).

Actually, media organisations operate under ambivalent conditions in Cameroon. Government officials take pride in claiming that the country is democratic but many journalists and civil society organisations beg to disagree (Atabong 2023; Hamekoue 2023; Nfongwa 2018). In the Cameroonian popular fantasy, freedom of the press is threatened by an authoritarian rule in the country. This follows from the fact that abuses against the Cameroonian press are every years reported by international observers such as Human Right Watch, Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders. In 2010 for instance, the publisher of *Cameroon Express* Bibi Ngota died in the Yaoundé, maximum security prison after he was arrested with three others on charges of forgery. Ngota was arrested while he was investigating allegations of government corruption. Similarly, *Radio France Internationale* reporter Ahmed Abba was arrested in July 2015 and jailed for two years on accusations of terrorism. Four years later, Paul Chouta, another journalist, was molested and stabbed by some unidentified assailants. He was later jailed for two years, an experience which left him seriously traumatised. Chouta rightly described the Cameroonian system as "an environment

of terror where they have decided to kill journalists and whistleblowers who have decided to speak the truth in a context where vices have taken over societal values" (cited in *Equal Times* 2023, p.10).

In August 2, 2019, Samuel Ajioka Abwue (alias Wazizi), an investigative journalist, was arrested in Buea by the police and later transferred to military custody. After this transfer the *Chillen Muzik and TV* reporter was held incommunicado. It was alleged that the journalist supported separatist militants in the Anglophone regions of the country. Wazizi's later died in government custody in August 2019, a fact which was admitted by government only in June 2020. In spite of government's promises to carry out independent, effective, thorough and impartial investigations into the circumstances surrounding the death of the journalist, not much is so far known about the real causes of Wazizi's death. Many critics doubt the government's allegations that the journalist died of "severe sepsis" and not of torture during his days in military custody (Committee to Protect Journalists 2023). Thus, the practice of journalism has been one of the high-risk professions in Cameroon. Indeed, although Cameroon has one of the most diverse media landscape in Africa, it is characterised by a hostile and precarious environment for the media. Foreign observers' descriptions of the country as one of the most dangerous place for journalists holds waters.

Journalists' Trade-Unions and the Security Problem in Cameroon

In the face of growing threats against journalists in the country, Cameroonian journalists' syndicates have developed a few forms of defensive mechanisms. These mechanisms mainly range from denouncing and documenting cases of violence against their colleagues to relying on foreign observers' intervention. In effect, most cases of abduction, murder or other physical aggressions against journalists in the country have inspired letters of appeal written by different local journalist syndicates to the President or influential government officials in view of pressuring the State to render justice to the affected journalists and/or ameliorate its political culture in the country.

In November 2010 for instance, the Association of Patriot Journalists of Cameroon, intervened to rescue the editor of *Generation Libre*, a private monthly tabloid, Francois Fogno. The latter was arrested on November 5, 2010 by security forces following his newspaper's October 2010 publication of a paper that detailed alleged corruption by some country's tax officials. From the 5th to the 9th of September, Fotso was interrogated without a lawyer and pressured to identify the sources in his news article. On September 9, Fotso was taken to court but not charged, and subsequently returned to the custody of military police in Yaoundé. Fotso had been summoned four times by military police since the October 2010 article but refused to comply with their demands. In a public statement, the Association of Patriot Journalists of Cameroon criticised what it called an "arbitrary arrest of a journalist who dared do his job" (Atabong, 2023). Similarly, the National Syndicate of Cameroon Journalists (SNJC) issues a statement denouncing the assault of *Le Messenger'* s journalist, Rodrigue Tongue on January 20, 2011 in the southern city of Ebolowa. Journalist Tongue was assaulted

by a senior officer of the country's Mvila Division, (South Region), the Police Commissioner Evina. The latter grievously beat up Tongue for unclear reasons. Meanwhile, no action was undertaken against the commissioner. In view of this, the SNJC issued a statement denouncing the assault on the journalist (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023). Another good example of defence mechanism adopted in the face of State instituted violence against journalists is a March 31, 2011 report published by the National Syndicate of Cameroon Journalists (SNJC) aimed at denouncing the sustained harassment and moral pressure under which journalists had been the victims since the beginning of that year. In the report, SNJC called on the government to respect the public liberties of citizens provided for in the constitution.

Besides appeals directly aimed at the government, local Cameroonian journalists' syndicates have often sought to woo the international community, particularly foreign journalists' associations to mobilise their support. In line with this, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on March 9, 2011, wrote a letter to President Biya expressing concern about ongoing abuses against press freedom in Cameroon. The CPJ called on the president to hold members of his administration accountable for using security forces and criminal laws to settle scores with the media and urged the president to initiate reforms that would refer matters of defamation to civil courts. In the same line of thought, foreign journalist/human rights organisations such as Journalist Without Borders, Freedom Watch and foreign chancelleries have written reports that call on the Cameroonian authorities to address specific cases of rights violations against journalists in the country.

A case in point is the United States' Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (USDSBDHL), which, in a 2011 Country Report on Human Rights Practices assessed the respect for civil liberties including freedom of speech and the press, and the status of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in Cameroon (USDSBDHL, 2011). In this report, the USDSBDHL deplored the fact that, even though the law provides for freedom of speech and freedom of the press, it also criminalises media offenses. The body further observed that within the year, government officials threatened, harassed, arrested, and denied equal treatment to individuals or organisations that criticised government policy or expressed views that were at odds with government policy.

The USDSBDHL went further to chronicle the various security challenges journalists and journalism trade unions encountered during the year ranging from assaults to illegal arrest and detention. The body mentioned among other cases the Lamissia Aldorarc case. *Le Jour* newspaper reporter Aldorarc was arrested and detained incommunicado on March 30, 2011, by security officers following his investigation of an alleged armed rebellion attempt in the ranks of the country's police forces. The reporter was held for several days in the Direction Générale de la Recherche Extérieure (Directorate General for External Research; Cameroon) known by its French acronym DGRE, Adamaoua Regional office.

Thus, local Cameroonian syndicates of journalists have mainly used diplomatic rather than confrontational means to address issues of violence against their members. These syndicates have hardly, if not never embarked on muscular techniques such as street protests, peaceful marches or strike actions, as it has often been the case in some under-developed and developing countries (Pleines & Somsalvy, 2022). It must be explained that such muscular approaches are very risky ways of denouncing injustices against journalists given the prevailing institutionalised authoritarianism in the country. Most cases of peaceful and violent street protests in the country have ended in a brutal way, with protestors being arrested, molested, jailed and/or murdered (Tita, Wantchami & Muluh, 2016). Two good examples are the 2016 peaceful demonstrations separately organised by Anglophone teachers and lawyers in the English-speaking regions of the country. The two demonstrations which aimed at denouncing the “francophonisation” of the Anglophone Common Law system (for lawyers) and Anglophone educational system (for teachers) in the country, ended up in a brutal way. Forces of law and security quashed the protests, causing the ongoing Anglophone war in the country. In view of the gloomy and complicated end of recent street protests in the country, it may be argued that local journalists’ reluctance to use muscular pressuring strategies is cautious.

Journalists’ Trade-Unions and the Martinez Zogo Case

Martinez Zogo’s murder was met with massive condemnations in and outside Cameroon. The gruesome act motivated national and international journalists’ syndicates to rise and denounce the alarming rate of authoritarianism and threats against journalists in Cameroon (Equal Times 2023, Repoters Without Borders 2023). From the Cameroon Journalists Trade Union (CJTU) to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), journalists’ movements deployed different forms of activism to draw the world’s attention to the Martinez Zogo’s case and demand prompt actions from the Cameroonian government. Their motivation was even accentuated by the fact that few days after Zogo’s death, there was a sudden spike of threats against journalists that reported the killing of their colleague or called for justice for the reporter and his family (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023). In effect, only two weeks after Zogo’s demise, the body of another journalist, Jacques Ola Bebe, was found in the city of Yaoundé. This body had signs of bullet wounds. A catholic priest and radio host, Bebe was a close associate of Zogo and had, before his demise, called for justice for his murdered colleague. He had also told journalists (notably Yaoundé-based *Galxay FM*) he constantly received death threats from unknown people (Mudge 2023).

Similarly, *Royal FM* female reporter Mapalah Zita complained that she had received many hostile phone calls from people she suspected to be officials. The calls were in connection oher repeated calls for justice for Martinez Zogo in her works. Zita remarked that:

It is like we will even end up being scared of executing our job the way it is supposed to be done. You are sending out the right information and you are being threatened for it. Seriously, what we need is that the government should give us that liberty which we deserve

so that we can practice in full freedom. Let us be free to carry out our job without any threat, without any fear of the unknown (Kindzeka 2023, p.15).

The Cameroonian Union of Journalists and other international observers such as Human Right Watch, recorded scores of journalists who, like Zita and Bebe, received death threats from people suspected to be officials (see Mudge 2023, *Equal Times*, 2023). Thus, the continuous wave of violence against pro-Zogo journalists only fuelled Journalists' and right organisations' activism in and outside Cameroon. The civic movement mounted by Journalists' syndicates in relation to Zogo's murder can be examined under three sub-topics. These include: the reporting of similar cases of threats against journalists, ii) the wooing of the international community and iii) the organisation of peaceful demonstrations and other public solidarity events.

Reporting Old and New Cases of Death Threats

The gruesome killing of Martinez Zogo is reminiscent of the batching and muzzling of the press in Cameroon. Media houses and journalists' trade-unions have been using the issue as a starting point to evoke old cases of abuses against media workers in the country. So, in their condemnations of the brutal act or their calls for justice for Martinez Zogo, both local and international journalists' syndicates tended to either resuscitate old incidents of aggressions against journalists or report new cases of violence against the media. In a release made public on January 23, 2023, the Cameroon Association of English Speaking Journalists (CAMASEJ), for instance, used the Martinez case as a window into the Wazizi one. Through its president, Viban Jude, the Association called on Cameroonian authorities to carry out transparent and thorough investigations and render justice not only for Martinez Zogo but also for the ensemble of English speaking journalists who have recently endured similar gruesome treatment from unidentified assailants. In the release, Viban Jude (2023) contends that "Impunity for crimes against journalists and other media workers in Cameroon is unacceptable and provocative. It must stop. It is still fresh in our minds that the killers of Samuel Wazizi are yet to be brought to justice despite the Head of State promising to investigate his killing. We urge the government to make public the findings of both investigations" (p.1).

Like the CAMASEJ, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) issued a statement in February 2, 2023 where it called on the Cameroon government to deliver justice for Zogo. In the statement, the CPJ also deplored government's light treatment of previous cases of journalists' murder. In her words, CPJ's Africa Program Coordinator, Angela Quintal observed that "past inquiries into the deaths of journalists, including Samuel Wazizi, have left much to be desired, and authorities must ensure that their investigations and findings surrounding Zogo's murder are public and credible" (cited in Committee to Protect Journalist, 2023, para 2). Apart from the Wazizi case, journalists' syndicates and media houses have explored various other cases of arbitrary arrests, murders or intimidation against Cameroonian journalists (see *Equal Times* 2023; Hamekoue 2023; Kindzeka 2023).

Public Demonstrations and Solidarity Actions

Besides evoking previous unresolved or ongoing cases of threats against media workers, Cameroonian journalists' syndicates organised various coordinated civic and solidarity actions aimed at keeping the Zogo case on top position on the political, social and media agenda. A case in point is the Cameroon Journalists Trade Union (CJTU) – the largest journalists' syndicate in the country and an affiliate of the International Federation of Journalist – which, from the early stage of the Zogo case, coordinated various peaceful civic movements. The movements were aimed at pressuring the Cameroonian government into delivering equitable justice for the murdered journalists and providing comprehensible outdates on the progress of the case. A week after Martinez Zogo's murder, the union questioned the lack of official government communication on the progress of the Zogo case. It issued series of directives to its members as from January 24, 2023, aimed at pressuring the Cameroonian judiciary. First, it declared a period of public mourning that started on January 25, 2023. The public mourning was massively observed not only by its members. Members dressed in black on the appointed day and brandished slogans calling for justice for their murdered colleague. Second, the union expressed its determination to step-up its pressure if no sign of progress is observed in the Zogo's case. In its Decision No 10 the union pointedly stated that:

1. CJTU notes with regret and bitterness that on the 7th day of the death of Martinez Zogo no official information on the investigation has been made public.
2. We ask the Attorney General at the Court of the Center Region, with the prosecutors of Mfoundi and Mfou to work certainly in serenity but with speed so that justice is done for the biological, professional and the media family.
3. CJTU cannot understand why the investigation is stalling. The investigation should not stall because the Press and the people are thirsty for the truth after Bibi NGOTA, Jules Koum Koum and Samuel Wazizi.
4. CJTU shall maintain the pressure until the perpetrators and sponsors of this horror have been identified, arrested and charged.
5. Wednesday shall be day of mourning in the press. All workers are expected to dress in black for mourning.
6. On Wednesday, February 1, 2023, media workers at the level of each chapter shall meet and go to the governor's office to deliver the position statement of CJTU because journalists are in danger and seek the effective protection of the State

While the CJTU deployed morning days and demonstration, *Amplitude FM*, Zogo's radio station organised a tribute ceremony for the murdered reporter. The ceremony gathered scores of journalists and sympathisers who placed flowers, candles and slogans around a portrait of Zogo, placed in the radio station's courtyard. During the tremendously mediatised

event, members of journalists' associations as well as opinion moulders and influencers aired strong messages not only on the murder of their colleague, but also on the predicament of investigative journalists and threats against media workers in Cameroon.

Wooing the International Community

Another key feature of journalists' syndicates' mobilisation was their remarkable efforts towards wooing the international community. As is usually the case in situation of serious human rights violation committed by powerful government institutions, local journalists' associations sought to cooperate with international trade-unions and media houses to put the Zogo case on the global spotlight and ultimately attract the support of the international community. In its Decision No. 10 for instance, the CJTU added a seventh point where it called on the International Community, the association of Press Unions in Central Africa (USYPAC), the African Federation of Journalists (FAJ), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Cameroon (CSAC) "to remain united in [their] claims and [civic] actions to bring out the truth" (p.1).

In line with CJTU's call for collaboration, a host of foreign journalists' syndicates and media houses contributed to a huge international movement aimed at calling for justice for Martinez Zogo. A visible feature of the movement has been the hashtag #MartinezZogo which by February 13, 2023 enjoyed over 14 million views on TikTok, thereby becoming viral online movement (Rachel, 2023; *Guardian Post*, 2023). Besides this hashtag, a good number of foreign media houses covered the Matinez Zogo case in a tremendous way that did not only tarnish the image of the Cameroonian government but also pushed many representatives of the Cameroonian government to make insightful pronouncements on the Zogo case. For instance, on February 15, 2023, France's most influential daily *Le Monde* devoted an article to the Martinez Zogo case where it described the journalist's murder as the harbinger of an impending political storm in Cameroon. The daily wrote that there must be more than simple corrupt practices behind the killing of the bloodhound journalist. The daily anchored its speculation on the fact that the corrupt officials often questioned by name in Zogo's works are some of the regime barons longing for power in the central African country. According to the daily, some pernicious succession battle for the presidency in Cameroon could therefore remotely be connected to the murder of the journalist. *Le Monde* (2023) wrote that: "the murder of the journalist also confirms that, Cameroon risks going through a troubled period when the man who succeeded dictator Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982) shall no longer be in power ... [My translation]²" (p.17)

The exploration of this gloomy angle to the Zogo story, visibly tested the nerves of the members of the government, particularly many heavy weights of the Cameroon People Democratic Movement (CPDM), the party in power. Through the person of Fame Ndongu (cited in *Guardian Post*, 2023), the Communication Secretary of the CPDM Central Committee,

²L'élimination du journaliste confirme aussi que le Cameroun risque de vivre une période troublée lorsque disparaîtra celui qui, héritier du dictateur Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982)

government swiftly reacted to *Le Monde's* editorial. In his statement, Fame Ndongo underlined that Mr. Paul Biya – the president – had ordered the opening of transparent investigation that were to lead to the truth highly awaited by all Cameroonians. The politician declared that the Cameroonian judiciary is independent and free from anyone control. He thus viewed *Le Monde's* impression that Cameroon's magistrates are at the beck of the executive as misleading and denigrating move. On the issue of Paul Biya's succession, Fame Ndongo stressed that political pluralism is a reality in Cameroon as over 320 political parties do exist in the country. He added that the president has always won the country's presidential elections in a climate of "healthy competition, transparency and appeasement". This reaction was to imply that the battle to succeed the president follows democratic traditions in Cameroon.

In the light of the preceding analyses, it could be argued that journalists' trade unions' and media associations contribute in various ways to the ongoing civic movement in favour of Zogo and freedom of expression in Cameroon. The efforts of these journalists' associations suggest that trade unionism in the domain of media is somehow perceptible. The efforts also show that journalists are ready to fight for their right to inform the masses, in spite of the authoritarian regime and the precariousness in which they are operating. This is contradictory to previous studies that tend to represent trade unions in authoritarian systems as lukewarm entities, covert vectors of state ideology and/or activists whose movements do not really affect the democratisation dynamics in their countries (Liang & Hui, 2022; Bishara, 2016; Levitsku & Way, 2010). Additionally, the analyses suggest that journalists' trade-unions might not be as well organised and vibrant as their counterparts from the Western world; yet they do contribute in no small measure to the democratisation process in Cameroon.

Conclusion

The gruesome assassination of *Amplitude FM* director, Martinez Zogo, has engendered a highly mediatised legal action aimed at justice for the murdered reporter, as well as a huge campaign for the rights of journalists in Cameroon. Journalists' syndicates have variously contributed to this campaign. This paper examined three ways in which the syndicates, together with other media associations, subtly and frontally pressured the Cameroonian government towards delivering justice for their murdered colleague. These ways include reporting old and new cases of violence against journalists, demonstrations and the wooing of the international community.

It may be hard to mathematically measure the (impact of) pressure journalists' syndicates have since Zogo's death exerted on the Cameroonian government through the three approaches mentioned above. The foregoing however shows that journalists' trade unions and media houses have been relatively active in the civil society's campaign for justice for Zogo and other unresolved cases of murdered journalists. The activism of the Cameroonian journalists' syndicates brought to the fore at least three things: the debate on mortal threats against media workers in Cameroon, the independence of the judiciary in the country and

journalists' ability to mobilise and pressurise government institutions towards adopting democratic cultures. Analyses in the previous sections of this paper show that journalists' trade-unions and media associations in Cameroon may not be as influential as their counterparts in western democracies; but they are alert to their role as watch-dogs and defenders of journalists' rights. In line with the findings and analyses presented above, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Local Journalists' trade union should strengthen their cooperation with their foreign counterparts, particularly in view of handling future cases of violation of journalists rights in Cameroon. Actually, synergizing with foreign journalists' trade union most often ensure a greater political pressure and a greater sensitization of government official around the predicament of journalists in Cameroon.
2. Greater solidarity among Cameroonian journalists should be encouraged. This can be done through the regular organization of seminars and conferences on Journalists' rights, involving not only journalists but also right organisation and journalism scholars.
3. A national day should be instituted to mourn the death of journalists unjustly killed in the exercise of their noble function. Such an institution may function as a constant reminder and a treatise on government's responsibility to protect journalists against all forms of political threats.

This paper focused particularly on the reaction of Cameroonian journalists' trade unions to the assassination of Martinez Zogo. Future research may interestingly give attention to similar and more recent cases of journalists' assassination and political intimidation in Cameroon and in the global south. Such future studies may also delve into journalists' perceptions of the political power of their trade unions particularly their levels of confidence in these trade unions.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Bio note

Floribert Patrick C. Endong-floribertendong@yahoo.com

Floribert Patrick C. Endong holds a Ph.D. in theatre and media arts from the University of Calabar (Nigeria). He teaches cinema and audio-visual media production in the Fine Arts Institute of Foumban, a faculty of the University of Dschang (Cameroon). He is a film critic and media arts scholar having authored more than 150 scholarly publications in the fields of

international communication, political communication, audio-visual media production, culture, sexuality and religious communication. His articles are published in the Journal of Globalization Studies, African Identities, CINEJ: Cinema Journal, Journal of Religion and Film, Cinema & Ci and Film, Philosophy and Religion (anthology) among others. He recently edited *Global Perspectives on Football and the Media and Entertainment Industry* (2024) and *The COVID 19 Pandemic and the Digitalization of Diplomacy* (2023).

Isidore Agem Abah-ashlyisidore@gmail.com

Isidore Agem Abah is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Buea, Cameroon, where he also teaches as an instructor. He is a fellow of the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum in Bonn, Germany, and holds a Global Affairs and Public Policy fellowship at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. Abah's academic pursuits focus on Political Economy of Communication, Media and Conflict, Strategic Communications, Constructive Journalism, Media and Society and Media Aesthetics. With extensive newsroom experience, Abah has served in key roles, including Editor-in-Chief of Divine Mercy Radio and Television (DMRTVS) from 2021 to 2024 and Copy Editor at The Post Newspaper from 2015 to 2020. He also freelances as an editor for various magazines. His investigative reports have shed light on corruption and abuse of power, significantly impacting policy discussions in his country and earning him multiple awards for his contributions.

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