The purpose of this project was to produce maps using ArcGIS in order to better understand how the languages, ethnicities and history of Cameroon affects the political mobilization and politics of the nation. In her earlier studies and visits to Cameroon Professor Albaugh had gathered large amounts of voting data along with some highly detailed political maps. Surprisingly, prior to this project, there were no freely available maps of the electoral districts of Cameroon. Therefore, the first step of my project was to digitize the very detailed map of Cameroon using ArcGIS and in doing so create the map in such a way that I would be able to insert election data from Excel files into the program. The second step of my project was to digitize a map of Cameroon’s language groups in a similar fashion and in doing so insert data about each of the languages.

In order to understand the main objective of the maps it is necessary to get a brief background of Cameroon’s history and politics. A large part of Cameroon was originally a French colony and it gained independence in 1960. In 1961, a sizeable section of British Nigeria elected to become a part of Cameroon and in doing so formed Cameroon’s Northeastern segment. This new section contained a large number of Anglophones while the greater part of Cameroon remained Francophone. Another important factor in understanding Cameroon is its abundance of languages, according to *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* Cameroon has 286 distinct languages.

The main reason for the creation of these maps though is because of the current rule of President Paul Biya. President Biya came to power in 1982 and has remained in power since the, ranking him among one of the longest serving leaders on the African continent. A reign so long in a supposedly democratic environment causes some questions to be raised. Professor Albaugh began asking questions and came to believe that Biya and his party were reorganizing the political districts in Cameroon in order to isolate his opposition voters, classic gerrymandering. In 1992, there were forty-nine electoral districts for the parliament with an average seat count of 3.67 per district. In 1997 the number of electoral districts increased to seventy-four with and average seat count of 2.43 per district. Finally in 2007, the amount of districts increased to eighty-five with an average seat count of 2.12 per districts. Therefore over a period of fifteen years the number of electoral districts increased incredibly from forty-nine to eighty-five. What we found to be most interesting though is that most of the political shifts occurred in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, the areas of the highest political opposition for Biya who himself is a Francophone.

Biya comes from a language group known as the Beti that is a conglomerate of a few smaller language groups located in the lower southern part of the country. The part of Cameroon that joined from Nigeria contains a language group known as the Bamileke. The Bamileke were historically merchants and the wealthiest people in Cameroon. When Biya came to power he created many difficulties for the Bamileke and tried to shift their wealth to his ethnic Beti so, not surprisingly, many of the aforementioned district changes occurred in Bamileke dominated areas.

When we took the data combined with the maps we were able to view trends in the political sphere of Cameroon and come to a number of important conclusions. First, we discovered almost deniably that Paul Biya is using underhanded political tactics like shifting district lines to maintain a grip on power. Secondly, that many of the new district changes occur regions of high opposition and most importantly along language group lines. Over the course of 15 years Biya’s party, the RDPC, went from controlling 49% of parliament to controlling 86% of parliament. Professor Albaugh will be able to use these maps in articles and books to help illuminate the points she is making and with the large amount of data that underlies these maps, she will certainly be able to show ever more than I mentioned above, especially as it relates to language groups and their literacy as it related to political mobilization.

**Faculty Mentor:** Ericka Albaugh

**Funded by the Gibbons Grant**
Attached Maps: 1. Language Map, 2. Electoral Division Map
3. Percent votes for RDPC in 1992
Percent of Votes per Electoral District for the RDPC in 1992

4. Percent Votes for RDPC in 2007
Percent of Votes per Electoral District for the RDPC in 2007