

# The Political Atmosphere in Cameroon on the Eve of Presidential Elections 2025

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## ABSTRACT

The political atmosphere in Cameroon ahead of the 2025 presidential election is tense and uncertain. President Paul Biya, aged 92, is seeking re-election, despite growing calls for him to step down. The opposition is facing challenges, with a key figure like Maurice Kamto encountering obstacles in their bids to participate in the election. All attempts by the opposition to form a coalition has proven abortive. Major allies of the regime backed out at the Nick of time and are all contenders, making the ruling party facing a strong split within the grand North, a region consider to be the game changer.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is a Republic with a powerful Presidency at its core. Since gaining independence, the country has seen several changes to its Constitution. The 1961 Constitution united West Cameroon and East Cameroon into a Federation. In 1972, this Federation was replaced by a Centralized Government through a revised Constitution(1). A constitutional amendment in 1996 paved the way for a bicameral legislature, although the second chamber was not established until 2013. This revision also led to some decentralization of the government. The constitutional provision effective as of January 18, 1996, solemnly upholds the defining principles of the Republic of Cameroon. It declares the country as a "decentralized unitary State, unique, indivisible, civil, democratic, and social(2)." The office of the president of the republic of Cameroon is a very prestigious one. Men and women of high moral standards contest for this office every seven years since 2008 when the constitution was amended with significant changes on the term limit and the introduction of the Senate as the upper house(3). The year 2025 had been earmarked as an election year in Cameroon, with the presidential, Regional, legislative and municipal elections anticipated. However, with the recent move extending the mandate of Members of parliament and municipal authorities(4), the lone elections for 2025 with a universal suffrage is the presidential elections. This is because the election of regional counselors is not universal but indirect as the electorates are municipal counselors and traditional rulers. Many oppositions and civil society sees this move as an attempt to shrink the civic space and give the incumbent an easy ride during the 2025 election(5). The Ministry of Territorial Administration through its minister, Minister Paul Atanga Nji has equally been very vocal on the thematic, making the political ecosystem very tensed. In this paper, the researcher will examine the political architecture and atmosphere in Cameroon, analyze the stakes and possibilities of credible and transparent elections, and finally the way forward.

## Cameroon's Political Architecture and Atmosphere Prior to 2025 Presidential.

The shaping of modern decolonized Cameroon was significantly influenced by the events of 1958 in French Cameroun and British Southern Cameroons(6). Understanding the political forces that emerged from these events is crucial in comprehending the evolution of the Republic of Cameroon. The echoes of these events from the colonial era continue to impact the postcolonial political landscape of the country, sparking important political debates and prompting reflections on the past(7). Decolonization, distinct from

independence, was granted by the colonizers, while independence was achieved by the colonized. Therefore, Cameroon can be seen as a decolonized rather than an independent nation, as it was decolonized by the French and British with the support of the United Nations(8). Cameroon is currently dealing with two major violent conflicts and is also experiencing increasing ethno-political tensions both online and offline. The larger conflict, which began in 2017, is between the government and separatists from the English-speaking minority and has resulted in the deaths of more than 6,000 people(9). Additionally, the country is facing a resurgence of jihadist insurgency, leading to deadly attacks in the Lake Chad area. The ongoing war with Boko Haram in the Far North has claimed the lives of over 3,000 Cameroonians, displaced approximately 250,000 individuals, and has led to the emergence of vigilante self-defense groups(10). Furthermore, nascent ethnic clashes along the border with Chad have also resulted in the displacement of thousands of people. The political atmosphere in Cameroon is marred with uncertainty and doubts as opposition parties, civil societies and even international observers sees a dark cloud hovering over the political ecosystem. Democracy is about to be defeated taking into considering the recent happenings(11). Elections are considered by many as one of the determining factors of democracy. Therefore, their credibility is sacrosanct for democracy to be considered effective.

## The Stakes of the 2025 Elections in Cameroon.

ELECAM, Cameroon's election management body, has reported more than 460,000 new voter registrations in preparation for the 2025 presidential election, marking a record-breaking number(12). The postponement of parliamentary and municipal elections to 2026 has made the stakes of the elections in 2025 very smooth for incumbent. Several members of the opposing party are concerned that the extension may diminish their ability to challenge Biya, as conducting legislative and municipal elections in 2025 could have provided them with an advantage leading up to the presidential election set for October 2025(13). The electoral law specifies that a candidate for president can only be put forward by a political party with seats in the National Assembly, senate, regional council, or municipal council, or by the endorsement of at least 300 dignitaries. With this in mind, Kamto who is one of President Biya main challenger, who came second in the 2018 presidential elections does not stand a chance. This is because, considering his boycott of the 2020 parliamentary and municipal, his only hope is to secure 300 dignitaries or be invested by a party that meets the

requirements. The same was the faith of Cabral Libi who emerged third in the 2018 presidential elections, but was in serious trouble with the leaders of Cameroon Party for National Reconciliation (PCRM), the party that saw him secure a seat in parliament. His tussle with party hierarchy had resulted in him being dismissed from the party. However, after several legal battles, he emerged victorious. Furthermore, the other election to be held in 2025 is that of regional counselors which in reality, the status quo will not change since the same electorates that was convened in September 2020 has not change (municipal counselors and traditional rulers).

## Summoning of electorate and the eventual disqualification of Maurice Kamto

Prior to the summoning of the electorate and the submission and examination of candidacy for the 2025 presidential election is Cameroon, the political atmosphere continued to be very uncertain with the resignation of some prominent members of government(14). This was further intensified by the validation of their candidacy by the elections management body. This act has caused a major political shakeup at the far north, a region which is considered as having a high stake for the October 12 presidential elections (15). Furthermore, On August 5, Cameroon's Constitutional Council backed the electoral commission's decision to bar Maurice Kamto, a key opposition leader and challenger to incumbent President Paul Biya, from the country's upcoming presidential elections. The move threatens the credibility of the electoral process and has triggered yet another crackdown on political opposition (16).

## Conclusion and way forward.

Presidential elections in Cameroon have historically been contentious, with allegations of irregularities and limited transparency. The opposition has often struggled to present a unified front against the incumbent. The country faces significant challenges including economic disparities, unemployment, and regional tensions, especially in areas like the Anglophone regions where separatist movements have been active. Furthermore, Cameroon's relationships with international partners, particularly France (its former colonial power) and other African nations, play a role in its political landscape. International observers often scrutinize the electoral process. It is therefore clear and evident that the political ecosystem within the country is very uncertain. For there to be an element of hope, the researcher is recommending a strong opposition front to be able to counter the machinery already put in place by the incumbent. For democracy to be achieved, the Cameroonian people don't only have to register and vote, but must ensure that their votes are counted and secured. How can this be possible, upon voting, stay around the polling stations for vote security. Furthermore, the elections management body which is ELECAM must prove beyond reasonable doubt that it cannot and has not been compromised. It is often said that he who pays the piper determine the tune, the accountability and transparency of ELECAM has been questioned of recent by oppositions and civil society activist, but for them to restore and regain the trust of the populace, they must be free, fair, credible and transparent in their dealings. The political future of Cameroon will likely be shaped by efforts to address regional conflicts, improve governance and electoral transparency, and manage economic challenges while balancing international relations. Citizen's consciousness and desire for change will equally be a contributing factor. The love for nation and the desire to effect change will play an important role. You must be the change that you want. To be able to predict the future, you must create it. To be able to create the future, the love for fatherland must be emphasized.

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