

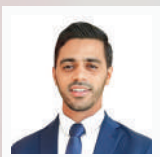


AFRICAN NARRATIVES

# Cameroon at a Crossroads: The 2025 Elections Between Regime Dominance and Escalating Internal Challenges



Author:



**Farouk Hussein Abu Deif**

Political Researcher\_ specializing  
in African affairs

**Published by:**  
African Narratives



## AFRICAN NARRATIVES



### Executive Summary

Cameroon is approaching a pivotal 2025 presidential election amid deep-rooted political stagnation, escalating security crises, and severe economic hardship. President Paul Biya, in power since 1982 and Africa's second-longest-serving leader, is expected to seek an eighth term. His grip on power, sustained by a 2008 constitutional amendment that eliminated term limits, remains firm. However, at 92, his health and the absence of a clear succession plan dominate the political discourse, fueling speculation as he becomes less visible on the international stage.

In a move the opposition decries as a tactic to neutralize them before the presidential race, the regime secured parliamentary approval in July 2024 to postpone legislative and local elections until 2026. This strategically hinders opposition candidates, many of whom are legally required to hold elected office to run for president. Meanwhile, Cameroon is grappling with multiple grave

security threats: a violent Anglophone separatist conflict in the west, a persistent Boko Haram insurgency in the north, and a refugee crisis on its eastern border with the Central African Republic. These conflicts have displaced over a million people, making the prospect of inclusive and safe elections unfeasible in large parts of the country. Economically, despite a projected 4.1% growth rate, rampant poverty, youth unemployment, and systemic corruption fuel popular frustration. The political opposition, while attempting to form alliances, is crippled by legal constraints, intimidation, and arrests. This article outlines five possible scenarios for the 2025 election, ranging from Biya's re-election under repressive conditions to a complete breakdown of the electoral process. Cameroon's future hangs in the balance, caught between entrenched authoritarianism and mounting pressure for fundamental change.

## Key Takeaways

- **Entrenched Authoritarianism:**

President Biya and the ruling CPDM party maintain absolute control through constitutional manipulation and suppression of dissent, creating an "electoral autocracy" that erodes public trust.

- **Strategic Election Delays:**

Postponing local and legislative elections to 2026 is a calculated move to disqualify opposition leaders from the 2025 presidential race and prevent them from building political momentum.

- **Severe Security Crises:**

Overlapping conflicts—the Anglophone crisis, Boko Haram, and refugee inflows—have left entire regions insecure, making safe and fair electoral participation impossible for millions.

- **Succession Uncertainty:**

President Biya's advanced age and frail health raise critical questions about succession, with internal power struggles creating the potential for instability if a sudden leadership vacuum emerges.

- **Systematic Opposition Repression:**

The regime uses anti-terrorism laws to jail opposition leaders, bans political coalitions, and silences independent media, neutralizing any credible challenge to its rule.

- **Worsening Socio-Economic Conditions:**

Despite modest growth, 40% of Cameroonians live in poverty and youth unemployment is critically high. Corruption and inflation fuel public anger and increase the risk of protests.

- **Barriers to Voting:**

Administrative hurdles, particularly the difficulty of obtaining national ID cards, threaten to disenfranchise millions of voters, especially displaced populations, further damaging the election's legitimacy.

- **Foreign Influence and Propaganda:**

External actors, including Russia, France, and China, are vying for influence. Russian-backed media, in particular, promotes pro-regime narratives, intensifying domestic polarization.

- **Risk of Electoral Collapse:**

The combination of widespread violence, displacement, and logistical failures could lead to a partial or total breakdown of the electoral process, potentially triggering diplomatic intervention.

- **Five Possible Scenarios:**

The analysis points to five potential outcomes, including a non-competitive election, an opposition boycott, widespread violence, a sudden leadership transition, or superficial reforms that preserve the status quo.

## Introduction

As Cameroon approaches its 2025 presidential election, the nation confronts unprecedented internal tensions that threaten its political and social stability. President Paul Biya, who has ruled for over four decades, is poised to run for an eighth term despite his advanced age and declining health. This prospect raises profound questions about the nation's future after decades of one-man rule, particularly within a political system defined by the ruling party's dominance and the absence of genuine democratic competition. The upcoming election is thus a critical juncture that will signal whether Cameroon is headed for meaningful change or deeper stagnation and conflict.

Against this backdrop, the regime's internal maneuvers are further complicating the situation. President Biya's inner circle has reportedly initiated moves to amend the constitution, ostensibly to create a vice-presidential post—a move widely seen as a mechanism to manage succession on the regime's own terms. While present-

ed as reforms, these actions are viewed by the opposition as a transparent attempt to consolidate power and redistribute influence within the ruling elite, rather than fostering a genuine political balance.

This political tension reflects a broader decay in Cameroon's democratic environment. Arbitrary arrests, crackdowns on opposition figures, and the suppression of peaceful protest have become common tactics to silence dissent. Opposition leader Maurice Kamto and his party face immense legal and administrative pressure designed to exclude them from the presidential race. These practices, combined with the expanding use of military courts to try civilians, have raised international alarm about the integrity of the electoral process and respect for fundamental freedoms.

This analysis examines the central question: **Do Cameroon's escalating internal crises pose a fundamental threat to the 2025 election and the future of its political leadership?**





## Part I: The Political and Security Landscape

Cameroon is preparing for its 2025 presidential election amid a complex political environment defined by the decades-long rule of President Paul Biya. At 91, Biya is a symbol of a stability that many argue has become stagnant. His frequent absences from the public eye have fueled widespread rumors about his health and ability to govern, while succession struggles reportedly simmer within the ruling elite. The political scene is dominated by his Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (RDPC), which has maintained power through constitutional amendments, most notably the 2008 abolition of presidential term limits.

This control was further tightened in July 2024, when the government secured parliamentary approval to postpone legislative and local elections until 2026. The opposition condemned

this as a strategic maneuver to ensure the presidential vote occurs while the RDPC retains total control of all elected bodies, thereby limiting the opposition's ability to build momentum. This move deepens the crisis of confidence in a system already plagued by accusations of election rigging.

The country also faces grave security challenges. The separatist crisis in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions, which escalated into armed conflict in 2017, has displaced over 700,000 people and devastated local infrastructure. Government-led dialogue has failed, and with separatist groups rejecting any solution short of international mediation, these regions remain effectively disenfranchised and at high risk of election-related violence.

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1 Tiara Njamfa, Growing Pains (and Gains): How Cameroon's Tech Scene is Jumping Through Hurdles and Prepping for Primetime, Included VC. <https://medium.com/included-vc/where-growing-pains-mean-growing-gains-how-camerouns-tech-scene-is-jumping-through-hurdles-and-98b7c94ea489>

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2 Cameroon: Change is Coming but More of the Same? 2025 Elections, Africa Center for Strategic Studies. <https://africa-center.org/spotlight/2025-elections/cameroon/>

Cameroon faces unprecedented security challenges with the ongoing separatist crisis in the Anglophone regions (Northwest and Southwest). This crisis escalated into armed conflict in 2017 and has resulted in the displacement of over 700,000 people and the destruction of educational and health infrastructure. Attempts at national dialogue and government initiatives have failed to contain the crisis, while separatist groups reject any solution without international mediation. This crisis further complicates the electoral landscape, as entire regions may be effectively disenfranchised due to insecurity. It also threatens to escalate violence during the electoral period, particularly given the potential for armed groups to exploit any possible political vacuum to strengthen their influence. Cameroon's economy, despite its diverse natural resources, remains fragile. While growth is projected at 4.1% for 2024, this has not translated into improved living standards. Forty percent of the population lives in poverty, and youth unemployment exceeds 75%, fueling social

discontent. These economic grievances provide fertile ground for instability and amplify the opposition's calls for radical change.

The political opposition, however, is fragmented and repressed. Despite attempts to form alliances, opposition parties face legal hurdles, funding shortages, and systematic intimidation. Civil society organizations are working to promote voter registration and awareness but operate in a repressive environment where journalists and activists are routinely arrested. This uneven playing field constricts the space for peaceful change and fuels pessimistic forecasts for the election's integrity.

Finally, escalating foreign interference complicates the political landscape. Russian influence is growing through media outlets that promote pro-regime narratives, while France and China compete for influence through aid and infrastructure projects. This international rivalry risks exacerbating internal polarization and undermines the potential for a unified, democratic path forward.

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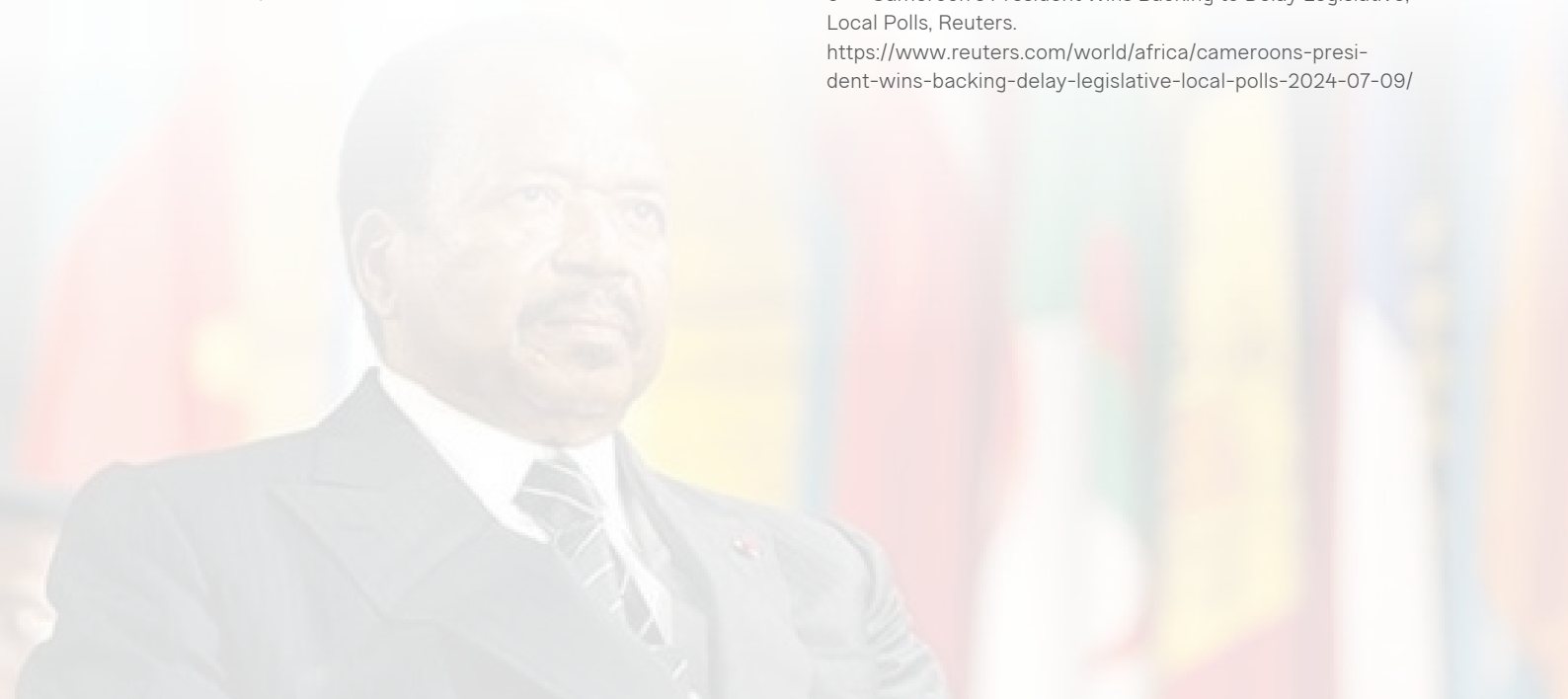
3 Inside Cameroon's Secret Push for Constitutional Reform, The Africa Report.  
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## Part II: Challenges to the 2025 Election

The 2025 presidential election is threatened by a confluence of deep-seated challenges that undermine the potential for a free, fair, or credible democratic process.

### 1. Overlapping Security and Humanitarian Crises:

Nine of Cameroon's ten regions are affected by conflict, including the Boko Haram insurgency, the Anglophone war, and refugee inflows. These crises have internally displaced over one million people, obstructing voter access to polling stations, particularly in rural areas controlled by armed groups. Persistent violence makes electoral participation a life-threatening risk for many citizens.

### 2. An Entrenched Authoritarian System:

Cameroon's political system is an "electoral autocracy." President Biya's CPDM controls all state institutions, including the electoral commission and the judiciary. The regime has a history of rigging elections and using vaguely worded laws, such as the 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law, to criminalize dissent and imprison opposition leaders like Maurice Kamto.

### 3. Violence and Armed Groups:

In the north, Boko Haram continues to target civilians, while Anglophone separatists enforce lockdowns and attack state symbols in the west. These groups actively work to prevent elections from being held in their areas of influence, making safe voter participation impossible for millions.

### 4. Logistical Failures and Poor Governance:

The electoral process faces immense logistical hurdles. A shortage of national ID cards prevents many, especially the internally displaced, from registering to vote. Systemic corruption—with Cameroon ranking 140th on the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index—cripples the state's capacity to organize a comprehensive and transparent election.

**5. External Interference:** The election is a focal point for foreign influence. Pro-regime propaganda, notably from Russian-backed media, seeks to delegitimize international calls for transparency. While the UN and other bodies advocate for free elections, their pressure has had limited impact on a regime resistant to reform.

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7 Head of State's 2025 New Year Message to the Nation, Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon.  
<https://www.prc.cm/en/news/speeches-of-the-president/7577-head-of-state-s-2025-new-year-message-to-the-nation>

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8 Cameroon: Civil Unrest – October 2025 Riot During Presidential Election, ReliefWeb.  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cmr-civil-unrest-10-2025-riot-presidential-election-cameroon>



# Cameroon's Four-Front Crisis



## • Deep Political Crisis

President Paul Biya, in power since 1982, has dismantled democratic checks and balances. The 2025 election risks being a non-competitive process designed to legitimize his continued rule.

## • Severe Security Challenges

With an Anglophone separatist war, a Boko Haram insurgency, and a refugee crisis, over one million people are displaced, making secure and inclusive elections nearly impossible in vast regions.



## • Fragile Economy & Public Discontent

Despite 4.1% projected growth, 40% of the population lives in poverty. Endemic corruption, high unemployment, and inflation fuel widespread frustration.

## • An Uncertain Electoral Future

Five scenarios loom: Biya's re-election, an opposition boycott, election-related violence, a sudden leadership vacuum, or cosmetic reforms. Each path underscores the fragility of Cameroon's stability.



## Part III: Five Scenarios for 2025

Given these conditions, Cameroon's electoral future is highly uncertain. The most plausible scenarios are:

### • **Scenario 1:**

**The Status Quo Prevails.** President Biya secures an eighth term through a non-competitive election marked by repression and low turnout. This outcome would entrench authoritarianism and grant the elite time to manage a future succession, but it risks triggering widespread protests and international condemnation.

### • **Scenario 2:**

**Opposition Boycott and Legitimacy Crisis.** Major opposition forces boycott the election, citing the absence of minimum democratic guarantees. The result is a ceremonial election with a predetermined outcome, leading to a profound crisis of legitimacy that isolates the regime and invites greater social unrest.

### • **Scenario 3:**

**Escalation of Violence and Electoral Collapse.** Intensifying armed conflict and a harsh government crackdown prevent voting in large parts of

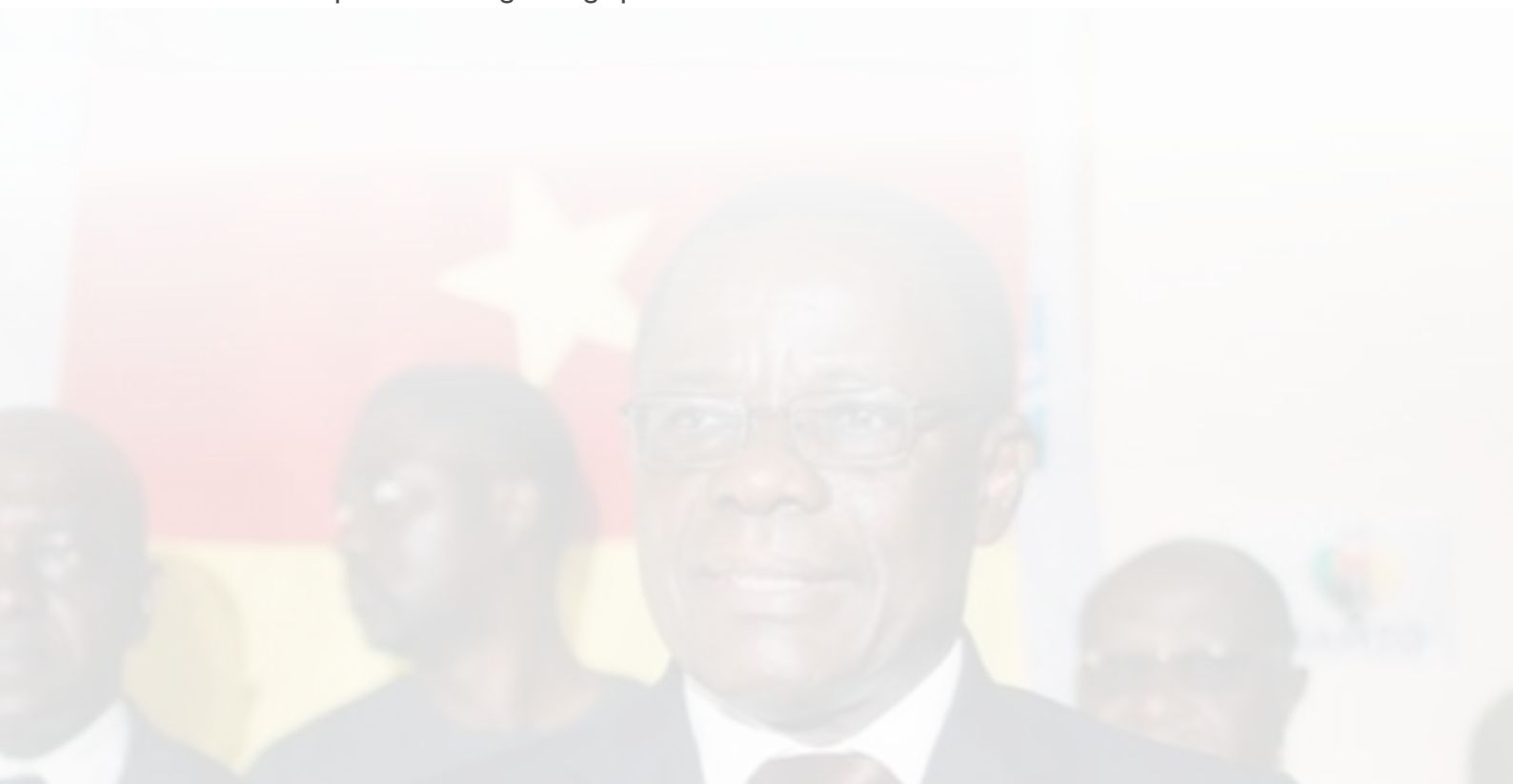
the country. Attacks on polling stations and widespread insecurity could force a postponement of the election or trigger calls for robust international intervention.

### • **Scenario 4:**

**A Sudden Political Transition.** President Biya's health fails before or shortly after the election, triggering a chaotic power struggle within the ruling elite. Without a consensus on succession, this scenario could lead to significant political turmoil, military intervention, or a complete breakdown of state authority.

### • **Scenario 5:**

**Cosmetic Reforms and Managed Continuity.** Facing international pressure, the regime implements superficial reforms—such as allowing token opposition participation or improving voter registration—to give the election a veneer of legitimacy. This scenario would ease external criticism but fail to produce substantive change, ensuring the continuity of the authoritarian system.





## Conclusion

**C**ameroon stands at a perilous crossroads. After four decades of rule by President Paul Biya, state institutions remain captured by his party, the democratic environment has severely deteriorated, and escalating security crises are tearing at the fabric of the nation.

Returning to the article's central question, the answer is an unequivocal yes: mounting internal tensions pose a genuine and severe threat not only to the integrity of the 2025 election but to its very feasibility. These crises also cast deep uncertainty over President Biya's political future, as his continued rule is increasingly seen as a source of instability, not a guarantee against it. Cameroon's trajectory now depends on a genuine commitment to comprehensive political reform—one that transcends superficial solutions and facade elections, and instead addresses the root causes of this multifaceted crisis.