

# Post Election Violence in Cameroon: Continuity and Change in the Era of Multiparty Politics, 1990–2025

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the persistence of post-election violence in Cameroon since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990. Despite the formal adoption of democratic electoral processes, post election periods have frequently been marked by contested legitimacy, political tensions, and episodes of violence. The study addresses the central problem of why post-election violence remains a recurring feature of Cameroon's political landscape. This study adopts a qualitative historical comparative research design combining process tracing and thematic content analysis. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with political analysts, civil society actors, and election observers, as well as academic literature, policy reports, electoral documents, media archives, and reports from international organizations. Electoral cycles from 1992, 2004, 2011, 2018, and 2025 were purposively selected because they represent critical moments in the evolution of electoral contestation and post-election violence in Cameroon. Through longitudinal analysis, the study identifies patterns of continuity and change in the drivers, forms, and consequences of post-election violence. The findings reveal that while the forms of post-election violence have evolved from urban protests and state repression in the 1990s to more complex patterns involving militarization and conflict dynamics in recent years, the underlying drivers have remained largely consistent. These include disputed electoral legitimacy, centralized governance, weak institutional independence, and constrained political competition. The study further demonstrates that the Anglophone crisis has significantly reshaped the nature and intensity of post-election violence by embedding it within broader conflict dynamics. The article concludes that post-election violence in Cameroon is structurally embedded in the political system rather than being a series of isolated incidents. It reflects enduring governance challenges that have persisted across electoral cycles. The study recommends comprehensive institutional reforms, including strengthening the independence and credibility of electoral management bodies, enhancing electoral transparency, promoting inclusive political participation, and establishing effective mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes.

**Keywords:** Post-Election Violence, Cameroon, Electoral Legitimacy, Multiparty Politics, Political Conflict, Governance

## INTRODUCTION

Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990, elections in Cameroon have functioned simultaneously as mechanisms of political participation and as recurrent sources of political tension. The transition from a single party system to a formally competitive political order generated widespread expectations of democratization accountability and inclusive governance (Nganji 2025, interviewed). However, these expectations have only been partially realized as electoral processes have frequently been accompanied by disputes over credibility transparency and legitimacy. As a result, post election periods have often been marked by protests, repression and varying forms of political violence. The persistence of post election violence in Cameroon raises important analytical and empirical questions about the nature of political competition and

governance in hybrid regimes. While elections are regularly organized, they have not consistently produce outcomes that are widely accepted by political actors (Hannah 2025, interviewed). This has contributed to a pattern in which electoral processes serve not only as instruments of representation but also as triggers of contestation. In this regard post election violence is not simply an outcome of isolated disputes but reflects deeper structural tensions embedded within the political system.

Existing scholarship on Cameroon has provided important insights into the nature of state power, political liberalization and identity based conflict. Studies have examined the dynamics of electoral authoritarianism and the ways in which incumbents maintain political dominance despite the formal presence of democratic institutions. Others have focused on the historical marginalization of Anglophone regions and the emergence of armed conflict since 2016. Long standing grievances related to political representation and recognition have significantly shaped patterns of contestation particularly in Anglophone Cameroon (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003, 92). Recent analyses further show that the Anglophone crisis has transformed political violence by linking local grievances to broader issues of governance and state legitimacy (Bang and Balgah 2022, 6).

Despite these contributions relatively limited attention has been given to the long term evolution of post election violence across multiple electoral cycles. Much of the literature tends to focus either on specific elections or on broader regime characteristics without systematically tracing how patterns of post election conflict have developed over time. This article addresses this gap by adopting a historical perspective that examines electoral cycles from 1990 to 2025.

The central argument advanced in this study is that post election violence in Cameroon is structurally embedded in a political system characterized by centralized authority, limited institutional independence and constrained political competition. While the forms of violence have evolved from urban protests in the early 1990s to more complex and militarized dynamics in recent years, the underlying drivers have remained remarkably consistent. By tracing these patterns across time, the article demonstrate that post election violence should be understood not as an episodic disruption but as a recurring feature of Cameroon's political order.

Existing scholarship has largely examined electoral authoritarianism, political liberalization, and the Anglophone conflict as separate phenomena. While these studies provide important insights, relatively few have systematically analyzed post-election violence across multiple electoral cycles spanning more than three decades. This article contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it adopts a longitudinal perspective that traces continuity and change in post-election violence from 1990 to 2025. Second, it integrates theories of electoral violence and democratization to explain both structural persistence and evolving forms of conflict. Third, it situates Cameroon within broader comparative debates on electoral conflict in Africa, thereby extending understanding of how electoral violence operates in hybrid political systems.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative historical comparative research design to examine the evolution of post election violence in Cameroon between 1990 and 2025. The objective is to identify patterns of continuity and change across successive electoral cycles and to explain the structural factors that sustain electoral conflict. The study draws upon both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consist of semi-structured interviews conducted between 2025 and 2026 with political analysts, election observers, academics, civil society representatives, and individuals directly involved in electoral processes. Secondary sources include academic books and journal articles, election observation reports, government publications, reports from international organizations, media archives, and publications from research institutions such as the International Crisis Group.

Five electoral cycles (1992, 2004, 2011, 2018, and 2025) were selected through purposive sampling. These elections represent critical moments in the evolution of Cameroon's electoral politics. The 1992 election marked the first major competitive election under multiparty politics; the 2004 and 2011 elections reflected periods of political stabilization and institutional development; the 2018 election occurred amid the Anglophone conflict; and the 2025 election illustrates the interaction between electoral politics and ongoing

insecurity. The study combines process tracing and thematic content analysis. Process tracing is used to identify causal mechanisms linking electoral disputes to episodes of post-election violence.

Thematic content analysis is employed to identify recurring themes across interviews and documentary sources, including electoral legitimacy, institutional trust, political exclusion, state repression, and regional marginalization. To improve reliability, findings were triangulated across multiple data sources. Divergent interpretations were compared and evaluated to reduce bias and strengthen analytical validity. Interview participants were anonymized where necessary to protect confidentiality. Information obtained from interviews was cross-checked with documentary evidence to ensure accuracy and credibility.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining Electoral Violence Theory, Democratization Theory, Political Instrumentalization Theory, and Relative Deprivation Theory.

Electoral Violence Theory argues that violence often emerges when political actors perceive elections as high-stakes contests in which access to political power, resources, and state authority are at risk. According to Fischer (2002), electoral violence may occur before, during, or after elections when competing actors question the legitimacy of electoral outcomes or seek to influence political processes through coercion.

Democratization Theory provides a broader explanation for the persistence of electoral conflict in hybrid political systems. Scholars such as Larry Diamond (2002) and Andreas Schedler (2006) argue that transitions toward democracy frequently generate instability when democratic institutions remain weak while political competition intensifies. In such contexts, elections may increase political contestation without establishing effective mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Political Instrumentalization Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory complement these perspectives by explaining how elite manipulation and citizen grievances interact to produce post election violence. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding both continuity and change in Cameroon's post-election violence since 1990.

## **MULTIPARTY POLITICS AND ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE IN CONTEXT**

The reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon in the early 1990s formed part of a broader wave of political liberalization across sub-Saharan Africa. This period was characterized by domestic pressures for reform combined with external demands for democratization following the end of the Cold War. In Cameroon, these pressures led to the legalization of opposition parties and the formal adoption of competitive elections. While these changes marked a significant departure from one party rule, they did not fundamentally transform the underlying structures of political power.

Scholars have frequently characterized Cameroon's political system as a form of competitive authoritarianism in which democratic institutions exist but are systematically shaped to favor incumbents. Within such systems, elections are regularly held but the playing field is uneven due to the control of state resources, media and administrative institutions by the ruling elite (Nfor 2026, interviewed). As a result, electoral competition is constrained and outcomes are often predictable. This perspective helps explain why electoral processes in Cameroon have been recurrently contested despite their formal regularity.

The institutional framework governing elections has played a central role in shaping these dynamics. Electoral management bodies have historically lacked full independence and have often been perceived as closely aligned with the executive branch (Emmanuel 2026, interviewed). This has undermined public confidence in the integrity of electoral processes and limited the effectiveness of formal mechanisms for dispute resolution. Concerns over electoral credibility and transparency have consistently contributed to political tensions particularly in the aftermath of presidential elections (International Crisis Group 2020, 12).

The 1992 presidential election represented a critical juncture in the evolution of electoral politics in Cameroon. As the first competitive presidential contest, it generated unprecedented levels of political mobilization and participation. The emergence of strong opposition candidates challenged the dominance of the incumbent regime and raised expectations of democratic alternation. However the announcement of results was followed by widespread allegations of electoral irregularities including manipulation of vote counts and lack of transparency in the electoral process (Nganji 2025, interviewed). These disputes had significant political consequences.

Opposition actors rejected the legitimacy of the results and mobilized supporters to contest the outcome. This marked the beginning of a pattern in which electoral disputes were frequently expressed through protests rather than institutional channels. The limited credibility of electoral institutions meant that formal mechanisms for resolving disputes were not widely trusted by political actors or the public. The broader historical context further illuminates these developments. Earlier patterns of political mobilization and resistance in Cameroon demonstrate the long standing tensions between state authority and popular demands for representation.

The roots of political contestation can be traced to earlier nationalist movements and struggles over political inclusion which continues to shape contemporary political behavior (Joseph 1977, 214). In this context the reintroduction of multiparty politics did not eliminate political conflict but rather reconfigured its expression. Elections became central arenas for contestation while post election periods emerged as critical moments in which underlying tensions were revealed. The combination of formal democratic procedures and persistent structural constraints created conditions in which electoral legitimacy remained contested and post election violence became a recurring feature of the political landscape.

## **THE 1990S: PROTEST AND REPRESSION**

The 1990s represented the foundational phase in the development of post election violence in Cameroon. The reintroduction of multiparty politics created new opportunities for political participation but also generated intense competition and contestation over state power (Nganji 2025, interviewed). The 1992 presidential election in particular marked a critical turning point as it was widely perceived as the first genuinely competitive electoral contest in the country's post independence history. The strong performance of opposition candidate John Fru Ndi significantly challenged the dominance of the incumbent regime and raised expectations of political alternation (Lamako 2025, interviewed).

However the announcement of the election results was followed by widespread allegations of fraud irregularities and lack of transparency in the vote counting process. Opposition actors rejected the legitimacy of the results and mobilized supporters to contest the outcome. These developments triggered large scale protests particularly in major urban centers such as Bamenda, Yaounde and Douala where political mobilization was most intense. The protests reflected both immediate dissatisfaction with the electoral outcome and deeper frustrations related to political exclusion and lack of representation (Nganji 2025, interviewed).

Post election violence during this period was primarily expressed through street demonstrations, strikes and acts of civil disobedience (Nfor 2026, interviewed). These forms of mobilization were often met with strong state responses including the deployment of security forces, the arrest of opposition leaders and restrictions on public gatherings. In several instances confrontations between protesters and security forces resulted in injuries and heightened political tensions. The state's reliance on coercive measures reflected broader concerns about maintaining political stability in a context of rapid political change. The dynamics of this period can be understood within the broader framework of political liberalization without institutional consolidation. While multiparty elections were formally introduced, the institutions necessary to manage political competition and resolve disputes were either weak or absent. Electoral administration remained closely linked to the executive branch and judicial mechanisms for contesting electoral outcomes lacked credibility. As a result, opposition actors had limited confidence in formal channels and instead relied on public protest as a means of political expression (Lamako 2025, interviewed).

**Plate 1: John Fru Ndi. Main Opposition Candidate in the 1992 Presidential Elections**



**Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) John Fru Ndi on the 20 January 2025 at 12:30 am.**

John Fru Ndi was the main opposition candidate during the 1992 presidential elections. He was the leader of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) Party. During this post election period, the government declared a state of emergency in his home town Bamenda and so many protesters were arrested and detained for refusing to accept the results of the presidential elections (Nganji 2025, interviewed).

The events of the 1990s established a recurring pattern in which electoral disputes were externalized into the public sphere rather than resolved through institutional processes. This pattern contributed to the normalization of protest as a central feature of post election politics in Cameroon. At the same time, it reinforced the role of the state as the primary actor in managing political conflict through coercive means rather than negotiation or institutional mediation. These dynamics were rooted in longer historical trajectories of political contestation and resistance in Cameroon where struggles over inclusion and representation have shaped political behavior since the nationalist period (Joseph 1977, 214).

Furthermore, the marginalization of certain regions and communities contributed to the intensity of post election mobilization. In particular, Anglophone regions expressed growing dissatisfaction with perceived political exclusion and unequal representation within the state structure. These grievances would later become more pronounced but were already visible in the patterns of political contestation during the 1990s (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003, 90). In sum the 1990s laid the structural and political foundations of post election violence in Cameroon. The combination of contested electoral legitimacy, weak institutional frameworks and coercive state responses created a cycle of protest and repression that would shape subsequent electoral periods.

**THE 2000S: STABILIZATION WITHOUT TRANSFORMATION**

The 2000s represent a period of relative stabilization in Cameroon’s electoral politics but this stabilization did not correspond to substantive democratic transformation. While post election violence appeared less intense compared to the 1990s the underlying structural conditions that had generated earlier tensions remained largely unchanged. Instead of resolving these tensions, political systems were adapted in ways that contained overt conflict while preserving existing power structures. The 2004 presidential election illustrated these dynamics. Although opposition parties continued to participate in the electoral process, they operated within a political environment characterized by significant constraints. Allegations of electoral irregularities persisted including concerns over voter registration, transparency and the neutrality of electoral administration (Peter 2026, interviewed). However, unlike the 1992 elections, these disputes did not result in large scale mass protests.

Post election reactions were more subdued and were expressed primarily through political statements and limited legal challenges (Lamako 2025, interviewed).

This shift can be explained in part by the consolidation of incumbent control over key political institutions. By the 2000s, the ruling elite had strengthened its capacity to manage political competition through a combination of administrative control resource distribution and selective accommodation of opposition actors. This reduced the likelihood of large scale mobilization while maintaining the appearance of political pluralism. As a result, electoral competition became more predictable and less disruptive. At the same time, the institutional environment remained largely unchanged.

Electoral management bodies continued to face questions regarding their independence and credibility. Mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes were present but were not widely trusted by opposition actors or the broader public. This contributed to a situation in which political tensions persisted beneath the surface even in the absence of visible large scale violence. Concerns over electoral credibility and governance continued to shape political perceptions and behavior (International Crisis Group 2020, 12).

The relative decline in post election violence during this period should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of democratic consolidation. Rather it reflects a process of political stabilization achieved through the containment of dissent and the management of opposition activity. In this context the absence of large scale protest did not indicate the resolution of underlying grievances but rather the limited capacity of opposition actors to effectively challenge the status quo.

Moreover structural inequalities and regional disparities continued to influence political dynamics. While these issues did not always translate into immediate post election violence, they contributed to a broader climate of dissatisfaction and mistrust. Over time these unresolved tensions would re emerge in more complex forms particularly in the context of the Anglophone crisis. In comparative perspective the 2000s can be understood as a phase in which Cameroon's political system transitioned from overt confrontation to controlled stability. However, this stability was fragile as it was not grounded in institutional legitimacy or inclusive governance. Instead, it depended on the continued dominance of the incumbent regime and the containment of political opposition. This explains why the fundamental drivers of post election violence remained intact despite the apparent reduction in its intensity.

In sum, the 2000s represent a period of stabilization without transformation. While the visible manifestations of post election violence declined the structural conditions that produce electoral conflict persisted. This period therefore served to reinforce rather than resolve the underlying dynamics that have shaped Cameroon's post election politics.

## **THE 2011 ELECTION: INSTITUTIONALIZATION WITHOUT TRUST**

The 2011 presidential election in Cameroon, held on 9 October 2011, was contested mainly by the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) led by incumbent president Paul Biya and a fragmented opposition that included candidates such as John Fru Ndi of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and Adamou Ndam Njoya of the Cameroon Democratic Union (UDC). According to official results, Paul Biya won overwhelmingly with 77.99% of the vote (approximately 3.77 million votes), while John Fru Ndi came second with about 10.71%, in an election with a voter turnout of roughly 68%. The outcome reinforced the dominance of the ruling party in the post-1990 multiparty era. Following the announcement, opposition leaders rejected the results, alleging widespread electoral fraud, irregularities, and lack of transparency, including issues with voter registration and ballot counting. They argued that the electoral process was neither free nor fair, which led to political tensions and criticism from both domestic actors and international observers regarding the credibility of the election.

The 2011 presidential election represents an important moment in the evolution of electoral politics in Cameroon as it illustrates the partial institutionalization of electoral processes without corresponding gains in public trust or democratic legitimacy. By this period, formal institutions governing elections had become more structured and visible including the establishment of electoral management bodies (ELECAM) and

constitutional mechanisms for dispute resolution. However these institutional developments did not translate into widespread confidence in the electoral system among political actors and citizens. The election was characterized by the continued dominance of the incumbent Paul Biya alongside participation from multiple opposition candidates. While the procedural aspects of the election reflected an organized electoral framework the substantive credibility of the process remained contested. Allegations raised by opposition parties focused on issues such as irregularities in voter registration limited transparency in vote counting and perceived bias within institutions responsible for overseeing elections (Lamako 2025, interviewed). These concerns contributed to a political environment in which the legitimacy of the electoral outcome was questioned despite the formal presence of institutional safeguards.

A key feature of this period was the role of the Constitutional Council as the highest authority responsible for adjudicating electoral disputes. Although the Council provided a formal avenue for contestation, its perceived lack of independence from the executive branch weakened its credibility in the eyes of opposition actors (Marry 2026, interviewed). This situation limited the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms intended to resolve electoral conflicts and reinforced perceptions that formal institutions were not fully neutral arbiters. As a result opposition responses to the election were primarily expressed through political statements public criticism and limited legal challenges rather than mass mobilization or sustained protest.

The relative absence of large scale post election violence in 2011 should not be interpreted as an indication of political stability grounded in legitimacy. Rather it reflects a continuation of controlled political competition in which institutional frameworks exist but operate within constraints that favoured the incumbent regime, the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM). In this context institutionalization refers more to the formal presence of electoral procedures than to their effectiveness in producing accepted and credible outcomes. The persistence of mistrust toward electoral institutions indicates that institutional development had not yet addressed the underlying issues of legitimacy and accountability.

Scholarly analyses of Cameroon's political system during this period emphasize that electoral governance remained embedded within a broader structure of centralized authority. The concentration of political power within the executive limited the autonomy of ELECAM and other institutions responsible for managing elections and resolving disputes. This contributed to a situation in which elections were regularly conducted but rarely produced outcomes that were perceived as fully legitimate by all stakeholders. Concerns about electoral credibility continued to shape political behaviour and maintained underlying tensions within the system (International Crisis Group 2020, 12). The 2011 election therefore illustrated a pattern of institutionalization without trust. While formal mechanisms for conducting elections and resolving disputes were in place, their effectiveness was constrained by structural factors related to political control and institutional dependence. This resulted in a political environment where elections functioned as routine administrative processes rather than fully credible democratic contests. The absence of widespread violence in this period masked the persistence of unresolved tensions that would later become more pronounced in subsequent electoral cycles.

## **THE 2018 ELECTION: CONFLICT AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE**

The 2018 presidential election occurred in a significantly more complex political and security context due to the escalation of the Anglophone crisis which began in 2016. This crisis fundamentally altered the dynamics of electoral politics by introducing armed conflict into regions that had historically expressed political grievances through non violent means (Judith 2025, interviewed). As a result the election took place not only within a framework of political competition but also within an environment marked by insecurity territorial contestation and fragmented authority. One of the defining features of the 2018 election was the impact of insecurity on electoral participation. In the Northwest and Southwest regions, separatist groups called for boycotts of the elections and in some cases, enforced lockdowns to prevent citizens from participating in the electoral process (Frankline 2025, interviewed). These actions significantly reduced voter turnout in affected areas and disrupted the organization of polling activities. The uneven nature of electoral participation across regions highlighted the extent to which conflict dynamics had begun to intersect with electoral processes.

**Plate 2: Maurice Kamto. Main Opposition Candidate in the 2018 Presidential Elections**

**Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) Maurice Kamto on the 20 January 2025 at 12:30 am.**

Post election reactions in this context differed markedly from earlier periods. While political opposition actors continued to raise concerns about electoral credibility, the broader environment was shaped by ongoing violence and military operations. The presence of armed groups and the deployment of security forces created conditions in which electoral contestation was closely linked to questions of territorial control and state authority. This marked a shift from earlier patterns in which post election violence was primarily expressed through protest to a situation where violence was embedded within a broader conflict environment.

The interaction between electoral politics and armed conflict during the 2018 election illustrates a transformation in the nature of post election violence. Rather than being limited to demonstrations or state repression violence now included armed confrontations, kidnappings and localized clashes between separatist groups and state forces (Lamako 2025, interviewed). This convergence of electoral and conflict dynamics significantly increased the complexity of the political environment and altered the meaning of elections in affected regions.

Analytical studies of the Anglophone crisis emphasize that it represents not only a security challenge but also a governance crisis rooted in long standing grievances related to political representation and recognition (Bang and Balgah 2022, 6). These grievances contributed to the emergence of armed resistance and also reshaped the ways in which political participation was understood and practiced in the affected regions. The international dimension of the crisis has also drawn attention to the humanitarian consequences including displacement and disruptions to civilian life which further complicate the electoral context (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2025).

**Plate 3: Paul Biya. Winner of Presidential Elections since 1992**

**Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) Paul Biya on the 20 January 2025 at 8:40 am.**

The 2018 election therefore represented a critical turning point in the evolution of post election violence in Cameroon. It demonstrated how electoral processes could become intertwined with broader conflict dynamics resulting in forms of violence that extend beyond traditional protest based contestation. In this context, elections were not only mechanisms of political competition but also events that intersected with ongoing struggles over authority legitimacy and territorial control. The implications of this transformation are significant. First it suggests that post election violence in Cameroon can no longer be understood solely within the framework of electoral disputes but must also be analyzed in relation to broader patterns of armed conflict. It also highlights the limitations of electoral governance in contexts where security conditions were unstable and political grievances remained unresolved. Finally it underscores the need to consider both institutional reforms and conflict resolution strategies when addressing the challenges associated with post election violence in Cameroon.

## **THE 2025 ELECTION: CONTINUITY UNDER CONDITIONS OF INSECURITY**

The 2025 presidential election occurred within a political and security context that reflects both continuity with earlier electoral cycles and the cumulative effects of unresolved structural tensions. Unlike the 1990s, when post election violence was primarily driven by immediate disputes over electoral outcomes, and unlike the 2018 election, which was deeply affected by active armed conflict, the 2025 election unfolded in an environment where long standing governance challenges and persistent insecurity continued to shape electoral participation and political contestation (Njanji 2025, interviewed).

Preliminary observations indicated that electoral competition remained formally intact, with political actors participating within established institutional frameworks. However the credibility of the electoral process continued to be contested by opposition groups and segments of civil society. Concerns were raised regarding transparency in electoral administration, the neutrality of institutions responsible for organizing elections, and the broader fairness of the political environment. These concerns are consistent with longstanding patterns in which electoral outcomes are questioned due to perceived structural biases embedded within the political system (International Crisis Group 2020, 12).

In regions affected by ongoing insecurity particularly the Northwest and Southwest the electoral process continued to be shaped by the legacy of the Anglophone crisis. Although the intensity of armed confrontation may have fluctuated compared to earlier peaks the presence of insecurity continued to influence voter turnout mobility and political engagement. In some localities citizens faced constraints related to safety which affected their ability to participate in electoral activities. This uneven participation reinforced existing disparities in political representation and contributed to perceptions that national elections do not equally reflect the preferences of all regions.

Post election reactions in 2025 followed a familiar pattern characterized by political contestation rather than large scale nationwide protest. Opposition actors most especially Issa Tchiroma Bakary expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct and outcome of the election while the incumbent administration maintained its position of continuity. Many protests erupted in major towns and cities of Cameroon. In Douala and other major towns in Northern Cameroon, protesters vandalized state properties of citizens, blocked roads and destroyed public properties. Many protesters were killed and thousands imprisoned. The main opposition candidate Issa Tchiroma went on exile declaring himself as winner of the elections (Ndi 2026, interviewed). In conflict affected areas however, political grievances were often intertwined with broader concerns about security, governance and state presence. This reflects the continued integration of electoral politics within a wider context of regional instability and uneven state authority.

The 2025 presidential election in Cameroon, held on 12 October 2025, was primarily contested between the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement led by Paul Biya and the opposition Cameroon National Salvation Front headed by Issa Tchiroma Bakary. According to official results announced by the Constitutional Council, Biya won the election with approximately 53.66% of the vote (2,474,179 votes), while Tchiroma secured about 35.19% (1,622,334 votes), with overall voter turnout estimated at 57.76%. The outcome extended Biya's long-standing rule, reinforcing the dominance of the incumbent party since the advent of multiparty politics. Following the announcement, Issa Tchiroma Bakary rejected the results, publicly

alleging electoral fraud and irregularities, and claimed that the process lacked transparency and credibility. His reaction contributed to heightened political tensions, as opposition supporters protested the results, reflecting ongoing concerns over electoral legitimacy and governance in Cameroon.

**Plate 4: Isa Tchiroma Bakari, the Main Opposition Candidate during the 2025 Presidential Elections**



**Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) Isa Tchiroma Bakari on the 27 January 2025 at 3:30 am.**

The 2025 election therefore demonstrated that while the forms of post election violence may have evolved over time, the underlying structural conditions remain largely unchanged. Elections continued to occur within a centralized political system where institutional independence was limited and electoral governance was closely associated with the executive branch. As a result, the credibility of elections remained contested and post election tensions persisted even in the absence of widespread visible violence across the entire territory.

## **COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: CAMEROON IN AFRICAN CONTEXT**

The Cameroonian experience shares important similarities with other African countries that have experienced recurrent post-election violence. In Kenya following the disputed 2007 presidential election, violence emerged from perceptions of electoral manipulation, weak institutional trust, and ethnic political mobilization (Mueller, 2011). Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire experienced severe post-election conflict in 2010–2011 when competing political actors claimed electoral victory and rejected institutional decisions.

Like Cameroon, these cases demonstrate how disputed electoral legitimacy can trigger violence when institutions responsible for managing elections are perceived as partisan or ineffective. However, Cameroon differs in several respects. Unlike Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, where electoral violence produced relatively short-term crises, Cameroon exhibits a pattern of recurring low-intensity post-election tensions embedded within a broader framework of competitive authoritarianism.

The Anglophone crisis further distinguishes Cameroon from many other African cases by creating a direct linkage between electoral politics and armed conflict. This intersection of electoral contestation and separatist violence has transformed post-election violence from a primarily political phenomenon into a multidimensional governance and security challenge.

Comparative analysis therefore suggests that while Cameroon shares common drivers of electoral violence with other African states, its combination of prolonged incumbency, centralized governance, and ongoing armed conflict creates a particularly resilient pattern of post-election instability.

## STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE

The findings of this study both support and extend existing scholarship on electoral authoritarianism in Africa. Consistent with Schedler (2006), the evidence suggests that elections in hybrid regimes may reinforce rather than challenge incumbent dominance when institutions remain dependent on executive authority. However, the Cameroonian case also demonstrates that electoral violence cannot be explained solely by authoritarian control. The persistence of regional grievances, particularly in the Anglophone regions, introduces dimensions of identity, representation, and state legitimacy that are not fully captured by conventional electoral authoritarianism frameworks.

Furthermore, the findings challenge assumptions that institutionalization necessarily reduces electoral conflict. While electoral institutions became more formalized between 1992 and 2025, public trust in these institutions remained limited. This suggests that institutional development without institutional legitimacy may have limited effects on reducing post-election tensions. A longitudinal analysis of post election violence in Cameroon from 1990 to 2025 reveals that despite variations in context and intensity several structural drivers consistently underpin the persistence of electoral conflict. These drivers are not isolated factors but interconnected elements that collectively shape the political environment and influence the likelihood of post election tensions.

A primary driver is the recurring issue of disputed electoral legitimacy. Across multiple electoral cycles, opposition actors and segments of the population have raised concerns about the transparency fairness and credibility of elections. These concerns often stem from perceptions of irregularities in voter registration, vote counting and result announcement processes. The persistence of these perceptions undermines trust in electoral outcomes and encourages political actors to contest results outside formal institutional channels (International Crisis Group 2020 p 12).

A second driver is centralized governance which concentrates political authority within the executive branch. This concentration of power limits the autonomy of institutions responsible for managing elections and adjudicating disputes. It also reduces the capacity of sub national actors to influence political processes meaningfully. As a result political competition is structured in a way that favours incumbency and restricts the possibility of genuine alternation in power. A key example was the rejection of the candidacy of Maurice Kamto by the constitutional council, at the time when his popularity had reached heights in the political arena in Cameroon.

A third driver relates to weak institutional independence particularly in relation to electoral management bodies and judicial institutions. This relates ELECAM and the constitutional council whose members are mostly high ranking figures of the ruling CPDM party. Thus, when institutions responsible for overseeing elections are perceived as lacking neutrality, their ability to function as credible arbiters of electoral disputes is diminished. This contributes to a situation in which formal mechanisms exist but are not widely trusted by political actors (Nganji 2025, interviewed). The absence of credible institutional checks reinforces reliance on informal or extra institutional means of contestation.

A fourth driver is regional inequality and political marginalization which has historically affected certain parts of the country. Perceptions of exclusion from political decision making and unequal distribution of state resources contributed to grievances that were expressed in various forms including political protest and in some cases support for separatist movements. These grievances have been particularly pronounced in Anglophone regions where historical and political factors have shaped a distinct trajectory of contestation (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003 p 92).

A fifth and increasingly significant driver is the interaction between electoral politics and armed conflict. The Anglophone crisis has introduced a dimension of militarization into the political landscape that affects both

electoral participation and post election dynamics. Armed groups, state security forces and local populations are all actors within this complex environment where political and security considerations overlap. The crisis has therefore transformed the nature of post election violence by embedding it within broader patterns of conflict and humanitarian concern (Bang and Balgah 2022, 6).

These structural drivers interact in ways that reinforce one another. Disputed legitimacy was amplified by weak institutions, centralized governance, limits opportunities for meaningful political competition and regional inequalities contributed to localized grievances that escalated under conditions of insecurity. Together these factors created a political system in which post election violence is not an exceptional occurrence but a recurring outcome shaped by enduring structural conditions.

## CONCLUSION

This article examined the persistence of post election violence in Cameroon from the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990 to the aftermath of the 2025 presidential election. The central problematic addressed is why post election violence remains a recurring feature of Cameroon's political landscape despite the formal adoption of multiparty electoral democracy and the regular organization of elections. While multiparty politics introduced competitive elections and expanded political participation, it did not eliminate the structural conditions that generate electoral conflict.

The findings of the study demonstrates that post election violence in Cameroon is not episodic but structurally embedded in the political system. Across the electoral cycles examined, from 1992 through 2004 and 2011 to 2018 and 2025, a consistent pattern emerged in which electoral outcomes were frequently contested and post election periods marked by varying forms of tension. Although the manifestations of violence have evolved over time, from urban protest and state repression in the early 1990s to more complex dynamics involving militarization and conflict in later years, the underlying drivers have remained remarkably stable. These include disputed electoral legitimacy, centralized governance, weak institutional independence, and constrained political competition.

The emergence of the Anglophone crisis further transformed the nature of post election violence by embedding it within a broader context of armed conflict and regional insecurity. The analysis therefore concludes that post election violence in Cameroon should be understood not as a breakdown of the political system but as a predictable outcome of its current configuration. Elections function within a governance structure that limits institutional autonomy and concentrates political authority, thereby undermining the credibility of electoral processes and the effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms. In this context, post election tensions were reproduced across electoral cycles because the structural conditions that generated them remained largely unaddressed.

The study also demonstrates that Cameroon's experience reflects broader patterns identified in the literature on electoral violence and democratization. Similar to cases such as Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, contested electoral legitimacy and weak institutional trust have contributed to recurrent post-election tensions. However, the Cameroonian case is distinguished by the interaction between electoral politics and the Anglophone conflict, which has introduced new forms of militarization and insecurity into post-election dynamics. This finding suggests that efforts to reduce electoral violence must address not only electoral governance but also broader questions of political inclusion, regional representation, and conflict resolution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Strengthening the independence and credibility of electoral management bodies, ELECAM and the Constitutional Council is essential to improving public confidence in electoral processes. Enhancing transparency in voter registration, voting process, vote counting, and result declaration can help reduce perceptions of manipulation and irregularity. Institutional reforms should also focus on ensuring the autonomy and impartiality of judicial bodies responsible for adjudicating electoral disputes so that political actors have access to trusted mechanisms for resolving grievances.

In addition, promoting inclusive political participation and reducing regional disparities can help address long standing grievances that contribute to political tension. Finally, in regions affected by insecurity, particularly those impacted by the Anglophone crisis, efforts to combine electoral governance reforms with broader conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives are necessary to create conditions conducive for free and fair participation. Without such structural reforms, post election violence is likely to remain a persistent and defining feature of Cameroon's political landscape, reflecting enduring challenges in governance, institutional credibility and political inclusion.

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