

Voter Apathy During Presidential Elections in Cameroon: A Stalled Democratic Transition in Disquiet

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Abstract. Voting is a key form of political participation through which citizens select representatives and hold public officials accountable. However, studies show a general decline in electoral participation across both liberal democracies and electoral authoritarian systems. In Cameroon, voter apathy is reflected in the significant proportion of eligible voters who abstain from elections. Although the first multiparty presidential election in 1992 generated considerable enthusiasm, it resulted in low turnout, allegations of electoral malpractice, and a disputed outcome that undermined democratic transition. Since then, voter participation has steadily declined.

This paper examines the factors contributing to persistent low voter turnout in Cameroon, focusing on voter disillusionment, political fragmentation, and institutional manipulation. It argues that governing authorities have systematically influenced electoral institutions to maintain political control, including during the 2025 presidential election. Similar patterns of electoral management and alleged manipulation are traced across presidential elections held between 1992 and 2018, where concerns over fraud and lack of transparency have contributed to declining public confidence in the electoral process. The study highlights how these dynamics collectively sustain voter apathy and weaken democratic participation in Cameroon.

Keywords: Elections, Voting, Participation, Manipulation, Apathy.

1 Introduction

Voting is the most important and the most common form of political participation. Unlike other legitimate forms of political action, voting is a less intense political activity when compared to

campaigning and engaging public affairs. As a key element of political participation therefore, voting is the process whereby citizens “elect public officials to government positions so those officials can represent the people’s beliefs and craft policies to express their will” (Rom, et al., 2022, p. 139). Further, voting is an important mechanism through which citizens ‘select’ among the multitude of candidates vying for public office, those they deem fit to represent their interests. At the same time, it is also a means of ensuring that public officials are held accountable and being voted out of office whenever they fail to meet the standards and or expectations of the electorate. Despite the importance of voting in determining who holds public office, studies indicate a generally declining trend in voter turnout in liberal democratic and electoral authoritarian societies (Hague, et al., 2019). Whereas in the former context declining voter turnout is often attributable to issues such as; limited political engagement, lack of faith in government, contentment with the existing political arrangements as well the diversity in the methods of participation. The situation in the latter context, is often quite complex particularly in polities often described as electoral authoritarian regimes wherein elections are neither free, fair nor transparent. In these contexts, therefore, government authorities in cahoots with the electoral management body orchestrate the electoral process to maintain political power, and safeguard the vested interests of the political elite.

Despite the contrasts between the liberal democratic and electoral authoritarian contexts, a very striking phenomenon that is observable in all political systems albeit to varying degrees is political participation. The term participation is quite broad and multifaceted, and some of its key characteristics include: Support as well as demands upon governing elites. Successful efforts to affect the actions of government, or to choose government leaders. Acts of citizens that are defined by law as legitimate such as voting, demonstrating, petitioning, lobbying, etc..., excluding illegitimate actions.¹ Representation which on the one hand is deemed appropriate since not all the millions of citizens in a state can seat in government; and direct democracy on the other hand which signifies the elimination of intermediaries between citizens and the government. Alienation as a form of participation is exemplified by a strong political feeling about the futility of political action,

¹ Illegitimate actions from a radical perspective signifies actions such as civil disobedience, boycotts and other forms of public demonstrations.

this in contrast to apathy which not only suggest a lack of interest but also a lack of action. Participation could also be seen in terms of the intensity or lack thereof of political actions. The latter include, voting while the former is exemplified by actions such as those who run for public office, attend public meetings, join political parties, and spend a significant amount of time engaging public affairs. Participation could also be perceived as organized or sporadic outbursts of rioting, lynch mobs, as well as political assassinations. Finally, participation involves activities affecting national politics, while others include subnational or local institutions (Weiner, 2015, pp. 161-165).

Meanwhile, elections just like voting and participation is an essential element in the democratic process. Elections generally take place at the local, national and international levels. Elections present a forum through which voters connect and interact with politicians, government officials and others seeking to hold elective positions. The electoral arena is quite unique in many ways, particularly because, for a brief period, the tables are turned in favour of voters who for once become 'supervisors' while political parties and the politicians seeking public office are transformed into 'supplicants' (Hague, et al., 2019). The interaction of voters and politicians could also be likened to a dialogue between society and the state which culminates into "a formal decision-making process in which groups determine which individuals will hold public office" (Rom, et al., 2022, p. 248). By casting votes, citizens give voice to their preferences and decide on who to hold public office (Sidney, et al., 1995). Whereas this assertion may hold true in some contexts particularly where electoral competitions are largely free, fair and transparent, the electoral arena in Cameroon has for several decades been marred by allegations of voting irregularities and other electoral malpractices which has led to a steady decline in electoral participation across the board.

As noted earlier, voter turnout significantly varies across countries, regions and political systems. However, one phenomenon that is observable in politics where elections regularly occur is declining voter turnout be it as a result of alienation and or apathy. A key concern for most analysts is the manifest lack of interest and enthusiasm among voters about participation in the electoral process. Like elsewhere, voter apathy in Cameroon is characterized by a significant portion of the eligible voting population abstaining from the electoral process. Paradoxically, the reintroduction of

multiparty politics in the 1990s was initially met with enthusiasm and the 1992 presidential election was the first competitive election in the post-monolithic era (Geschiere, 2009). However, enthusiasm for elections in Cameroon has been on the wane ever since, largely because subsequent municipal, legislative and presidential elections have been tainted by allegations of fraud and other electoral malpractices, designed to entrench the current regime in place (Mentan, 1998). Couched in voter disillusionment, political fragmentation, and other frameworks; this paper, explains how the governing authorities manipulate electoral institutions to maintain political power as was the case during the 2025 presidential election, and how such political manoeuvrings have in the past led to persistently low turnout in presidential elections held between 1992-2018.

2 Background

In electoral authoritarian contexts, governments deploy a broad repertoire of manipulative strategies to keep winning elections. They ban parties, prosecute candidates, harass journalists, intimidate voters, forge election results, and so forth. Their proximate goal is to contain the uncertainty of electoral outcomes, their ultimate goal to prevent the uncertainties of regime change (Schedler, 2013, p. 1).

The above quote largely describes the events leading up to and after the October 12, 2025² presidential elections in Cameroon. It all started with a series of decrees by the President of the Republic extending the term of office of municipal Councillors³ from 25 February 2025 to 31 May 2026, and that of members of the National Assembly⁴ from 10 March 2025, to 30 March 2026. According to the government, these measures were designed to ‘lighten the electoral calendar’ given that a total of four elections i.e. Presidential, Parliamentary, Legislative and Regional elections were scheduled to take place in 2025 (Atabong, 2024). However, critiques argued that the President’s decision to move the elections by at least one year in both cases violates Article 15(4), of the

² Decree N° 2025/305 of 11 July 2025 on the convocation of the electoral corps for the Election of the President of the Republic.

³ Decree No. 2024/328 of 24 July 2024 to extend the term of office of Municipal Councilors

⁴ Law No. 2024/011 of 24 July 2024 to extend the term of office of members of the National Assembly

Constitution which provided for such an action to take place only “*in the event of a serious crisis or when circumstances so require,*” and in such an event “*the election of a new assembly takes place at least forty (40) days and at most one hundred and twenty (120) days*” following the postponement. Sensing that the government’s move was a calculated ploy to weaken and disqualify its leader Maurice Kamto from the 2025 Presidential election, the opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) party called on the government to respect the electoral calendar. (The Guardian Post, 2024)

Prior to publication of the election date, and unlike previous occasions speculation was rife about the candidacy of incumbent President Paul Biya, in power since 1982. This was not very surprising given the highly personalistic system that is “deeply identified with the person controlling the chief executive office” (Schedler, 2013, p. 246). This time around there was greater acrimony about the 92-year old’s fitness to rule. On the one hand, there were fervent calls from the ruling party, ‘paid-opposition’ and affiliate groups for the president to run for another 7-year mandate. On the other hand, were frantic cries from opposition political parties, civil society, concerned individuals and groups for him to step aside and pave way for a smooth transition. This debate was finally closed on 14 July 2025, when a message from the Head of State was posted on the presidential website captioned: “I am a candidate.” The president justified his decision to run for another term of office by citing among others the desire to continuously ensuring the ‘security and wellbeing’ of Cameroonians; heeding to the massive and persistent calls from all the 10 regions of the country and from abroad. The president further mentioned the wellbeing of youths and women as a top priority; the message ended with a promise that “the best is still to come...”⁵

Following the unveiling of the election date, all potential candidates now had the opportunity to make public their intentions to run in the presidential race. By the close of the 10-day deadline for the submission of candidacy files, (21 July 2025), the elections management body Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) had received a total of number of eighty-four⁶ applications and rejected all

⁵ Declaration of candidacy for the 12 October 2025 Presidential Elections by His Excellency Paul Biya.

⁶ <https://portail.elec.cm/en/2025-presidential-election-in-cameroon-82-nomination-files-received-by-elec-cam-between-11-and-21-july-2025/>

but thirteen⁷ including the main opposition leader Maurice Kamto who was largely seen as the principal challenger to incumbent president Paul Biya. It is important to note that, but for the change of leadership in 1982, during which former president Ahmadou Ahidjo resigned and handed over power to his constitutional successor Paul Biya, there has not been any fundamental alteration in the system of governance in Cameroon since independence in the 1960s. In fact, the current head of state and a significant portion of the ruling elite have been shuttling around the state apparatus since independence (Gwaibi, 2015).

The disqualification of Maurice Kamto's presidential bid was quite contentious and highly acrimonious. In the months leading up to the announcement of the election date, there was fierce debate and discussions among politicians, the intelligentsia as well as ordinary citizens, via social and mainstream media and related circles throughout the country about Kamto's eligibility to contest the election. The reason often cited by government officials and affiliates was that the CRM party had no national representation, given that it boycotted the municipal and legislative elections that took place in February 2020, and without holding any elective post (local or national) the party could not present a candidate for the presidential election. However, Kamto sprang up a last-minute surprise by presenting his candidacy under the banner of the *Mouvement Africain pour la Nouvelle Indépendance et la Démocratie (MANIDEM)* party. A move that caught the government off-guard. However, the government spearheaded by the Ministry of Territorial Administration quickly bounced back and manoeuvred into place a dissident faction of the *MANIDEM* to present a candidate, Dieudonne Yebga for the election effectively putting Kamto's candidacy in peril. This was the content of a letter⁸ addressed to Mr. Kamto by ELECAM in which it cited 'double nomination by the MANIDEM' as justification for rejecting his application thereby nullifying his second bid for the presidency. It is important to note that in his first presidential bid in 2018, Kamto

⁷ Resolution N° 012/R/ELECAM/EB of 26 July 2025 to draw up and publish the list of candidates for the election of the President of the Republic of 12 October 2025

⁸ Correspondence N° 00544/ELECAM/DGE of 26 July 2025

lost to Biya but quickly claimed victory⁹ only to be arrested and briefly jailed,¹⁰ before being released and placed under house arrest.¹¹

Following ELECAM's decision, a total of 35 presidential aspirants whose files were rejected filed petitions¹² to the Constitutional Council in a last-ditch attempt to get their nominations reinstated. However, most of these petitions were rejected including that of Kamto, leaving the current head of state with what seemed to be no veritable challenger. Curiously, during the election campaign, a one-time Biya ally and former Minister Issa Tchiroma emerged from the shadows, and crisscrossed the country during the campaigns pulling out mammoth crowds. The popular momentum behind Issa Tchiroma was such that many believed that real change was finally coming to Cameroon. However, like all previous presidential elections the outcome as declared by the Constitutional Council was the re-election of President Biya with a score of 53.66% over his immediate challenger Issa Tchiroma who scored 35.19%.¹³

Analysts have argued that given the authoritarian nature of the regime in place, Issa Tchiroma's rather dazzling election campaign performance was a smokescreen and a misdirection. On the one hand, it was described as a manifest ploy to divert popular anger following the dubious elimination of Maurice kamto by presenting what appeared to be a messiah. On the other hand, it was seen as a diversion of the people's attention away from the failures of the regime, and a theoretical performance designed to present the country as a vibrant democracy. Finally, these political manoeuvrings were all geared towards granting a sense of credibility to a flawed electoral process whose outcome is often always known in advance. Having painted a picture of the electoral manoeuvring that occurred around the 2025 presidential election, this paper will now return to examining some of the philosophical underpinning of voter apathy before proceeding to discussing past presidential elections and demonstrating how voter apathy significantly impacted the outcome.

⁹ Cameroun : Maurice Kamto se déclare vainqueur de la présidentielle 2018

¹⁰ Cameroon: Post-election crackdown escalates with arrest of opposition leader Maurice Kamto

¹¹ Cameroon Opposition Leader's De Facto House Arrest Ends

¹² Election du Président de la République du Cameroun du 12 Octobre 2025 : Liste des Requetés Pose au Conseil Constitutionnelle pour le Contentieux Pré-Electoral

¹³ Official Results of the 2025 Presidential Election, 27 October 2025. Constitutional Council of Cameroon.

3 Voter Apathy and Electoral Participation: Conceptual Overview

This section unravels the literature on voter apathy and its impact on electoral participation. However, before delving deep into the matter, it is imperative to reiterate the importance of elections and voting in both established and developing democracies. Elections can only be deemed meaningful when people massively turnout to vote, and a high turnout rate usually indicates inclusiveness and significant participation; likewise, significant voter involvement is not only a sign of engagement in politics but also an indicator of a healthy democracy (Bukusi, 2022). Further, voting in elections is not only an expression of citizens' interest in national political process but also a marker of their engagement in the developmental affairs of the state. In this context, voting can therefore be seen as a means through which citizens choose who should represent them in government which is fundamental for the development of a sustainable democracy (Dupuy & Prakash, 2022). What then is voter apathy, and what are some of the philosophical underpinnings that underlie it...?

Voter apathy can therefore be described as a generalized lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern among the electorate (potential / actual) towards participation in the electoral process. It is often characterized by a significant percentage of the eligible population abstaining from voting or engaging in political activities. Voter apathy is often manifested in the form of indifference to elections, and or a deliberate choice not to register for and vote in elections as a result of disillusionment or a perceived lack of impact from one's vote. Voter apathy is quite problematic because it undermines the fundamental principle of political participation in established democracies and is often linked to the decline in the legitimacy of elected governments (Franklin, 2004). Voter apathy is also prevalent in Africa, Asia and Latin America and its increasing salience in these contexts generally have negative impacts on democratic development (Fagunwa, 2015). As elaborated upon later voter apathy during presidential elections in Cameroon was marked by a significant proportion of eligible voting population abstaining from the polls either by not registering or when registered not turning out on polling day to cast their vote. Some conceptual elements underlying voter apathy will be explored in the paragraphs below.

To begin with, Education is a major factor that determines how voters make their choices. Because of the higher literacy rate in most established democracies people are more informed and engaged in political processes although this often hardly translates into high voter turnout (Birch, 2010). Education or lack thereof in non-established democracies often leads to relatively low literacy rates because many potential voters do not have access to basic education that would enable them to understand how their vote is expected to affect the direction of government policies. Related to this is voter education which is quite negligible in Cameroon and other developing countries unlike elsewhere where political parties somewhat engage their militants all year round (Blais, 2006). In Cameroon for example, political parties mostly engage their militants around the period leading up to elections and the type of 'voter education' often involves making promises that are often unfulfilled thereby causing disillusionment. Further, political parties often always engage their militants on the eve of elections and these encounters practically involves providing gifts such as cash, food items, party paraphernalia etc., not only to motivate their militants, but at times to lure those of other parties to 'sell' their votes in exchange for cash. This strategy often backfired as was the case in Bali between the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) party and the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party in the early 1990s where because of its dominant position in that constituency the CPDM always sought to sway the militants of the SDF to switch sides without much success because SDF militants kept 'eating' from the CPDM and voted their consciences (Gwaibi, 2015).

The state of the economy is also a vital element in determining people's choice to vote. For example, results of a study carried out on the relationship between elections and the economy found that "voters who believed the economy had improved were twice as likely to vote for the party of the incumbent president or prime minister as voters who thought the state of the economy had worsened" (Hague, et al., 2019, p. 294). Whereas this may be true at the general level, the reality in most African countries is that economic adversity negatively affects political participation resulting in voter apathy because faced with economic hardship people pay less attention to politics and or withdraw entirely from political processes to focus on meeting their basic needs (Birch 2010). Many political parties are conscious of voter disillusionment and therefore resort to paying or buying of

voters. This was certainly the case during the 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria where political party representatives were observed offering gifts and other material, financial and gastronomical inducements/compensation to people at the polling stations. In Cameroon, the term '*sardinars*' is a popular euphemism to describe militants of the ruling CPDM party who after attending political events are fed bread and sardines by party officials. People are lured to attend these political events because it is an opportunity to get free food, drinks and cash. On another note, opposition members who switch to the ruling party are often mocked for having been corrupted by the '*huile de la sardine*' or sardine oil. While some have argued that 'poorer citizens are more likely to vote than richer ones' (Tambe, 2024), the reality is that faced with economic hardship, and given an opportunity to trade votes, most poor people will quickly jump at the opportunity to make a quick buck. This is the result of decades of mismanagement, nepotism, corruption and cronyism among others that have left many citizens in destitute.

Political fragmentation has an effect on voter turnout in Africa. In fact, the number of parties that contest an election can affect voter turnout, but there is no agreement on whether fragmentation increases or decreases turnout. Some argue that the availability of more parties gives more options to voters, and may also increase the desire to vote, particularly along ethnic lines (Ishiyama, 2003). However, the opposite may also be true. In fact, too many options can confuse voters and make it difficult for them to judge whether their vote will have the desired impact on the election outcome (Birch, 2010 & Blais, 2006). In Cameroon, the multiplication of political parties is a strategy that the governing authorities in place have employed for decades to fracture opposition parties, prevent unity within the opposition and divide the vote. As of the last count, the number of registered political parties in Cameroon stood at 329,¹⁴ out of this number only 8 are represented in the 180-member National Assembly which is the lower house of parliament. However, more political parties keep getting authorized¹⁵ making one to wonder about the essence of having over 300 political parties in a country of less than 30 million people? Nevertheless, you don't need to go far to find the answer because the vast majority of these political parties only exist in name and often coalesce

¹⁴ <https://minat.gov.cm/annuaires/parti-politiques/#>

¹⁵ Press Release N° 000036 by the Minister of Territorial Administration, 09-11-2023

around the governing CPDM party during elections in what is known as the presidential majority. These party leaders aspire to get cabinet jobs, government contracts and other forms of compensation in exchange for their support.

Meanwhile, registration requirements also cause voter apathy particularly when such requirements constitute a burden to the potential voter. This is often the case where voter registration entails financial costs such as for travel to registration centres which may constitute an extra burden that could dissuade potential voters thereby preventing them from engaging in the electoral process (Vassal, et al., 2015). However, flexible voting arrangements such as single or multiple voting days, elections taking place on rest or working days, the availability of voting technologies, the proximity of polling stations and alternative voting procedures including advance voting, postal voting or proxy voting have a direct positive bearing on voter turnout. Unlike in the United States where elections are held during the week which may be seen as a constrain on participation since many have work or school commitments (Rom, et al., 2022); election days in Cameroon are usually on weekends as was the case with the 12, October 2025 presidential election that took place on a Sunday, or are usually declared public holidays which is designed to remove any potential obstacles that could prevent people from going to the polls. Despite the disparities in voting arrangements in the abovementioned political contexts, the reality as observed in both liberal democratic and electoral authoritarian polities is a declining trend in voter turnout in (Hague, et al., 2019).

Interest in the political affairs of the state or lack thereof is another key factor that impacts voter apathy. Societies that encourage citizens to develop interest in the political process through the introduction of citizenship education in schools, and creating an enabling environment for political discussions and debates to thrive could significantly boost voter participation. Likewise, a sense of civic duty particularly when citizens have the feeling that it is their duty to contribute to political processes in general and decision making in particular could also significantly boost voter turnout (Chansa, 2024). Finally, lack of confidence in the capacity of election management bodies to hold free, fair, transparent and credible elections also significantly contribute to incidents of voter apathy. This latter point is very crucial when it comes to Cameroon particularly because ELECAM, which is the structure in charge of electoral management in the country is often accused by the opposition

of not being independent, nor impartial and not capable of organizing credible elections. In fact, “it has become customary that senior members of ELECAM tend to be either key figures in the government or central administrative services (appointed by the President) or members of the ruling CPDM party whose chairman is the President of the Republic” (Enonchong, 2021, p. 70). The impartiality of ELECAM was further laid bare in the lead up to the 2025 Presidential election following accusations by lawyers of the CRM party during debates at the Constitutional Council following the disqualification of Kanto’s candidacy that it received instructions from the government specifically from the Ministry of Territorial Administration to invalidate his candidature. Having explored key elements about voter apathy and its impact on electoral participation, the next section will present details of presidential in Cameroon from 1992-2018 which as noted earlier was marred by significant voter apathy.

4 Voter Apathy During Presidential Elections in Cameroon from 1992 to 2018

The following section presents detailed results of the presidential elections that took place in Cameroon from 1992 to 2018. These elections were marked by significant voter apathy, which as noted earlier is a situation where a significant proportion of eligible voting population abstains from the polls either by not registering or when registered not turning out to cast their vote on polling day. Meanwhile, education, the economy, political fragmentation, registration requirements and interest in the affairs of the state have been identified as factors that contributed disillusionment and hence voter apathy. Before delving any further, I will present an overview of the 1992 presidential election in Cameroon, which as noted earlier was the first poll that took place in the post-monolithic era.

The 1992 election was organized within the broader context of the ‘democratic wind of change’, that blew across Africa in the 1990s (Southall, 2003), marked by successful transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule in some but not all parts of the continent. For example, in 1991, Benin’s incumbent president Mathieu Kerekou reluctantly organized elections, lost, and subsequently handed over power to a democratically elected government; in 1991, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana successfully transitioned from a military to a civilian leader through democratic elections that institutionalized competitive politics; in Zambia, Kenneth Kounda’ one-party rule came to an end when multi-party elections brought in Frederick Chiluba; similar political transitions occurred

in other parts of Africa including Malawi, Mali, South Africa among others (van de Walle, 1997, & Wiseman, 1996). It is important to note that the democratic transitions that occurred in these countries were driven by popular protests, civil society mobilization as well as international pressure. It also ushered in constitutional limitations to the terms of office among other democratic practices.

In Cameroon, civil society mobilization, protests and international pressure was also brought to bear on the incumbent. In fact, the 1992 election was the culmination of the efforts of these actors. Like elsewhere, this election was a significant turning point marked by a fierce contest between Paul Biya and leading opposition figure John Fru Ndi. However, the election was marred by allegations of massive rigging in favour of the incumbent who was declared winner by the authorities in charge of elections at the time; the Ministry of Territorial Administration. The opposition challenged the results at the Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of the incumbent. The then president of the Supreme Court was infamously associated with the phrase ‘my hands are tied by the law’ because of shortcomings in the electoral code which did not grant the Court powers to annul a highly contentious presidential election (Gwaibi, 2018). With hindsight, the 1992 presidential election was seen as the turning point when Cameroonians, according to Nyamnjoh (1999, p. 114), “were made to understand that democracy is not necessarily having as president the person the majority wants.” This assessment was based on the widely held view that the election was won by the opposition SDF leader, John Fru Ndi, but declared in favour of the CPDM by the Supreme Court (Nkwi & Scopa, 2011). The next section will present details of 1992 and subsequent presidential elections in Cameroon, data was obtained primarily via secondary sources and presented using descriptive statistics, tables and percentages.

4.1 The 1992 Presidential Election

The information presented in table 1, below indicates that in 1992, the population of Cameroon was around 12,421,000 with approximately 8,500,000 eligible voters. Out of this number, 4,220,136 enrolled in the electoral list, while 4,279,864 did not register representing 50.4%. On polling day 2,451,811 (out of 4,220,136 enrolled) effectively cast their votes representing a voter turnout of 71.9%. Findings also indicate that 1,768,325 (out of 4,220,136 enrolled) failed to cast their votes on

election day representing 41.9% of registered voters. Finally, a total of 6,048,189 did not take part in the election representing 72.3 % of eligible voters (those who registered and never voted and those who never registered at all) representing a very high rate of voter abstention amongst Cameroonians that year.

Table 1. Details of the 1992 Presidential Election

Analytical components	Numbers & percentages
Total population	12,421,000
Total number of eligible voters	8,500,000
Total number of registered voters	4,220,136
Total number of vote cast	2,451,811
Percentage of voter turnout	71.9%
Total number of registered voters who did not vote	1,768,325
Percentage of registered voters who did not vote	41.9%
Total number of eligible voters who never registered	4,279,864
Percentage of eligible voters who never registered	50.4%
Total number of eligible voters who never took part in the election	6,048,189
Percentage of eligible voters who never took part in the election	72.3%

Source: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

4.2 The 1997 Presidential Election

The information presented in table 2 below, indicates that in 1997, the population of Cameroon was approximately 14,433,000 with an eligible voter population of approximately 10,599,982. Out of this number 4,718,093 enrolled on the electoral register, while 6, 379,964 did not register representing 73.4%. On polling day, 3,718,039 (out of 4,718,093 enrolled), effectively cast their votes representing a voter turnout of 87.8 %. Findings also indicate that 502,097 (out of 4,718,093 enrolled) failed to cast their votes on election day representing 11.9% of registered voters. Finally, a total of 6,881,943 eligible voters did not take part in the election representing 64.9% of eligible

voters (those who registered and never voted and those who never registered at all), representing a high rate of voter abstention.

Table 2. Details of the 1997 Presidential Election

Analytical components	Numbers & percentages
Total population	14,433,000
Total number of eligible voters	10,599,989
Total number of registered voters	4,718, 093
Total number of vote cast	3,718,039
Percentage of voter turnout	87.8%
Total number of registered voters who did not vote	502,097
Percentage of registered voters who did not vote	11.9%
Total number of eligible voters who never registered	6,379,864
Percentage of eligible voters who never registered	73.4%
Total number of eligible voters who never took part in the election	6,881,943
Percentage of eligible voters who never took part in the election	64.9%

Source: Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook

4.3 The 2004 Presidential Election

The information presented in table 3 below indicates that in 2004 the population of Cameroon was approximately 16,300,000 with an eligible voter population estimated at 12,400,000. Out of this number, 5,502, 161 enrolled in the electoral register while 6,897,839 did not register representing 55.62%. On polling day, 4,835, 898 (out of 5,502, 161 enrolled) effectively cast their votes representing a voter turnout of 82.2%. Findings also indicate that 666,263 (out of 5,502, 161 enrolled) failed to cast their votes representing 12.8% of registered voters. Finally, a total of 7,564,102 did not take part in the election representing 61% of eligible voters (those who registered and never voted and those who never registered at all), representing a high level of voter abstention.

Table 3. Details of the 2004 Presidential Election

Analytical components	Numbers & percentages
Total population	16,300,000
Total number of eligible voters	12,400,000
Total number of registered voters	5,502,161
Total number of vote cast	4,835,898
Percentage of voter turnout	82.2%
Total number of registered voters who did not vote	666,263
Percentage of registered voters who did not vote	12.8%
Total number of eligible voters who never registered	6,897,839
Percentage of eligible voters who never registered	55.62%
Total number of eligible voters who never took part in the election	7,564,102
Percentage of eligible voters who never took part in the election	61%

Source: Archives, Ministry of Territorial Administration, Cameroon

4.4 The 2011 Presidential Election

The information presented in table 4 below indicates that in 2011, the population of Cameroon was approximately 20,300,000 with an eligible voter population estimated at 15,000,000. Out of this number 7,251,434 enrolled on the election register while 7,748, 349 did not register representing 51.7%. On polling day, 4,835, 898 (out of 7,251,434 enrolled) effectively cast their votes representing a voter turnout of 68.8%. Findings also indicate that, 2,300, 217 out of (out of 7, 251,651 enrolled) failed to cast their votes representing 46.5% of registered voters. Finally, a total of 10,048, 566 representing 66% of eligible voters did not take part in the election (those who registered and never voted and those who never registered at all), representing a high level of voter abstention.

Table 4. Details of the 2011 Presidential Election

Analytical components	Numbers & percentages
Total population	20,030,000
Total number of eligible voters	15,000,000
Total number of registered voters	7,251,151
Total number of vote cast	4,951,434
Percentage of voter turnout	68.3%
Total number of registered voters who did not vote	2,300,271
Percentage of registered voters who did not vote	46.5%
Total number of eligible voters who never registered	7,748,349
Percentage of eligible voters who never registered	51.7%
Total number of eligible voters who never took part in the election	10,048,566
Percentage of eligible voters who never took part in the election	66%

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

4.5 The 2018 Presidential Election

The information presented in table 4 below indicates that in 2018, the population of Cameroon was approximately 25,216,000 people, with an eligible voter population of approximately 20,657,000. Out of this number, 6,667,754 enrolled on the election register representing 66.7%, while 1,332,246 did not register representing 53.85%. On polling day, a total of 3,979,651 (out of 6,667,754 enrolled) effectively cast their votes representing a voter turnout of 53.85%. Findings also indicate that, a total of 2,688,103 (out of 6,667,754 enrolled) failed to cast their votes representing 40.3% of registered voters. Finally, a total of 16,020,349 representing 79.6 % of eligible voters did not take part in the election (those who registered but never voted and those who did not register at all), representing a high level of voter abstention.

Table 5. Details of the 2018 Presidential Election

Analytical components	Numbers & percentages
Total population	25,216,000
Total number of eligible voters	20,657,000
Total number of registered voters	6,667,754
Total number of vote cast	3,979,651
Percentage of voter turnout	53.85%
Total number of registered voters who did not vote	2,688,103
Percentage of registered voters who did not vote	40.3%
Total number of eligible voters who never registered	13,332,246
Percentage of eligible voters who never registered	66.7%
Total number of eligible voters who never took part in the election	16,020,349
Percentage of eligible voters who never took part in the election	79.6%

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

5 Conclusion

The electoral arena in Cameroon has for several decades been marred by allegations of voting irregularities which has led to a steady decline in electoral participation across the board. As a result, the outcome of presidential elections held in Cameroon from 1992 to 2018 demonstrate that a significant portion of the eligible voting population abstained from the electoral process largely because of persistent allegations of fraud and other electoral malpractices, designed to entrench the current regime in place. Another presidential election took place in Cameroon in October 2025, and state officials in cahoots with the election management body ELECAM and the Constitutional Council employed the same old, tried and tested tactics to outwit the opposition and ensure victory for incumbent Paul Biya who has now secured an eight term in office. Just like all previous presidential polls, the losing candidate Issa Tchiroma challenged the results proclaimed by the authorities and declared himself the president elect. This was followed by a few days of violent

street protests that was put down by the security forces and president Biya was subsequently sworn in for another seven-year term of office.

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