

# Protests sweep Cameroon after 92-year-old Paul Biya declared president again

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29 October 2025

Mass protests have erupted across Cameroon after the Constitutional Council announced that Paul Biya, the world's oldest head of state at ninety-two years and in power since 1982, has secured yet another presidential term. His new seven-year mandate would keep him in office until 2032, when he would be 99 years old.

The Court, dominated by the regime's supporters, ratified an election denounced as fraudulent, provoking mass social opposition. In cities across the country, demonstrators have poured into the streets to denounce the electoral farce. Reports of intimidation, ballot-stuffing, and suppression were rampant. Opposition candidates have been barred from standing. Official figures show that registered voters were about 7,845,622 and turnout was 57 percent. In the Anglophone regions of the country, known by the English-speaking separatists as Ambazonia, voter turnout was among the lowest in the country according to reports, as separatists enforced an election boycott.

The official outcome claims that Biya won with 53.7 percent of the vote, ahead of Tchiroma Bakary with 35.2 percent. The other eight candidates each received less than one percent of the vote. Bakary quickly denounced the announcement of Biya's win, telling French news agency AFP that "there was no election; it was rather a masquerade. We won unequivocally".

Authorities say at least four people have been gunned down by security forces. The deaths happened on Sunday in Douala, the economic capital, as hundreds of people took to the streets in several cities including Garoua and Maroua. "I am ready to stake my life to defend my vote. I voted for Tchiroma because I want change," Oumarou Bouba, a 27-year-old trader in Maroua, said to RFI.

Max Ndongmo, an inhabitant of Douala, told *AfricaNews*, "I was crushed when I heard the news about the results, it just crushed me. I will be honest with you, it was so shocking to me that I almost broke my TV. What they are doing and have been doing is just hypocrisy. To this government, I want to say, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, but you need to stop."

The political crisis could fuel the kind of Gen Z mass protests that have erupted in Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Angola and Kenya against soaring food prices, inequality, mass youth unemployment and corruption from the parasitical elite.

For millions, Biya's "victory" is the continuation of a nightmare that began in 1982, when he first assumed power, before most Cameroonians were born. His installation in power followed the

defeat of the international upsurge of working class struggles in the period 1968-75 which allowed the bourgeoisie in both the imperialist centres and the colonial world to stabilise its rule and launch a global offensive against the working class. Keynesian national economic regulations and import substitution policies were replaced with pro-business monetarist policies.

Facing an economic collapse in the late 1980s, Biya's government imposed International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programmes that slashed public spending by nearly a fifth, froze wages, and dismantled large parts of the state sector. Public enterprises that once provided employment and basic services were sold off at knock-down prices, beginning in the 1990s and accelerating in the early 2000s, when key utilities such as the national electricity company SONEL were privatised. These measures, deepened unemployment, rural impoverishment, and social decay.

The most recent International Monetary Fund programmes, renewed in 2017 and extended through the current 2025 framework, continue austerity, "rationalisation" of state-owned firms, and cuts to public investment. The result has been the systematic transfer of wealth from the Cameroonian masses to international creditors and domestic elites.

The political crisis is set to intersect with the two major insurgencies. One is the decade-long insurgency in the Anglophone west by bourgeois separatists. The second is in the Far North, where Islamist Boko Haram has carried out attacks. In both cases, the state has responded with brutal force. The English-speaking regions, once promised autonomy within a federal structure, have been subjected to collective punishment and economic strangulation. Entire towns have been razed, thousands killed, and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Underlying this crisis is the deep social misery produced by decades of capitalist underdevelopment. Cameroon is a social powder keg. Real unemployment and underemployment reach nearly 40 percent, forcing millions into precarious informal work and bare survival. At least 23 percent of the population live on less than US \$2.15 a day, and when deprivation in education, health and living conditions are included, the share rises to more than 40 percent. The rural masses face the worst conditions, with over 56 percent counted among the poor in contrast to around 21 percent in urban areas.

On the other end, the rot at the top has become almost surreal. Biya, at 92, spends most of his time in the luxury Intercontinental

Hotel in Geneva—with bills for him and his entourage estimated at around \$65 million—or discreet locations around the Swiss lakeside city, from where he rules by decree through his proxies. The real machinery of power is handled by a narrow inner circle around the presidency, led by the flamboyant First Lady Chantal Biya and Secretary-General Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, who was granted sweeping presidential authority in 2019.

Cameroon possesses vast natural wealth. Offshore oil and gas fields along the Gulf of Guinea provide a major share of export revenues, while the country's fertile lands yield cocoa, coffee, bananas, cotton, and palm oil for global markets. Its dense forests supply tropical hardwoods, and beneath the soil lie rich deposits of bauxite, iron ore, cobalt, gold, and diamonds. Hydroelectric rivers, notably the Sanaga and Lom, give Cameroon immense energy potential.

Control over these resources lies in the hands of a few multinational giants that throw crumbs at Biya and his entourage. In the oil and gas sector, French conglomerate TotalEnergies and Anglo-British firms like Perenco and Victoria Oil & Gas dominate, working closely with the state-owned SNH under opaque contracts. Timber exploitation is led by companies such as Rougier, Wijma, and Chinese logging groups that have devastated large parts of the southern rainforest. In mining, the Sundance Resources project at Mbalam-Nabeba and the Camalco bauxite venture reflect growing Australian and Chinese interests, while Canadian companies have stakes in gold and cobalt extraction. The agricultural export trade is monopolised by agribusiness multinationals like Société des Plantations du Haut-Penja, controlled by the French group Compagnie Fruitière, which dominates the banana industry, alongside a handful of European cocoa traders. These firms extract enormous profits through cheap labour, tax exemptions, and repatriated earnings.

The state survives through repression and imperialist support. Biya's regime has long relied on French imperialism, which continues to dominate the economy, the CFA franc currency, and the commanding heights of finance and trade.

In recent years Washington has moved aggressively to expand its influence, viewing the aged autocrat as a convenient instrument for securing US strategic interests in Central Africa and the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea. Under the banner of "stability" and "security cooperation," Washington has deepened military and intelligence ties with Yaoundé, deploying advisers and carrying out joint operations against Anglophone separatist leaders both inside Cameroon and abroad.

In September 2024, when Biya travelled to Switzerland for medical treatment, his security was coordinated by American advisers. In recent months, the new AFRICOM commander, Dagvin Anderson, has met Biya, Defence Minister Joseph Beti Assomo, and the leadership of the Rapid Intervention Battalion, signalling a renewed military partnership.

The electoral farce has exposed the emptiness of the capitalist opposition. Figures like Issa Tchiroma, seventy-nine years old, parade themselves as alternatives but are products of the same rotten system. Tchiroma's career has unfolded entirely within the structures of Biya's regime. A former minister of transport under Biya in the early 1990s, he later served as minister of

communication and government spokesperson from 2009 to 2019, loyally defending the dictatorship's every abuse.

Tchiroma's campaign rhetoric against "corruption" and "bad governance" recycles the fake moralism of a privileged bureaucrat. He represents a section of the ruling class seeking to reshuffle the spoils and a negotiated truce with Anglophone elites that would integrate them into the existing system of plunder.

The crisis in Cameroon is the latest example of the failure of bourgeois nationalists in the former colonial countries. Forty years of Biya's rule have shown that the national bourgeoisie cannot resolve the fundamental problems of the country. They cannot develop the economy in the interests of the masses, end imperialist domination or unify the working people across ethnic and linguistic lines. Every attempt at reform has collapsed into corruption, and every opposition movement that bases itself on capitalist property relations becomes, sooner or later, a tool of imperialism or of one or another faction of the elite.

The masses are ready to fight. Workers, students, and unemployed youth have taken to the streets in defiance of curfews, police repression, and internet shutdowns. But spontaneous revolt, without organisation and programme, risks exhaustion or defeat. The regime will attempt to crush dissent, while imperialism and its local allies will seek to channel the movement into negotiations, commissions, or another "transitional" trap.

What is needed is the conscious organisation of the working class as an independent political force. The Cameroonian proletariat, regardless of language or tribe, is the only class capable of uniting the nation on a socialist basis. The strategic axis that must guide this fight is Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution provides the key.

In semi-colonial countries like Cameroon, the bourgeoisie is too weak, dependent, and cowardly to accomplish even the basic democratic and national tasks: land reform, genuine independence, national unity, and industrial development. These tasks fall to the working class, which must take power in alliance with the rural masses. Only by expropriating the oligarchs, breaking with imperialism, and reorganising the economy on socialist lines can Cameroon emerge from its nightmare. But this fight cannot be won within national borders. The same forces of global capitalism that strangle Cameroon exploit workers everywhere. The struggle in Cameroon must therefore be consciously internationalist, linking up with the workers and oppressed across Africa and the world.



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