



Original Research Article

Discursive Construction of Power, Identity, and National Future in the 2025 Cameroonian Presidential Election Campaigns: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Candidate Manifestos and Political Rhetoric

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Abstract: The 2025 presidential election in Cameroon unfolded against a backdrop of significant socio-political tension, economic disparity, and ongoing debates over national cohesion, particularly concerning the Anglophone crisis. This article thus employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the major candidates in the October 2025 election discursively constructed power, national identity, and the vision for Cameroon's future. Through an analysis of manifestos, campaign rhetoric, and political statements, particularly those of incumbent Paul Biya, opposition leaders Joshua Osih, disqualified candidate Maurice Kamto (analyzed as a discursive participant), and youth aspirant Hiram Iyodi, this study identifies three dominant discursive strategies. The incumbent used a '*guardianship discourse*,' framing power as a stabilizing force based on continuity and peace. The opposition employed '*rupture and reform*' narratives, using federalism and anti-corruption as signifiers of a new national identity. A third, emergent discourse centered on '*youthful sovereignty*,' sought to challenge the gerontocratic status quo by reframing governance through the lens of generational justice and economic decolonization. The findings suggest that the 2025 campaigns represent a critical moment where the "*politics of the belly*" (neopatrimonialism) is discursively contested by emerging liberal and radical sovereigntist ideologies.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Cameroonian Presidential Elections 2025, Political Rhetoric, Power Legitimation, National Identity, Presidential Manifestos.

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1-INTRODUCTION

Political campaigns are not merely contests of policy but sophisticated struggles over meaning and reality, where language serves as the primary tool for constructing and projecting power (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993). As it is said, the business of politics is carried out mainly through language (Chilton, 2004). Presidential election campaigns are critical periods where competing

political visions are articulated, and the very fabric of national identity and power relations is negotiated or renegotiated. So is the case with the Cameroonian 2025 presidential election campaigns. In a dominant-party state such as Cameroon, every electoral cycle is not merely a contest for administrative control but a battleground for the legitimacy of political power itself. The 2025 presidential election, held on October 12, was particularly significant. With President Paul Biya, Africa's longest-ruling head of state, seeking

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another mandate at the age of 92, the political atmosphere was charged with questions of succession, generational transition, and the resolution of the protracted Anglophone conflict that has claimed thousands of lives since 2016.

The campaigns for the 2025 election provided a rich corpus of texts where candidates did not just propose policies; they actively constructed reality. They defined what “Cameroon” means, who belongs to it, who has the right to lead it, and what future awaits it. This article argues that language in the 2025 election served three primary functions: (1) to legitimize or delegitimize existing power structures, (2) to negotiate the fractured “Cameroonian” identity amidst separatist tensions and regional disparities, and (3) to project competing chronotopes (time-space configurations) of the nation’s future. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998) as a theoretical and analytical framework, this study analyses primary sources-campaign manifestos and media reports, from the 2025 election period (September 27 to October 11, 2025), focusing on the discursive strategies of major political actors: Paul Biya (CPDM), Joshua Osih (SDF), Maurice Kamto (MRC)- treated as a discursive participant via disqualification narratives rather than an official candidate, and Hiram Iyodi (FDC) with his pan-Africanist rhetoric.

The central thesis of this article is that while the “*discourse of continuity*” successfully secured electoral victory for the incumbent, the “*discourse of rupture*” and the emergent “*discourse of youthful sovereignty*” fundamentally altered the terms of political debate in Cameroon, introducing federalism and economic decolonization as legitimate and unavoidable topics for future elections.

2. Contextual Background: Cameroon’s Political Landscape Before 2025

To understand the discursive strategies, candidate positioning, and voter grievances that shaped the 2025 Cameroonian presidential election, it is necessary to first examine two deeply interconnected features of the country’s pre-2025 political terrain: the enduring logic of presidential electoral competition since the reintroduction of multiparty politics, and the protracted Anglophone Crisis that by 2025 had fundamentally destabilised the nation’s Anglophone regions. The former reveals a pattern of incumbent dominance, opposition fragmentation, and contested electoral legitimacy, while the latter represents the most violent challenge to national unity in six decades. These elements together form the indispensable backdrop against which all campaign rhetoric, whether invoking stability, change, federalism, or secession, must be understood.

2.1 Historical Overview of Presidential Elections in Cameroon

Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990, Cameroon’s presidential elections have been consistently won by Paul Biya. Elections have been characterized by opposition fragmentation, allegations of fraud, legal challenges, and the strategic use of state resources for incumbent campaigns. The 2025 election followed this pattern but with heightened tension due to Biya’s advanced age and the unresolved Anglophone crisis.

2.2 The Anglophone Crisis (2016-2025)

The Anglophone Crisis, rooted in the colonial legacies of British and French rule and the systematic marginalisation of Cameroon’s English-speaking minority by a Francophone-dominated state, represents the most significant challenge to national unity since reunification in 1961 (Fonjong & Takougang, 2024). The immediate spark came in October 2016, when peaceful protests by lawyers and teachers against the imposition of French-speaking judges and teachers in Anglophone regions were met with tear gas, arrests, lethal military force, and a five-month Internet Shutdown (Frogameni, 2025). Rather than quelling dissent, the government’s heavy-handed response radicalised moderates, and by late 2017, separatist groups had unilaterally declared an independent “Ambazonia,” transforming the crisis into an armed insurrection. The conflict rapidly escalated, with government forces deploying elite units accused of human rights abuses and separatist groups resorting to kidnappings, extortion, and attacks on civilians (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2025).

Between 2019 and 2025, the crisis evolved into a protracted humanitarian catastrophe. Around 900,000 people were internally displaced, 70,000 fled to Nigeria, and more than 6,000 lives were lost. (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2025). The education and health sectors in the North West and South West regions collapsed: an estimated 700,000 children remained out of school, with separatist groups threatening violence against those who defied school boycotts, while healthcare facilities were systematically attacked (HumAngle, 2025). Despite several peace initiatives, including a 2019 Major National Dialogue and Swiss-facilitated talks, the government under President Paul Biya combined military repression with a facade of dialogue, leveraging geopolitical rivalries (notably with France and Russia) to avoid meaningful negotiation or external pressure (Genocide Watch, 2025; Nikolovski & Walther, 2025). By 2025, the conflict had become a forgotten civil war, characterised by fragmented separatist groups, widespread banditry, and a deepening governance vacuum in Anglophone regions (Belgian

Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, 2025).

As the October 2025 presidential election approached, the Anglophone Crisis took on new urgency. Separatist groups called for an election boycott and intensified attacks, including ambushes that killed soldiers weeks before the vote, while the government escalated crackdowns on dissent (Folefac, 2025). The violence and fear of participation in Anglophone regions threatened to disenfranchise nearly 20% of Cameroon's population. Critically, the crisis remains fundamentally linguistic in character: grievances over language policy, access to English-speaking officials, and the erosion of Anglophone identity have become central axes of the conflict (Frogameni, 2025). For the 2025 presidential campaigns, how candidates discursively construct power, identity, and the nation's future, whether through calls for unity, federalism, secession, or military resolution, cannot be understood without reference to this decade-long crisis and its devastating human toll. The crisis formed the backdrop for all 2025 campaign discourse, even when not explicitly named.

2.3 Biya's Long Incumbency (1982-present)

President Paul Biya's 44-year rule (as of 2026), one of the longest of any non-royal head of state in Africa, deeply shapes the discursive construction of power, identity, and national future in the 2025 Cameroonian presidential election campaigns. Biya assumed power in November 1982 after Ahmadou Ahidjo's resignation and has consolidated an authoritarian system marked by personalized state control, elite co-optation, and opposition suppression. His tenure persists through constitutional changes, like the 2008 term limit removal, electoral controversies, and state resource allocation favoring loyalists. For Anglophone Cameroonians, Biya's centralization embodies Francophone dominance that sparked the 2016 protests and armed conflict; his limited engagement with reforms has prolonged the crisis. At 92 years old in 2025, seeking an eighth term, Biya's campaign rhetoric emphasizes stability, unity, and his 'legacy,' portraying change as a risk to territorial integrity amid separatist threats.

Within the context of the discourse analysis of 2025 campaign rhetoric in this study, Biya's incumbency serves as a core theme. Official candidates echo his continuity narrative through "positive programs," while Maurice Kamto's excluded position fuels critical discourse blaming regime manipulation for electoral flaws and opposition fragmentation. Thus, Biya's long rule becomes a discursive battleground between entrenched power and demands for democratic renewal.

2.4 Electoral Framework and Disqualification Controversies

The 2025 Cameroonian presidential election operated within a legal framework anchored in the 1972 Constitution (as amended in 1996 and 2008) and the 2012 Electoral Code, which establishes a single-round, first-past-the-post system for a renewable seven-year presidential term. Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), created in 2006 as an ostensibly independent body, oversees voter registration, candidate validation, polling, and result tabulation, with the Constitutional Council serving as the final arbiter of disputes. However, ELECAM's independence has long been questioned by opposition parties due to CPDM-dominated appointments, rendering it susceptible to regime influence, a critique echoed in pre-2025 reform demands. ELECAM approved 13 of 83 candidates on July 26, including Paul Biya (CPDM), Issa Tchiroma, Joshua Osih (SDF), and Hiram Iyodi (FDC), while rejecting others.

The most contentious issue was the disqualification of Maurice Kamto (CRM), barred by ELECAM for "plurality of investitures" and sponsorship irregularities, a ruling affirmed by the Constitutional Council on August 5 despite his appeals. Kamto denounced his disqualification as a premeditated "political plot" by the CPDM, implicating ELECAM, the judiciary, and even UN facilitation efforts, framing it as procedural manipulation to neutralize his challenge. Analysts and Human Rights Watch (2025) viewed it as a regime tactic to sideline Biya's strongest rival, who claimed a 2018 victory, reducing the race to a formality amid Anglophone crisis disruptions.

Within this study's analysis of political discourse in Cameroon's 2025 election, the electoral framework and disqualifications exemplify discursive strategies of exclusion and blame-shifting. Official candidates like Biya promoted "*positive programs*" of continuity, while Kamto's negative rhetoric, positioning himself as a victim of "*flawed processes*," transferred responsibility for opposition fragmentation onto the regime. This relationship, compounded by the Anglophone Crisis's destabilizing effect on voter turnout in Northwest/Southwest regions, underlines how institutional controversies fueled Kamto's critical framing, portraying the election as inherently illegitimate and reinforcing narratives of authoritarian entrenchment.

2.5 Emergence of Youth and Pan-Africanist Movements

The years leading up to the 2025 Cameroonian presidential election saw intensified youth-led civil society activism demanding political change, driven by high unemployment, generational

exclusion, and frustration with Paul Biya's long rule. Post-election protests in October 2025 across Douala, Yaoundé, Bafoussam, and Bamenda drew thousands of young people contesting results, advocating electoral transparency, and calling for generational turnover, amplified through social media campaigns and civic workshops. Earlier actions in the 2020s, such as the #FreeKamto demonstrations, faced suppression but sustained discourse on generational justice, economic opportunity, anti-corruption, and democratic renewal, indirectly shaping opposition rhetoric.

Pan-Africanist sentiments also emerged as an undercurrent, with youth framing Cameroon's crises, including the Anglophone conflict, as legacies of neo-colonialism and French influence, invoking figures like Thomas Sankara to demand self-determination. These movements did not field formal candidates but exerted transversal pressure on the 2025 campaigns.

In this study's analysis, youth activism complicated the regime-opposition binary. Official candidates like Paul Biya (CPDM) and Issa Tchiroma (FSNC) emphasized stability and "positive programs" of continuity, while Maurice Kamto's excluded critiques, blaming regime manipulation for opposition fragmentation, resonated with youth calls for change. Amid Anglophone Crisis disruptions, these dynamics enriched campaign narratives, projecting competing visions of national renewal across linguistic and regional divides.

3-Review of Related Literature

Identity in political discourse is often understood as a dynamic, relational construct. Drawing on the work of Hall (1996) and Benwell & Stokoe (2006), political manifestos and speeches do not simply express pre-existing national or partisan identities; they actively "perform" and "interpellate" voters into specific subject positions such as 'the responsible citizen,' 'the marginalized indigene,' and 'the guardian of stability.' Furthermore, the discursive construction of a national future operates as what Fairclough (2013) terms a 'discourse of unfulfilled potential,' wherein political actors project competing chronotopes (time-space configurations) that promise a resolution to present crises. This theoretical triad: power, identity, and future, forms the prism through which Cameroonian electoral rhetoric will be analyzed.

Early studies of political discourse disproportionately focused on Western liberal democracies, emphasizing rational argumentation and issue-based deliberation (Habermas, 1989). However, scholars of African political communication have challenged this model, highlighting the

centrality of clientelism, ethnic mobilization, and 'Big Man' rhetoric (Ibelema, 2014; Schaffer, 2015). For instance, Chilwa (2018) demonstrates that in Nigerian election campaigns, discursive strategies often prioritize ethnic solidarity and the vilification of opponents over substantive policy debates. Similarly, Mufwene (2016) notes that post-colonial African leaders frequently employ 'discourses of autochthony' (claims to original land rights) to legitimize political authority while marginalizing 'allochthonous' (non-native) rivals. Importantly, research has shown that presidential manifestos in Africa function less as binding policy contracts and more as 'performative pledges,' symbolic acts designed to invoke trust in the candidate's persona rather than in specific legislative outcomes (Obono & Nwosu, 2019). This study builds on this body of work by examining whether and how these pan-African patterns manifest in the specific institutional and linguistic context of Cameroon.

Cameroon is often characterized as a 'hybrid regime,' combining formal democratic institutions (multi-party elections, a constitution) with authoritarian practices (state control of media, electoral manipulation, and suppression of dissent) (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Political discourse in such contexts follows distinct logics. According to Lawson (2019), incumbent parties in hybrid regimes deploy a 'grammar of stability,' framing opposition as a threat to national unity and economic security. This strategy often entails the discursive construction of the incumbent as the indispensable 'father of the nation,' a trope prevalent in many post-independence African states (Médard, 2015).

In Cameroon specifically, Cameroonian scholars such as Nshom and Mforteh (2025) have examined dissenting voices in political discourse from 2019 to 2022, revealing how Biya's speeches employ control tactics like resilience and authority to suppress opposition, often framing change as destabilizing amid the Anglophone Crisis. Similarly, Fornkwa (2015) applied CDA to newspaper coverage of the 2015 state budget, uncovering ideological power structures in fiscal rhetoric that naturalize elite dominance through lexical choices. However, these studies rely on rhetorical or corpus-assisted approaches rather than full CDA micro-analysis (e.g., modal verbs, presuppositions), missing the grammatical mechanisms that legitimize authoritarian continuity in presidential campaigns. This study addresses that gap by dissecting the "unspoken" assumptions and implicit threats in 2025 candidate manifestos and rhetoric.

No analysis of Cameroonian political discourse is complete without addressing the foundational cleavage between the Anglophone

(North-West and South-West) and Francophone (eight other regions) subsystems. Following the country's reunification in 1961, a persistent discourse of 'national unity' has been deployed by the state to suppress claims for federalism or secession (Fossung & Tamanji, 2015). Recent scholarship by Ambani (2020) and Nkwi (2021) shows that during election periods, presidential candidates from the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) strategically use inclusive pronouns ('we,' 'our nation') to mask Francophone hegemony, while opposition Anglophone candidates employ victimization discourses ('marginalisation,' 'forgotten sons'). Nevertheless, extant research has largely treated identity as a fixed ethnic or linguistic category. Drawing on discursive psychology (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), this study will instead examine how identity is "flexibly deployed," how a single candidate may claim a 'national' identity in one paragraph and a 'regional' identity in another, depending on the audience. The literature currently lacks a systematic CDA of how campaign manifestos oscillate between these competing identity frames.

The discursive construction of the future is a relatively underexplored dimension of political discourse studies. Following Koselleck's (2004) concept of 'horizons of expectation,' political rhetoric often mobilizes three temporal frames: *progressive* (a break from the past toward a promised renewal), *restorative* (a return to an idealized past), and *precautionary* (a future to be avoided through fear of decline). Research on Latin American and European campaigns has shown that populist leaders favor progressive futures ('reclaim the nation'), while incumbents favor precautionary futures ('don't risk change') (Moffitt, 2016).

In the Cameroonian context, preliminary observations suggest a bifurcation: ruling party manifestos may construct a future of 'emergence' (Cameroon Vision 2035), a technocratic, state-led modernization narrative, while opposition manifestos may construct a future of 'rectification' (correcting historical injustices, particularly regarding the Anglophone crisis). However, no empirical CDA has systematically compared these future-constructions across multiple candidates in a single election cycle. This study will fill that void by examining the lexical choices, metaphors (e.g., 'ship of state,' 'dark tunnel'), and argumentation schemes (e.g., threat-appeal vs. hope-appeal) that shape voters' temporal imaginaries.

In summary, the literature confirms that political campaigns are sites of intense discursive struggle over power, identity, and futurity. While African political discourse studies have grown substantially, and while Cameroon has received some

attention regarding ethnic rhetoric and the Anglophone crisis, significant gaps remain:

First off, most existing studies use content or thematic analysis. For instance, Nshom and Ambe (2025) identify key socio-political themes and rhetorical strategies of control in Biya's speeches (2019–2022), while catchphrase analyses of end-of-year addresses highlight stability motifs through recurring patterns. For instance, Nshom and Ambe (2025) identify key socio-political themes and rhetorical strategies of control in Biya's speeches (2019–2022), while catchphrase analyses of end-of-year addresses highlight stability motifs through recurring patterns. Mediatization research on the 2018 campaigns similarly examines thematic adaptations to media via interviews, without linguistic micro-scrutiny. Few other studies employ the full apparatus of CDA (e.g., Fairclough's three-dimensional model) to examine intertextuality, presupposition, and modality in manifestos. Closest examples include Fornkwa's (2015) lexical CDA of state budget coverage and discursive studies of minority representations in speeches (which blend CDA with postcolonial frames but stop short of manifesto-specific intertextuality).

Also, studies often analyze either the ruling party or the opposition but rarely comparing multiple manifestos from the same election cycle using a unified framework. The discursive construction of the *national future* (as distinct from past grievances) has been neglected in Cameroonian political discourse research. No study to date has systematically integrated the three axes of power, identity, and future into a single CDA of Cameroonian election campaigns.

This research article addresses these gaps by conducting a critical discourse analysis of candidate manifestos and key rhetorical speeches from the most recent Cameroonian presidential election, examining how competing visions of power, collective identity, and national destiny are linguistically enacted and contested.

4-Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis and the Post-Colonial African State

4.1 Foundations of CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis, as developed by Norman Fairclough (1995) and Teun van Dijk (1998), rests on the premise that language is not a neutral conduit of information but a social practice that constitutes, reproduces, and challenges social realities, power relations, and ideologies. Discourse, in this view, is simultaneously text, discursive practice (production, distribution, consumption), and sociocultural practice. Analyzing political campaigns through this lens requires attending to what is said,

how it is said, who is allowed to say it, and under what historical conditions it is received.

4.2 Power, Ideology, and Hegemony in Electoral Discourse

Electoral discourse is inherently about power. Candidates seek not merely votes but consent; what Gramsci (1971, pp. 12-13) conceptualizes as hegemony—a process whereby the governed come to see the governors' authority as natural, inevitable, or preferable to alternatives. This consent is not imposed but actively produced through language, making electoral discourse a central site for the reproduction of political legitimacy. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the work of Fairclough (2013), reveals how lexical choices (e.g., “peace” vs. “repression”), grammatical structures (active vs. passive voice), and narrative frames (e.g., “father of the nation”) work to naturalize specific power arrangements. For instance, the passive voice can obscure agency in state violence (“protesters were dispersed”), while active constructions highlight government benevolence (“the president delivered aid”) (van Dijk, 2006, pp. 365-366). Such linguistic mechanisms render contingent power relations as common-sense realities.

In authoritarian-leaning or dominant-party systems like Cameroon's, electoral discourse becomes a contradictory terrain where democratic language (e.g., “free and fair elections,” “rule of law”) coexists with neopatrimonial logic (e.g., distribution of state resources to loyal regions). This hybridity reflects what Mbembe (2001) terms the “banality of power” in the postcolony, where electoral rhetoric blends formal-legal procedures with clientelist practices. Research on Cameroon's 2018 presidential election shows that ruling-party discourse framed the opposition as “foreign-backed destabilizers” while presenting Biya's regime as the guarantor of “peace” and “national unity”, a strategy that mobilizes postcolonial anxieties about fragmentation (Amnesty International, 2019, pp. 8-9). Ideologically, such discourse draws on what Wodak (2015) calls “strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation,” constructing the incumbent as a paternalistic figure and opponents as threats to order. In essence, electoral discourse in neopatrimonial contexts does not simply reflect power asymmetries but actively recycles them, using the very vocabulary of democracy to legitimize its suspension (Fairclough, 2013, p. 98).

4.3 Post-Colonial Political Communication in Africa

Scholars of African politics have long noted the persistence of what Jean-François Bayart (2009) termed the “politics of the belly,” neopatrimonialism, where political office is understood as a means of

personal accumulation and redistribution to clients. In such contexts, political discourse often straddles the line between modern democratic rhetoric and traditional authority. For the incumbent, discourse frequently relies on what Max Weber called “traditional authority” (the leader as elder, father, or chief), repackaged as stability. For the opposition, discourse is a tool of resistance, often invoking “legal-rational” authority (constitutionalism, rule of law, meritocracy) to challenge the status quo. The 2025 campaigns show a distinct evolution: the emergence of “economic decolonization” as a discursive tool. This aligns with a growing pan-African sentiment among younger voters who view the CFA franc, centralized energy grids, and raw material export economies as vestiges of colonial control rather than technical policy choices.

4.4 Key Analytical Categories

This article operationalizes CDA through three specific analytical lenses: *lexical choice and empty signifiers*, *chronotopes*, and *identity construction*.

First, *lexical choice and empty signifiers* examines words such as “peace,” “unity,” and “development” that carry massive positive connotations but are rarely defined concretely; their power lies precisely in their vagueness. Second, *chronotopes* (Bakhtin, 1981) refers to the specific configurations of time and space embedded in political discourse, asking whether a candidate promises a future that is an extension of the present (continuity), a break from the past (rupture), or a return to a mythic past (restoration). Third, *identity construction* analyzes how discourse positions the speaker (as father, reformer, or engineer) and the voter (as child, agent, consumer, or citizen), since these positionings imply specific rights, duties, and relationships.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis design. It is interpretive rather than purely quantitative, seeking to uncover the ideological assumptions and power relations embedded in political texts.

5.2 Corpus Selection Criteria

In selecting the corpus for this study, I prioritized documents that represented the clearest divides based on three criteria: (1) official or verified campaign materials, (2) relevance to the 2025 electoral cycle, and (3) representation of distinct political positions. The corpus includes four categories of materials. First, *Official manifestos*, including Paul Biya's 11-point manifesto published in *L'Action* (September 28, 2025), policy statements

from Joshua Osih's SDF campaign, and Hiram Iyodi's platform as reported in multiple outlets. Second, *Campaign speeches and rally transcripts* drawn from coverage by the *Cameroon News Agency*, *Africa24 TV*, and *Cameroon Tribune*. Third, *media coverage and analysis* of candidate strategies, voter reactions, and electoral logistics. Fourth, *Electoral results*, specifically the official data from the October 2025 election published in *Cameroon Tribune* (October 28, 2025).

It is worth noting that this study analyzes the discourse of selected *political actors who actively campaigned during the official campaign period (September 27 to October 11, 2025)*, regardless of their final status on the ballot. Maurice Kamto is included not as an official presidential candidate. His candidacy was invalidated by Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) prior to the vote. He is included as a *discursive participant* whose campaign statements, disqualification narrative, and "vote freely" directive significantly shaped opposition discourse and voter behavior. Excluding Kamto would omit a central voice in the 2025 campaign conversation. However, the analysis clearly distinguishes between official candidates (Biya, Osih, Iyodi, Tchiroma) and discursive participants (Kamto). This distinction is maintained throughout the findings and discussion sections. The campaign period analyzed runs from September 27 (official campaign opening) to October 11 (eve of the election) 2025.

5.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed Fairclough's three-stage model: *textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and sociocultural practice analysis*.

It begins with *textual analysis*, which involves the examination of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and structure of manifestos and speeches. It then proceeds to *discursive practice analysis*, which considered how texts were produced (by campaign teams), distributed (via state media, social media, and rallies), and consumed (by different audiences, including rural versus urban and Francophone versus Anglophone populations). Finally, *sociocultural practice analysis* situates the discourse within Cameroon's political history, the Anglophone crisis, economic conditions, and regional dynamics.

5.4 Researcher Positionality and Limitations

This analysis is conducted from an external academic perspective. Limitations include reliance on translated or reported speech for some candidates, limited access to closed-door campaign strategy sessions, and the impossibility of measuring reception effects (how actual voters interpreted the discourse) without original survey research. Future reception studies are recommended.

5.5. Key Political Actors in the 2025 Campaign Discourse

This study analyzes four major discursive actors who shaped the 2025 campaign conversation. It is worth noting here that this selection prioritizes discursive contrast over electoral performance, capturing elite vs. reformist vs. separatist-adjacent rhetoric. They are divided into two categories: *official candidates* who appeared on the final ballot, and one *discursive participant* who was disqualified but remained rhetorically influential.

Among the official candidates, the first is Paul Biya (CPDM), the incumbent since 1982 seeking an eighth term, whose campaign slogan implied "*Together, we continue*." The second is Joshua Osih (SDF), the standard bearer of the historic opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF), who centered his campaign on federalism. The third is Hiram Iyodi (FDC), at 38 the youngest candidate and leader of the Fight for Democracy and Change, whose campaign focused on "*Afro Social Liberalism*" and economic sovereignty. The fourth is Issa Tchiroma (FSNC), a late entrant who secured 35.19% of the vote. He is included in electoral analysis but receives limited discursive analysis due to his late entry and limited published manifesto. Beyond these official candidates, Maurice Kamto (MRC) is treated as a discursive participant. Kamto, the 2018 runner up and leader of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, was disqualified by ELECAM prior to the election on procedural grounds. Despite, or because of, this disqualification, he remained a significant discursive actor throughout the campaign period. His statements, particularly the directive to "*vote freely in good conscience*," shaped opposition voter behavior and framed the election as illegitimate. This study includes Kamto not as an equivalent official candidate, but as a critical voice from the margins of the formal campaign, whose rhetoric reveals the mechanisms of political exclusion in Cameroon's electoral process.

Table 1: Presidential Candidates and Discursive Actors in the 2025 Cameroonian Election Campaign

Political Actor	Political Party	Status in 2025 Election	Political Role	Discourse Type	Value for CDA
Paul Biya	CPDM (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement)	Official candidate (incumbent)	President of Cameroon since 1982; the longest-ruling head of state in Africa	Guardianship / Continuity Discourse	Reveals how incumbents in dominant-party systems use "empty signifiers" (peace, unity, stability) and paternalistic framing to naturalize prolonged rule. Demonstrates the discursive construction of the voter as a dependent child and the future as an extended present.
Joshua Osih	SDF (Social Democratic Front)	Official candidate (opposition)	Member of Parliament; former SDF Vice-President; standard-bearer of the historic opposition party	Rupture / Reform Discourse (Federalist)	Illustrates how opposition actors reframe national problems from leadership failure to structural failure. Shows the discursive power of federalism as an alternative chronotope (ruptured future). Demonstrates construction of citizen as active agent rather than passive recipient.
Hiram Iyodi	FDC (Fight for Democracy and Change)	Official candidate (youth / outsider)	Youngest candidate (age 38); political newcomer; engineer by training	Youthful Sovereignty / Economic Decolonization Discourse	Reveals the emergence of a pan-Africanist, anti-neocolonial lexicon in mainstream electoral politics. Demonstrates how "technocratic morality" (competence over ethnicity) challenges neopatrimonialism. Shows the discursive construction of the "decolonized youth" as a new political identity.
Maurice Kamto	MRC (Cameroon Renaissance Movement)	Discursive participant (disqualified from ballot)	2018 presidential runner-up; lawyer; former minister; opposition leader	Protest / Political Exclusion Discourse	Provides critical insight into how political exclusion generates counter-discourse. Reveals the strategy of "conditional loyalty" and protest-as-absence. Demonstrates that what is <i>excluded</i> from official campaign discourse is as analytically valuable as what is included. Shows how disqualification can be discursively transformed into a critique of regime legitimacy.
Issa Tchiroma	(Independent / late entrant)	Official candidate (late entrant)	Former government spokesperson; veteran politician	Undefined / Late Emergence Discourse	Limited CDA value due to late entry and lack of published manifesto. His 35.19% vote share, however, indicates the existence of a protest vote constituency not captured by other opposition discourses. Suggests need for further research on late-emerging candidates in dominant-party systems.

Source: Author's own compilation

6. Findings: Discursive Strategies in the 2025 Campaigns

The table below provides an analytical summary by discourse type; these categories will be examined in this section.

Table 2: Analytical Summary by Discourse Type

Discourse Type	Associated Actor(s)	Core Lexicon	Chronotope	Citizen Identity
Guardianship / Continuity	Biya	Peace, unity, security, together, stability	Extended present	Dependent child
Rupture / Reform (Federalist)	Osih	Federalism, empowerment, justice, restructuring	Ruptured future	Active agent
Youthful Sovereignty / Decolonization	Iyodi	CFA exit, sovereignty, raw materials ban, decolonization	Autonomous / closed future	Decolonized youth
Protest / Political Exclusion	Kamto	Free voting, disqualification, illegitimacy, conditional loyalty	Rejected / suspended present	Excluded claimant

Source: Author's own compilation.

6.1 Discourse of Continuity and Guardianship (Paul Biya / CPDM)

The manifesto of Paul Biya, released on September 28, 2025, is a masterclass in the discursive construction of stability. It opens with a narrative of shared struggle:

"Together, we have overcome many trials and celebrated great victories. The challenges we have taken up, particularly over the last seven years, have enabled our country to face up, to resist, to remain on its feet and to move forward. Despite an unstable global environment and persistent constraints, we have stayed the course towards emergence. We have continuously worked to improve the well-being and living standards of each and every one of you, while consolidating peace, national unity, living together and our territorial integrity" (L'Action, September 28, 2025).

This brief excerpt operates through three interlocking discursive mechanisms. First, *lexical choice and empty signifiers*: words such as "together," "trials," "victories," "unstable global environment," and "emergence" carry overwhelmingly positive or morally charged connotations but are never concretely defined. "Trials" could refer to the Anglophone Crisis, economic downturns, or opposition protests, but naming none of them allows the discourse to absorb any hardship into a single, manageable narrative of resilience. "Emergence" (*émergence*) is a long-standing CPDM buzzword that promises development without measurable benchmarks. Second, *chronotope* (Bakhtin, 1981): the temporal configuration is one of the *extended present*. The past ("we have overcome... celebrated") is selectively narrated as a series of successfully weathered storms; the future ("towards emergence") is framed as a linear continuation of the same path. There is no rupture, no fundamental change, only persistence. The *unstable global environment* (a

vague external threat) justifies why change would be reckless. Third, *identity construction*: the speaker (Biya) positions himself as the *guardian-father* who has led the national family through danger. The voter is constructed as part of a collective "we" that is grateful, resilient, and dependent on continued leadership. The pronoun "we" is inclusive but hierarchical, it is Biya who names the trials and declares the victories. This paternalistic framing naturalises prolonged incumbency by making the alternative (a new leader, a different path) seem both ungrateful and dangerous.

Going further, the phrase "*we have stayed the course*" is particularly revealing. It positions the regime's primary accomplishment not as transformation but as *endurance*, the capacity to remain on one's feet amidst turbulence. This is a discourse of survival, not progress. The manifesto then transitions to future commitments through a grammatical structure that negates temporal rupture:

"Therefore, drawing on our shared experience, we must continue and, above all, speed up the implementation of the major projects we have embarked on."

The future is constructed as an acceleration of the already-initiated, not as a departure. The manifesto's action verbs are uniformly iterative: "*I shall continue with the streamlining of institutions,*" "*I shall complete the actions underway,*" "*I shall continue to improve the rules,*" "*I shall continue to strengthen,*" "*I shall continue to implement*". Each pledge is framed as the continuation of an existing trajectory, foreclosing the possibility of fundamental change. From this analysis, it is safe to say that Biya's manifesto emphasizes continuity, stability, and an ambitious vision of national renewal, yet the "renewal" is "ambitious" only in its rhetorical packaging, not in its programmatic content.

6.1.1 “Peace” and “Stability” as Empty Signifiers

A key lexical theme in Biya’s discourse is the repetition of ‘Peace,’ ‘Unity,’ and ‘Security.’ In CDA terms, these are “empty signifiers,” words that carry massive positive connotations but are divorced from specific empirical referents. In his official manifesto, Biya states; *“I shall complete the actions underway to restore peace and security in crisis zones.”* The phrase “crisis zones” is never specified. It could refer to the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, the Far North (Boko Haram), or elsewhere. But its vagueness allows the discourse to absorb all conflicts into a single, manageable narrative of regime-led restoration. His 11-point manifesto opens by listing voter demands: *“You are calling for a return to peace throughout the country, border security, a merciless fight against organised crime and trafficking of all kinds, as well as the strengthening of living together and more solid institutions.”* The discursive move is to position Biya not as a partisan politician but as the ontological guardian of the nation’s existence, the one who prevents the country from descending into chaos.

6.1.2 Paternalistic Framing: The President as Father and Protector

In Biya’s 11-point manifesto, the concluding section is titled *“For a New Cameroon Citizenship.”* This appeals to a traditional, patriarchal social order. Campaign field reports reinforce this, with operatives referring to Biya as *“The friend of widows, the father and protector of our young girls”* (L’Action, October 6, 2025). This paternalistic framing constructs the voter as a dependent child for whom stability is preferable to the risky “freedom” offered by the opposition. However, a deeper CDA reveals three additional ideological operations.

First, *the gendered politics of protection.* By casting Biya as “protector of our young girls,” the discourse mobilises a conservative gender ideology in which female citizens are objects of state protection rather than political agents. This aligns with postcolonial state practices that use the figure of the vulnerable woman to justify militarised responses to conflict. For example, framing military operations in Anglophone regions as necessary to “protect our daughters” from separatist violence. The phrase “friend of widows” further constructs women as dependent recipients of charity, not as rights bearing citizens. Notably absent from the campaign’s gendered discourse is any recognition of women as political leaders, candidates, or claimants of constitutional change. The L’Action report (October 6, 2025) describes Biya’s field operatives using these terms in rural rallies, suggesting that the paternalistic frame is deliberately deployed to resonate with patriarchal community structures where the elder male is the unquestioned authority.

Second, *the creation of affective dependency.* Paternalism does not merely describe a relationship; it produces one. By repeatedly positioning the citizen as a recipient of benefits (peace, security, development) rather than an author of demands, Biya’s discourse cultivates what Bayart (1993) calls “the politics of the belly,” a neopatrimonial logic in which loyalty is exchanged for protection. The phrase “friend of widows” implies that Biya personally intervenes to help the most vulnerable, bypassing any institutional mechanism. This personalised dependency makes political opposition seem ungrateful, even childish. The voter’s role is to be grateful and to vote for continuity. Any challenge to Biya’s rule is framed not as legitimate democratic contestation but as a rebellion against a benevolent father, a discursive strategy that has historically enabled the regime to dismiss electoral fraud allegations as disrespect.

Third, *the material anchoring of paternalism in clientelist networks.* The paternalistic frame is not merely rhetorical; it corresponds to the actual distribution of state resources. Campaign operatives referring to Biya as “father and protector” are simultaneously signalling the availability of patronage, access to school fees, medical care, or small business permits, for communities that deliver votes. In the L’Action report, these references appear alongside descriptions of Biya’s donations to widows’ associations and scholarships for girls. The discourse therefore performs a dual function: it legitimises hierarchy as natural (father child) while promising material rewards for submission. This stands in sharp contrast to opposition discourses that construct the citizen as an active claimant of rights (Osih) or a decolonised youth demanding sovereignty (Iyodi). By framing the citizen as a dependent child, Biya’s discourse forecloses the very possibility of horizontal, rights based political relationships.

The paternalistic framing in Biya’s 2025 campaign is not a harmless cultural reference. It is a strategic discourse that naturalises prolonged incumbency, delegitimises opposition, and anchors clientelist governance. Its power lies in its affective resonance with voters who have experienced decades of state neglect, the “father” who occasionally provides becomes preferable to an unknown “child” who promises only uncertainty. This is why, despite Biya’s advanced age and the unresolved Anglophone crisis, the paternalistic chronotope of the extended present remained electorally effective.

6.1.3. Chronotope of the “Extended Present”

Biya’s manifesto constructs a temporality in which the future is neither a rupture nor a genuine arrival but an *intensified continuation* of the present.

This chronotope relies on three discursive mechanisms: (1) the systematic use of iterative verbs (*"continue," "pursue," "consolidate"*), (2) the deployment of *"new"* as an empty signifier, and (3) the strategic deferral of emergence to a perpetually receding horizon (e.g., 2035).

In the section of his manifesto titled *"Our Vision for the Next Seven Years,"* Biya averred:

"I shall continue to modernize our infrastructure while preserving the social peace that has enabled us to stay the course. We shall pursue the construction of the Kribi deep seaport phase two. We shall consolidate the achievements of the National Dialogue and maintain the dynamic of living together. My ambition is to accelerate the march towards emergence by 2035, for a New Cameroon Citizenship."

The iterative verb cluster used in this excerpt such as *'Continue,' 'pursue,' 'consolidate,' 'accelerate the march,'* all imply motion without a change in direction. The subject (Biya) has been moving; the future only quickens the same pace. Biya's discourse constructs a future that is essentially an extension of the present. The word *'new'* appears in *'New Cameroon Citizenship,'* but the content of this new citizenship is never specified. Its function is purely performative: it signals responsiveness to the demand for *"newness"* while committing to nothing. The implied message is that tomorrow will look very much like yesterday, only with more *"peace"* and *"emergence."* This chronotope appeals to risk-averse voters who fear that change might mean civil war.

6.1.4. Construction of Citizen Identity: The Passive Dependent

Across Biya's campaign discourse, the citizen is constructed as a *beneficiary of elite benevolence*, not an agent of change. The state (personified by Biya) gives peace, the state gives development, the state gives security. The citizen's role is to be grateful, to vote for continuity, and to trust the father. This stands in sharp contrast to opposition constructions of the citizen as an active claimant of rights. In the preamble of Biya's manifesto, he stated:

"My Fellow Compatriots, for many years you have constantly renewed your trust in me. Thanks to you, I have had the honour and privilege of serving Cameroon. In return, I have worked tirelessly to ensure your security, your wellbeing, and the unity of our nation. I entreat us all to unite our efforts so that together we may continue to build a Cameroon of peace and prosperity."

The citizen in this excerpt is constructed as a passive agent. The citizen's action is limited to

"renewing trust," a one-time, affective act, not ongoing participation. *"Thanks to you"* appears to credit the citizen, but the actual agency (*"I have worked tirelessly"*) remains with Biya. Security, wellbeing, unity are presented as *gifts* from the state to the citizen. The verb *"ensure"* suggests unilateral provision, not co-production. The citizen is a receptacle. In the phrase, *"I entreat us"* (the royal plural), Biya speaks for the collective (*"us"*) but issues the entreaty from a singular position. The citizen is invited to join a project already defined by the leader. There is no space for oppositional demands.

Biya's discourse contrasts with opposition discourse. Where Osih's manifesto speaks of *"your right to decide your future"* and *"regions controlling their destiny,"* Biya's discourse uses *"you"* only in the context of gratitude or voting. The citizen who protests, who organizes, who formulates counter-proposals is invisible.

6.2 Discourse of Rupture and Reform (Joshua Osih / SDF and Maurice Kamto / MRC)

While the incumbent (Biya) offered continuity, the opposition framed 2025 as a moment of existential choice between perpetuation and fundamental restructuring. However, rupture was articulated differently across candidates. For Osih (SDF), rupture was institutional, a shift from a unitary to a federal state, from centralized to regionalized governance. For Kamto (MRC, disqualified), rupture was procedural and moral, a rejection of the electoral process itself as illegitimate.

All opposition discourses reject Biya's extended present. The future is not an acceleration of the same trajectory but a different trajectory entirely. Words like *"restructuring," "federalism," "sovereign national conference,"* and *"rupture"* replace Biya's *"stability," "peace,"* and *"continuity."* The citizen is repositioned as an active protagonist, one who claims, who decides, who transforms.

An excerpt from Osih's campaign launch speech (Douala, August 2025) reads:

"We have tried the same medicine for 43 years. The patient is sicker than ever. The Anglophone regions are bleeding. The Far North is abandoned. The youth have no jobs. More of the same is not a strategy; it is a confession of failure. We need a rupture, a new constitution, a federal Cameroon, and a future that belongs to all of us, not to one man and his clan."

An excerpt from Kamto's video address (after disqualification, September 2025):

"They have removed my name from the ballot because they know that when the people

choose, they do not choose them. This is not an election; it is a masquerade. The rupture will not come from a rigged ballot. It will come from your refusal to accept this farce. Stay home, or vote with a clear conscience – but know that the real change begins when we say 'no more'.

Osih's rupture is programmatic (federalism, constitutional reform); Kamto's rupture is existential (rejection of the electoral framework). This difference reflects their positions: Osih was on the ballot and had to propose a governable future; Kamto was excluded and could afford pure critique.

6.2.1 Federalism as a Discursive Solution

Joshua Osih, the SDF candidate, centered his campaign on a specific structural solution: federalism. He argued that *"decentralization has shown its limits"* and that only a federal system would allow regions to control their destiny (Africa24 TV, September 18, 2025). Discursively, Osih reframes the national problem from a failure of leadership to a failure of *structure*. The Anglophone crisis is not evidence of bad governance but of an inherently centralized system that cannot accommodate diversity. Discursively, federalism performed three functions: (1) it named the root cause of Cameroon's crises (over-centralization), (2) it offered a concrete, constitutionally plausible alternative, and (3) it created a bridging identity for Anglophone and marginalized Francophone regions. In his manifesto, Osih projected federation as a solution by stating:

"Decentralization has shown its limits. It is a gift from the center, revocable and incomplete. Federalism, by contrast, is a right. It divides sovereignty constitutionally. Under a federal Cameroon, the North-West and South-West will control their own police, their own education, their own economic development. The Far North will decide its own agricultural policy. The Littoral will manage its port revenues. The center will handle defense, currency, and foreign affairs, nothing more."

The phrase *the phrase 'Decentralization has shown its limits'* is a direct rebuttal of Biya's signature reform. Biya often cites decentralization as his answer to Anglophone grievances. Osih reframes it as a "gift," not a right, a powerful distinction that shifts the moral economy of governance. By listing specific competencies (*police, education, economic development*), Osih moves federalism from abstraction to tangibility. Voters in conflict zones can imagine what federalism would mean for their daily security. By saying *'Nothing more,'* he offers a provocative limitation. Osih is not merely adding regional power; he is subtracting central power. This

discursively constitutes the center as a potential predator that must be constitutionally caged.

6.2.2 Lexical Field: "Empowerment," "Restructuring," "Justice"

Osih's vocabulary represents a deliberate lexical break from Biya's discourse. Where Biya speaks of "peace," Osih speaks of "justice." Where Biya speaks of "unity," Osih speaks of "restructuring." Where Biya speaks of "stability," Osih speaks of "empowerment." This lexical shift is neither stylistic nor incidental; it represents a different political ontology, a different understanding of what politics is for. For Biya, the primary political good is order. For Osih, the primary political good is equitable distribution of power.

6.2.3 Construction of Citizen Identity: The Active Agent

Osih's discourse constructs the citizen not as a passive recipient of state benevolence but as an active agent capable of demanding, enacting, and monitoring change. This is most visible in his treatment of federalism: it is not a gift from the center but a right of the regions. The voter in the North-West or Far North is repositioned from petitioner to claimant. Excerpt from Osih's manifesto (Section: *"Your Rights Under Federalism"*) reads:

"You have the right to decide who polices your community. You have the right to retain the taxes your region generates. You have the right to educate your children in a curriculum that respects your history and language. These are not privileges to be begged from Yaoundé. They are rights that a federal constitution will guarantee. And you have the right to hold your regional government accountable – through elections, through recall, through civil society."

Listing specific rights (*"decide who polices your community"*) makes agency tangible. The citizen is not abstractly *"empowered"* but concretely enabled to control security, revenue, and education. By stating, *'Not privileges to be begged,'* he directly attacks Biya's gift economy. A privilege can be revoked; a right cannot. The discourse shifts the moral register from gratitude to entitlement. He advocated accountability mechanisms. Osih includes not just rights but also the means to enforce them (*elections, recall, civil society*). The active agent is not a one-time voter but an ongoing monitor. Osih's active agent remains within a liberal democratic framework-voting, civil society, legal accountability. For more radical youth (like Iyodi's supporters), this is insufficient. They demand not just rights but the wholesale decolonization of the state. Osih's agency is procedural; Iyodi's is structural.

6.2.4 Chronotope of the “Ruptured Future”

Where Biya offers an extended present, Osih offers a ruptured future, a clear, constitutionally anchored break from the Biya era. This chronotope is not merely temporal but spatial: the rupture is realized through federalism, which redraws the map of political authority. The future, under an SDF presidency, would be fundamentally different not only in who governs but in how governance is structured. In his opening statement in the manifesto, Osih stated:

“The 7th of October 2025 will be remembered as the day Cameroonians chose to end 43 years of one-man rule. Not by replacing the man with another man, but by replacing the system with a new architecture of power. On that day, we do not just elect a president. We inaugurate a federal republic. The past will not be extended. It will be broken. And from its ruins, we will build a Cameroon where power is shared, where justice is real, and where no region is a colony of the capital.”

From this excerpt, we see a date as a rupture marker. Naming a specific date (“7th of October 2025”) performs the rupture as imminent and concrete. It is not a vague hope but a scheduled transformation. The phrase, “*Not replacing the man with another man*” distances Osih from the typical opposition critique (change the leader). Osih argues for systemic change, not personal replacement. This is a sophisticated move against the regime’s likely counter-argument (“*all politicians are the same*”). The language of destruction (“ruins”) as used in the excerpt as used in the excerpt ‘*From its ruins*’ is unusually stark for a mainstream opposition manifesto. It signals that the existing system is not reformable; it must be demolished and rebuilt. This is closer to revolutionary discourse than to liberal reformism.

6.3 Discourse of Protest and Political Exclusion (Maurice Kamto / MRC-Discursive Participant)

As we mentioned above, Kamto is analyzed here as a *discursive participant* who campaigned but was not on the final ballot. His discourse is therefore distinct from that of official candidates; it is a discourse of protest-from-outside rather than governance-proposal. It operates in a different register: it does not say “*vote for me and here is my plan*”; it says “*the system is illegitimate, and your vote cannot change that; here is how to resist*.” Reacting to the lack of an opposition coalition, Kamto told supporters:

“I call on all our militants and all Cameroonians of good will to vote freely in good conscience for the opposition candidate of their choice. The MRC does not endorse any candidate. But we do not boycott. We observe.

We document. And after the charade is over, we will present the evidence of this stolen election to Cameroonians and to the world.”(Cameroon News Agency, September 27, 2025).

Analysts labeled this “playing it safe.” The sentence, “*Vote freely in good conscience*,” in this excerpt is not a directive but an anti-directive. It refuses the responsibility of leadership (endorsing a candidate) while maintaining moral authority. The phrase “*good conscience*” implies that voting for any of the available candidates may require compromise; Kamto absolves the voter of that guilt. “*We do not boycott. We observe*,” is a strategic ambiguity that avoids the accusation of undermining democracy (boycott) while withholding legitimacy (observation). Observers are not participants; they are external monitors.

The election is pre-emptively labeled a “charade” when he said, “*After the charade is over*.” This performative naming delegitimizes the outcome before it is announced, immunizing Kamto’s discourse from the results.

6.3.1 Discourse of Conditional Loyalty

From a CDA perspective, Kamto’s refusal to issue direct orders is a discursive strategy of “conditional loyalty.” By not endorsing a single candidate, he discursively maintains his moral purity while holding the system accountable for the lack of unity. The implied argument is: *The regime has denied you a real choice; therefore, no candidate fully deserves your vote; vote as you will, but remember who disenfranchised you.* This is a discourse of protest-as-absence.

6.3.2 Framing the Election as Illegitimate

Unlike official candidates who proposed positive programs, Kamto’s discourse was necessarily negative and critical, a reflection of his excluded position. His statements consistently framed the 2025 election as a flawed process. Kamto described his August 2025 disqualification by ELECAM and the Constitutional Council as a “*long-planned*” political plot by the ruling CPDM. He asserted: “*The decision to sideline me from the 2025 presidential election was taken long ago by the CPDM regime*,” accusing the judiciary, ELECAM, and even international bodies like the UN of complicity (AfricanewsYoutube). In June 2025, Kamto warned that the CPDM could not win a “*transparent and free election*,” alleging preparations for an “*electoral coup*” and military takeover to cling to power. He tied this to the party’s expired leadership terms since 2016, framing the process as legally and politically deadlocked. In a message addressed to Cameroon on August 7, 2025, he accused the United Nations of

supporting the Biya regime's efforts to crush Cameroonians, declaring: "*The UN, which signed a secret agreement with ELECAM on 9 May 2025, purportedly to guarantee the transparency of the 2025 presidential election, has betrayed you.*" Kamto further asserted that "*The regime never accepted the fact that we avoided the big political trap of the 2020 legislative and municipal elections by choosing to boycott.*" Echoing his 2020 boycott rationale, Kamto reiterated in 2025 that no legal barriers existed to his candidacy, while decrying "*flawed electoral processes*" amid the Anglophone crisis. These utterances consistently depicted the election as a "*political crime*" against Cameroonians, sustaining his victim narrative. By positioning himself as the victim of procedural manipulation, Kamto discursively transferred responsibility for opposition fragmentation from opposition leaders to the regime itself. His consistent refrain, "*I am on my feet and will remain at your side. The struggle continues,*" framed the election as a political crime rather than a legitimate democratic exercise.

6.3.3 The Discursive Power of Absence

The 2025 Cameroonian presidential election witnessed a paradoxical phenomenon: one of the most potent opposition voices, Maurice Kamto of the Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (MRC), was absent from the ballot following his disqualification by the Constitutional Council. Yet, far from silencing his critique, this absence became a powerful discursive resource. Kamto's exclusion from the formal electoral process transformed him from a mere candidate into a symbol of systemic illegitimacy. His absence from the ballot functioned discursively as a silent critique of the entire electoral process. For his supporters, every vote cast for any candidate was, in effect, a vote *against* the system that excluded Kamto. This demonstrates how political exclusion can generate a powerful counter-discourse even without formal candidacy.

6.4 Discourse of Youthful Sovereignty and Economic Decolonization (Hiram Iyodi / FDC)

Perhaps the most innovative discursive shift in 2025 came from the youngest official candidate, Hiram Samuel Iyodi (38). Iyodi's rhetoric represents a departure from the Francophone/Anglophone binary and the Biya/opposition dichotomy. It draws instead on a global lexicon of decolonization, pan-Africanism, and technocratic modernity.

6.4.1 Lexicon of Sovereignty: Exiting the CFA Franc

Iyodi's manifesto, titled "*Let's Free 237*" and unveiled in Yaoundé on September 13, 2025, is built on a lexicon of "*sovereignty*" and "*autonomy*." He calls for the immediate withdrawal of Cameroon from the FCFA monetary system, which he described as "*a relic*

of colonial dependence." He argues that no powerful state has ever developed using another country's currency:

«Aucun État puissant ne s'est jamais développé avec la monnaie des autres.» (No powerful state has ever developed using another country's currency.)

Iyodi pledged "*to lead efforts toward the adoption of a Pan-African or regional currency, while spearheading the establishment of the African Monetary Fund.*" He declared: "*Our economic liberation is not negotiable. We must free ourselves from IMF and World Bank dictates.*"

The CFA franc, a colonial-era currency pegged to the euro and guaranteed by the French Treasury, becomes a metonym for all post-colonial subordination. Iyodi's 12-point programme promises to "*restore confidence, strengthen social justice, offer opportunities to young people, and promote national sovereignty and free the country from economic stagnation, embezzlement, and poor governance.*"

6.4.2 Technocratic Morality: Downsizing Government

Iyodi's slogan, "*Afro-Social Liberalism*," attempts to synthesize African traditional values with liberal economics. His promise to "*downsize the government from 63 to 20 ministers*" (Africa24 TV, September 18, 2025) is a discursive attack on the "*politics of the belly*," the neopatrimonial logic that the state exists to distribute spoils to ethnic and regional clients. By positioning himself as an engineer rather than a career politician, Iyodi discursively constructs identity based on *competence* rather than ethnicity, region, or party loyalty. However, a deeper CDA reveals three critical tensions within this technocratic morality.

First, *the neoliberal genealogy of "downsizing."* The promise to cut ministries from 63 to 20 echoes the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) imposed by the IMF and World Bank on Cameroon in the late 1980s and 1990s. Those programmes demanded privatisation, civil service retrenchment, and the reduction of state spending, policies that led to widespread layoffs, the collapse of public services (health, education, transport), and deepened poverty for urban and rural populations alike (Konings, 2011). Iyodi's discourse repackages these SAP prescriptions as "*efficiency*" and "*sovereignty*," but it does not explain how reducing the state's capacity would help deliver the massive public investment his manifesto also promises (e.g., 6,500 megawatts of electricity, local industrial processing). This contradiction, a desire for both a lean state and an interventionist state, is not resolved discursively. It reveals that "*technocratic morality*" is

itself a political discourse that privileges private sector and market solutions over public goods, potentially alienating voters who depend on state employment or services.

Second, *the erasure of political negotiation*. Downsizing government from 63 to 20 ministers is not a technical efficiency measure; it is a profoundly political act that would eliminate dozens of clientelist networks sustained by ministerial positions. In Cameroon's neopatrimonial system, each ministry is a patronage hub through which the president distributes resources to ethnic and regional elites in exchange for loyalty (Bayart, 1993). Iyodi's discourse presents this downsizing as a simple matter of "competence over ethnicity," but it offers no account of how the resulting political backlash from displaced elites would be managed. Would they be bought off? Repressed? Excluded? The silence on this point is strategic: it allows Iyodi to project a clean, corruption-free future without confronting the messy reality of elite accommodation that any successful president must navigate. By contrast, Biya's discourse of continuity explicitly embraces the existing patronage structure, while Osih's federalism proposes to reallocate patronage to regional levels rather than eliminate it. Iyodi's technocratic morality is therefore the most radical in its rejection of neopatrimonialism, but also the most silent on the mechanisms of political survival.

Third, *the class and generational assumptions of the "engineer" identity*. By positioning himself as an engineer and business leader rather than a career politician, Iyodi implicitly constructs the ideal citizen as educated, technically skilled, and entrepreneurial, what he elsewhere calls the "*decolonised youth*." This identity appeals to young urban professionals, students, and diaspora returnees who see themselves as blocked by an ageing, unqualified political class. However, it excludes the majority of Cameroonians who work in the informal sector, subsistence agriculture, or as low-level civil servants, precisely the populations that might fear the loss of state jobs from downsizing. The Africa24 TV interview (September 18, 2025) shows Iyodi speaking in French with technical economic vocabulary ("*fiscal discipline*," "*public expenditure rationalisation*"), a register that may alienate rural and less educated voters. In this sense, the technocratic morality that promises "*competence*" also performs a kind of class exclusion, rewarding a specific kind of cultural capital (university degrees, business experience) over the political capital of community organising or labour union activism.

Iyodi's promise to downsize government is not merely a policy proposal; it is a discursive strategy that mobilises the symbolic power of

"*efficiency*" against the "*politics of the belly*." Yet this strategy carries internal contradictions: it repackages neoliberal SAPs as pan Africanist sovereignty, it erases the political challenge of elite backlash, and it constructs an ideal citizen who looks like Iyodi himself, educated, urban, and entrepreneurial. These tensions do not invalidate Iyodi's discourse, but they reveal that "*technocratic morality*" is itself a political ideology with its own exclusions and blind spots. For voters who have suffered from state neglect, the promise of a leaner, more competent state may be appealing; for those who depend on the state for employment or services, it may be threatening. Iyodi's discourse never addresses this trade off, leaving it as an unresolved rhetorical strength (ambiguity allows coalition building) and weakness (vulnerability to Biya's counter framing of "chaos").

6.4.3 Banning Raw Material Exports

Iyodi promises to "*ban raw material exports*" and generate "*6,500 megawatts of electricity*" through localized renewables. This creates a chronotope of a "*closed, self-sufficient*" future, a Cameroon that processes its own resources, powers its own factories, and negotiates with global markets from a position of strength. This contrasts sharply with Biya's "*open for business*" globalization, which Iyodi's discourse implicitly criticizes as neocolonial extraction.

6.4.4 Construction of Citizen Identity: The Decolonized Youth

For Iyodi, the ideal citizen is not the dependent child (Biya) or the claimant agent (Osih) but the *decolonized* youth, educated, technically skilled, globally aware, and unwilling to accept the political and economic structures inherited from French colonialism. In his manifesto, *Notre Génération, Notre Destin (Our Generation, Our Destiny)*, Iyodi explicitly contrasts his ideal citizen with the two alternatives:

"Biya tells you to follow the elder who knows the road. Osih tells you to claim your rights from the system. I tell you: the road was built by colonizers to lead to their warehouse. Build your own road. Rights that are granted can be taken away. Skills that you own cannot be stolen. The colonized man who learns the master's language and asks politely for a seat at the master's table remains a colonized man. The decolonized youth builds his own table."

This passage crystallizes the three-part typology: 1) *The dependent child* (Biya's citizen) accepts the colonial infrastructure of power and seeks only to follow its designated path. This citizen's identity is defined by obedience and gratitude for the peace that the elder provides. 2) *The claimant agent* (Osih's citizen) recognizes the injustice of the existing

structure but remains within its discursive and institutional framework, petitioning for inclusion, demanding accountability, and seeking reform, 3) *The decolonized youth* (Iyodi's ideal) rejects the foundational premises of that structure. To him, the problem is not that the system is poorly managed; the problem is that the system was designed by French colonialism to extract value from Cameroon.

Therefore, citizenship cannot mean participation in that system, it means building an alternative. This identity is aspirational; it addresses young Cameroonians who feel locked out of a political system dominated by octogenarians.

6.5 Comparative Matrix of Discursive Strategies

Table 3: Comparative Matrix of Discursive Strategies

Political Actor	Status	Power Frame	Identity Frame	Future Frame	Dominant Lexicon
Paul Biya (CPDM)	Official candidate	Guardianship	Dependent child	Extended present	Peace, unity, security, continuity
Joshua Osih (SDF)	Official candidate	Restructuring	Active agent	Ruptured/federal	Empowerment, federalism, justice, restructuring
Hiram Iyodi (FDC)	Official candidate	Sovereignty	Decolonized youth	Autonomous/closed	CFA exit, sovereignty, raw materials ban, decolonization
Maurice Kamto (MRC)	Discursive participant	Protest/Absence	Excluded claimant	Conditional/rejection	Free voting, disqualification, illegitimacy

Source: Author's own Compilation

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The Three-Way Battle over the Definition of "Real" Cameroon

The 2025 campaign discourse reveals a three-way battle over the definition of reality itself, with Kamto's excluded voice providing a fourth, meta-discursive critique of the process:

The campaign discourse of the 2025 Cameroonian presidential election was not merely a contest of policies or personalities; it was a profound struggle over the very definition of what constitutes the "real" Cameroon, its problems, its possible futures, and the legitimate boundaries of political action. Four competing realities clashed, each constructing a different ontology of the nation and each demanding a different kind of citizen response.

The incumbent's reality, articulated most fully by Paul Biya and the CPDM, is built on a foundational premise of national fragility. In this discourse, Cameroon is a precarious unity, perpetually threatened by ethnic fragmentation, regional rebellion, and external interference. Peace, understood as the absence of widespread violence, is elevated to the highest political good. The future, as we have seen in the chronotope of the extended present, is not a site of rupture but of managed continuity. Voting for Biya is therefore framed as a defensive act: a vote against chaos, against the unknown terrors of sudden change. The Anglophone crisis, in this reality, is reduced to a security problem, a law and order challenge that requires military pacification and the careful distribution of state

resources to co-opt local elites. There is no political or constitutional dimension to the crisis because acknowledging such a dimension would validate the very restructuring that Biya's reality forecloses.

The traditional opposition's reality, championed by Joshua Osih and the SDF, rejects this diagnostic. Here, the nation is not fragile by nature but broken by design, specifically, by the over centralization of power in Yaoundé. Cameroon's dysfunctions (Anglophone separatism, economic stagnation, regional marginalisation) are not accidents of poor leadership but structural outcomes of a unitary system that denies diversity its political expression. Justice, in this reality, requires not peace alone but a restructuring of the state along federal lines. The Anglophone crisis is therefore a constitutional problem demanding a constitutional solution: a new federal compact that guarantees regional control over police, education, and economic development. Osih's discourse does not reject the nation; it seeks to rebuild it on more equitable foundations. The citizen in this reality is an active claimant of rights, not a passive recipient of stability.

The radical youth reality, articulated by Hiram Iyodi and the FDC, shifts the frame entirely. For Iyodi, neither peace nor federalism goes deep enough. The nation is not merely centralized or poorly governed, it is neo-colonized. The real chains are monetary (the CFA franc), economic (raw material exports without local processing), and psychological (the internalized inferiority of the colonized subject). Justice, therefore, requires a

complete break with the colonial inheritance, an exit from the CFA zone, the local processing of all strategic resources, and a pan African reorientation of foreign policy. The Anglophone crisis, in this reading, is a symptom of a deeper sovereignty deficit: a nation that cannot control its own currency, its own borders, or its own industrial policy cannot credibly claim to represent any of its citizens, Anglophone or Francophone. The decolonized youth, not the federalist reformer, is the agent of this transformation.

Finally, the excluded voice of Maurice Kamto (MRC) introduces a meta-discursive critique that operates at a different logical level. Kamto's disqualification from the ballot meant that his discourse was not about what kind of Cameroon to build, but about whether the electoral process itself was capable of producing a legitimate outcome. For Kamto and his supporters, no candidate operating within a system that arbitrarily excludes the most credible opposition figure can claim a full democratic mandate. The real choice, therefore, is not among Biya, Osih, Iyodi, or Tchiroma, it is between accepting the regime's rules of the game (voting, campaigning, petitioning) and rejecting them entirely. Kamto's conditional loyalty, "*vote freely in good conscience*," was a strategic refusal to legitimize a process he considered a charade. His absence from the ballot became a permanent reminder that the election was stolen before it began.

These four realities did not simply coexist; they competed for the allegiance of voters, each offering a different diagnosis of the past, a different evaluation of the present, and a different prescription for the future. The CPDM's reality appealed to risk averse voters who feared civil war; the SDF's reality appealed to reformists who believed federalism could reconcile unity and diversity; the FDC's reality appealed to disillusioned youth who saw decolonization as the only authentic path; and the MRC's meta critique appealed to those who had lost faith in the electoral process entirely. The 2025 election was therefore not only a vote for a president—it was a referendum on which Cameroon is real, and which future is possible.

7.2 Why the Discourse of Continuity Won

Despite the energetic campaigns, the official results gave Biya 53.66% of the vote, with Issa Tchiroma (a last-minute opposition figure) at 35.19% and Iyodi securing only 0.40% (Cameroon Tribune, October 28, 2025). This electoral math suggests that while the "*discourse of rupture*" was loud in urban centers and online, the "*discourse of fear/stability*" remained dominant in rural and regional strongholds.

Biya's 90.46% in the South Region exemplifies the enduring power of regional and ethnic identity in anchoring the national political discourse. In CDA terms, the *sociocultural practice*, the material distribution of state resources along ethnic and regional lines, overwhelmed the textual appeal of opposition manifestos.

Voters in Biya's home region and other historically loyal areas did not need to be persuaded by arguments about federalism or decolonization; their identity as beneficiaries of the existing system already determined their vote.

7.3 The Paradox of Digital Discourse

A striking finding of this analysis is the disjuncture between digital and electoral outcomes. On social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp), Iyodi's discourse of sovereignty and generational justice was widely shared and debated. Among urban youth in Douala and Yaoundé, his proposals were taken seriously. Yet this digital energy translated into negligible vote share (0.40%). This suggests that digital discourse in Cameroon remains largely decoupled from actual electoral mobilization; a space for identity performance rather than political organization.

7.4 The Failure of Opposition Unity as a Discursive Weakness

The opposition's inability to field a single candidate was a catastrophic discursive failure. Kamto's disqualification and his subsequent "*vote freely*" directive left opposition voters fragmented. No single opposition voice could credibly claim to represent "*the alternative*." This allowed Biya's discourse of continuity to present itself as the only viable national project, with opposition candidates appearing as regional or niche figures.

Kamto's role as a discursive participant rather than an official candidate exacerbated this fragmentation. His discourse of conditional loyalty, while morally coherent, did not provide voters with a clear path to collective action. The opposition thus suffered from what might be termed a "*discursive deficit of coordination*."

7.5 Implications for National Identity Construction

The 2025 campaigns reveal that "*Cameroonian identity*" remains deeply contested. For Biya, being Cameroonian means accepting the unitary state, the CFA franc, and the leadership of the elder statesman. For Osih, being Cameroonian means accepting regional diversity and constitutional federalism. For Iyodi, being Cameroonian means rejecting neocolonial dependency and embracing economic sovereignty. For Kamto's supporters, being

Cameroonian may mean refusing to accept an electoral system that excludes legitimate voices. These are not merely policy differences; they are competing answers to the question: *What kind of country should Cameroon be?*

7.6 The Anglophone Crisis as an Absent Presence

Strikingly, the Anglophone crisis was rarely named directly in the manifestos of the major official candidates. Biya referred to “*crisis zones*” in the passive voice. Osih’s federalism was a structural solution but avoided direct address to separatist grievances. Only Iyodi, whose vote share was negligible, spoke directly about “*self-determination*” and “*decolonization*.” Kamto, speaking from outside the formal process, referenced the crisis more directly but without detailed policy proposals. The Anglophone crisis thus functioned as an absent presence: the reason for the urgency of the election, the source of national anxiety, but unspeakable in mainstream political discourse. This silence is itself a discursive act, one that delegitimizes Anglophone grievances while simultaneously acknowledging their power.

8. CONCLUSION

The discursive construction of power in Cameroon’s 2025 election demonstrates a nation at a crossroads. The incumbent successfully wielded a discourse of security, paternalistic guardianship, and extended-present stability to secure another term. His victory was not merely a product of electoral manipulation (though allegations of such exist) but of a coherent discursive strategy that resonated with voters who prioritize order over freedom, continuity over rupture, and the known over the unknown.

However, the opposition, particularly the youth candidate Hiram Iyodi, successfully introduced a lexicon of federalism, economic decolonization, and generational justice into the mainstream. While these discourses did not win the election, they won the narrative in the digital public sphere. For the first time in Cameroonian electoral history, an official candidate openly called for exiting the CFA franc, banning raw material exports, and downsizing the government to 20 ministers, and was debated seriously.

The inclusion of Maurice Kamto as a discursive participant rather than an official candidate in this study enriches this analysis by revealing what the formal campaign discourse excludes. His disqualification and subsequent “*vote freely*” directive demonstrate that political exclusion generates its own powerful counter-discourse, one that frames the entire electoral process as illegitimate. Future research should examine how

such exclusionary dynamics shape voter cynicism and political disengagement.

The theoretical contribution of this article is to show how CDA can reveal the ideological stakes of lexical choice in post-colonial electoral contexts, while also demonstrating the importance of distinguishing between official candidates and discursive participants. The shift from “*peace*” (Biya) to “*justice*” (Osih) to “*sovereignty*” (Iyodi) to “*illegitimacy*” (Kamto) is not merely semantic; it represents different political ontologies, different answers to the question of what politics is for.

For Cameroon to achieve a stable national future, the discursive gaps highlighted in this campaign, between the center and periphery, between the gerontocracy and the youth, between Francophone and Anglophone identity constructions, between digital aspiration and electoral reality, and between official candidates and excluded voices, must be addressed beyond the ballot box. Elections end, but discourse continues. And it is in the continuing discourse of federalism, sovereignty, generational justice, and political exclusion that the seeds of Cameroon’s political future, whether in 2030 or beyond, are being planted.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available, often translated texts. It does not include original interview data with candidates or campaign strategists. A further limitation concerns the inclusion of Maurice Kamto as a discursive participant rather than an official candidate. While this decision is methodologically justified (as seen in Sections 4.2 and 5.6), worthy of note is the fact that Kamto’s discourse operates under different constraints than those of ballot-listed candidates. His statements are not subject to the same campaign finance regulations, media access rules, or legal liabilities. Future research comparing the discourse of disqualified versus official candidates would help clarify whether these different positions produce systematically different rhetorical strategies.

Additional future research should pursue: (1) reception studies examining how different voter demographics (rural/urban, Francophone/Anglophone, youth/elderly) actually interpreted these discourses; (2) comparative analysis with other Central African elections (Gabon, Chad, DRC) to identify regional patterns of discursive legitimation; (3) longitudinal studies tracking whether the lexicon of “*sovereignty*” and “*decolonization*” persists beyond the 2025 cycle; and (4) analysis of how disqualified candidates like Kamto maintain political relevance through extra-electoral discourse.

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