

237 LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS



Understanding the Relevance of Municipal and Legislative Elections in Fostering Good Governance and Democracy in Cameroon.

“FORGET THE SCARS, STAY PATRIOTIC AND PERFORM YOUR CIVIC DUTY GEARING TOWARDS THE CHANGE YOU SEEK.”



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD



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Dear Readers,
Welcome to the third edition of the MDDT Quarterly Newsletter. As we continue our journey of civic reflection, empowerment, and democratic engagement, this edition takes a strategic and timely look at the relevance of municipal and legislative elections in strengthening good governance and democracy in Cameroon. Our focus is clear; to deepen understanding, spark meaningful dialogue, and catalyze action that ensures elections are not only periodic events but engines of accountable leadership, robust institutions, and vibrant citizen participation. In this issue, you can expect a thoughtful exploration of how inclusive electoral processes contribute to strengthening Cameroon's democratic fabric. We bring into focus the critical roles played by both municipal councils and the National Assembly in driving effective governance

Through well-grounded analysis, we unpack how locally elected bodies influence service delivery, community development, and participatory decision-making at the grassroots, while legislative representatives uphold lawmaking, oversight, and democratic accountability at the national level.

A special feature of this edition is our Call to Youth Action in the face of upcoming municipal and legislative elections. We challenge the growing tide of political apathy and urge young people across Cameroon to step forward as informed voters, active advocates, and community leaders. Our youth are not only the future of Cameroon's democracy they are its indispensable force today.

We are sincerely grateful for the continued collaboration and partnership that make this work possible. We extend our deep appreciation to key partners including ELECAM, MINJEC, MINAT, other civil society organizations, and, most of all, the young people who bring energy, creativity, and a bold commitment to democratic participation. Your engagement enriches the conversations captured in this newsletter and strengthens the impact of our collective work.

As you read through this edition, we hope you feel inspired, informed, and equipped to take part in the democratic processes that shape our shared future. Good governance thrives when citizens are informed, institutions are inclusive, and leaders are held accountable. Let us move forward together with purpose and resolve.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

EDITOR
MAUREEN DUNGU

2.

UPCOMING MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

By Barrister Akonteh Clifford Niba

In Cameroon today, young people and women form a large share of the population, yet political disengagement, voter apathy, limited representation, and weak confidence in electoral institutions continue to undermine democratic participation. Many youths feel excluded from decision-making, and challenges such as bureaucratic barriers, distrust in the system, and ongoing sociopolitical tensions further dampen civic engagement ahead of the 2026 municipal and legislative elections. These obstacles risk marginalizing the voices of the very demographic that should be driving democratic renewal.

As Cameroon prepares for these crucial municipal and legislative elections, it is essential for youth and women to move from apathy to active civic engagement not only as voters, but also as candidates and community advocates. Democracy gains real meaning when citizens participate in shaping policies that affect their daily lives.

Recent elections across Africa show that when young people participate in significant numbers, change follows. In Nigeria's 2023 general elections, youth voter registration surged and young citizens influenced national debate through grassroots campaigns. In Kenya's 2022 polls, strong youth turnout and candidacy helped broaden representation in Parliament. In Zambia's 2021 elections, active civic engagement contributed to a peaceful transition and strengthened democratic accountability under President Hakainde Hichilema.



Most recently in Senegal, youth mobilisation in the 2024 presidential and legislative elections helped elect one of Africa's youngest presidents and delivered a clear parliamentary majority reflecting robust organised participation. These examples affirm that when young people vote, run for office, and organise constructively, governance becomes more responsive to their priorities.

For Cameroonians, municipal elections determine local priorities from infrastructure and education to sanitation and youth employment, while legislative elections shape national policy on jobs, healthcare, security, and economic reform. Disengagement allows others to define the future of youth and women without their input.

To overcome these challenges, collective action is needed. Traditional leaders, churches, civil society organizations (CSOs), human rights defenders (HRDs), media, artists, influencers, and digital content creators must join forces to promote civic education, counter misinformation, and encourage peaceful participation throughout the electoral cycle.

▪ What MDDT Cameroon is doing to engage youth:

The Movement for Democracy, Development and Transparency (MDDT) is actively working to enhance youth participation in democratic processes ahead of the 2026 elections. Through its “Not Too Young to Vote” campaigns and safe civic spaces, MDDT engages youth organisations to sensitise and mobilise young voters while encouraging qualified youths to run for office. The organisation has also established civic advocacy clubs in schools and universities across the North West and South West regions to mobilize and promote peaceful engagement and community dialogue on elections. Additionally, MDDT mobilises youth through social media platforms and digital tools to counter radicalisation, promote political awareness, and strengthen a culture of peaceful participation. These efforts aim to increase youth confidence, build leadership capacity, and ensure Cameroonian youth contribute meaningfully to democratic development.

▪ A Call to Action:

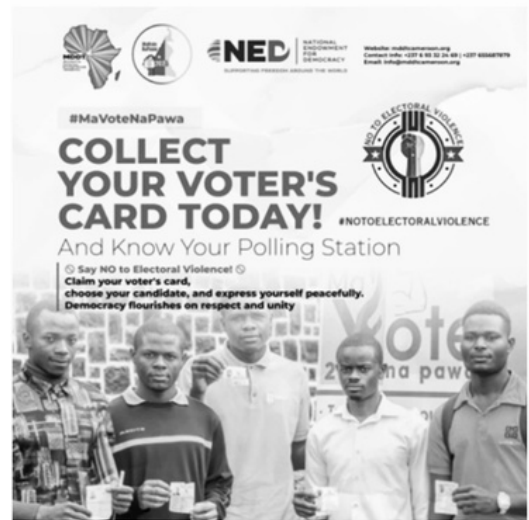
To give true meaning to democracy, young people and women must:

- Register and vote in the upcoming municipal and legislative elections
- Run for office and support capable youth candidates.
- Organise and participate in civic dialogues that address community priorities.
- Champion peaceful engagement before, during, and after elections.
- Hold leaders accountable through lawful advocacy.



The upcoming elections offer a defining moment for Cameroon’s democratic future. The choice is clear: participate and shape the future, or remain on the sidelines while others decide. Now is the time for Cameroon’s youth and women to act through active, peaceful, and sustained civic engagement.

“Forget the Scars, Stay Patriotic and Perform Your Civic Duty Gearing Towards the Change You Seek.”



3. **BALLOTS AT THE GRASSROOTS: HOW MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS POWER GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CAMEROON**

Across Africa, the quality of democracy is measured not only by presidential transfers of power but by the everyday responsiveness of local governments and parliaments. In Cameroon, with nearly 60 percent of the population under 25, the nation holds one of the youngest electorates on the continent. Yet in the 2018 presidential election, only 27 percent of youth aged 18 to 35 participated; in the conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest regions, turnout plummeted to 10 percent (ELECAM, 2019).

This gap between demographic weight and political voice is not merely a statistical curiosity. It is a threat to democratic consolidation.

Cameroon's municipal and legislative elections now delayed yet again are the primary channels through which citizens access public goods and hold the state accountable at close range. Unlike the presidential contest, local and parliamentary ballots determine who controls the budgets for primary schools, rural roads, and health centers. Municipal councils, 360 in total, manage roughly 15 percent of public expenditure and are legally empowered to promote economic, social,



and cultural development under Article 55(2) of the Constitution. Legislative elections fill the 180 seats of the National Assembly, which holds the power to legislate, amend the budget, summon ministers, conduct inquiries, and even impeach the government. This is the government that touches skin. When a farmer in Bafut cannot get his cassava to market because the bridge collapsed,

it is not the President failing him. It is the council. When a mother in Maroua cannot register her newborn because the registry office has run out of forms, it is not the National Assembly failing her. It is the council. When a young electrician in Ebolowa cannot obtain the professional certification that requires a mayor's signature, it is not the Minister of Employment failing him. It is the council. Municipal elections determine who sits in that office.



President Paul Biya announced a further postponement of the parliamentary and municipal elections in his Youth Day address on February 10, 2026, citing "certain compelling constraints" while reaffirming his commitment to respecting the constitution (BSS News, 2026). No new date was set.

This delay extends an exceptional institutional situation. According to the RDPC party newspaper L'Action, the mandate of municipal councilors was extended from February 25, 2025, to May 31, 2026. The mandate of Members of Parliament was extended from March 10, 2025, to March 30, 2026 (L'Action, 2026). February 9, 2026, now hangs in limbo. Under the electoral code, registration could be suspended by February 6 once the electoral corps is convened (Cameroon Tribune, 2025).

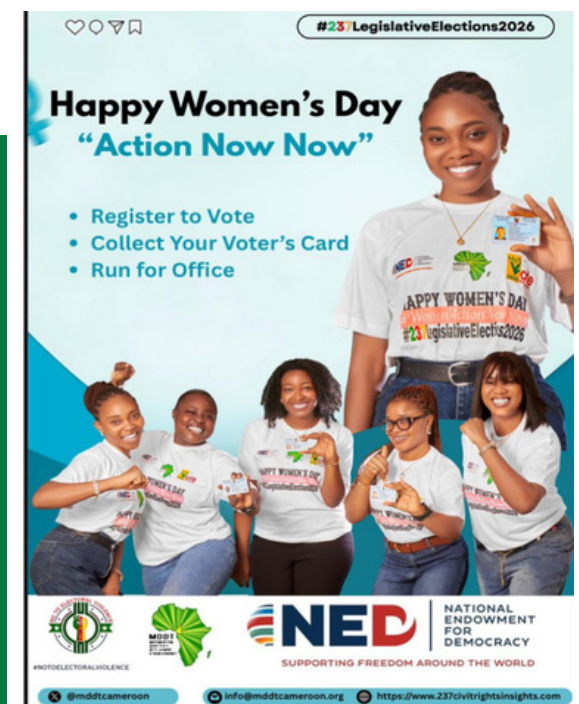
4. The Electorate: Youth and Women Take Center Stage

On January 12, 2026, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) Director General Erik Essousse officially launched the annual revision of the electoral register for 2026. The theme: **"Mass registration of women and youth on electoral lists for increased participation in the electoral process"** (StopBlaBlaCam, 2026).

The slogan is unmistakable: "Youth and women, 2026 belongs to you."

The numbers explain why. According to ELECAM statistics published on October 9, 2025, the eve of the presidential election Cameroon's electoral register listed 8,010,464 voters. Of these, men account for 4,293,897 or 53.6 percent, while women number 3,716,567 or 46.4 percent. Crucially, voters under 35 total 2,581,965, representing 32.2 percent of the electorate. Voters abroad number 34,411, or 0.43 percent (StopBlaBlaCam, 2026).

This youth bloc, over 2.5 million strong is often the most affected by unemployment and the most critical of the political system. They could play a decisive role, particularly in the upcoming legislative elections.





But registration is only half the battle. In the North West Region alone, ELECAM Regional Delegate Mbowoh Elvis reported that 636,983 citizens have registered. However, they have registered only 15,730 voters this year, far short of their 45,000 target. More troubling: 7,313 invalid cards were detected, and only 6,645 valid cards have been distributed (ELECAM North West, 2026).

Across Cameroon, the backlog is staggering. In the Littoral Region, more than 350,000 cards sit uncollected. In the Southwest, only 48 percent of cards have been handed over. In the Northwest, nearly 50,000 cards remain undistributed, with officials admitting that separatist threats and the displacement of populations have made collection nearly impossible.

Registration without collection is an exercise in futility.

5.

The Money Trail: Nearly 9 billion FCFA at Stake

For the 2026 fiscal year, the State has mobilized nearly 9 billion FCFA for 145 councils nationwide through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MINHDU, 2026).

During the official launch on January 30, 2026, in Garoua, the ministry made clear what these funds are for: public lighting, community development operations, rehabilitation and management of public spaces, urban planning documents, creation and maintenance of municipal roads, and related works (MINHDU, 2026).

But the message was firm. The MINHDU Secretary General, Pr. Mathurin Nna, called on mayors to correct the imperfections observed in 2025. The causes of past failures were clearly identified: delays in procurement processes, weak or poor collaboration among actors in project monitoring, delays in making commitment authorizations available, procedures for relocating projects and modifying project objectives, and the exclusion of departmental delegates who ensure information flows upward for real-time problem resolution (MINHDU, 2026).

The ministry's prescription is clear: launch procurement procedures at the start of each budget year, report difficulties in real time, and supervise contracting companies closely. "2026 cannot be yet another lost year," the message implied.



The Bafut Model:

On September 21, 2025, the Bafut Council in the Northwest Region demonstrated what accountable municipal governance can achieve (Bafut Council, 2025).

Mayor Ngwakongoh Lawrence officially unveiled a newly acquired heavy-duty road grader, a powerful machine capable of opening up the 54 villages that constitute the council area. The event began in Nsoh-Bafut, where residents gathered in their hundreds, joined by traditional leaders. From there, the convoy made symbolic stops in Agyati, Nsem, and Njiteh, before halting at the bustling Bafut Main Market. Cheers erupted as the machine rolled in (Bafut Council, 2025).

"This is not just a machine. It's a solution," Mayor Ngwakongoh told the crowd. "We are saying goodbye to bad roads and to the days when manual labor was our only option."

Crucially, the grader was placed under the supervision of a multi-village Caretaker Committee, answerable not to the mayor's political faction but to the Fon's palace, the traditional authority. This mechanism ensured equitable deployment across villages regardless of partisan affiliation.

"The grader is for everyone," the mayor stressed. "It will go where it's needed, fairly and transparently" (Bafut Council, 2025).

Within weeks, previously impassable farm-to-market routes became navigable. Cassava, plantains, and tomatoes crops that once rotted in baskets reached urban buyers. Pregnant women no longer walked kilometers to ambulance pickup points.

The Bafut Council's 2025 Annual Report documents additional achievements. Over 100 million FCFA in sanitation equipment was distributed to all 54 villages, including wheelbarrows, dump trucks, rakes, dig axes, and refuse containers. Nineteen local artisans were supported through a craft exhibition

connecting rural producers to buyers in Bamenda and Yaoundé. In partnership with FEICOM, the council distributed 2,148 cassava stems, 800 plantain suckers, and 350 kilograms of maize seeds, alongside cassava-grinding and gari-processing machines to enable value addition (Bafut Council, 2025).

This is municipal governance. It is not televised. It does not trend on social media. But it is the difference between hope and despair.

6.1

WHAT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ACTUALLY DOES

The National Assembly's constitutional functions are not ceremonial.

In lawmaking, no statute of general application becomes law without the Assembly's vote. The budget, the penal code, the electoral code, the framework for decentralization all must pass through this chamber.

In budgetary control, the Assembly votes the annual Finance Law. It authorizes taxation. It approves borrowing. It allocates resources to every ministry, every public enterprise, every council.

In oversight, deputies may address written and oral questions to members of government. In 2024, deputies submitted 27 written questions; the government responded to 21, a response rate of 77.8 percent (IPU Parline, 2025). They may also establish commissions of inquiry into any matter of public interest.

Under Article 34(4) of the Constitution, the Assembly may impeach the government through a motion of censure, passed by at least one-third of members and adopted by absolute majority.

These are not theoretical powers. But they are only exercisable if the legislature contains members willing to exercise them.

The Anatomy of a Boycott: FSNC's Reversal and Internal Chaos

On January 15, 2026, veteran politician Issa Tchiroma Bakary announced that his Front for the National Salvation of Cameroon (FSNC) would totally boycott the upcoming municipal and legislative elections. His reasoning: participating in an election organized by an "unconstitutional government" legitimizes wrongdoing (FSNC, 2026).

Then came a spectacular reversal.

In late January 2026, a video surfaced of FSNC spokesperson Barrister Alice Nkom addressing young supporters. She indicated that she had discussed the issue with Tchiroma and suggested the party might participate after all. "When I discussed with him, he understands the approach perfectly," she said (Africa Press, 2026).

But on February 6, 2026, the Interim Secretary General of the FSNC Central Committee, Elh Moussa Firissou, issued an official communiqué reaffirming **"with the greatest firmness and without ambiguity, its sovereign decision not to take part in the upcoming legislative and municipal elections"** (Africa Press, 2026).

The communiqué was unequivocal. The decision to boycott was **"ARRÊTÉE PAR SON PRÉSIDENT NATIONAL, ISSA TCHIROMA BAKARY"** and constitutes **"the immutable political line of the party"** (Africa Press, 2026).

The party justified its refusal by citing **"an irrefutable observation: the minimum conditions for a democratic, transparent, and peaceful election are not met."** Participating, they argued, would legitimize **"A REGIME DEFEATED IN THE OCTOBER 12, 2025 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION"** and validate "an electoral parody with results already pre-established" (Africa Press, 2026).

Tchiroma himself remains in exile in The Gambia, claiming victory in the October 2025 presidential poll and refusing any recognition of Biya's re-election with 53.66 percent (Sputnik Africa, 2025).

This internal chaos has drawn criticism. Activist Sandy Boston attacked FSNC militants, noting that party members who go to elections against the president's position are not treated the same way as those in other parties. "The FSNC is an example of democracy, where fatwa is not launched on those who think differently," she wrote sarcastically, contrasting them with parties that repress dissent (CamerounWeb, 2026).

By choosing the path of boycott, the FSNC risks political erasure. Without representation in the National Assembly or municipal councils, the party could lose all institutional capacity and condemn itself to an extra-parliamentary opposition with limited effectiveness (Africa Press, 2026).

The 2020 Lesson: What Boycotts Actually Achieve

The numbers from 2020 tell an unambiguous story.

According to ELECAM's General Report of February 2020, the CPDM won 152 seats, a gain of 17 from 2013. The Social Democratic Front, once the dominant opposition with 18 seats, won only 5 seats, a loss of 13. The Cameroon Renaissance Movement won zero seats, no change from their previous zero. Other parties combined won 23 seats, a loss of 4.

The SDF was reduced to a parliamentary footnote. The MRC won zero seats and, as of 2026, has never held a single elected mandate at national or local level.

The cost of absence was not limited to seat counts. Article 121(1) of the Electoral Code



When Maurice Kamto sought to run in 2025, he was forced to seek nomination from MANIDEM, a smaller party that did not meet the threshold. A rival faction within MANIDEM also submitted a candidacy; Article 121(2) prohibits a party from sponsoring more than one candidate. Faced with two competing nominations, ELECAM rejected both.

On August 5, 2025, the Constitutional Council declared Kamto's appeal unfounded. His candidacy was dead (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

This is the arithmetic that every young Cameroonian must internalize. A boycott does not weaken the ruling party, it strengthens it by eliminating competitors. It does not delegitimize flawed institutions it surrenders them to those willing to play by the existing rules while working to change them.

6.2 MDDT Cameroon: Building Civic Infrastructure

The Movement for Democracy, Development and Transparency is not a political party. It does not endorse candidates.

What it does is construct the infrastructure that makes youth participation possible.

Solving the "Final Mile" of Voter Registration Between July and September 2025, MDDT launched the "Collect Your Voter Card" nationwide

campaign. Rather than waiting for bureaucratic partnerships to crawl forward, they pivoted to activity-specific collaborations with regional ELECAM offices. Mobile vans visited markets, motor parks, and university campuses. Door-to-door teams explained in local languages and Pidgin where and when to collect. Over 10,000 voter cards were collected directly at MDDT-organized events across the Centre, South, East, Adamawa, North, and Far North regions (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

Reimagining Civic Leadership: Miss & Mister Civic Cameroon The contest is not a conventional pageant. No swimsuits. No talent shows. Finalists are evaluated on project feasibility, communication skills, digital engagement, and civic knowledge.

Over 1,000 applicants from all ten regions submitted applications. Ten finalists five men and five women emerged. Two-week online campaigns reached over 500,000 young Cameroonians (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

Winners Hashiatou Ibrahim from the North and Assam Meka Cedrick from the South received laptops, cameras, smartphones, and a one-year contract to execute community advocacy projects. Hashiatou's "Civic Bridge 237" deploys mobile caravans to reach nomadic pastoralist communities in the Far North populations historically mobilized as voting blocs but never as rights-bearing citizens. Assam's "Jeunesse Citoyenne Sud" trains peer mediators to prevent election-related violence

in the South Region (MDDT Cameroon, 2025). National Youth Forum for Peace: From Event to Institution

On December 10–12, 2025, deliberately scheduled on International Human Rights Day, the forum convened 500 delegates from all ten regions at the Yaahot Hotel in Yaoundé (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).



Youth from conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest were transported via carefully secured corridors. When post-election riots made November travel impossible, MDDT postponed the forum by one month and implemented a hybrid participation framework: key delegates attended in person while broader networks participated via livestream (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

The outcomes included 112 trained and certified Youth Peace Ambassadors, each with a one-year mandate to conduct community sensitization, monitor electoral violence risks, and serve as institutional bridges. Additionally, 328 stakeholders including CSO representatives, government officers, and traditional rulers were trained in modern advocacy and digital security. High-level mentorship sessions were held at the U.S. Embassy Yaoundé and the Canadian High Commission, where finalists received direct guidance from Deputy Chief of Mission Mr. John G. Robinson, Deputy Public Affairs Officer Mme. Amanda Cauldwell, and Canadian High Commissioner Mme. Marie-Claude Harvey (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

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Youth Affairs and Civic Education (MINJEC) officially adopted MDDT's NYFP and Miss & Mister Civic model for national replication in 2026. An official from MINJEC stated: "MDDT's forum model successfully blends youth appeal with substantive policy dialogue. We're integrating aspects of their approach into our ministry's youth engagement strategy because it demonstrably works" (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

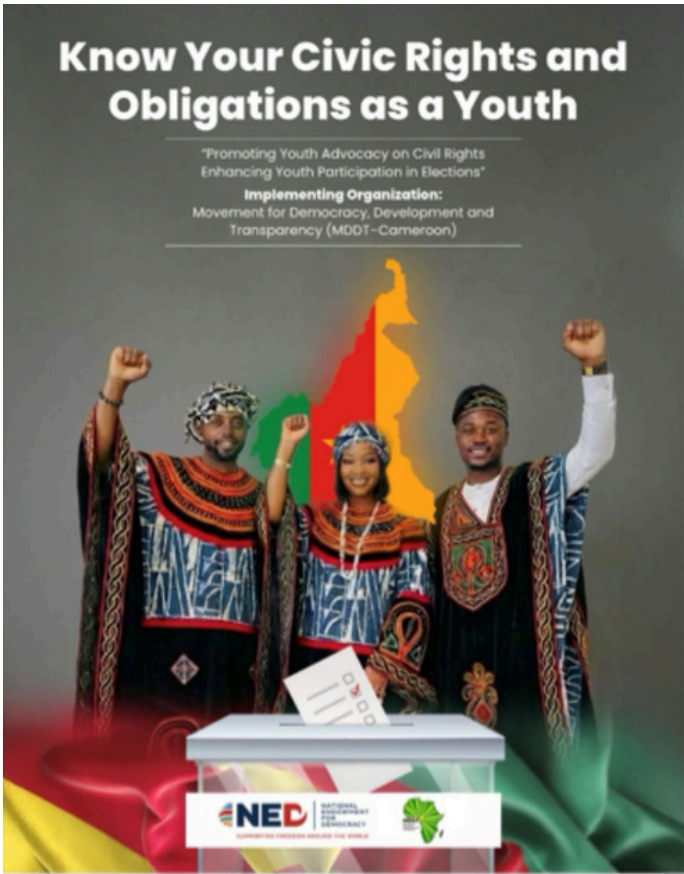
Digital Sovereignty: #MaVoteNaPawa and 2 Million Voices

Digital organizing in Cameroon operates under constant threat. Following the October 2025 presidential election, internet service in the Northwest, Southwest, and North was disrupted for over a month and, as of February 2026, has not fully recovered (Timbuktu Institute, 2025).

MDDT's #MaVoteNaPawa campaign adapted. When Instagram flagged "vote," they pivoted to WhatsApp. When WhatsApp groups were monitored, ambassadors trained in encrypted channels. When the internet was cut, 5,000 civic newsletters were distributed and radio partners activated.

The verified results, tracked through social media analytics, showed over 2 million impressions and 200,000 engagements. Web analytics revealed a 40 percent increase in traffic from MDDT platforms to ELECAM's polling station locator in October 2025 alone. Over 4 million Cameroonians were reached through traditional media: TV debates on CRTV, Equinox, and MY Media Prime; radio jingles in local languages; and press coverage in national dailies (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).





The Toolkit: Knowledge as Infrastructure In December 2025, MDDT launched

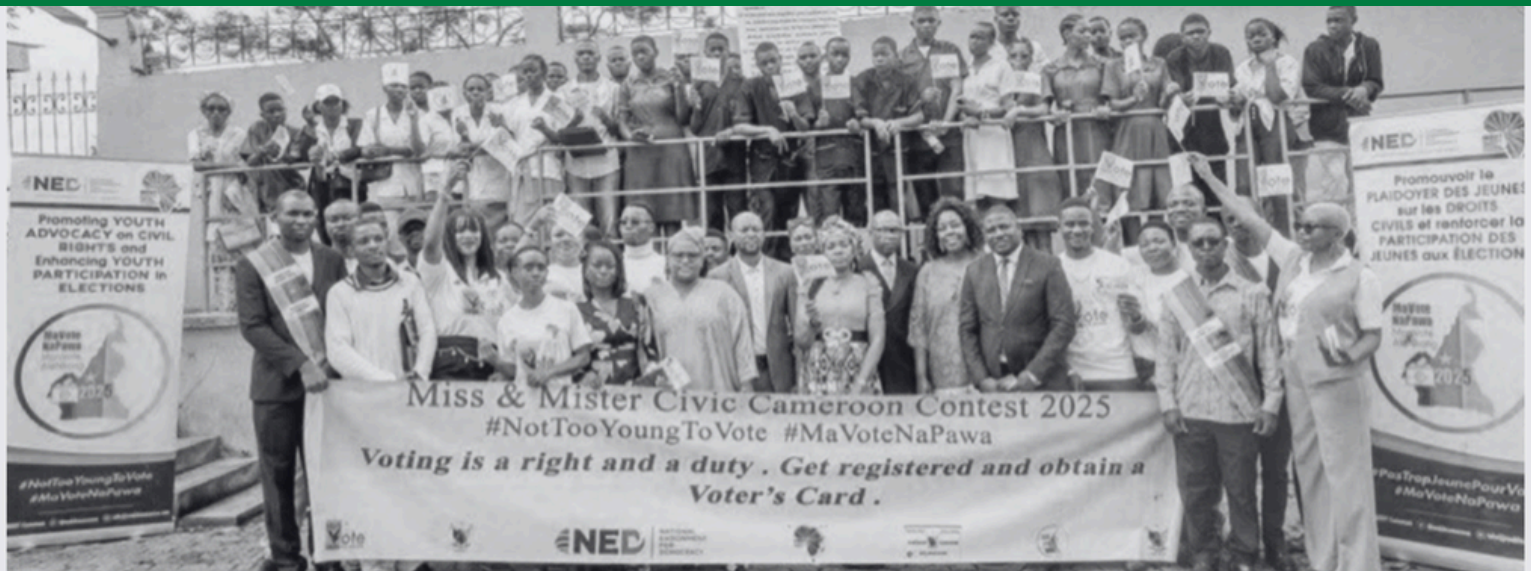
"Know Your Civic Rights and Obligations" a manual written in accessible French and English, illustrated with local case studies, and structured as a practical guide to electoral procedures, complaint mechanisms, and peacebuilding (MDDT Cameroon, 2025) At launch, 2,000 copies were distributed. Five thousand civic newsletters were circulated. the digital platform 237civilrightsinsights.com maintains 10,000 monthly page views, with 30 percent growth in email subscriptions between July and December 2025. MDDT is not just distributing information. It is building a knowledge infrastructure.

7. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Structural, Political, and Social Barriers
 Administrative inertia and bureaucratic gatekeeping remain significant obstacles. Obtaining formal partnership agreements with ELECAM remains unnecessarily cumbersome. Establishing civic clubs in universities requires approvals that move at geological speed. MDDT circumvented this through activity-specific authorizations at regional level a workaround that should not be necessary in a functioning democracy (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

The digital divide excludes large populations. Internet service in the Northwest, Southwest, and North was disrupted for over a month after the presidential election. Digital campaigns are essential but insufficient when 40 percent of the target population cannot access them (Timbuktu Institute, 2025).

The seduction of the boycott persists. The FSNC's February 2026 boycott reaffirmation threatens to repeat the 2020 error. Young people see respected opposition figures withdrawing from the process and conclude that participation is complicity.



Logistical exclusion of conflict-affected youth continues. Transporting youth delegates from the Northwest and Southwest to national events requires extensive security planning and contingency funds. Without dedicated resources, their voices remain unheard (MDDT Cameroon, 2025).

Actionable Recommendations

To the Government of Cameroon and ELECAM: Decentralize voter card collection permanently. Mobile collection units should be deployed routinely, not as a one-off civil society innovation. In the North West, only 6,645 valid cards have been distributed a fraction of those registered. Establish a *"Civic Space Fast-Track"* protocol for pre-vetted CSOs to receive expedited accreditation. Guarantee uninterrupted internet access throughout the electoral cycle. Broadcast Electoral Board sessions so citizens can see their democracy at work.

To Civil Society and Donors: Fund infrastructure, not episodic events. A symposium reaches 500 people. A trained, equipped, and insured ambassador network reaches 50,000. Invest in low-tech, high-reach tools such as USSD codes, community radio partnerships, and SMS-based information services.

To Young Cameroonians: Reject the boycott. History has proven that absence does not punish incumbents, it punishes the absent. You cannot reform an institution you refuse to enter. Run for something. Council seats, mayoralities, parliamentary constituencies are winnable when youth organize early, build coalitions, and present credible alternatives. Register before the window closes. The voter rolls are closing imminently. Do not wait. Do not assume there will be time later. Collect your card. That card sitting in an ELECAM office is your voice on a shelf. Go get it.

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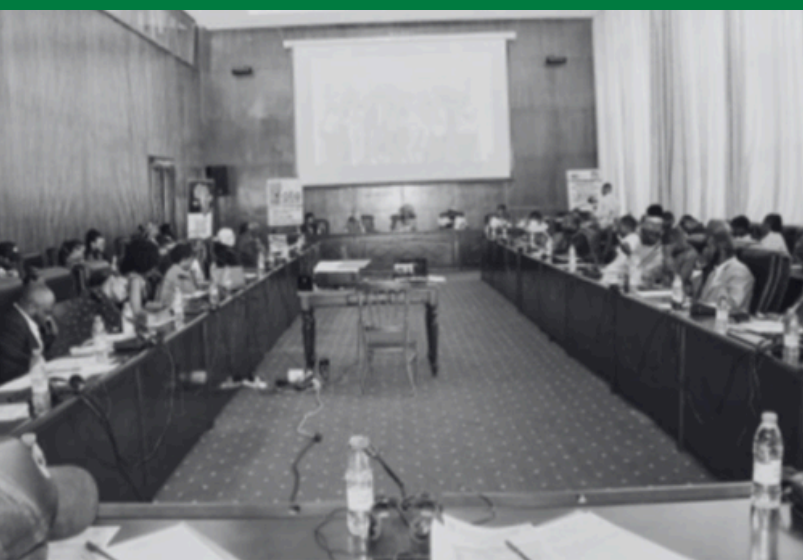
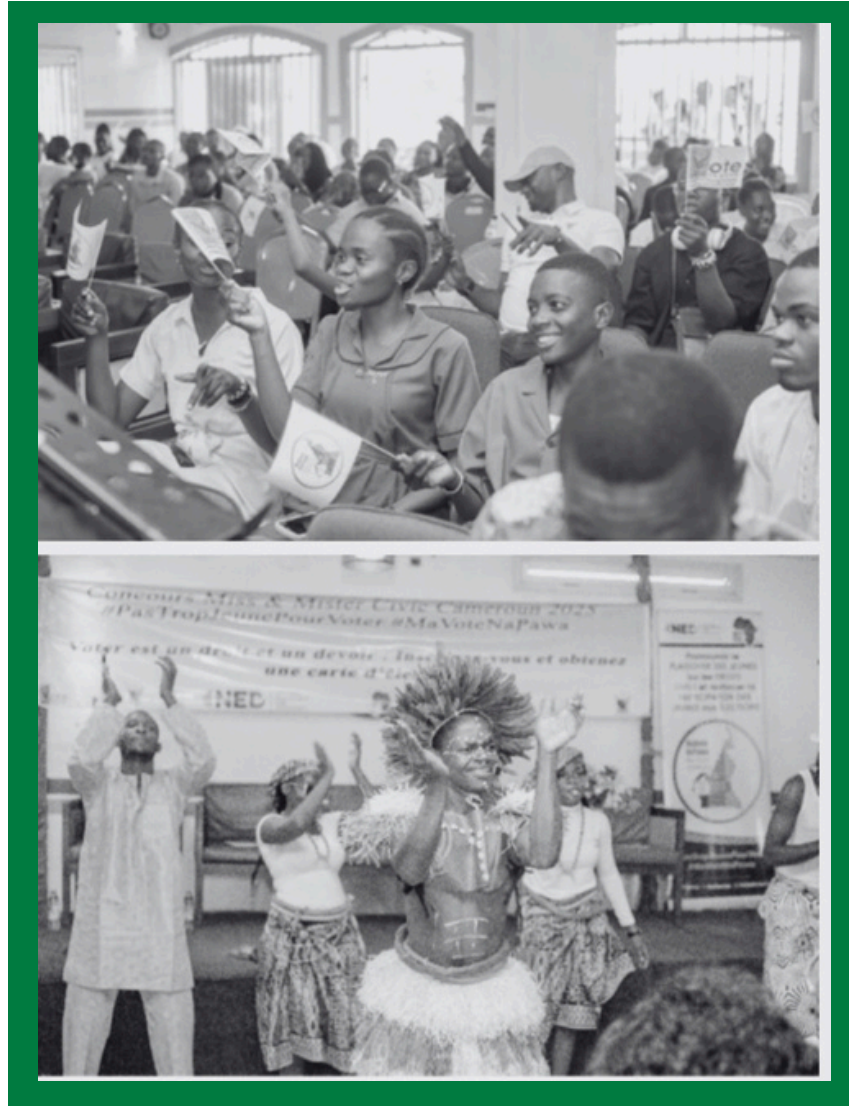
UNLOCKING YOUTH CIVIC POTENTIAL AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT, RADICALIZATION, AND THE IMPERATIVE OF CIVIC POTENTIAL.

By Maureen Dunghu

Across Africa including in Cameroon young people represent the largest demographic cohort and are central to the future of democratic governance. More than 60 % of Africa's population is under 25, yet

across the continent, youth consistently participate in formal civic and political processes at lower rates than older generations.

This discrepancy reflects a complex mix of structural, socio-economic, and political factors. While youth are often highly active in social movements, digital advocacy, and protests, they are less inclined to engage in formal electoral processes such as voting, party membership, or engaging with elected representatives.



This dynamic raises crucial concerns about the health and inclusivity of democracies. When young citizens feel disillusioned with formal institutions or excluded from decision-making, they may turn to radicalized movements, disengage entirely from civic responsibilities, or embrace alternative sometimes destabilizing forms of expression. Responsible participation therefore goes beyond casting a ballot. It encompasses understanding the electoral system, making informed decisions, engaging in community discourse, and mobilizing peers in constructive ways.

To unpack this issue, we examine the causes and consequences of youth non-participation and highlight pathways for unlocking the civic potential of Africa's most populous generation.

9. Causes and Effects of Youth Non-Participation in Democratic Processes Structural and Institutional Barriers

Despite youth making up a significant share of the electorate, they often lack meaningful access to formal avenues of influence. In many African countries, including Cameroon, electoral systems and political institutions are perceived as rigid, unresponsive, or dominated by older elites, discouraging youth involvement.

For example, bureaucracy and administrative hurdles such as complex voter registration processes can deter young citizens from participating in elections, particularly when registration is not deliberately tailored to youth needs.

Furthermore, restrictive candidacy requirements such as high age thresholds, steep campaign costs, or party nomination barriers effectively marginalize many young aspirants from political office,

reinforcing the impression that electoral politics is not a realistic route to change.

Socio-Economic Exclusion

Economic instability plays a major role in shaping youth political participation. High rates of unemployment and poverty divert attention from civic engagement as young people prioritize immediate survival needs over political involvement.

In contexts where education and employment opportunities are limited, many young people lack the economic resources and confidence to invest time in politics, weakening their agency and attachment to institutional processes.

Political Distrust and Disillusionment

A central driver of low civic engagement among youth is pervasive distrust in political systems and electoral integrity. Many young Africans perceive political parties and leaders as uncorrupt or unresponsive, believing that elections do not produce meaningful change.

This distrust manifests in reduced voter turnout and political withdrawal. Afrobarometer data shows that across 39 African countries, youth aged 18-35 vote at rates 18 percentage points lower than older generations, and are less likely to attend community meetings, join civic groups, or feel close to political parties.

In Cameroon, specific studies and civic development organizations report similar patterns: despite a youthful electorate, voter registration and turnout among youth remain low, driven by skepticism that their participation will yield tangible gains.

Lack of Civic and Political Education

Insufficient civic education diminishes young people's understanding of democratic processes, electoral systems, and their roles as citizens. Many youths are unaware of their rights, responsibilities, and the mechanics of political engagement, further reinforcing feelings of inefficacy and apathy.

Without robust political literacy whether through school curricula or public awareness campaigns elections remain abstract concepts rather than tools for everyday improvement and empowerment.

Alternative Forms of Engagement Dominate

Paradoxically, while youth are disengaged from formal structures, many are highly active outside them. Research shows that young Africans are often more likely than older generations to participate in protests and social movements, particularly when motivated by issues such as economic justice, corruption, or governance failures.

Digital platforms, online activism, and grassroots mobilization increasingly shape youth civic expression. However, such channels may lack direct influence on policy outcomes and do not replace active engagement in formal democratic processes over the long term.



Consequences of Youth Non-Participation

Erosion of Democratic Legitimacy

When a large demographic segment refrains from voting or engaging with formal civic structures, the representativeness of electoral outcomes weakens. Democracies derive strength from broad participation particularly from their largest demographic groups and low youth turnout risks diluting the legitimacy of elected governments.

Limited Representation and Policy Voice

Youth perspectives shaped by distinct socio-economic realities and priorities – are often absent from parliamentary debates and policymaking. Globally, only a small fraction of legislators are under 35, and this underrepresentation is mirrored in many African legislatures.

This lack of youthful representation means that policies affecting jobs, education, climate, and digital opportunities are shaped without adequate input from those most impacted.

Increased Risk of Disaffection and Instability

Persistent non-participation can foster alienation, pushing youth toward radicalized or disruptive forms of engagement. When formal channels are perceived as blocked or ineffective, disillusionment can fuel unrest, illicit mobilization, or civic withdrawal.

Over time, this dynamic undermines social cohesion, weakens trust in institutions, and heightens inter-generational tensions all of which pose risks to democratic stability.





Key Concerted Multi-level Strategies to Unlocking the Civic Potential of Youth Expanding Civic Education and Political Literacy

Embedding practical, experiential civic education in school systems and community programs can help young people understand democratic processes and feel equipped to participate meaningfully.

Youth-Friendly Engagement Platforms

Leveraging digital media and youth networks including social media campaigns, town halls, and interactive forums can bridge gaps between institutions and young citizens, making information accessible and relevant.

Institutional Reforms and Inclusion

Lowering structural barriers to political involvement such as reducing candidacy fees, easing registration processes, and ensuring youth representation in party leadership can broaden access to formal decision-making.

Addressing Socio-Economic Exclusion

Enhancing opportunities for education, employment, and entrepreneurship reduces economic constraints that limit civic participation, while signaling that political engagement is connected to real improvement in lives.



Building Trust and Accountability

Transparent electoral systems, anti-corruption efforts, and responsive governance practices can rebuild trust among youth, reinforcing that participation can create meaningful change.

Summarily, young people stand at the nexus of Africa's democratic future. While they face significant challenges in translating their demographic presence into political influence, the potential for transformative civic engagement remains immense.

By addressing socio-economic barriers, strengthening civic education, reforming institutions, and creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and leadership, countries like Cameroon and the continent at large can transform youth aspiration into responsible and effective participation in democratic life. Empowered youth are not just participants they are architects of more resilient, equitable, and vibrant democracies. Bottom of Form

MDDT CAMEROON ENHANCING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS.

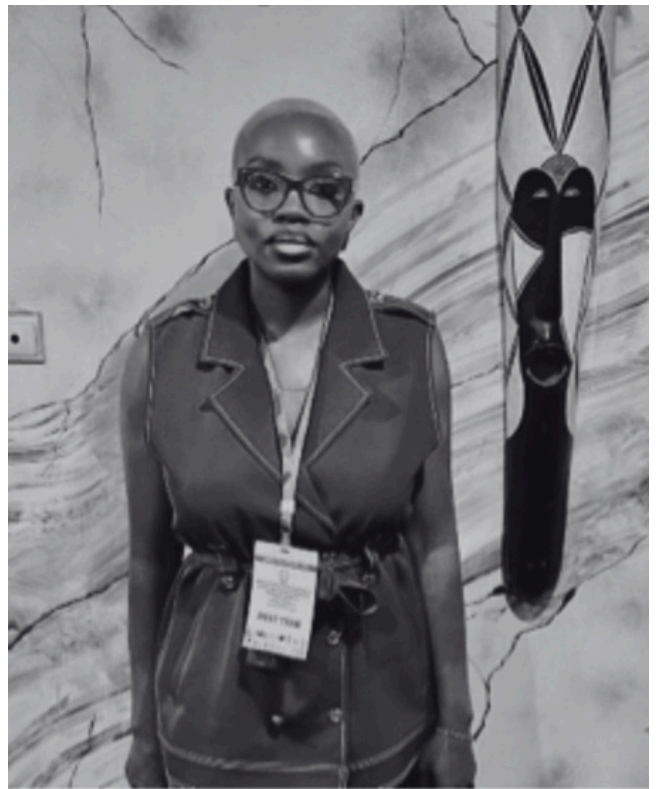
By Shalo Hedwig Yondu

A summary of findings from the NYFP Report, highlighting key performance indicators, measurable impact, and lessons learned.

Young people are shaping Cameroon's democratic future, yet their participation has often been limited by real barriers that affect awareness, trust, and safety. In response, MDDT Cameroon convened the 2nd edition of the National Youth Forum for Peace in December 2025 to strengthen youth leadership, civic responsibility, and electoral participation. The event marked International Human Rights Day and the tenth anniversary of the National Youth Peace and Security Programme, linking civic action with national reflection on rights, peace, and democratic inclusion. This is possible when youth receive tools, trust, and platforms.

The National Youth Forum for Peace brought this vision to life by turning civic participation into action and measurable results as well acting as a generational and institutional bridge while creating a safe space for expression in a society experiencing rapid shrinkage of the civic space. It gave voice to the youths, access to stakeholders and presentation of opportunities to these youths by key actors. Organized in December 2025, the 2nd edition of NYFP united youth leaders, institutions, and partners to strengthen electoral engagement and a call for No Electoral Violence ahead of national elections (legislative & municipal elections).

This program responded to a clear challenge. More than sixty percent of Cameroon's population is under twenty-five,



yet youth turnout in past elections has remained significantly lower than expected, especially in conflict affected regions. Across several regions, civic space has shrunk, reducing opportunities for youth dialogue with decision makers. In past electoral cycles, warning signs of tension appeared early, including inflammatory online messages, localized clashes between rival supporters, and fear driven rumours that discouraged voter turnout. In some communities, misinformation campaigns spread false voting procedures and inaccurate election dates, leading to confusion among first time voters. Youth radicalisation has also emerged in fragile areas where frustration, unemployment, and exclusion create fertile ground for manipulation by divisive actors. MDDT designed the programme to close this gap through training, mentorship, public campaigns, and national dialogue that equip young citizens with practical civic skills. Key performance indicators show strong progress.

Table 1. Results

Indicator	Result
Youth leaders trained	112
Stakeholders equipped	328
Citizens reached	4.2 millions
Physical forum participants	300+
Toolkits distributed	2000

These numbers reflect a structured strategy rather than a single event. Participants completed digital pre trainings, intensive workshops, and mentoring sessions with civil society leaders and institutional partners. This layered approach strengthened advocacy, communication, and project design skills that youth can apply directly within their communities.

The Miss and Mister Civic Cameroon contest added a creative pathway to participation. Over one thousand applicants entered from all ten regions, and finalists presented community projects focused on peace, voter education, and digital literacy. Judges assessed feasibility, communication, mobilization, and innovation, ensuring that winners emerged as credible civic ambassadors prepared to lead local initiatives.



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The programme also demonstrated how partnerships multiply impact.

Collaboration included youth organizations, government institutions, development partners, and media actors whose combined audiences exceeded two million people. This coalition model strengthened legitimacy, expanded outreach, and improved policy dialogue between young citizens and decision makers.

Key lessons



NATIONAL YOUTH FORUM FOR PEACE

SECOND EDITION COMPREHENSIVE ACTIVITY REPORT

Implementing Organization:
Movement For Democracy, Development and Transparency (MDDT)
Cameroon Event

Date: December 12, 2025 | Venue: Yaahot Hotel, Yaounde

Funding Partner: National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

REPORT DATE [28Y DEC. 2025]



Youth engagement rises when activities connect culture with civic education

- Mentorship increases confidence and project sustainability
- Hybrid outreach expands reach across urban and rural communities
- Institutional participation builds trust in democratic processes
- Clear data tracking strengthens accountability and credibility

forum shows that participation improves when information is accessible and when young people see real pathways to influence decisions. Beyond statistics, the most important outcome is mindset change. Participants reported stronger confidence, greater sense of responsibility, and readiness to educate peers. Communities now see youth as partners in governance rather than passive observers. This shift signals long term democratic resilience and shows that investment in youth civic leadership produces measurable national value. This progress must continue nationwide steadily.

11. Challenges and Recommendations on Youth Participation in Elections

Identification of persistent obstacles to youth engagement and strategic recommendations to foster sustained and responsible participation.



Economic and structural constraints also affect engagement. Transportation costs, document processing delays, and limited registration centres create practical obstacles. Youth who work in informal sectors often cannot leave income activities to complete administrative steps. Without flexible systems, participation remains low among those already marginalized.

Trust deficits further reduce motivation. Some young citizens believe their vote will not influence outcomes or that institutions do not represent their interests. This perception grows when communication between authorities and youth is weak or inconsistent. Rebuilding confidence requires transparency, dialogue, and visible accountability.



Strong youth participation is essential for credible elections, yet many young citizens still face barriers that limit their involvement. Field evidence from civic programmes, community dialogues, and national consultations shows that these obstacles are real, interconnected, and solvable when addressed with practical strategies.

One major barrier is information inequality. Many first-time voters lack clear guidance on registration steps, voting procedures, and eligibility requirements. In rural and conflict affected areas, access to verified civic information is limited, allowing rumours and false messages to spread quickly. This misinformation discourages participation and weakens trust in democratic processes.





Digital restrictions and censorship concerns present another challenge. Limited internet access, high data costs, and occasional platform restrictions reduce the reach of online civic education. When young people cannot freely access information or express opinions, participation declines and misinformation fills the gap.

KNOW YOUR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES PAGE 16

#NOTTOOYOUNGTOTO

THE YOUTH ARE NOT THE FUTURE. THEY ARE THE NOW

Cameroon's young civic leaders are speaking with clarity, purpose, and courage. Through education, activism, and democratic participation, they are laying the groundwork for a fairer, freer, and more inclusive nation. Their messages are not only inspiring; they are a call to action.

As the country moves forward, the time for youth to take the lead is now. With their voices, their votes, and their vision, they are not just dreaming of a better Cameroon, they are building it.

**RISE, SPEAK. ACT.
THE FUTURE IS YOURS
TO SHAPE.**

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS THE ENGINE OF DEMOCRACY.
EYANG REVINE CARINE, ADVOCATE FOR CIVIC RIGHTS

When someone's health is ignored, it affects the entire community," says Claire Laetitia. "Access to healthcare must be a national priority. I call on leaders, institutions, and citizens to invest in systems that protect everyone, especially the vulnerable. A healthy nation is a strong nation, and we must never forget that every life matters."

MAKING AN INFORMED CHOICE

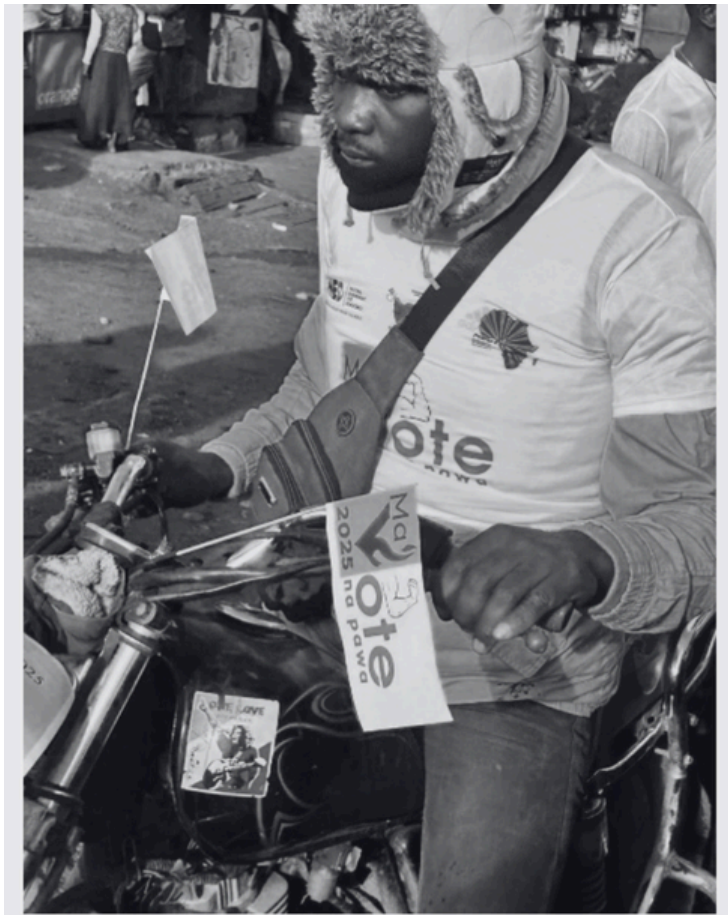
Barrier	Effect on Participation
Limited civic knowledge	Low registration rates
Misinformation	Confusion and fear
Economic constraints	Incomplete registration
Low institutional trust	Political withdrawal
Digital access limits	Reduced awareness

Addressing these barriers requires coordinated action.

Priority solutions

- Expand community civic education using local languages
- Provide mobile registration and documentation support
- Strengthen partnerships between civil society and electoral bodies
- Promote youth led dialogue with institutions
- Support affordable internet access for civic information.

The path forward requires sustained commitment. Governments must ensure transparent processes. Civil society must continue education and monitoring. Media must share verified information. Youth must remain active and informed. When these actors work together, participation increases and elections become more credible and peaceful. Long term democratic stability depends on removing these barriers systematically. Data driven planning, inclusive policies, and sustained youth investment will determine whether participation grows or declines. Cameroon has the demographic advantage of a young population. Turning that potential into democratic strength requires action, coordination, and commitment from every level of society starting now and continuing beyond election cycles for lasting impact.



12. WHAT NEXT FOR MDDT CAMEROON

A forward-looking perspective outlining MDDT Cameroon's strategic priorities and future activities.



MDDT Cameroon is entering a new phase of action focused on deepening youth participation, preventing electoral violence, and strengthening democratic trust at community level. The next phase of the #NotTooYoungToVote campaign will move beyond awareness into direct grassroots engagement across institutions, neighbourhoods, and cultural spaces. This approach responds to growing concerns about misinformation, voter apathy, and tension during election periods, which have historically limited constructive youth participation.

The organization will expand its presence in communities through sports tournaments, cultural festivals, campus dialogues, and music driven civic events. These platforms are designed to meet young people where they already gather and create safe spaces for learning, discussion, and participation. A major highlight will be the release of MDDT's Peace Anthem, which will serve as a unifying message at outreach events, reinforcing peaceful civic engagement and national cohesion.

Targeted institutional entry will begin in Bamenda and Buea through coordination visits with universities, traditional authorities, and faith leaders to secure local ownership and participation. This strategy ensures that activities are not imposed externally but are rooted in community structures that young people trust. Once access is secured, Campus Dialogue Zones will be established to provide information booths, debates, quizzes, and expert panels reaching at least 600 students directly.

Civic clubs remain central to MDDT's sustainability model. All 50 civic clubs will be reactivated to host debates, peer education sessions, and leadership discussions that promote responsible citizenship. These clubs function as long term platforms where youth continue engagement after major events end. Alongside this, media campaigns across radio, television, social platforms, and print will continue delivering verified electoral information to counter misinformation and strengthen informed participation.



Partnership expansion is another priority. Collaboration with ELECAM and MINJEC will be intensified to ensure accurate voter education, on-site registration guidance, and institutional credibility at all outreach events. These partnerships also strengthen public trust by demonstrating cooperation between civil society and national institutions.

Priority Actions Ahead

- Community sports and cultural civic outreach
- Launch of Peace Anthem campaign
- Expansion of campus dialogue platforms
- Strengthening of institutional partnerships
- Continuous nationwide media engagement



MDDT will also launch the 6th edition of its newsletter to sustain information flow and document progress. A WhatsApp Civic Verification Line will allow youths to submit suspected misinformation and receive verified responses, ensuring rapid fact checking and responsible digital engagement.



These next steps position MDDT as a bridge between institutions and communities. The goal is clear. Equip young citizens with knowledge, platforms, and confidence so they participate peacefully, reject manipulation, and lead democratic change within their communities.

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