

**ARTICLE**

# Imperialistic Politics in Francophone Africa: The Franco-Cameroonian Economic Accord under Ahmadou Ahidjo

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**Abstract**

Imperialistic politics in Cameroon is deeply rooted in its colonial past, beginning with the French-imposed accords on Ahmadou Ahidjo prior to independence. These accords have had enduring consequences, obstructing the country's political and economic development. They appear to represent a pact between France and the Cameroonian ruling class, enabling Ahidjo to consolidate and extend his authoritarian rule with French support while allowing France to exploit Cameroon's wealth with impunity. This legacy persists in contemporary Cameroon, perpetuated by the same imperialistic structures established during the colonial era. These systems of foreign domination prioritize the interests of the imperialist power (France) over those of the victimized nation (Cameroon). This article examines the broader context of French imperialistic politics in Africa, focusing on its political and economic ramifications in Cameroon. By analyzing these dynamics, the study highlights the ongoing impacts of neocolonial practices on Cameroon's governance and development.

**KEYWORDS:**

Imperialistic Politics; Ahmadou Ahidjo; Franco-Cameroonian Economic Accord.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Francophone Africa presents a compelling arena for examining the enduring legacies of imperialism, particularly the influence of French colonial policies on governance and economic systems. France's role as the principal architect of these policies has shaped the trajectory of its former colonies for over two centuries, leaving an indelible mark on their political and economic landscapes (Marshall, 2005). A growing body of literature (e.g., Burgis, 2015; Ndikumana and Boyce, 2011; Bayart, 2009) has interrogated these dynamics, revealing the mechanisms through which imperial structures continue to undermine local autonomy and perpetuate dependency. This study contributes to this discourse by focusing on the Franco-Cameroonian Accord, an emblematic example of France's strategy to maintain post-colonial influence. The Accord, which was designed during the presidency of Ahmadou Ahidjo, established economic and political dependency under the guise of cooperation. This arrangement reflects broader patterns observed across Francophone Africa, where colonial legacies such as direct rule, assimilation policies, and authoritarian governance were carefully engineered to ensure the preservation of French interests long after formal independence was granted.

The policy of assimilation, in particular, sought not only to impose foreign rule but also to institutionalise a shared cultural and linguistic identity, reinforcing France's political and economic grip on its former colonies (Conklin, 1997). This approach created a neo-colonial environment where post-colonial elites often collude with former colonial powers to sustain a status quo

that benefits foreign interests at the expense of national development (Rodney, 1972-2018; Ayittey, 2005). Leaders like Ahmadou Ahidjo actively supported these policies, aligning with France's agenda to consolidate power domestically while perpetuating dependence on the former colonial master.

The persistence of these dynamics raises critical questions about the outcomes of this cooperation. Has the Franco-Cameroonian Accord fostered meaningful economic growth and political stability in Cameroon, or has it entrenched cycles of dependency and authoritarianism? To explore these questions, this study examines the historical, political, and economic dimensions of the Accord and its implications for Cameroon and other Francophone African nations. While some nations, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, are beginning to challenge these neo-colonial arrangements, the consequences remain dramatic, especially in Cameroon, which serves as the focal point of this analysis.

In Cameroon, the entanglement of politics and economics has been profoundly shaped by the Franco-Cameroonian Accord, established during Ahmadou Ahidjo's presidency in 1960. This agreement symbolised a continuation of colonial power structures, allowing France to maintain significant influence over Cameroon's governance and economic policies. While the Accord ostensibly aimed to facilitate cooperation and development, it effectively entrenched neocolonial practices that prioritised French interests over those of the Cameroonian populace. Neocolonialism simply refers to the continuous influence exerted by former colonial powers over their former colonies through political, economic, military, and cultural means rather than direct governance. The mechanisms involved here are political manipulation, economic dependency, and cultural domination. French imperialism in Cameroon has manifested through direct political intervention, economic agreements, and institutional frameworks that serve to perpetuate dependency. Post-independence policymaking has remained heavily influenced by the colonial legacy, with local governance constrained by systems designed to benefit France. This has created a paradoxical relationship where Cameroon operates as an ostensibly independent state but remains tethered to the interests of its former colonizer. These practices have transitioned from direct colonial rule to more insidious forms of economic co-optation and cultural influence, as seen in the persistence of certain French financial systems and cultural narratives.

These dynamics prompt critical questions about the Accord's implications for Cameroon's political and economic development. To what extent has it shaped governance structures and economic outcomes in the country? Has French policy facilitated sustainable growth, or has it deepened economic inequality and dependency? This study seeks to address these questions, focusing on the enduring effects of French influence on Cameroon's political and economic landscape.

## **2 | THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BROADER POLITICAL SCIENCE UNDERSTANDING**

The exploration of state sovereignty versus neo-colonial influences, particularly through the lens of the Franco-Cameroonian Accord, offers valuable insights into the complexities of sovereignty and autonomy in post-colonial states. This analysis advances theoretical discussions in political science, particularly within the subfields of international relations, post-colonial studies, and comparative politics.

### **2.1 | Reconceptualising Sovereignty in Post-Colonial Contexts**

The case of Cameroon and similar former French colonies highlights a critical need to expand the traditional understanding of sovereignty beyond its formal trappings. Krastev's (2017) articulation of sovereignty as a foundational principle of self-determination and territorial integrity underscores its normative appeal. However, Mamdani (1996) and Ndlovu (2013) compel us to question whether such sovereignty is genuinely realised in African states burdened by neo-colonial structures.

While sovereignty is symbolically represented through national flags, anthems, and governments, its substance remains compromised when economic and political decision-making is externally influenced. This paradox challenges political science to redefine sovereignty not merely as formal independence but as a functional, authentic exercise of power by the governed.

### **2.2 | The Neo-Colonial Paradox: Nominal Sovereignty, Practical Dependence**

Cameroon's situation exemplifies what Montt (2016) describes as the paradox of nominal sovereignty undermined by external interference. The continued use of the CFA franc and the presence of binding accords favouring France illustrate how neo-colonial arrangements erode the autonomy and authority of post-colonial states. This invites broader questions about the

effectiveness of sovereignty as a framework for understanding the dynamics of power in international relations, particularly in regions where imperialistic legacies persist.

The theoretical implication here is the need to interrogate the limits of sovereignty when juxtaposed with systemic dependencies. Evans' (2015) and Pritchett & Laitin's (2014) works on state autonomy emphasise that genuine sovereignty entails independence in decision-making. For Cameroon and similar states, autonomy is constrained, rendering sovereignty a façade rather than a reality.

### **2.3 | Revisiting State Autonomy and Authority**

The interplay between sovereignty, autonomy, and authority is critical to understanding post-colonial governance. While sovereignty denotes independence, autonomy and authority reflect a state's ability to act and enforce decisions effectively. Lukes (2005) and Weber (2019) stress that legitimate authority is central to maintaining order and ensuring compliance among the populace.

In neo-colonial contexts, however, authority may lack legitimacy if perceived as serving external rather than domestic interests. The Franco-Cameroonian arrangement illustrates how external forces can co-opt domestic governance, undermining both autonomy and authority. This interplay complicates state capacity and governance, as described by Clegg and Allen (2016), revealing a gap between theoretical sovereignty and practical governance.

### **2.4 | Implications for Broader Political Science Understanding**

This analysis reinforces the relevance of dependency theory in explaining the persistent economic and political subordination of former colonies to their colonial powers. It invites scholars to revisit dependency frameworks with a focus on the nuanced mechanisms of neo-colonial control, such as economic pacts and cultural ties.

The gap between nominal sovereignty and the lived experience of dependency fosters legitimacy crises in post-colonial states. Political science must examine how such crises influence resistance movements, governance stability, and policy outcomes.

The implications extend to discussions about global governance and equity. The case underscores the importance of restructuring international institutions and agreements to prioritise genuine sovereignty and equitable partnerships.

The examination of state sovereignty in the context of neo-colonial influences challenges conventional definitions of independence and autonomy. By critiquing the limitations of formal sovereignty in post-colonial Africa, this analysis underscores the need for a deeper understanding of autonomy and authority as essential dimensions of statehood. For broader political science, the findings highlight the importance of examining power dynamics, legitimacy, and resistance within neo-colonial frameworks, offering pathways to reimagine sovereignty in more equitable and functional terms.

## **3 | IMPERIALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN AFRICA: UNRAVELLING SOVEREIGNTY, DEPENDENCY, AND THE QUEST FOR AUTONOMY**

The literature surrounding imperialism in African politics reveals a complex and nuanced discourse that both acknowledges certain infrastructural and educational advancements while critiquing the persistent economic and political subjugation embedded in neo-colonial systems. Scholars such as Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher (2015) point to infrastructural development and improved healthcare during the colonial period, arguing that these advances were not solely exploitative but also brought tangible benefits to African societies. Similarly, Roger Louis (2016) highlights how imperialism inadvertently fostered nationalism, creating a sense of shared identity among Africans that fuelled resistance against colonial domination. The investment in education, as analysed by Ana Lucia Araujo (2018) and Bickel (2018), further complicated the colonial legacy. While these educational structures cultivated an African elite and bureaucratic class, they simultaneously entrenched colonial hierarchies and suppressed indigenous knowledge systems.

However, these purported benefits pale in comparison to the exploitative and suppressive mechanisms of imperialism. Iliffe (2007) underscores the lasting damage caused by resource exploitation, labour marginalisation, and the imposition of foreign governance systems, which disrupted pre-existing African political and social frameworks. These critiques resonate deeply within the broader critique of neo-colonialism, a concept popularised by Kwame Nkrumah (1965). Neocolonialism refers to the

continued dominance of former colonial powers, such as France, through economic dependencies and cultural hegemony. Scholars like Dambisa Moyo (2009) extend this critique by arguing that foreign aid, often presented as a philanthropic endeavour, perpetuates poverty and corruption by fostering dependency rather than self-sufficiency. Moyo's advocacy for economic independence aligns with the actions of leaders in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, where bold steps have been taken to resist French influence, such as constitutional reforms and severance from neo-colonial agreements (Africanews, 2023).

Central to the critique of neo-colonialism is the role of leadership. Genuine sovereignty and economic autonomy require leaders who prioritise the interests of their people over those of foreign powers. Historical figures like Sekou Touré and Thomas Sankara exemplify nationalist and pan-Africanist leadership that rejected imperialist dictates. In contrast, many leaders in Francophone Africa have historically been seen as extensions of French influence, perpetuating dynastic rule and suppressing democratic expressions to maintain stable regimes that favour French interests (Chabal, 1981). Such leadership patterns underscore the limitations of political independence in many post-colonial African nations, where the exercise of power often remains conditioned by external forces. Dependency Theory, as articulated by Cardoso and Faletto (1979) and expanded upon by Samir Amin (2010), provides a compelling framework for understanding these dynamics. It highlights the economic subordination of Global South nations to developed countries, perpetuating cycles of underdevelopment. However, this theory has its limitations. It sometimes underestimates the agency of African states, such as Cameroon, which, despite its deep economic ties to France, has pursued diversification strategies and regional partnerships to mitigate its dependency. Contemporary scholarship also emphasises the growing resistance to neocolonial influence among younger generations and civil movements, signalling a potential shift in Franco-African relations (Wa Thingo, 2009; Chancellor, 2020).

The synthesis of these perspectives reveals a critical tension between the theoretical promises of political independence and the practical realities of neo-colonial influence. While imperialism brought infrastructural and educational developments, these gains were often instrumentalised to serve colonial interests and perpetuate systemic inequalities. The persistence of neo-colonial dynamics challenges the very notion of sovereignty, as nations like Cameroon grapple with the dual pressures of historical ties and emerging demands for economic and political autonomy. For African nations to achieve genuine sovereignty, they must address not only the structural dependencies entrenched by imperialism but also foster leadership that embodies the principles of self-determination and accountability to their citizens. This dual challenge remains central to contemporary debates on African development and international relations.

### 3.1 | Regional Cooperation in Political Stability and Economic Development

Understanding the impact of colonial legacies on contemporary state relations allows for insights into the broader theories of regional cooperation among African states. The Cameroonian experience can reveal how former colonial ties affect current economic partnerships and political alliances, which may offer lessons for enhancing stability and fostering sustainable economic growth across Francophone Africa (Mokoginta, 2018). This is very eminent in Francophone Africa, as many other countries—Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Senegal, Chad, etc.—operate under the influence of the France-Afrique, which is simply a machinery of control and imperial imposition by France over her former colonies. This played negatively over any impactful results of the former Organisation of African Unity, as there was polarisation between those for and against French dictates. Such division is still ongoing with the present African Union, and it helps in disavouring any solid and genuinely unified action by the African leaders for the good of Africa. This explains why leaders like Thomas Sankara (1983-1987) of Burkina Faso, Modibo Keita of Mali (1960-1968), Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (1957-1966), etc., had it difficult to broaden their revolutionary visions against imperial dictates for the benefit of Africa because of thorns (stooges) hired by the imperialists to counter such action. Houphouët Boigny, one of such stooges and architects of France-Afrique, regularly confronted nationalist figures such as Sekou Touré and, notably, Thomas Sankara. The consequences of this polarity are far-reaching, and it gives rise to questions like, of what use is the African Union to the Africans? This question became even more pertinent with the brutal killing of the Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, spearheaded by foreign interventions without any robust mobilisation or counterattack by the African Union (Wehrey, 2018; Pack, 2013).

### 3.2 | Linking the Study to Theories of International Relations

Another very important angle for discussion linked to imperial studies is the international relations theories with an emphasis on the post-colonial states (McGlinchey, 2017; Burchill, 2013; Dunne, 2013). International Relations (IR) theories, especially constructivism and realism, are crucial for understanding the political dynamics in post-colonial states (Epstein, 2020; Williams,

2021; Krishner, 2020). Constructivism argues that identities and national interests are socially constructed and shaped by historical legacies (Rosch, 2022; McCourt, 2022). In the context of Franco-African relations, the historical ties and shared languages (mainly through the assimilation policy) create a unique political identity that influences both political and economic policies.

On the other hand, realism focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system, where states act primarily in their own interest. This perspective is illustrated in the relationships between France and its former colonies, where political leaders may maximise gains through collaborations with France while compromising their sovereignty (Safa, 2016). This has been in fashion since independent Africa, with most of the continent's leaders out to safeguard their interests, build personalist power hegemony, rely on imperial backup to crush resistances, and sell the future of the nation. It is a deal between the master and the puppet, both benefitting at different levels and capacities. However, the drama here is that France, as the master, benefits with her population, as the predatory policies targeting the economic resources of the victim nations enhance the living standards of the French men, contrary to the case of the Africans, who are only the puppets, and their family, as well as a tiny group of collaborators, share the national cake (Herbst, 2000; Van de Walle, 2001). The rest of the population is left to their fate without any certainty of expecting manner. Based on this explanation, it becomes crystal clear that the interest here is simply referred to as "egocentrism." Egocentrism is a self-centred approach that prioritises individual desires and benefits against a common or collective good. From this it is crystal clear that an egocentric leader will accept a deal that is destined to fill only his pocket and impoverish the rest of the people. A non-egocentric leader sees the people just the way he sees himself and his family and cannot align to a covenant with another partner that will come to kill such a patriotic and nationalistic feeling. Ahidjo of Cameroon is still remembered for that. The ratio in terms of percentage benefits is 99 (France): (Victimised African Nations). In fact, once in power, he developed a chronic taste for securing it by every means, and this made him one of the most faithful servants of the French government in contemporary Africa. He did not tolerate any threat to his power and rule, notably from the Union des Population du Cameroun (UPC), the genuinely nationalist political party that had long served as a thorn in both France's and Ahidjo's path. Ahidjo actively relied on the French military assistance to crush the UPC rebellion at different periods (1958, 1959, 1961, 1964, etc.) with thousands of losses of lives. The same French military services were exploited by Houphouët Boigny, among many other leaders, for the purpose of ethnic cleansing and repression.

#### **4 | COMPARING FRENCH IMPERIAL RELATIONS IN AFRICA TO OTHER IMPERIAL POWERS**

The relationship between France and its former African colonies stands out as notably distinct when compared to the approaches of other colonial powers on the continent. Numerous studies (Chafer & Keese, 2013; Deltombe, Domergue, & Tatsita, 2016; McNamara, 1989; Bertocchi et al., 2015) have delved into the political dynamics of French-African relations, often highlighting the enduring networks of influence that extend well beyond formal decolonization. Research by Bat (2020) underscores the dual role of French military agreements, which ostensibly ensure localised security but also serve as a mechanism for France to project power and safeguard its economic interests. Frantz Fanon (1961) earlier identified the post-colonial conundrum wherein African leaders often oscillate between aspirations for autonomy and the reality of economic and military dependence on their former coloniser.

A contemporary manifestation of this dependency is the "Françafrique" phenomenon, which scholars like Imad Khadduri (2012) argue represents a system of covert control maintained through a complex network of political and economic alliances. Language and culture have also played a critical role in sustaining French influence. The continued dominance of the French language in African political discourse often limits alternative frameworks, reinforcing the power dynamics that favour France and curtailing the potential for nationalist or Pan-Africanist projects to take root.

Economic arrangements between France and its former colonies reflect another dimension of this enduring influence. Scholars (Smith, 2011; Marsaille, 2005; Bush, 2018; Bond, 2014) have analysed agreements such as the CFA Franc currency system, established ostensibly to promote monetary stability in Francophone Africa. While some argue that the system has provided economic predictability (Amin, 2010), it has also been widely criticised for perpetuating dependency. François Venter (2017) notes that while these economic frameworks offer stability, they severely constrain the capacity of African governments to make autonomous fiscal and monetary decisions. Furthermore, studies show that French economic policies often prioritise French corporate interests, leading to significant repercussions for local economies. Faye (2013) highlights that these agreements often hinder genuine development by channelling wealth and opportunity disproportionately towards France.

The CFA Franc system epitomises this dynamic. Critics argue that its design maintains a quasi-colonial economic structure, limiting the economic sovereignty of participating nations. While proponents cite its role in stabilising inflation and exchange rates, detractors highlight the broader implications of such dependency, including the inability to pursue independent developmental policies tailored to local needs.

## 5 | THE FRANCO-CAMEROONIAN ACCORD: A FRAMEWORK FOR POST-COLONIAL DEPENDENCY

The Franco-Cameroonian Accord refers to a set of agreements signed between Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first president of Cameroon, and representatives of the French government. These agreements were formalised in two critical phases: the first on 31 December 1959 in Paris and the second on 13 November 1960, coinciding with Cameroon's official independence. These documents reveal much about the nature of French influence in Cameroon post-independence and its implications for governance, resource management, and sovereignty.

A key question arises: what did the signing of these accords mean for the future of French Cameroon? To address this, it is essential to examine two critical clauses, as highlighted by Guiffo (1977, pp. 40-41):

### Article 1:

*“The defence of the state of Cameroon is ensured under the responsibility of the High Commissioner of the French Republic by the French armed forces. These forces are tasked with maintaining territorial integrity and protecting material resources from external aggression and internal subversion that could compromise the security of Cameroon.”*

### Article 55:

*“The High Commissioner of the French Republic in Cameroon is consulted by the Cameroonian government regarding personal authorisations for research permits, acquisitions, or leasing of permits or concessions concerning mineral substances classified as defence materials. These include hydrocarbons, uranium, thorium, lithium, beryllium, helium ores, and their compounds. The list is non-exhaustive and can be modified by mutual agreement.”*

These clauses provide a clear picture of the type of “independence” France envisioned for Cameroon and its other former colonies: a framework where sovereignty was nominal while economic and military control remained firmly within France's grasp.

Article 1 places the responsibility for Cameroon's defence squarely under French authority, ostensibly to ensure stability and security. However, this clause also allowed France to maintain a military presence and exercise significant political influence in Cameroon. The implication was that Cameroon's sovereignty in defence matters was subordinated to French strategic interests.

This arrangement extended to economic matters, as reflected in Article 55. The High Commissioner's role in controlling access to mineral resources, particularly those classified as “defence materials,” highlights a system designed to prioritise French interests. The inclusion of valuable resources such as uranium and hydrocarbons, coupled with the non-exhaustive nature of the list, demonstrates the flexibility France reserved to exploit additional resources as circumstances evolved.

As Abé (2019) points out, these clauses reveal a distinction between genuine and apparent power. While Ahmadou Ahidjo was nominally the leader of an independent Cameroon, true authority resided with the French High Commissioner. Ahidjo's frequent visits to Paris for consultation on governance matters further underscore this dynamic. The legal framework provided by the accords allowed France to maintain substantial influence while presenting an image of decolonisation.

The replacement of André-Marie Mbida, Cameroon's first Prime Minister, with Ahidjo exemplifies France's strategy to install leaders who would safeguard French interests. Mbida's refusal to align with French priorities made him unsuitable for the post-independence political landscape that France sought to control. Ahidjo, seen as more compliant, ensured that France's strategic and economic objectives were upheld.

Article 55's classification of mineral resources as “defence materials” gave France a legal avenue to monopolise access to Cameroon's natural wealth. By framing this control within a defence narrative, France entrenched economic dependency and restricted Cameroon's capacity to exploit its resources autonomously. This arrangement effectively stifled genuine development

and contributed to long-term economic stagnation, as decisions about resource management were conditioned by French interests rather than local priorities.

The clause stating that the list of “defence materials” could be modified by mutual agreement further highlights the asymmetry of power. In practice, this flexibility was an assurance that any new resource discovered could also fall under French control, given the imbalance in the negotiating power of the two parties. Such provisions ensured that Cameroon remained a resource hub for France, with minimal benefits for its own economy.

The second phase of the accord, signed on 13 November 1960, further institutionalised French influence across multiple sectors. The “Accord Franco-Camerounais de Coopération et d’Assistance Technique” included a wide range of agreements, covering economic, monetary, and financial cooperation; military assistance and technical cooperation; and cultural exchange and personnel agreements.

These provisions ensured that even after formal independence, France retained control over Cameroon’s currency, trade, and military. The agreements reflected a broader French strategy of sustaining influence in its former colonies under the guise of cooperation.

The Franco-Cameroonian Accord represents a paradox of independence. While Cameroon gained formal sovereignty, its political and economic systems remained tightly controlled by France. The legal frameworks established through the accord prioritised French strategic and economic interests, often at the expense of Cameroon’s development and autonomy.

The accords illustrate how legality can be wielded to sustain dominance under the guise of mutual benefit. By conditioning resource exploitation and defence on French oversight, the agreements entrenched a dependency that continues to shape Cameroon’s political and economic landscape. The question of whether France would have maintained such arrangements without access to Cameroon’s resources highlights the opportunistic nature of post-colonial politics, where national interests are subordinated to external control masked as cooperation.

## 6 | METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study examines the intricate interplay of historical, political, and economic factors shaping politics and economic cooperation in Francophone Africa, with a particular focus on the Franco-Cameroonian Accord during Ahmadou Ahidjo’s presidency. By analysing the direct and indirect impacts of French imperial policies on Cameroonian governance and development, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Franco-Cameroonian relationship and its long-term implications.

A qualitative research design underpins this study, enabling a nuanced exploration of the historical and socio-political dimensions of the Franco-Cameroonian Accord. Among the questions addressed in this study are: (a) How did Ahmadou Ahidjo’s administration navigate economic cooperation with France? (b) In what ways did French imperial policies shape Cameroon’s political landscape during this period? (c) What were the socio-economic outcomes of the Franco-Cameroonian Accord for Cameroon? (d) In which specific ways has Cameroon sought to assert autonomy and mitigate the influence of French neocolonial practices? (e) What counter-strategies or policies has Cameroon implemented in response to perceived French manipulation in economic governance?

From these questions, we hypothesise that (a) the Franco-Cameroonian Accord fostered economic dependency, gradually undermining Cameroonian sovereignty; (b) French imperial policies influenced Cameroonian governance, reinforcing a neocolonial relationship that persisted post-independence; (c) the socio-economic outcomes of the Accord varied regionally within Cameroon, reflecting ethnic and political disparities. (d) Cameroon has not officially renewed the 50-year Franco-Cameroonian Accord that expired in 2011 and which constitutes the basis of France’s dictates, hence giving the latitude for a possible and genuine autonomy (e) Cameroon today has improved its foreign policies by incorporating other solid international partners such as China, Japan, and Russia as vital players in economic and infrastructural matters, hence limiting French monopoly over this sector.

## 7 | SOURCES AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process for this study relied on both primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the Franco-Cameroonian Accord and its implications.

For primary sources, the research utilised extensive archival materials from both public and private repositories in Cameroon and France. The National Archives in Yaoundé provided critical government records, policy papers, and periodicals. These

were complemented by rare collections of eyewitness accounts and digital resources from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), which offered access to correspondence, reports, and records from French colonial administrators and Cameroonian officials. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the nuanced perspectives of individuals with expertise in Franco-Cameroonian relations. The interview participants included twenty individuals from diverse backgrounds, such as political historians, former officials, economists, and local activists deeply engaged in the study of Cameroon's political landscape and its post-colonial relationship with France. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in exploring their views and provided deeper insights into the complex interplay of neocolonial dynamics. The responses were analysed systematically through thematic coding to identify recurring themes and divergent opinions. These qualitative findings were then integrated into the broader research framework to illustrate the residual influence of French policies on Cameroon's political economy.

The secondary data collection focused on analysing scholarly works on Franco-African relations, post-colonial governance in Cameroon, and African economic development policies. This study drew upon personal collections, library resources in Yaoundé, and online databases such as the Internet Archive and Harmattan to synthesise existing research. Contemporary newspapers and magazines, including *La Presse du Cameroun* and other periodicals, were also examined to understand public perceptions and the political discourse surrounding the Franco-Cameroonian Accord. Together, these primary and secondary sources enabled the study to construct a comprehensive understanding of both historical and contemporary perspectives on Cameroon's relationship with France.

## 8 | ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applies multiple theoretical approaches to analyse the Franco-Cameroonian Accord and its broader implications. Dependency theory is used to explore how colonial economic structures have perpetuated underdevelopment in Cameroon, fostering a continued economic dependency on France. Additionally, a constructivist approach is adopted to examine how Franco-Cameroonian relations and French imperial influence have shaped political identities and discourses in post-colonial Cameroon.

To provide context and draw comparisons, the Franco-Cameroonian experience is analysed alongside similar accords in other Francophone African nations. This comparative perspective highlights how varying domestic political, social, and economic contexts have influenced the outcomes of such agreements.

The core of the analysis centres on a detailed case study of the Franco-Cameroonian Accord. This case study investigates the Accord's formation, implementation, and long-term consequences, offering an in-depth understanding of the

## 9 | IMPACT OF THE FRANCO-CAMEROONIAN ACCORD ON CAMEROONS POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The Franco-Cameroonian Accord has profoundly shaped Cameroon's political and economic trajectory, largely reinforcing authoritarian governance and economic dependency on France. The agreement, in place for over six decades, has been a source of significant controversy, particularly in its perceived role in perpetuating colonial-era dynamics.

### 9.1 | Shifts in Political Power and Authoritarian Rule

The Accord provided Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, with considerable leverage to consolidate power, often at the expense of democratic principles. With French backing, Ahidjo suppressed dissent, framing opposition groups such as the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) as threats to national stability. This support enabled him to centralise authority, dismantle federal structures, and establish a one-party state in 1966 under the Cameroon National Union (CNU). The alignment with French interests often justified authoritarian measures, including laws against subversion and the dissolution of political pluralism, under the guise of fostering national unity.

Ahidjo's governance set the stage for continued authoritarianism under his successor, Paul Biya, who has maintained a system that permits limited democratic representation while preserving authoritarian control. While multiparty politics were reintroduced in 1990, the practice of democracy remains superficial, with freedom of expression curtailed when it challenges state authority. The persistence of authoritarian governance reflects a broader pattern across Francophone Africa, where regimes often serve imperial interests over domestic priorities.



## 9.2 | The Role of French Influence

French influence has remained pervasive in shaping Cameroon's governance. French advisors have guided key political and economic decisions, fostering a system that prioritises French interests. This has entrenched nepotism and corruption, as local elites align with external powers to maintain their positions. Both Ahidjo and Biya have relied on these patronage networks, undermining genuine sovereignty and democratic governance.

## 9.3 | Economic Dependency and Monetary Servitude

The Accord's provisions on currency have been central to Cameroon's economic dependence. While Article 25 of the agreement allows Cameroon to establish its own currency, Article 26 ensures the continued use of the CFA franc—a mechanism of monetary control tied to the French Treasury. Attempts by other African leaders, such as Togo's Sylvanus Olympio and Mali's Modibo Keita, to replace the CFA franc were met with French-backed coups, highlighting the political costs of challenging this economic arrangement.

In Cameroon, the CFA franc has stifled economic growth and sovereignty, as its value and policies are dictated by external interests. Despite its supposed benefits, the currency has undergone devaluations, exacerbating economic hardships for ordinary Cameroonians. This monetary servitude perpetuates the colonial legacy, binding Cameroon's economic fate to France.

The Franco-Cameroonian Accord has profoundly shaped Cameroon's political and economic systems, reinforcing authoritarianism and economic dependency. While framed as a partnership, the agreement has primarily served French interests, undermining Cameroon's sovereignty and development. Breaking free from these constraints requires a re-evaluation of this relationship and a concerted effort to assert genuine independence.

## 10 | ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF FRENCH POLICIES ON CAMEROONS DEVELOPMENT

French policies have played a significant role in shaping Cameroon's economic development, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of neocolonial dynamics. The economic implications of these policies can be understood by examining the effectiveness of French aid-funded development projects and the dependency created by French investments and trade relations.

The effectiveness of development projects funded by French aid has been mixed. Historically, French aid targeted infrastructure and agricultural development, as outlined in Section II (Articles 9, 10, and 11) of the Economic and Monetary Cooperation Agreement (Guiffo, 1977). While projects such as the construction of roads and hospitals brought short-term benefits, they often served French economic interests rather than addressing systemic issues like poverty and unemployment. Many of these projects relied on French companies, resulting in inflated costs, limited capacity building, and a dependency that undermined sustainable growth. A striking example of French influence is the Bolloré Group, a multinational conglomerate entrenched in Cameroon's economy. Bolloré has dominated vital sectors such as ports, railways, plantations, forests, and media (Deltombe, 2009). In the forestry sector, its operations, often conducted through the Société d'Exploitation des Parcs à Bois du Cameroun (SEPBC), prioritise exports over local economic benefits. The agricultural sector tells a similar story. Through subsidiaries like Safacam and Socapalm, Bolloré controls vast palm oil plantations, where workers endure poor conditions, low wages, and displacement, particularly affecting vulnerable communities like the Bagyeli people. Environmental degradation from these activities further compounds the challenges. Recent legal actions, including a ruling by a French tribunal in 2023 ordering Bolloré to compensate affected Cameroonian communities, highlight the persistent issues of exploitation and injustice.

The privatisation of Cameroon's railway system, Camrail, is another example of French economic dominance. Once a source of national pride, the railways have suffered from outdated infrastructure and unsafe conditions under Bolloré's management. Financial gains that could have benefitted Cameroon have instead been directed to French interests, while mass worker dismissals and poor management have exacerbated unemployment and economic hardship (Le Plan B, 2007).

Economic dependency on French investments and trade relations further underscores Cameroon's challenges. French companies dominate critical sectors, such as telecommunications, banking, and energy, restricting economic diversification and perpetuating a cycle of dependency. Cameroon's trade relationship with France is similarly skewed, with the country exporting low-cost raw materials and importing high-value goods. This trade imbalance stifles local industries and hampers economic growth (Guiffo, 1977). The prioritisation of Douala's artificial seaport over natural ports in Limbe and Tiko reveals the neocolonial strategies at play. This decision, made during the Ahidjo era, aligned with French interests and has continued to marginalise

certain regions of the country, fuelling grievances, particularly among Anglophone communities. Restrictive agreements, such as Articles 14 and 15 of the Franco-Cameroonian economic accord, further cement this dependency. These provisions require French consultation for significant economic decisions, limiting Cameroon's ability to pursue equitable partnerships with other nations. Despite efforts by President Paul Biya to diversify economic relationships, including partnerships with China, the influence of France remains deeply entrenched, slowing meaningful progress.

Although French policies in Cameroon often attract criticism, some benefits are worth noting, particularly during the early years of independence. French investments in infrastructure during the 1960s and 70s, including roads, education, and health-care, laid the foundation for economic growth. Transport networks established during this period facilitated trade and mobility, contributing to preliminary development. Additionally, French monetary policies in the early post-independence years provided a degree of economic stability. Cameroon recorded GDP growth rates of 5–6% annually between 1960 and 1980, with the GDP per capita doubling from \$180 to approximately \$450 during this period (World Bank, 1980). However, these achievements came at the cost of increased external debt and limited local enterprise diversification, highlighting the complexities of French influence.

The economic implications of French policies in Cameroon reveal a dual narrative. While certain initiatives supported short-term development and stability, the broader framework entrenched economic dependency and perpetuated systemic inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires a critical reevaluation of exploitative agreements and the establishment of partnerships that genuinely prioritise Cameroon's long-term interests and sustainable development.

## 11 | COMPARATIVE DYNAMICS

Analysing Cameroon in the context of other Francophone nations enhances our understanding of the shared imperialistic dynamics that shaped post-colonial realities. The experiences of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire offer useful comparative frameworks:

**Senegal:** The post-independence relationship between Senegal and France mirrors that of Cameroon, marked by continued reliance on French aid and investment. This support facilitated infrastructural development but also perpetuated neocolonial ties. French involvement in Senegal primarily centred around the promotion of an agricultural sector focused on the cash crop exports, much like in Cameroon, highlighting the common structural dependency on monoculture economies within both nations.

**Côte d'Ivoire:** Similarly, the economic policies during Félix Houphouët-Boigny's leadership in Côte d'Ivoire were closely aligned with French interests, fostering agricultural modernization. Despite an economic boom and notable development fuelled by French backing, the underlying economic structure faced criticism for replicating colonial dependencies, thereby reinforcing neocolonial dynamics similar to those experienced in Cameroon.

### *Integration with larger debate on post-colonial theory and global governance*

The aforementioned insights resonate profoundly with post-colonial theories that advocate for critical interrogation of former colonial narratives and structures. Scholars like Spivak (2010) highlight the importance of local voices and perspectives in reconstructing a more equitable global narrative, arguing against the dominant discourses propagated by former colonial powers.

Moreover, in the context of global governance, addressing neocolonial dependencies necessitates a reassessment of international financial institutions that often perpetuate such inequalities. Structural adjustments imposed by institutions like the IMF and World Bank have historically led to further entrenchment of neocolonial relationships rather than genuine development (Moyo, 2018). Thus, for countries like Cameroon, developing policies aimed at ensuring economic sovereignty and regional cooperation in light of these historical injustices becomes not only an ethical imperative but also essential for sustainable development in the 21st century.

## 12 | THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF NEO-COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

The Franco-Cameroonian Accord serves as a striking illustration of the delicate balance between state sovereignty and external influence, highlighting the paradox of post-independence sovereignty in countries like Cameroon. Despite certain developmental benefits gained through imperialist support, the enduring suffering inflicted by asymmetrical cooperation between Cameroon and France cannot be overlooked (Harvey, 2003; Prashed, 2007; Sylla, 2018; Bond, 2015). Ahmadou Ahidjo's regime epitomised

this neocolonial relationship, as it navigated the political and economic pressures imposed by French influence amidst nationalist movements. Ahidjo's experience was not unique, as many other Francophone African leaders shared similar predicaments. Leaders like Senghor of Senegal and Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire formed close economic and political ties with France, often subordinating national resources and decision-making to French interests. Senghor, for instance, was highly dependent on French economic aid, offering significant control over Senegal's markets and resources in return. This dynamic continued under his successor, Abdou Diouf, and in other nations like Côte d'Ivoire, where France remained the principal economic partner. General Charles de Gaulle's assertion that these leaders were France's "most important and faithful allies" underscores the entrenched neocolonial arrangements that prioritised French dominance over African sovereignty.

Gabon offers another striking example of French influence. Omar Bongo, who ruled for 42 years, was accused of using Gabon to secure French interests across Africa, including allegedly facilitating French arms supplies during the Biafran conflict. Such actions, if true, would be violations of international law concerning territorial sovereignty and non-interference (Shaw, 2017; Brownlie, 2008; Crawford, 2006; Kohen, 2004). Despite his claims of bringing development to Gabon, Bongo's lengthy tenure was marked by slow progress on infrastructural projects, while his allegiance to France ensured that Gabon continued to fuel French economic interests. This raises critical questions about the true independence of sovereign nations in a system where foreign powers, like France, maintain such deep economic and political control. This phenomenon challenges the conventional notion of sovereignty, revealing the complex dynamics of governance under neocolonialism.

The implications of the Franco-Cameroonian Accord also extend to broader regional cooperation dynamics within Francophone Africa. The patterns of neocolonialism in the region are characterised by France's strategic use of certain nations to expand its influence over others, maximising its benefits while maintaining economic and diplomatic control. Cameroon's interactions with other Francophone nations often align with France's agenda, limiting the scope for autonomous regional cooperation (Bush, 2020). This pattern of French influence stifles the potential for independent action within regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), as well as the African Union (AU) and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The dynamics within these organisations often reflect the competing interests of member states, many of which maintain neocolonial ties with imperial powers, undermining genuine regional solidarity.

In the case of CEMAC (Central African Economic and Monetary Community), where all member states maintain relationships with France, the prospect of collective action becomes increasingly difficult. The French influence discourages the development of a unified defence bloc or economic cooperation, as external imperial powers actively work to prevent any initiatives that might threaten their interests. This pattern is echoed in the African Union, where internal divisions persist between leaders who maintain ties with France and those who resist. The presence of such divisions raises concerns about the credibility and effectiveness of regional and continental cooperation, as political conditions foster betrayal and undermine solidarity. For instance, Houphouët-Boigny's suspected involvement in the assassination of Thomas Sankara and the 2011 coup against Laurent Gbagbo reflect the neocolonial undercurrents in Francophone Africa, where political leaders often prioritise imperialist interests over national or regional unity (Voice of America, 2015; Jeune Afrique, 2011). These instances of betrayal are not isolated but part of a broader pattern of political manipulation within neocolonial contexts, complicating efforts at regional solidarity. The persistence of such dynamics reveals that the interests of imperial powers continue to fragment African unity, ultimately impeding the realisation of a genuine, collective African identity and self-determination.

## CONCLUSION

To effectively address neocolonial dependencies, Cameroon, along with other similar nations, must adopt comprehensive policy reforms that promote economic independence and bolster local governance. The government should prioritise diversifying its economy to reduce reliance on French investment and trade. By cultivating partnerships with emerging economies, particularly within the Global South and BRICS nations, Cameroon can access alternative investment sources and expand its participation in global markets (Nyamnjoh, 2020). A key strategy should include strengthening local industries, particularly in agriculture and technology, to build resilience against external economic shocks.

In parallel, education and capacity-building programs are crucial to fostering long-term self-reliance. By reorienting educational curricula to emphasise critical thinking, local history, and the importance of autonomy, future generations will be better positioned to challenge neocolonial frameworks and nurture local leadership and innovation. Moreover, increasing transparency in governance is essential for combating corruption, which often exacerbates dependency on foreign powers.

Recent political shifts, such as rising anti-French sentiments in nations like Mali and Burkina Faso, offer Cameroon an opportunity to reassess its foreign policy and economic partnerships. These sentiments reflect broader dissatisfaction with former colonial powers and signal a growing desire for self-determination and regional unity among African countries. By aligning with this rising wave of nationalism and autonomy, Cameroon could foster stronger ties with neighbouring countries seeking to distance themselves from neocolonial influences. Such regional solidarity could pave the way for a collective push towards greater sovereignty and economic cooperation, potentially shifting the historical power dynamics in West Africa.

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