

The Geopolitical Projection of Cameroon in the 21st Century: A Myth Between Institutional Weaknesses and the Absence of International Public Policy

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Abstract :

This article examines the geopolitical projection of Cameroon in the twenty-first century, arguing that it remains largely a performative myth shaped by institutional fragility and the absence of a coherent foreign policy. Drawing on a combined constructivist–neorealist framework, the analysis asks: to what extent does Cameroon's claimed geopolitical projection constitute a functional foreign policy posture, or does it amount to a discursive exercise disconnected from material capabilities? The article shows that governance deficits including the concentration of executive authority, endemic corruption (Cameroon ranked 140th out of 180 countries on the 2023 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index), administrative fragmentation, and a crisis of political legitimacy prevent the state from formulating and sustaining a coherent external strategy. Unlike Nigeria, which has institutionalized its continental influence through ECOWAS leadership and peacekeeping missions, or South Africa, whose BRICS membership and AU Commission presence give it durable multilateral leverage, Cameroon relies primarily on symbolic gestures and one-off diplomatic events with limited strategic follow-through. The article also examines the role of non-state actors' civil society, diaspora networks, and corporations alongside the constraints imposed by external partners such as France, China, and multilateral institutions. It concludes that without institutional reform and a structured foreign policy integrating security, development, and economic diplomacy, Cameroon will remain a reactive actor rather than a shaper of regional dynamics.

Keywords: Cameroon, geopolitical projection, governance, economic diplomacy, institutions, foreign policy, international partnerships, constructivism, neorealism.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Importance and Scope of the Topic:

Cameroon begins the twenty-first century at a structural crossroads. Sahelian insecurity is reshaping security alliances north of its borders. China has become the dominant infrastructure financier across Central Africa. Franco-African relations are under pressure from both sides. The post-COVID economic landscape has forced a renegotiation of continental hierarchies that few states in the region were positioned to navigate. Against these pressures, a country that shares borders with six states, anchors the CEMAC monetary zone, and operates the main port for a landlocked hinterland stretching into Chad and the Central African Republic would appear to hold real cards. In theory, Cameroon's position is strategic. In practice, as the following pages show, it converts remarkably little of that geography into influence.

This gap is not uniquely Cameroonian, but it is unusually stark. Achille Mbembe, one of the most incisive Cameroonian theorists of postcolonial African statehood, has argued across several decades that the distance between Africa's structural weight and its political voice is reproduced through what he calls the "private indirect government" of the state a mode of authority that extracts without investing, that performs sovereignty without institutionalizing it (Mbembe, 2001). In his more recent work, *Brutalisme* (2020), Mbembe sharpens this analysis, arguing that the contemporary African state has increasingly assumed what he calls a "logic of the expendable": it governs through the controlled production of scarcity and insecurity rather than through redistribution or institutional capacity-building. This framework captures Cameroon's diplomatic paralysis precisely. A state whose governing logic prioritizes predatory extraction over institutional investment cannot, almost by definition, sustain the long-term strategic thinking that effective foreign policy requires. Mamoudou Gazibo, whose work on African democratization remains among the most analytically rigorous produced on the continent, has similarly shown that weak state institutions in sub-Saharan Africa tend to produce "facade pluralism" an appearance of organized political life that masks the personalization of power (Gazibo, 2006). Both frameworks describe Cameroon with unusual precision.

The numbers confirm what these frameworks predict. Cameroon scored 44.5 out of 100 on the 2023 Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance below the continental average of 50.2 with particularly weak scores in Safety and Rule of Law and Participation and Human Rights. It ranked 140th out of 180 countries on the 2023 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. These are not incidental data points. They describe the institutional environment that shapes everything the state tries to do beyond its borders.

1.2 Research Problem and Questions:

Against this backdrop, Cameroonian political elites have sustained a consistent discourse of strategic projection and regional leadership in official speeches, diplomatic protocols, and state-sponsored events whose ambition contrasts sharply with the country's measurable external influence. The gap between what is claimed and what is achieved raises a specific analytical problem.

The central question this article addresses is: to what extent does Cameroon's claimed geopolitical projection constitute a functional foreign policy posture, or does it remain a

performative fiction sustained by institutional fragility and the absence of a structured external strategy? Three subsidiary questions follow. First, through what institutional mechanisms is the gap between discourse and capacity reproduced? Second, how do the comparative cases of Nigeria and South Africa states with comparable structural weight but different foreign policy trajectories help explain what Cameroon lacks? Third, under what conditions could Cameroon transition from a reactive actor to a genuine shaper of regional dynamics?

1.3 Research Methodology

This article draws on two complementary theoretical frameworks developed in detail in the next section. At the empirical level, it combines documentary analysis official speeches, diplomatic communiqués, strategic documents, and reports from the IMF and World Bank with a critical reading of quantitative governance indicators. The Mo Ibrahim Index, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, and the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index provide a baseline against which Cameroon's self-presentation can be tested. The comparative analysis of Nigeria and South Africa follows a most-similar-cases logic: all three are sub-Saharan African states with significant geographic and demographic weight, but they differ substantially in their foreign policy coherence and multilateral reach.

The article also draws extensively on African political science scholarship from 2020 to 2025, privileging analytical frameworks developed by scholars embedded in the continent. These include Mbembe's (2020) diagnosis of extractive state logics, Sylla and Pigeaud's (2021) analysis of the CFA franc architecture and its constraints on Central African fiscal autonomy, Gazibo's (2006) account of facade pluralism, Mkandawire's (2001) comparative work on African developmental states, and the empirical contributions of Cameroonian researchers including Tiky (2023), Ngwang (2022), Galindo-Silva and Tchente (2023), Ngujoi, Nyogbet and Obia Messembe (2025), Nkwain (2023), Kaze Tindo Narcisse Saturnin and Ndukong (2023), Hamadou and Karim (2024), Kum (2025), and Lefort-Rieu (2024) whose field-level analyses provide the empirical substance that aggregate indicators alone cannot capture. Their combined contribution is to show that the patterns diagnosed in this article are not abstract governance failures but lived political conditions with specific causes, specific costs, and specific beneficiaries.

1.4 Research Outline:

The article is organized as follows. The next section defines the central concept of geopolitical projection and lays out the theoretical and methodological framework. Section 1 analyzes the discursive construction of Cameroon's geopolitical claims and their disconnect from measurable outcomes what this article calls the performative myth. Section 2 examines the institutional pathologies that prevent the translation of ambition into strategy: executive concentration, corruption, and governance fragmentation. Section 3 diagnoses the structural absence of a coherent international public policy and maps the strategic opportunities Cameroon has left unexploited. The conclusion draws together quantified findings, practical recommendations, and directions for future research.

1.5 Theoretical and Methodological Framework:

Geopolitical projection, as used in this article, refers to a state's demonstrated capacity to translate its geographic position, material resources, and institutional capabilities into

sustained influence beyond its borders through multilateral leadership, security commitments, economic diplomacy, or norm-setting within regional organizations. This definition deliberately distinguishes projection from mere presence. A state can attend every summit, issue statements on every continental crisis, and still exercise no geopolitical projection if those activities produce no durable outcomes: no decisions shaped, no coalitions built, no frameworks defined. Presence is the currency of the weak; projection is the currency of the capable. It is precisely this distinction that official Cameroonian discourse consistently collapses, and that the rest of the article works to expose.

This article draws on two complementary theoretical frameworks. Constructivism, as developed in international relations theory, provides the tools to analyze the discursive and performative dimension of Cameroon's geopolitical claims. It shows how political elites construct representations of power through speeches, diplomatic protocols, and symbolic events and how these representations can develop a social reality of their own, even when disconnected from material capabilities. The concept of performativity, borrowed from political sociology, captures how symbolic statements about power contribute to producing the very appearance of power they proclaim.

Constructivism alone, however, cannot tell us whether Cameroon's claims are credible to external actors or whether they produce tangible regional effects. For this, the article draws on neorealism's insistence on material power as the ultimate currency of international influence. Building on Waltz's structural framework, neorealism compels us to evaluate Cameroon's geopolitical posture against measurable indicators: military capacity, economic resources, institutional resilience, and strategic autonomy. The gap between the constructivist "image of power" and the neorealist "capacity to project power" is precisely the space in which the performative myth operates.

The article also draws on the fragile state literature, which provides an important third lens. Scholars such as Robert Rotberg and Charles Call have argued that state fragility measured through governance deficits, institutional weakness, and limited territorial control directly constrains foreign policy ambition. This argument gains added analytical precision when read alongside the African political science tradition: Gazibo's (2006) account of facade pluralism in sub-Saharan Africa and Thandika Mkandawire's (2001) work on developmental states in Africa both show that the path from institutional fragility to foreign policy paralysis is not automatic but is mediated by specific political choices choices that comparative cases like Nigeria and South Africa made differently.

Mbembe's *Brutalisme* (2020) adds a crucial further dimension to this picture. In that work, Mbembe argues that African states caught in what he calls the "logic of brutalism" governing through dispossession and the normalization of precarity produce political elites for whom institutional investment in foreign policy capacity is structurally irrational. Resources that could build a competent diplomatic corps or a coherent security doctrine are more profitably, from the elite's perspective, channeled into the patronage networks that sustain domestic political dominance. The result is not dysfunction in the ordinary sense but a different rationality altogether: one that optimizes for short-term elite survival at the cost of long-term state capacity. Cameroon fits this pattern closely. The monetary architecture compounds the problem. Ndongo Samba Sylla and Fanny Pigeaud (2021), in their analysis of the CFA franc system, have shown how CEMAC member states including Cameroon operate within a

monetary framework that concentrates foreign exchange reserves in Paris, constrains independent monetary policy, and disciplines fiscal choices in ways that systematically limit the public investment on which a credible diplomatic posture would need to rest. Cameroon's claimed leadership of the CEMAC zone is therefore doubly hollow: it presides over an integration bloc whose monetary sovereignty is exercised elsewhere.

2. The Geopolitical Projection of Cameroon in the 21st Century: A Myth

Cameroonian elite discourse on regional leadership follows a recognizable script. Official speeches routinely position Cameroon as a geopolitical pivot in Central Africa, a stabilizing force in the Lake Chad Basin, and a natural leader of the CEMAC zone. This narrative draws on genuine geographic assets Cameroon's location, its port at Douala serving landlocked neighbors, its relative demographic weight in the CEMAC area to argue for a natural leadership role. State visits, security cooperation agreements, and infrastructure inaugurations serve as recurring staging points for this self-presentation. Tchomeni, Nawal, and Tchoula Viny's (2024) historical and geopolitical analysis of Cameroon's cooperation with Russia and China documents precisely this pattern: each successive partnership is announced with strategic fanfare but evaluated, in hindsight, by the absence of lasting institutional frameworks or durable economic outcomes.

Concrete diplomatic outcomes tell a different story. In February 2022, when the African Union debated a resolution on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Cameroon was among the states that chose a notably cautious position, avoiding any stance that might have elevated its role in continental deliberation. Within CEMAC, Cameroon has not managed to drive a single major integration initiative; the zone's monetary governance is managed by the BEAC based in Yaoundé, but Cameroon's political leadership over that body reflects administrative geography more than genuine influence. In ECCAS mediation processes particularly regarding the recurring political crises in the Central African Republic and the DRC Cameroon has been conspicuously absent from frontline diplomatic roles, a space largely occupied by Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, and externally by Rwanda.

Ngwang (2022) has traced these patterns to a structural root that purely institutional explanations tend to miss. His analysis of colonial legacies and insecurity in Cameroon argues that the architecture of institutional dependence currently shaping the country's diplomatic posture is not simply a governance failure but a structural inheritance: the colonial state was designed to extract and administer rather than to build the autonomous public institutions that strategic sovereignty requires. The discourse of regional leadership that postcolonial elites have sustained is, on this reading, itself a kind of colonial inheritance a performance of African grandeur that compensates discursively for the substantive sovereignty the colonial encounter prevented from developing. The claim to geopolitical projection, in other words, is partly a response to the very conditions that make it impossible.

Comparing Cameroon with Nigeria and South Africa makes the specificity of this situation clear. Nigeria, with a GDP of approximately \$477 billion (2023 World Bank data), has institutionalized its regional influence through successive ECOWAS leadership roles, sustained contributions to peacekeeping missions (most recently ECOWAS's intervention posture toward Niger in 2023), and a foreign policy doctrine explicitly anchored in "Africa as the centerpiece." Despite its own serious governance challenges Nigeria scores 41.0 on the Mo

Ibrahim Index, lower than Cameroon its foreign policy apparatus has maintained a degree of strategic continuity across administrations that Cameroon has never achieved. South Africa represents a different model: a state that leveraged its democratic transition, its BRICS membership since 2010, and a dense network of multilateral engagements (including the ICC, the NPT review process, and SADC peacekeeping) to project influence well beyond its neighborhood. The SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), deployed from 2021, is one concrete expression of a capacity to translate strategic vision into operational commitment a capacity Cameroon has not demonstrated.

What Cameroon has produced instead is a series of spectacular but episodic initiatives. The Francophone Africa–China Fair (SICCAF), held in Yaoundé with substantial state investment, generated significant media coverage but no lasting economic partnerships or diplomatic networks. Security cooperation with the United States, framed in official discourse as evidence of international partnership, in practice reflects Cameroon’s dependence on external actors to manage threats it cannot contain on its own. The claim to regional leadership is further complicated by the rise of competing actors: Chad has leveraged Turkish military investment to consolidate its position in the Sahel security architecture, while Morocco’s Atlantic–Sahel logistics corridor is reshaping economic geographies that Cameroon once considered its natural sphere (Tambe, C. B. 2024). These shifts do not simply relativize Cameroonian ambitions they expose how little strategic groundwork has been laid to defend them.

This is not to say that the performative dimension of Cameroon’s projection is entirely without function. Domestically, the narrative of geopolitical leadership offers a vocabulary of national purpose that partially compensates for the governance deficits visible to ordinary citizens. Internationally, maintaining a certain image of stability and partnership has helped Cameroon preserve access to bilateral aid flows and multilateral financing. Tiky (2023), however, offers a more critical reading of what these international partnerships actually reproduce. His diagnosis of corruption in Cameroon as rooted in colonial antecedents and perpetuated through neo-imperial structures argues that the relationships Cameroon celebrates with France, with China, with the Bretton Woods institutions are not diplomatic achievements but structural arrangements that reproduce the conditions of dependence under which symbolic performance substitutes for strategic capacity. Maintaining those relationships, on Tiky’s account, is not a foreign policy success; it is a condition of elite survival that happens to require periodic international theatre. The gap between the two is what this article calls the performative myth (Ngwang, R. 2022).

3. Institutional Weakness: A Major Obstacle to Any Geopolitical Ambition

Cameroon’s limited foreign policy reach is not the product of bad luck or unfavorable circumstances. It reflects structural conditions embedded in how the state is built and how power is exercised. Three institutional pathologies stand out: hyper-presidentialism, corruption, and the fragmentation of governance.

Executive concentration is the most visible feature. Paul Biya, in office since 1982 and now among the world’s longest-serving heads of state, has presided over a system in which decision-making authority is tightly centralized. Parliamentary and judicial institutions lack the capacity to function as genuine checks on executive power. This matters for foreign policy

because effective external strategy requires institutional continuity, inter-agency coordination, and a clear chain of command between the presidency, the foreign ministry, the defense apparatus, and economic ministries. Where authority is hoarded at the top and informal networks substitute for institutional processes, none of this is achievable. Foreign policy becomes, in practice, an extension of presidential preference rather than a state function (Galindo-Silva, H., & Tchunte, G. 2023). Mbembe's concept of the "banality of power" developed in his earlier work and deepened in *Brutalisme* (2020) captures exactly this dynamic: a governing style in which politics is perpetual theater, institutions are props, and the concentration of authority at the apex is so normalized that its foreign policy costs are simply not registered as costs at all.

Corruption compounds the problem. Cameroon scored 26 out of 100 on the 2023 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index placing it 140th among 180 countries, worse than Nigeria (26, ranked 145th) and far behind South Africa (41, ranked 83rd). The World Bank's 2022 Worldwide Governance Indicators placed Cameroon in the 14th percentile for Control of Corruption, the 18th percentile for Government Effectiveness, and the 22nd percentile for Rule of Law. These figures are not merely administrative benchmarks. Nkwain (2023) has reframed this data in terms that are directly relevant to foreign policy: his analysis of corruption in Cameroon as a structural impediment to the right to development argues that what is being diverted is not just money but the institutional investments in education, judicial capacity, and administrative infrastructure on which any credible diplomatic posture would need to rest. A state that systematically robs its citizens of their developmental rights has a diminished claim to represent them in international forums, and partners who are aware of this record have rational grounds for skepticism when Cameroon makes pledges in multilateral settings (Ngondiep, E. 2022).

Governance fragmentation takes a more subtle form, but its costs are measurable. The central government manages a complex set of regional and ethnic balances, distributing patronage and appointments through networks of loyalty rather than merit. This "great juggler" function may maintain surface stability, but at the cost of institutional coherence. The Anglophone crisis, now entering its ninth year, is the most dramatic expression of this fragmentation. Galindo-Silva and Tchunte (2023), in the most rigorous econometric assessment of the conflict's effects to date, estimate that children in affected zones have lost between 0.8 and 1.2 years of educational attainment relative to non-conflict areas a human capital deficit that will constrain Cameroon's developmental trajectory for decades. Ngujoi, Nyogbet, and Obia Messembe (2025) have further demonstrated that the government's response to the crisis has been systematically militarized: counterinsurgency operations have displaced political avenues, foreclosed negotiated solutions, and generated a sustained stream of international criticism that narrows the space for productive diplomatic engagement. The conflict is not just a drain on resources; it actively produces diplomatic liabilities.

The diplomatic apparatus reflects these pathologies directly. Cameroon's embassies and multilateral representations are staffed through a process that privileges political loyalty over technical expertise. Foreign ministry personnel are rarely equipped with the specialized skills needed to navigate complex negotiating environments whether in trade talks, climate negotiations, or security forums. This stands in contrast to Nigeria's foreign service, which despite its own limitations has accumulated institutional experience across ECOWAS, the UN

Security Council (where Nigeria has served as a non-permanent member), and African Union bodies. South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) maintains a structured analytical capacity and has produced generations of diplomats with genuine multilateral expertise. Cameroon has no equivalent institutional investment (Monga, C. 2022).

On the defense side, the picture is similar. Despite persistent security threats Boko Haram in the Far North, separatist armed groups in the Northwest and Southwest Cameroon's armed forces operate with significant logistical and organizational constraints. Counterterrorism operations in the Far North depend heavily on intelligence sharing and material support from the United States and France. The Multi-National Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, to which Cameroon contributes, is precisely the kind of multilateral security framework in which a more capable state might play a leadership role; instead, Cameroon remains a participant dependent on external coordination. This prolonged reliance is not a temporary arrangement it reflects a structural deficit in autonomous military capacity that constrains any serious ambition for regional security leadership (Mfewou, A. 2022; Noutchie, S. C. O. 2025).

4. The Absence of a Coherent International Public Policy

If institutional weakness explains why Cameroon struggles to act, the absence of a coherent international public policy explains why it struggles to think strategically. The two are related but distinct problems. A state can have weak institutions and still maintain a clear foreign policy doctrine Chad under Idriss Déby managed this, leveraging strategic positioning in the Sahel to extract significant support from France and the United States. What Cameroon lacks is not just capacity but vision: a roadmap that identifies national interests, sets priorities, and aligns diplomatic activity toward achievable objectives.

What Cameroonian diplomacy produces instead is what might be called "small-steps" management of international relations: reactive, personalized, and driven by the immediate calculus of the ruling elite rather than by a medium- or long-term strategic logic. The SICCAF case illustrates this precisely. Despite a financial investment of over 22 million CFA francs and high-profile media coverage, the fair generated no lasting economic partnerships, no sustained engagement with Chinese investors beyond the event itself, and no follow-up institutional mechanism. The "project" simply dissolved, leaving no institutional trace (Sammuvagha, A. S. 2023; Djoumessi Tonle, C. L., & Ndikum, C. N. 2025). This is not an isolated failure it is a symptom of a diplomatic culture that treats international visibility as an end in itself rather than as a means to strategic objectives.

The personalization of diplomacy around the president and his immediate networks is a structural feature, not an accident. When bilateral relationships are managed through informal channels close to the presidency rather than through the foreign ministry, they become dependent on personal trust, subject to the same clientelist logic that governs domestic politics, and structurally resistant to institutionalization. A change in the personal relationship between two leaders can unravel years of supposed "partnership." Cameroon's positioning vis-à-vis France is the clearest example: what looks like a foreign policy is in large part a relationship between elites with shared interests in maintaining the Franco-Camerounais status quo, rather

than a strategic engagement designed to serve Cameroonian development objectives (Kum, F. F. 2025; Gbemudia, R. U., & Cho, D. T. 2024).

The African Union context amplifies these weaknesses. Within AU forums, effective diplomacy requires the capacity to build coalitions progressively, advance consistent positions across multiple sessions, and engage technically with complex dossiers trade, climate, peace and security, digital governance. Cameroon lacks the diplomatic staff and the strategic communication infrastructure to compete in this environment. It is telling that Cameroon has never produced a candidate for a major AU Commission position, while South Africa has repeatedly sought and obtained leadership roles in continental institutions, and Nigeria's sheer weight ensures that its positions cannot be ignored. Cameroon's absence from these spaces is not accidental it reflects a fundamental failure to treat multilateral diplomacy as a strategic asset (Laure, N. E. 2021; Lefort-Rieu, C. 2024).

There is also a missed-opportunity dimension worth addressing directly. Cameroon has genuine assets that a more strategically oriented diplomacy could leverage. The Port of Douala is the main maritime gateway for Chad, the Central African Republic, and parts of northern Congo a geographic reality that creates natural bargaining power if managed strategically. Cameroon's bilingual status, unique in Central Africa, could position it as a bridge between Francophone and Anglophone African institutions. The country's demographic weight within the CEMAC zone gives it a structural presence that could be converted into agenda-setting capacity, as Nigeria has done in ECOWAS. None of this has been systematically exploited. Kaze Tindo Narcisse Saturnin and Ndukong (2023) have documented a revealing dimension of this failure at the sub-national level: Cameroonian municipal governments have individually pursued international partnerships twinning arrangements, development cooperation agreements, and diaspora engagement mechanisms but without any national framework to coordinate, amplify, or translate these micro-initiatives into diplomatic capital. The potential of paradiplomacy exists; the central state has simply not invested in the infrastructure to leverage it. Hamadou and Karim's (2024) analysis of public spending patterns in Cameroon identifies a related dynamic: corruption mediates the relationship between government expenditure and human development outcomes in ways that prevent investment from building the social and institutional base that effective external projection requires. The result is a double bind: not only does the state fail to convert its assets into influence, but the corruption that diverts resources also erodes the domestic legitimacy that would make international ambitions plausible.

The deficit of strategic vision is also visible in Cameroon's engagement with emerging global governance questions. Kum's (2025) analysis of climate governance in Cameroon shows that the country's participation in international environmental frameworks remains reactive and donor-driven, organized around the capture of external funding rather than the articulation of a coherent national position on issues deforestation, carbon markets, adaptation finance where Cameroon's interests are genuinely significant and not negligible. A similar pattern is evident in digital infrastructure debates. As China's infrastructure dominance raises genuine sovereignty questions for Central African states around data governance, undersea cable routing, and platform regulation Cameroon has articulated no coherent position. These are not marginal issues. They are the terrain on which twenty-first-century geopolitical influence will be shaped. Cameroon's absence from them is the clearest evidence that the

claimed “geopolitical projection” remains, for now, a rhetorical exercise (Noutchie, S. C. O. 2025; Mfewou, A. 2022).

5. Conclusion

Cameroon’s geopolitical projection is best understood not as a foreign policy but as a discourse about foreign policy. The gap between official claims and measurable influence is not a temporary imbalance that better resources alone could correct. It is a structural condition and the data assembled in this article make that plain.

Several numbers anchor the argument. Cameroon ranked 140th out of 180 countries on the 2023 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, scoring 26 out of 100 the same bracket as Nigeria (26) but far below South Africa (41). The World Bank’s 2022 Worldwide Governance Indicators placed Cameroon in the 14th percentile for Control of Corruption, the 18th percentile for Government Effectiveness, and the 22nd percentile for Rule of Law. Its Mo Ibrahim score of 44.5 sits below the African continental average of 50.2. The SICCAF summit mobilized more than 22 million CFA francs in state funding and left no lasting institutional trace. Galindo-Silva and Tchuenté’s econometric work estimates that the Anglophone conflict has cost children in affected zones between 0.8 and 1.2 years of educational attainment relative to non-conflict areas. In ECCAS and AU mediation processes, Cameroon has been absent from frontline roles in every major Central African crisis of the past decade. These are not symptoms of temporary underperformance. They describe a structural condition that will reproduce itself unless the political incentives that sustain it change.

The constructivist–neorealist framework applied here captures both sides of the problem. Elites use symbolic performance to produce an image of power speeches, summits, security agreements but the material benchmarks show that this image has no credible foundation. The concept of the performative myth captures precisely this gap: a self-representation of influence that functions domestically as political legitimation but fails to produce the kind of sustained external outcomes that projection requires. The comparative perspective with Nigeria and South Africa avoids the trap of treating Cameroon’s situation as structurally inevitable. Nigerian scholar Adekeye Adebajo, writing on African regionalism and peace and security architecture, has noted that Nigeria’s foreign policy traction in ECOWAS derives less from institutional sophistication than from a combination of economic weight, strategic intentionality, and a willingness to absorb the costs of regional leadership a combination that requires political choices, not just resources. South Africa’s trajectory confirms the same point from a different angle. What the African political science literature from Gazibo’s analysis of facade pluralism to Mkandawire’s account of developmental states to Mbembe’s diagnosis of brutalist extraction collectively suggests is that the conditions for coherent foreign policy are political before they are technical. And Sylla and Pigeaud’s work adds the monetary dimension: as long as CEMAC states operate within a CFA franc architecture that disciplines their fiscal choices from Paris, any discussion of Cameroonian geopolitical projection must reckon with the structural limits on economic sovereignty that the monetary system imposes.

First of all, Cameroon needs to professionalize its foreign service. The current system of appointing diplomats on the basis of political loyalty is not a side effect of the system it is its core logic. A competitive recruitment process for the foreign ministry, drawing on the

models of South Africa's DIRCO or Nigeria's diplomatic academy, would be a first step. This is not just an administrative reform it is a political decision to accept a degree of institutional autonomy in the diplomatic apparatus, which the current configuration of power in Yaoundé has consistently resisted.

Second, the strategic value of the Port of Douala must be converted from a geographic fact into a bargaining asset. Chad, the CAR, and northern Congo depend on Douala for their import-export flows. Cameroon has never systematically leveraged this dependency in multilateral negotiations, infrastructure financing discussions, or regional integration forums. A dedicated port diplomacy coordinating the foreign ministry, the port authority, and the development bank would give Cameroon a concrete and defensible position in ECCAS and CEMAC deliberations.

Third, the Anglophone crisis must be treated as a foreign policy problem, not just a domestic security one. Every year it continues, it absorbs diplomatic resources, damages Cameroon's international credibility, and narrows the space for constructive multilateral engagement. Lefort-Rieu's analysis of peacemaking in authoritarian contexts in Cameroon makes a specific and empirically grounded argument here: durable solutions are more likely to come from below from civil society actors, diaspora networks, and local communities who have developed conflict-resolution practices outside the state than from a central government whose institutional configuration systematically resists the political concessions that peace requires. Any genuine geopolitical repositioning must start with a negotiated settlement, and that settlement will need to be anchored in inclusion rather than administrative reorganization.

Fourth, Cameroon should develop a structured engagement with non-traditional partners. Gulf states, India, and Turkey have all expanded their African footprints over the past decade. Morocco's Atlantic-Sahel corridor is already reshaping logistical geographies that Cameroon has left uncontested. A strategic diversification beyond the Franco-Chinese axis would reduce structural dependence and open new leverage points.

Several dimensions remain underexplored and deserve dedicated investigation. The role of the diaspora as a foreign policy resource is almost entirely absent from official strategy and from the scholarly literature on Cameroon. Remittances to Cameroon reached approximately \$358 million in 2022, and Cameroonian diaspora communities are active in France, the United States, and increasingly in Gulf states. Whether and how diaspora actors shape diplomatic priorities, economic partnerships, or public narratives about Cameroon's regional role remains an open question whose answer could substantially revise the picture this article has drawn.

Cameroon's positioning in digital governance debates also deserves attention. As China's infrastructure dominance raises genuine sovereignty questions for Central African states around data governance, undersea cable routing, and platform regulation Cameroon has articulated no coherent position. This is terrain where the stakes are high and where acting does not depend primarily on military or economic weight. It is one domain where a strategically oriented state of Cameroon's size could punch above its institutional capacity. Kum's analysis of climate governance failures points to the same structural gap from a different angle: both climate and digital governance require the capacity to translate national interests into technical negotiating positions, which in turn requires a foreign ministry with specialized expertise that

Cameroon currently lacks. Building that expertise is a precondition, not a supplement, for credible projection.

Finally, comparative work is needed on the role of civil society organizations, local actors, and non-state networks in Cameroon's external relations. Noutchie's examination of corporate governance failures in conflict-affected zones of Cameroon reveals a dynamic that has clear foreign policy implications: the Anglophone crisis has created governance vacuums that non-state actors fill in ways that further complicate the state's international positioning, generating alternative narratives, external advocacy campaigns, and diaspora-driven policy pressures that the state is poorly equipped to manage or channel productively. Djoumessi Tonle and Ndikum's work on participatory approaches in local community contexts suggests that the civic infrastructure for a more bottom-up foreign policy exists what is missing is a national framework capable of recognizing and amplifying it. The intersection between civil society, diaspora networks, and foreign policy formation in Cameroon remains largely uncharted territory, analytically and practically.

One thing the evidence does not leave in doubt: the performative myth carries costs. It consumes resources that could support genuine strategic investment. It creates expectations among partners that Cameroon consistently fails to meet. And it prevents the kind of honest assessment of national interests that effective foreign policy requires. Until the political conditions for that assessment exist, Cameroon will continue to project the image of a regional power while exercising the influence of a reactive state.

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