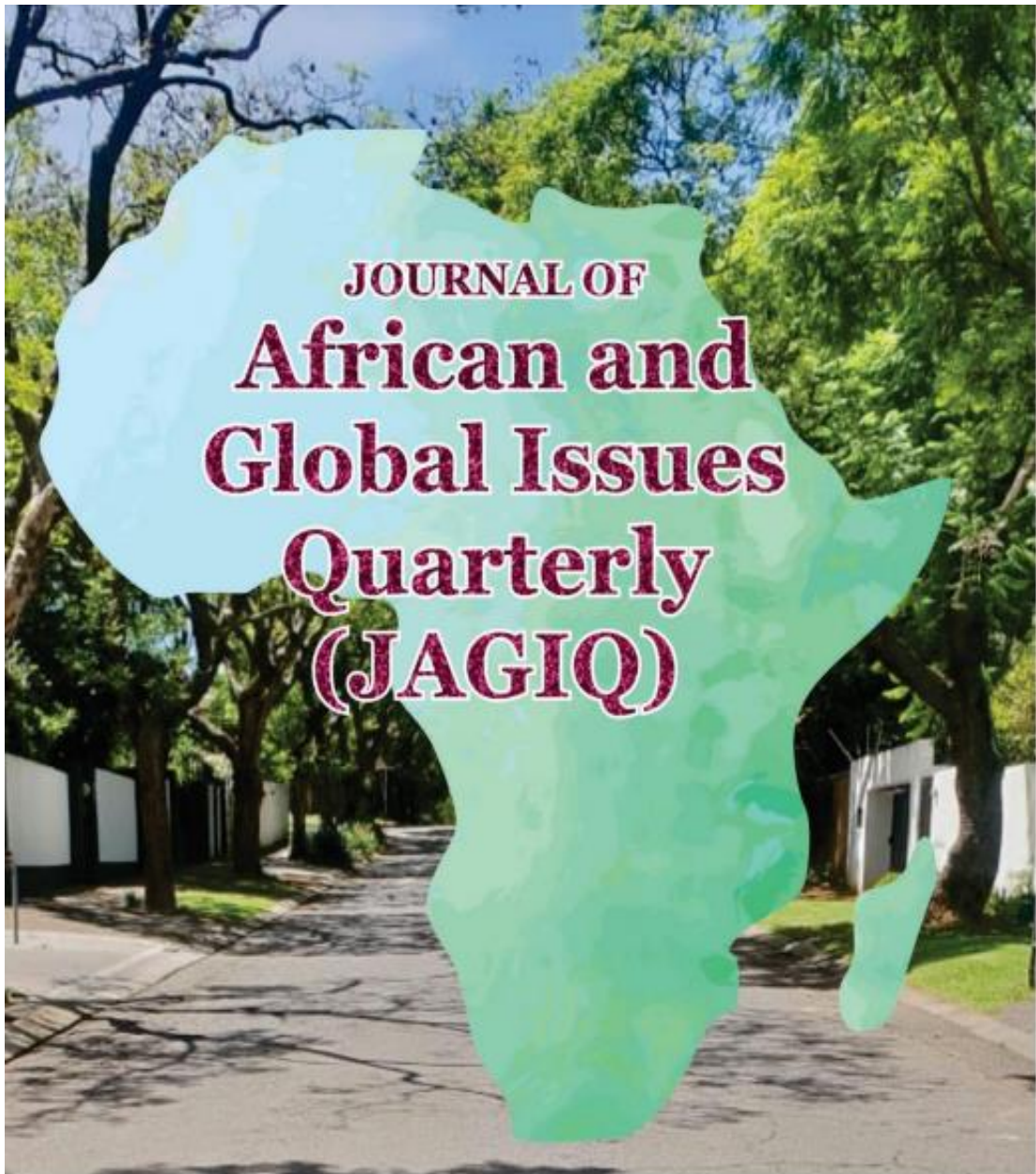




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Editorial Note

Indigenous Knowledge, Institutional Capacity, And Africa's Quest For Self-Determination

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the African and Global Issues Quarterly. The collection of articles assembled here reflects the journal's enduring commitment to interrogating the multifaceted challenges and opportunities confronting the African continent and its place in the global order. The contributions in this volume share a common thread: a determination to look inward for solutions while engaging critically with external frameworks and legacies.

Several articles in this issue foreground the imperative of harnessing indigenous knowledge and frameworks as vehicles for progress. Nkemakolam and Amaechi propose "Igbozealotism" as an indigenous framework for socio-political and economic advancement, challenging scholars and policymakers to centre African philosophical traditions in contemporary governance discourse. Similarly, Mthethwa, Kolanisi, and Singh explore the repositioning of indigenous knowledge in fostering "studentpreneurship," while Mahlala and colleagues examine indigenous governance systems through a public administration lens. Kilonzo and her co-authors contribute a profile of indigenous banana cultivars, reminding us that agricultural biodiversity and traditional knowledge are integral to food security and rural livelihoods. These contributions collectively affirm that sustainable development in Africa must be rooted in, rather than detached from, local epistemologies and practices.

The issue also engages critically with questions of institutional effectiveness and the delivery of public goods. Lamidi and Hofisi examine the implementation gap in South African public service delivery, highlighting the centrality of bureaucratic capacity. Malope's study of community health worker programmes illuminates the intersection of recruitment, governance, and the democratisation of public administration. These articles underscore that institutional strengthening is not merely a technical exercise but a deeply political one, requiring accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to community needs.

On the continental and global stage, Odaudu's analysis of post-Françafrique dynamics in the Sahel offers a penetrating account of shifting dependencies and external realignments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, a region of immense strategic significance. Taleat, Lukamba, and Diedericks examine the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, arguing that global agendas must be adapted to local

realities if they are to deliver meaningful prosperity. Maeresera's study of strategic communication and nation branding during Zimbabwe's COMESA chairmanship illustrates the role of media in projecting regional leadership.

Finally, the issue addresses pressing social and demographic concerns. Omopo and Pillay investigate the psychological distress associated with food insecurity and housing conditions among school-going children and adolescents, while Ifanayajo, Palamuleni, and Adebowale provide a decomposition analysis of fertility rates among women of reproductive age in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Taken together, these thirteen articles offer a rich and diverse body of scholarship. They challenge us to think deeply about the relationship between indigenous agency and institutional effectiveness, between local realities and global agendas. We trust that this issue will stimulate further research and debate and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge on African and global affairs.

We thank our authors, reviewers, and readers for their continued support.

Editor

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Table of Content:

1. Proposing Igbozealotism As An Indigenous Framework For Advancing Socio-Political Progress And Economic Development In African Political Landscape
Somadina Cynthia Nkemakolam, Kingsley Ekene Amaechi
6
2. Africa and Sustainable Development Goals: Localization of the Global Agenda towards future prosperity
Bisiriyu Abiodun TALEAT, Muhlya Tshombe LUKAMBA, Melvin Diedericks
24
3. Article 33 Of The United Nations Charter And The Peaceful Settlement Of Disputes: An Afrocentric Critique
Dickiel Kachekenje Mwale Kusainda, Kgothatso Brucely Shai
42
4. Repositioning Indigenous Knowledge Utilisation in "Studentpreneurship"
Mzweleni Fundani Mthethwa, Unathi Kolanisi, and Sue Singh
62
5. Post-Françafrique in the Sahel: Dependency, Autonomy, and External Realignments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger
Joel Odaudu
92
6. The Persistence and Evolving Role of Traditional Courts within the National Legal Framework of South Africa.
Sikhumbuzo Sibusiso Khoza, Khulisile Judith Nkuna, Innocent Zitha
123
7. Bridging the Implementation Gap: Bureaucratic Capacity and Public Service Delivery in South African Context
Kazeem Oyedele Lamidi, Costa Hofisi
142
8. Recruitment, Governance, And The Democratisation Of Public Administration: Evidence From A Community Health Worker Programme In Sedibeng District, Gauteng
Nthabeleng Malope
165
9. Food Insecurity, Housing Conditions and Psychological Distress among School-Going Children and Adolescents Aged 9–19 Years
Oluwaseun Emmanuel Omopo, and Jace Pillay
194

10. Parity Progression Ratio and Decomposition Analysis of Fertility Rates Among Women of Reproductive Age in Sub-Saharan Africa
Ifanayajo Oluwafemi, Palamuleni Martin E., Adebowale Ayo S.
217
11. Exploring Indigenous Governance Systems And Traditional Practices: A Contemporary Public Administration Perspective
Sandiso Mahlala, Zwelinzima Ndevu, Phumudzo P. Ramolai, Bright Muronda
246
12. A Profile of Indigenous Banana Cultivars in Rural South Africa
Beata Kilonzo, John B. Ochanda Ogola, Ishmael Obaeko Iwara
271
13. Strategic Communication and Nation Branding: Media Instrumentality in Projecting Zimbabwe's Regional Leadership During the COMESA Chairmanship, 2026–2027
Sadiki Maeresera
286

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POST-FRANÇAFRIQUE IN THE SAHEL: DEPENDENCY, AUTONOMY, AND EXTERNAL REALIGNMENTS IN MALI, BURKINA FASO, AND NIGER

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Abstract

This study examines whether recent political developments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger represent a substantive break from the Françafrique system or a reconfiguration of external dependency under new geopolitical alignments. Drawing on Dependency Theory and Modernisation Theory, the study examines key mechanisms of Françafrique, including monetary relations, security cooperation, resource governance, and corporate influence, with particular attention to how recent security and economic realignments in the Sahel affect autonomy and dependency. Using a comparative case-study design structured by a most-similar-systems logic, qualitative document analysis, and theory-guided thematic analysis, the study indicates that the expulsion of French military forces, reassessment of resource arrangements, and diversification of international partnerships constitute a significant challenge to France's historical influence. However, the findings indicate that rejecting French influence does not automatically produce substantive political and economic autonomy. Emerging partnerships with actors like China, Türkiye, and Russia may expand diplomatic flexibility, but risk reproducing dependency if strategic sectors become reliant on alternative external actors for finance, technology, and security provision. Substantive autonomy therefore also depends on stronger domestic institutions, bargaining capacity, productive capabilities, and greater control over development priorities. By integrating monetary, economic, and security dimensions, the study contributes to debates on postcolonial dependency, autonomy, and Africa's evolving international relations.

Keywords: *Françafrique, External Dependency, Postcolonial Autonomy, Sahel, External Realignment, Resource Governance,*

1. Introduction

By the late nineteenth century, France had established a vast colonial empire across West, North, and Central Africa during the period commonly known as the “Scramble for Africa.” Driven by economic gain and strategic ambitions, France relied heavily on its African colonies to strengthen its economic and political influence (Frankema et al., 2018; Pickett, 2017). Haag (2011) observes that these efforts aimed to create a ‘Greater France,’ with colonies such as Senegal, Algeria, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon serving as pillars of imperial growth. Colonial infrastructure and administrative systems largely reflected imperial economic priorities, shaping later debates over dependency and development. After independence, France’s influence persisted through what many scholars describe as neocolonial arrangements that operated through economic, military, political, and cultural channels. These arrangements are reflected in financial dependency, trade imbalances, military presence, and cultural influence through education and language systems (Abraham, 1962; Chafer & Cumming, 2011; Bovcon, 2013; Medushevskiy & Shishkina, 2022).

Although decolonisation accelerated after World War II, France sought to manage the process in ways that preserved its strategic interests. The Brazzaville Declaration of 1944 advocated political reforms while explicitly rejecting colonial

independence (De Gaulle, 1944). Although formal independence was eventually achieved, many scholars argue that it was accompanied by institutional arrangements through which France retained varying degrees of economic, monetary, military, and diplomatic influence in several former colonies, a phenomenon widely associated with the *Françafrique* system (Chafer & Cumming, 2011; Bovcon, 2013; Medushevskiy & Shishkina, 2022). Guinea’s rejection of the French Community in 1958 illustrated early tensions surrounding sovereignty and France’s preferred model of postcolonial cooperation (Pace, 1984). These arrangements provide the foundation for contemporary debates over the persistence and transformation of *Françafrique*.

The relationship between France and its former African colonies remains the subject of considerable scholarly debate (Bovcon, 2013; Korkmaz, 2019; Medushevskiy & Shishkina, 2022). While some scholars interpret post-independence cooperation as facilitating political stability, monetary integration, and institutional continuity, others argue that these arrangements have reproduced unequal economic and political relationships (Chafer & Cumming, 2011; Dzekashu, 2021). Critics argue that these patterns reflect a neocolonial architecture sustained through French influence and collaboration with domestic political elites, which has constrained policy

autonomy in several Francophone African states (Dzekashu, 2021).

Existing analyses often examine individual dimensions of *Françafrique*, such as monetary arrangements, security cooperation, or economic relations, with less attention to how these mechanisms interact in shaping contemporary struggles over autonomy and external dependence. This study addresses that gap by examining how monetary structures, resource governance, security arrangements, corporate networks, and emerging geopolitical partnerships influence whether recent realignments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger represent greater autonomy or a reconfiguration of dependency.

Accordingly, the study is guided by two related questions: To what extent do recent political developments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger constitute a substantive rupture with the *Françafrique* system? Do these developments foster greater political and economic autonomy, or do they merely reconfigure patterns of external dependency under new geopolitical alignments? The study addresses these questions through a comparative analysis of economic and security indicators in the three countries following their political realignment away from France.

The significance of this study extends beyond Franco-African relations, as the Sahel has emerged as a critical arena in debates concerning sovereignty,

neocolonialism, geopolitical competition, and alternative development pathways in the Global South. By examining recent political and economic realignments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the study contributes to broader debates on postcolonial governance, external influence, and state autonomy.

The study is informed primarily by Dependency Theory, which views underdevelopment as a consequence of unequal integration into the global economy, while also engaging with insights from Modernisation Theory concerning development and external partnerships. To investigate these issues, the study adopts a comparative case-study approach focusing on Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. On this basis, the paper argues that *Françafrique* represents a postcolonial system through which France maintained significant influence over its former African colonies via monetary arrangements, military cooperation, economic ties, and political networks.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case-study design to examine the persistence and transformation of *Françafrique* in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It employs a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), as the three cases share important historical, political, and structural characteristics, including

French colonial legacies, membership in the Francophone sphere, exposure to Sahelian security challenges, and comparable patterns of external economic dependence. This design enables a systematic comparison of how similarly situated states have responded to France's postcolonial influence and whether recent political realignments represent substantive change or continuity under evolving geopolitical conditions.

The analysis does not seek to establish direct causal links between *Françafrique* and contemporary economic or security outcomes. Instead, it assesses whether observed political, economic, and security developments are consistent with changing patterns of dependency, autonomy, and external alignment. Dependency Theory and Modernisation Theory serve as competing analytical lenses through which the empirical evidence is interpreted, enabling the study to assess the extent to which the empirical evidence supports, challenges, or qualifies the expectations of each theoretical perspective.

2.2 Case Selection

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger were selected because they have become critical cases in contemporary debates on the decline or transformation of French influence in the Sahel. All three countries have experienced recent military transitions, expelled or significantly reduced the presence of French military forces, criticised

postcolonial arrangements such as the CFA franc system, and pursued alternative diplomatic, economic, and security partnerships with actors including Russia, Türkiye, and China. Their selection is also methodologically appropriate because they combine structural similarity with variation in timing, intensity, and form of political realignment. Mali's rupture with France unfolded after the military transitions of 2020–2021, Burkina Faso's intensified after the 2022 coups, and Niger's followed the 2023 military takeover. This variation allows the study to compare both common patterns and country-specific trajectories, thereby reducing the risk of selecting cases solely on the basis of similar outcomes.

2.3 Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, historical documents, government publications, policy reports, international organisation databases, NGO reports, think-tank analyses, and reputable media investigations. Economic data, including GDP growth, are obtained from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and national statistical agencies. Security-related evidence is obtained from government documents, international security databases, policy reports, and specialist analyses of military cooperation and conflict dynamics.

Sources were identified through searches of Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Taylor and Francis Online, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online (AJOL), together with the francophone platforms Cairn.info and OpenEdition Journals. Further material was obtained from the institutional repositories of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Crisis Group, and the Institute for Security Studies. Searches combined keywords using Boolean operators, with representative strings including *Françafrique* AND *Sahel*, “*CFA franc*” AND *sovereignty*, (“*Mali*” OR “*Burkina Faso*” OR “*Niger*”) AND (“*military withdrawal*” OR “*security cooperation*”), and “*external dependency*” AND “*West Africa*”. Equivalent French-language strings were used to locate francophone material. The search was conducted iteratively as the analysis developed,

with further sources identified through reference-list screening.

Selection followed purposive sampling guided by explicit criteria. Included were peer-reviewed scholarship, books and book chapters, institutional and policy reports, official documents and legal instruments, and reputable investigative reporting addressing French postcolonial influence, monetary arrangements, resource governance, security cooperation, or external realignment in the three cases. Excluded were sources lacking direct relevance to the research objectives, advancing empirical claims without a traceable evidentiary basis, or consisting of unsupported commentary. Where several reports reproduced the same underlying claim, the earliest traceable source was cited and derivative reports were not treated as independent corroboration. The composition of the 79 sources analysed is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of the Documentary Sources by Category and Period

Source category	Pre-2010	2010–2015	2016–2020	2021–2026	Total
Peer-reviewed journal articles	7	6	6	15	34
Books and book chapters	14	5	5	0	24
Institutional and policy reports	0	1	0	13	14
Official documents and legal instruments	1	0	0	1	2

Source category	Pre-2010	2010–2015	2016–2020	2021–2026	Total
News and investigative reporting	1	0	1	3	5
Total	23	12	12	32	79

Note: Pre-2010 sources provide historical, theoretical, and contextual grounding. The table reports the composition of the sources analysed rather than screening or exclusion counts, which were not recorded.

Sources in French were consulted in translation. Where a French-language source also exists in an official English version, as with several World Bank and International Monetary Fund publications, the English version was used.

To enhance reliability, evidence is triangulated across multiple source types. Peer-reviewed scholarship, official datasets, and primary policy documents are prioritised, while media sources are used mainly for contextual and corroborative purposes. Politically sensitive claims are cross-checked

across independent sources to minimise bias and strengthen analytical reliability.

The empirical focus falls on developments between 2010 and 2026, with particular attention to the period following the military transitions in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Earlier historical, theoretical, and contextual publications are incorporated where necessary to establish the longer trajectory of French postcolonial influence and the conceptual foundations of the analysis.

2.4 Operationalisation of Key Concepts

To ensure analytical consistency, the study operationalises its key concepts through the observable indicators presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Operational Indicators of Key Concepts

Concept	Operational indicators
Political autonomy	Diplomatic alignment; security agreements; military partnerships

Concept	Operational indicators
Economic autonomy	Trade patterns; resource policy; monetary policy; corporate participation
Dependency	External finance; military assistance; institutional arrangements
Resistance	Military expulsion; alliance diversification; monetary reform
Geopolitical realignment	Substitution of external partners; new bilateral and multilateral agreements; diversification of security and financing arrangements

Note: These indicators are not treated as direct or exhaustive measures of autonomy or dependency, but as empirical proxies for assessing changes in patterns of external relationships across the three cases.

For analytical purposes, autonomy is treated as a variable and multidimensional condition, with political, economic, and security autonomy assessed separately across the cases and over time rather than combined into a single binary measure of whether a state is autonomous or dependent.

2.5 Analytical Strategy

Data are analysed through theory-guided thematic analysis and cross-case comparison. The coding framework comprised four principal themes derived deductively from the theoretical framework before analysis

began: dependency, autonomy, resistance, and geopolitical realignment. These correspond to the concepts operationalised in Table 2. Dependency was coded where evidence indicated continued reliance on external finance, military assistance, or inherited institutional arrangements. Autonomy was coded where evidence indicated independent decision-making in monetary, resource, or security policy. Resistance was coded where states took deliberate action to withdraw from or renegotiate established arrangements. Realignment was coded where evidence indicated substitution of one external partner for another rather than a reduction in external reliance overall. The framework was retained throughout the analysis and refined through iterative engagement with the material, with sub-themes specified within each theme as recurring patterns became apparent.

Within these themes, evidence was examined across five domains in which French postcolonial influence has historically operated: monetary arrangements, foreign reserve mechanisms, resource governance, security cooperation, and corporate market access. These domains structure the analytical assessment in Section 5 and provide the empirical basis for the case comparison in Section 6.

Comparative analysis is then employed to identify similarities and differences across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger along three dimensions: political realignment, economic transformation, and security dependence. The study examines developments within each case over time and then compares patterns across the three. This approach enables the analysis to assess whether recent political realignments correspond with measurable shifts in economic performance, security cooperation, and external dependence.

Coding and comparison were conducted manually through iterative reading, categorisation, and interpretation; no specialised qualitative analysis software was employed. Greater analytical weight was assigned to claims corroborated across two or more independent source types, and claims supported by a single source type are presented with corresponding caution. Where sources offered conflicting accounts, both were retained and the disagreement reported rather than resolved in favour of either theoretical position.

2.5.1 Reflexivity and Analytical Dependability

As the sole researcher, the author was responsible for the selection, analysis, and interpretation of the documentary evidence. The author is a Nigerian researcher with no national, professional, or field connection to the three states examined or to francophone West Africa more broadly. The analysis was therefore conducted from the position of an anglophone West African observer, which affords familiarity with the regional security environment while offering no insider access to the political or institutional contexts under study. As no additional coder was involved, the study did not employ formal intercoder reliability or re-coding procedures. Analytical consistency was instead supported through iterative review, the application of two competing theoretical lenses to the same evidence, and triangulation across independent source types. The absence of independent coding remains a limitation of the study.

2.6 Limitations

This study has methodological limitations. Its reliance on secondary data limits opportunities for direct validation through interviews or field observations. The analysis was conducted by a single researcher without independent coding or intercoder reliability testing, so the organisation and interpretation of evidence necessarily involved researcher judgement. Documentary

coverage is also uneven across the three cases, with Mali attracting substantially more scholarly and institutional attention than Burkina Faso or Niger, which may affect the depth of evidence available for each comparison. Additionally, given the evolving political landscape in the Sahel, developments beyond the study period fall outside the scope of analysis. The study also relies on translation for francophone sources, which introduces the possibility of interpretive loss in legal and technical terminology. This constraint is most relevant to the treatment of national mining legislation and monetary instruments, where precise wording carries substantive weight.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Dependency Theory and Modernisation Theory, which offer contrasting explanations of development, external influence, and state transformation in postcolonial Africa. Rather than reconciling these perspectives, the study employs them as competing analytical lenses for interpreting France's continued involvement in Francophone Africa and the changing political economy of Françafrique. Their application to Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger is particularly relevant because recent efforts to reduce French military, political, and economic influence reflect the central tension examined in this study: whether postcolonial states can restructure inherited external relationships and pursue institutional

transformation, or whether such relationships continue to reproduce structural dependency.

Dependency Theory provides a useful framework for explaining the persistence of asymmetrical relationships between France and its former colonies. Associated with the work of scholars such as Dos Santos (1970), Frank (1966), Amin (1976), and Cardoso and Faletto (1979), the theory argues that formal political sovereignty does not necessarily translate into economic or strategic autonomy, as former colonial powers may continue to exercise influence through monetary arrangements, military cooperation, trade structures, and institutional linkages. Applied to this study, Dependency Theory interprets Françafrique as a postcolonial system through which external influence is reproduced despite political independence. It explains patterns of continuity by examining whether structural constraints continue to shape policy choices, economic relations, and external alignments even after states attempt to reduce French influence.

Modernisation Theory, developed principally by Rostow (1960), Lerner (1958), and Parsons (1964), offers an alternative interpretation of these dynamics. It views development as a process of institutional transformation supported by capital accumulation, technological transfer, international cooperation, and integration into global markets. From this perspective, foreign investment, institutional reform, and

external partnerships can strengthen state capacity, promote economic growth, and facilitate development. Applied to the present study, Modernisation Theory provides a framework for assessing whether the diversification of international partnerships by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger has expanded policy flexibility, strengthened state autonomy, and improved prospects for economic and institutional development. It therefore explains patterns of transformation by examining whether changing external relations contribute to increased policy capacity and socio-economic development.

The analytical value of employing both theories lies in their contrasting expectations. Dependency Theory foregrounds historical inequality, structural constraint, and the persistence of external domination, whereas Modernisation Theory emphasises institutional reform, international cooperation, and developmental opportunity. These competing perspectives enable the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of changing Franco-African relations by evaluating alternative explanations for recent political and economic developments in the Sahel.

Dependency Theory expects that political realignment away from France will not necessarily produce substantive autonomy if states remain dependent on external military assistance, foreign capital, limited economic

diversification, and asymmetrical partnerships.

Conversely, Modernisation Theory expects that diversified international partnerships, policy realignments, and institutional reforms may strengthen state capacity, economic performance, and strategic autonomy. By employing these competing analytical frameworks, the study links Françafrique mechanisms, including monetary relations, resource governance, corporate networks, and security cooperation, to contemporary debates over autonomy and dependency in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The framework examines how these mechanisms interact with domestic institutional capacity, bargaining power, and emerging external partnerships to determine whether recent political realignments represent substantive autonomy, dependency continuity, or a reconfiguration of external dependence under new geopolitical conditions.

4. Literature Review

The literature on Françafrique reflects broader scholarly debates over the nature, extent, and consequences of France's postcolonial influence in Africa. While some interpretations emphasise continuity, cooperation, and institutional linkages between France and its former colonies, more critical perspectives conceptualise these relationships as mechanisms through which colonial-era structures of influence have persisted after formal independence. Although initially used to describe close Franco-African

cooperation, later scholarship reconceptualised *Françafrique* as a system of postcolonial political, economic, military, and monetary relationships through which France maintained influence after formal decolonisation (Gibbs, 2024; Korkmaz, 2019). Additional studies reinforce this interpretation, highlighting how postcolonial networks, elite alliances, and institutional continuities sustained French leverage across Francophone Africa (Bayart, 2000; Chafer, 2002b). Despite differing interpretations, *Françafrique* has become a central analytical concept for examining French influence, postcolonial governance, sovereignty, and changing geopolitical relations in Francophone Africa.

Existing studies offer contrasting interpretations of these postcolonial relationships. One body of scholarship argues that French engagement has contributed to institutional continuity, monetary stability, security cooperation, and diplomatic partnerships following independence (Chafer & Cumming, 2011). This perspective is complemented by studies highlighting the stabilising role of French military interventions and development assistance in certain contexts (Charbonneau, 2017). Conversely, a more critical body of literature contends that these arrangements have perpetuated asymmetrical political and economic relationships through mechanisms such as the CFA franc, military cooperation,

preferential trade arrangements, and elite political networks (Bovcon, 2013; Korkmaz, 2019; Medushevskiy & Shishkina, 2022). This interpretation is reinforced by studies emphasising how monetary governance, resource extraction, and political patronage networks reproduce structural dependency (Sylla, 2017; Cooper, 2019).

The political economy literature further examines the implications of these relationships for development. Harvey (2003) argues that postcolonial economic relations evolved through successive phases, beginning with continued exploitation of colonial economic structures, followed by increasing influence of multinational corporations, and more recently, the growing involvement of emerging powers such as China. Hargreaves (1969) similarly observes that many newly independent West African states inherited weak fiscal and administrative institutions, increasing their reliance on external financial assistance and security cooperation during the early post-independence period. More recently, Dzekashu (2021) interprets persistent patterns of economic dependency and limited industrial transformation as evidence of a neocolonial architecture sustained through both French influence and domestic political elites. This aligns with broader dependency scholarship that identifies structural constraints on African economic autonomy (Amin, 1976; Rodney, 1972).

Not all scholars, however, share this interpretation. Alternative perspectives within development literature argue that external engagement, international cooperation, and participation in global markets can contribute to economic transformation under appropriate institutional conditions. Wolf (2004), for example, contends that participation in the global economy ultimately generates net developmental gains despite the challenges associated with globalization. Similarly, Carchedi (2002) argues that competition among external powers has, in some instances, enabled African states to negotiate more favourable economic arrangements while benefiting from international trade and investment. Recent empirical work also suggests that diversification of external partnerships may enhance bargaining power and reduce overreliance on traditional partners (Carmody, 2013; Kohnert, 2021).

Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on geopolitical changes in the Sahel following the deterioration of relations between France and several Francophone African states. The expulsion of French military forces, growing criticism of the CFA franc system, and the expansion of partnerships with countries such as Russia, China, and Türkiye have renewed scholarly interest in the future of *Françafrique* and the changing nature of external influence in the region (Medushevskiy & Shishkina, 2022). Scholars such as Wing (2023) and

Cold-Ravnkilde and Sylla (2024) highlight how these shifts reflect broader transformations in regional security governance and the emergence of alternative geopolitical alignments. While these developments have been widely examined from diplomatic, security, and geopolitical perspectives, their broader implications for economic autonomy, development trajectories, and postcolonial dependency remain contested.

Although existing literature provides substantial insight into *Françafrique* and competing interpretations of dependency and development, several gaps remain. Studies primarily examine the historical foundations of *Françafrique*, the CFA franc system, military cooperation, and Franco-African diplomatic relations as separate areas of inquiry rather than as interconnected dimensions of postcolonial influence (Chafer & Cumming, 2011; Sylla, 2017; Charbonneau, 2017; Bovcon, 2013). Moreover, recent political transformations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have received considerable attention in relation to security and geopolitics, but comparatively fewer studies have evaluated whether these developments constitute a substantive rupture with the historical structures associated with *Françafrique* or merely a reconfiguration of external dependency under new international partnerships (Wing, 2023; Cold-Ravnkilde & Sylla, 2024; Atabongwoung & Nkoko, 2025; Maiga,

2026). Furthermore, relatively limited research has integrated political, economic, and security indicators within a comparative framework to assess the consequences of these recent realignments.

5. French Postcolonial Influence in the Sahel: An Analytical Assessment

France's relationship with its former African colonies has generated competing interpretations concerning dependency, cooperation, and development. Following independence, mechanisms such as the Accords de Coopération (Cooperation Accords) shaped continued engagement in defence, monetary policy, economic cooperation, education, and cultural affairs (Chafer, 2002a; Korkmaz, 2019). This section examines these arrangements through the competing lenses of Dependency Theory and Modernisation Theory to assess their implications for autonomy, external influence, and socio-economic transformation.

(i) The CFA Franc, Stability, and Monetary Autonomy

The CFA franc system operates through two monetary unions: the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), which uses the West African CFA franc (XOF), and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), which uses the Central African CFA franc (XAF). Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are members of WAEMU. Both currencies maintain the same fixed

exchange rate with the euro but operate under separate monetary frameworks and are not directly interchangeable (Debrun et al., 2011; Diallo & Ba, 2024).

Historically, the CFA franc system has been characterised by a fixed exchange-rate arrangement, convertibility guarantees, and institutional links with France. From a Dependency Theory perspective, these arrangements represent a form of monetary dependence because member states have historically had limited control over exchange-rate adjustments and independent monetary policy decisions, potentially restricting industrial policy options and reinforcing externally oriented economic structures (Sylla, 2017). Conversely, Modernisation Theory interprets such monetary cooperation as a mechanism that can facilitate macroeconomic predictability, investor confidence, and integration into international markets through monetary stability and currency credibility (Boughton, 1991; Gulde & Tsangarides, 2008). The debate therefore centres on whether monetary stability translates into broader developmental capacity and autonomous economic policymaking.

(ii) Foreign Reserve Mechanisms and Economic Sovereignty

The management of foreign exchange reserves represents a central dimension of debates surrounding monetary sovereignty within the CFA franc

system. Historically, CFA franc member states were required to deposit a portion of their foreign exchange reserves in operations accounts (*comptes d'opérations*) held with the French Treasury as part of the convertibility mechanism supporting the currency's fixed exchange rate (Gulde & Tsangarides, 2008). While this arrangement was designed to guarantee convertibility and maintain monetary stability, it also generated debate regarding the extent to which externally anchored monetary institutions affect domestic economic decision-making.

The reserve arrangement raises a more specific question about policy autonomy: not merely where reserves are held, but whether monetary governance remains aligned with external stability objectives rather than domestically determined development strategies (Amin, 1976; Sylla, 2017). At the same time, reserve arrangements and convertibility guarantees have been associated with monetary stability and inflation control (Gulde & Tsangarides, 2008). Continued participation in the CFA franc system may therefore reflect calculations about the perceived benefits of monetary stability alongside the persistence of historically embedded monetary dependence.

Recent reforms to the CFA franc system, including changes to reserve requirements and France's institutional role, were introduced to address longstanding concerns about monetary autonomy and the future of France—

Africa monetary relations (Wilson, 2020). However, the cases of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger indicate that recent political realignments have not only challenged security and diplomatic relationships with France but have also intensified broader debates about economic sovereignty and externally embedded institutions. The persistence of these debates suggests that changes in monetary arrangements must be assessed not only by whether French influence declines, but by whether states acquire greater capacity to determine economic policy priorities independently.

(iii) Resource Governance and Economic Autonomy

Natural-resource governance represents another important dimension in debates over autonomy and external influence in Francophone Africa. Although former colonial relationships no longer involve direct control over natural resources, scholars argue that historical economic ties, established corporate networks, and long-term commercial agreements continue to shape patterns of resource extraction and economic cooperation (Amin, 1976; Korkmaz, 2019). This debate has become particularly relevant in the Sahel, where recent political realignments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have been accompanied by efforts to increase domestic control over strategic resources.

Niger's uranium sector illustrates these tensions. For several decades, French

companies, particularly Areva (now Orano), occupied a central position in uranium extraction through its subsidiaries Somaïr and Cominak in northern Niger. Debates emerged over whether the sector generated proportional developmental benefits. Oxfam International (2013) argued that existing mining arrangements provided Areva's subsidiaries with significant fiscal advantages, including exemptions related to taxes, duties, and operational costs. Their analysis estimated that, in 2010, uranium extracted by Somaïr and Cominak represented an export value of approximately 2.3 trillion CFA francs, while Niger received about 300 billion CFA francs, representing around 13% of the exported value (Oxfam International, 2013). These concerns contributed to the 2014 renegotiation process, during which Niger sought greater application of its 2006 Mining Code, increased fiscal returns, and improved transparency in uranium agreements.

From a Dependency Theory perspective, disputes surrounding Niger's uranium sector illustrate how resource-rich states may remain constrained by historical economic structures, limited bargaining capacity, and dependence on external corporations. This interpretation aligns with Amin's (1976) argument that externally oriented economic systems can produce "disarticulated" development, where natural-resource extraction does not necessarily translate

into domestic industrialisation or development.

Modernisation Theory offers an alternative interpretation by emphasising the developmental potential of foreign investment and multinational partnerships. From this perspective, external investment may facilitate capital formation, technology transfer, skills development, and integration into international markets when supported by appropriate domestic institutions and policy frameworks (Moran, 2011; Alfaro et al., 2004). However, the Nigerien case suggests that outcomes depend not only on foreign capital inflows but also on governance capacity, regulatory frameworks, revenue management, and the extent to which extractive activities generate linkages with the wider domestic economy (Ross, 1999; Morrissey, 2012; Oxfam International, 2013).

Niger's uranium case and recent Sahelian efforts to reassess control over strategic sectors indicate that resource autonomy depends not only on reducing external influence but on whether revised arrangements improve domestic value capture, strengthen institutional capacity, and translate resource revenues into broader socio-economic development.

(iv) Security Cooperation and Strategic Autonomy

Security cooperation has been one of the most significant dimensions of France's relationship with its former

African colonies. Following independence, several Francophone African states entered into defence agreements (*accords de défense*) with France that established frameworks for military assistance, training, defence cooperation, and the stationing of French forces (Chafer, 2002a; Charbonneau, 2016). While these arrangements were formally based on bilateral cooperation, they have generated contrasting interpretations regarding their implications for sovereignty, security governance, and state autonomy.

Long-term reliance on external security providers may reproduce asymmetric relationships and constrain autonomous security decision-making (Sandnes, 2024). Conversely, external security cooperation may strengthen state capacity through professionalisation, technical support, and assistance in responding to security challenges (DeVore, 2019).

These competing interpretations became increasingly visible in the Sahel, where the deterioration of relations between France and Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger raised questions about whether ending long-standing security arrangements represents genuine strategic autonomy or a restructuring of external dependence. Despite extensive French counterterrorism operations, including Operation Serval (2013) and Operation Barkhane (2014–2022), these interventions did not produce sustained improvements in regional security, as

insecurity persisted across parts of the Sahel, contributing to growing domestic criticism of French military involvement and debates over the effectiveness of existing security partnerships (Bertrand et al., 2024; Charbonneau, 2017).

The expulsion of French forces from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger therefore provides an important basis for assessing whether the decline of France's security presence represents a transformation of postcolonial security relationships or a shift toward new forms of external alignment. However, the replacement of French cooperation with alternative external partnerships does not automatically indicate reduced dependency if security provision remains externally driven. The transformation of external partnerships can be considered a substantive shift only to the extent that it reduces structural dependence and strengthens the ability of states to address security challenges independently.

(v) Corporate Networks and Market Access

The role of French corporations in strategic sectors of Francophone African economies remains an important area of debate within discussions of *Françafrique*. Although formal colonial economic structures have ended, historical ties, established business networks, and long-standing institutional relationships have continued to influence patterns of investment, infrastructure

development, and commercial activity (Bayart, 2009; Langan, 2018). These debates are particularly relevant to contemporary realignments in the Sahel, where reducing French influence has raised questions about economic diversification and control over strategic sectors.

The activities of major French corporations illustrate these debates. Companies such as Bolloré, Bouygues, and Société Générale have maintained significant positions in sectors including transport infrastructure, construction, logistics, and finance across Francophone Africa. Such firms often operate through concession agreements, long-term contracts, and integrated business models involving financing, construction, and management arrangements (Langan, 2018).

Concentrated foreign participation may constrain domestic competition, local ownership, technology transfer, and economic diversification (Amin, 1976; Langan, 2018). Conversely, multinational investment may support infrastructure development, managerial expertise, technology transfer, and integration into international markets (Moran, 2011; Alfaro et al., 2004; Morrissey, 2012).

While multinational corporations have contributed to infrastructure development, financial services, and economic integration, persistent concentration of foreign corporate influence in strategic sectors has raised

concerns regarding domestic participation, value retention, and economic diversification. For Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, recent efforts to diversify external partnerships therefore represent a test of whether economic realignment expands domestic productive capacity or merely transfers dependency from established French networks to alternative external actors.

6. Case Studies: Economic Autonomy and External Dependence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger

The cases of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger provide important contexts for assessing changing patterns of autonomy and external dependence in the Sahel. Following recent political transitions, all three states moved to redefine aspects of their relationships with France, including the termination or revision of security agreements, the expulsion of French military forces, and the pursuit of alternative international partnerships (Al Jazeera, 2024; Prah & Kaunert, 2025). These developments have generated debate over whether the weakening of traditional French influence represents a substantive transformation of the *Françafrique* system or a reconfiguration of dependency through new external alignments. The analysis therefore considers both economic restructuring and changing security partnerships as indicators of shifting autonomy and dependence.

Mali

Mali illustrates the complex relationship between resource wealth, economic autonomy, and external dependence. Prior to its recent political realignment, Mali maintained extensive security and institutional ties with France, including French military involvement through Operation Serval and later Operation Barkhane, while remaining integrated into broader Francophone economic and monetary structures. However, persistent insecurity and debates over the effectiveness of existing partnerships contributed to increasing demands for alternative political and economic strategies. Following this realignment, Mali pursued measures aimed at strengthening domestic control over strategic sectors, making economic performance and resource governance important indicators for assessing whether reduced French influence has translated into greater autonomy. The IMF notes that Mali remained highly fragile but resilient amid multiple shocks (IMF, 2023), while the African Development Bank reports growth of 4.3% in 2023 and projects 5.0% in 2024, supported in part by higher gold production (AfDB, 2024). However, the mining sector's contribution to broad-based development remains limited, as gold mining has generated revenue but relatively limited linkages with the wider domestic economy (Mainguy, 2011). Within this context, resource governance became a central component of Mali's effort to redefine

its external economic relationships. In response, Mali adopted a revised mining code in 2023 aimed at increasing state participation in the mining sector (Reuters, 2023b; Secrétariat général du gouvernement du Mali, 2023). Authorities also expect these policy changes to raise mining revenues, though the extent to which increased state participation and revenue mobilisation will produce broader socio-economic transformation remains uncertain (Reuters, 2023b; AfDB, 2024).

Mali's resource reforms are consistent with a Dependency reading insofar as they seek to alter externally oriented structures in which significant gold production has generated limited domestic transformation. Yet greater state control does not itself satisfy the Modernisation expectation of stronger developmental capacity: its significance depends on whether resource governance improves investment efficiency and economic diversification. Mali therefore shows expanded policy autonomy without establishing that resource reform has produced substantive economic transformation.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso presents a similar but distinct case in which efforts to strengthen economic autonomy have unfolded alongside political transition, security pressures, and attempts to redefine external partnerships. Before its recent political realignment, Burkina

Faso maintained close security cooperation with France, including French military presence linked to regional counterterrorism operations in the Sahel. However, worsening insecurity despite external security assistance contributed to growing criticism of existing partnerships and increasing demands for greater strategic autonomy. Following the reduction of French military influence and the pursuit of alternative external relationships, Burkina Faso's economic trajectory provides insight into whether political realignment has strengthened domestic capacity or reproduced existing structural constraints. The economy remained fragile after the 2022 coups, although growth recovered to 3.2% in 2023 and increased to 4.8% in 2024 (World Bank, 2024; 2025b). Growth reached an estimated 5.3% in 2025, reflecting continued economic resilience despite persistent security and structural challenges (World Bank, 2026). Real GDP per capita growth also improved from 2.5% in 2024 to 3% in 2025, although insecurity continued to constrain the pace and inclusiveness of economic recovery (World Bank, 2026).

The World Bank also reports that insecurity has disrupted industrial gold mining, which remains central to exports, GDP, and government revenues (World Bank, 2024). In this context, the transitional government under Ibrahim Traoré announced public investment and resilience measures aimed at supporting strategic

development sectors and food security, reflecting efforts to expand domestic development capacity amid changing political and external relationships (IMF, 2024; World Bank, 2026).

Burkina Faso presents a different constraint. Continued economic vulnerability, external financing dependence, and limited fiscal capacity support the Dependency expectation that changing external alignments need not remove structural constraints. Increased state investment and development planning nevertheless provide a possible Modernisation pathway if they strengthen productive capacity and economic diversification. The case therefore combines greater room to redefine external relationships with persistent fiscal and developmental constraints.

Niger

Niger provides another dimension of the autonomy–dependency debate, particularly through the relationship between strategic resource governance, political realignment, and external economic pressures. Prior to its recent break with France, Niger maintained extensive security and economic ties with its former colonial power, including French military cooperation and the significant involvement of French companies in the uranium sector. However, longstanding debates over resource benefits, security effectiveness, and sovereignty contributed to growing pressure for the reassessment of these relationships.

Following the 2023 military takeover, Niger faced ECOWAS sanctions, border restrictions, and the suspension of some external assistance (Reuters, 2023a; International Crisis Group, 2023). These developments contributed to economic disruption and pressure on public finances. Despite these pressures, Niger's economy demonstrated resilience after the coup, with GDP growth reaching 8.4% in 2024, supported primarily by increased oil production and strong agricultural performance. These figures are therefore treated as indicators of economic conditions during the period of political realignment, not as evidence that reduced French influence caused the observed growth. Industrial output also expanded by 12.1%, reflecting the impact of large-scale oil production, although private investment weakened amid uncertainty and reduced access to credit. Economic growth is projected to moderate to 7.1% in 2025 and average 4.8% between 2026 and 2027, while extreme poverty is expected to decline gradually to 36.2% by 2027 (World Bank, 2025a). Although Niger possesses substantial natural resources, particularly uranium, the translation of resource wealth into broad-based development has remained constrained by challenges relating to revenue mobilisation, economic diversification, and domestic value creation (Soumaila, 2023; Oxfam International, 2013).

Resource governance has become central to Niger's recent efforts to redefine external economic

relationships. Following the deterioration of relations with France, Niger has pursued greater control over strategic sectors and expanded alternative international partnerships as part of broader efforts to restructure external economic relations, although the long-term developmental outcomes of these changes remain uncertain. While improved growth indicators suggest increased economic activity after realignment, continued dependence on commodity exports, vulnerability to climate conditions, banking-sector pressures, and limited diversification indicate that structural constraints remain significant (World Bank, 2025a).

Niger most clearly exposes the distinction between resource control and economic transformation. Externally oriented extraction, limited domestic processing, and reliance on foreign investment and expertise remain consistent with the Dependency expectation despite changing political alignments. The Modernisation expectation would require greater national control to generate productive investment, stronger institutional capacity, and domestic value creation. Reduced French influence therefore changes the configuration of external relationships without demonstrating that Niger has overcome structural dependence.

Alternative Partnerships and the Reconfiguration of External Dependency

The declining influence of France in parts of Francophone Africa has not produced isolation but a diversification of external partnerships. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have increasingly engaged alternative actors, including China, Türkiye, and Russia, as part of efforts to expand diplomatic flexibility, economic opportunities, and security options. However, the significance of these shifts depends on whether new partnerships enhance autonomous capacity or reproduce patterns of external dependence through different geopolitical relationships.

The China Model: Infrastructure Diplomacy and State-Led Development

China has become an increasingly important economic partner across the Sahel, although the depth of engagement varies considerably among the three cases (Carmody, 2020). The relationship is most developed in Niger, where CNPC has invested in the Agadem oilfield, the Soraz refinery, and the export pipeline linking Niger to the Beninese coast. In 2024, Niger also obtained \$400 million in pre-financing from CNPC against future oil exports, while the government's expulsion of three CNPC executives in 2025 demonstrated its willingness to challenge aspects of the relationship (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025). Yet continued reliance on

Chinese investment, technology, and export infrastructure illustrates how greater political assertiveness can coexist with structural dependence. Chinese engagement in Mali includes infrastructure and investment, whereas relations with Burkina Faso are more recent following the restoration of diplomatic relations in 2018. These differences suggest that diversification toward China expands external options without producing a uniform reduction in dependency across the three states.

The Türkiye Model: Strategic Diversification and Emerging Partnerships

Türkiye has expanded its Sahel engagement through diplomatic, economic, and particularly defence cooperation, but the relationships are not uniform (Donelli & Cannon, 2026; Darıcılı & Oruç, 2026). Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have acquired Turkish unmanned aerial systems, including Bayraktar TB2 drones, while Niger's security relationship predates the 2023 coup and developed alongside earlier economic, mining, military-training, and defence agreements. This longer trajectory complicates an interpretation of Türkiye's role as simply replacing declining French influence. Turkish defence cooperation may widen procurement choices and strengthen operational capabilities, but reliance on externally supplied drones, training, maintenance, and associated technologies can simultaneously create new forms of technological dependence. Türkiye therefore

illustrates diversification of external partnerships rather than an unambiguous transition from dependency to autonomy.

The Russia Model: Security Cooperation and Strategic Realignment

Russia's expanding security role also differs significantly across the three cases. Mali developed the deepest relationship, with Wagner personnel deploying from late 2021 and remaining an important external security provider for more than three years (Doxsee et al., 2023). Burkina Faso and Niger entered more formal Russian security relationships later, with their first post-Wagner arrangements emerging in 2024, illustrating that Russian engagement has not followed a uniform regional trajectory (Bauer, 2025; Knubel, 2026). The emergence of Africa Corps under the Russian Ministry of Defence by early 2024 represented a shift toward more direct state control of Russian security activity, and Wagner's 2025 departure from Mali left Africa Corps as the principal institutional vehicle for the continuing Russian presence (Minde, 2024). These developments expand alternatives to traditional French security partnerships but also preserve reliance on external military capabilities. Russia therefore illustrates a reconfiguration rather than a straightforward reduction of external dependence: the identity and institutional form of the security provider have changed without

necessarily eliminating dependence on external security provision.

South–South Cooperation and Regional Development Strategies

South–South cooperation and African-led initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represent attempts to strengthen regional integration, industrial capacity, and development cooperation beyond traditional external relationships (Maru, 2021; Zaleza, 2025). From a Dependency Theory perspective, such initiatives respond to concerns about unequal global structures by promoting greater collective bargaining power and reduced reliance on historically dominant actors. Conversely, Modernisation Theory views regional integration, institutional development, and knowledge exchange as mechanisms for promoting economic transformation and long-term development.

Regional realignment is also evident in the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), established by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger through the Liptako-Gourma Charter in September 2023. The three governments announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS in January 2024 and established the AES Confederation at their Niamey summit in July 2024; their ECOWAS withdrawal became effective in January 2025 (Asante & Bembir, 2025; Economic Community of West African States, 2025). Scholarship differs over

whether this development primarily weakens established regional security cooperation or represents an alternative institutional trajectory for West African integration (Asante & Bembir, 2025; Kuditchar, 2025). For the present analysis, the AES is therefore evidence of collective institutional realignment and an attempt to increase strategic room for manoeuvre, rather than evidence that greater regional or external autonomy has already been achieved.

Overall, the emergence of alternative partnerships suggests that the decline of *Françafrique* should not automatically be equated with the achievement of autonomy. The experiences of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger indicate that recent political developments represent a significant rupture with traditional French influence, particularly in security cooperation and diplomatic alignment. However, substantive autonomy depends on whether these states transform domestic capacity, strengthen bargaining power, and develop more resilient economic structures rather than reproduce dependency through new external partnerships.

7. Conclusion

This study examined whether recent political and economic realignments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger represent a substantive break from *Françafrique* or a reconfiguration of external dependency. The findings show that France's historical relationships with these states cannot be understood solely as either external domination or developmental cooperation. Their consequences vary across monetary governance, resource relations, security

cooperation, and corporate influence, and depend partly on the domestic institutional conditions through which external relationships are mediated.

The analysis showed that the mechanisms associated with *Françafrique* have generated different developmental interpretations. From a Dependency Theory perspective, these arrangements have contributed to patterns of asymmetric influence by limiting policy autonomy, reinforcing external reliance, and constraining domestic value creation. Conversely, Modernisation Theory highlights that external partnerships may contribute to development through investment, institutional cooperation, technical expertise, and economic integration when supported by effective domestic governance and productive capacity.

Recent realignments constitute a significant challenge to traditional French influence through military disengagement, reassessment of resource arrangements, and diversification of international partnerships. Yet engagement with China, Türkiye, Russia, and other actors may expand bargaining options while generating new dependencies where strategic sectors remain reliant on external finance, technology, markets, or security provision. Post-*Françafrique* autonomy is therefore multidimensional rather than binary: gains in diplomatic or security autonomy may coexist with continuing monetary, economic, or technological dependence. Substantive autonomy ultimately depends on stronger domestic institutions, bargaining capacity, productive capabilities, and greater control over development priorities.

Future research could complement these findings through archival investigation, fieldwork, and interviews with policymakers, military officials, and civil society actors to provide deeper insight into the domestic decision-making processes shaping contemporary realignments in the Sahel.

Contribution to Scholarship

The study contributes to scholarship on postcolonial dependency and African international relations by analysing monetary governance, resource relations, security cooperation, and external partnerships as intersecting rather than separate dimensions of autonomy. It shifts attention from whether French influence is simply declining to what forms of dependency and policy autonomy emerge as external relationships are reconfigured. The comparison of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger consequently highlights a broader challenge for states pursuing greater autonomy in an increasingly multipolar international system: diversification expands strategic options, but its developmental significance depends on whether external partnerships strengthen domestic capacity rather than reproduce reliance on new external actors.

8. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings regarding autonomy, external dependence, and post-Françafrique realignments, the following recommendations are made:

(i) Monetary reforms require greater policy flexibility, regional ownership, and institutional credibility. Debates over the future of the CFA franc should focus not only on reducing external influence but also on ensuring that alternative monetary arrangements can support macroeconomic

stability, investment, and long-term development.

(ii) Resource governance reforms should strengthen domestic value capture, transparency, and bargaining capacity. Effective management of mining and strategic-sector agreements requires greater attention to technology transfer, local participation, fair revenue distribution, and broader economic diversification.

(iii) Public procurement and investment frameworks should strengthen competitive processes, local enterprise development, and linkages between foreign investment and domestic economies. External partnerships should be evaluated according to their contribution to national productive capacity rather than the nationality of investors.

(iv) Security reforms should focus on developing sustainable domestic and regional capabilities. While external security partnerships may provide support, long-term autonomy requires stronger national institutions and African-led mechanisms capable of addressing security challenges.

(v) Governments should approach emerging partnerships with actors such as China, Türkiye, Russia, India, and Brazil through strategic diversification rather than dependency substitution. New geopolitical relationships should be structured to enhance domestic capacity, preserve policy autonomy, and avoid reproducing unequal external relationships.

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Author's Declaration on the Use of Generative AI Tools

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No new datasets were generated or analysed in this study. The analysis was based entirely on publicly available secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, government publications, institutional reports, and media sources. All data supporting the findings of this study are contained within the cited references in the manuscript.

Ethics Declaration

This study relied exclusively on publicly available secondary sources and did not involve human participants, primary data collection, identifiable personal information, or access to confidential data. Consequently, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.