Diagnosing Perpetual High Corruption in Cameroon: From Colonial Antecedents to Neo-imperialism

Lembe M. Tiky | ORCID: 0000-0002-6789-1763
Department of Politics, Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT 06824, USA
ltiky@fairfield.edu

Abstract

Although every index of “perceived corruption” invariably ranks African nations amongst the most corrupt countries in the world, few studies have examined their particular situations to understand the causes of this “cancer.” This article analyses the causes of corruption in Cameroon, a country ranked twice as the most corrupt in the world. The analysis develops in theory triangulation to assess the following three hypotheses: (1) High Corruption in Cameroon is due to the weakness of its colonially inherited institutions and the country’s slow modernization; (2) High corruption results from the reinforcement of colonial institutions by postcolonial leaders in the context of the Cold War; and (3) The persistence of high corruption is due to path dependence and is linked to the structure of the world financial order that allows the laundering of ill-gotten wealth. Following the investigation of the causes and persistence of corruption is a discussion on its reduction, if not elimination. This research has implications for Cameroon institutions that must adopt the best-required policies to reduce corruption and boost economic development.

Keywords

corruption – neo-colonialism – neo-imperialism – Cameroon – global financial order
1 Introduction

The 1996 “cancer of corruption” speech delivered by the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, probably explains the exponential interest in corruption causation research. Most studies (Momoh, 2015; Treisman, 2000; Tanzi, 1998; Mauro, 1995) conducted by development economists and political scientists are cross-national investigations that outline the economic, political, and cultural factors associated with high or low corruption. However, these variable-oriented studies can only tell part of the story; there is a need for more contextual research on the causes and persistence of corruption to not only expose the root causes of the “cancer,” but also to understand the processes through which variables amalgamate to generate high corruption. As Osoba (1996: 371) argued, “corruption is a global phenomenon, intelligible only in its social context.” This study analyses the causes and persistence of high corruption in the Sub-Saharan country of Cameroon. It borrows the definition of corruption proposed by the World Bank, which is the misuse or abuse of public office for private gain. It relies on Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public officials, including politicians and bureaucrats, are perceived to be. The expression “high corruption” used in the study applies to any countries ranking 140 and up consistently for at least five years from the TI scale of 0 (very clean) to 100 (highly corrupt).

The paper contends that three factors are responsible for Cameroon’s high level of corruption: institutions of dictatorship designed by colonialism, oppressive postcolonial institutions that maintained the relationship of dependency vis-à-vis former colonial powers, and the free flow of stolen wealth enabled by the global financial order. The choice of Cameroon is motivated by the following factors: it is a perpetually developing country with a per capita GDP of about US$ 3,720 (2020 PPP est.) and its Transparency International1 (TI) ranking as the world’s most corrupt country in 1998 and 1999. In 2022, Cameroon still ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, 142nd out of the 180 countries included in the survey. The National Anticorruption Commission’s (NACC) annual report shows that corruption activities cost the country an astonishing sum of CFA 43 billion in 2021.2 The other incentive to investigate corruption in Cameroon is that the country has

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1 TI is an international NGO that has produced yearly reports and perceived corruption index since 1995 ranked it consistently as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.
yet to attract corruption causation scholarship particularly. Most on the causes of corruption related to Cameroon are regional studies that group African countries or studies on developing economies in general studies (Signé et al., 2020; Kimemia, 2018; Mbaku, 1996; Harsh, 1993; Gould, 1980). One of the goals of this paper is to contribute to filling this void. Another goal is to contribute to the debate on curbing corruption. An investigation of the causes and persistence of the “cancer” of corruption in Cameroon will be incomplete if solutions are not generated to eliminate the disease.

The paper adopts an explanatory qualitative case study approach, which is appropriate for at least three reasons. First, it allows a multidimensional analysis of the topic, thereby ensuring a more holistic understanding (Yin, 2003) of how various conditions amalgamate in many ways and in a given context (Ragin, 1987). In this regard, corruption needs to be studied in its natural environment involving the particular conditions that led to its emergence, proliferation, and maturation. One particular condition, such as low economic development, does not raise the level of corruption by itself. Instead, it is part of a complex web of interactions among several factors. High levels of corruption in Global South countries, including Cameroon, are likely produced by low economic development and low human capital, democracy deficit, and ethnic fragmentation. Second, a qualitative case study approach can yield more profound insights into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about high corruption in Cameroon. Third, the approach is instrumental in studying corruption’s causes and persistence, which tend to be cumulative as previous experiences explain current levels. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate how the factors causing corruption worked together over time, in historical chronology, to generate that outcome.

The paper uses primary and secondary data sources to provide a quantitative and qualitative understanding of the issues under investigation. There are five sections. Following this section which introduces the subject matter and discusses its significance, the second section provides a brief overview of scholarly theories on corruption. The third section uses the three propositions this study formulated to analyse the causes and persistence of corruption in Cameroon; the discussion starts with the country’s colonial origins and continues with the analysis of the political and economic trajectories taken after independence. The discussion provides further explanations of the persistence of corruption in the country as it factors into the role of the world financial system. The fourth section discusses the likelihood of its eradication and includes suggestions based on best practices. The fifth section provides concluding thoughts.
Most theories investigating corruption in developing economies emphasize the influence of structure on human behaviour, and they outline the critical economic, political, and social factors that cause high corruption (Mauro, 1995; Treisman, 2000; Montinola & Jackman, 2002; Rose-Ackerman & Kunicová, 2005). The effect of structure on corruption is captured by the following variables: low economic development, weak institutions, ethnic fragmentation, low capacity, and traditional values.

The argument that high corruption hinders economic development (Badioa & Ojewale, 2022; Chang-Qing et al., 2021; Okunlola, 2019; Chêne, 2014; Mbaku, 2007; Cherry, 2006; Tanzi, 1998; Mauro, 1995) has acquired the status of conventional knowledge within the scholarship on corruption. Corruption negatively affects economic development in many ways; it discourages private locale and foreign direct investments (Chêne, 2014; Igiebor, 2019). Low wages that politicians and bureaucrats receive often constitute an incentive to make ends meet through criminal behaviours, which hurt the economy (Kingsley, 2015). Arguably, low-paid Cameroonian government officials charged with fighting corruption are unlikely to resist pricing their services. Anassi’s study (2003) finds that high corruption in security forces is due to the lack of resources.

Research has shown that democracy and its institutions correlate with low corruption. The features of democracy conducive to high corruption include contested elections (a mechanism available to citizens to sanction corrupt public officials), the rule of law, freedom of expression, and separation of powers (Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Atangan’a, 2012). The absence of these features in Cameroon opens the doors to various corrupt practices, impunity, and a sense of entitlement (Ogundiyi, 2009). Mbaku (1996) contends that, in dictatorial countries, bureaucrats and elected officials, who are members of the dominant political group, are less constrained in their abuse of collective resources. Logically, they do not worry about sanctions for soliciting bribes or using public resources for personal gains.

The absence – or the fear – of sanctions is associated with the concentration of political and economic power, a significant feature of politics in most developing countries. The state is the largest employer and contractor and often the sole owner of natural resources. This framework gives public officials control over economic and political processes and outcomes. The political and economic concentration of power has contributed significantly to corruption in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana (Werlin, 1972), Cameroon (Mbaku, 1996), and Kenya (Anassi, 2003).

Ethnic fragmentation is a related explanatory factor (Yehoue, 2007). Under conditions of scarcity, members of different ethnic groups see politics as a
competition with others to capture the distributive power of the state. In such
an environment, the ethnic group in charge of the executive branch of govern-
ment is compelled to serve the interests of its members and, in the process,
abuse state resources. Gould (1980) observed this situation in the Democratic
Republic of Congo (DRC) after independence when ethnic politics was the
driving force behind numerous violent overthrows of executive officers and
the chaotic political and economic developments that followed. Werlin (1972)
observed similar situations in Ghana and Nigeria.

Studies have also found that the persistence of traditional values contrib-
utes to high corruption. Among these is solidarity, which requires successful
bureaucrats or politicians to share their good fortune with relatives. The prob-
lem is that higher salaries are needed to cover the expenses involved in such
sharing. Consequently, public officials find additional income through cor-
ruption (Harsch, 1993; Banuri & Eckel, 2012; Bamidele et al., 2016). Another
traditional value that impact corruption is respect due to elders. It is cultur-
ally unacceptable for younger and lower bureaucrats to question the corrupt
behaviour of elders in positions of authority (Werlin, 1972); in fact, they are
expected to support any activities of their superiors.

Given the above arguments, it is common to observe the presence of high
corruption in developing countries with low human capital. Low levels of edu-
cational attainment reduce political participation, a situation that explains the
limited capability of the citizenry to organize and sanction corrupt public of-
ficials. Under such conditions, what matters for the competing groups is ac-
cumulating as much wealth as possible and using it to purchase support from
key constituents. Gould (1980) shows how the évolutés (Congolese educated in
the West) took control of all state apparatus and enriched themselves without
opposition from their uneducated compatriots.

The paper further analyses the structural perspective and the five related
factors outlined above using major development theories. Modernization the-
ory stipulates that “the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances it
will sustain democracy” (Lipset, 1959: 31). Institutions of democracy, in turn,
positively affect good governance and accountability. The modernization
proposition also assumes that good governance and poverty eradication go
hand in hand as their interaction generates an equilibrium between crucial
agents such as civil society, the private sector, and the State (Tessitore, 1999;
Huntington, 1968). Modernization theorists contend that social developments
in freedom, trade, urbanization, education, communication, and infrastruc-
ture are prerequisites for a state to develop strong institutions capable of alle-
viating corruption.

Dependency theory and the related world system theory explain low and
slow modernization in developing countries. The approach looks at past
political developments to explain countries’ state of affairs and the behaviour of their politicians and bureaucrats. Dependency theorists (Amin, 1973; Prebisch, 1950) argue that human and natural resources in Global South countries were exploited during and after colonialism for the exclusive benefit of industrialized countries, and their institutions were specifically designed to serve as a vehicle for such exploitation.

In the postcolonial world, the capitalist economic order created and maintained inequalities between core, industrialized countries (in the Northern Hemisphere) and exploited, peripheral ones (in the Southern Hemisphere), where neo-colonialism replaced colonialism. Indeed, peripheral countries’ contributions to the world economy are limited to producing raw materials (Wallerstein, 2000). Gould (1980) supports this contention and argues that “independence brought about a major change, in that direct exploitation was transformed into neo-colonialism. Subtlety and ruse replaced open foreign domination and brutality. In the new context, corruption became one of the most efficient appendages of postcolonial capitalism.” Positive institutional developments are less likely to happen, and bureaucrats and politicians are likely to develop an understanding that corrupt practices are just a way of life as long as the exploitation regime in peripheral countries continues.

Path dependence theory helps to explain why high corruption persists. Once a country embarks in a particular direction, every step in that direction increases the likelihood of many steps in the same direction (Pierson, 2002). Reversal is rendered difficult because of the level of uncertainty and high costs associated with it. A change of direction could be very costly: officials would have to give up most of the advantages they accumulated through corruption and possibly face severe punishment from the people they have exploited for years.

To date, studies on the causes of corruption in the Global South have tended to use the above theories separately. This paper triangulates the three to assess the following hypotheses about the causes and persistence of high corruption in Cameroon: (1) High corruption in Cameroon is due to the weakness of its colonially inherited institutions and the slow modernization of the country; (2) High corruption results from postcolonial leaders’ reinforcement of colonial institutions during the Cold War; (3) The persistence of high corruption is path dependent and is linked to the structure of the world financial order that allows the laundering of ill-gotten wealth. These propositions have an additional research value not often found in the current scientific literature; they allow the analyses to engage in process tracing. Corruption causation research discusses conditions such as low economic development or human capita found in Cameroon and Global South countries as if they were primordially
part of their fabric. Research on corruption rarely asks how these conditions emerged in the first place. The paper’s comparative historical analysis helps us understand the origins of these conditions and how they persist and cause high levels of corruption.

3 Analysing the Causes and Persistence of High Corruption in Cameroon

The qualitative case study approach used in this study proceeds by looking at the creation of the Cameroonian State by European powers and analyses the institutions and elements of power arrangement that planted the seeds of corruption in the country. Next is the analysis of post-independence political developments in the context of the Cold War, when indigenous leaders adopted policies that led to the institutionalization of corruption. In turn, the relationship between Cameroon and the international system is analysed in terms of how the persistence of high corruption is a function of the support that corrupt rulers receive from their foreign patrons and how the structure of the international financial system creates avenues for the free flow of illegally earned money.

3.1 Proposition 1: High Corruption in Cameroon Is Due to the Weakness of Its Colonialy Designed Institutions and the Country’s Slow Modernization

The coastal region of Cameroon has been an important trading centre for international business since the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (Silva, 2027; Ugochukwu, 2019). Due in part to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the region had grown in influence by the end of the nineteenth century as international commerce was booming. This strategic location in Africa attracted traders from Africa and Europe who converged there, hoping to reach inland populations. Jealous of their very profitable middleman's monopoly of hinterland trade, the coastal kings of Cameroon negotiated agreements with foreign traders that forbade the latter from doing business with other natives of Cameroon (Austen, 1983). Other native rulers soon challenged this monopoly position while European traders opposed one another as they backed different parties. This conflict situation meant a significant loss of profit for the coastal kings who, encouraged by their European lenders, requested British protection. In 1881, the two most influential Duala Monarchs King Bell and King Akwa wrote to Queen Victoria

3 The Duala people are natives of the Cameroonian coast.
of England, seeking military protection and offering to surrender authority over their territories to her (Eyongetah, 1974).

The British response to the Duala request was prolonged while German trade significantly increased, allowing Woerman, a German firm, to dominate economic relations in Cameroon. Its owner, Adolf Woerman, successfully lobbied Chancellor Bismarck, who was finally convinced of the need to counter British domination of international affairs by protecting German traders overseas and acquiring colonies (Rudin, 1968). Aware that the Duala kings’ preferences were toward England, the German representatives in Cameroon resorted to corruption to win their consent (Eyongetah, 1974; Rudin, 1968; Libam, 1970). The German offer of bribes was accepted by the two most prominent kings, Bell and Akwa, but was rejected by their neighbors. Kings Lock Priso and Dido. According to Rudin (41), “(t)o overcome this negative opinion, the Germans had to do a good deal of bribing. They also pressured King Bell, who stood in very great debt to the Woerman firm.” The German authority then proceeded to build institutions of a new administration, one that would continuously buy the support of the local elites through institutionalized bribes called dash or kumi. Eyongetah (1974) reports that, up to 1914, the kings received a lump sum each year under German colonial rule, and “provision for that payment was always made in the annual budget.” The German administration set up in 1884 provided the blocks upon which the Cameroonian State was born. Unambiguously, these blocks were made of corruption. Lacking any legitimacy, the colonial administration sought and bought the support of local elites to safely conduct its exploitative business. A political entente developed between the colonial administration and the local elites to share the profits of the plantation economy they created and natural resources at the expense of the population. Thus, a regime of exploitation and extortion that did not consider the welfare of Cameroonians was created. The designed and implemented colonial political institutions condoned corruption, which became the modus operandi of the colonial administration.

To paraphrase Simon (1997), whatever government officials of modern Cameroon and bureaucrats believed the goals of the new state determined their behaviour. The German firm Woerman lobbied German Chancellor Bismarck to turn Cameroon into a colony to protect its commercial interests. The Duala kings signed a protectorate treaty with Germany to protect their lucrative middleman monopoly of hinterland trade. Thus, the Cameroonian State was a venture designed to generate profits for the Germans and the native elites. The Cameroonian State was a vehicle for exploiting the people and resources. The weak institutions of the new German colonial state were specifically and appropriately designed to allow the fulfillment of this goal.
The Germans did not plan to settle in Cameroon; they were only interested in commercial profits. Subsequently, the administration, the police, the army, the courts, and other institutions they established differed from German institutions (Acemoglu et al., 2001).

The weak institutions allowed the Germans and the native elites to accumulate as much wealth as possible. These institutions were highly repressive against the general population and anyone who stood against the colonial state’s goals. As Thomson (2000) explains,

Coercion acted as a substitute for legitimacy. The state, in this sense, never rested on a social contract between the government and the people. Indeed, colonial administrators were not accountable to the Africans they ruled. Instead, they obeyed orders from their superiors back in the capitals of Europe.

Democratic governance notions and practices that function as corruption reduction mechanisms, such as individual property rights, the rule of law, political participation, freedom of opinion, and representation, were irrelevant in the colonial dependency. The Bundestag was not exported to Cameroon to ensure representation. Its people were not considered citizens but objects of unlimited exploitation. As a consequence, the German colonial administration and the native elites of Cameroon freely helped themselves in the loot ing of Cameroonian resources. The institutions created by the colonial state institutionalized corruption and laid the foundations of its pervasiveness in postcolonial Cameroon.

3.2 Proposition 2: High Corruption Results from Postcolonial Leaders’ Reinforcement of Colonial Institutions during the Cold War

After achieving international sovereignty, President Ahmadou Ahidjo, an advanced elementary school graduate (Beti, 1984; Eyinga, 1984), surrounded himself with poorly educated Cameroonians to fill in the vacant positions of an administration previously managed by the French, who replaced the Germans in the aftermath of World War II. The Ahidjo administration and bureaucrats learned from their colonial mentors that the role of the government was to facilitate the exploitation of human and natural resources, maintain the plantation economy that supplied the international market with crops, use repression to silence dissent, and enrich its leaders. Planned liberalism, Ahidjo’s brand of statism, “assigned the government the leading role in economic development while encouraging the development of a private sector”: (Mbaku, 2003: 395). Ahidjo’s planned liberalism was not meant to modernize the country, and
it did not. Consequently, Cameroonian institutions did not develop in complexity, a necessary step for curbing corruption.

According to modernization theory, institutions develop to accompany economic progress; the theory explains that institutions grow at the same pace as the economy. The development of a capitalist economy, which is essentially free of government interventions and open to peoples’ innovations, is likely to generate a web of complex social transactions over time. For example, a judicial system that efficiently functions as a mechanism of conflict resolution will develop in complexity to adjudicate issues between various social actors. A military power whose job is restricted to the physical protection of the state results from a positive evolution of the capitalist state. In other words, an efficient judiciary or a non-political military cannot result from a decree but is an outcome of economic and institutional evolution. The Cameroonian economy was not meant to grow, and it did not. Consequently, interactions between social actors only grew to an elementary level, and institutions that were planted at the colonial state’s roots were perpetuated. Political developments that took place in Cameroon after independence consolidated existing institutions allowing state officials to enrich themselves exponentially.

Soon after independence (January 1, 1960), and lacking legitimacy as he appeared to have been selected by the French (Eyinga, 1984) to protect their economic and strategic interests in Cameroon, President Ahidjo initiated several political stratagems to consolidate his power, thus reinforcing the colonial institutions that allowed corruption to flourish. By January 15, he called for a constitutional reform that instituted presidentialism (Bayart, 1979). His second major political initiative was to ask his opponents to join his party to establish a single-party system. Like other former colonial leaders, he used the resentment of the populations against foreign colonial powers and capitalism and the desire for self-determination to advocate for national unity through the single-party system.

In 1966, Cameroon became a one-party state, and multi-party political competition was de facto eliminated. All other institutions of the state were subordinated to the decrees of the President and his party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU). The President was thus constitutionally allowed to appoint all officers of the judicial branch, from members of the Supreme Court to the district court judges. By giving absolute powers to the President, the single-party system quarantined the institutional tools critical for curbing corruption.

The popular sanction for corrupt behaviour: Cameroonian citizens could not vote out their corrupt officials; regular elections were organized only within the context of the single party, and party leaders approved the nominees. The plurality system could have created the conditions for limited corruption
because it exposes elected officials to scrutiny and sanctions from his/her constituents in case of deviant behaviour (Rose-Ackerman & Kunicová, 2005). This argument underscores the view that political accountability is essential to low corruption (Treisman, 2000; Montinola & Jackman, 2002; Yehoue, 2007).

Respect for the rule of law and the tradition of common law: because common law also derives from precedents established by judges, it affords greater protection of rights and property against the government, which is not the case with civil law (La Porta et al., 1999). Party members overwhelmingly dominated the bureaucracy and controlled all key positions; the party and the state were indistinguishable. A situation that set the context for massive corruption as people's rights and property could not be protected against members of the CNU.

Civic participation: when people are knowledgeable enough to organize and scrutinize government activities, the result is better governance, hence less corruption (Putnam, 1993). In 1962, President Ahidjo established the single-party system and criminalized civic associations. Cameroonians could only organize within the context of the CNU (Bayart, 1979); unions, sports clubs, associations of women, youth, and others were all supposed to be part of the party. The silencing of the civic society meant that government officials and bureaucrats did not have anyone to challenge the unbridled looting of state resources and other corrupt behaviours.

Media scrutiny and criticism: under-the-table deals are exposed to voters, and the perpetrators are likely to be sanctioned (Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Adsera et al., 2003). The disappearance of private media followed the emergence of the single-party system in Cameroon, including the catholic paper L'effort camerounais, which was very critical of the postcolonial state. Without a free press, corruption activities in Cameroon could not be reported and denounced.

The absence of competitive elections, the rule of law, separation of powers, freedom of the press, a weak civil society, and the presence of a large bureaucracy are all variables known in the literature to favour corruption. In the Global South in general, and Cameroon in particular, these variables are effects; they result from the colonial state's initial institutional setup and the postcolonial state's political trajectory.

The postcolonial trajectories of Cameroon and other African states were heavily influenced by the structure of the international system and its main actors. Context matters. The conditions under which African states achieved international sovereignty largely explain their internal and external political predicaments. Indeed, Cameroon and almost all other African countries achieved independence during the bipolar struggle of the Cold War. African
postcolonial leaders faced a hard choice: aligning with the communist East under the leadership of the USSR or the liberal democratic West led by the USA. As President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana explains, the choice and agency of African states were severely limited: “the balkanization of the continent created a very complex situation for us. We found ourselves in a crossfire between the East and the West, a very complex situation that made it difficult for us even to be Africans; your survival depended on alignment with the East or the West.”

During the Cold War, security concerns over the stability of the international order and the struggle for dominance compelled the East and the West to support African dictators in general and military dictators in particular (Abramsen, 2018). The support the communist USSR provided to African states that adopted both the single-party system and socialism or even communism was logical from an ideological standpoint. Western democracies also supported dictators like President Ahidjo arguably for the stability of the international order and to prevent the expansion of communism. Moreover, the Cold War order provided opportunities for the continuous exploitation of former colonies, thus preventing their modernization. Ghanaian first President and scholar, Kwame Nkrumah (1965), explained how following their independence, African countries entered into a period of neo-colonialism that he defined as a situation in which the economic and political fate of the subaltern states was in the hands of imperial powers. African states also found themselves under the claws of neo-imperialism, which derives from the use of legal means such as international agreements, lobbying, corrupt practices such as blackmail and forcing weaker nations to purchases which are not beneficial for the weaker nation” (Wilczyński, 2021: 63). Neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism maintained dependency conditions of Cameroon vis-à-vis core countries of the international system, which heavily influenced the decisions of its leaders to continue with the colonial extractive economic policies that favour multinational corporations.

France ensured that conditions of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism were rooted in its former African colonies, including Cameroon. Indeed, Paris branded independent leaders of the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) as communists and eliminated them politically (UPC was outlawed by the colonial administration) (Mbembe, 1984; Deltombe et al., 2011) ahead of the parliamentary election of 1956 and physically (their leaders were executed by

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both the colonial power and postcolonial leaders of Cameroon (Eyinga, 1984).5 The French colonial administration selected Amadou Ahidjo, a semi-literate civil servant, to lead Cameroon and organized massif frauds to send him to the parliament. Interviewed by Eyinga (1984: 131–132), Jean Ramadier, a French Governor of Cameroon, revealed that he was the author of the inauguration speech that Ahidjo read to the Atcam-Alcam assemblies to become Prime Minister on February 18, 1958. Tobies-Kuoh (1991), then President Ahidjo’s Director of the Civil Cabinet, revealed that in 1962, the President handed him a recommendation letter in favour of Paul Biya from Louis-Paul Aujoulal, who was a former French cabinet member. Aujoulal also led the Cameroonian Democratic Bloc, a political party under which banner Ahidjo won elections in 1956. Ahidjo then instructed Tobie-Kuoh to take Biya to the Cabinet. Two decades later, the French authorities ordered Ahidjo out in 1982 in favour of Paul Biya, who has since assumed the Presidency. They provided him with the material support needed to sustain the neo-colonial and neo-imperialist systems. Le Floch-Prigent, then CEO of Efl, a public-owned French oil company, detailed how France saved Biya’s regime from a popular uprising in 1993. France provided the regime with up to Franc 50 million of equipment for repression; general Jacques Dewatte of the French spy agency DGSE was charged with reforming the Cameroonian army that hosted more than 100 French army officers as advisors in 1999 (Vershave, 2000).

Cameroon’s situation of dependency allowed French corporations to own or control the most lucrative and strategic sectors of the Cameroonian economy, from oil and bauxite to banking, insurance, transportation, telecommunication, construction, public works, and agriculture. The Maison des Français de l’Etranger, a French organization affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reported in 2013 that France was the leading foreign investor in Cameroon.6 Moreover, article 9 of the fiscal convention that France and Cameroon signed in 1976 and modified in 1994 stipulates that “income derived from immovable property, including income from agriculture and forestry, may be taxed only in the State in which they are situated.” This legal disposition is directly linked to high corruption in Cameroon. Indeed, some French corporation affiliates do not pay taxes to France or Cameroon, where they are situated. The most

5 Eyinga (1984) explains that Ahidjo’s election to the Territorial Assembly of Cameroon in 1956 was due to fraud, following the instructions of the French colonial Governor of Cameroon, Pierre Messmer. Mr. Messsmer “sent his direct orders to his representatives in the Benoue [district] who, perfectly equipped for that kind of operations, proceeded with manipulations, intimidations, and fraud that characterize colonial and neocolonial elections.”

emblematic case in this respect is the corruption network exposed by the mayor of Njombe-Penja that benefited *La Compagnie Fruitière de Marseille*, which affiliate in Cameroon is Société des Plantations du Haut Penja (PHP) (Nwabueze & Pofinet, 2018). After the Njombe-Penja mayor initiated legal action, claiming 20 years of unpaid taxes from PHP, he was arrested and jailed in 2008. He was released only in 2015 after pressure from UN agencies (Hung, 2020). The company that bribes everyone in the chain of command, from the local police chiefs to the regional administrative heads and the Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, refused to comply. Hung (2020) also described the actions of PHP, a Fairtrade-certified corporation, in massive land grab operations with the complicity of Cameroonian authority, leading to the imprisonment of local farmers.

The neo-colonial system implemented at the dawn of independence by the former colonizer ensured that their investment – the colonial state – would continue to generate surpluses. The former colonial power, France, ensured that the Cameroonian President understood that the priority was protecting and promoting French interests in Cameroon. The Cameroonian President was always to be deferential to his French counterpart. President Paul Biya did not hesitate to introduce himself in front of television cameras as “le meilleur élève du président Mitterrand.” Vershave (2000) describes the many fraudulent financial transactions involving French leaders of the fifth Republic, from both sides of the political spectrum, and leaders they support in the Global South. French leaders and the Cameroonian dictator designed a sophisticated system to siphon off money from Cameroon’s raw materials and French development aid.

The connection between neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism and corruption is robust; their policies and practices at the expense of democracy and human rights during the Cold War sustained Ahidjo and Biya’s dictatorial regimes and provided the ideal conditions upon which corruption flourished in Cameroon.

**3.3 Proposition 3: The Persistence of Corruption Is Due to Path Dependence and Is Linked to the World Financial Order That Allows Stolen Wealth to Be Hidden in Fiscal Paradises**

The systemic change after the Cold War ended in 1991, from bipolarity to unipolarity, led to the unprecedented growth of NGOs (Nongovernmental Organizations) (Makoba, 2002). The new world order provided new opportunities for civil society organizations (CSOs) to voice concerns over human

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rights and good governance issues, to influence, and, in some cases, to shape international interactions. These organizations challenged neo-colonial and neo-imperialist relations of dependence like never before and successfully brought issues of good governance, including the fight against corruption, to the top of the international agenda. Moises Naim (2005) observed that the 1990s saw a ‘corruption eruption’ following the end of the Cold War, when ‘democratic winds swept the world, [and] the dirty deals of once unaccountable dictators and bureaucrats came out into the open’ (p. B7).

The fight against corruption became a significant development issue and achieved prominence on the international agenda in 1993 with the launching of Transparency International (Krastev, 2004). Concurrently, CSOs also work with Western governments to pressure dictatorial regimes to liberalize their political systems. The works of Transparency International and sister organizations questioned the lending policies and practices of western industrial democracies and International financial institutions, such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Indeed, these and other financial institutions provided ‘illegitimate’ and ‘odious’ loans to corrupt dictators (Hanlon, 2006) throughout the Cold War while ignoring the negative relationship between aid (often confused with loans) and accountability (Bräutigam, 2000), and knowing that substantial portions of the loans would be stolen and stashed in fiscal paradises. This activism compelled IFIs, notably the IMF and the WB, to systematically use conditional lending practices, which require countries to adopt a set of neo-liberal policies to secure new loans (Zendejas, 2016). By the 1980s, the WB and the IMF became the main development actors (Cherry, 2006) as developing countries starved for new loans, a consequence of the abrupt decline of the prices of primary products. These agencies use their leverage to prescribe policies to liberalize developing countries’ political and economic systems as conditions for loan disbursement. Cameroon signed a structural adjustment plan with the WB and the IMF in 1989 (Ndoye & Kaimowitz, 2000) and agreed to implement the requested institutional reforms and combat corruption.

Indeed, Cameroon created the following anticorruption instruments: The Supreme State Audit Office (CONSUPE), which “hopes to win a threefold battle: the moralization of the behaviour of managers and public book-keepers, the good management of public affairs and the fight against corruption; a gangrene to public life in developing countries.” The National Anticorruption Commission (NACC) was established in 2006 and tasked to monitor and

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evaluate the effective implementation of the government’s anticorruption program. The National Agency for Financial Investigation (NAFI) is a Cameroonian mechanism for combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The Special Criminal Court (SCC), created in 2011, “shall be competent to hear and determine matters, where the loss amounts to at least 50,000,000 CFA Francs [approximately USD 50,000] relating to misappropriation of public funds.” Additionally, the country is a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), which adopted an AML/CFT regulation in 2003. The CEMAC countries also established the Groupe d’Action contre le Blanchiment d’Argent en Afrique Centrale (GABAC) to assist its members against money laundering and terrorist financing (ML/TF). In 2008 the country signed the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting corruption (UNCAC) in 2006 and is a member of the Economic Community of Central African States, the Network of National Anticorruption Institutions in Central Africa, the Commonwealth Africa Anticorruption Centre. Moreover, the NACC has signed partnership agreements with the French anticorruption Agency and the Egyptian Administrative Control Authority.

The adoption and implementation of multiple domestic and international anticorruption instruments show the determination of the state to improve the management of public finances and fight against corruption. Membership and partnership with several anticorruption institutions signal the understanding that a holistic approach is needed to combat corruption. Puzzlingly, decades after the enactment of domestic laws and the ratification of international laws to curb corruption, Cameroon still ranks amongst the most corrupt countries in the world, 142nd out of 180 countries included in the 2022 TI corruption perception index. The argument Akanle and Adesina (2015: 421) made while studying corruption in Nigeria applies unambiguously to Cameroon: “Corruption is so pervasive in that country that it would be nearly correct to opine that it is a way of life.”

Corruption in Cameroon has indeed become a way of life; it is endemic. According to Fombad (2003), Cameroon’s top government officials’ motto is “grab as much as you can and as fast as you can before the party is over.” The sums stolen by public officials, collected from research, local papers, NGOs, and the SCC, are astronomical. A study by Signé, Sow, and Madden (2020) showed that Cameroon is among the top 10 African emitters of illicit financial flows that

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represent fourteen percent of its total trade. The African Regional Centre for Community and Endogenous Development (CRADEC) reported that the country loses US$ 7 billion annually to illicit financial flows (IFF) of wealth.\(^\text{10}\) Having absolute power in Cameroon since 1982, President Biya and his entourage managed to embezzle massive amounts of money and safely kept it in banks in the West. As early as 1992, the sacked General Manager of government-owned Société Camerounaise de Banque (SCB), Messi Messi, revealed that Paul Biya and his first wife were responsible for the collapse of the financial institution. The first couple and their cronies ‘took billions of bank money in loans that were never repaid’ (Fonge, 1998). In 1999, French mainstream media *Le Monde and Le Point* reported that Paul Biya gave 4 billion CFA (about US$ 8 million) to Raymond Bernard, the leader of a French sect (Emvana, 2005). A 2009 report of the CCFD-Terre Solidaire (Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement), a French Catholic organization, presented Paul Biya as one of the most corrupt leaders in Africa. The report revealed that by 1997 Biya’s fortune was at least US$ 76 million, a treasure well-kept in Swiss banks and other fiscal paradises. Cameroon Tribune reported that SCC has published a five-volume book detailing the decisions rendered since 2012: “177 decisions on the merits and 48 cases on interlocutory being a total of 225 decisions … the book states that damages and fines amount to more than FCFA 205 billion.”\(^\text{11}\)

Corruption is so pervasive and institutionalized in Cameroon that the fight against it has become profitable for CSO. The most emblematic example is that of the Collectif National contre l’Impunité (CNI), which, according to an Amnesty International public statement,\(^\text{12}\) is an organization that fights against impunity. CNI President, Djeukam Tchameni, sent a letter to the Director of Civil Cabinet seeking a ‘secret’ meeting with the President of the Republic “to discuss the lawsuit filed in Belgium by CNI to prevent the trampling of our national sovereignty.”\(^\text{13}\)

Cameroon’s poor performance in the fight against corruption begs the question: Why endemic corruption persists in Cameroon despite its domestic anticorruption policies and procedures, despite international anticorruption instruments it signed or ratified, and despite IMF and WB’s stated determination to constrain corruption through conditional lending practices?


Part of the answer is in the institutionalization of corruption that led to path dependence. The discussion on Cameroonian neo-colonial evolution has shown that domestic anticorruption instruments are inefficient, for they are tools of dictatorship, used discretionary by the President to neutralize anyone who threatens his power.\textsuperscript{14} Investigated by the Office of State Audit and NACC and prosecuted by the SCC, dozens of high-level politicians and civil servants have been sent to jail for embezzlement of public funds (Agbor, 2023). This punitive justice has not discouraged other public officeholders from misusing their positions for limitless personal enrichment. Since the creation of Cameroon as a modern state, government officials and bureaucrats have been accustomed to using corruption [and repression] to conduct government business. A change of direction would come with a price tag that officials want to avoid paying. The implementation of a competitive election, the rule of law, freedom of the press, and separation of powers have the potential to cost government officials their positions, and many would have been sent to jail. Aware of the high cost of change, postcolonial Cameroonian leaders rationally chose to move forward in the same direction of corruption and repression as a means of government. Pierson’s (2000) path dependence theory shows that once a country is engaged in a particular direction (or has adopted a specific behaviour, i.e., corruption), every step in that direction increases the likelihood of more steps in the same direction. It is so because of uncertainty, the unknown and unforeseen difficulties that inevitably surface whenever a new direction is taken, and the high costs associated with a reversal. The many steps taken in the direction of corruption explain why Cameroon is one of the most corrupt countries in the world and has taken the ultimate title twice, in 1998 and 1999.

The other part of the answer is that the international instruments adopted by Cameroon to curb corruption are unlikely to yield positive results because the liberal world order that has structured global interactions since the end of World War II has strong connections with corruption. As Rothe’s (2010) research shows, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the WB and IMF notably, which operate as the guardians of the liberal economic order, are for-profit organizations that value the policy orientations of their principal shareholders; as such, they have little to no incentive to change practices that generate immense returns, this even as their study shows that policies and

\textsuperscript{14} A Minister Delegate leads CONSUPE from the Presidency; NACC is attached to the Secretariat General of the Presidency of the Republic; the TCS is directly controlled by the President, who authorizes investigations against high-level politicians and civil servants. All the leaders of the anticorruption agencies are appointed by the President, who allocates their budgets, salaries, and other advantages.
Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) implemented have adverse effects on the development prospects of poor countries. The contention that IFI’s goals of development, coupled with the need to remain profitable, can be viewed as factors of IFIs facilitation of conditions conducive to corruption is solid.

Indeed, the world economic order can be said to condone corruption in Cameroon and other Global South countries in three other ways: Profit-driven Multinational corporations (MNCs) – major players in global economic relations – use bribery and other forms of corruption for tax advantages or to win procurement contracts with government officials in Global South countries. Core countries encourage corruption by welcoming stolen wealth from government officials of Global South countries in their banks.15 For too long, the Bretton Woods Institutions provided corrupt leaders with financial loans even though precedence has shown that the money would likely end up in overseas private bank accounts.16

MNCs’ practice of corruption is one of the most severe forms of disease because it involves enormous amounts of money. MNCs are involved in the politics of their host countries in significant ways to protect their interests through the large-scale corruption of government officials (Momoh, 2016; Kimemia, 2018). The public French oil company, Elf, used bribery to secure an oil extraction monopoly in countries in the Gulf of Guinea, including Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, and Chad. Elf’s actions were not limited to bribing officials; its security division employs French secret service agents (DGSE) to maintain dictators in power through military coups (Vershave, 1999). MNCs’ corrupt practices were so prevalent that the United States Congress adopted legislation prohibiting American companies from paying bribes to foreign officials: The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977, revised in 1988 and 1998. In 1999 that OECD countries signed a treaty banning bribery. The practice has stopped, however.

Significantly, the global financial system encourages corruption in Cameroon and other Global South countries by allowing anonymity in creating offshore accounts and stolen wealth to be laundered and hidden in fiscal

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15 Citing a 2007 Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), Odile Tobner contends that: “the plundering of wealth from the Global south occurred with the complicity of governments and corporations from the Global North or were initiated by them.” Biens Mal Acquis, 1 April 2007.

16 The UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) includes a landmark chapter on asset recovery; asset recovery is also included in the Sustainable Development Goals under Goal 16.4 and in the commitments under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. Nevertheless, corrupt funds from Cameroon are kept in powerful banks in the West that benefits from the interest they generate.
paradises or tax havens. Most people interested in corruption news and literature are familiar with the astronomic wealth that Mobutu, Marcos, Duvalier, Bongo, Abacha, Suharto, and other corrupt leaders have accumulated over the years. Since the signing of the SAP agreement, the multilateral institutions provided the government with vast amounts of loans even though it was no secret that the Cameroonian authorities were highly corrupt, that government officials stole a significant part of the loans and stored it in private bank accounts overseas. The loans encouraged financial profligacy and political corruption and provided subsidies to public officials to buy the support of crucial constituents to repress descent to stay in power. What is more puzzling is that vast portions of these loans, stolen by Cameroonian officials, are securely kept abroad in democratically governed countries where corruption is effectively treated as a crime.\footnote{For example, a 2017 investigation by African Arguments revealed that Cameroonian and other francophone African leaders have spent millions of USD purchasing real estate in Quebec, Canada, without a mortgage, but “the origins of funds invested in real estate do not seem to raise too many questions.”18} The work of TI on the question highlights the role played by foreign banks in facilitating money laundering: “in spite of advances in the regulatory framework, banks continue to turn a blind eye to dirty money, failing to stop or report suspicious transactions.”\footnote{The so-called ‘irrational’ corrupt officials have rational reasons for hiding their stolen wealth abroad. Fully aware of the undemocratic nature of their countries, they understand that a coup d’etat could kick them out of power at any given time. Thus, keeping money under the mattress would be a safety hazard. Arguably, President Paul Biya and others would not have embezzled so much of their developing countries’ money if the global financial governance did not allow corrupt public officials to hide their stolen wealth abroad.}

17 New York Times journalist Ian Urbina reported that Teodoro Nguema Obiang, the Forest & Agricultural minister of Equatorial Guinea and son of the country’s strongman, is regularly granted a visa to enter the US “despite a federal law and presidential proclamation that prohibit corrupt foreign officials and their families from receiving American visas.” The minister owns a $35 million estate in Malibu, California, and immigration documents show that from April 2005 to April 2006, he transferred $73 million to the US. NY Times, November 17, 2009.


4 Curbing High Corruption

Noticeably, keeping vast sums of Cameroon’s wealth abroad significantly affects its political and economic development prospects. From other studies, it is clear that when unchecked, corruption harms political, economic, and social development (Gong & Yang, 2019). Indeed, under conditions of high corruption, an incentive structure that affords politicians multiple opportunities to buy the support of voters and election officers to win office is built into the political system. In turn, their priority is to get a return on their initial investment and amass as many public funds as possible to win the next round of elections. Essentially, corruption undermines the rule of law, nullifies political legitimacy, and ruins public trust in government (Amundsen, 1997). High levels of corruption destabilize the economy as it affects regulatory regimes, distorts public service provision, discourages private locale and foreign direct investments, and diverts funds from investment projects (Chêne, 2014; Igiebor, 2019). High levels of corruption also contribute to increasing income inequality, low human development, and poverty (Igiebor, 2019) and could trigger social unrest (Gong & Yang, 2019).

An investigation of the causes and persistence – and consequences – of corruption in Cameroon necessarily leads to the question of its reduction, if not elimination. The two-level-games perspective used in this study showed that corruption is a factor of weak domestic institutions and faulty international financial governance. Accordingly, fighting corruption must involve changes to strengthen Cameroonian domestic institutions and reform international financial institutions to prevent the flow of stolen wealth.

A solid empirical argument is that Cameroon needs to democratize, strengthening institutions that maximize accountability, such as the rule of law, free and fair elections, and freedom of the press. The argument rests on the proposition that democracies are less corrupt than dictatorships. What is problematic is that the transition to democracy can be a long process, and there is no guarantee that a democratic outcome will translate into less corruption. The case of neighboring Nigeria is a case in point; it is one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Egunjobi, 2013; Bamidele et al., 2016; Igiebor, 2019). There are a few non-democratic countries that have succeeded in curbing corruption. Singapore provides the best practices. In all corruption indexes, the country consistently ranks among the least corrupt countries of the world, on par with Switzerland and Sweden, better than most Western liberal democracies. In Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, and Rwanda have successfully overcome dysfunctional public corruption; they score better in TI ranking than Italy or Portugal.
As indicated in section three, Cameroon has created several legal anticorruption instruments and Anticorruption agencies (ACAs): The Supreme State Audit Office (CONSUPE), the National Anticorruption Commission (NACC), the National Agency for Financial Investigation (NAFI), the Special Criminal Court (SCC), and Article 66 of the constitution that requires the President of Republic and other office holders to “declare their assets and property at the beginning and at the end of their tenure of office.” Subordinated to political authority, these instruments and ACAs are yet to be efficient.

Pending the democratization of the country, and relying on research and best practices observed in Hong Kong, Singapore, Mauritius, Botswana, and Rwanda, the following successful models (Heilbrunn, 2004) of ACAs and measures that work irrespective of regime type are suggested for an efficient fight against public corruption in Cameroon; this would necessitate new laws and the restructuration of its various ACAs:

1. The universal model, best implemented by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). This ACA has three departments to pursue corresponding missions: The de Operations Department, which investigates alleged corruption offenses to prosecute the corrupt and deter potential future offenders. The Corruption Prevention Department, which statutory functions include reviewing government ministries and public agencies’ procedures to reduce corruption opportunities. The Community Relations Department, which statutory function is public education to engage citizens in the fight against corruption and to provide them with the necessary tools.

2. The investigative model is best implemented by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) of Singapore, which has significant powers to fight against endemic corruption. This ACA is charged with investigation and enforcement, including obtaining evidence for prosecutions. The other major function of the agency is corruption prevention, which is achieved by examining public agencies’ procedures.

3. The parliamentary model is best implemented by the Independent Commission Against Corruption in New South Wales, Australia (NSW ICAC). The NSW ICAC reports directly to the parliament and has significant powers to initiate investigations involving government agencies, their employees, and anyone who holds official public functions. Its other functions include corruption prevention and education. In fact, this model emphasizes prevention and adopts three principles: “First, prevention is better than the cure. Second, prevention is better than punishment. And third, prevention is better than management” (Heilbrunn, 2004: 8).
Although different, these models share a common characteristic on which their success rests: their powers derive from legal instruments. The following laws support the Universal model: The Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (PBO), the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Ordinance (CIPO), and the Independent Commission Against Corruption Ordinance (ICACO). The investigative model derives its powers from the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance, which was amended and renamed the Prevention of Corruption Act, the Confiscation of Benefits Act, later amended and renamed the Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Other Serious Crimes Act of 1999. The powers of the parliamentary model come from the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act. In addition to adopting similar legislation, Cameroon must implement Article 66 of its constitution to compel all officeholders to “declare their assets and property at the beginning and at the end of their tenure of office.” The effective implementation of the rule of law is a sine qua none for curbing corruption. Quah’s (2008: 73) comparative study of ACAs identified the following preconditions to ensure success: (1) they must be incorruptible themselves; (2) they must be independent of the police and from political control; (3) there must be comprehensive anticorruption legislation; (4) they must be adequately staffed and funded; (5) they must enforce the anticorruption laws impartially; and (6) their governments must be committed to curbing corruption in their countries.

Finally, other measures known to contribute to curbing corruption that Cameroon should adopt include the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman, as done in Rwanda, to not only monitor bureaucrats and elected officials’ wealth and property but also to provide Cameroonians with a platform to denounce acts of abuse of authority. Like Hong Kong and Singapore models, the Rwandan regime emphasized changing culture; it regularly surveys youth attitudes toward corruption to calibrate educational programs better.

At the international level, both regional and global, the flow of illicit gains needs to be seriously addressed to prevent public officials from having unabated access to the global financial system for the purpose of concealing their fraudulent gains generated from corruption. Arguably, Cameroonian bureaucrats and elected officials would steal less if the anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) measures were strictly implemented. The amounts of proceeds from public corruption are generally extra-large and thus need to be laundered abroad. A number of legal instruments at the regional level have been adopted since the 1990s, including the 1996 Organization of American States’ Inter-American Convention against Corruption, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in
International Business Transactions, the 1999 Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention, the 2003 African Union (AU) Convention against corruption. In 2003, a legally binding universal anticorruption instrument with a specific provision concerning the laundering of the proceeds of corruption offenses was adopted: The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Cameroon has ratified both the AU and the UN conventions, yet the collection of bribery, embezzlement of public resources, and the concealment and laundering of the proceeds of corruption have not diminished. What would prevent Cameroonian leaders from concealing their illicit gains abroad is the effective implementation of the (AML/CFT) frameworks, and this includes disabling systems for secret payments and concealment of assets and holding accountable corruption-enabling networks and gatekeepers such as banks.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was threefold: (1) to add to the extant literature on corruption causation by outlining the particular conditions that amalgamate over the years to cause high corruption in Cameroon; (2) to analyse, through process tracing, the economic and political trajectories taken by post-independence Cameroonian authorities that led to the institutionalization of corruption; and (3) to discuss the relationship between the global financial order and endemic corruption in Cameroon. The article demonstrated that the colonial order created Cameroon to exploit and extract human and natural resources; that the colonial dominion designed weak institutional arrangements to serve that purpose. Furthermore, it shows that the country achieved international sovereignty during the Cold War when competition between communists and neo-colonial and neo-imperialist Western powers prevented developing countries from modernising and pursuing their national interests. The study also discussed how the liberal world order that emerged from the ashes of World War II protected the capitalist interests of core countries at the expense of the political and economic development prospects of Cameroon and other developing countries. France, like the United States, the United Kingdom, and other core countries, has used its position of dominance to suppress the democratic aspirations of people in the periphery to ensure the stability of the world economic system. France supported the regimes of President Ahidjo and Biya that maintained an extractive economic architecture in which survival depended on core countries and thrived on corruption and repression. The WB and the IMF policies and procedures also provided conditions for massive
corruption by continuing to provide loans to Cameroonian authorities despite several reports outlining their corrupt practices.

The purpose of this work was to comprehensively understand the causes and persistence of the high levels of corruption in Cameroon. Other studies have discussed the negative consequences of corruption and explained how it distorts political competition and severely impedes the development prospects of developing countries.

The contention that corruption is the number one impediment to the development of Cameroon leads to an important policy-related question: how to curb it? The paper discussed the question and made policy recommendations that require a major domestic institutional shake-up and the implementation of existing international legal instruments. The research made several suggestions at the domestic level, including ACA models that have proven successful in a few developing countries, irrespective of political regimes. Also, measures to make the rule of law central to political and economical procedures are paramount to success. At the international level, both regional and global, laundering money must be rendered unappealing through sanctions to expect the reduction, if not the elimination, of corruption. This requires the effective implementation of existing anticorruption AML/CFT measures to eliminate illicit financial flows, incapacitate systems for secret payments and concealment of assets, and hold accountable corruption-enabling networks and gatekeepers such as banks.

A question that future research projects should pay attention to is: Who will or how to implement the institutional reforms suggested here? If Cameroonian authorities benefit from the current state of affairs, they do not have incentives to de-institutionalize corruption.

References


