

Mediating Sovereignty: Legitimacy and the Portrayal of Burkina Faso Leader in Jeune Afrique

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Abstract

This study conducts a qualitative content analysis of the French magazine “Jeune Afrique”’s coverage of Ibrahim Traoré, the transitional president of Burkina Faso. Using framing theory, the author analyzes seven articles to argue that the magazine systematically delegitimizes Traoré’s sovereigntist leadership through biased selection, lexicon, and moral judgment. The paper contrasts this with the legitimizing portrayal of Gabon’s leader, revealing a discursive double standard based on geopolitical alignment and introduces “informational sovereignty” as a crucial dimension of African autonomy.

Keywords

Media Framing, Sovereignty, Jeune Afrique, Legitimacy, Ibrahim Traoré

1. Introduction

The media play a decisive role in shaping the image of African political leaders. In a context marked by the colonial legacy and the strong presence of international media, the representations of African leaders oscillate between legitimization and delegitimization, often through the lens of narratives produced outside the continent. These media narratives not only shape public perception but also participate in the fabrication of political legitimacy in contemporary Africa. Among these media outlets, Jeune Afrique holds a singular position. Founded in 1960 and based in Paris, the magazine presents itself as a leading pan-African organ. Its wide distribution in Francophone Africa and its influence among political and economic elites make it an essential actor in the circulation of representations. However, its institutional and editorial base in Europe raises a question: to what extent do its

media frames reflect African dynamics, or do they reproduce logics inherited from the post-colonial landscape?

The figure of Ibrahim Traoré, President of the Burkinabe transition since 2022, crystallizes these tensions. At 34 years old, he came to power through a military coup in a volatile security context and quickly initiated a series of sovereigntist reforms: the expulsion of French forces, the challenge of the CFA franc, a break with ECOWAS, and the creation, with Mali and Niger, of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). These choices reflect a desire to break with the neocolonial order and appeal to a segment of African youth. As highlighted by Nigerian journalist and writer Babafemi Oju, these actions are part of a continent-wide momentum “aspiring for freedom, dignity, and prosperity”¹.

This study proposes to analyze this process of delegitimizing framing by drawing on media framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974) and the concept of sovereigntism, understood as a project of political, economic, and symbolic reconquest. The objective is twofold: first, to identify the narrative, lexical, and structural biases at work in *Jeune Afrique*'s (2025b) articles dedicated to Traoré; and second, to interrogate the role of these frames in the differentiated construction of political legitimacy in Francophone Africa.

The analysis is based on a reasoned corpus of seven articles published between January and April 2025, a period marked by an intensification of sovereigntist discourse in Burkina Faso. It seeks to answer the following questions: 1) Which aspects of Traoré's leadership are highlighted or obscured? 2) Which lexical and narrative registers are used to characterize his government? 3) What types of sources are privileged, and which voices are granted authority? 4) Finally, is Traoré presented as a legitimate and strategic leader, or as a figure in crisis?

By answering these questions, this article aims to contribute to contemporary debates on African sovereignty by introducing the notion of informational sovereignty, understood as an essential condition for the political and cultural autonomy of African states.

2. Why *Jeune Afrique*?

Jeune Afrique is one of the most influential publications in Africa, despite its editorial office being based in Paris. Founded in 1960, it has become a key source for political and economic analysis across the Francophone world, with a wide audience in Africa and Europe. The magazine's ability to shape political discourse and its considerable influence among African leaders, economic elites, and policymakers make it an essential media outlet for understanding how African leaders are represented. Although it is based outside Africa, *Jeune Afrique* has maintained a strong focus on African affairs and wields significant influence over how political events and leaders are framed, largely due to its wide circulation and online presence. This makes it particularly relevant for studying the media framing of leaders

¹A journalist, writer, farmer, politician with integrity and nature enthusiast.

<https://medium.com/@ojudubabafemi/let-captain-ibrahim-traor%C3%A9-be-2430010bbe1b>

like Ibrahim Traoré, who took the helm of Burkina Faso amidst a severe political and security crisis. Despite its African focus, *Jeune Afrique*'s editorial line and its location in Paris raise important questions about how its framing of African leaders may be shaped by both local African concerns and external (often Western) perspectives. As a private media outlet, independent of direct political control, *Jeune Afrique* offers a unique perspective on African leadership, combining critical political analysis with a broad international audience.

This study focuses on *Jeune Afrique* because of its significant role in shaping narratives about African leadership and its unique position as a France-based publication with substantial influence across Africa. Understanding how *Jeune Afrique* (2025a) frames Ibrahim Traoré's leadership will provide valuable insight into how such media construct and perpetuate narratives about African political figures for both African and global audiences.

3. Theoretical Framework

Framing theory

Framing is the process by which mass media structure issues by highlighting certain aspects while neglecting or minimizing other dimensions, effectively structuring social reality by selecting certain aspects of events while obscuring others. For Robert Entman (1993), this process rests on four main functions: defining a problem, identifying a cause, proposing a moral judgment, and suggesting a solution. Media narratives, considered rhetorical devices, allow news producers to effectively communicate their view of events and steer public perception by imposing a specific interpretive lens. Thus, depending on the ideology of the media, this communication takes various forms, depending on the political agenda of the media.

This operation is never neutral: as Goffman (1974) demonstrated, frames are interpretive schemas that reflect power relations. In particular, media narratives created by elites can both reflect and shape a common perception of the political order, often with the aim of building a collective identity. This process occurs even when the plausibility of the narratives is not necessarily a priority for those who adopt them. This demonstrates that the media have power over the construction of collective identity, but it does not prove the existence of an innate collective identity (Polletta & Callahan, 2017).

Media impact and collective action

Repeated exposure to negative news can also stimulate collective action, especially when the news is perceived as biased. This phenomenon shows that the media can have an impact on collective action and the perception of reality, but this impact depends on the perceived accuracy of the information disseminated (Saleem et al., 2019). Media framing highlights certain pieces of information related to a communication topic, thereby increasing their salience. The term "salience" must be defined here: it refers to making information more visible, meaningful, or memorable to the public. An increase in salience increases the

probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern its meaning, and then process and store it in their memory (Entman, 1993).

Framing in the African context

In the African context, Nyamnjoh (2005) reminds us that the media, far from being simple relays, actively participate in reproducing imaginaries inherited from colonialism. They perform a selection of legitimate voices, often to the detriment of dissenting African actors. This demonstrates how framing processes can perpetuate power structures and marginalize alternative perspectives within specific cultural and historical contexts.

Application of framing analysis

Framing analysis examines how ideas and information are structured and presented to influence people's understanding and attitudes. It is used in various fields, including communication, social sciences, and social movement studies (Van Dijk, 2023). It helps identify the "frame packages" that structure media narratives. In the field of public policy, framing helps to understand how issues are defined and discussed, thereby influencing policy decisions (Koon et al., 2016). It is used to analyze how social movements define and communicate their causes, thereby influencing public support and policies (Van Dijk, 2023). Framing is applied to understand environmental conflicts by analyzing how different parties present their arguments (Shmueli, 2008).

For this study, we adopt a typology of framing biases inspired by Entman but expanded through a critical lens: 1) Selection Bias: The highlighting of chosen information and the omission of other elements; 2) Lexical Bias: The use of negatively connotated terms (e.g., "putschist", "paranoid"); 3) Authority Bias: The hierarchical privileging of sources, favoring Western experts or external institutions; 4) Moral Judgment Bias: The implicit mobilization of values that delegitimize certain political stances.

This framework allows us to interrogate not only the technical dimension of framing but also its ideological function: to what extent do the media shape a differentiated legitimacy for African leaders based on their geopolitical alignment?

Sovereignism

The study of regime changes in Burkina Faso and neighbor country (Mali and Niger) reveals a geopolitical and discursive dynamic structured around the notion of sovereignty. These ruptures, which led to the expulsion of Western forces and the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), are not only national political crises, but also the affirmation of a new pan-African order.

This section review aims to map the field of research on this new sovereignty, focusing specifically on how Ibrahim Traoré, its actions and discourses are framed in JA magazine. The objective is to examine how a media outlet influential among Francophone elites, such as *Jeune Afrique* (2025c) (JA) magazine, makes these narratives visible or invisible, and through what lens (positive or negative) it confers or withdraws legitimacy from Ibrahim Traoré authorities.

Postcolonial Sovereignty and the Emergence of Sovereignty

Sovereignty in postcolonial Africa transcends its classic Westphalian definition of non-interference. It is historically rooted in an “obsession with national sovereignty” inherited from colonial rule, which motivated the creation of state infrastructures such as press agencies after independence. Today, in the face of the multidimensional crisis that the literature describes as “a striking amalgam of internally generated conflicts and regrettable scenes of pervasive neo-colonialism”, this notion has evolved into sovereignty². Andrew Lebovich (2024) conceptualizes this contemporary stance as “aggressive sovereignty”³. It is an ideology defining Sahelian regimes, strategically used to justify power grabs and exploit global geopolitical rivalries in order to obtain concessions and support from new partners. This sovereignty is sought not only in military non-interference, but also in economic autonomy, in the face of the exploitation of resources (uranium, gold) under unfair terms.

Academic work on sovereignty in the Sahel has evolved from an analysis of the structural causes of instability to a study of the ideological and geopolitical consequences of military coups. In the period 2012-2020, the dominant theme was the failure of Western (French/American) security cooperation to curb the insurgency, leading to the erosion of the central state. Gregory Mann (2014) highlighted that Western development aid, by focusing on local communities and decentralized governance, paradoxically worked to the detriment of national state institutions, creating a “non-governmentality” that eroded the state’s authority to act as a sovereign actor⁴. Subsequently, during the period 2020-2024, the literature focused on sovereignty as an ideology of regime change, with discourse becoming explicitly anti-Western and aimed at “regained sovereignty” (Mali). Ndah et al. (2025) concluded that the intractability of neo-colonialism and insecurity compelled Sahelian states to expel foreign forces and form the AES, favoring “African solutions”⁵. Andrew Lebovich (2024) described this new posture as “aggressive sovereignty”, a strategic action aimed at maximizing benefits by exploiting geopolitical rivalries and allowing states to choose new partners (Russia, China, Turkey) without subordination, which is perceived as “a bold and necessary attempt to claim political autonomy, economic self-determination, and civilizational dignity”⁶. Finally, the narrative of sovereignty is based on a dual legitimization through action: anti-imperialist rupture, which frames coups d’état as a necessary response to economic subordination (unfair exploitation of uranium and gold) and the rejection of neo-colonialism; and legitimization through geopolitical autonomy, where the choice of partners such as Russia and Turkey is presented as proof of the sovereign maturity of states, capable of “doing business with whom-

²Marie Soleil frere (2021) Chapitre 2. Médias et idéologies dans l’Afrique indépendante.

³Andrew Lebovich (2024) “Sovereignty” means never having to say you’re sorry: The Sahel’s new geopolitics.

⁴Mann G. From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality. Cambridge University Press; 2014.

⁵Ndah et al. (2025). The Sahel Crisis and its Ramifications on International Relations.

⁶People’s Dispatch 2025. (Johannesburg). West Africa: New Documentary Shines a Light On Those Building the Revolution in the Sahel.

ever they want” and resolutely engaging with the Global South, going beyond the simple renegotiation of contracts.

While in Europe “sovereignism” could be presented as a legitimate defense of sovereignty, it is often disqualified in Africa when applied to political projects that seek to break with the neocolonial order. Thus, whereas European sovereignism is viewed as a strategic choice, African sovereignism is frequently framed as a threat: populism, authoritarianism, isolation. This double standard reveals a fundamental asymmetry in how sovereignty is legitimized or disqualified through media narratives. Due to this, the concept of sovereignty complements this theoretical framework by providing a key to understanding the rhetoric and actions of Ibrahim Traoré. It allows us to situate and understand what he’s defending (reaffirmation of political and economic autonomy, control of resources, national security) and to analyze how these demands fit into broader struggles for sovereignty. Sovereignty thus constitutes a rhetorical and practical framework that sheds light on the internal logic of Ibrahim Traoré regime and the way he’s and he’s actions are framed in JA.

Informational Sovereignty: An Emerging Stakes

The concept of informational sovereignty is part of the ongoing debate on media dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) and the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) of the 1970s and 1980s. As demonstrated by Schiller’s (1976) work on cultural imperialism and, more recently, by Thusu’s (2006) work on global information flows, the production and circulation of media narratives are major geopolitical issues. In the African context, this issue ties in with Mudimbe’s (1988) analyses on the invention of Africa by Western discourse: informational sovereignty then becomes the ability of African societies to reclaim the naming of their political and social realities. Beyond military and economic dimensions, African sovereignty must be conceived in informational terms. Abba (2016) has demonstrated how media narratives structure the African public space, often in a state of dependency on external sources. In a context of information globalization, the capacity of states and societies to produce, control, and disseminate their own narratives becomes a central issue for political and cultural autonomy.

Colonial Legacy and Information Asymmetry

The debate on NOMIC, led in particular by UNESCO in the 1970s, emerged from a radical critique of the information order inherited from colonization. The MacBride⁷ Report (1980) denounced a “one-way flow” of information from met-

⁷Many Voices, One World: Towards a new more just and more efficient world information and communication order was issued in 1980 as the Report by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. Better known as the MacBride Report, after the Commission President, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Sean MacBride, former President of Ireland, Many Voices, One World offers a brilliant analysis of the history and evolution of communications—with a focus on media concentration and media domination by western media—and includes a remarkable insight into the emergence of peer-to-peer and grassroots communications that are now ubiquitous. Published by UNESCO, the MacBride Report evoked a storm of criticism from western media, and was a catalyst in the decision of the U.S. and U.K. to leave UNESCO.

ropolitan centers to the peripheries, creating a structural dependence of Southern countries on Western news agencies (AFP, Reuters, AP). This asymmetry is not limited to the quantity of information: it also determines who speaks about Africa, for whom, and according to what criteria of legitimacy. As Mudimbe (1988) points out, Africa has historically been constructed as an object of discourse, rarely as a subject expressing its own reality. This “colonial library”, to use Mudimbe’s expression, continues to shape imaginations, including in contemporary media that claim to be objective.

Contemporary Manifestations of Information Dependency

Abba (2016) has demonstrated how media narratives structure the African public sphere, often in a state of dependency on external sources. This dependence manifests itself on several levels: 1) Dependence on sources: African media extensively reproduce Western news agency reports, thereby consolidating an agenda defined elsewhere; 2) Economic dependence: advertising and funding by Western groups (such as the Lagardère group) condition editorial lines and the topics covered; 3) Symbolic dependence: journalistic legitimacy remains indexed to Western standards and training, marginalizing African epistemologies and narrative practices.

In the Sahelian context, this asymmetry translates into an inability of local actors to impose their own framing of events. The coups d’état of 2020-2024 are systematically interpreted through the prism of “declining democracy” or “instability”, obscuring the demands for economic sovereignty and critiques of neocolonialism that motivate these ruptures. Dissenting voices like pan-Africanist activists, community leaders, critical intellectuals are either rendered invisible or dismissed as “populist” or “anti-Western”. The suspension of Western media outlets (France 24, RFI) in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger is part of this logic: the aim is to challenge the Western monopoly on information production and assert the right of states to control their media space. However, these measures raise fundamental tensions between informational sovereignty and press freedom. Critics denounce “censorship” and “media authoritarianism”, while supporters see it as a necessary decolonization of information. This debate reveals a normative conflict: can press freedom, as conceived in the Western liberal paradigm, be imposed as a universal norm, or are there specifically African modes of media regulation that are compatible with the imperatives of sovereignty?

Alongside state strategies, alternative and pan-African media are emerging, driven by intellectuals and activists seeking to decolonize the view of Africa. Citizen initiatives on social media offer competing narratives, highlighting African perspectives and challenging dominant frames. Although limited in resources, these initiatives contribute to the pluralization of the media space and the democratization of speech.

Implications for Ibrahim Traoré’s Framing Analysis

Beyond military and economic dimensions, African sovereignty must be conceived in terms of information. In a context of information globalization, the ability of states and societies to produce, control, and disseminate their own narratives

becomes a central issue for political and cultural autonomy. The analysis of *Jeune Afrique's* (2025d) media coverage of Ibrahim Traoré must therefore be situated within this broader framework of the struggle for informational sovereignty. How does JA, a so called pan-African media outlet structured by economic and symbolic logics inherited from the colonial period, frame the actions and discourse of a leader who explicitly calls for a break with the neocolonial order? To what extent does the magazine reproduce or challenge the informational asymmetries described above? These questions allow us to examine not only JA's journalistic practices, but also the role of the media in reproducing or transforming power relations between Africa and the West.

4. Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative content analysis approach, applied to a corpus of seven articles published by *Jeune Afrique* between January and April 2025 (*Jeune Afrique*, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d). The sample of the seven articles was selected to represent *Jeune Afrique's* editorial line on Traoré during this critical period. These articles cover the different dimensions of his leadership: security policy (Solenzo massacre), economic policy (bank taxation), diplomatic policy (France-Burkina relations), military policy (presidential pardon), cultural policy (creation of an orchestra), and psychological policy (article on “paranoia”). This thematic diversity, combined with the direct involvement of editor-in-chief *Marwane Ben Yahmed* (2025) in two articles, provides insight into the publication's discursive consistency on all aspects of Traoré's leadership. The selected period corresponds to a phase of intensification of the sovereigntist discourse by Burkinabe President Ibrahim Traoré, marked by symbolic decisions. The corpus was assembled using the purposive sampling method, which falls under non-probability techniques (*Mellenbergh*, 2019). This choice aims to select texts representative of *Jeune Afrique's* recent editorial line regarding Traoré. The selection criteria were: Thematic Relevance (articles directly addressing his leadership, his reforms, and his international relations); Media Visibility (articles published online and promoted on *Jeune Afrique's* official channels); Illustrative Capacity of media framing mechanisms (lexicon, causal attribution, value judgments).

The analysis was conducted using a framework inspired by *Entman's* (1993) model, allowing for the identification, in each article, of: 1) The problem as defined, 2) The causes assigned, 3) The moral judgment invoked, and 4) The implicit solution proposed.

These dimensions were supplemented by the identification of specific biases (selection, lexical, authority, moral judgment).

This methodology does not aim to claim statistical representativeness of all Francophone media or all JA articles, but rather to highlight recurrent discursive mechanisms in a particularly influential media outlet. The approach is therefore interpretive, aiming to shed light on the ideological logics of framing rather than to measure its effects on audiences.

5. Findings

Delegitimization vs. Legitimization

A comparative analysis of the media framing of Ibrahim Traoré and Brice Oligui Nguema reveals a striking discursive asymmetry. Both came to power following a military coup, invoking objectives of national sovereignty and enjoying broad popular support. Yet, Jeune Afrique adopts a radically different tone depending on the case.

In articles devoted to Traoré, the most recurrent terms belong to a disqualifying lexicon—“putschist”, “junta”, “paranoid”—which reduce his political actions to instability and chaos. In contrast, articles published on Oligui Nguema during the same period emphasize his political and economic initiatives, implicitly qualifying him as a legitimate and visionary president.

For instance, an article titled “How Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema is Cultivating His Popularity Ahead of the Presidential Election” stresses the concrete measures taken by the Gabonese leader, such as lifting the curfew and launching a vast youth recruitment operation in the army⁸. In another text, written by the publication’s director, Marwane Ben Yahmed, “What Awaits the Future President of Gabon”, Oligui is projected into the future as the coming head of state, and his actions are associated with ambitious modernization projects: economic diversification, youth training, and investments in electricity^{9,10}. The recurrent use of the category “president”, even before his official election, contrasts with the labeling of Traoré as a “putschist”.

These examples confirm that the double standard is not a subjective impression but a differentiated discursive construction of political legitimacy. While Traoré is reduced to an illegitimate and conflictual leader, Oligui is valorized as a rational and strategic builder.

This asymmetrical treatment illustrates how Jeune Afrique contributes to manufacturing political legitimacy in Francophone Africa based on the degree of alignment of regimes with dominant economic and geopolitical interests. This dynamic has not escaped Ibrahim Traoré himself, who publicly stated:

“These very media outlets, especially Jeune Afrique, courted us at the very beginning in 2022-2023. They used several channels to approach us, to get us to pay and ‘clean our image’ as they put it. We refused. [...] They sent people, that’s how they operate, and many heads of state fall into their trap. They give money every month to have articles published to whitewash their image. You refuse, and they lie to destroy your reputation. All of Africa must be made aware of this”¹¹.

⁸Jeune Afrique (20 décembre 2024) <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1642760/politique/comment-brice-clotaire-oligui-nguema-cultive-sa-popularite-avant-la-presidentielle/>

⁹Marwane Ben Yahmed (24 février 2025) <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1659182/politique/ce-qui-attend-le-futur-president-du-gabon-par-marwane-ben-yahmed/>

¹⁰Omer Mbadi (Janvier 2025) <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1647154/economie-entreprises/les-trois-chantiers-doligui-nguema-pour-transformer-lest-du-gabon/>

¹¹Mikhail Gamandiy-Egorov (2025). Lorsque le journalisme occidental en Afrique est aussi synonyme d’extorsion. <https://afriquemedias.tv/2025/04/04/lorsque-le-journalisme-occidental-en-afrique-est-aussi-synonyme-dextorsion/>

In a similar vein, the former Guinean president Moussa Dadis Camara had previously reported:

“Jeune Afrique had asked me for 500,000 euros—not 5000, not 50,000, but half a million—to clean my image. And that was per quarter! [...] Because I refused, they undermined my image and tried to portray me as the biggest crook”.

The accusations of “pay-to-clean” made by Traoré and other African leaders, although difficult to verify empirically, are an important sociological indicator. They illustrate a widely shared perception of the commodification of media legitimacy in French-speaking Africa. Rather than ruling on their factual veracity, this study analyzes them as indicators of a crisis of confidence in media outlets perceived as dependent on external interests. This mistrust is part of a broader context of questioning postcolonial mediations, where the battle for informational sovereignty is becoming central.

Analysis of Articles on Ibrahim Traoré

The study of the seven articles devoted to Ibrahim Traoré reveals a discursive coherence: each text constructs a negative image by combining selection, lexical, and moral biases.

Tables 1-7 demonstrate that:

Problems Defined: Consistently linked to the regime’s instability, violence, or irrationality.

Causes Assigned: Attributed exclusively to Traoré himself, with no consideration of structural factors (regional terrorism, the legacy of the CFA franc, external interference).

Table 1. “Ibrahim Traoré or the art of diversion”.

Dimension	Key element	Identified bias
Problem	Traoré accuses JA and fails to combat terrorism	Omission of successes and the neocolonial context
Cause	Traoré is solely responsible	Absolution of France and external factors
Moral judgment	Dehumanizing vocabulary (“tyrant”, “repugnant”)	Systematic delegitimization
Solution	Return to the pro-Western order	No sovereignist alternative proposed

Table 2. “Burkina Faso: Ibrahim Traoré pardons around 20 soldiers convicted for the failed coup in 2015”.

Dimension	Key element	Identified bias
Problem	Controversial pardon for “putschists”	Omission of strategic motivations
Cause	Traoré is the sole decision-maker	Ignorance of internal dynamics within the army
Moral judgment	Negative vocabulary (“putschists”, “conditions”)	Denigration of the measure
Solution	Intervention by the BCEAO expected	Delegitimization of sovereign solutions

Table 3. “Solenzo massacre: Ibrahim Traoré and the lying imperialist media”.

Dimension	Key element	Identified bias
Problem	Massacre attributed to the VDP	Omission of the jihadist and ethnic context
Cause	Traoré is responsible	Ignorance of the complex dynamics of the conflict
Moral judgment	Polarized vocabulary (“lying”, “Pravda”)	Systematic denigration of local institutions
Solution	Recommended external intervention	Delegitimization of sovereign solutions

Table 4. “Why Ibrahim Traoré wants to tax banks”.

Dimension	Key element	Identified bias
Problem	Economic risk	Omission of monetary constraints (CFA franc)
Cause	Traoré is an incompetent manager	Ignorance of external factors (BCEAO, colonial legacy)
Moral judgment	Alarmist vocabulary (“staggering”, “sacrifice”)	Delegitimization of economic sovereignty
Solution	Desired external intervention	Refusal to consider African alternatives

Table 5. “In Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Traoré creates an orchestra to boost the reconquest of territory”.

Dimension	Key element	Identified bias
Problem	Misplaced priority: orchestra	Omission of the psychological dimensions of war
Cause	Traoré is a disconnected leader	Ignorance of global military traditions
Moral judgment	Ironic lexicon (“decibels”, “neo-sovereignist”)	Contempt for national symbols
Solution	Return to a “realistic” approach	Denigration of cultural solutions

Table 6. “Under Ibrahim Traoré, has Ouagadougou become paranoid?”.

Dimension	Key element	Identified bias
Problem	Security/paranoia	Concealment of real threats
Cause	Traoré, creator of fear	Ignorance of geopolitical dynamics
Moral judgment	Traoré is “paranoid”	Delegitimization through pathologization
Solution	Return to the pre-Traoré status quo	Rejection of endogenous security models

Table 7. “Burkina Faso-France: for Ibrahim Traoré, ‘Emmanuel Macron has insulted all Africans’”.

Problem	Personalized diplomatic crisis	Omission of real threats
Cause	Traoré is reactive, Macron is clumsy	Ignorance of colonial history
Moral judgment	Uneven lexicon (“putschist” vs. “president”)	Delegitimization of the African position
Solution	Maintenance of France-Africa relations	Refusal to consider other partnerships

Moral Judgments: Use of pathologizing and pejorative vocabulary (“astounding”, “paranoid”, “putschist”).

Implicit Solutions: A return to a pro-Western order, the maintenance of France-Africa relations, and the rejection of sovereigntist alternatives.

This logic results in a systematic pathologization of Burkinabè leadership and an implicit disqualification of any sovereigntist policy.

JA magazine framing lexical

A quantitative examination of the lexicon confirms these biases, as shown in **Figure 1**.

“Coup d’État” and its derivatives (putsch, junta): 24 occurrences

Repression/Authoritarianism: 11 occurrences

Incompetence/Chaos: 9 occurrences

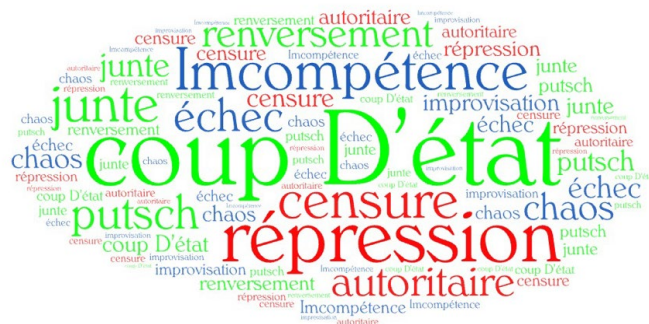


Figure 1. Quantitative lexical analysis of editorial framing (Author’s own illustration)

On the other hand, the central concepts of the sovereigntist project—such as “CFA franc”, “neocolonialism”, and the “AES” (Alliance of Sahel States)—are absent.

This lexical imbalance reflects an editorial orientation that obscures structural issues in favor of a deprecating and personalized narrative.

Summary of Findings

The integrated analysis reveals three major dynamics in Jeune Afrique’s coverage:

First, the systematic delegitimization of Ibrahim Traoré’s leadership. Each article employs consistent discursive biases: defining problems centered on instability

and violence, attributing causes exclusively to the Burkinabè president, using morally pejorative vocabulary, and implying solutions oriented towards a return to a pro-Western order. This pattern produces a pathologizing effect: Traoré is not merely presented as a contested leader, but as an irrational, dangerous actor incapable of embodying a viable alternative. Second, the comparison with Brice Oligui Nguema reveals a discursive double standard. Two leaders who came to power through similar means (military coup) are framed in diametrically opposite ways: one is portrayed as a “paranoid putschist”, the other as a “builder president”. This lexical and narrative asymmetry suggests that legitimacy is not based solely on facts, but on an implicit alignment with an inherited geopolitical order. Regimes that break with France and its allies are delegitimized, while those that maintain diplomatic continuity are re-qualified as legitimate partners. Third, the examination of the lexical field confirms an erasure of structural issues. While the core concepts of the sovereigntist project (CFA franc, neocolonialism, Alliance of Sahel States) form the heart of Traoré’s discourse, they are absent or marginalized in the articles analyzed. Instead, the focus is placed on disqualifying categories (“junta”, “putsch”, “chaos”), which reduce complex debates to political stigmas. This lexical bias helps to narrow the field of thinkable possibilities: African sovereignty does not appear as a legitimate option, but as a threatening anomaly.

The results show that *Jeune Afrique* does not merely report facts; it actively constructs a narrative of disqualification. The framing is not just descriptive, but ideological: it delegitimizes certain forms of African leadership while valorizing others, based on their compatibility with dominant geopolitical norms. This dynamic highlights the necessity of interrogating media production as a space of power, where the battle for the political and symbolic legitimacy of African sovereigntist projects is waged.

6. Discussion

The Systematic Delegitimization of Sovereigntist Projects

The analysis has demonstrated that *Jeune Afrique*’s articles employ recurrent discursive biases—selection of facts, pejorative lexicon, simplified causal attribution—that contribute to a systematic delegitimization of Burkinabè sovereigntism. Structural reforms (regarding the CFA franc, ECOWAS, AES) are marginalized or rendered invisible, while problems are personalized and reduced to the leader’s irrationality. This type of framing illustrates the ideological function of media: they do not merely inform but steer the meaning given to events by producing a normative reading of African leadership. As noted by Nyamnjoh (2005), African media or media focused on Africa, when relying on external reference points, tend to perpetuate an imaginary where endogenous alternatives appear suspect, even dangerous. It should be noted that this analysis focuses on the production of media frames and does not presuppose their passive reception by African audiences. As reception studies have shown (Hall, 1973; Morley, 1980), readers can develop opposing or negotiated readings in response to dominant frames.

The emergence of alternative media in Africa and heated debates on social media concerning Traoré's coverage suggest that *Jeune Afrique's* narratives are being challenged and reinterpreted by African audiences.

The Media Double Standard and the Fabrication of Political Legitimacy

The comparison between Ibrahim Traoré and Brice Oligui Nguema confirms that media legitimacy is not uniform but differentiated according to geopolitical alignments. While Traoré is disqualified through pathologizing vocabulary, Oligui is re-qualified as a respectable "president", despite a similar ascent to power. This asymmetry illustrates how certain transnational media contribute to manufacturing political legitimacy in Francophone Africa, hierarchizing figures based on their compatibility with the post-colonial order. This observation aligns with Adebawé's (2017) analyses on the discursive construction of African "political dignity": regimes that contest hegemony are caricatured, while those that accommodate it are validated. In other words, media legitimacy becomes a geopolitical resource, distributed unevenly according to dominant interests.

Informational Sovereignty as a Dimension of African Autonomy

Beyond identifying biases, these findings call for a rethinking of African sovereignty. While military and economic autonomy are often emphasized, informational autonomy remains a relatively unexplored field. Yet, as Abba (2016) underscores, the framing power of media narratives is central to shaping public opinion and political imaginaries. Informational sovereignty must thus be understood as the capacity of states, but also civil societies, to produce and disseminate their own legitimate narratives, without depending exclusively on external mediation. In this context, the "pay-to-clean" accusations made by Traoré and other African leaders, although difficult to verify empirically, are revealing. They reflect a widely shared perception of the commodification of media legitimacy, where a leader's public image could be negotiated for financial or political considerations. More than their factual veracity, it is their circulation in public discourse that matters: they illustrate the growing distrust towards media perceived as dependent on external interests. This distrust fuels the idea that true sovereignty cannot be achieved without increased control or autonomy in the realm of information and representations.

This study underscores that the informational field has become a central front in Africa's sovereignty struggles. The capacity of African leaders to be framed positively or negatively is not merely a media issue but a power dynamic intertwined with postcolonial and geopolitical forces. Recognizing informational sovereignty as a constitutive dimension of African autonomy opens a new space for critical reflection, where the battle for independence is waged not only on military and economic grounds but also in the universe of narratives and images.

7. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the media framing mechanisms employed by the magazine *Jeune Afrique* in its representation of Ibrahim Traoré, an emblematic figure of sovereigntist African leadership. The analysis of a purposive corpus of seven

articles published between January and April 2025 reveals a systematic delegitimization of the Burkinabè leader: the obscuring of his structural reforms, the exclusive attribution of crises to his leadership, the use of a pathologizing lexicon, and the implicit valorization of a return to a pro-Western order.

Beyond this finding, the comparison with Brice Oligui Nguema in Gabon reveals a media double standard: two leaders who assumed power via a coup d'état are framed in diametrically opposite ways, depending on their degree of alignment with the dominant geopolitical order. This result confirms that political legitimacy in Francophone Africa is not merely an institutional fact but also a discursive product shaped by media narratives.

On a theoretical level, the article proposes articulating media framing analysis with the concept of informational sovereignty. This approach underscores that African sovereignty cannot be limited to military and economic dimensions; it must include the capacity to produce and disseminate its own narratives, to legitimize its choices, and to name its realities based on endogenous reference points. In a transnational public sphere marked by postcolonial asymmetries, the battle for information and representations thus becomes a central dimension of political autonomy.

These findings have implications for the study of African media and contemporary political legitimacy. They urge us to consider media narratives as instruments of power, capable of amplifying or neutralizing alternative political projects. They also encourage an interrogation of the conditions of news production, particularly the economic and symbolic logics that influence the construction of African leaders' public images.

This research opens several avenues for future inquiry. It would benefit from being expanded to other media outlets, both Francophone and African, to assess the plurality of framings and their comparative effects. Particular attention could be paid to reception by African audiences: how are these narratives appropriated, contested, or reinterpreted? Such an approach would allow for a better grasp of the circular dynamic between media production, social perception, and political legitimacy. Understanding, deconstructing, and critiquing these framing mechanisms is essential for envisioning the emergence of a African media space that is truly plural, autonomous, and rooted in the continent's realities.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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