

Adaptive Continuity Governance: Governing Logic, State Rationality, and Crisis Management Architecture in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict (2016-2025)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon through the lens of governing logic, state rationality, and crisis management architecture. In moving beyond conventional conflict narratives, centered on state versus non-state actors, this study interrogates how the Cameroonian state operationalized authority, legitimacy, securitization, and institutional continuity throughout the management of the Anglophone conflict between 2016 and 2025. In employing a qualitative forensic policy analysis approach, the paper utilizes the Rational Actor Model, New Institutionalism, Conflict Transformation Theory, and Easton's Systems Theory as interconnected analytical instruments for examining the operational behavior of this post-colonial Cameroonian state under conditions of legitimacy contestation.

This paper argues that Cameroon's crisis management model evolved predominantly around three interrelated governance logics: securitized stabilization, centralized administrative continuity, and symbolic reform adaptation. While these mechanisms enabled the preservation of formal territorial continuity and institutional command structures, they simultaneously constrained transformative political adaptation and contributed to the cyclical reproduction of instability. The study further contends that the persistence of the crisis reflects broader tensions within post-colonial African governance systems, particularly regarding legitimacy, participation, institutional flexibility, and adaptive statecraft, within increasingly youthful, digitally connected, and politically mobilized societies.

Rather than approaching the Anglophone conflict solely as a humanitarian or separatist crisis, the paper positions it as a revealing site for examining the operational logic of modern African state governance, when under conditions of political stress. This study concludes that contemporary crisis governance within plural political systems increasingly requires adaptive, legitimacy-centered, participatory, and anticipatory governance architectures capable of balancing institutional continuity with negotiated inclusion and governance responsiveness.

Keywords: Governing Logic; State Rationality; Crisis Management Architecture; Cameroon; Anglophone Crisis; Securitization; Post-Colonial Governance; Institutional Centralization; Conflict Transformation; Adaptive Governance

INTRODUCTION

The Anglophone crisis, which escalated in Cameroon in 2016, represents not merely a regional political conflict or separatist insurgency, but a profound institutional test of the Cameroonian post-colonial state, its governing logic, crisis management architecture, and mechanisms of political adaptation. Although the immediate triggers of the crisis emerged from peaceful protests organized by Anglophone teachers and lawyers concerning the perceived erosion of the common law tradition and the marginalization of the English-speaking educational subsystem the rapid securitization of these grievances transformed what began as sectoral demands

into a broader political confrontation. This morphed into competing conceptions of citizenship, legitimacy, national integration, and territorial sovereignty.

The persistence of the crisis despite multiple governmental interventions raises critical questions concerning the operational rationality of the Cameroonian state, under conditions of political stress. Since 2016, the government has relied upon an evolving combination of military securitization, administrative restrictions, symbolic dialogue initiatives, selective decentralization measures, particularly following the institutional reforms associated with the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities and subsequent implementation mechanisms surrounding the □ Special Status□ for the Northwest and Southwest Regions (Republic of Cameroon, 2019; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 2020). However, notwithstanding these interventions, the crisis has persisted, revealing deeper contradictions within the structures and operational culture of governance itself (Amnesty International, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Existing scholarship on the Anglophone crisis has made substantial contributions in documenting colonial legacies, constitutional asymmetries, identity politics, minority grievances, and human rights concerns (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Achankeng, 2014; Nfi, 2014) ; Yet comparatively limited attention has been devoted to a forensic interrogation of the Cameroonian government□ s crisis management model itself, particularly regarding how institutional rationality, securitization logic, centralized governance traditions, and regime preservation imperatives shaped the trajectory of state responses between 2016 and 2025.

This paper therefore departs from predominantly event-centered and humanitarian approaches by positioning the operational logic of the Cameroonian state as the primary object of analysis. Rather than focusing exclusively on the chronology of violence or separatist mobilization, the study interrogates how policy mechanics, institutional structures, governing assumptions, crisis-response architectures, and legitimacy management mechanisms interacted to shape both the persistence and evolution of the conflict. In this regard, the Anglophone crisis becomes analytically significant not only as a conflict environment, but also as a revealing site through which the behavior of the post-colonial African state under conditions of legitimacy contestation can be critically examined.

Accordingly, the central problematic guiding this study is as follows:

> To what extent did Cameroon□ s governing logic, institutional structures, and crisis management strategies between 2016 and 2025 shape the trajectory, persistence, and reproduction of the Anglophone crisis?

By examining the interaction between securitization, governance centralization, symbolic reform mechanisms, institutional legitimacy, digital political mobilization, and state rationality, this paper seeks to contribute to broader debates on post-colonial governance, crisis management, and state adaptation within fragile and legitimacy-sensitive political systems.

Literature Positioning and Analytical Approach

The Anglophone crisis has generated a substantial body of scholarship, examining its historical origins, political drivers, humanitarian consequences, and implications for national unity. Existing studies have contributed significantly to understanding the conflict's roots in colonial legacies, linguistic identity, constitutional debates, governance grievances, and contested narratives of citizenship. Collectively, this literature provides important insights into the emergence and evolution of one of the most significant political crises in contemporary Cameroon.

A substantial strand of scholarship emphasizes the historical foundations of the conflict. Researchers have examined the consequences of British and French colonial administration, the reunification process, constitutional transformations, and the gradual consolidation of centralized governance structures. These studies argue that perceptions of marginalization within the former British Southern Cameroons were created during enduring grievances relating to representation, cultural recognition, legal traditions, and educational systems. Such analyses have been particularly valuable in explaining the historical context within which contemporary tensions emerged.

A second body of literature focuses on conflict dynamics and political mobilization. Scholars have explored protest movements, separatist mobilization, identity politics, diaspora activism, and patterns of resistance that contributed to the escalation of tensions following the 2016 protests. This work highlights the interaction between local grievances, elite contestation, transnational advocacy networks, and digital communication platforms in shaping conflict trajectories.

A third strand examines the humanitarian and security dimensions of the crisis. Research in this tradition documents population displacement, civilian victimization, human rights concerns, economic disruption, educational interruptions, and the broader social consequences of prolonged violence. International organizations, human rights groups, and policy-oriented studies have made important contributions by documenting the human costs of the conflict and drawing attention to protection concerns affecting affected populations.

While these literatures have significantly advanced understanding of the Anglophone crisis, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the internal logic of state crisis management itself. Existing studies frequently evaluate state actions primarily through normative lenses focused on repression, human rights, conflict escalation, or governance failure. Although such perspectives remain important, they often provide limited insight into how state institutions understood the crisis, prioritized objectives, selected policy instruments, and managed competing governance imperatives under conditions of political stress.

This study seeks to address that gap by shifting analytical attention from conflict actors to governance architecture. Rather than asking why grievances emerged or whether particular actors were justified in their claims, the paper examines how the state responded to escalating legitimacy challenges and what those responses reveal about governing logic, institutional behavior, and crisis management rationality. The state is therefore treated not merely as a participant in the conflict but as an analytical object in its own right.

This perspective draws upon broader debates within African governance scholarship. Authors such as Bayart (2009), Chabal and Daloz (1999), and Hyden (2006) have emphasized the importance of examining how African states maintain authority, reproduce institutional continuity, and manage political challenges within complex social environments. Similarly, contemporary governance scholarship highlights the growing importance of legitimacy, adaptability, participation, and institutional resilience in contexts characterized by rapid demographic, technological, and political change.

Positioning the Anglophone crisis within these debates enables a shift from descriptive conflict analysis toward the examination of governance under stress. The central concern becomes not simply whether the state's interventions succeeded or failed, but how those interventions were structured, what assumptions informed them, and how they interacted with evolving societal demands.

Accordingly, this paper adopts a governance-centered analytical approach. It investigates the state's crisis management architecture through the lenses of governing logic, institutional continuity, strategic adaptation, and legitimacy management. By focusing on the operational rationality underpinning state responses between 2016 and 2025, the study contributes to broader discussions concerning crisis governance, state adaptation, and political resilience in post-colonial contexts.

The argument advanced throughout the paper is that the Cameroonian state's response was characterized neither by complete institutional rigidity nor by transformative reform. Instead, crisis management evolved through a pattern of selective adaptation operating within enduring structures of institutional continuity. Understanding this pattern provides insight not only into the persistence of the Anglophone conflict but also into broader governance dilemmas confronting post-colonial states in increasingly youthful, digitally interconnected, and legitimacy-sensitive political environments.

Methodological Orientation

This study employs a qualitative forensic policy analysis to examine the governing logic, state rationality, and crisis management architecture underpinning Cameroon's response to the Anglophone conflict between 2016

and 2025. The objective is not to produce a comprehensive narrative history of the conflict or an exhaustive account of humanitarian consequences, but rather to investigate the operational logic through which the state sought to manage escalating political, security, and legitimacy challenges.

Qualitative forensic policy analysis is particularly suited to examining complex governance processes because it focuses on the relationship between policy decisions, implementation mechanisms, institutional responses, and governance outcomes. Rather than evaluating individual interventions in isolation, the approach seeks to reconstruct how policy instruments interacted within a broader crisis management architecture and how those interactions shaped political trajectories over time.

Research Design

The study adopts a case study design centered on the Anglophone crisis as a critical governance challenge confronting a post-colonial African state. The case provides an opportunity to examine how governments respond when demands relating to representation, identity, participation, and legitimacy evolve into broader challenges to state authority and territorial integrity. The analysis covers the period from 2016, when protests by lawyers and teachers emerged in the North West and South West Regions, to 2025, by which time multiple rounds of security interventions, dialogue initiatives, decentralization reforms, and reconstruction programs had been implemented. The focus of inquiry is therefore not the conflict itself, but the governance architecture constructed to manage it.

Sources of Data

This study relies primarily on documentary evidence obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Given the political sensitivity of the Anglophone conflict and the practical constraints associated with conducting extensive fieldwork during an active conflict, documentary analysis provides an appropriate and reliable basis for reconstructing state decision-making processes, governance interventions, and policy outcomes.

Primary Documentary Sources

Primary sources consisted of official government documents that directly informed the design and implementation of crisis management policies. These included Presidential speeches and official communications, presidential decrees, the resolutions of the 2019 Major National Dialogue, Law No. 2019/024 on the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities, decentralization legislation and implementing instruments, official reconstruction policy documents, and relevant ministerial communiqués issued between 2016 and 2025.

Secondary Documentary Sources

Secondary sources comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy papers, and reports produced by reputable national and international organizations, including the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other institutions engaged in conflict monitoring and governance analysis. These materials provided complementary evidence regarding policy implementation, conflict dynamics, institutional performance, and humanitarian outcomes. The use of multiple documentary sources facilitated methodological triangulation by allowing official policy positions to be examined alongside independent analyses and scholarly interpretations. Rather than privileging a single perspective, the study compares and synthesizes evidence from these diverse sources to reconstruct the governing logic, institutional responses, and operational architecture that characterized the state's management of the Anglophone crisis.

Analytical Strategy

The analysis proceeds through process tracing and policy reconstruction.

Process tracing is employed to identify major phases in the evolution of crisis governance and to examine how state responses evolved over time. Particular attention is given to critical turning points, including:

- * The 2016–2017 protest phase.
- * The 2017–2019 militarization phase.
- * The 2019 Major National Dialogue.
- * The implementation of Special Status reforms.
- * Reconstruction and decentralization initiatives extending to 202

Policy reconstruction examines the objectives, implementation mechanisms, and outcomes associated with major governance interventions. Four categories of policy instruments receive particular attention:

1. Securitized stabilization measures.
2. Dialogue and inclusion mechanisms.
3. Decentralization and Special Status reforms.
4. Reconstruction and development initiatives.

The purpose is to identify recurring governance patterns rather than evaluate individual policies in isolation.

Evaluating State Rationality

A central objective of the study is to understand the rationality underpinning state action. State rationality is assessed through three analytical questions:

1. What problem was the state attempting to solve?
2. What policy instruments were selected?
3. What governance outcomes emerged from implementation?

This approach allows examination of the relationship between strategic objectives, institutional constraints, and governance consequences without assuming either policy success or policy failure in advance. The analysis therefore focuses on how state actors understood challenges, prioritized objectives, and selected responses within specific political and institutional contexts.

Inclusion, Digital Dynamics, and Governance Feedback

The study further incorporates attention to groups and processes often underrepresented in state-centered analyses. Particular consideration is given to the roles of youth, women, civil society organizations, diaspora actors, and digital communication networks in shaping governance outcomes. Digital platforms significantly altered the dynamics of political mobilization, information dissemination, and state-society interaction throughout the crisis. Consequently, governance feedback processes extended beyond traditional institutional channels and increasingly operated through digitally mediated networks. This dimension is incorporated into the analysis through examination of online mobilization, information management strategies, and transnational advocacy activities.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, ongoing security conditions and restricted field access limit opportunities for extensive primary fieldwork. The study therefore relies primarily on documentary evidence and secondary reporting. Second, casualty estimates, displacement figures, and conflict statistics vary across sources. While such data are utilized where appropriate, the analysis prioritizes governance processes and policy mechanisms rather than precise humanitarian accounting. Third, the study focuses primarily on state

responses and governance architecture. Although separatist actors, civil society organizations, and international stakeholders are considered where relevant, they are examined principally in relation to their influence on state decision-making and governance outcomes. Despite these limitations, the combination of documentary analysis, process tracing, policy reconstruction, and theoretical triangulation provides a robust basis for examining crisis governance within the Cameroonian context.

Theoretical Foundations of Crisis Governance Analysis

This study is grounded in a multi-theoretical framework, combining the Rational Actor Model, New Institutionalism, Conflict Transformation Theory, and Easton's Systems Theory. However, rather than functioning as isolated explanatory categories, these theories are operationalized as interconnected analytical traditions through which the governing logic, institutional rationality, legitimacy structures, and crisis-management architecture of the Cameroonian state can be critically interrogated. The adoption of a multi-theoretical framework is methodologically necessary because the Anglophone crisis cannot adequately be understood through mono-causal explanations centered exclusively on separatist mobilization, state repression, or historical grievance narratives. Rather, the crisis reflects the interaction between strategic state calculation, institutional continuity, securitized governance, legitimacy contestation, participatory exclusion, and adaptive governance limitations within a post-colonial political system. Consequently, the paper approaches theory not merely as descriptive scaffolding, but as an operational instrument for interrogating how the Cameroonian state conceptualized authority, processed political dissent, operationalized crisis stabilization, managed legitimacy pressures, and reproduced institutional continuity.

This theoretical orientation aligns with broader governance scholarship examining how modern political systems respond to legitimacy crises within fragmented and institutionally stressed environments (Fukuyama, 2013; Beetham, 1991; Scharpf, 1999). It also reflects securitization scholarship emphasizing that contemporary crisis governance frequently transforms political contestation into security-management questions through institutional framing processes (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Within this analytical context, the Cameroonian case becomes particularly significant because it reveals tensions between inherited centralized post-colonial statecraft and the governance demands of increasingly youthful, digitally interconnected, politically mobilized, and legitimacy-sensitive societies.

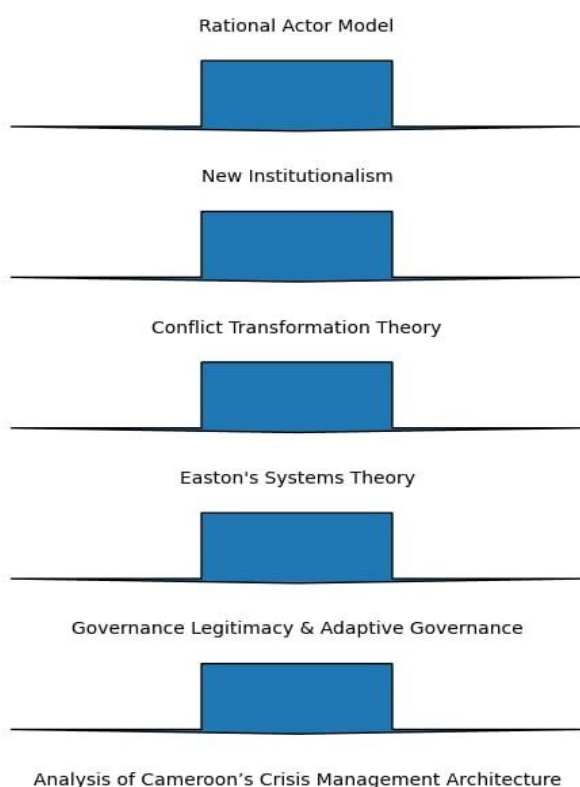


Fig 4.1 Integrated Theoretical Framework for crisis, Governance Analysis

Source: Authors synthesis, based on Allison and Zelikow (1999), Hall and Taylor (1996), Lederach (1997), Easton (1965) and adaptive governance literature

Rational Actor Model, Strategic State Behavior, and Crisis Calculation

The Rational Actor Model conceptualizes the state as a strategic actor pursuing calculated decisions, designed to maximize institutional interests, preserve political continuity, and maintain strategic stability (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Within classical rationalist traditions, state behavior is generally interpreted as the product of deliberate calculations undertaken to preserve authority, territorial continuity, and institutional survival.

Within the Cameroonian context, this framework becomes analytically useful in explaining why the government consistently prioritized territorial preservation, regime continuity, and administrative control in its management of the Anglophone crisis. Through this lens, military deployments, internet shutdowns, administrative restrictions, emergency security measures, and the criminalization of separatist discourse can be interpreted as strategic policy choices, intended to contain perceived threats to sovereignty and institutional stability.

The securitization of the Anglophone crisis further reflected broader post-colonial state anxieties concerning territorial fragmentation and regime vulnerability. As Herbst (2000) argues, African states historically exhibit heightened sensitivity toward territorial integrity because state legitimacy frequently remains tied to inherited colonial boundaries and centralized sovereignty structures. Consequently, political dissent within fragile or plural political systems is often reframed as an existential security threat rather than a negotiable governance dispute.

However, contemporary governance scholarship increasingly reviews classical rationalist assumptions regarding the coherence and adaptability of state decision-making processes. Simon's (1957) concept of bounded rationality, demonstrates that political actors frequently operate under conditions of informational limitation, institutional constraint, and procedural rigidity rather than perfectly rational calculation. Similarly, March and Olsen (1989) argue that institutional routines and organizational cultures frequently shape political behavior independently of purely strategic calculation.

These critiques become particularly important within the Cameroonian case. Although the government has securitized responses, reflected strategic attempts to preserve state continuity, the persistence of coercive stabilization despite declining legitimacy and prolonged instability, suggests that state rationality was simultaneously constrained by inherited institutional assumptions and administrative path dependencies.

The state's recurrent reliance upon coercive stabilization mechanisms despite escalating distrust, international criticism, and increasing separatist radicalization reveals what Migdal (2001) describes as the tension between state control imperatives and societal accommodation within post-colonial governance systems. Rather than adaptively recalibrating governance structures toward negotiated legitimacy, institutional behavior frequently remained anchored within centralized traditions privileging authority preservation and administrative continuity.

Consequently, the Cameroonian state's operational logic cannot adequately be interpreted solely through strategic rationality. Rather, it reflects the interaction between calculated state preservation, institutionalized governance cultures, and historically embedded assumptions concerning sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regime continuity.

New Institutionalism, Administrative Continuity, and Path Dependency

New Institutionalism provides a critical framework for examining how historical institutional arrangements, bureaucratic cultures, administrative routines, and organizational path dependencies shape governance behavior over time (Peters, 2012; Hall & Taylor, 1996).

Unlike purely rationalist approaches emphasizing strategic calculation, institutionalist perspectives argue that political behavior frequently reflects deeply embedded administrative norms and inherited governance traditions. Institutions therefore become more than governance instruments; they evolve into systems of behavioral reproduction structuring political possibilities while simultaneously constraining adaptive transformation.

Within the Cameroonian context, this framework becomes particularly significant because the post-colonial state inherited and consolidated highly centralized administrative traditions characterized by executive concentration of authority, vertical policy coordination, and limited local autonomy. Consistent with Bayart's (2009) observations regarding the persistence of centralized post-colonial governance structures in Africa, institutional authority within Cameroon remained concentrated around executive administrative cores, thereby limiting governance flexibility during periods of political contestation.

This administrative continuity reflects broader Francophone post-colonial state traditions, rooted in centralized bureaucratic governance models, emphasizing executive hierarchy, territorial administrative control, and centralized policy coordination (Young, 1994). Consequently, Governance adaptation within Cameroon frequently occurred through controlled institutional adjustment rather than substantive structural transformation.

The persistence of centralized crisis-management responses strongly reflects what Pierson (2000) conceptualizes as path dependency, whereby institutional arrangements reproduce themselves over time because existing structures generate incentives favoring continuity over transformation. In such systems, governance flexibility becomes constrained not merely by strategic calculation, but by institutional routines, bureaucratic interests, and organizational inertia.

Consequently, even reform initiatives publicly framed as adaptive or conciliatory, including decentralization reforms and the granting of "special status" formally institutionalized under the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities and subsequent executive implementation frameworks (Republic of Cameroon, 2019; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 2020), Effectively the Northwest and Southwest regions, remained operationally constrained by bureaucratic inertia and centralized administrative logic. Executive authority, fiscal coordination, and strategic governance control largely remained concentrated within central state structures despite the rhetoric of inclusion and decentralization.

The Cameroonian case therefore reveals an important contradiction within post-colonial governance systems: while reform discourse may emphasize decentralization, participation, and accommodation, actual governance practice frequently remains anchored within inherited structures of centralized administrative continuity.

This contradiction aligns strongly with Chabal and Daloz's (1999) argument that many African political systems preserve institutional continuity beneath formally adaptive political rhetoric. Similarly, Hyden (2006) observes that governance reform within many African political systems frequently operates through selective accommodation rather than substantive redistribution of institutional authority.

In this regard, decentralization within the Cameroonian crisis-management framework frequently functioned less as transformative restructuring and more as controlled institutional adaptation aimed at preserving broader governance continuity and executive stability.

Conflict Transformation Theory, Legitimacy, and Relational Governance

Conflict Transformation Theory, developed principally by Lederach (1995), shifts analytical attention away from immediate conflict symptoms toward the deeper relational, structural, institutional, and cultural conditions sustaining prolonged political conflict.

Unlike stabilization-oriented approaches prioritizing order, restoration and coercive containment, Conflict Transformation Theory emphasizes the reconstruction of institutional trust, participatory legitimacy, relational inclusion, and governance credibility as prerequisites for sustainable peace. Conflict therefore becomes

understood not merely as a security disruption requiring containment, but as an expression of unresolved structural tensions embedded within political relationships and governance systems.

This perspective becomes especially significant within the Anglophone context because the crisis extends beyond military confrontation into broader questions concerning political belonging, linguistic recognition, governance inclusion, institutional legitimacy, citizenship, and the historical relationship between the Anglophone regions and the post-colonial Cameroonian state.

The Cameroonian case strongly reflects Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative peace and positive peace. While securitized stabilization mechanisms may temporarily suppress overt confrontation, they do not necessarily transform the deeper structural and relational tensions sustaining political instability. Consequently, the persistence of violence despite repeated stabilization efforts suggests limitations within governance approaches predominantly oriented toward coercive order restoration rather than relational transformation.

Conflict Transformation Theory further emphasizes the importance of inclusive participation within peace and governance processes, particularly regarding groups structurally marginalized within formal state negotiation frameworks. Contemporary peacebuilding scholarship increasingly argues that the exclusion of women, youths, grassroots civic actors, and locally embedded social networks from crisis governance mechanisms frequently weakens legitimacy reconstruction and undermines long-term stabilization efforts (Richmond, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2011; Paffenholz, 2014).

Within the Cameroonian context, the limited incorporation of women and youth actors within formal crisis-dialogue processes reflected broader patterns of centralized state-managed participation. Yet these demographic groups simultaneously emerged as important informal governance actors within the broader conflict environment.

Youths, particularly through digitally mediated mobilization networks, became increasingly significant in shaping protest organization, separatist communication ecosystems, diaspora engagement, and legitimacy narratives surrounding the conflict. This reflects broader observations by Castells (2012) and Tufekci (2017) concerning the decentralization of political communication within digitally networked societies.

Similarly, women frequently occupied critical but under recognized roles within local mediation structures, humanitarian coordination networks, informal community stabilization processes, and relational trust reconstruction efforts. Consistent with broader peacebuilding scholarship emphasizing women's participation in legitimacy reconstruction and sustainable peace processes (O'Reilly, 2015; Enloe, 2014), their marginal incorporation into formal governance and negotiation frameworks constrained broader participatory legitimacy and weakened opportunities for relational conflict transformation.

The Anglophone crisis therefore demonstrates that governance legitimacy within contemporary political conflicts increasingly depends not merely upon institutional authority, but also upon the capacity of governance systems to substantively incorporate socially influential, politically mobilized, and digitally interconnected demographic actors into crisis-response architectures.

Similarly, Richmond (2011) and Mac Ginty (2011) argue that state-managed reconciliation frameworks frequently prioritize stabilization and institutional continuity over genuinely transformative political restructuring. These critiques become particularly relevant when examining the Major National Dialogue of 2019.

Although officially framed as a reconciliation initiative, the dialogue process remained heavily state-managed, selectively participatory, and operationally subordinate to broader state stabilization objectives. The exclusion or marginalization of significant separatist actors, grassroots civil society structures, women-led mediation actors, and locally embedded political networks reflected broader tensions between performative inclusion and substantive political transformation.

Consequently, Conflict Transformation Theory reveals that the limitations of Cameroon's crisis-management architecture did not emerge solely from insufficient policy intervention, but from the predominance of stabilization-oriented governance rationalities insufficiently oriented toward negotiated legitimacy, relational restructuring, participatory inclusion, and institutional trust reconstruction.

Easton's Systems Theory, Governance Feedback, and Recursive Instability

Easton's Systems Theory conceptualizes political systems as dynamic structures processing societal demands into policy outputs, which subsequently generate stabilizing or destabilizing feedback effects (Easton, 1953).

Within this framework, governance legitimacy depends upon the capacity of political systems to adaptively process societal inputs without generating recursive cycles of instability. Political systems therefore survive not merely through coercive authority, but through sustained responsiveness capable of maintaining institutional legitimacy and societal equilibrium.

The Cameroonian case strongly illustrates this systemic dynamic. Initial societal inputs included demands relating to legal autonomy, linguistic recognition, educational reform, administrative inclusion, and governance responsiveness. However, state outputs, particularly coercive securitization combined with limited symbolic concessions, generated increasingly destabilizing societal feedback manifested through intensified protests, declining institutional trust, separatist radicalization, and prolonged confrontation.

This recursive feedback dynamic aligns with broader governance scholarship emphasizing that institutional rigidity frequently intensifies rather than stabilizes legitimacy crises within politically contested environments (Luhmann, 1995; Almond & Powell, 1966). As Habermas (1975) further argues, legitimacy crises emerge when political systems become increasingly incapable of reconciling governance outputs with evolving societal expectations and participatory demands.

The expansion of digitally mediated mobilization significantly intensified these recursive feedback cycles. Social media platforms, diaspora communication networks, online broadcasting ecosystems, and decentralized information circulation increasingly amplified perceptions of exclusion, state coercion, and institutional distrust among politically mobilized populations, particularly youths.

Rather than stabilizing the political system, coercive governance outputs frequently generated additional legitimacy pressures upon the governance structure itself. Consequently, the Anglophone crisis gradually evolved from a reform-oriented protest movement into a broader legitimacy crisis involving competing conceptions of authority, participation, sovereignty, and political inclusion.

Easton's framework therefore becomes particularly useful because it demonstrates that policy failure within the Cameroonian context cannot adequately be interpreted solely as the product of isolated state actions or separatist mobilization independently. Rather, instability emerged through recursive interactions between governance outputs, societal reactions, digital political mobilization, and institutional rigidity within an increasingly stressed political system.

Governance Legitimacy, Adaptive Governance, and Contemporary Statecraft

Beyond the immediate explanatory relevance of the four principal theoretical frameworks, the Cameroonian case also raises broader theoretical questions concerning governance legitimacy and adaptive statecraft within contemporary political systems.

Classical legitimacy theory, particularly Weber's (1978) conception of authority, traditionally emphasized legal-rational legitimacy grounded in institutional continuity and procedural authority. However, contemporary governance scholarship increasingly argues that legitimacy within modern political systems extends beyond formal institutional authority toward broader questions of responsiveness, participation, institutional trust, procedural credibility, and governance adaptability (Beetham, 1991; Rosanvallon, 2008; Scharpf, 1999).

This transition becomes particularly significant within increasingly youthful, digitally interconnected, politically mobilized, and identity-sensitive societies. As Castells (2012) observes, contemporary political mobilization increasingly operates through decentralized information networks capable of rapidly amplifying legitimacy crises and restructuring state-society relations.

The expansion of digitally mediated political mobilization further complicates traditional governance architectures structured predominantly around centralized administrative control. Digital communication networks increasingly transform political mobilization processes by decentralizing information circulation, accelerating identity formation, and amplifying legitimacy contestation beyond conventional territorial governance boundaries (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Shirky, 2011).

Within the Anglophone crisis, digitally mediated mobilization significantly reshaped the relationship between the state, separatist actors, diaspora networks, grassroots civic actors, and politically engaged youths. Social media platforms, diaspora broadcasting channels, online activism networks, and digitally coordinated political narratives increasingly became parallel spaces through which legitimacy, resistance, identity, and political authority were contested.

This transformation generated important governance implications. Traditional state-centered crisis-management mechanisms designed around territorial administrative control encountered increasing limitations within digitally networked political environments characterized by decentralized communication flows and transnational political engagement.

The state's recurrent internet shutdowns and digital restrictions therefore reflected not merely security measures, but broader attempts to reassert informational sovereignty within an increasingly networked governance environment. However, such measures simultaneously intensified perceptions of exclusion, distrust, governance opacity, and participatory marginalization among digitally mobilized populations, particularly youths.

Consequently, the Cameroonian case reflects broader contemporary governance tensions in which legitimacy crises increasingly unfold simultaneously across physical, institutional, informational, and digital political spaces.

Within such environments, governance systems structured predominantly around centralized command, coercive stabilization, and symbolic accommodation frequently encounter adaptive limitations and legitimacy deficits. This observation aligns with adaptive governance scholarship emphasizing institutional flexibility, negotiated legitimacy, collaborative governance, participatory responsiveness, and anticipatory governance mechanisms as increasingly important dimensions of sustainable governance within complex political systems (Folke et al., 2005; Ansell & Gash, 2008).

The Cameroonian case therefore becomes analytically important not merely as a national conflict environment, but as a broader reflection of evolving tensions confronting post-colonial governance systems within contemporary Africa.

Toward a Concept of Adaptive Continuity Governance

The preceding theoretical perspectives collectively reveal that contemporary crisis governance cannot be adequately explained through a single analytical lens. While the Rational Actor Model illuminates strategic state behavior, New Institutionalism explains the enduring influence of administrative structures, Conflict Transformation Theory highlights legitimacy deficits arising from exclusionary governance, and Easton's Systems Theory demonstrates the recursive relationship between governance outputs and societal feedback. Considered independently, each framework explains an important dimension of crisis governance. Considered together, however, they reveal a broader governance pattern that extends beyond the explanatory scope of any individual theory.

This pattern is characterized by the coexistence of adaptation and continuity. States confronted with legitimacy crises rarely remain institutionally static, nor do they typically undertake comprehensive political transformation. Instead, they frequently introduce selective reforms intended to respond to evolving pressures while simultaneously preserving fundamental structures of authority, constitutional order, and administrative continuity. Governance therefore becomes an exercise in balancing competing imperatives rather than pursuing absolute stability or unrestricted reform.

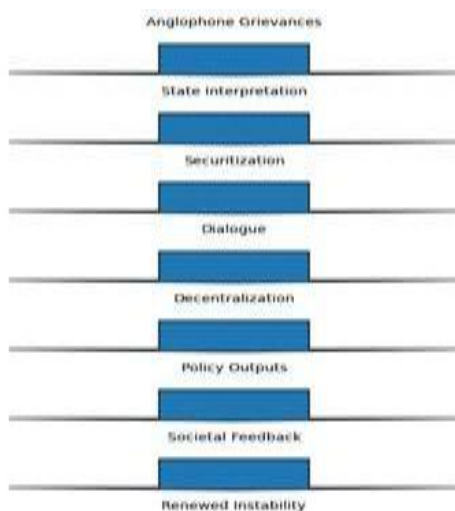
This study conceptualizes this governance pattern as Adaptive Continuity Governance. Adaptive Continuity Governance refers to a mode of crisis management in which states confronted with legitimacy challenges introduce selective adaptive reforms sufficient to preserve political stability and institutional continuity while avoiding transformative restructuring of underlying governance arrangements. Adaptation is therefore neither rejected nor pursued without constraint; rather, it occurs within carefully managed institutional boundaries designed to safeguard the continuity of the political order.

Four characteristics distinguish Adaptive Continuity Governance. First, adaptation is incremental rather than revolutionary, occurring through calibrated institutional adjustments rather than wholesale constitutional transformation. Second, continuity remains a strategic objective, with governments prioritizing territorial integrity, institutional resilience, and administrative coherence. Third, competing pressures arising from legitimacy demands, political feasibility, and security considerations shape governance decisions. Finally, governance remains dynamic and iterative, requiring continuous adjustment as societal expectations, political conditions, and external pressures evolve over time.

Adaptive Continuity Governance should not be interpreted as a normative prescription or an ideal model of crisis management. Rather, it is proposed as an analytical framework for understanding how states navigate tensions between stability and responsiveness under conditions of political stress. The empirical analysis that follows examines the extent to which the Cameroonian state's management of the Anglophone crisis exhibits these defining characteristics...

5. Emergence of Adaptive Continuity Governance (2016–2025)

The evolution of the Anglophone crisis between 2016 and 2025 reveals a progressive transformation in the state's crisis management approach. While government responses varied across different phases of the conflict, a consistent pattern emerged in which adaptation occurred within enduring structures of institutional continuity. Rather than pursuing either rigid resistance to change or comprehensive political transformation, the state adopted a series of selective adjustments intended to contain instability, preserve territorial integrity, and maintain administrative control. Examined longitudinally, these developments reveal the gradual emergence of a governance pattern later conceptualized in this study as Adaptive Continuity Governance.



Phase I: Protest Management and Initial Securitization (2016-2017)

The evolution of the Anglophone crisis between 2016 and 2025 reveals a progressive transformation in the state's crisis management approach. While government responses varied across different phases of the conflict, a consistent pattern emerged in which adaptation occurred within enduring structures of institutional continuity. Rather than pursuing either rigid resistance to change or comprehensive political transformation, the state adopted a series of selective adjustments intended to contain instability, preserve territorial integrity, and maintain administrative control. Examined longitudinally, these developments reveal the gradual emergence of a governance pattern, conceptualized in this study as Adaptive Continuity Governance.

The crisis originated in late 2016 with protests by lawyers and teachers in the North West and South West Regions. Initial grievances centered on concerns regarding the protection of the Common Law system, the status of English-language education, and perceptions of political and administrative marginalization. At this stage, demands largely focused on reforms within the existing constitutional framework rather than outright separatism.

The government's early response combined administrative engagement with increasingly securitized measures. While authorities established commissions and initiated consultations to address specific professional grievances, arrests of protest leaders, restrictions on demonstrations, and security deployments signaled an emerging shift toward a security-centered interpretation of the crisis.

This phase illustrates the first manifestation of the dual logic that would characterize subsequent crisis governance. Adaptation occurred through limited engagement with sectoral concerns, while continuity was maintained through reliance on centralized administrative authority and security mechanisms. As protests escalated and trust deteriorated, opportunities for early conflict de-escalation diminished.

Phase II: Militarization and Crisis Expansion (2017–2019)

The declaration of symbolic independence by separatist actors in October 2017 and the subsequent growth of armed groups transformed the conflict environment. What began as a governance dispute increasingly evolved into a security crisis involving armed confrontation, population displacement, economic disruption, and competing claims of political authority.

State responses during this period prioritized territorial preservation and the restoration of public order. Military deployments expanded significantly, counterinsurgency operations intensified, and security institutions assumed a central role within crisis management structures. Concurrently, internet restrictions and information management measures reflected growing concerns regarding digital mobilization and transnational activism.

Despite the predominance of securitized responses, the period also witnessed tentative efforts toward political adaptation. Public statements acknowledging governance concerns and discussions surrounding decentralization indicated recognition that security measures alone would not provide a sustainable solution.

Nevertheless, the balance during this phase remained heavily weighted toward continuity through coercive stabilization. The result was the preservation of state presence in strategic areas but also the deepening of societal polarization and the entrenchment of conflict dynamics.

Phase III: Dialogue and Institutional Adaptation (2019–2020)

The convening of the Major National Dialogue in 2019 marked a significant turning point in the evolution of crisis governance. The Dialogue represented the most substantial effort to introduce political adaptation into the state's response architecture and signaled recognition of the limitations associated with an exclusively securitized approach.

The Dialogue generated recommendations relating to decentralization, reconstruction, cultural recognition, local governance reforms, and the status of the Anglophone regions. Most significantly, it provided the foundation for the introduction of Special Status arrangements under Law No. 2019/024.

These developments represented meaningful adaptive interventions within the governance framework. However, adaptation remained bounded by constitutional and institutional parameters designed to preserve the unitary structure of the state. Discussions of federalism and secession remained outside the scope of formal consideration, reflecting the continued priority attached to territorial integrity and political continuity.

Consequently, the Dialogue phase illustrates a movement toward controlled adaptation rather than transformative restructuring.

Phase IV: Institutionalization of Selective Reform (2020–2025)

Following the Dialogue, government efforts increasingly focused on implementing recommendations, operationalizing Special Status provisions, and advancing reconstruction initiatives within affected regions. New institutions were established, administrative reforms were introduced, and development programs sought to facilitate recovery and strengthen state legitimacy.

The Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of the North West and South West Regions, together with the establishment of Regional Assemblies and related governance structures, reflected an effort to institutionalize adaptation within the existing political order.

Yet implementation outcomes revealed enduring tensions between reform and continuity. While new structures expanded formal recognition of regional particularities, central government oversight remained substantial. Fiscal autonomy remained limited, executive authority continued to be concentrated within national institutions, and many conflict drivers persisted.

The coexistence of reform initiatives and centralized control highlights the defining characteristic of this phase: adaptation was real, but carefully managed within established governance boundaries.

Patterns of Adaptation and Continuity

Across all four phases, state responses reveal recurring interactions between adaptation and continuity. Adaptation manifested through consultations, dialogue processes, decentralization measures, reconstruction initiatives, and institutional innovations. Continuity manifested through the preservation of centralized authority, constitutional arrangements, territorial integrity, and core administrative structures. These dynamics are summarized in Table 5.1.

Phase	Adaptive Measures	Continuity Measures
2016-2017	Consultations and Commissions	Security Deployments and Centralized Central
2017-2019	Limited Political Engagement	Militarization And Territorial Preservation
2019-2020	Major National Dialogue and Reform Proposals	Constitutional Boundaries Maintained
2020-2025	Special Status and Reconstruction Initiative	Continued Central Oversight and Institutional Continuity

Table 5.1: Adaptation and Continuity across Crisis Phases Source: Authors compilation, based on analysis of government responses to the Anglophone crisis (2016-2025)

The significance of these patterns lies not in any individual intervention but in their cumulative effect. The state's response evolved neither toward complete transformation nor toward rigid institutional immobility. Instead, crisis governance was characterized by selective adaptation operating within enduring structures of continuity. This governance trajectory provides the empirical foundation for the operational analysis that follows and ultimately informs the concept of Adaptive Continuity Governance developed later in this study.

Operational Architecture of Cameroon's Crisis Management Model

The management of the Anglophone crisis was characterized by a combination of security interventions, political dialogue mechanisms, decentralization reforms, and administrative measures designed to preserve state authority while responding to mounting legitimacy pressures. Rather than constituting isolated initiatives, these interventions formed an integrated crisis governance architecture through which the state sought to maintain territorial integrity, contain violence, and manage political demands. Examining these instruments individually provides insight into the operational logic underpinning the state's crisis response.



Fig 6.1 Operational Architecture of Cameroons Crisis Management Model

Source: Author's synthesis

Securitized Stabilization

The earliest phase of state intervention was dominated by securitized stabilization. Following the escalation of protests in late 2016 and the emergence of armed separatist activity in 2017, government responses increasingly framed the crisis as a national security challenge requiring the preservation of constitutional order and territorial integrity.

Key instruments included the deployment of defense and security forces, the expansion of military operations in affected regions, restrictions on public demonstrations, enhanced surveillance measures, and the use of emergency security frameworks. Specialized units, including the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), became important actors within the operational architecture of conflict management.

From a state perspective, these measures sought to prevent territorial fragmentation, suppress armed insurgency, and restore public order. However, their implementation generated mixed outcomes. While securitized stabilization contributed to the maintenance of state presence within major urban centers and strategic locations, it also intensified perceptions of exclusion and contributed to cycles of confrontation and resistance. Reports from international organizations documented allegations of human rights violations, while separatist groups simultaneously engaged in attacks against civilians, government personnel, educational institutions, and public infrastructure.

The persistence of violence despite sustained security operations illustrates both the necessity and limitations of securitized responses within legitimacy-driven conflicts.

Dialogue as Controlled Political Inclusion

Recognizing the limitations of purely security-based approaches, the government introduced dialogue mechanisms aimed at reducing tensions and projecting political responsiveness. The most significant of these initiatives was the Major National Dialogue convened in 2019.

The Dialogue represented an important institutional instrument within the crisis governance architecture. It provided a formal platform for discussing decentralization, reconstruction, cultural recognition, local governance reforms, and measures intended to address concerns originating from the North West and South West Regions.

Nevertheless, participation remained contested. Several separatist leaders and factions declined involvement, while critics argued that important grassroots constituencies, including women, youth organizations, and

segments of the diaspora, were insufficiently represented. Consequently, the Dialogue functioned simultaneously as an inclusion mechanism and as a managed political process operating within predefined constitutional boundaries.

Although the initiative generated important recommendations and contributed to a reduction of immediate political tensions, its transformative capacity remained constrained by implementation challenges and competing interpretations of legitimacy.

Controlled Decentralization and Special Status

A central outcome of the Major National Dialogue was the introduction of Special Status arrangements for the North West and South West Regions through Law No. 2019/024 and subsequent implementing measures.

The Special Status framework sought to acknowledge the linguistic, educational, legal, and historical particularities of the Anglophone regions while preserving the unitary character of the state. Institutional innovations included Regional Assemblies, Regional Executive Councils, the House of Chiefs, and the office of the Public Independent Conciliator.

These measures represented a significant adaptive component within the state's governance strategy. However, implementation revealed important limitations. Fiscal autonomy remained restricted, major policy authority continued to reside within central institutions, and administrative oversight from Yaoundé remained substantial. Consequently, while the reforms expanded formal recognition of regional specificity, they did not fundamentally alter the distribution of political authority within the governance system.

The result was a pattern of decentralization characterized by adaptation within continuity rather than transformative restructuring.

Reconstruction and Development Initiatives

Alongside political and security interventions, the government pursued reconstruction and development initiatives aimed at restoring public services, rebuilding damaged infrastructure, and facilitating socio-economic recovery in conflict-affected areas.

The Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of the North West and South West Regions represented the most visible institutional expression of this effort. The initiative focused on education, healthcare, transportation infrastructure, community rehabilitation, and economic revitalization.

From a governance perspective, reconstruction initiatives served dual purposes. They addressed immediate developmental needs while simultaneously functioning as legitimacy-building instruments intended to reinforce the state's presence and responsiveness. However, ongoing insecurity, population displacement, and implementation constraints limited the overall effectiveness of these interventions.

The uneven relationship between reconstruction efforts and security realities highlights the difficulties of pursuing development-oriented legitimacy strategies within active conflict environments.

Digital Governance and Information Management

The Anglophone crisis unfolded within an increasingly digital political environment. Social media platforms, online news networks, diaspora organizations, and transnational advocacy groups became important actors in shaping narratives, mobilizing support, and influencing perceptions of legitimacy.

State responses included efforts to regulate information flows, counter online mobilization, and maintain control over public communication spaces. The 2017 internet shutdown in the Anglophone regions became one of the most internationally visible examples of digital crisis management.

While intended to limit mobilization and reduce escalation, digital restrictions generated significant criticism and economic disruption. They also illustrated the growing tension between traditional approaches to information control and the realities of networked political communication.

The crisis demonstrates that contemporary governance architectures must increasingly engage with digital dimensions of legitimacy, participation, and political contestation. Information management has become a central component of crisis governance rather than a secondary administrative concern.

Assessment of the Operational Architecture

Taken together, securitized stabilization, controlled dialogue, decentralization reforms, reconstruction initiatives, and digital governance measures constituted an integrated crisis management architecture. These instruments enabled the state to preserve institutional continuity, maintain territorial integrity, and prevent the collapse of administrative authority despite prolonged conflict.

At the same time, the architecture exhibited important limitations. Security interventions struggled to generate durable legitimacy; dialogue mechanisms faced questions of inclusivity; decentralization reforms remained constrained by centralized administrative traditions; reconstruction initiatives operated within insecure environments; and digital restrictions often intensified rather than reduced perceptions of exclusion.

The operational architecture therefore reveals a governance model characterized by selective adaptation operating alongside enduring institutional continuity. This pattern becomes particularly significant when examined through the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier and provides the basis for the broader governance implications explored in the following section.

Theoretical Interrogation and Governance Implications

The Cameroonian government's crisis-management framework reflects broader tensions embedded within post-colonial governance systems confronted by legitimacy contestation,

	What it Reveals
Rational Actor	Strategic State Logic
Institutionalism	Structural Rigidity
Conflict Transformation	Legitimacy Deficit
Easton	Feedback Instability
Adaptive Governance	Future Governance Gap

Fig 7.1 Theoretical Interrogation Matrix of State Responses

Source: Author's synthesis

The empirical analysis demonstrates that the Cameroonian state's response to the Anglophone crisis reflects a complex interaction between strategic calculation, institutional continuity, legitimacy management, and adaptive governance. Rather than representing isolated policy decisions, securitization, dialogue, decentralization, reconstruction initiatives, and information management collectively constituted an integrated crisis governance architecture. Examining these interventions through the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study provides a deeper understanding of their operational logic and governance implications.

From the perspective of the Rational Actor Model, the state's actions reflected strategic efforts to preserve sovereignty, territorial integrity, and constitutional continuity. Government responses consistently prioritized the prevention of political fragmentation and the restoration of public order.

Security deployments, emergency measures, and subsequent political reforms may therefore be understood as rational policy choices made within a context of perceived existential threat. At the same time, the analysis suggests that strategic rationality operated within significant political and institutional constraints, limiting the range of feasible policy alternatives.

New Institutionalism provides further insight into these constraints by demonstrating the influence of inherited administrative arrangements on policy choice. Centralized governance traditions, bureaucratic path dependency, and established decision-making structures encouraged reforms that remained compatible with existing institutional arrangements. Consequently, adaptation occurred through the modification of governance practices rather than through comprehensive institutional redesign. This explains why decentralization reforms and the Special Status framework expanded administrative recognition without fundamentally redistributing political authority.

Conflict Transformation Theory highlights a different dimension of the state's crisis management architecture. Although security interventions and institutional reforms contributed to maintaining public order and institutional continuity, they were less successful in rebuilding relationships of trust between state institutions and affected communities.

The limited participation of key separatist actors, segments of civil society, women, youth, and diaspora organizations constrained opportunities for inclusive legitimacy reconstruction. As a result, conflict management frequently achieved stabilization without fully addressing deeper relational and political grievances.

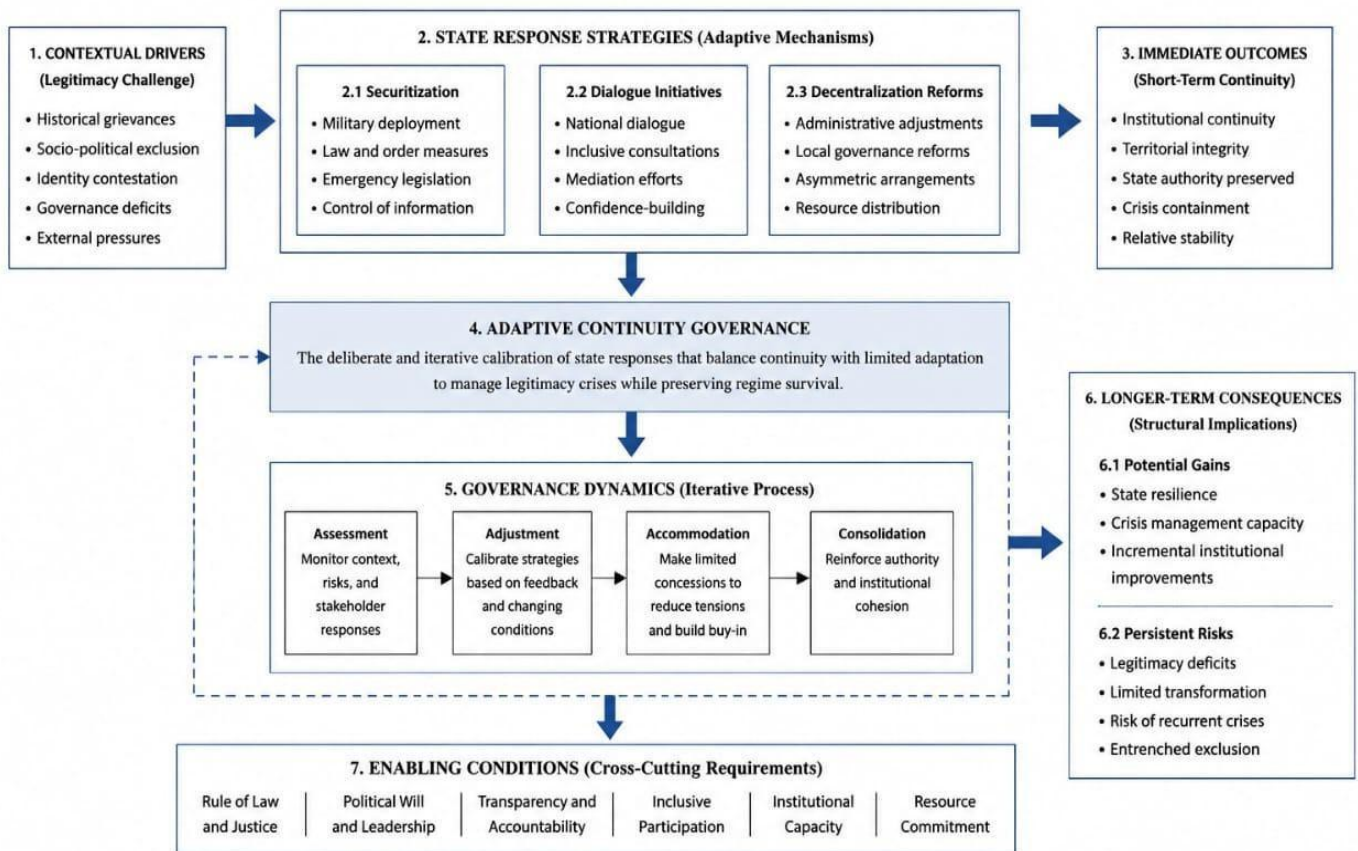
Easton's Systems Theory illustrates how state interventions generated recursive feedback that shaped subsequent phases of crisis governance. Security operations, dialogue initiatives, decentralization reforms, and reconstruction programs each produced societal responses that influenced future policy decisions. These feedback processes became increasingly complex within a digitally networked political environment where social media, online activism, and diaspora engagement accelerated the circulation of political narratives and expanded channels of mobilization beyond conventional institutional structures.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that the Cameroonian state's crisis management architecture cannot be reduced to either coercive stabilization or political reform alone. Instead, the evidence reveals a governance approach characterized by selective institutional adaptation operating alongside enduring structures of centralized authority and administrative continuity.

Strategic adaptation and institutional preservation therefore functioned simultaneously rather than sequentially, producing a governance pattern that reflects the defining characteristics of Adaptive Continuity Governance. The significance of this finding lies not merely in explaining the trajectory of the Anglophone crisis, but in providing a broader analytical basis for understanding crisis governance within post-colonial political system.

Reimagining Crisis Governance: Adaptive Continuity Governance and the Future of Post-Colonial Statecraft

Figure 8.1: Adaptive Continuity Governance Model
A Framework for Managing Legitimacy Crises in Post-Colonial States



Source: Author's conceptualization.

Fig 8.1 Adaptive Continuity Governance Model

Source: Authors conceptualization

The Cameroonian experience illustrates governance challenges that extend well beyond a single national case. Across many post-colonial states, governments increasingly confront legitimacy pressures arising from demographic transformation, digital connectivity, transnational political engagement, and expanding demands for participation and accountability. Under these conditions, governance is no longer concerned solely with preserving institutional order but with sustaining legitimacy within rapidly changing political environments.

Adaptive Continuity Governance provides a framework for understanding how states attempt to reconcile these competing demands. Rather than viewing crisis management through binary distinctions between reform and repression or continuity and transformation, the framework recognizes that governments frequently pursue calibrated adaptation while preserving core institutional structures. Such strategies reflect political calculations concerning state stability, constitutional continuity, and institutional resilience, while simultaneously responding to pressures for governance reform.

The analytical value of Adaptive Continuity Governance extends beyond conflict management. The framework offers insight into broader governance challenges associated with decentralization, constitutional reform, institutional modernization, public sector transformation, and state legitimacy across post-colonial political systems. It suggests that governance outcomes are often shaped not by the presence or absence of reform, but by the relationship between adaptive initiatives and the institutional structures within which they operate.

The framework also has important implications for governance in digitally networked societies. Digital communication technologies have transformed relationships between governments and citizens by accelerating political mobilization, expanding participation, and increasing the visibility of governance performance. Traditional models of centralized administrative control increasingly coexist with decentralized information networks that reshape public expectations of responsiveness, transparency, and accountability. Future governance strategies must therefore recognize digital engagement as an integral component of legitimacy rather than merely an instrument of information management.

Future research should examine the applicability of Adaptive Continuity Governance across a broader range of post-colonial contexts. Comparative analyses involving other African states, as well as longitudinal studies examining institutional adaptation over extended periods, would assist in refining the explanatory scope of the concept and identifying conditions under which adaptive continuity contributes either to durable legitimacy or to the reproduction of governance instability.

Ultimately, the central challenge confronting post-colonial governance is not simply the preservation of political order but the reconciliation of institutional continuity with adaptive transformation. Adaptive Continuity Governance provides a conceptual framework for understanding how states navigate this challenge within increasingly complex, participatory, and legitimacy-sensitive political environments. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates concerning governance resilience, institutional adaptation, and the evolving character of statecraft in contemporary Africa.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the Cameroonian state's management of the Anglophone conflict between 2016 and 2025 through the lenses of governing logic, state rationality, and crisis management architecture. Moving beyond grievance-centered and humanitarian narratives, the analysis focused on the operational logic through which the state sought to preserve sovereignty, maintain institutional continuity, and respond to escalating legitimacy challenges. Drawing upon the Rational Actor Model, New Institutionalism, Conflict Transformation Theory, and Easton's Systems Theory, the study demonstrated how securitized stabilization, controlled dialogue, and selective decentralization functioned as interconnected elements of a broader crisis governance architecture.

The findings suggest that while these interventions contributed to the preservation of territorial integrity, institutional continuity, and administrative resilience, they were less successful in generating transformative legitimacy reconstruction. The persistence of violence, political distrust, and competing claims of authority indicates that stabilization and legitimacy are not synonymous outcomes. The analysis further demonstrates that governance responses were shaped not only by strategic calculations but also by institutional path dependencies, political feasibility constraints, and evolving pressures arising from digital mobilization, youth activism, and transnational networks.

The principal conceptual contribution of this paper is the notion of Adaptive Continuity Governance. The Cameroonian experience demonstrates how states confronted with legitimacy crises may simultaneously adapt and preserve continuity, introducing reforms sufficient to maintain political stability while avoiding transformative restructuring of underlying governance arrangements. Rather than viewing crisis governance through a binary lens of reform versus repression, the concept highlights the complex and often-contradictory processes through which states seek to balance adaptation, authority, legitimacy, and institutional survival.

Beyond Cameroon, the study contributes to broader debates concerning governance resilience, crisis management, and state adaptation in post-colonial political systems. Many contemporary states face growing tensions between inherited centralized governance structures and increasingly participatory, digitally interconnected, and politically conscious societies. Under such conditions, the challenge of governance extends beyond maintaining order and preventing instability. It increasingly involves constructing institutions capable of responding adaptively to changing expectations while preserving the continuity necessary for political and administrative cohesion.

The future challenge confronting post-colonial states is therefore not merely the preservation of political order, but the reconciliation of institutional continuity with adaptive transformation. Sustainable governance in the twenty-first century will depend less on the capacity to suppress crises than on the capacity to build legitimacy, foster inclusion, and develop governance architectures capable of learning and adapting in response to evolving societal demands. In this regard, Adaptive Continuity Governance provides a useful framework for understanding both the resilience and limitations of contemporary statecraft in an era defined by legitimacy sensitivity, digital connectivity, and expanding demands for political participation...

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