



Liberation in Action: Perspective on How Politics is Rewriting Burkina Faso's Sustainable Economic Future

Sadiq H. Melhim*, Mohammed B. Hussein

International Economics Department, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Doha, Qatar

*Orcid: [0009-0009-9524-0982](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9524-0982)

ABSTRACT: Despite growing attention to political instability, security crises, and headline macroeconomic indicators in the Sahel, existing analyses of Burkina Faso's recent reforms remain fragmented and largely technocratic. Studies typically examine mining, debt, agriculture, or growth in isolation, offering limited insight into how political power actively structures economic strategy in post-coup contexts. This article addresses that gap by advancing an integrated political, economic framework that conceptualizes Burkina Faso's post-2022 transformation as a deliberate "liberation economy," rather than a sequence of disconnected policy responses.

Under the leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traoré, the state has pursued resource nationalization, debt sovereignty, expanded agricultural support, and regional realignment through the Alliance of Sahel States. Drawing on comparative insights from post-liberation states and synthesizing recent macroeconomic, sectoral, and governance indicators, the article demonstrates how these measures function as mutually reinforcing political instruments to reclaim sovereignty, consolidate domestic legitimacy, and recalibrate external dependencies. Evidence points to a post-2022 recovery in GDP growth, a sharp easing of inflation, and record cereal production, alongside increased state control over gold assets, even as investor confidence and institutional transparency remain constrained.

By embedding sustainability within economic, social, institutional, and geopolitical dimensions, the article argues that Burkina Faso's liberation economy is neither inherently sustainable nor unsustainable, but conditionally viable. Its durability depends on whether political sovereignty can be translated into institutional capacity, equitable distribution, and predictable governance. The study contributes to sustainable development scholarship by demonstrating that, in fragile and post-colonial contexts, sustainability is fundamentally political, shaped as much by legitimacy, power, and state-building choices as by markets or technocratic design.

KEYWORDS: Liberation Economy; Political Economy; Sustainable Development; Resource Nationalism; Debt Sovereignty; State-Led Development; Burkina Faso

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*Corresponding Author: Sadiq H. Melhim

1. INTRODUCTION

Since September 2022, Burkina Faso has undergone a profound political transformation under the leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traoré, a shift that has rapidly reshaped the country's economic priorities, policy instruments, and external alignments (Sandor & Berlingozzi, 2025). Emerging from a context of prolonged insecurity, institutional fragility, and popular disillusionment with traditional political elites, the new leadership has articulated a "liberation agenda" that fuses national security, anti-colonial discourse, and economic self-reliance into a single governing narrative (Frowd, 2022). This agenda has resonated strongly within a society marked by rising living costs, territorial fragmentation, and skepticism toward external actors long perceived as extractive or paternalistic (Engels, 2015). Nevertheless, the significance of this transformation extends well beyond political rhetoric. It has translated into concrete economic interventions that challenge prevailing development orthodoxies and raise fundamental questions about sustainability, sovereignty, and state-led development in the contemporary Sahel.

In a relatively short period, Burkina Faso's authorities have moved to nationalize strategic gold assets, establish a state-owned mining company and domestic gold refinery, assert debt sovereignty, expand agricultural subsidies and mechanization, and spearhead new forms of regional cooperation through the Alliance of Sahel States alongside Mali and Niger (Navarro-Pabsdorf &

Cuenca-García, 2025). These actions signal a deliberate reorientation away from long-standing dependence on former colonial powers, multilateral lenders, and externally driven policy conditionalities (Kevane & Englebert, 1997). Rather than pursuing incremental reform within existing institutional frameworks, the government has framed economic policy itself as an extension of political liberation, explicitly linking sovereignty over resources, finance, and food systems to national dignity and survival.

This article argues that Burkina Faso's recent economic trajectory cannot be adequately understood as a set of technocratic reforms aimed solely at improving macroeconomic indicators or sectoral performance. Instead, it constitutes an explicit political project in which economic policy is mobilized to consolidate legitimacy, reduce external leverage, and reassert state authority amid acute insecurity. The pivot away from France and traditional Western partners, the embrace of state-led resource nationalism, and the pursuit of Sahelian solidarity are not isolated policy choices but interconnected elements of a broader political calculus that defines both the scope and direction of economic decision-making. From this perspective, economic outcomes are inseparable from political intent, and sustainability must be evaluated through a lens that captures this interaction.

Much of the existing literature on Burkina Faso and the wider Sahel focuses on security dynamics, humanitarian crises, or headline macroeconomic trends such as GDP growth and inflation (Warsame & Abdulle, 2019; Wodon, 2007). While valuable, these approaches often treat economic policy as reactive or technocratic, downplaying the extent to which it is shaped by ideology, power struggles, and legitimacy concerns. Similarly, sector-specific analyses of mining contracts, agricultural productivity, or debt sustainability frequently assess outcomes in isolation, without situating them within a unified political framework. As a result, the coherence of Burkina Faso's post-2022 reforms as a political-economic system remains underexplored.

This article takes a different approach. It treats Burkina Faso's emerging economic strategy as a deliberately political project, rooted in liberation-era ideals and adapted to twenty-first-century geopolitical realities. By framing gold nationalization, debt independence, agricultural expansion, and regional alliance-building as mutually reinforcing instruments of sovereignty, the study advances one of the first integrative political-economic interpretations of the country's recent transformation. Drawing historical and comparative parallels with other post-liberation states in Africa and beyond, the article situates Burkina Faso within a broader tradition in which economic policy serves as a vehicle for state-building, identity formation, and resistance to external domination.

At the same time, the article engages directly with the concept of sustainability, which has become central to contemporary development discourse but is often narrowly operationalized. In fragile and post-conflict contexts such as Burkina Faso, sustainability cannot be reduced to environmental protection or steady GDP growth alone. Rather, it encompasses the long-term viability of economic systems, the resilience of social structures, the credibility of institutions, and the durability of geopolitical strategies. Economic reforms that fail to enhance legitimacy, manage distributional tensions, or withstand external shocks are unlikely to endure, regardless of their short-term efficiency gains.

From this standpoint, Burkina Faso's liberation economy presents a paradox for sustainable development. On the one hand, early indicators suggest tangible gains in areas closely tied to social sustainability, including food security and price stability, alongside renewed fiscal autonomy and greater state control over strategic resources. On the other hand, the same policies generate new risks, including investor uncertainty, governance challenges, and environmental pressures associated with intensified extraction and agricultural expansion. Whether the liberation agenda can evolve from symbolic sovereignty toward institutionalized, inclusive, and environmentally responsible development remains an open question.

This article, therefore, advances two core propositions. First, sustainability in Burkina Faso's current context is fundamentally political. It is shaped not only by markets and technologies, but by leadership choices, narratives of legitimacy, and struggles over control of resources and policy space. Second, the sustainability of the liberation economy is conditional rather than predetermined. Its long-term viability depends on whether political sovereignty translates into institutional capacity, whether resource nationalism supports diversification rather than renewed dependence, and whether social gains are distributed equitably across regions and generations.

By situating Burkina Faso's post-2022 reforms within a unified political-economic and sustainability-oriented framework, this study contributes to broader debates on state-led development, resource sovereignty, and alternative pathways to sustainable development in the Global South. It challenges the assumption that depoliticized, technocratic reform is the only route to sustainability, suggesting instead that, in certain contexts, political mobilization and sovereignty claims may serve as catalysts for economic reorientation. At the same time, it underscores the risks inherent in politicized economics, particularly where institutions remain fragile, and expectations are high.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative political-economy methodology designed to examine Burkina Faso's post-2022 economic transformation as a coherent political project and to assess its sustainability implications across economic, social, institutional, and geopolitical dimensions. Given the exploratory and integrative nature of the research question, the analysis does not aim to establish a narrow causal link between individual policies and outcomes. Instead, it aims to identify patterns, interactions, and strategic logics through which political leadership shapes economic policy and sustainability trajectories in a fragile, post-coup context.

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The research relies on a structured synthesis of multiple secondary data sources. Macroeconomic indicators, including GDP growth, inflation, fiscal balances, and external accounts, were drawn primarily from international financial institutions and multilateral development databases. Sectoral data on gold production, mining governance, and agricultural output were sourced from extractive industry transparency reports, food security assessments, and international agency briefs. These quantitative indicators were used descriptively to contextualize observed policy shifts and illustrate trends before and after the 2022 political transition, rather than for statistical testing.

To capture the political and institutional dimensions of the liberation economy, the study draws on peer-reviewed academic literature, policy reports, and reputable analytical commentary addressing Burkina Faso's governance, security environment, and regional positioning. Particular attention was paid to sources examining post-liberation development models, resource nationalism, and state-led economic strategies in Africa and comparable contexts. This comparative lens supports analytical generalization while avoiding claims of direct equivalence.

Analytically, the study proceeds in three stages. First, it reconstructs the core elements of Burkina Faso's liberation agenda by mapping key policy interventions across fiscal policy, extractive governance, agriculture, and regional integration. Second, these interventions are interpreted through a political-economy framework that treats economic policy as an instrument of legitimacy, sovereignty, and state-building. A conceptual model is developed to visualize the interaction between political leadership and economic domains. Third, the sustainability implications of this model are assessed using a multidimensional lens encompassing economic resilience, social inclusion, institutional capacity, environmental constraints, and geopolitical durability.

Throughout the analysis, methodological caution is exercised to avoid overstating policy impacts in a volatile environment characterized by security shocks, climatic variability, and external economic influences. Where data limitations or contested claims exist, these are explicitly acknowledged. By combining empirical indicators with interpretive political-economy analysis, the methodology enables a nuanced assessment of how sustainability in Burkina Faso is shaped not only by markets and resources, but by power, legitimacy, and governance choices.

3. DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Politics as the Engine of Economic Policy

Economic policies are rarely neutral; they reflect political priorities, ideologies, and power struggles (Höhmman, 1986). Burkina Faso's current trajectory exemplifies this. Traoré's government frames its actions as part of a "liberation economy," a concept that blends the anti-colonial zeal of Thomas Sankara's 1980s revolution with twenty-first-century pragmatism (Botchway & Traore, 2023).

The ruling authorities have linked their legitimacy to concrete economic deliverables: reclaiming gold wealth, revitalizing agriculture, and asserting regional autonomy. Each of these policy pillars is rooted in the political goal of reducing external leverage and demonstrating sovereignty. In this sense, Burkina Faso mirrors other post-liberation states, from Ghana under Nkrumah (Esseks, 1971) to Tanzania under Nyerere (Pratt, 1999), where economic policy became a vehicle for political identity and state-building.

This deliberate politicization of economic choices also explains the government's tolerance for risk. Nationalizing mines, building a state refinery, and pushing for a Sahelian currency all carry economic uncertainties, but they pay political dividends by signaling independence and popular control.

3.2 Debt Independence: Fiscal Policy as Political Statement

One of the most striking examples of politics shaping economics is Burkina Faso's debt policy. In 2023–2024, the government announced the clearance of about \$6 billion in external debt, a move widely celebrated domestically as the country's "financial liberation." While international observers note that some liabilities remain, the symbolism of using domestic gold revenues to repay or restructure debt is highly significant (Reuters Fact Check, 2025). This act sends three political messages. First, it signals to the population that the government will not allow external creditors to dictate domestic priorities. Second, it undermines Western leverage over policy conditionalities that historically accompanied loans and aid. Third, it enhances domestic legitimacy by framing fiscal prudence as an act of national sovereignty rather than austerity imposed from abroad.

Viewed through this lens, debt independence is not merely an economic tactic to improve the balance sheet but a political declaration of self-determination, reminiscent of post-revolutionary Cuba (Rai, 2013) or, more recently, Ecuador's moves to renegotiate IMF loans under left-wing governments (de la Torre, 2016).

3.3 Gold and State Ownership: Resource Nationalism as Political Economy

Gold dominates Burkina Faso's export profile, accounting for more than 70% of its external revenues (Carole Sisso et al., 2016). Yet until recently, much of the sector was controlled by foreign firms and plagued by smuggling (Martin & Balzac, 2017). Traoré's government has recast the gold policy as a test case for economic sovereignty.

The establishment of the Société de Participation Minière du Burkina (SOPAMIB), a state-owned mining company, and the nationalization of two major industrial mines mark a historic shift (Agbetiloye, 2025). Combined with the launch of Burkina Faso's

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first domestic gold refinery, capable of processing 400 kilograms per day (Ecofin Agency, 2023), such moves are designed to keep value onshore, reduce illicit flows, and transfer profits from foreign shareholders to the national budget.

This is more than a resource policy; it is a political project of nation-building. By visibly reclaiming gold, the government aligns itself with the legacy of Sankara's anti-imperialist rhetoric, portraying itself as the custodian of national wealth. The downside, however, is investor caution: nationalization risks discouraging foreign direct investment and could reduce capital inflows if governance and legal protections appear uncertain.

In effect, the government is betting that political legitimacy gained through national control of resources will outweigh potential economic costs in the short term, a gamble familiar to resource-nationalist governments from Venezuela to Tanzania (Arbucias, 2023).

3.4 Agriculture and the Politics of Rural Support

Agriculture has always been central to Burkina Faso's economy and social fabric, employing the majority of its population (Traore et al., 2022). Under the liberation economic agenda, the government distributed more than 400 tractors, provided fertilizer subsidies, and upgraded irrigation systems to smallholder farmers (Kankabo, 2025). By mid-2024, Burkina Faso achieved a record cereal harvest of six million tons, improving food security and reducing reliance on imports (ReliefWeb, 2025).

While these are clear economic wins, they are also politically strategic. Rural constituencies are crucial to the government's stability, and policies that deliver tangible benefits, inputs, equipment, and irrigation to build loyalty and diffuse discontent. In essence, agriculture becomes both a development tool and a mechanism for political consolidation.

The emphasis on food sovereignty aligns Burkina Faso with a broader trend of "developmental state" models, from Ethiopia's agricultural extension policies to South Korea's rural modernization campaigns in the 1970s (Awoke & Melkamu, 2023). However, the risk remains: subsidies can strain the budget, and rapid mechanization can create regional inequalities if not managed inclusively.

3.5 Regional Integration: Sovereignty Through Solidarity

The political dimensions of Burkina Faso's economic policy extend beyond its borders. Alongside Mali and Niger, Burkina Faso has spearheaded the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a regional bloc aimed at reducing reliance on France and the West African CFA franc (Osuchukwu, 2024). Plans for a gold-backed currency, enhanced cross-border infrastructure, and coordinated defense policies reflect a bid for collective economic sovereignty.

This initiative resonates with the Pan-African dreams of earlier liberation movements. By pooling resources and harmonizing policies, the AES seeks to create a counterweight to traditional power centers in West Africa. However, the project is still in its infancy, and its feasibility depends on political stability across the Sahel, a region beset by insurgency and humanitarian crises.

In this sense, regional integration is not just about economics (currency reform, trade corridors) but about redefining political alliances. It is a statement of autonomy and mutual defense among states that feel marginalized by existing institutions, such as ECOWAS (Jaye et al., 2011).

3.6 Geopolitics of New Partnerships: Between Diversification and Dependency

Another major shift is Burkina Faso's growing ties with Russia and Turkey (Kirui, 2025). These relationships span mining, infrastructure development, and defense cooperation. While often framed as diversification, they also reflect a political realignment away from France, the European Union, and traditional Bretton Woods institutions.

By courting non-Western partners, Burkina Faso hopes to gain technical support and foreign direct investment without the policy strings attached to Western aid. Nevertheless, this strategy carries its own risks: trading one dependency for another, sacrificing transparency for expediency, and inviting geopolitical rivalries into domestic policymaking.

This is where the political economy lens is critical. Decisions about which partners to favor are not merely commercial; they also reshape the state's ideological orientation. They also influence how economic reforms are designed and who benefits from them, potentially creating new elites aligned with external powers.

3.7 Risks and Trade-Offs: The Double-Edged Sword of Politicized Economics

The liberation-driven economic strategy creates real opportunities for Burkina Faso: higher gold revenues, improved food security, and strengthened regional bargaining power. But it also introduces significant risks.

First, nationalizations and abrupt policy changes can undermine investor confidence, slowing much-needed capital inflows and technology transfer. Second, persistent insurgencies and security costs divert resources from development priorities. Third, governance challenges, from state enterprise management to procurement transparency, can erode the very legitimacy the government seeks to build.

These risks highlight a paradox. By tying its legitimacy to rapid economic transformation, the government raises expectations it may struggle to meet. If political control becomes too heavy-handed or economic benefits too unevenly distributed, the liberation narrative could backfire, leading to social unrest or renewed dependence on external bailouts.

3.8 Public Perceptions and Legitimacy of the “Liberation Economy”

The durability of Burkina Faso’s economic turn depends not only on macroeconomic indicators but also on whether citizens experience the agenda as fair, competent, and responsive. Ethnographic work on the Sahel shows that security, dignity, and material relief are intertwined in how people evaluate political authority (Sandor & Berlingozzi, 2025). Survey evidence across Africa also indicates that trust in institutions is volatile, with West Africa often showing comparatively higher trust levels even as overall confidence has weakened in recent years (Afrobarometer, 2024).

In Burkina Faso, the visibility of concrete outputs has mattered. FAO’s country brief estimates 2024 aggregate cereal production at about 6.1 million tons, well above recent averages, which strengthens the claim that sovereignty-oriented policies can yield everyday gains for rural constituencies (ReliefWeb, 2025). Nationalizations in the gold sector and the launch of a domestic gold refinery have likewise been framed as reclaiming national wealth (Reuters Fact Check, 2025). The refinery project laid by the transition authorities was announced with an annual capacity target of roughly 150 tons, intended to retain more value onshore (Ecofin Agency, 2023).

Legitimacy is contingent on distribution and transparency. Independent transparency work finds significant illicit financial flows and fraud in Burkina Faso’s gold trade and recommends stronger disclosure and oversight, measures closely associated with perceived fairness in governance (EITI, 2024).

Two distinct sets of actors mediate perceptions on the ground. Formal civil society engages through advocacy and monitoring, including participation in extractive governance via the EITI multi-stakeholder process. Informal and local security brokers such as Koglweogo exercise authority through protection networks and territorial presence, and their stance toward state policy can reinforce or undermine legitimacy; research shows they operate in an ambiguous space between local autonomy and state recognition (Frowd, 2022). Additional analysis confirms these groups’ central yet unstable role in shaping authority and cohesion in Burkina Faso’s current context (International Crisis Group, 2025).

The policy implication is to treat legitimacy as a policy instrument. Publishing refinery outputs and audited sales, earmarking a defined local share of gold revenues for visible community projects, and embedding grievance mechanisms in input-subsidy schemes are consistent with extractives-governance recommendations and can reduce leakage while strengthening accountability (EITI, 2024).

Figure 1 provides a synthetic visualization of how Burkina Faso’s liberation agenda translates political priorities into differentiated economic impacts across key domains. Rather than depicting uniform progress, the radar chart highlights an uneven but deliberate policy footprint, consistent with a sovereignty-first political economy operating under security and institutional constraints.

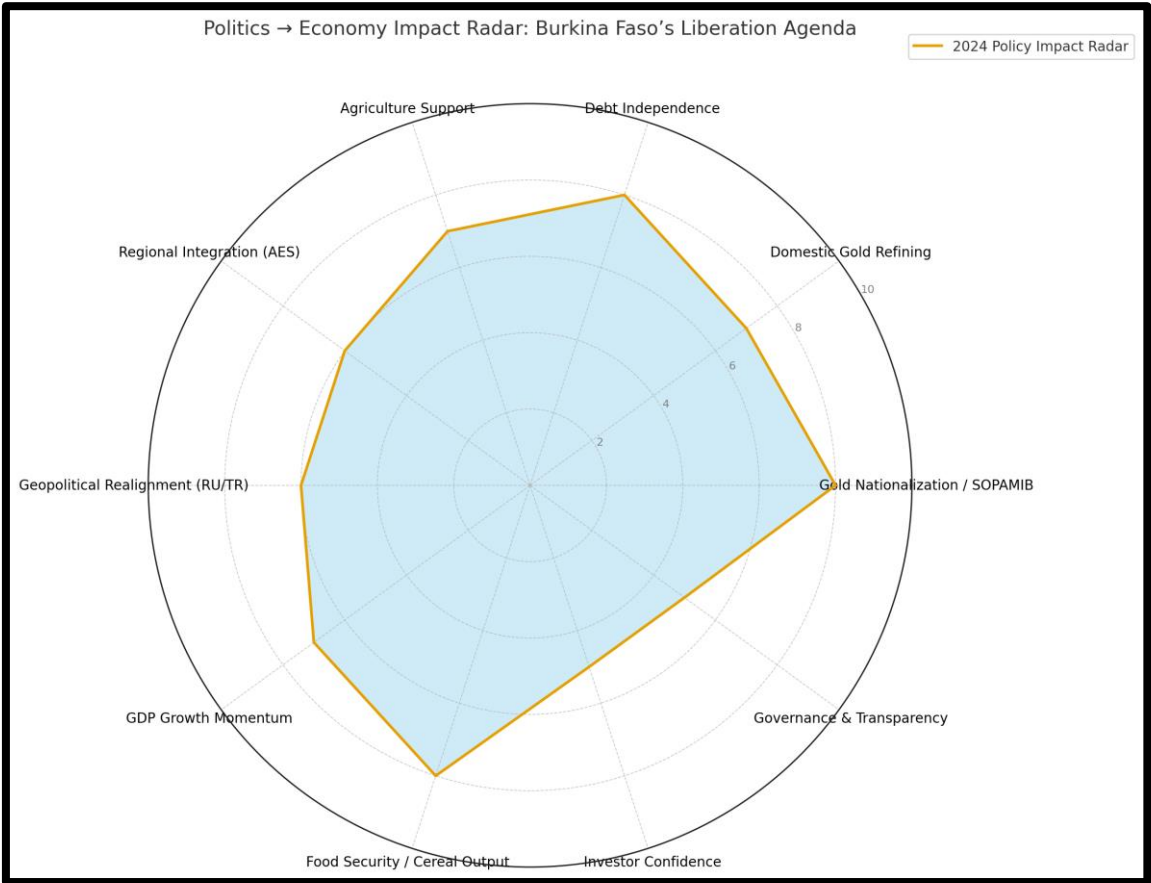


Figure 1. Political–Economic Impact Profile of Burkina Faso’s Liberation Agenda.

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The strongest scores are observed in debt independence and food security, both rated at the upper end of the scale. This reflects the government's strategic emphasis on fiscal autonomy and domestic resilience as foundations of legitimacy. Debt independence functions less as a narrow macroeconomic objective and more as a political signal aimed at reducing external leverage. At the same time, gains in cereal output and food availability underpin social stability and popular support. These two axes illustrate that, in this context, sustainability is initially pursued through risk reduction and the fulfillment of basic needs rather than through market confidence or institutional reform.

Gold nationalization and domestic refining also score relatively high, underscoring the centrality of resource sovereignty within the liberation agenda. The establishment of SOPAMIB and the push toward local refining indicate a shift from export-oriented extraction toward domestic value retention. However, the slightly lower score for domestic refining compared to nationalization suggests that institutional and technical capacity constraints still limit the full realization of this strategy.

Mid-range scores for GDP growth momentum and agriculture support indicate tangible, but still consolidating, economic effects. Growth recovery appears real yet fragile, reflecting the interaction between state intervention, favorable agricultural conditions, and persistent security risks. Similarly, agricultural support has generated measurable output gains, but its long-term sustainability depends on inclusiveness, budgetary discipline, and environmental management.

The lowest scores appear in investor confidence, governance, and transparency. This imbalance is analytically significant. It suggests that while the liberation economy has delivered visible distributive and sovereignty-oriented outcomes, it has not yet translated into institutional trust or predictable investment conditions. Geopolitical realignment and regional integration occupy intermediate positions, reflecting their strategic importance but also their early, uncertain stage of implementation.

3.9 Sustainability Implications of the Liberation Economy: A Political–Economic Assessment

Sustainability in fragile and post-conflict contexts cannot be reduced to environmental protection or aggregate economic growth alone. Rather, it must be understood as the long-term viability of interconnected economic, social, institutional, and geopolitical systems. In countries such as Burkina Faso, where state legitimacy, security, and sovereignty are under continuous strain, sustainability is inseparable from politics. Economic reforms that fail to consolidate political authority or social cohesion are unlikely to endure, regardless of their technical merits. From this perspective, Burkina Faso's emerging "liberation economy" represents not only a political experiment, as discussed throughout this article, but also a test of whether sovereignty-driven economic strategies can generate sustainable development outcomes over time.

The sustainability question is therefore not whether Burkina Faso's recent policies conform to conventional development models, but whether they can stabilize revenues, enhance social welfare, strengthen institutions, and preserve strategic autonomy amid insecurity and global volatility. This section evaluates the liberation economy through that multidimensional sustainability lens, emphasizing trade-offs, risks, and long-term implications rather than short-term performance.

From an economic standpoint, the sustainability of the liberation economy hinges on fiscal resilience and the capacity to transform episodic resource gains into durable development foundations. The nationalization of gold assets, the creation of a state-owned mining enterprise, and the establishment of a domestic gold refinery have increased the state's share of mineral rents and reduced capital flight. In the short term, these measures have strengthened public finances and enabled politically salient actions such as debt repayment and agricultural subsidies. However, long-term economic sustainability depends less on ownership structures than on how resource revenues are managed, reinvested, and diversified.

Gold remains a highly volatile commodity subject to global price fluctuations beyond Burkina Faso's control. An economy that relies excessively on extractive rents, even under national ownership, risks reproducing the classic vulnerabilities of resource dependence, including fiscal instability, crowding out of productive sectors, and exposure to external shocks. Sustainable development, therefore, requires that the liberation economy evolve from resource capture toward value creation. This entails channeling mining revenues into productive investments in infrastructure, agro-processing, education, and the formation of domestic enterprises. Without such reinvestment, resource nationalism may secure sovereignty in form while undermining sustainability in substance.

Debt policy offers a contrasting, yet equally instructive dimension of sustainability. The government's emphasis on debt clearance and resistance to external conditionality has improved fiscal autonomy and reduced vulnerability to foreign policy leverage. From an intergenerational perspective, lowering external debt burdens can enhance sustainability by preserving future fiscal space. Yet fiscal independence must be paired with disciplined public financial management. If debt avoidance is achieved at the expense of underinvestment in human capital or critical infrastructure, the long-term growth base may erode. Sustainable fiscal sovereignty thus requires a careful balance between autonomy, investment, and macroeconomic prudence.

Social sustainability constitutes another core pillar of the liberation economy. Burkina Faso's emphasis on food sovereignty, agricultural mechanization, and rural subsidies addresses a fundamental vulnerability in Sahelian societies: the exposure of rural livelihoods to climatic shocks, market volatility, and insecurity. By improving cereal production and reducing reliance on food imports, the government has enhanced household resilience and mitigated the social consequences of global price fluctuations. These gains contribute directly to social sustainability by stabilizing incomes, reducing hunger, and reinforcing the social contract between the state and citizens.

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At the same time, social sustainability depends on the inclusiveness and durability of these gains. Subsidy-driven agricultural expansion can exacerbate inequalities if benefits are unevenly distributed across regions or social groups. Larger landholders and politically connected farmers may capture disproportionate shares of state support, while marginal communities remain excluded. Moreover, mechanization without parallel investments in rural education, extension services, and market access risks creating productivity islands rather than broad-based transformation. Sustainable social outcomes, therefore, require that food sovereignty policies be embedded within inclusive rural development strategies that prioritize equity, participation, and long-term capacity building.

Human security further complicates the sustainability calculus. In Burkina Faso, economic policy unfolds against a backdrop of insurgency, displacement, and contested authority. Development initiatives that fail to address security realities may falter, while security expenditures that crowd out social spending can undermine development itself. The liberation economy attempts to reconcile this tension by framing economic sovereignty as a foundation for national dignity and stability. Whether this narrative translates into sustained improvements in safety and livelihoods will significantly affect the project's social sustainability.

Institutional sustainability represents perhaps the most decisive and most uncertain dimension of the liberation economy. Political legitimacy rooted in liberation rhetoric and popular mobilization can accelerate reform, but it does not substitute for durable institutions. State-owned enterprises in mining, agriculture, and processing are central to the government's strategy, yet their long-term performance depends on governance quality, transparency, and managerial competence. Without clear accountability mechanisms, independent auditing, and professional administration, such entities risk becoming vehicles for inefficiency or patronage, undermining both economic and political sustainability.

The transition from revolutionary legitimacy to institutional legitimacy is therefore critical. Sustainable development requires that policies outlast individual leaders and political moments. Codifying reforms into laws, strengthening regulatory bodies, and insulating key economic institutions from ad hoc political interference are essential steps toward that goal. In the absence of such institutionalization, the liberation economy may remain vulnerable to policy reversals, elite capture, or administrative overload, particularly as expectations rise and fiscal constraints tighten.

Environmental sustainability introduces additional complexity (Hassabou et al., 2025; Melhim & Isaifan, 2025a, 2025b). Mining expansion, whether under foreign or national ownership, carries significant environmental risks, including land degradation, water contamination, and ecosystem disruption. Artisanal and small-scale mining, which employs large numbers of Burkinabè, poses particular regulatory challenges due to informality and limited oversight. While national control of resources may facilitate stronger environmental regulation in principle, it does not guarantee improved outcomes in practice. Environmental sustainability requires dedicated monitoring capacity, enforcement mechanisms, and community engagement, all of which impose institutional and financial demands.

Agricultural sustainability is similarly contested. Increased production has bolstered food security, but intensified land use and mechanization can accelerate soil depletion and water stress if not managed carefully. In a climate-vulnerable region, sustainable agriculture depends on climate-smart practices, diversified cropping systems, and long-term soil and water management strategies. Integrating environmental considerations into food sovereignty policies is therefore essential to preserving future productivity.

Geopolitical sustainability forms the outer boundary of the liberation economy's viability. Burkina Faso's pivot away from traditional Western partners toward alternative alliances reflects a strategic effort to diversify dependencies and reclaim policy autonomy. In theory, such diversification enhances resilience by reducing exposure to any single external actor. In practice, it introduces new forms of dependency and geopolitical risk. Partnerships that prioritize speed and political alignment over transparency and institutional compatibility may weaken governance standards and complicate long-term development planning.

Regional initiatives, particularly the Alliance of Sahel States, aim to anchor sovereignty within collective frameworks. By pooling resources and coordinating policies, member states seek to enhance their bargaining power and strategic depth. The sustainability of this approach depends on the bloc's ability to institutionalize cooperation beyond shared grievances. Durable regional integration requires functional mechanisms for trade, finance, and dispute resolution, as well as political stability across member states. Without these foundations, regional solidarity may remain symbolic rather than transformative.

Early macro indicators (**Table 1**) suggest that Burkina Faso's post-2022 political economy shift has coincided with a recovery in aggregate growth and a sharp easing of inflation. However, causality remains contested and likely reflects multiple interacting drivers. World Bank indicators show real GDP growth rising from 1.6% in 2022 to 3.0% in 2023 and 4.8% in 2024, indicating improving headline performance despite elevated security and investment risk (The World Bank, 2025).

Table 1. Selected Macroeconomic Indicators for Burkina Faso (2016–2025e), source: (The World Bank, 2025).

BURKINA FASO

SELECTED INDICATORS*	Avg. '10-24	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 E
INCOME AND ECONOMIC GROWTH											
GDP growth (annual %)	5.2	6.0	6.2	6.6	5.9	2.0	6.9	1.6	3.0	4.8	4.7
GDP per capita growth (annual %, real)	2.4	2.9	3.2	3.8	3.2	-0.4	4.4	-0.7	0.7	2.5	2.3
GDP per capita (US\$, nominal)	770.3	663.7	709.1	777.5	764.9	825.2	895.5	827.3	873.5	982.0	1069.2
Private consumption growth (annual %)	4.5	4.3	3.5	2.4	3.4	1.9	3.8	4.6	2.8	9.5	4.8
Gross investment (% of nominal GDP)	19.6	20.2	20.9	20.2	18.8	17.8	18.1	18.1	18.4	17.2	16.9
Gross Investment - Public (% of nominal GDP)	7.8	4.8	7.2	8.5	6.0	5.6	6.2	7.5	7.0	8.4	8.2
MONEY AND PRICES											
Inflation, consumer prices (annual %, EOP or MRV) ¹	1.1	-0.2	1.7	0.4	-2.5	4.5	..	..	..	..	..
Inflation, consumer prices (annual %, period average)	1.8	-5.4	1.5	2.0	-3.2	1.9	3.9	14.0	0.7	4.2	2.7
Base money (% of GDP)	28.4	36.8	34.3	31.6	28.1	25.5	24.4	26.2	24.8	21.4	18.5
Domestic credit to the private sector (% of GDP) ²	24.9	25.8	27.4	27.1	28.3	28.7	29.5	31.3	31.6	27.0	..
10-year interest rate (annual average) ¹	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Nominal exchange rate (local currency per USD)	555.8	592.6	580.7	555.5	585.9	575.6	554.5	623.8	606.6	606.4	609.3
Real exchange rate index (2015=100)	98.5	100.9	96.4	99.7	95.4	101.4	103.8	99.8	101.3	102.8	107.6
FISCAL											
Revenue (% of GDP)	19.8	18.5	19.0	19.3	20.0	19.0	20.4	21.6	22.1	22.0	22.6
Expenditure (% of GDP)	24.4	21.6	25.5	23.5	23.0	24.2	26.7	33.4	28.9	27.8	27.3
Interest payments (% of GDP)	1.1	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.8	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.0
Non-interest expenditure (% of GDP)	23.3	20.8	24.6	22.4	21.7	22.8	24.9	31.4	26.6	25.6	25.3
Overall fiscal balance (% of GDP)	-4.6	-3.1	-6.5	-4.3	-2.9	-5.2	-6.2	-11.8	-6.8	-5.8	-4.7
Primary fiscal balance (% of GDP)	-3.5	-2.2	-5.7	-3.2	-1.7	-3.9	-4.5	-9.8	-4.5	-3.6	-2.7
General government debt (% of GDP)	42.5	33.4	33.4	38.2	41.9	43.9	55.5	59.2	56.8	57.2	55.6
External public debt (% of GDP)	22.7	20.9	20.9	21.7	23.3	21.6	25.6	26.3	26.2	25.5	24.5
EXTERNAL ACCOUNTS											
Export growth, G&S (nominal US\$, annual %)	14.2	7.7	12.2	19.6	5.1	20.1	14.7	-10.0	0.1	13.5	15.0
Import growth, G&S (nominal US\$, annual %)	9.7	5.2	12.8	11.6	-3.3	2.8	13.7	15.9	1.7	7.4	9.2
Merchandise exports (% of GDP)	23.9	22.5	23.1	25.7	26.6	29.5	30.5	28.8	26.3	25.9	25.2
Merchandise imports (% of GDP)	25.5	26.4	27.4	28.2	26.7	25.2	25.8	32.2	30.2	28.5	24.4
Services, net (% of GDP)	-3.1	-2.1	-2.2	-2.0	-1.8	-1.5	-1.6	-1.6	-1.3	-0.8	-2.6
Current account balance (current US\$ millions)	-710.8	-586.4	-680.0	-665.9	-520.9	-21.9	87.0	-1374.1	-1674.1	-1534.0	-1076.2
Current account balance (% of GDP)	-4.5	-4.6	-4.8	-4.2	-3.2	-0.1	0.4	-7.4	-8.3	-6.6	-4.2
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP)	1.4	2.6	-0.1	1.3	0.9	-0.5	-0.2	3.5	1.9	1.2	1.1
Multilateral debt (% of total external debt) ²	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

These dimensions suggest that the liberation economy is neither inherently sustainable nor inherently unsustainable. Rather, it is conditionally sustainable. Its long-term success depends on whether political sovereignty translates into institutional capacity, whether resource control evolves into economic diversification, and whether social gains are distributed equitably and sustained over time. Sustainability, in this context, is not a static endpoint but a dynamic process shaped by governance choices, external conditions, and societal expectations.

The central risk facing Burkina Faso lies in the gap between symbolism and systems. Liberation narratives can mobilize popular support and legitimize bold action, but they must ultimately give way to routine, transparent, and accountable governance. If sovereignty is expressed primarily through confrontational politics or ad hoc interventions, sustainability will remain fragile. Conversely, if the liberation economy becomes a platform for institutional learning, policy coherence, and inclusive development, it may offer a viable alternative model for states navigating the constraints of post-colonial dependency.

In this sense, Burkina Faso's experience contributes to broader debates in sustainable development by challenging the assumption that technocratic, depoliticized policy is inherently superior. The case illustrates that sustainability is deeply political, particularly in contexts where state authority, identity, and autonomy are contested. Whether the liberation economy matures into a sustainable development pathway will depend less on ideology than on execution, less on ownership than on governance, and less on rhetoric than on results.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined Burkina Faso's post-2022 economic transformation as a deliberate political-economic project rather than a collection of isolated policy interventions. By conceptualizing the country's recent reforms as a "liberation economy," the analysis demonstrates how political leadership, ideology, and concerns about legitimacy have actively shaped fiscal policy, resource governance, agricultural support, and regional realignment. In doing so, the study departs from technocratic readings of growth or sectoral performance. Instead, it situates economic outcomes within a broader struggle over sovereignty, state authority, and sustainable development in a fragile Sahelian context.

The findings suggest that Burkina Faso's liberation agenda has generated tangible short-term gains in areas closely tied to social and economic sustainability, particularly food security, price stability, and fiscal autonomy. Expanded agricultural production and debt-reduction efforts have reduced immediate vulnerabilities, while increased state control over gold assets has strengthened

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revenue capture and symbolic sovereignty. These outcomes illustrate how politically driven economic strategies can, under certain conditions, stabilize key dimensions of development even amid insecurity and external pressure.

At the same time, the analysis highlights critical constraints that condition the long-term sustainability of this model. Investor confidence, institutional capacity, and governance transparency remain weak, limiting the state's ability to translate political momentum into durable economic transformation. Resource nationalism and state-led development, while politically potent, carry risks of inefficiency, environmental degradation, and elite capture if not embedded within robust institutional frameworks. The liberation economy, therefore, remains highly contingent, dependent on whether sovereignty claims evolve into predictable rules, accountable institutions, and inclusive policy implementation.

A central contribution of this study is to reframe sustainability as an inherently political process in post-colonial and post-coup settings. In Burkina Faso, sustainability is not simply a function of economic diversification or environmental management, but of legitimacy, distribution, and the state's capacity to manage competing social and geopolitical pressures. The case challenges dominant development paradigms that privilege depoliticized, market-centric reform, showing instead that political mobilization and sovereignty narratives can serve as powerful, if risky, drivers of economic reorientation.

Ultimately, Burkina Faso stands at a crossroads between symbolic liberation and institutional consolidation. Whether its current trajectory matures into a sustainable development pathway will depend on the state's ability to convert political authority into governance capability, to balance autonomy with transparency, and to ensure that the benefits of reform extend beyond immediate legitimacy gains. As such, Burkina Faso offers a critical test case for scholars and policymakers seeking to understand how politics, sustainability, and development interact in an era of renewed contestation over sovereignty in the Global South.

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