

Will the UEMOA survive the rise of anti-French sentiment in West Africa?

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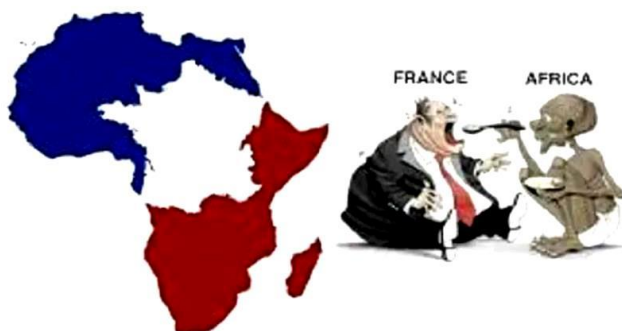
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Will UEAMO survive the rise of anti-French sentiment in West Africa?

Dirk Kohnert ¹

Franc's new partnership agenda ?



Source: © Relations France – Afrique | [Infog È Web](#),
Amouzou, 2017, 16 February 2017

Abstract: The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) was established by France to counteract the dominance of Anglophone countries in West Africa, particularly Nigeria and Ghana, over Francophone West Africa. Francophonie in French West Africa is mainly driven by a power elite, the 'Pré Quarré' in both France and Africa. The notorious Françafrique network determined the fate of the region for decades. This provoked a growing anti-French sentiment, which focused on three points. First, development policy; second, the currency; and third, the military. France was the only Western country to maintain a significant military presence in the Sahel. While the number of French troops has fallen drastically from 30,000 in the early 1960s to around 6,100 today, political and military interventionism has not abated. But, after so many years of failed military efforts against terrorism in the region, citizens became increasingly suspicious of France's motives for being there. However, a clear distinction must be made between anti-French sentiment and anti-French military presence. Many believe that any presence of foreign troops in the Sahel makes the situation worse by attracting rather than repelling extremists. Yet, this view obscures two important realities. First, the development of a broader authoritarian movement, driven in part by Russia, challenging democracy and its proponents. The local population makes France the scapegoat for the worsening of their situation on the ground. Its political leaders are capitalizing on hostility to the colonial legacy, including the CFA franc and military cooperation. This is fertile ground for insurgent military officials, who have no legal legitimacy but a thirst for authenticity. The slogan 'France, get out' has become a new means of legitimizing political and military power in French-speaking Africa. However, for some autocrats, it is also used as a welcome distraction from acknowledging their own responsibility for the predicament. Africans are becoming increasingly aware that France is staying in Africa for its own interests. But anti-French is not necessarily pro-coup. The axis of young, fiery military leaders, seeking legitimacy from their terrorized compatriots, exploited all sorts of populist sentiments, from Africanism to the quest for economic independence. They accused Paris of supporting the terrorists who are targeting the local population so that France can continue siphoning off their resources and thereby sinking the country into increasing poverty. It would be a mistake to think that making it clear to Africans that they are being manipulated by the Russians would end the whole thing. Nevertheless, the African heavyweights of UEMOA, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, as well as the other member states, will keep the Union together out of self-interest, albeit on fairer terms. The African public is - understandably - extremely sensitive to being treated as equals. They don't want to be lectured to or made fun of.

Keywords: [Françafrique](#), [WAEMU](#), [UEMOA](#), [ECOWAS](#), [Anti-French sentiment](#), [Africanisms](#), [coup d'état](#), [governance](#), [sustainable development](#), [post-colonialism](#), [informal sector](#), [CFA franc](#), [ODA](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), [West Africa](#), [Mali](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Niger](#), [Guinea](#), [Nigeria](#), [African Studies](#)

JEL-Code: F15, F35, F51, F52, F54, H12, H56, K42, L13, L72, N17, N47, Z13

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1. Introduction: Brief history of the UEMOA

Cartoon 2: '[Françafrique](#)'



Source: © [Abdelghani Dahdouh](#) ²

The West African Economic and Monetary Union ([WAEMU](#), in English; *Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine* ([UEMOA](#)), in French) was created on 10 January 1994 in [Ouagadougou](#) ([Burkina Faso](#)), the headquarters of the organisation. It was inextricably linked to [France's](#) attempt to maintain special economic and political ties with [its former colonies](#) and to prevent the feared domination of [Anglophone West Africa](#), especially [Nigeria](#) and [Ghana](#). With a population of 72 million and a gross domestic product (GDP) of € 28 billion, the organisation represented around 30 % of the population or 33 % of West Africa's GDP (Kohnert, 2005). The UEMOA aimed to pool the resources of francophone West Africa in a powerful organization geared to the specific development needs of the [CFA franc zone](#) and thereby taking into account the special relationship that had developed with the former economic and monetary zone of the colonial power France. Close cooperation with the [IMF](#), the [World Bank](#) and [France](#), which provided the UEMOA with substantial funding from the outset, was to ensure its success. However, Anglophone West African states such as Ghana feared that this would intensify competition for future funds and positions of power with the other [ECOWAS](#) states (Kohnert, 2005).

The concept of the special relationship of the '[Francophonie](#)' was coined already in 1880 during the high time of European [Imperialism](#) in Africa. Shortly before the [Berlin Conference](#) of 1885, it laid the foundation for the colonial division of Africa in the subsequent [scramble for Africa](#). However, institutionalised and structured became the common representation of the interests of Francophone countries only on 20 March 1970 in [Niamey](#), ten years after the official end of [colonialism](#) ([Francophonie](#), official website) (Kohnert, 2022).

The UEMOA was originally founded with seven member states, all former French colonies, i.e. [Benin](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Ivory Coast](#), [Mali](#), [Niger](#), [Senegal](#), and [Togo](#). [Guinea-Bissau](#), a former Portuguese colony, joined the organisation on 2 May 1997 as eighth (and only non-francophone) member. The UEMOA is a [customs union](#) and [currency union](#), dominated by [France](#). Its predecessors were the Francophone Economic Community of West Africa (CEAO) and the West African Monetary Union (UMOA), founded in 1973/74. Although the heads of state concerned denied it in their soapbox speeches, the regional associations of the former French colonies were created from the outset in obvious competition with the Economic Community of West African States ([ECOWAS](#)), founded in 1975 by all West

² [Abdelghani Dahdouh](#), Moroccan cartoonist, published in the daily Moroccan newspaper '[Al-Massae](#)'. President of the Moroccan Association of Cartoonists (AMC). © (all rights reserved). Source: [peace.international.org](#) .

African states. It was dominated by Anglophone West Africa, especially [Nigeria](#) and [Ghana](#) (Kohnert, 2005). The institutionalisation of UEMOA was also triggered by the 50 % devaluation of the [CFA franc](#) in January 1994, which caused an uproar in francophone Africa because it was imposed by [Paris](#). The Africans concerned felt: ‘*We are all being devalued!*’ (Kohnert, 1994).

The UEMOA is an integral part of the [CFA Zone](#) (created in 1945), which has served as a haven of relative monetary and economic stability on the troubled African continent for over 70 years. It was pegged directly to the [French franc](#) (FF) and later to the [euro](#) (since 1999) through a credit and budget agreement. The parity of the CFA franc remained virtually unchanged from 1948 until the 1994 devaluation (50 F CFA= 1 FF). The agreement ensured monetary stability and greater fiscal discipline than other African states, as well as preferential conditions for development aid.

However, the CFA Zone also served the particular interests of generations of French businessmen and politicians, the [Messieurs Afrique](#), and their African junior partners. [Paris](#) has effectively installed and maintained puppet governments and autocrats in many West African countries for decades, stifling dissent across the continent. Its support for the [Gnassingbé dynasty](#) in [Togo](#), the world's longest-running dictatorship after [North Korea](#), is a prominent example (Andjembe Etogho & Eben & Dalton, 2022; Kohnert, 2022e).

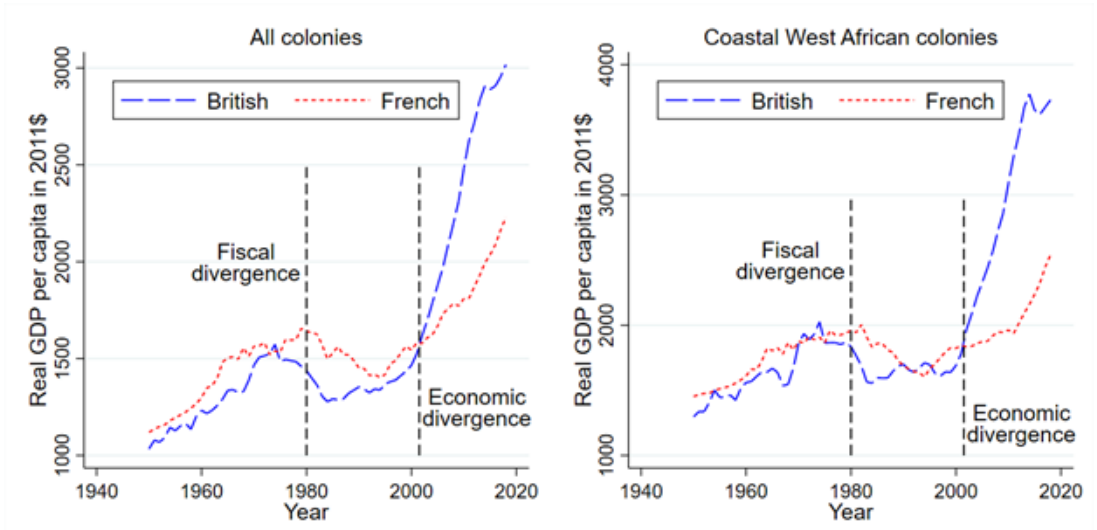
The costs were borne by French and EU taxpayers and the poor in the African countries concerned. The [CFA Zone](#) was seen as a self-service shop for the francophone elite. French entrepreneurs in [Dakar](#) or [Abidjan](#) freely admitted that their profit margins in Africa were twice as high as in their home country (Kohnert, 2005). Prices for French imports in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) - enforced through [aid tying](#) and political patronage - have long been up to 30% higher than world market prices for comparable goods and services. The African business partners and intellectuals involved in the patronage relationship, who were interested in relatively cheap French imports and trips to France (because of the CFA’s overvaluation), did not fare badly either (Kohnert, 2005). Although French presidents have repeatedly announced a break with the post-colonial system of the shadowy, informal and sometimes even criminal network of ‘[Françafrique](#)’ it remained very much alive (Borrel, 2021; Kohnert, 2022a).

The price of these special arrangements was that [Paris](#) allowed its monetary and fiscal policies to be guided primarily by its own foreign trade interests (France's foreign exchange rate, interest rate and money supply dictate). France's internal monetary policy decisions had a full impact on the CFA countries (e.g. [devaluation of the FF in 1969](#)) without taking into account their structural adjustment needs. This led to a [real exchange rate appreciation](#) of around 40% (1984-92) against the [US dollar](#), the leading currency in world raw materials markets, which are crucial for African exports, by around 40% (1984 - 92). For a long time, France resisted calls from the international donor community, led by the [IMF](#), to devalue the CFA franc, relying on ‘internal solutions’ for [structural adjustment](#), i.e. deflation, lowering production costs and restructuring the financial system. At the same time, French economic interests in Africa were significantly weakened (Kohnert, 1994).

Nevertheless, the [CFA Zone](#) in general and the [UEMOA](#), in particular, have long been regarded as a model case of economic and monetary integration in Africa, even though neither of these sub-zones meets the classical criteria of an optimum currency area ([OCA](#)) (Kohnert, 2005). However, this stability has not had a positive impact on economic growth. There is no robust evidence of a direct positive impact of an economic union on economic growth in the

UEMOA region, nor a positive impact through [financial development](#) (Ehigiamusoe & Lean, 2019).

Graph 1: Long-term divergence of economic growth: Anglophone and Francophone West Africa compared, 1940 - 2020



Source: Ricart-Huguet, 2022

On the contrary, all available indicators point to the contrary and show a growing discrepancy, at least in the coastal former [West African French colonies](#), since the 2000s. Arguably, however, the higher growth rates in Anglophone Africa over the past decade may also indicate an erosion of the persistence of colonial investments. For example, public investment per capita in education and health has been higher since independence in Francophone Africa (Ricart-Huguet, 2022).

In any case, the rules of the [informal sector](#), which still dominates West African economies, have been at least as important in structuring the CFA Zone as the institutions and policies of the formal economic sector, including its monetary institutions (Lavallée & Roubaud, 2018). The cost of this rent-seeking has been borne not only by the [French Treasury](#), which guarantees the peg, but also by French and EU taxpayers, who have financed bailouts and development aid, and ultimately by the poorer member states and social classes (see the [free-rider thesis](#)). In 1998, [Côte d'Ivoire](#), for example, was even dreaming of catching up on development like the [Asian 'tiger states'](#). However, the Ivorian crisis of 1999 and the [second Ivorian civil war](#) (2011), as well as external crises such as the Asian financial and banking crisis, significantly dampened these hopes. They showed how vulnerable most West African countries, dependent on commodity exports and development aid, remain to external shocks and uncertain domestic political conditions (Kohnert, 2005).

2. The rise of anti-French sentiment in francophone West Africa

Cartoon 3: when anti-French sentiment spreads out of the backyard³



Source: © [Damien Glez](#), 28 May 2022

According to the media, there is a well-established anti-French feeling in [West Africa](#), felt by a majority of the population who reject the French presence in all its forms, military, political, economic and cultural. Many Africans, notably in the Sahel region, think that any foreign troop presence in a country is making the situation worse because it allegedly doesn't repel extremists, but actually attracts them (Mules, 2019).

But the reality is more complicated than this simplification (Guiffard, 2023). By too easily equating protests against France's actions in Africa with labelling them as expressions of resentment, French power elites delegitimise any African protest movement that criticises France. Protesters are disqualified as irrational, easily manipulated and misled, either by Russia or China and incapable of making rational choices (Condé & M'Bama, 2023). But there is nothing irrational about denouncing, for example, [Nicolas Sarkozy's discourse of Dakar](#), in which he claimed that *'the tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history... (and) they have never really launched themselves into the future'*. The same goes for criticism of the CFA franc or of ineffective French military operations in the Sahel against Islamist terrorism ([Operation Barkhane](#), [Operation Serval](#)), with intolerable 'collateral damage'. Paternalistic attitudes as well as the psychologization of political and societal problems serve to disqualify African protest movements as irrational (Condé & M'Bama, 2023).

Moreover, the slogan 'France, get out' has become a new way of legitimising political and military power in francophone Africa. This is fertile ground for leaders who lack the legal authority to gain popular legitimacy. But one must distinguish between anti-French sentiment and anti-French military presence. When coup leaders in Mali, Burkina Faso or Niger stir up sweeping anti-French sentiment, they can easily distract us not only from thinking about France's factual mistakes but also from recognizing the Africans' faults (Sylvestre-Treiner, 2023).

³ Balloon: "is this the red of the French flag? ... No, that's the red of the Russian flag ... that's the red of the freedom fighters ...". -- "Like a metastasis beyond the former French colonies, hundreds of South African protesters demanded the departure of a "post-colonial imperialist" France from the African continent. ... After demonstrations against the French military presence in Bamako, Ouagadougou, N'Djamena, then an aborted attempt at a "peaceful march" from the French military base in Libreville, it was Pretoria that resounded with slogans such as "France, get out of Africa", "Wealth of France on the backs of Africans", "Reparations for colonial crimes" or certain more flowery wordings such as "Fuck you France, fuck you" from a scene set up on a truck open..." -- © [Damien Glez](#), [Jeune Afrique](#), 28 May 2022.

Cartoon 4: 'France, get out!' - Françafrique⁴



Source: © Sébastien Marchal / *Survie*,
TV5-Monde (2011)

France's historical relationship with West Africa puts it at the forefront of the accusations of populations suffering either from a serious deterioration in security or from significant economic or development inequalities. People are waking up to the realisation that France remains in Africa for its own interests. They accused France of abetting the armed groups targeting Africans so that they can continue to siphon off their resources, leaving their country wallowing in growing poverty (Idris, 2023). Its central political and economic presence makes it a punching bag, because its historical mistakes make it vulnerable to attack, and its opponents have understood this well. But this phenomenon conceals two important realities (Guiffard, 2023). France's colonial past in West Africa as the first imperial power next to [Great Britain](#) facilitates its exploitation by political activists, who make this colonial factor the only explanation for the current difficulties of many African countries, thus contributing to fomenting tensions. This is due to the following main factors (Guiffard, 2023):

First, the political reflexes of the [Françafrique](#) network, including an apparent '[double standard](#)' and lack of coherence between the support for autocratic regimes and the promotion of Western values of liberal democracy and the rule of law, which undermines French credibility.

Second, the dominant discourse on immigration in French and [European migration policy](#) and the domestic political debates it generates, including the resulting visa restrictions for Africans. The lively debates in France, which are followed very closely in [French-speaking Africa](#), give rise to the feeling of latent and encroaching [racism](#) (Guiffard, 2023).

Third, anti-French feelings were also caused by the significant drop in [development aid](#). French technical cooperation collapsed from almost 30 % to several West African countries in the 1970s by the whole [OECD](#) to less than 20% in the 2000s, especially from the 1990s onwards. This retreat of [France](#), increasingly replaced by [China](#), [Russia](#) and [Turkey](#), also had an impact on mutual understanding. Apparently, the

⁴ In addition to criticising the [Françafrique](#) network, the cartoon also refers to the socio-psychological consequences of French cultural imperialism in Africa, which already [Frantz Fanon](#) vehemently criticised in his publication '[Black Skin, White Masks](#)'.

common language alone could not compensate for this. This was all the more true given the notorious arrogance and lack of self-criticism of many French development experts. Other donor nations had as many errors in their African policy, without being subject to such questioning (Guiffard, 2023).

Fourth, instrumentalized and manipulated [Pan-Africanism](#). The most visible and harshest critics of French policy in Africa have been public activists, French and African, who espouse pan-Africanism, such as [Kemi Séba](#), [Nathalie Yamb](#), [Franklin Nyamsi](#), [Sylvain Afoua](#) or [Maikoul Zodi](#) (Guiffard, 2023). They represented a fairly diverse spectrum of activism and positions and were not necessarily linked to each other, although some of them coordinated their actions. They had thousands of followers on social networks and a regular presence on West African TV shows. Far from all of them were instigated by Russia and its proxies, although the instrumentalisation of Western errors by these revisionist powers was systematic. The trap set for the West by [Russia](#) and [China](#) was to cloak an ideological confrontation in a supposedly pragmatic rationality that would resemble [Realpolitik](#). The exploitation of Western errors by these revisionist powers was systematic and did not care about consistency (Guiffard, 2023). It would also be a mistake to think that explaining to Africans that they are being manipulated by the Russians will put an end to it. This is all the more so because interventionism has not diminished, even though the number of French troops has fallen drastically from 30,000 in the early 1960s to around 6,100 today (Rédaction Africanews, 2023).

Cartoon 5: ‘Crisis of French imperialism in Africa and process of fascism in France’⁵



Source: © Lupo, Bouamama, 2021

The old Pan-Africanism of Ghana's [Kwame Nkrumah](#), Senegal's [Leopold Senghor](#) or Algeria's [Frantz Fanon](#) had been revived in recent decades in the light of new political struggles for equality between peoples and races in the old and new worlds. A prominent example was the ‘[Black Lives Matter](#)’ movement in the [United States](#). But also African

⁵ Cartoon: "Is it the intention that Africa should receive all the French soldiers in the world?" - Crisis of French imperialism in Africa and process of fascism in France -- Source: © Lupo (2021): FrançAfrique. Caricatures politiques et sociales de Lupo, wordpress, 24 February 2019 -- Bouamama, Saïd (2021): Crise de l'Impérialisme français en Afrique et processus de fascisation dans l'hexagone. CADTM, Comité pour l'abolition des dettes illégitimes, 15 June 2021.

intellectuals counted among the fiercest critics, such as the historians [Amzat Boukari-Yabara](#) and [Achille Mbembe](#), the economist [Felwine Sarr](#), and the Togolese [Kako Nubukpo](#), a former official at the Central Bank of West African States ([BCEAO](#)) and a fierce critic of the Franc CFA, or the writer [Léonora Miano](#), many of whom were based at American universities. Afro-descendant American youth, but also African youth, who make up the vast majority of the continent's population, were receptive to this attempt to mobilize codes of political and cultural emancipation (Guiffard, 2023). This revival was even mobilized positively in pop culture as the Senegalese *Y'en a mare* ('I am fed up', in French), created by a group of rappers and journalists in 2011 in the aftermath of the [Arab Spring](#) to denounce the societal and political problems in [Senegal](#). The movement had spread-effects to the whole of [Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (Kohnert, & Marfaing, 2019). It was inspired by the heroes of the West-African anti-colonial liberation struggle, notably [Amilcar Cabral](#) of neighbouring [Guinea-Bissau](#), and the [Burkinabé](#) President [Thomas Sankara](#), both murdered by their adversaries (Kohnert, 2022).

3. Which role for the F CFA in the common West-African currency?

Cartoon 6: *The CFA Franc: French Monetary Imperialism in Africa ?*⁶



Source: © Antonio Medina

As shown above, the CFA franc arrangement complemented general US dollar dependency with euro dependency and forced governments to accumulate reserves instead of investing them productively. Within the CFA franc zone, it radicalized the constraints imposed on all central bank policies and bank-firm relations in francophone Africa and made it more difficult to pursue growth strategies geared towards the well-being of the broader population. It made the creation of credit at affordable interest rates to the broader population extremely unlikely, allowed for handsome bank credits, and failed to support small and medium-sized enterprises (Koddenbrock & Sylla, 2019).

⁶ © Antonio Medina via *The Corner EU* (<http://bit.ly/2slfjZu>), Blog Editor, London School of Economics (LSE), 12 July 2017.

Graph 2: Winners and losers of the CFA arrangement

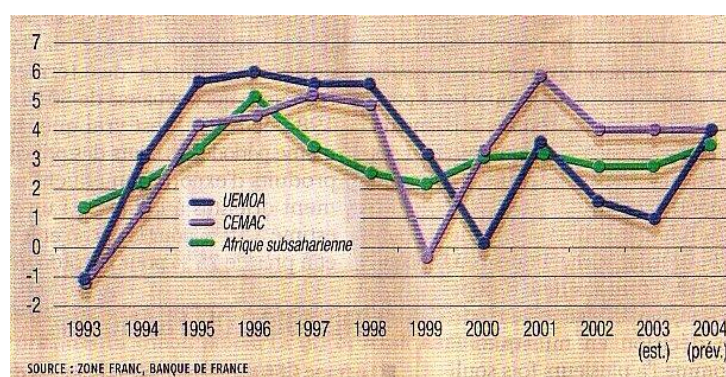
	Winners	Losers
Social status	<i>Upper middle class and upper classes (including central bank executives and rentier political elites)</i> Benefit from low inflation, a strong currency, the absence of exchange rate risk, and free transferability.	<i>Popular classes and unskilled workers, workers outside the modern sector, new jobseekers</i> Suffer consequences of deflationary policies: stagnant incomes and low net creation of decent jobs.
Enterprises	<i>Multinationals and other foreign companies</i> Benefit from low inflation (low wage costs), the absence of exchange rate risk, and free transferability.	<i>Local producers and local businesses</i> Suffer from a scarcity of bank credits and expensive bank interest rates as well as the anchoring to the euro.
Economic sectors	<i>Trade and other services</i> Benefit from low inflation and the euro peg (which makes imported products cheap relative to local products).	<i>Agriculture and industry</i> Suffer from a scarcity of bank credits and expensive bank interest rates as well as currency overvaluation because of the peg to the euro.
Foreign trade	<i>Importers</i> Benefit from the euro peg and the absence of exchange rate risk.	<i>Exporters of products other than primary products</i> Suffer from a scarcity of bank credits and expensive bank interest rates as well as the euro peg.
Financing relationships	<i>Banks in the franc zone</i> Benefit from a situation of oligopoly and high real interest rates. <i>Financial markets and international banks</i> Benefit from high real interest rates (notably in a context of zero interest-rate policies in the Global North) and important volumes of illicit financial flows.	<i>Households, SMEs and states</i> Suffer from a scarcity of bank credits and expensive bank interest rates. States must rely on external funding to finance development/productive investment. <i>States</i> Suffer from the volatility of foreign direct investment and high borrowing costs on international markets. In a context of zero interest-rate policies, states are issuing eurobonds at 6–7 percent while the real returns on their foreign exchange reserves are negative.

Source: Koddenbrock & Sylla, 2019

The growing structural divergences between UEMOA and CEMAC between 1993 and 2004 were intensified by the development of world oil markets, booming production in Equatorial Guinea and the arrival of Chad in the club of oil producers (Kohnert, 2005a).

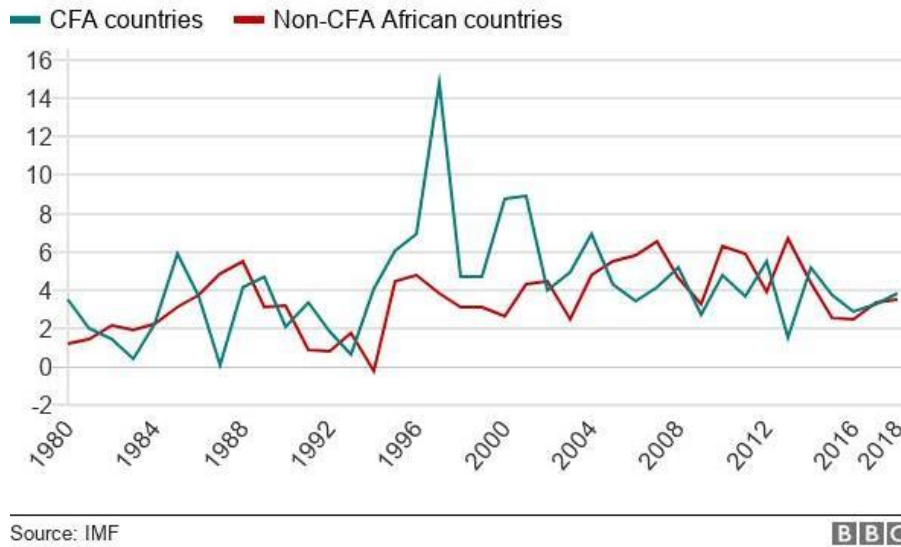
As for UEMOA, there is no robust evidence of a direct positive impact of an economic union on economic growth in the region, nor a positive impact of an economic union on economic growth through financial development (Ehigiamusoe & Lean, 2019).

Graph 3: Economic growth rate (% p.a.) in the franc CFA zones of UEMOA, CEMAC and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1993 to 2004



Source: *Jeune Afrique*, 4 January 2004; Kohnert, 2005a

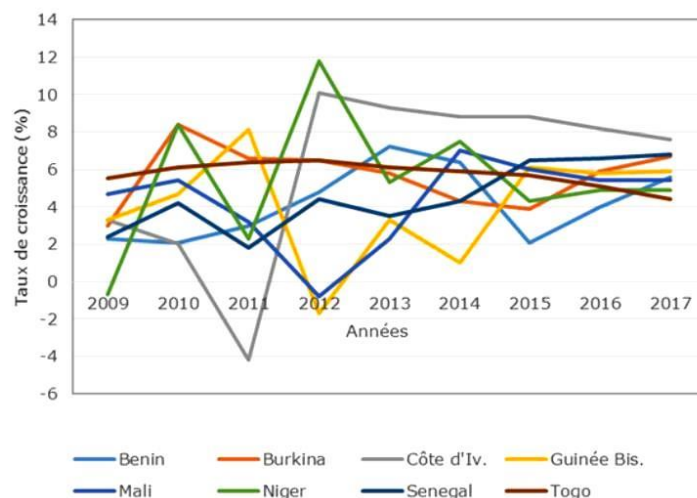
Graph 4: How did CFA franc economies fare compared to the rest of Africa? (Average GDP growth over time, 1980 - 2018)



Source: Dewast, 2019

To counteract post-colonial dependency, the West African Monetary Zone ([WAMZ](#)) was founded in December 2000, to create a monetary union and later on a common currency, the [eco](#), for [ECOWAS](#) to facilitate trade, lower transaction costs and ease payments amongst Ecowas' 385 million people. However, critics worried that [Nigeria](#), the region's biggest economy, would dominate monetary policy and impede the projected benefits. The introduction was delayed multiple times (Kohnert, 2022). Already in July 2019, the leaders of the sub-region had adopted a proposal to introduce a single currency, labelled 'eco', originally restricted to the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), for the entire ECOWAS by 2020. In the first phase, the [Anglophone countries](#) with their own currencies ([Gambia](#), [Ghana](#), [Nigeria](#), [Liberia](#) and [Sierra Leone](#)) and French-speaking [Guinea](#) were to launch the *eco*. In a second phase, the eight [UEMOA](#) (WAEMU) member countries that have in common the [CFA franc](#) ([Ivory Coast](#), [Senegal](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#), [Togo](#), [Niger](#), [Benin](#) and [Guinea-Bissau](#)) should follow suit.

Graph 5: Convergence of real GDP growth rates of UEMOA member countries, 2009-2017



However, in December 2019, the French and Ivorian presidents, [Emanuel Macron](#) and [Alassane Ouattara](#), surprisingly declared that the (Francophone) UEMOA member states would abandon the CFA first to adopt the *eco*, irrespective of WAMZ Anglophone member states, by unilaterally transforming the CFA franc to *eco* by 2020. This caused a sharp protest of the latter, notably [Nigeria](#), the by far biggest of West African countries because [Abuja](#) suspected [Paris](#) to continue its one-sided Africa policy and its post-colonial relations under the disguise of assisting an ‘independent’ West African currency. In May 2020, the French Council of Ministers passed a bill that prepared the way to abandon the West African CFA franc for the *eco*. The bill has still to be confirmed by the parliaments of WAEMU member states and France. Characteristically, it did not address one of the most controversial aspects of the CFA, i.e. the linkage of the currency to the monetary policy of Paris and the fixed parity with the [Euro](#). Thus, Paris undermined the long-lasting ambitions of WAMZ member states with its [divide-and-rule policy](#). In June 2021 the [ECOWAS](#) announced 2027 as the new date to launch the *eco*. It also took several measures to encourage the adoption of the *eco*, including creating a common monetary reserve, harmonizing economic and financial policies, and strengthening financial supervision. However, further delays are probable because of the repercussions of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), the [coups d'états](#) in the [Sahel](#) countries and growing threats of [Islamist terrorism](#) (Kohnert, 2022).

Advocates of retaining key functions of the CFA franc within the West African Monetary Zone ([WAMZ](#)) suggested that the currency could be pegged to several stable currencies with the potential to increase relative stability, restructure reserve requirements and separate the UEMOA and Economic Community of Central African States ([ECCAS/CEMAC](#)) into [optimum currency areas](#) (Dzekashu, 2021). They assert, that the basket in question for the WAMZ would be determined according to the structure of the external trade of African member countries, including [Nigeria](#) and [Ghana](#). This option would have the advantage of ensuring that all the currencies in the basket do not fluctuate in the same direction and at the same time, thus offsetting each other and ensuring the stability of the exchange rate around its long-term trend (Avom & Noumba, 2019). However, both the CFA- and CMA-Zones are vivid examples of the limited practical value of abstract economic models, like that of [Optimum Currency Areas](#) (OCAs), in the African context. The major structural deficiencies within and between member states of each zone cannot be solved by monetary coordination. They require sustainable political and economic solutions, adapted to the specific needs of each of its members, and aimed at the ownership of the measures and instruments by each country and/or sub-zone concerned (Kohnert, 2005a).

But the divide between Anglophone and Francophone West African countries over a common currency within the WAMZ remains. Nigerian authors, for example, proposed the [Nigerian naira](#) as an anchor currency. They argue that the *naira* is a better reserve currency anchor for the proposed West African common currency than the CFA franc, because the *naira's* reserve ratio has consistently been higher than that of the CFA franc, and allegedly the *naira* has performed better, even in its worst performing period than the CFA franc in its best performing period (Akume & Isik & Oduh, 2021).

But all this sounds like wishful thinking. Continued poor governance, particularly in the Sahel countries of the region, calls into question the resilience of such a WAMZ exchange rate regime to external shocks in the foreseeable future. The new WAEMU *eco*-zone has been heralded by anxious French and African leaders as a stepping stone to a common West African currency and greater economic and political independence in the interests of regional integration. In reality, however, it more closely resembled the fairy tale of the emperor's new clothes, triggered by the rising costs of guaranteeing the CFA's peg to the euro and the impact of Brexit on Africa. Paris's position as a power broker in a postcolonial political system for

the benefit of French and African elites will be reinforced by the impact of Brexit, at the expense of the African poor and French and European taxpayers. The divide between Francophone and Anglophone West Africa will rather be reinforced, and renewed African attempts at regional integration will be monkey-wrenched.

4. West Africa's Anglophone-Francophone divide persists, affecting the survival of UEMOA

Cartoon 7: *Military coup in Niger ...
French chains replaced by Russian ones?*



Source: © [Rahma Cartoons](#), 31 July 2023, *cartoon-movement*

Contrary to popular belief the [Francophonie](#) is mostly about politics and only partly about language and a common culture. Francophone West African countries are not francophone because they have a predominantly French-speaking population but because they share the common legacy of French [\(post-\)colonialism](#). In [Senegal](#), for example, only a minority, estimated at somewhere between 10 % and 24 %, are [African French](#) speakers (McLaughlin, 2008). [Côte d'Ivoire](#) ranks fourth on the list of French-speaking countries in Africa (ahead of Senegal, which ranks 8th; Admin, 2023). Estimates of the French-speaking population of Côte d'Ivoire vary between 23% and 34%. They are found mainly in urban centres and among the more educated classes. Most prefer to speak [pidgin French](#) or [petit nègre](#), a term and language now widely perceived as racist. Of all French speakers in Côte d'Ivoire, 77.8 % are in the 25-34 age group, where most of the protesters come from (Wiki user, 2022).

Africa is today the most important part of the [Francophonie](#). In 2010, half of all Francophones worldwide lived in Africa. It is expected that by 2060 almost 84 % of the French-speaking population will live in Africa. French is an official or co-official language along with other languages in 21 African countries, all in sub-Saharan Africa ([SSA](#)). Since the end of colonialism and [Cold War](#) politics, changes in the Francophonie have been largely driven by external factors, such as the desire to combat Anglo-American cultural hegemony. As shown above, the Francophonie is mainly driven by the Francophone power elite in, both [France](#) and [Africa](#) and the notorious [Françafrique](#) patronage network. Both propagate the universality of the French language, including [pidgin French](#), culture and way of life and instrumentalise it for their particular political and economic ends (Kohnert, 2022).

In many accounts of the colonial legacy in [sub-Saharan Africa](#), a distinction is made between '[indirect rule](#)' in Anglophone and '[direct rule](#)' in Francophone Africa. However, [Mahmood Mamdani](#) has shown that such a distinction largely obscures the fact that both were variants of [despotism](#) (Mamdani, 1996). By giving culture an authoritarian bent, indirect rule (decentralized despotism) set the pace for Africa. The French later followed suit, also moving from direct to indirect administration. These institutional and administrative differences served to fragment resistance and to play off reform in one sector against repression in the other (Mamdani, 1996).

Colonial legacies are still very much alive, but the subjects of (post)colonial rule, while largely accepting and internalising the norms of state-based identity, have retained their indigenous bases of African, culture, association and behaviour that continue to define their autonomy and in ways undermine state sovereignty. (Miles, 2015; Kohnert, 2009). Political convergence between Anglophone and Francophone West Africa has been very limited, and in practice was often more a matter of a division of labour, with each country taking the lead in its former colonies. Britain and France have traditionally acted independently, maintaining bilateral relations with countries in their largely exclusive post-colonial spheres of influence. (Chafer, 2013).

The [new nationalism](#) in [West Africa](#) and elsewhere shows remarkable differences both in its roots and its impact, compared with that of the [national independence movements](#) of the early 1960s. Contrary to the 'first' nationalism, the 'second' is less prone to include, tending rather to exclude populations. Alienation, xenophobia and its political instrumentalization are its curses. The new nationalism has been shaped decisively by the consequences of globalisation and by the increasing cleavage between the poor and the rich. Nowadays, the structures of nationalism and nation-states differ more than in the past. Frequently, the new nationalism is rooted in populist grass-roots movements which do not necessarily share the same interest as the ruling class or the state. This makes for its extraordinary political and social ambiguity and brisance (Kohnert, 2009). Since colonial times, national pride and the exclusion of 'foreigners' have been closely linked in [SSA](#), leading to [xenophobia](#) and in extreme cases to civil war. The [Biafran war](#) (1967-1970) and the [first](#) (2002-2007) and [the second Ivorian civil wars](#) (2011) are sad examples. Xenophobic violence has escalated dramatically since independence. The theologically inspired philosophy of [Ubuntu](#), i.e. the language of multiculturalism, which propagated a cultural nationalism aimed at (pan-) African group solidarity, represented another extreme. In a dialectical process, it may even have promoted xenophobia in the long run. Through its idealistic visions and its concealment of real class barriers, it later contributed to the great disillusionment of the poor and marginalised, who were caught up in the witch-hunt against migrants. At least [Achille Mbembe](#) (2001) and other exponents of post-colonial approaches caution against the dangers of a '[cultural nationalism](#)', still deeply rooted in the illusionist intellectual traditions of the African elite of the 1960s and 1970s, and mirrored by the [African Renaissance](#) policy as promoted by [Thabo Mbeki](#) in the late 1990s. Violent xenophobic excesses such as those in the 'rainbow-nation' of [South Africa](#) may be the herald of similar tendencies in other parts of Africa and beyond (Kohnert, 2009).

5. Conclusion

Cartoon 8: Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger:
Does the coup have 'anti-French' or 'pro-Russian' undertones?



Source: © Damien Glez, [The AfricaReport](#), 5 October 2022

Although the member states of [UEMOA](#) are still dependent on foreign aid to varying degrees, the [new nationalism](#) that has developed since the [decolonisation of Sub-Saharan Africa](#) is so deeply rooted that their populations, including their political and military elites, have a genuine self-interest in maintaining the organisation. Obviously, the union continues to serve at least as an alliance of convenience for the [Francophone countries of West Africa](#) against the competing Anglophone states of [ECOWAS](#). The [Francophonie](#) serves, if at all, mainly as a cover for the power claims of the competing political, economic and military power elites in these countries. Even if France's leading role within the UEMOA has been challenged by increasing anti-French political campaigns, other global players would be more than happy to fill that role, notably [Russia](#) and [China](#). The UEMOA would not be shaken to its foundations. As shown above, the close cooperation between the Ivorian President [Alassane Ouattara](#) as well as other heads of state of the UEMOA and the French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) in the tactical assertion of Francophone interests on the issue of replacing the [CFA franc](#) with the West African common currency, the [eco](#), demonstrated that the African partners are also prepared to ruthlessly assert their interests within ECOWAS. This Machiavellian [realpolitik](#) offers little hope that the divide between the Francophone and Anglophone member states of ECOWAS will narrow any time soon. The long shadows of the colonial legacy, including the post-colonial power politics of [Paris](#) and [London](#), contribute to perpetuating this divide.

From a [postcolonial](#) perspective, the transition from democracy to military autocratic regimes in [Mali](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Guinea](#) and [Niger](#) demonstrated the self-confidence of the new power elite (Daffé, 2023). It was triggered by a vehement rejection of the colonial framework in the foreign policies of the countries concerned, not only by the military, but also by large sections of the population, including the youth, who had no prospects of earning a living in their own country and were therefore increasingly inclined to migrate to Europe.

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Résumé : [*L'UEMOA survivra-t-elle à la montée du sentiment anti-français en Afrique de l'Ouest ?*] – L'Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine (UEMOA) a été créée par la France pour contrer la domination des pays anglophones d'Afrique de l'Ouest, en particulier le Nigeria et le Ghana, sur l'Afrique de l'Ouest francophone. La francophonie en Afrique occidentale française est principalement dirigée par une élite au pouvoir, le « Pré Quarré » en France et en Afrique. Le tristement célèbre réseau Françafrique a déterminé le destin de la région pendant des décennies. Cela a provoqué un sentiment anti-français croissant, qui s'est concentré sur trois points. Premièrement, la politique de développement ; deuxièmement, la monnaie ; et troisièmement, l'armée. La France était le seul pays occidental à maintenir une présence militaire significative au Sahel. Alors que le nombre de soldats français a chuté drastiquement de 30 000 au début des années 1960 à environ 6 100 aujourd'hui, l'interventionnisme politique et militaire n'a pas faibli. Mais, après tant d'années d'efforts militaires infructueux contre le terrorisme dans la région, les citoyens sont devenus de plus en plus méfiants à l'égard des motifs de la présence française. Cependant, une distinction claire doit être faite entre le sentiment anti-français et la présence militaire anti-française. Beaucoup pensent que toute présence de troupes étrangères au Sahel aggrave la situation en attirant plutôt qu'en repoussant les extrémistes. Pourtant, ce point de vue occulte deux réalités importantes. Premièrement, le développement d'un mouvement autoritaire plus large, mené en partie par la Russie, qui défie la démocratie et ses partisans. La population locale fait de la France le bouc émissaire de l'aggravation de leur situation sur le terrain. Ses dirigeants politiques capitalisent sur l'hostilité à l'héritage colonial, notamment le franc CFA et la coopération militaire. C'est un terreau fertile pour les responsables militaires insurgés, qui n'ont aucune légitimité légale mais une soif d'authenticité. Le slogan « France, dégage » est devenu un nouveau moyen de légitimation du pouvoir politique et militaire en Afrique francophone. Cependant, pour certains autocrates, il est également utilisé comme une distraction bienvenue pour ne pas reconnaître leur propre responsabilité dans la situation difficile. Les Africains prennent de plus en plus conscience que la France reste en Afrique pour ses propres intérêts. Mais anti-français n'est pas forcément putschiste. L'axe des jeunes chefs militaires fougueux, cherchant la légitimité de leurs compatriotes terrorisés, a exploité toutes sortes de sentiments populistes, de l'africanisme à la quête d'indépendance économique. Ils ont accusé Paris de soutenir les terroristes qui ciblent la population locale afin que la France puisse continuer à siphonner leurs ressources et ainsi plonger le pays dans une pauvreté croissante. Ce serait une erreur de penser que faire comprendre aux Africains qu'ils sont manipulés par les Russes mettrait fin à tout cela. Néanmoins, les poids lourds africains que sont l'UEMOA, la Côte d'Ivoire et le Sénégal, ainsi que les autres États membres, maintiendront l'Union unie par intérêt personnel, quoique dans des conditions plus équitables. L'opinion publique africaine est - et c'est compréhensible - extrêmement sensible à être traitée sur un pied d'égalité. Ils ne veulent pas être sermonnés ou moqués.

Zusammenfassung : [*Wird die UEMOA die Zunahme antifranzösischer Stimmung in Westafrika überleben?*] – Die Westafrikanische Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion (UEMOA) wurde von Frankreich gegründet, um der Dominanz anglophoner Länder in Westafrika, insbesondere Nigeria und Ghana, über das französischsprachige Westafrika entgegenzuwirken. Die Frankophonie in Französisch-Westafrika wird hauptsächlich von einer Machtelite vorangetrieben, dem ‚Pré Quarré‘ in Frankreich und Afrika. Das berühmte Françafrique-Netzwerk bestimmte jahrzehntelang die Geschichte der Region. Dies löste eine wachsende antifranzösische Stimmung aus, die sich auf drei Punkte konzentrierte. Erstens, die Entwicklungspolitik; zweitens, die Währung; und drittens, das Militär. Frankreich war das einzige westliche Land, das eine bedeutende militärische Präsenz in der Sahelzone aufrecht erhielt. Während die Zahl der französischen Truppen von 30.000 in den frühen 1960er Jahren drastisch auf heute etwa 6.100 gesunken ist, hat der politische und militärische Interventionismus nicht nachgelassen. Doch nach so vielen Jahren gescheiterter militärischer Bemühungen gegen den Terrorismus in der Region wurden die Bürger zunehmend misstrauisch gegenüber den Motiven Frankreichs für seinen Aufenthalt dort. Es muss jedoch klar zwischen antifranzösischer Stimmung und antifranzösischer Militärpräsenz unterschieden werden. Viele glauben, dass jede Präsenz ausländischer Truppen in der Sahelzone die Situation verschlimmert, indem sie Extremisten anzieht und nicht abwehrt. Diese Sichtweise verdeckt jedoch zwei wichtige Realitäten. Erstens die Entwicklung einer breiteren autoritären Bewegung, die teilweise von Russland vorangetrieben wird und die Demokratie und ihre Befürworter herausfordert. Die lokale Bevölkerung macht Frankreich zum Sündenbock für die Verschlechterung ihrer Lage vor Ort. Seine politischen Führer nutzen die Feindseligkeit gegenüber dem kolonialen Erbe, einschließlich des CFA-Franc, und der militärischen Zusammenarbeit. Dies ist ein fruchtbarer Boden für rebellierende Militärs, die keine rechtliche Legitimität, dafür aber nach Authentizität dürsten. Der Slogan „Frankreich, raus“ ist zu einem neuen Mittel der Legitimierung politischer und militärischer Macht im frankophonen Afrika geworden. Für einige Autokraten dient es jedoch auch als willkommene Ablenkung von der Anerkennung ihrer eigenen Verantwortung für die missliche Lage. Den Afrikanern wird zunehmend bewusst, dass Frankreich aus eigenen Interessen in Afrika bleibt. Aber Anti-Französisch ist nicht unbedingt Pro-Putsch. Die Achse der jungen, heißspornigen Militärführer, die von ihren terrorisierten Landsleuten Legitimität suchen, nützte alle möglichen populistischen Gefühle aus, vom Afrikanismus bis zum Streben nach wirtschaftlicher Unabhängigkeit. Sie warfen Paris vor, die Terroristen zu unterstützen, die es auf die lokale Bevölkerung abgesehen haben, damit Frankreich weiterhin ihre Ressourcen abschöpfen und das Land dadurch in zunehmende Armut stürzen kann. Es wäre ein Fehler zu glauben, dass die ganze Sache zu Ende wäre, wenn den Afrikanern klar gemacht würde, dass sie von den Russen manipuliert werden. Dennoch werden die afrikanischen Schwergewichte UEMOA, Côte d'Ivoire und Senegal sowie die anderen Mitgliedstaaten die Union aus Eigeninteresse zusammenhalten, wenn auch zu faireren Bedingungen. Die afrikanische öffentliche Meinung reagiert verständlicherweise äußerst empfindlich darauf, gleichberechtigt behandelt zu werden. Sie wollen nicht belehrt oder ausgelacht werden.