

Long-term evaluation of public policies:

An historical investigation into colonial policies in French Western Africa, and its impacts on modern political attitudes and intra-state conflicts

Evaluation of Democracy Research Group

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This project aims to investigate long-term consequences of colonial policies and political environments on modern day intra-state conflicts and political attitudes. A growing literature shows the long term effects of historical shocks on economic outcomes (Acemoglu et al. 2001, Acemoglu et al. 2002, Banerjee et Iyer 2005, Nunn 2008, Huillery 2009, Huillery 2011, among others), but fewer evidence is available on the historical roots of political preferences and attitudes, as well as of conflicts within countries. Since Africa is characterized by a high level of intra-state conflicts and low political and institutional quality, an important question is to understand how these bad outcomes developed and whether they can be traced back to the colonial history's policies and political environment, which would reveal the highly persistent nature of political attitudes and conflicts.

Methodological Approach

The project will proceed in two steps:

1. We will first explore the interaction between the quality of colonial political leaders, the contemporaneous hostility of the population towards colonial political leaders, and the resulting state capacity (taxation and public investments) in colonial times;
2. We will estimate the long term effects of hostility and state capacity in colonial times on current political attitudes, economic and political inequalities, and current intrastate conflicts.

We rely on a *tri-disciplinary approach*, based on extensive examination of historical archives, following the political science literature on conflicts and political attitudes, and complemented with empirical strategies from economics. **Our methodology will rely on using characteristics of the colonial leaders as instruments for the hostility of local population and state capacity.**

Testing assumptions and identifying variables

There is evidence that the allocation of French colonial administrators within French West Africa was quasi-random on the one hand (Cohen 1974), and the characteristics of the administrators varied a lot in terms of education level and personal quality (Cohen 1974, Delavignette 1939, Association des anciens élèves de l'école coloniale (1998)). These historians emphasize the relationship between administrators' educational and familial backgrounds and their vision of colonization (more or less humanist). The specific personality of the administrators is therefore likely to be a strong determinant of the policy they implemented. Since the affectation of an administrator in a specific district was a matter of vacancy and not a matter a selection (Cohen (1974, p. 76)), the variation in the "quality" of the administrators can constitute an exogenous source of variation in the quality of leadership, and consequently the hostility of the population towards the political power and state capacity. *We will test this assumption in order to identify good instrumental variables for the level of hostility of the population and state capacity. In addition, different characteristics might explain different public policies, which would provide different instruments to estimate the long term impact of different public policy features.*

The current project aims to collect personal data on the French colonial administrators who served in the colonial administration in French West Africa from 1906 to 1932. A preliminary investigation showed that 1,000 different administrators would be part of our study. Their personal information is available at the Archives Nationales de la France d'Outre-Mer (ANOM) in Aix-en-Provence, including education level, marital status, military status, military background, experience in the colonies, assessment from the colonial administrative hierarchy, and region of birth, among others.

Arriving at a better understanding of long-term public policy consequences

Discussions on public policies oftentimes raise concerns over the very long run consequences of important policies regarding education, health, and institutional design, for example in the context of the World Bank's development policy recommendations towards developing countries. However, there has been very little empirical evidence that provides strong support to one type of policies or another, naturally due to the scarcity of empirical designs that cover a very long period of time with sufficient historical data and an empirical strategy that could separate the true effects of policies from confounding factors. Without this type of evidence of policy evaluation in the very long run, policy recommendations based only on theoretical argumentation may easily become victims of the pitfalls of ideological theorization. Huillery (2009) has shown that different districts in French West Africa implemented widely different types of policies. Some were motivated by humanist concerns about the development of local people, and have produced long-term consequences in terms of education and health outcomes ever since. Our objective is to broaden Huillery's (2009) initial question in two major directions.

1. In order to truly understand the consequences of colonial policies, we need to look for the keystone of those policies. Thanks to extensive reading and discussions with historians on this topic, we choose to focus on the educational and familial backgrounds of the administrators from the early colonial period. This investigation would provide the exogenous source of variation that helps separate out the effect of policies from confounding factors, such as local geographical and geopolitical conditions.
2. We focus on modern outcomes that relate more to determinants of modern political institutions, given this unique occasion to study their formation and persistence. We look at the policy effects on political attitudes, violent conflicts, and economic and political inequality. We connect them with an investigation of the cultural attitudes of the local population, in order to understand how they interact in shaping political institutions today.