

WHY FRANCE'S REJECTION IN AFRICA?



ACTION-RESEARCH IN
SIX AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Illustration: Axel Champloy (2024)



TOURNONS LA PAGE



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Tournons La Page (TLP) is an international movement, bringing together more than 250 African and European civil society organizations whose aim is to promote democratic alternation and good governance. Founded in 2014, Tournons La Page today includes coalitions in 15 African countries. <https://tournonslapage.org/fr>.



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The positions and statements in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of TLP, its members or CERI. They are the sole responsibility of their authors.

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Intro- duction



Brazzaville market, Congo © Valdy Mbemba

On the African continent, rejection of France's foreign policy runs deep. No one doubts it any more, not even the authorities, who are alarmed at the rise of "anti-French sentiment". This rejection is above all the result of vast campaigns of manipulation and disinformation orchestrated underhand by competing and malevolent powers, foremost among them Russia, but also Turkey and China. But what is the reality? What do the people primarily concerned think, whose voices are absent from the mainstream media and so little heard by decision-makers? How does this rejection of French policy in Africa shape the movements fighting for social transformation and the defense of human rights in Africa? **Tournons La Page (TLP) has conducted this survey in partnership with Sciences Po's International Research Center (CERI), in an attempt to provide answers to these essential questions for the democratic debate in France on our country's African policy.** It was also an opportunity for TLP and its African members to make progress on issues central to its advocacy and influence actions.

For the first time on this scale, hundreds of committed citizens in French-speaking Africa were questioned about their perceptions of France's political, diplomatic and economic action in Africa [see "Survey methodology" box]. 470 people responded to a survey [see Appendix 1], and almost 50 others took part in ten focus groups in six countries (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Niger). In each case, several hours of discussions around the same interview grid [cf. appendix 2], led by researchers and Tournons La Page activists, enriched and nuanced the results of the quantitative survey.

This research makes no claim to represent "African opinion". We have deliberately surveyed a specific population: civil society activists. The people interviewed are trade unionists, activists, members of human rights or environmental organizations, or activists in women's associations or youth movements.

However, the specificity of the sample is all the more significant of the gap that has opened up between France and a large proportion of African civil and political society players.

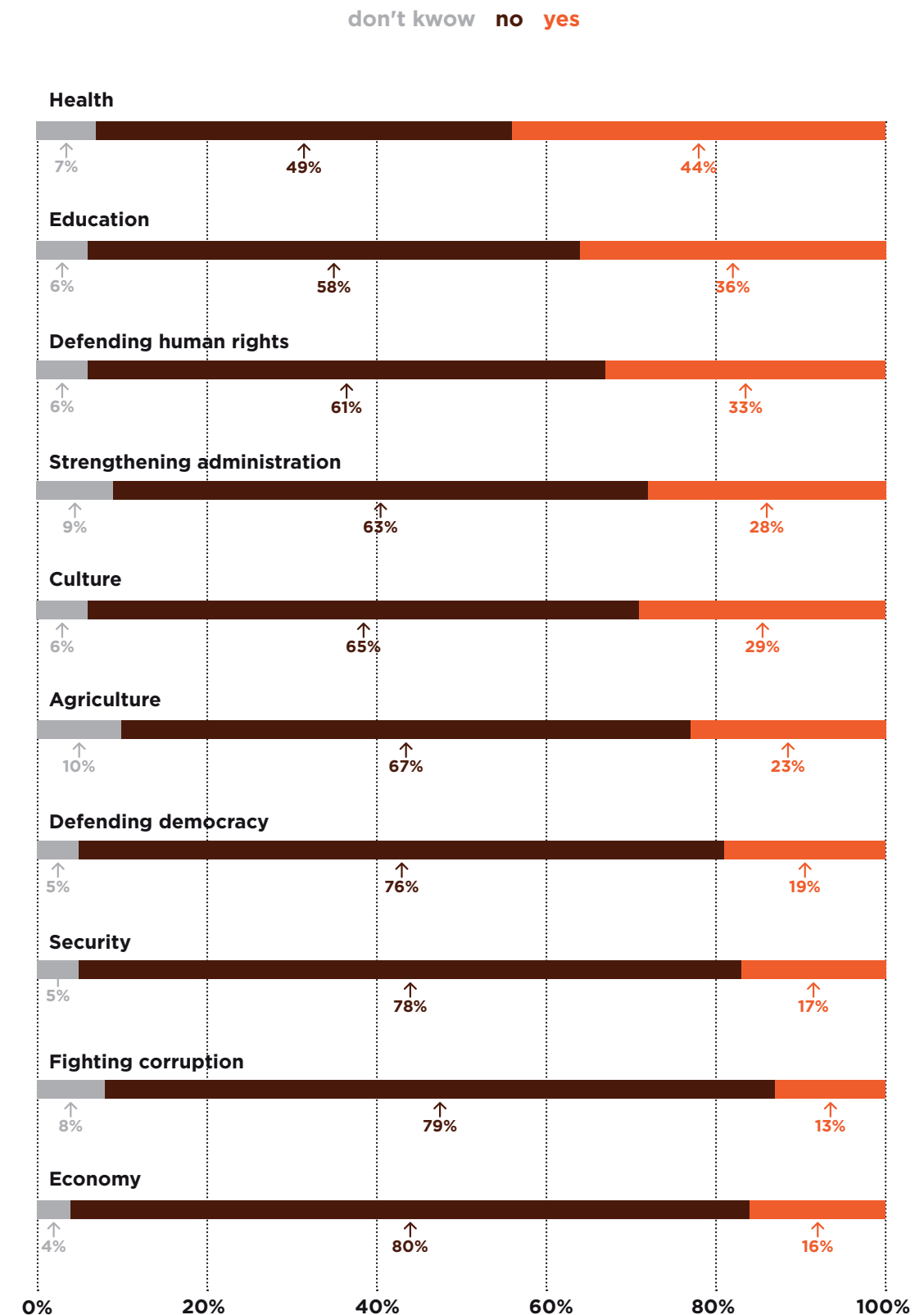
The main finding of this survey is that, in these activist networks, the rejection of French policy in Africa is massive, almost unanimous. Naturally, this unanimity does not preclude nuanced comments and assessments, depending on the country or the commitment of the participants. Some themes were agreed upon, while others were divisive. But mistrust runs deep. It is not the result of any lack of understanding of France's concrete action in Africa. On the contrary, those who speak out here have many militant, cooperative and, for some, family ties with France. They are internationalized actors, who construct their thinking and actions within collective frameworks, open to the world, and who, moreover, have, for many, a practice of negotiation and compromise.

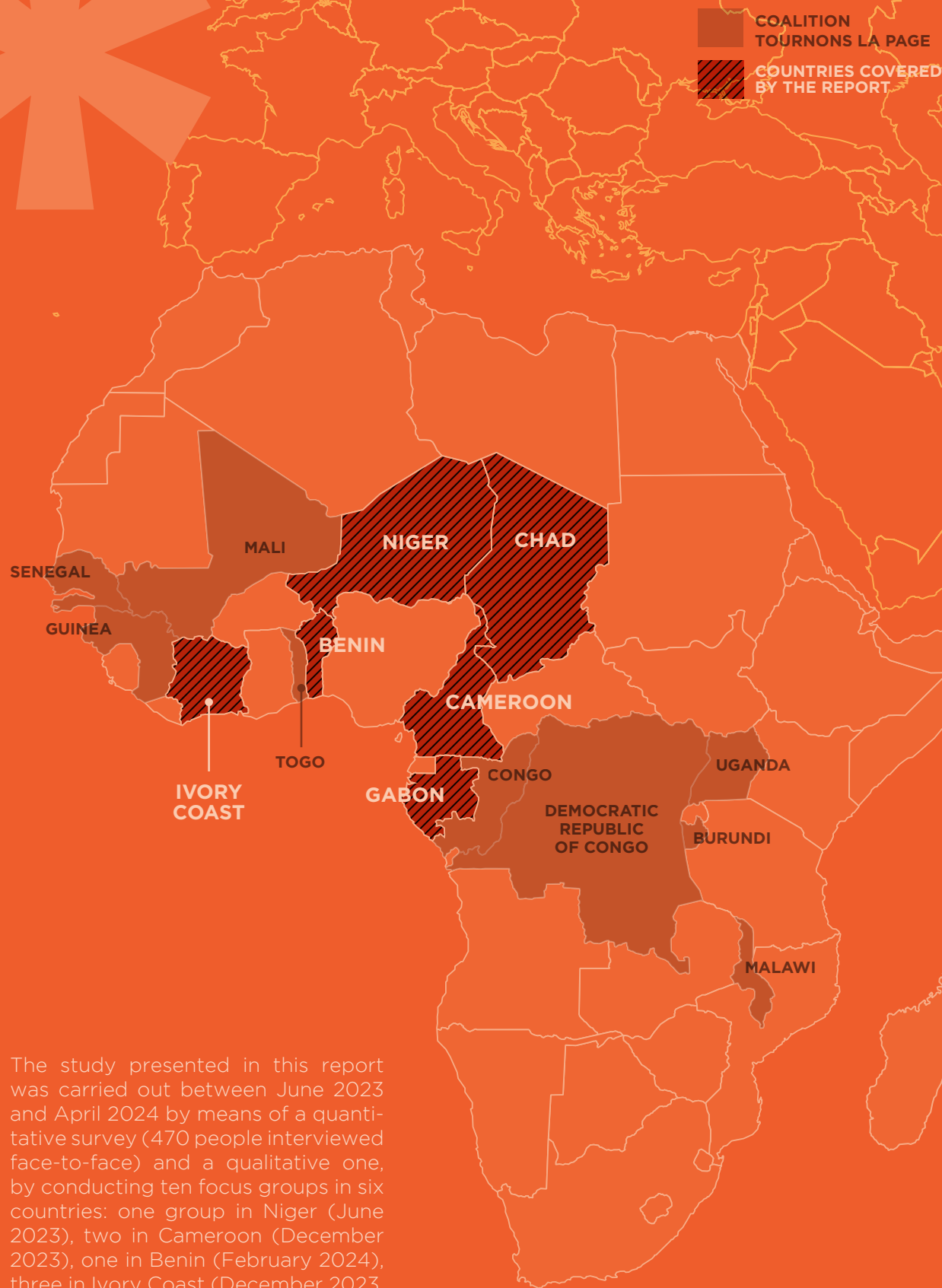
The perspectives of these African activists are profoundly at odds with the dominant discourse in the French media, and their representations of concrete situations are often very different. The chapters that follow attempt to reflect this, leaving plenty of room for the direct expression of the people interviewed, with a clearly stated bias: to avoid any attempt to distinguish between the "true" and the "false" in the stories that circulate, **to avoid any pretence at fact-checking, and to let the militant voice express itself, with as few filters as possible. The words are sometimes harsh, reflecting the long history of Franco-African relations.** They should be a wake-up call to the French public authorities and, beyond that, to all those who work on relations between Africa and France (associations, research centers, companies, etc.). **Let's hope they can contribute to an introspection of French decision-makers on France's African policy, and to a rethinking of this policy.**

Fig. 1

Is France a reliable partner in the field of...?

Percentage answers to the question "Do you think that, in general, France is a reliable partner in these different areas?"





The study presented in this report was carried out between June 2023 and April 2024 by means of a quantitative survey (470 people interviewed face-to-face) and a qualitative one, by conducting ten focus groups in six countries: one group in Niger (June 2023), two in Cameroon (December 2023), one in Benin (February 2024), three in Ivory Coast (December 2023, January and April 2024), one in Chad (March 2024) and two in Gabon (February and March 2024) ⁰¹

The political situation in Niger after the coup d'Etat of July 2023, with the issue of relations with France becoming extremely sensitive, meant that the quantitative survey could not be deployed there as initially planned **[Fig. 2]**. The qualitative workshops, generally made up of 5 or 6 people, were co-facilitated by a representative of the country's TLP coalition and an academic or member of a research center ⁰². The approach was intended to be inclusive and cooperative, to "do research together on a divisive subject" **[cf. chapitre 1]**.

A first bias in the results of the study naturally stems from the selection of the sample, composed exclusively of activists and associative or trade union militants identified by the national TLP coalitions. Nevertheless, this selection is fairly representative of the national activist scene. Moreover, although the research was initiated by TLP, more than a third are not members of the network's member organizations. Women are under-represented (a quarter of respondents), as is generally the case in the militant world, while over four-fifths of respondents declare a higher level of education. The panel is thus made up of an intellectual "militant elite", mainly male, with a higher-than-average social status - 11%, however, declare themselves to be unemployed. The panel questioned, both in the quantitative survey and in the qualitative interviews, makes no claim to represent "African opinion".

The specificity of the panel is not without impact on the answers given: over and above the differences in appreciation resulting from the respondent's country of residence, the statistical modelling carried out on the sample shows, for example, that a higher level of education is associated with a more critical view of the state of democracy, that being a man reduces the positive appreciation of the army's interventions in political life, and that the respondent's membership of an organization significantly reduces his or her confidence in African heads of state. Gender is a significant bias in respondents' perceptions of African

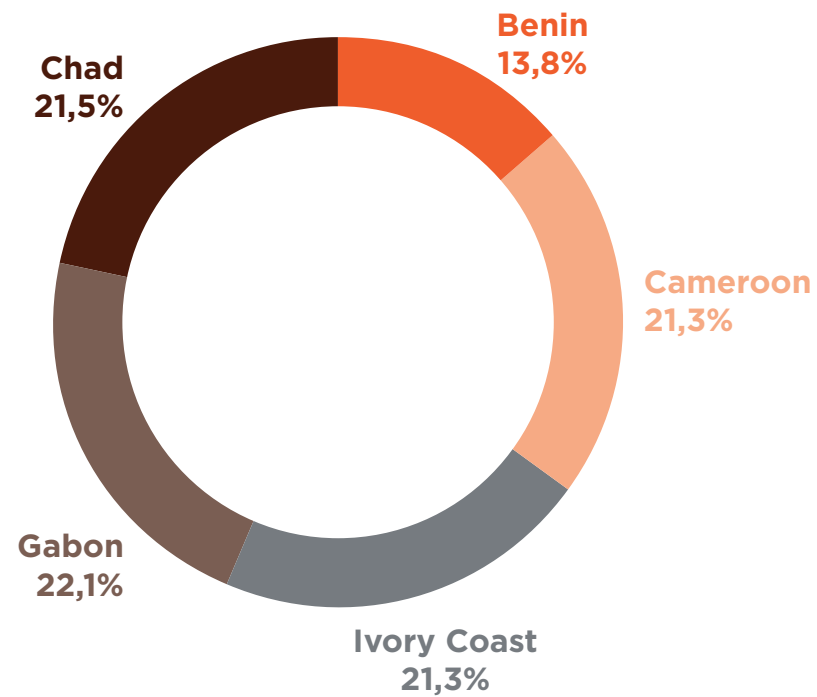
and non-African leaders, while the nature of activist involvement (in a trade union, human rights organization, etc.) has very little impact on the nature of responses.

The same questionnaire **[appendix 1]** and interview grid **[appendix 2]** were deployed in the various countries, but over a period of several months marked by numerous political and military events, a period of several months marked by numerous political and military events. The most significant of these were, of course, the coups d'Etat in Niger (July 2023) and Gabon (August 2023), the standoff between the new authorities in Niger and the French authorities, marked by the hasty departure of Barkhane troops and the French ambassador, and the political crisis in Senegal in 2023 and the first quarter of 2024. All of these events are likely to have a significant influence on participants' perceptions, and to introduce biases into their responses depending on the date of the interview **[see chapter 7 in particular]**. Naturally, there were some obvious gaps in the composition of the questionnaire, which was already very time-consuming to administer: for example, there was no question to enable respondents to situate themselves in relation to ideological and political references, or information on their personal practices and representations of external relations (where would you go to study, seek medical treatment, rebuild your life, etc.).

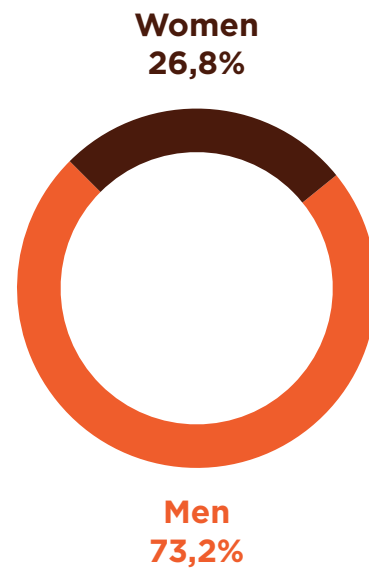
Fig. 2

Main characteristics of the quantitative survey panel (470 respondents)

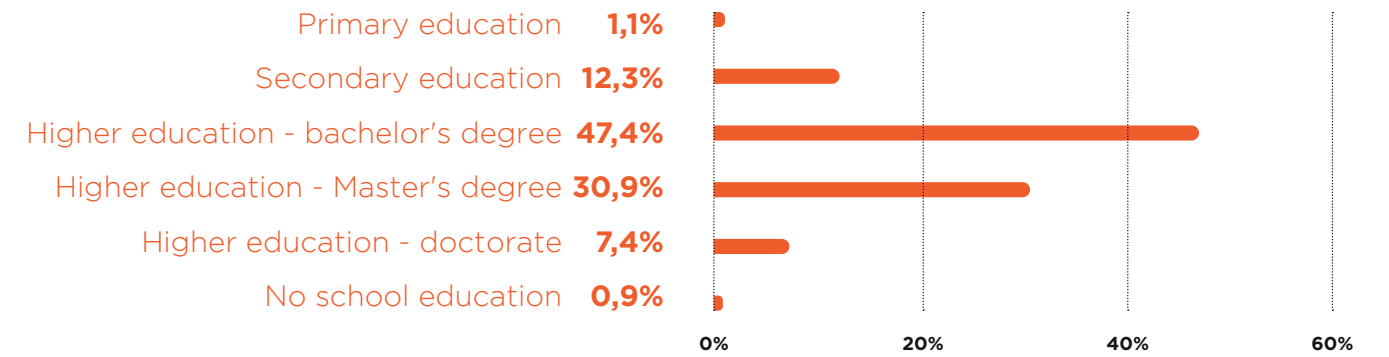
Country of residence



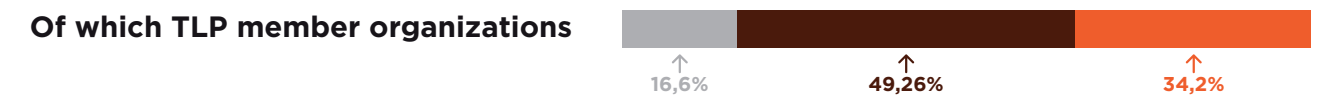
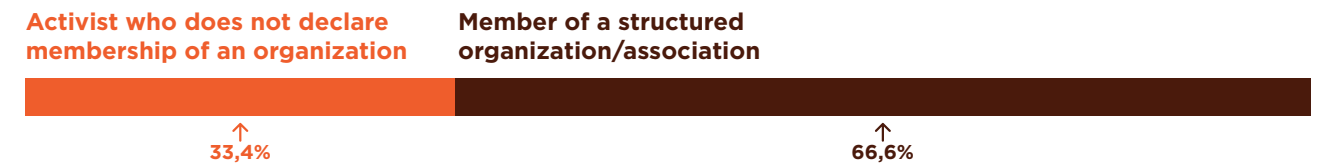
Gender



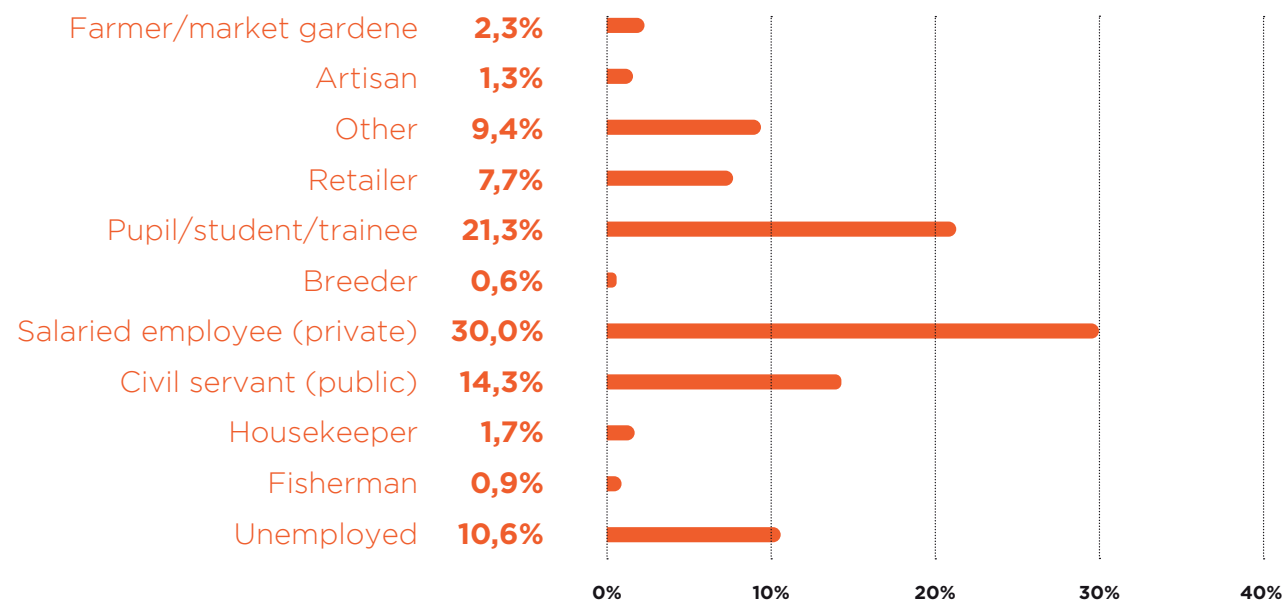
Study level



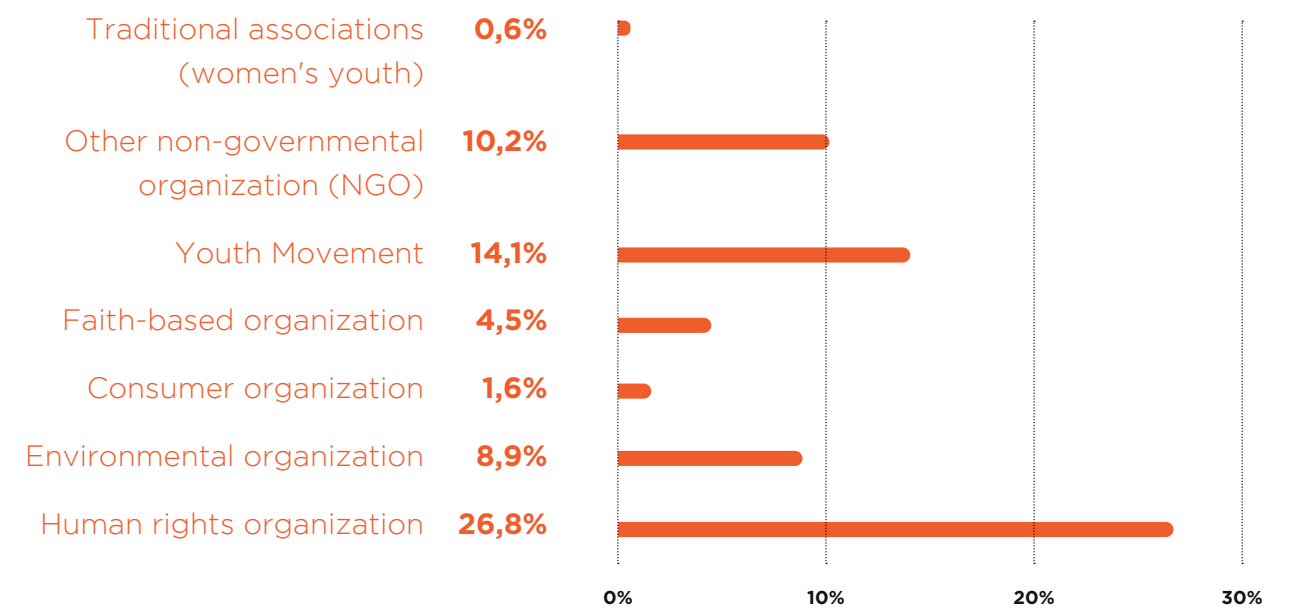
Commitment



Socio-professional categories



Of which types of organization



"Anti-French sentiment": researching together on a divisive subject



Demonstration in support of political opponent Maurice Kamto. Credit: Maurice Kamto Facebook account

Since the coup d'Etat in Mali on May 24, 2021 - the third since the beginning of the conflict in the country - the issue of rejection of France's policy in Africa, or "anti-French sentiment" to use the accepted media term, has become a subject of interest beyond militant or academic circles. The departure of French armed forces from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and public demonstrations against the French presence not only in the Sahel but also in Senegal and Chad, remind those who still doubt that **France-Africa relations have reached a breaking point. The status quo is no longer an option.**

This rejection of the former colonial power's African policy is part of a broader movement of tensions surrounding decolonization and the persistence of coloniality in relations between the North(s) and the South(s). But as Martin Mourre points out in an article on the history of "feelings" (anti-French and others) in Africa, this question "is probably an epiphenomenon of greater concern to French politicians than to African populations - if there were a feeling to be dealt with as a priority today in the Sahel, linked to the security situation, it would probably be fear. [...] The expression "anti-French sentiment", as has already been said, is a curious one. Perhaps, to get a better grasp of it, we should reverse the terms and ask whether there is such a thing as anti-African sentiment in France. The many studies on systemic racism certainly answer yes. One of the challenges for French decision-makers who are therefore concerned about these African feelings is probably first to understand these French feelings linked to the African continent"⁰³.

What emerges from our exchanges over many years with citizens•nes africain•es, c'est **the profound desire to be sovereign•es, to determine the course of their history. The continent aspires to profound change in the face of situations of major social injustice.** This aspiration to break with the past, to turn the table upside down, even to start from scratch, concerns the academic field as much as the associative field. Tournons La Page movement has been plagued by these questions, to the point of creating deep dissensus within the network on fundamental issues for a pro-democracy movement: the relationship with forms of power; the consideration of international geopolitics; Western (and French) domination over Africa and within the movement itself, etc. Against a backdrop of polarized debates, exchanges were difficult. It was out of this tense situation that TLP came up with the idea of reflecting on what the rejection of French politics and the virulence of criticism of France were teaching us. Eager to pursue the cross-fertilization of expertise between researchers, activists, political decision-makers and journalists from Africa and France, TLP members wished to provoke a debate of ideas, open a space for dialogue and publish works to enlighten political decision-making and nurture advocacy to build new relations between France and Africa⁰⁴. This is how the International Secretariat came to work with researchers from The Center of International Studies (CERI) at Sciences Po Paris, who have been companions of the movement for many years.

The alliance between TLP and CERI, initiated in 2014, has always been a fruitful one. On the face of it, however, it wasn't self-evident. Getting members of citizen movements and international solidarity organizations to work with academics from one of France's most prestigious institutions is a daring marriage, but one that has always worked on the expression of well-understood mutual interests: on the one hand, researchers eager to work on the subjects of social and citizen mobilizations with the first•es concernées•es; on the other, activists wishing to bring their struggles, experiences and knowledge into spaces of power and legitimacy, while feeding their analyses and political arguments. From the outset, the people behind this project have been united by the conviction "that action research is a way of building democracy"⁰⁵. Added to this conviction is the belief that the action-research process will empower both



Demonstration against France in N'Djamena, Chad, May 2022.

African and French social movements. This marriage of convictions has led to the organization of colloquia, roundtables, interventions by militant•es with students•es or in-depth exchanges on democratic trajectories or taxation in Africa. It had never before culminated in the production of research lasting several months and the writing of a joint report.

Initial debates within TLP's governing bodies revealed a very strong reluctance on the part of the network's African coalitions⁰⁶ to use the expression "anti-French sentiment". There was, they said, no targeting of French populations or individuals, but a profound questioning of the continuing relations of domination between France and its former colonies. In May 2023, an initial exchange between researchers and activists•es was devoted to this semantics of "anti-French sentiment". For many participants•es, the expression posed a problem: it's a vague concept, readily publicized in the media and widely used by French political figures wishing to discredit the critical word of militant•es on France's policy in Africa. Mobilizing the register of emotion, it would refer, to paraphrase Léopold Sédar Senghor, to a French reason and an African emotion. Using the term français rather than France **the expression implicitly refers to "anti-French racism", while minimizing criticism of the former colonial power and its policies.** Seven-

ral speakers•es, however, stressed the importance of "sentiment" in the political universe and in the construction of collective identities. In line with the work of Chantal Mouffe, it is important to assert that it is also "through affects that adherence to democratic institutions can be created"⁰⁷. "Passion" is a fundamental category for understanding the situation in many African countries, just as it would be for Western countries. Faced with the accumulation of social, economic and historical violence, and the persistence of relations of domination, passionate rejection can be heard. And at the same time, the cultural, political and linguistic attraction - sometimes familial and personal - for France is accompanied by hostility. Ambivalently, the two feed off each other.

The study was no exception to this ambivalence. Intended by activists to deconstruct the dominant discourse on "anti-French sentiment", it was also perceived as a "top-down" study project, driven by TLP's European organizations rather than its African members, tinged with neo-colonialism, aiming to understand their discourse in order to better instrumentalize it. Often criticized for the time and energy it required, when it didn't necessarily correspond to the current priorities of African coalitions, it nevertheless, on a voluntary basis, mobilized hundreds of activists•es in six different countries (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Niger and Chad).

A number of French think-tank publications have focused on the subject in recent months. Firstly, a note from IFRI, written by Thierry Vircoulon and Alain Antil⁰⁸, then an issue of *Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, published by IRIS in April 2024⁰⁹. These analyses are of high quality, but they are not based on any survey mechanism that gives a voice to the first is concerned•es¹⁰. Our desire for joint research between Sciences Po and TLP is based precisely on the shared observation that this African voice has been erased from too many studies on relations between France and Africa. Foreign policy, and even more so African policy, is written and enunciated, not only without the French citizens but even more without African citizens. The difficulty here was to construct an action-research process that did not rely, once again, on the extractivism of knowledge, epistemologies... and words. Undoubtedly, we did not entirely succeed.

Consciously and unconsciously, we have reproduced the logic of domination: a predominantly French, male editorial team imposing the pace and objectives from Paris. African researchers executed more than to build the device. Our efforts to overcome and correct

these asymmetries were, as is often the case, smashed against everyday routines and the top-down operation of the international development world. As one participant in the Chad focus group put it to the national researchers mobilized to conduct the interviews: *"Look, you're here with us today, they're the ones who sent you, and when they receive your report, they'll come here and say they're specialists in Chad, whereas you're the one who gave them the information. Personally, I don't understand why we needed to go through all these questions when we know the anti-French sentiment"* [Chad]. In Cameroon, it's the objectives of the project itself that are questioned:

"the activity you're carrying out here is to help the French understand what justifies turning around people they thought were under their control, but who are now escaping them. And they're using this as a pretext to stir up anti-French sentiment. Is there such a thing as anti-French sentiment?" [Cameroon 1]

It has to be said that Tournons La Page, as an international association, has been both a formidable lever and a straitjacket. African members have often criticized requests from the North, without ever taking control of a project they themselves initiated. Some African teams were able to participate in data ana-



Demonstration against the French presence in Mali (2022)

lysis, report writing or proof-reading. Others were unable to do so. Added to this is the time pressure: to meet our deadlines, we are sometimes forced to adopt less participative and inclusive methods.

Finally, a major question arises: is it possible to carry out action research with people located in seven countries and in such different political, economic and social contexts? Doesn't genuine participatory and democratic research depend on territorial anchoring? This work is helping us to invent a way of working together that goes beyond constraints. For us, it was a question of verifying the diversity of points of view and histories of rejection of France. Niger is not Cameroon, Benin is not Gabon in the relationship of militants to France, to political power, to the state's projection on the international stage.

In any case, we have tried, and "to try is to avoid creating impediments where there is possibility, just as to learn to create possibility where we see only impediments"¹¹.



UN Mission in Mali.



What is "anti-French sentiment"?

Protest against French presence in Niger. (2023)

This discussion is normally about anti-French sentiment, they know what they've created and now they want to know if we can still put up with them" [Chad]. This sentence, taken from an exchange between Chadian activists, sums up the tension generated by the expression "anti-French sentiment", widely used by the French media and politicians.

The growing use of this term has been evident since the late 2010s, certainly in connection with the stalemate of French armed forces in the Sahel. In few years, the expression has become a linguistic convenience¹². However, researcher Martin Mourre points out that the use of the epithet "anti-French" was fairly recurrent in the 1940s and 1950s. Coupled with the terms "conducted", "propaganda", "slogans" and "comments", it reflected the concerns of the colonial power and expressed its own perception: "For the colonial political power in West Africa, these terms 'anti' seem to clash with another characterization of African populations, that of being 'loyal'"¹³. A search of the archives of the daily Le Monde illustrates not only the growing use of the expression "anti-French sentiment", but also the long history of manifestations of hostility to France's African policy. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin used the expression during France's armed interventions in the Central African Republic in 1997¹⁴. The terms were used in the same context by Central African lieutenant Parfait Mbaye, for whom "a clear anti-French, and even anti-Western, sentiment is emerging"¹⁵. The same year, two articles on migration in the Maghreb and Mali made reference to this.

During Lionel Jospin's visit to Bamako in December 1997, "a senior Malian official" wrote that "the charter policy is creating anti-French sentiment in French-speaking countries"¹⁶. The expression was not used again in Le Monde until five years later, in seven articles published between October 2002 and November 2004 on the civil war in Ivory Coast. In one of them, the Ivorian President spoke of the rise of "anti-French sentiment", with Laurent Gbagbo asking Ivorians to "leave the French alone"¹⁷. A few months later, the then French Minister for Cooperation, Xavier Darcos, echoed the Ivory Coast President's expression, considering that "the anti-French sentiment aroused by Mr. Gbagbo is relatively recent"¹⁸. The same terms are used in two articles from December 2010 and April 2011 on the post-electoral crisis in Ivory Coast, in which France is intervening. In each case, the expression is used by leading politicians at times of heightened diplomatic tension. "Anti-French sentiment" also appeared in the columns of the French daily in 2006, in connection with Chad and the Front Uni pour le Changement rebellion against the French-backed Idriss Déby Itno. Laona Gong, spokesman for the FUC, believes that "this regime has survived for 16 years only thanks to France. If this support does not stop, it will be difficult not to reach a situation comparable to that of Rwanda or Côte d'Ivoire", he adds, asserting that he "does not want anti-French sentiment to develop"¹⁹. Three years later, in 2009, Le Monde's journalist following the funeral of Gabonese President Omar Bongo and the presence of French President Nicolas Sarkozy expressed concern about "a latent and ambivalent anti-French sentiment, [which] could be instrumentalized in a country gripped by the fear of a political vacuum after forty-one years of the 'Bongo system'"²⁰. In 2015, Le Monde ran the headline "Au Cameroun, la montée d'un sentiment anti-français" during French President François Hollande's visit to Yaoundé. Under the presidency of Emmanuel Macron, the first occurrence is in relation to the Democratic Republic of Congo and a "hostile campaign on social networks". At issue was the alleged ambiguity of French diplomacy towards President Joseph Kabila, who was widely contested by the street at the time²¹. From 2019 onwards, thirteen articles almost exclusively concerning Sahelian countries use the expression "anti-French sentiment".

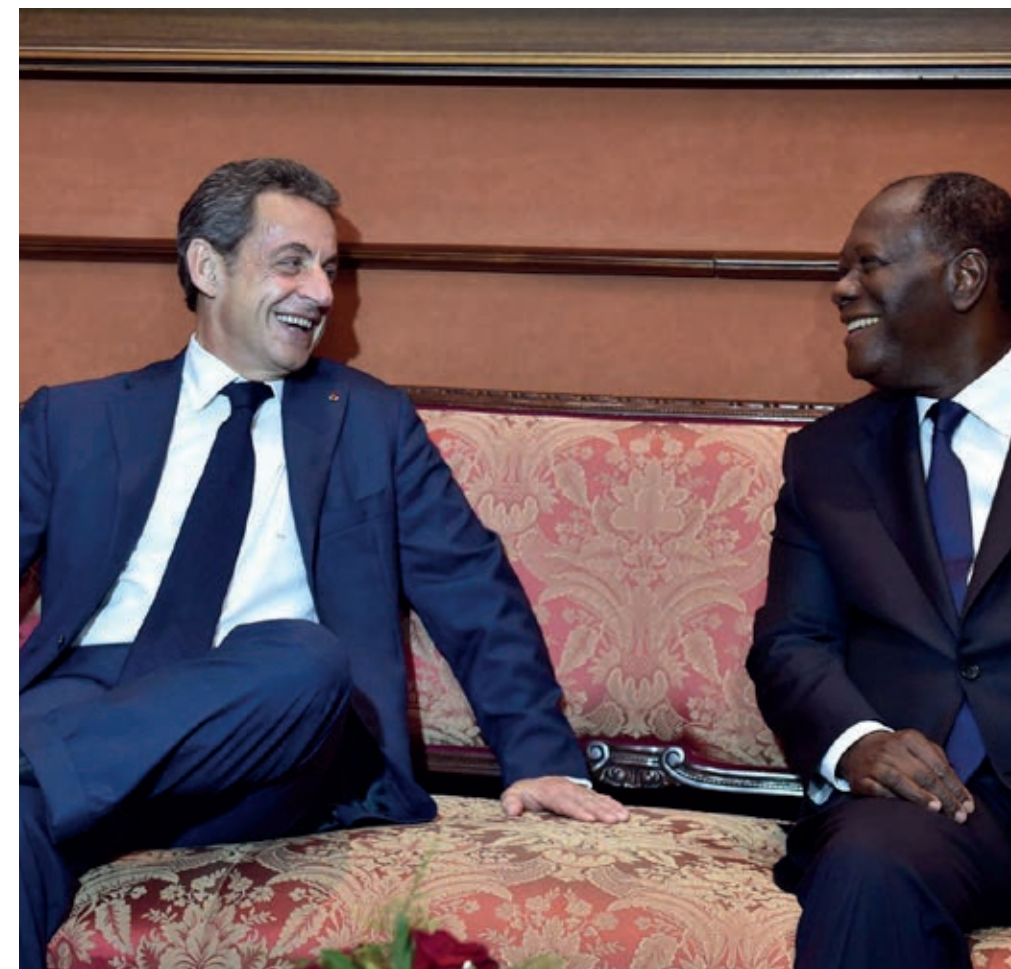
French media framing therefore plays an important role and is regularly referred to in the workshops as a distorting mirror: "The French

media do a bit too much. That's it. They try to... keep the attention on them. [...]. We just feel that France [does] a bit too much in... in our politics, in our lives. So we have the right to shout about how fed up we are. That's all" [Côte d'Ivoire 2]. For others, in a kind of reversal of the "fake news" stigma, it's even an explicit strategy of disinformation on the part of the French media:

"It's normal for these media to talk like this. Everyone knows that the French lie through their media. They never tell the truth about their actions on the ground."

That's why they talk about anti-French sentiment" [Ivory Coast 2].

These comments reflect a deep-seated anger with the French political elites, but also with the African elites: "Yes, we hate the French. If they don't change the way they do politics with us, we'll never have them in our hearts" [Ivory Coast 1]. But it's not the visibility of critical remarks against France, as in the Sahel, that makes them so deep-rooted in society. **Some countries, often perceived as less hostile to French policy on the continent, are also plagued by deep-seated, latent rejection:** "It has to be said that anti-French sentiment is very strong in Gabon, but it... we'll say it's latent. In other words, there hasn't been much expression, but it's latent, because in the Gabonese mentality, when it comes to electoral fraud, people think that it's France that's committing fraud. So there is this feeling" [Gabon 1].



Nicolas Sarkozy and Alassane Ouattara during an official visit to Ivory Coast in March 2016. © Elysée

Fig. 3

How, in one word, would you characterize the relationship between your country and France?

Cloud of words given in response to the quantitative survey question: "How, in one word, would you characterize the relationship between your country and France?"



This comment, made in Gabon, is another reminder of the historical depth of the rejection of France’s African policy. The fact that this rejection of French state policy is rooted in history, and in specific facts, is echoed in many of the workshops: “The feeling is not [...] for the French. It’s about the policies they established before independence, and through which they led our leaders at that time to be able to sign these various contracts against us, which we denounce today through our various scientific and other contributions” [Cameroon 1]. In Gabon, “there is this resentment, which dates back to 1964, you know, the episodes, the French army...The coup d’Etat of 1964 left some traces” [Gabon]. Criticism of France is part of a collective, political and systemic logic: “when we say ‘anti-French sentiment’, it’s as if Africans hold a grudge against these French individuals. For me, it’s not that. Rather, it’s a rejection of a system” [Benin]. While Emmanuel Macron claimed back in 2017 to be “from a generation that did not experience colonial Africa” but “Mandela’s victory over apartheid”, you can’t erase the traces of history with speeches alone. The virtual absence of references to colonial violence in the discussions, even in a country like Cameroon, shows that **rejection of France’s African policy is rooted, above all, in very contemporary realities.**

The use of the term “sentiment”, referring to affect in politics, would tend to make criticism of France irrational. Indeed, it is with (counter) communication, a “transformational agenda” and “public diplomacy” that the French state intends to respond to the virulent criticism of its action and presence on the African continent. And yet, it is the facts and the reason that lead to a rejection of France’s African policy: “But for people who have understood relations, they know very well. They’re not talking about this relationship between the French and Africans, but [about] this relationship between Africa and French policy in Africa. That’s what they’re talking about” [Niger]. The sentimental dimension is not rejected, however, not least as a reminder that strong cultural and personal ties exist between “French” and “Africans”: “Cameroonians are in love with French culture, with history itself. They love that history. They love the French art of living” [Cameroon 2].

Finally, the rejection of the expression “anti-French sentiment” is unanimous. For those interviewed, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between criticism of the French state or French decision-makers, and the relationship with French citizens. “We’re not the ones saying it! We’re not against France. The proof is that there are a lot of French people in Ivory Coast. We ourselves are in their country. That’s all there is to it. We just denounce their... excessive interference in our politics. Because we’re patriots. What they wouldn’t like us to do in their country, they mustn’t do in ours. That’s all” [Ivory Coast 1]. The use of the expression “anti-French sentiment” should therefore be banned: “There isn’t even an anti-French sentiment, it’s an anti-Françafrique sentiment that I’ve been developing for many years now, it’s a sentiment against France’s unhealthy policy in Africa” [Chad].

In a nutshell, they criticize the French political system for being out of touch with its citizens: “We don’t have an anti-French problem. [The problem] is French politics back home. We know that politics is a handful of people, individuals who have crystallized a certain number of interests that they preserve and defend. They are the ones who harm us. So, it’s “the Élysée that has a problem with Africans”. [Ivory Coast 2]. With xenophobic parties on the rise in Europe, one participant wonders: “I think that today there is more anti-black, anti-African sentiment in France, than anti-French sentiment in Cotonou. White people, the French [and] the Belgians, whom I know best, [...] hate black people, much more than we do [we hate white people, even] after a thousand studies to prove it” [Benin]. And while physical violence against racialized people in France has been widely documented²², one participant recalls: “I have yet to see a French person in the street who has been attacked by a Chadian” [Chad].

“French army,
out of our
countries!”

● 03



Barkhane operation in Mali © Ministère des Armées



Emmanuel Macron visits a military base in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), December 2019.
© Élysée

Against the backdrop of the end of Operation Barkhane, the - forced - departure of French forces from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and continuing jihadist attacks, security issues and the challenge of foreign military intervention featured prominently in the discussions. These issues were tackled in different ways in different countries, with Niger and Chad taking a leading role, Ivory Coast and Benin to a lesser extent, where the question of jihadist incursions along the northern border preoccupied participants, and Gabon and Cameroon being more distant. When the focus groups were organized, French contingents were present in four of the six study countries (Ivory Coast, Gabon, Niger and Chad) - Niger had not yet asked for the departure of French troops - and rumors of a secret French base in northern Benin made their way to the Cotonou workshop. These specific contexts, like the history of French military operations in these countries,

sometimes translate into different positions. However, the overwhelming majority (85%) of respondents to the quantitative survey agree that France's military influence is important or very important in their country²⁵. Only Cameroon was slightly behind, at 62%.

The French intervention in the Sahel is widely perceived as a failure, as one Gabonese participant put it graphically: *"The real problem with these intervention missions is how long they last. You get the impression that at the start they're greeted with glee. It's a bit like coups d'Etat too, in that we applaud them. And then, it's a marriage that goes horribly wrong"* [Gabon 1]. Some participants, notably in Côte d'Ivoire, wondered: if French troops *"hadn't been there [in northern Mali], who knows what might have happened? Maybe the terrorists would have reached Bamako! Because the Malians asked for help from France and other African countries"* [Ivory Coast 1]. And *"even if you don't like the hare, you have to admit that it runs fast. France's presence in these various states is helping to stabilize the security situation"* [Côte d'Ivoire 2]. However, the prevailing opinion among the panels is that the deployment of French troops, and more ge-

nerally external military interventions, do not contribute to resolving the conflict and, on the contrary, contribute to the deterioration of the security situation. *"In most cases where France has been present, we have not seen stability. In the Central African Republic, Mali and Burkina Faso, the answer is obvious just by mentioning these examples"* [Gabon 2]. We are witnessing *"a generalized 'warmongering' in these zones where France is present. We have permanent wars"* [Cameroon 2]. Or again:

"Never in Africa, from colonization to the present day, have I seen [a country] where France has intervened in an African conflict and resolved it definitively. In the history of conflicts, I have never seen". [Niger]

A Nigerian panelist drew a parallel with the situation in Afghanistan: *"Why did Kabul fall? Quite simply because the elite or Western leaders bet on corrupt leaders to the detriment of the people, and naturally, they're going to lose. And it's the same mistake that's being made here in the Sahel, mainly in the central Sahel, in the face of this crisis"* [Niger]. It was in this country's panel that the rejection of the French military presence was most strongly asserted, in the harshest terms, in a workshop held a month before the military coup of July 2023, accompanied by demonstrations organized to demand the withdrawal of French troops. We are victims of an invasion today," *said one participant. Why do I call it invasion and occupation? These are [foreign] forces that have been installed by our dictatorial rulers*" [Niger]. *"We are being conquered by foreign powers"* [Niger].

Another added:

"We categorically reject the presence of these forces, because their presence has done nothing to improve the situation. On the contrary, it has deteriorated [...]. [...]. Are they really there to make us feel safe, or are they there to create chaos?" [Niger].

These positions are in line with those of numerous Nigerien civil society organizations, including Tournons La Page Niger, which for many years has been calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Niger.

Generally speaking, the participants did not question the principle of an essentially security-based response to the Sahelian conflict - the prospect of political negotiations was not mentioned. But **they do question the reasons for such a stalemate, which has given rise to a number of widely-shared theories on the networks.** *"How can we understand [that despite an] international force dispatched to help re-establish the territorial integrity of a country, bandits occupy this country for ten years, without [it] being able to clear them out?"* [Ivory Coast 1]. Some suggest a hidden agenda and complicity with *"terrorists"*, claiming that *"French soldiers support the jihadists and take advantage of the fact that the latter sow [disorder] to plunder resources"* [Ivory Coast 1]. We are also astonished by the sophisticated weaponry available to jihadist groups: *"How do you explain that these people can have a certain amount of weaponry that is not at their level? It means they are supported"* [Gabon].

The episode of the French army's recapture of Kidal in January 2013, which restricted Malian troops' access to the historic town of Tuareg insurgents, is repeatedly cited as an example of duplicity on the part of the French authorities or, at the very least, a serious infringement of Mali's sovereignty. As for Western support for Ukraine, many panellists saw it as demonstrating the limits of French - and, more broadly, Western - commitment to Africa, in a kind of *"double standard"* of military support: unlimited when it comes to a Euro-

pean state, more limited when it comes to an African country. So, "why so much armament in Ukraine, but not in Africa? Even in terms of surface area, Africa exceeds Ukraine. Why so much mobilization of resources towards Ukraine?" [Niger].

Finally,

"if the technology were transferred, if these [armies] brought in the technology they needed, there would be no terrorism in the Sahel. There is already a lack of will, which contributes to the spread of terrorism". [Niger]

Depending on the country, and sometimes within panels from the same country, views were divided as to whether African countries could meet security challenges on their own. For one participant from Gabon, "given that [...] armies [do] not have sufficient resources, it is illusory to think that [African] countries, in the current context, are in a position to deal with security issues on their own. [...] You only have to look at what's happening [in the east of the Democratic Republic of the] Congo to understand that to win today's security battles, you need to be accompanied" [Gabon 1]. But **the prevailing view is that African states have the capacity to meet these challenges, provided their armies are properly trained and, above all, equipped.** For "if we ask for a French troop to come here to help us in the north, okay, they succeed, we have peace. They leave. The guys come back again. There they go again. We have to call them back every time. It's not credible. So, instead of necessarily trying to set up a [French military] base in the north of the country, we should be looking to strengthen training, equipment and everything else, to make the army really optimum" [Benin]. This conviction is very strong in Niger, which "on its own, can fight these assailants" [Niger], or in Chad, where "we have seen the bravery [of] the soldiers" [Chad]. But this requires "technical support. To have the tools, the armaments, so [to provide] the armaments that can really help our military or our defense forces to accomplish their missions" [Niger]. From this point of view, **the inability of the West in general, and France in particular, to really respond to the demands of African armies is seen as fur-**

ther proof of their duplicity, or as a means of perpetuating the presence of foreign troops.

For example, "to reinforce or support the Beninese army in the fight against terrorism, the French administration has provided Benin with a certain number of machines [...] but they are not suitable. We've been using the same type of vehicles for years. But in reality, it's not the same thing. It's not what they have, but what they want to give you" [Benin]. This selectivity on the part of European countries when it comes to supplying military equipment is an argument regularly put forward to justify the need to forge partnerships with other countries, in particular Russia, which is reputed to have less stringent standards in this area [see box: "What about the Russians?"].

This rejection of French overseas operations extends equally to permanent French bases,

for a variety of often intertwined reasons. First and foremost, it's a question of sovereignty being flouted, not least because of the largesse granted to stationed troops. Thus "if you read [the decree of June 12, 2014 publishing the treaty establishing a defense partnership between the French Republic and the Republic of Gabon], it is a text that does not take into account the sovereignty of our country. [...]"

When they arrive here, they have such permission to do what they want, when they want, how they want! ". [Gabon 2]

For some, however, "if we take the example of Gabon and Senegal [...], [these bases] contribute in some way to stabilizing the security situation, because there is a deterrent force here, with the necessary material resources" [Gabon 1]. But **they are mainly perceived as protecting the interests of France and the leaders chosen by Paris,** not those of the people. "It's a presence that is there above all to legitimize, to favor, to encourage a well-established system" [Gabon 2]. Thus, "when you have a [French] military base, and you see the distance [that separates it from] the house of [former President Ali] Bongo, it becomes clear very quickly"²⁴ [Gabon 2]. The attitude of French soldiers in 2016, in the aftermath of the proclamation of the rigged results of the Gabonese presidential election²⁵, also bears witness to this. The assault on the headquarters of Ali Bongo's opponent, Jean Ping, by the presidential guard, just a few hundred me-

ters from the French army's Camp de Gaulle, left dozens dead. Because of "the distance between the base and Jean Ping's HQ, they could have intervened to avoid the massacre. But they didn't" [Gabon 2], recalls one participant. Similarly, "when the riots broke out in Port Gentil in 1990, did the French bother to protect the Gabonese as well? They came, took their nationals and left" [Gabon 2].

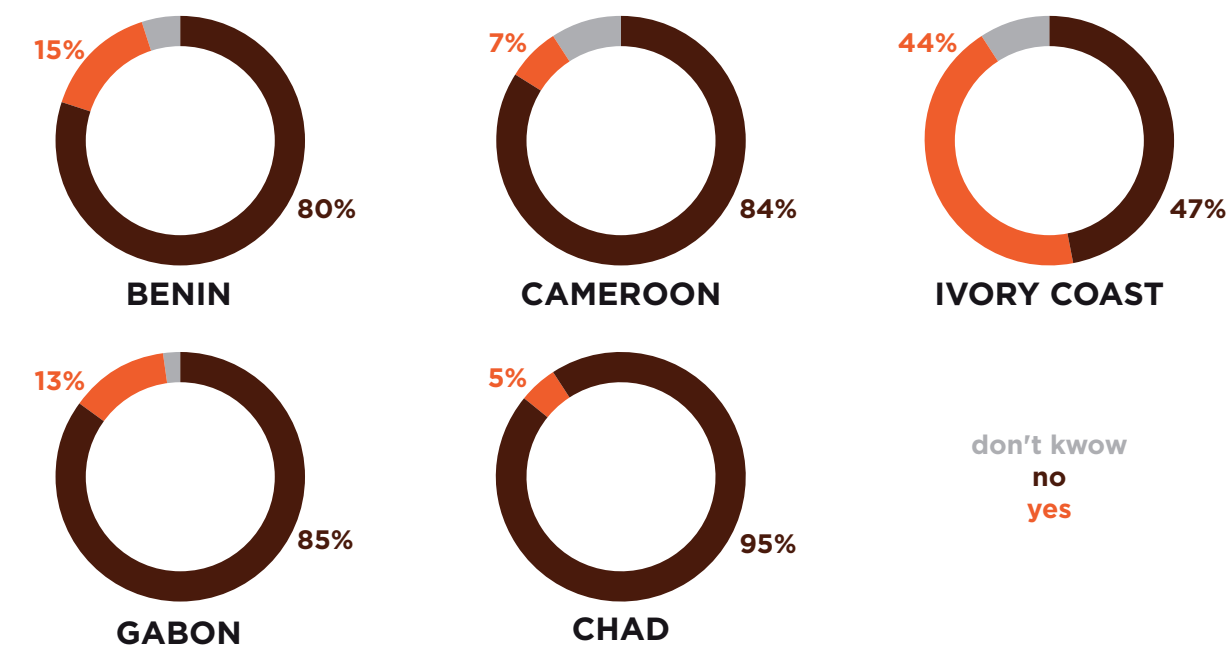
Between the failure of the military intervention in the Sahel, the suspicion of a hidden agenda and the weight of history, grievances have piled up against the French army, which is now almost unanimously opposed. So much so, in fact, that almost 80% of the activists questioned in the quantitative survey consider France to be an unreliable security partner [Fig. 4].

The assessment is more nuanced for Côte d'Ivoire alone, which in 2024 contrasts with the violent rejection of French interference fifteen years earlier²⁶. Finally, the widely shared impression is that France "feeds" on the insecurity of African countries, as summed up by an Ivorian participant: "We've understood that it's these armies that are at the root of our security problems. When they [need] our natural resources, they provoke war" [Ivory Coast 1].

Fig. 4

Do you think that, in general, France is a reliable partner in the security sector?

Rate of negative responses to the question "Do you think that, in general, France is a reliable partner in the security sector?", by country of study



And what about the Russians?

Russia's actions and ambitions are well evoked in the focus group debates. The dominant media and political framing of the Franco-Russian confrontation in Africa was taken up as an efficient reading grid, with a polarization of geopolitical representations of Africa and the world. A panelist from Niger summed it up succinctly: *"In reality, Russian policy is going to completely dislocate French policy in Africa. I don't know whether I'll be alive or dead, but you'll see"* [Niger].

The growing number of agreements with Russia - or the possibility of concluding such agreements in the future - is seen, first and foremost, as the expression of a new-found sovereignty on the part of African countries, with the asserted possibility of freely choosing their partnerships. It is also a question of rebalancing a Franco-African relationship perceived as too exclusive, for if *"France has settled in, [...] a few stronger powers must also settle in"* [Cameroon 2].

"Russia today is a salutary pole, because it is there to counteract the influence of France, which has totally exploited us".

[Cameroon 2]

Thus, nearly 40% of those questioned in the quantitative survey considered that *"diversifying partnerships, particularly with non-Western countries"* was the main measure to be taken to better guarantee the country's sovereignty, ahead of all other proposals. ²⁷

The rapprochement of several countries with Russia is analyzed without naivety. In particular, the risk of replacing one relationship of domination with another is highlighted, as *"you can't say you reject France and then automatically go and join forces with Russia, for example. In other words, you leave the arms of your first executioner and go into the hands of another. Because, some people will tell me that they have the right to work with whoever they want. We agree, some countries work with several countries. But [the military putschists in the Sahel], since their arrival, we've seen that they've kicked out the French, but they're only with the Russians. We haven't yet really seen any contacts with other countries to say they're going to work together. So I think they're still going to be under the thumb of other countries, other major powers in fact"* [Ivory Coast 2]. A fear shared by a participant from Gabon, for whom *"when you see [demonstrators in] West African countries waving Russian flags, it's as if people were just changing masters"* [Gabon 1].

However, the participants reject the French obsession with Russian disinformation as the cause of "anti-French sentiment": *"instead of trying to heal the wound, [...] instead of trying to find solutions so that we no longer talk about anti-French sentiment, they want to find a scapegoat to pin the blame on. [...] That's why they're talking about foreign powers such as Russia, [...] China, the emerging powers. [...] They should rethink their policy and not put this... don't blame the populists or the powers... the other powers competing with France"* [Ivory Coast 2]. And if *"the Russians are behind certain [informational] content, [...] even when we come [to this conclusion], we still have to admit that there are facts"* [Benin]. In other words, Russian propaganda feeds on the errors of France's African policy, but is not the cause of them. Also noteworthy is the scant

attention paid to the Wagner group. This paramilitary group is assimilated to the Russian authorities and is not perceived as a specific threat to human rights, or at least not enough of a threat to invite itself into the debates. **In many ways, Russia is presented as the antithesis of France.**

***The latter has "lost Mali, [Burkina], and I'm sure it won't stop there. And why is that? Because the Russians have come up with the opposite of France. I think they've taken a good look at French policy. And they're doing the opposite, radically"*.** [Niger]

Moscow does not, of course, have the same colonial past as Paris. So, *"the contempt of the colonial governor who hits people, who massacres people, that's not the Russians! When the Blacks were deported from here, taken to America, they were mistreated, killed, chained up. But there were no Russians"* [Benin]. Russia is not equated with a predatory power. Above all, it is perceived as a security partner capable of making up for Western shortcomings, without interfering in the internal affairs of countries: *"What makes Africans wave the Russian flag today is in relation to security and decision-making in countries. They think that the Russians who come here will guarantee our peace"* [Chad]. *"It's on the security front that people think they can help us, because they have a whole arsenal of warfare to help us keep our sovereignty. That's why the military are obliged to ally themselves with other powers"* [Chad]. The juntas' discourse on Russia's unconditional aid is gaining ground, as evidenced by the exchanges within the Beninese group: *"I followed the interview given by the President [of Burkina Faso, Ibrahim]*

Traoré to Mr. Alain Foka a few weeks ago," recounts one participant. He said that [when you buy] arms from France or the Europeans, they're the ones who really decide what they want to give you. So you go to buy, but they don't sell you what you want, [and] you buy what they want. On the other hand, they are currently buying these weapons from Russia, and [Ibrahim Traoré] says: 95% of what they are buying is what they want" [Benin]. *The argument of restrictive Western policies on arms sales or embargoes imposed on states facing security challenges is regularly put forward, notably for the Central African Republic: "the very reason why Russia went to the Central African Republic was because they [the Central African authorities] denounced [the fact] that their arms order had been blocked"* [Niger].

This extreme polarization between France and Russia, supported by both Paris and Moscow, is reflected in the quantitative survey of trust in non-African leaders. Vladimir Putin is by far the most trusted head of state, while Emmanuel Macron is by far the least trusted **[see box "Vladimir Putin, partner of sovereignty"]**.

Predatory France



Patrice Talon and Emmanuel Macron at Élysée Palace (2021). © Élysée

Contestation of France's economic interests in Africa is nothing new, but it has gained renewed vigor in the last decade. We'll recall, in particular, the high-profile rallies against the CFA franc in Dakar and Cotonou, in September 2017, the "Auchan get out" mobilizations denouncing this French multinational's growing stranglehold on retail in Senegal²⁸ or, in the same country, the riots that targeted French businesses during the mobilizations against the arrest of Ousmane Sonko, in March 2021. So it's hardly surprising that these issues figured prominently in the focus group discussions. Indeed, for all the panelists, **the economy is a key dimension of sovereignty** and "true sovereignty, somewhere, [...] is economic. [...] We are truly sovereign when we manage our resources. And all the debates about the CFA franc, about mining contracts, all that, that's when people realize that sovereignty has been lost" [Gabon 1].

In reality,

"today, it's the multinationals that are doing France's influencing work [...], because most of the relationships and networks [...] are forged there". [Gabon 1]

Participants generally point to a worsening economic context, the "high cost of living, both in terms of housing and food" [Côte d'Ivoire 1], "rising food prices" [Cameroon 2] or difficulties in accessing basic services: "the real Niger, the deep Niger, even today when I'm talking to you, doesn't even have access to drinking water. [...] As I speak to you now, there is no electricity, even a simple healthcare service is not for them" [Niger]. In Cameroon, the economic situation is seen to be the result of options taken under the diktat of international financial institutions in the 1980s and 1990s, which translated into "deflation of the civil service", "wage cuts on two occasions" and "the policy

of privatization". The role of French companies is dissected in the light of this difficult economic context.

Quantitative surveys often overestimate the real influence of French companies in particular sectors of African economies [Fig. 5]. However, **in both panels and surveys, the questioning of French multinationals fairly reflects the real weight of these companies in the economy of the country** [Fig. 6], which is not very significant in Benin - "In terms of French companies, specifically, their weight in the economy is not very great" [Benin] -, limited to a few sectors in Chad (notably public works) or Niger (uranium mining), or, on the contrary, omnipresent in Côte d'Ivoire where, "on the national level, everything you see as companies, they belong to France. In the end, nothing belongs to us" [Côte d'Ivoire 1]. It is undoubtedly in Gabon, where over two-thirds of respondents consider France to have a very strong economic influence, that this stranglehold is most strongly felt. A view

shared by all focus group participants in this country, for whom "information [...] is managed by France, because when you look at [the printer] Multipresse or [the newspaper] l'Union, it's French; you have the food industry, Sigalli-Yoplait, it's French; you have in mining, Eramet and everything else, it's French; you have Setrag, which operates the Transgabonais [railroad], it's French" [Gabon 2]. "We've got Eramet, we've got Total, we've even got the [Castel] breweries, Bolloré for example [for] ports in Africa, there's CMA-CGM..." [Gabon 1]. "You only have to look at the stores where we do our shopping [...], they're all French products. I'm talking about what we consume, the consumption of basic necessities" [Gabon 1].

So it's in the economic sphere that France ap-

Fig. 5

Do France dominate these sectors?

Percentage answers to the question "In your opinion, are these [economic] sectors under French domination in your country?"

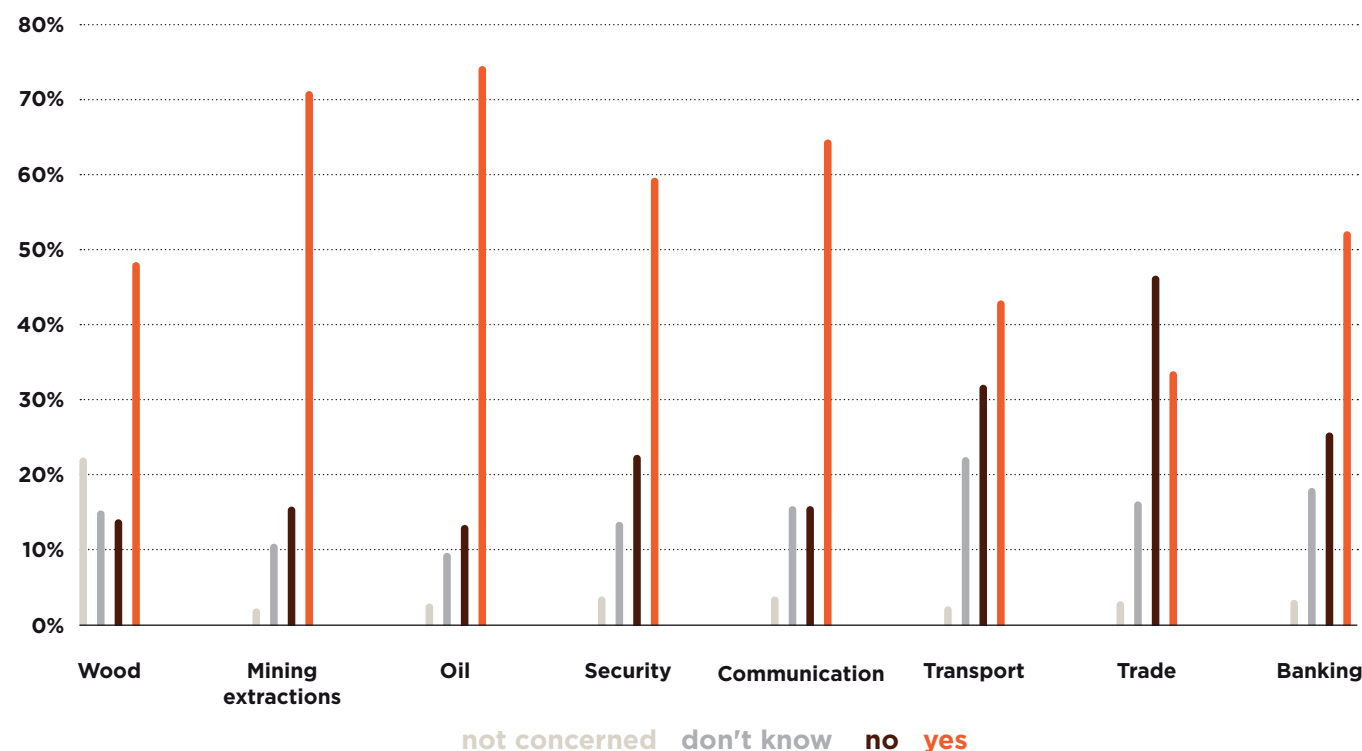
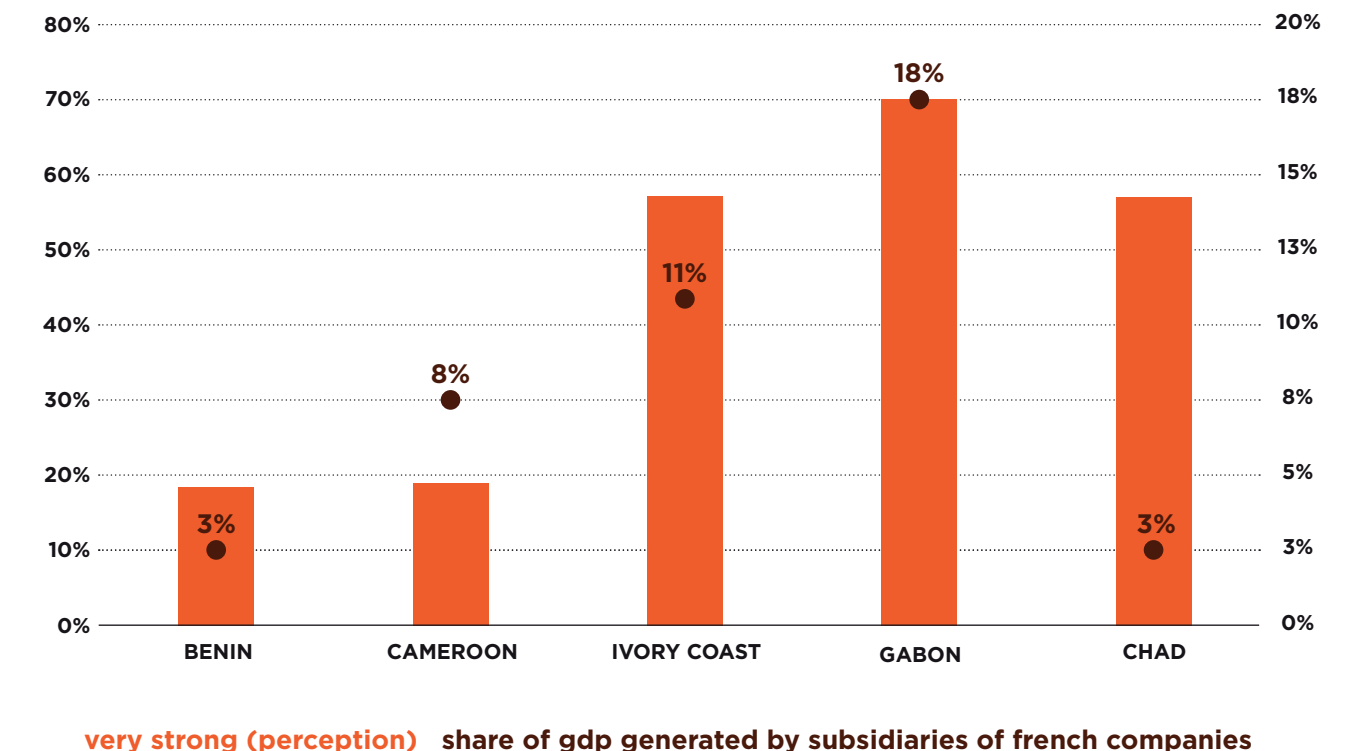


Fig. 6

France's economic influence

"Very important" response rate to the question "In your opinion, what is France's economic influence on your country?", by study country (left-hand scale) and weight of subsidiaries of French companies in each country's economy (right-hand scale, average sales 2018-2020 as a percentage of GDP, according to Eurostat Outward FATS).



pears to be the least reliable partner for the activists interviewed [Fig. 1]. The actions of its companies are associated with the plundering of natural resources, particularly uranium in Niger, where "at one time we were the second largest producer of certain minerals. The most expensive in the world. And the monopoly of this exploitation belongs to France. But how did that help us develop? I can't see any positive aspects" [Niger]. The bitterness is all the greater given that French extractive companies, like those of other countries, often fail to demonstrate the utmost transparency²⁹: "mining agreements, so-called leonine agreements, perhaps we should start by exposing them to the general public" [Niger]. Similarly, "when it comes to oil and mining, we don't actually know how much is being produced. It's not the Gabonese who export, so we have no control over that" [Gabon 1]. Finally, "our raw materials leave here and come back to us at a high price, they impose Western consumption on us and with that, we can't get started" [Chad].

History comes into the discussion, with reminders that "we have seen Perenco³⁰ support wars, we have seen Elf support wars in Congo-Brazzaville [...]. We've seen Bolloré here in Gabon, we've seen what Bolloré does" [Gabon 1]. French companies are seen as making no lasting contribution to the country's development - "they produce to exploit the Cameroonians, and to leave them totally crumpled, finished. [...] All they do is take their profits, go away and leave. So for me, the impact of French companies in the construction of Cameroon is zero" [Cameroon 2]. Although they are dominant in the satellite television sector, with Canal+ - "I don't even understand why it's only Bolloré that can have contracts and accreditations" [Cameroon 2] - or in telephony, with Orange, the prices charged are deemed "exorbitant" [Cameroon 2]. Above all, **they are accused of colluding with corrupt local authorities**, as in Chad, where, according to one panelist, "these companies (notably Satom)³¹ are political instruments, and our instability is also due to the presence of these companies. When they don't have access to many markets, they find bridges. Today, the world is run by economic operators, and it's not for nothing that when someone wants to be President, they go and talk to these people, because they are the big lobbies" [Chad]. The same is true in Gabon, where some people feel that

"the role of French companies is to serve politicians, not the people. Everything happens between them and the politicians"

[Gabon 2]

While conceding that there are sometimes "companies that do their job well, but unfortunately the money is diverted [by those in power] for something else. That too is a reality" [Gabon 2].

However virulent, the comments are not without nuance: in Cameroon, Gabon or Ivory Coast, French companies are not considered to be the worst employers

the presence of trade unionists on the panels undoubtedly contributes to a more marked attention to working conditions and employment - and plundering is not the prerogative of these multinationals alone. Thus, for one Ivorian participant, "in terms of labor law, it has to be said that French companies are more respectful of Ivorian workers' rights" [Ivory Coast 1]. For another, "it's a positive asset for Côte d'Ivoire because it creates a lot of jobs. And above all, these French companies respect human rights and declare [workers] to the CNPS [Caisse nationale de prévoyance sociale]. They give you your rights when you work, unlike other foreign companies who don't do that. [...] On this point alone, French companies have a very positive impact on the Ivory Coast's economy" [Ivory Coast 2]. A point of view shared by several Cameroonian participants: "Overall, when French companies, in particular [those active in] public works, built infrastructure here, I appreciated the quality on two levels: the quality of the work - I'm not a technician, so I can't say much - but above all the treatment of the personnel. And as my predecessor said, the salaries, the mention but one thing, are of better quality" [Cameroon 2]. Others underline, in a more anecdotal way, the role of corporate foundations: "There's the building of schools, hospitals.

There's the improvement of people's living conditions. There's the fight against discrimination. They do a lot of things through these foundations" [Ivory Coast 2]. For some, international competition may have contributed to the positioning of French companies, which "have been making efforts for some time. [...] They are making efforts, perhaps because they are aware of the very heavy liabilities. I've noticed a lot of efforts in terms of CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility]. Maybe they're also trying to stand out" [Gabon 2]. For others, on the contrary, this competition contributes to the deterioration of employment conditions: "Faced with Chinese competition, French companies have degraded this treatment by using Cameroonian subcontractors, so they are not accountable for the way they treat staff. Wage levels have fallen, and so on and so forth. That's a step backwards by France, by French companies, who have found it easy to respond to China's pettiness" [Cameroon 2].

Generally speaking, this criticism of French companies is part of a critique of globalization, trade liberalization and the stranglehold of multinationals, whether French, Chinese or Lebanese. In the words of one Chadian participant: "Whether they are French or Chinese, they are corrupt and treat many in their own way, so that we do not benefit rationally from our resources" [Chad]. In Gabon, the Singaporean multinational Olam, which has a strong presence in the country, is also singled out for criticism: "Olam is destroying the environment. [It] has moved out of agribusiness and found itself managing airports and ports. It's an octopus, with known affinities with power" [Gabon 2]. Finally, "we see that the market is invaded by products that come from outside, preventing [the] people from freeing themselves from the domination and supremacy of foreign markets. We are part of globalization, but [it] does not benefit our societies" [Gabon 1].



Demonstration in Niamey (Niger) against uranium mining by French and foreign companies © Boureima Hama

Putting an end to the CFA franc

Unsurprisingly, **the CFA franc crystallizes debates around French influence, even though the currency is unanimously considered an essential marker of sovereignty.** "The crux of the economy is the currency, it's monetary independence," sums up a participant from Chad. If we don't have our own currency, if we're affiliated to a power that defines the ins and outs of our currency, then we can't flourish economically" [Chad].

Few participants found any "small advantages" [Cameroon 2] in the CFA franc such as "stability, parity with the euro or the dollar" [Ivory Coast 2], fixed parity, or trade facilities between countries in the same currency zone. But the CFA franc is seen, above all, as a vehicle for "unequal exchange", making African economies "weak" and "uncompetitive" [Cameroon]. Thus, "when we go to sell our cocoa, coffee and rubber products on the international market, France takes 95% of our revenue, which it places in the famous operating account. And the day we need money, they give us our own money in the form of loans" [Ivory Coast 1]. Over and above misunderstandings and simplifications of the actual functioning of the convertibility guarantee or the operating account⁵², it is primarily France's "stranglehold" [Cameroon 2] that poses a problem. For many participants, "the CFA is a colonial currency. That's what it is. A currency that still allows the old, the neo-colonialists to have a hold, to have influence over our economy" [Côte d'Ivoire 2]. "We wanted to change the acronym, but we know that as long as you don't have a currency, you're not sovereign" [Cameroon1]⁵³

Focus group participants also pointed to

France's "hypocritical" stance, which asserts that the exit from the CFA franc depends solely on African states, while it is perceived as maneuvering behind the scenes to prevent this from happening. But **in this power struggle with the former colonial power, African leaders are also seen to be working to maintain the CFA franc, in defense of their own interests.**

For one Cameroonian activist, **"the CFA franc is the keystone of the debate on sovereignty in Africa[...]**

They say they can't get out of it, as if there's some kind of grid holding them in. there. [...] It's proof that there's a kind of cession, a concession of sovereignty that the African elite wants. There's an African elite in place that was willing to cede part of its sovereignty to France" [Cameroon 2].

While criticism of the CFA franc is widely shared, views on the way forward are more divergent. One panelist from Benin wondered: "[Should we now] launch a process of tug-of-war with France, the UEMOA [West African Economic and Monetary Union] or another structure to move towards a currency that is a little more sovereign, that will give us the impression that we are a little sovereign?" [Benin]. Here, positions also depend on national contexts and activists' perceptions of the main obstacles to sovereignty. For example, the Chadian respondents to the quantitative survey ranked a change of currency as the first measure to be taken to guarantee the country's sovereignty (21% of those questioned made it their first or second choice). The proposal comes second in Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, third in Cameroon, but only sixth in Gabon, far behind the nationalization of companies that exploit raw materials or the strengthening of the rule of law.

For some, "before taking the decision to break with the CFA, we must first reform it. [...] I think that if we make the right reforms to this currency, until it is no longer a neo-colonialist currency, this currency will be beneficial" [Côte d'Ivoire 2]. The same person adds, however, that "if we've tried a reform that puts us in the neo-colonialist's way again and again, [then] I think we simply have to break with the CFA". For others, "we need to get out, not reform" [Cameroon 2]. Some are in favor of adopting a national currency, since "as long as a people, whoever it may be, does not have a monopoly on its own currency, it is difficult for it to have economic sovereignty" [Niger]. English-speaking countries are given as examples of the possibility of full sovereignty in this area. Nigeria has its own currency. Nigeria has managed to impose a certain value on its currency. Even if, in terms of cost, it's going to be treated as low [...], but Nigeria has its own currency" [Cameroon 2]. Similarly, "doesn't Ghana live? Does it not trade internationally? Does it need the CFA to trade internationally? It's in relation to your economic power that your money has power too" [Ivory Coast 1]. Other panellists, in the same countries, advocate maintaining a regional currency: "It's not necessarily that Niger has its own currency, Mali has its own currency, no, no. It's just that we need a regional currency. For economic harmonization in West Africa, why not in Africa, for the whole continent, [we must] have a single currency" [Niger].

Everyone is well aware of the narrowness of the path out of the CFA franc. As one participant from Cameroon put it: "We need an African currency, in Central Africa. And if we don't agree in Central Africa, let Cameroon have its own currency. Even if it means that Cameroon will negotiate this currency" [Cameroon 2]. But the same activist concludes: "We can no longer remain in a CFA franc that has already been trapped, where Cameroon and Central Africa [have] no control.

We are no longer a French colony, we must have our own currency, which gives us our sovereignty, our desire to be African, our pride in being Cameroonian."





France, democracy, human rights & double standards

April 2023, Goré, southern Chad. French soldiers help Chadian soldiers renovate a border post on the Central African Republic border. © Ministry of Defense

France is often accused of practicing a policy of double standards vis-à-vis African countries. Through its variable-geometry condemnations and lack of coherence in terms of human rights and democracy, it feeds criticism of hypocrisy and cynicism. This criticism has a long history, dating back to the first "democratic conditionalities" set out at the La Baule summit. But it has become even more acute with the twin issues of third presidential terms and putsches, which have elicited varying reactions from Paris.

In the focus groups, Emmanuel Macron's procrastination on respecting constitutional rules was a particular topic of discussion: "Alassane Ouattara had announced to the Ivorian people that he was not going to return to power, and we had taken note of this. [Following] a meeting between Ouattara and Macron, Alassane Ouattara [changed his mind and] ran for a third term. [On the other hand,] Macron has systematically condemned the coup d'état by Assimi Goïta in Mali" [Niger]. Some leaders might play fast and loose with constitutions and the rule of law if they're close to Paris, while others would be infrequent for committing the same crimes: "France didn't agree with the coups d'état that took place in West Africa, but France participated in the coup d'Etat that took place in Chad. They went to install Déby's son. Why this double standard? [Cameroon 1].

Support for Mahamat Idriss Déby's (and previously Idriss Déby Itno's) regime in Chad comes up in every discussion as the very symbol of French duplicity and its explicit support for certain authoritarian regimes: "

"It's a bit complicated to understand France's haste when it saw that Déby père had died. It's a bit difficult to understand their haste to come and install the son. For me, it's clear that France is behind it" [Benin]. The same incomprehension emerges with regard to the putsch in Gabon, which France seems to have come to terms with: *"France has taken a stand in Niger and Mali, saying, 'We don't want coups d'état'. But France has not taken a stand, for example, in Gabon"* [Benin]. Double standards, once again.

The image of Emmanuel Macron sitting next to Mahamat Idriss Déby in fatigues at Idriss Déby Itno's funeral is particularly striking: *"I disapprove of the fact that Macron went to Chad to stand next to Déby, who was being installed under irregular conditions"* [Benin]. France is thus perceived as being close to dictators who support Paris' interests, particularly in Central Africa:

"When France's interests are not threatened, it's as if they become deaf, dumb and even blind. But when interests are threatened, then..." [Gabon]

In other words, *"as long as you meet France's demands, you're a good democrat"* [Ivory Coast 1].



The President of Chad, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, received at the Élysée Palace on February 6, 2023. © Presidency of Chad

For Chadians, the condemnation of French interference is even stronger. Paris continues to make the country its own preserve, a pre-settlement area administered like a colony by a corrupt and violent elite. Thus, "[democracy in Chad] is the power of whoever is chosen by the colonist, because even if we talk about independence, the colonist remains the colonist in deeds" [Chad]. Rejection of the power of the Déby dynasty and criticism of French policy are intrinsically linked in most of the speeches. The advent of a democratic regime requires new independence and genuine decolonization: "You saw Macron's deployment to N'Djamena to put [Mahamat Idriss Déby] in charge of the country, and this way of doing things. Where is sovereignty, where is democracy? It doesn't exist. It's up to us, Chadians, to become the real actors in the struggle" [Chad].

France is also accused of its reluctance to condemn repression and human rights violations in French-speaking African countries, especially when committed by friendly leaders. For the participants, often direct victims of repression as civil society activists, every French silence during an episode of state violence leaves a scar.

In Chad, even when the repression took place in front of the French embassy, there was no question of giving up on the soldier Déby. One panelist recalls that

"in 2001, when Jacqueline [Moudeïna] and many others went to demonstrate in front of the French embassy, it was under France's watch that the police used firearms and tear gas on our mothers. But France said nothing"

[Chad]

In Niger, it is not only support for Mahamadou Issoufou's regime that is criticized, but also the abuses committed by the French army itself in Téra ⁵⁴: "In concrete terms, the international community has turned a blind eye to several blunders committed by the Nigerien government. We know that [the French military] are

complicit with them. Why hasn't the international community reacted? And yet, in how many countries do you kill 5 people and say that there has been a massacre? In how many countries where the population is prevented from demonstrating, are they called dictators? Why not Niger?" [Niger]. The impunity of the Niger regime goes hand in hand with the impunity of the French army that protects it.

France is thus perceived as trampling on universal principles of democracy and respect for human rights. **The failure to respect the red line of term limits enshrined in the constitutions of many African countries is seen as a symbol of the inconsistency and complacency of French governments.** In the words of an Ivorian panelist, "In France, the term of office of the President of the Republic is limited to two. But why do French presidents support

African presidents who serve more than two terms? France flouts democracy when it comes to us Africans" [Ivory Coast 1].

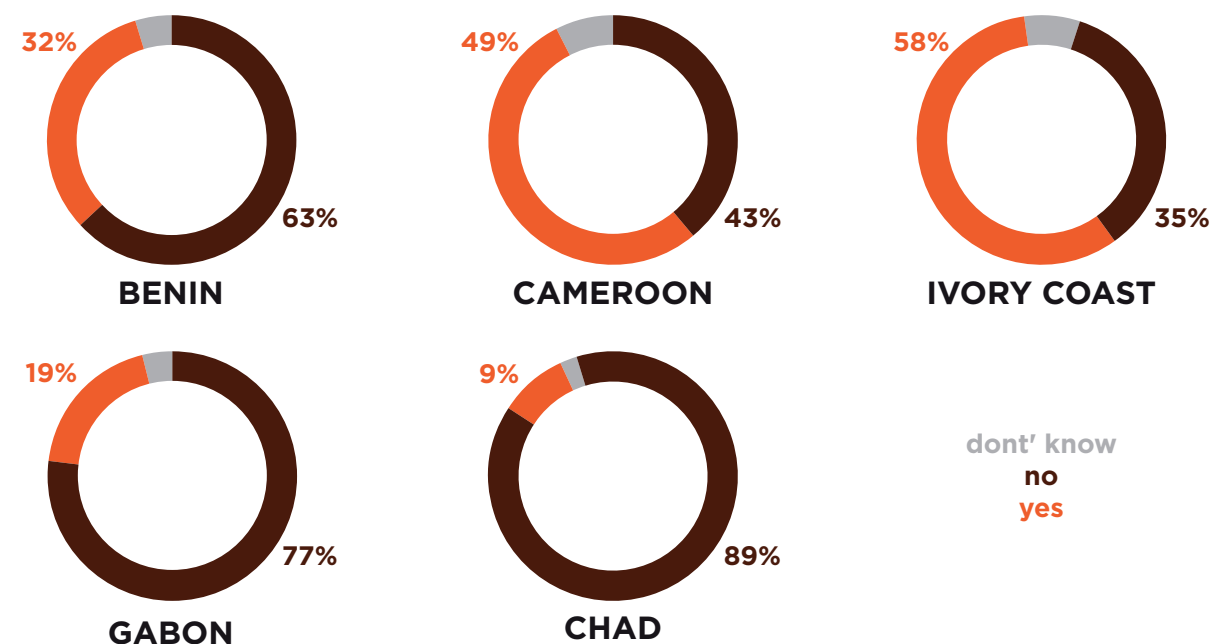
Criticism is all the more vociferous given that the "double standards" of French diplomacy are not a short-term phenomenon, attributable solely to Emmanuel Macron's presidency or to the failure of Barkhane. It is part of a long history, as in Ivory Coast and Gabon. In the first country, "Laurent Gbagbo says 'I won'. The French say he didn't win. They give themselves the means to condemn. But in Gabon, Ali Bongo says 'I won', and even kills people. France says nothing. Variable geometry politics!" [Gabon 2]. The historical and political trajectories of African countries are thus diverted towards authoritarianism by French interference. Thus, "in Africa as a whole, we realize, whether in terms of longevity or the absence of alternation, that the majority are



Fig. 7

Is France a good partner in the defence of human rights?

Rate of positive responses to the question "Do you think France is a reliable partner in the human rights defense sectors?"



[former] French colonies. [...] The link is quickly made between France's place in these states, in other words France's role, its relations with the governments, and this reality. People tend to make this connection, which is not wrong" [Gabon 1].

In the eyes of the participants, this double-standard foreign policy, and its ponderous silences on numerous issues, removes all credit from France for calling for a return to constitutional order in Mali, Burkina Faso or Niger. For some, it's simply *"the fact that she's speaking out that bothers me. [...] For me, wanting France to take a stand, to react to what is happening to us, is proof that we refuse to take responsibility for what is happening to us"* [Benin].

The quantitative survey also reveals a strong geographical polarization of perceptions. In Chad and Gabon, where France's support for the authoritarian Déby and Bongo regimes is explicit, a very large majority of respondents (89% and 77% respectively) do not consider France to be a reliable partner on human rights issues [Fig. 7]. Activists in Ivory Coast and Cameroon are more nuanced, with 58% and



Supporters of political opponent Maurice Kamto in Cameroon (2018). Source: Maurice Kamto's Facebook account

49% of respondents respectively giving credit to French diplomacy in this area. But **overall, the quantitative survey portrays the French state as unreliable in almost all areas**, including the defense of democracy, with three quarters of respondents not trusting it in this respect. Paris's actions are slightly better perceived in technical fields, including health, and to a lesser extent in education, which shows that an ambitious development aid policy and more assertive support for human rights organizations could undoubtedly have a positive impact on France's image, particularly among civil society actors.

Naturally, **the lack of attention to human rights in Africa is not seen as the sole fault of France, but of the West in general.** A Gabonese panelist recalls that *"whether it was France or the United States, nobody came to our rescue. The coup de grâce that happened on August 30 was the Gabonese's doing! Today, we're being asked to let [the former First Lady] go free. But when the Gabonese cried out, nobody came to our rescue. The Gabonese were suffocated, Gabon was on the verge of exploding"* [Gabon]. Beyond Africa, the double standard is a Western policy, as shown by the reactions to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Israel's crimes against humanity in Gaza: *"You can see France's position in the Ukraine affair in relation to what's happening in Israel. Africans recognize themselves in what the Palestinians are going through. So there too, we say to ourselves, the [Westerners] have given billions, tanks, [they have] condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, [but they] do nothing about what's happening in Palestine"* [Benin].

From paternalism to racism: France's African policy mirrors its domestic policy

In August 2023, at a conference of ambassadors, Emmanuel Macron returned to the tensions with the military regime in Niger, calling for a posture *"free of paternalism and weakness"*³⁵. However, it has to be said that this paternalism still sticks to the skin of France, its leaders - starting with the President - and ambassadors. One participant summed up France's carelessness and contempt for African citizens. *"France has spat in the air and doesn't want to get it back in the face". And then there's too much contempt," adds another, "too much contempt in relations, a lot of contempt..."* [Niger]. [Niger]. This contempt is coupled with paternalism and arrogance, culminating in Emmanuel Macron's summoning of African leaders to the Pau summit in January 2020, to chastise them on the ineffectiveness of the fight against armed groups, but above all to demand an end to the demonstrations against Barkhane's presence.

Added to this perception of contempt is the acute perception of racism in French society and its consequences for the country's image: *"I think that today there is more anti-black, anti-African feeling in France, than anti-French feeling in Cotonou. Not all, but the whites, the French and the Belgians I know [...] hate black people more, much more than we do [hate them], even after a thousand studies to prove it in Africa"* [Benin]. Social networks and the globalization of information play their part in disseminating racist acts, such as these *"videos which show that Africans [in France] are quickly handcuffed"*.

Racism is also experienced, on a daily basis, in French visa policy, perceived as profoundly unfair and a form of racketeering: The biggest French business in Africa and in Benin is the consulate, *"recalls one participant. It's practically 60,000 francs per file, and they get practically 200 a day"* [Benin]. but **it's migration policy in general that is seen as benefiting only the elite:** *"In France, yesterday, they passed a law against immigration that requires young foreigners, young Africans who are going to study there, to pay a deposit that will supposedly be reimbursed. Given our low purchasing power, they want to open the door to the children of the elites they've installed here. That's how we see this law. The elites who plunder our resources and embezzle our money are going to bail out their children. And France is pursuing a policy of reproducing the positions of power acquired during colonization"* [Cameroon 2]. Racist and imbued with colonial overtones, this policy is profoundly alienating African societies from France. A view shared by Cameroonian intellectual Achille Mbembe, for whom *"the policy of forcibly stemming migration has become [...] a major factor in destabilizing the continent. It is not only unsustainable. It is inhuman"*³⁶.

(Imported) values: the sensitive topic



Adjamé market, Abidjan, Ivory Coast. © Eva Blue (Unsplash)

subjects, while the French language or religion are very rarely mentioned as instruments of cultural domination. **France, the lightning rod of the Western world, is accused of meddling even in the family and private sphere.**

What emerges from these discussions is a form of relativism with regard to certain fundamental rights that are not universal. Among these rights, perceived as Western (or Western-centric) and not transposable to Africa, is the right to choose one's sexual orientation. Homosexuality is thus perceived as "the" imposed value par excellence. A panelist from Gabon underscored the paradox: "The issue of homosexuality in our societies is a source of anger, but it's part of democracy to let an adult choose his or her sexuality. It's part of democracy. It's clear that African countries don't agree on this issue. We also need to think about adapting certain systems of life [...] in our countries. And that's where we'll be able to come up with systems that really fit in with our lives" [Gabon 2]. We see here that the rejection of gender - the anti-gender³⁷ - is sometimes accompanied by doubts or questioning around what French sociologist Éric Fassin defines as "sexual democracy", i.e. "the extension of the democratic domain to sexual questions - that is, the introduction of the values of freedom and equality into a domain previously relegated to private life, kept sheltered from history and politics in a timeless culture, or even nature"³⁸.

The question of "imported values" as opposed to "African values" systematically came up in the workshops as "the sensitive topic" [Gabon 2]. Among these values, it is the way in which democracy is practiced, today modelled on European models understood as universal, that is questioned. While the majority of panelists were involved in social movements and human rights organizations, the democratic system was regularly described as an imported, sometimes imposed, political model [see chapter 7].

Much more virulently, it was the subject of homosexuality, or rather the perception of a Western desire to impose homosexuality on African societies, which, out of the blue - the subject did not figure in the focus-group grid - initiated numerous debates on the family, gender and, more broadly, African society. **For most participants, Africa is alienated by a cultural offensive.** These "imported" or even "imposed" values, which are in the political news, have become extremely sensitive



Adjamé market, Abidjan, Ivory Coast.
© Eva Blue (Unsplash)

For the participants, the vectors that impose this worldview are multiple.

"In every cartoon you see now, there are homosexual scenes. You see that they use every means to be able to harm us, to make us accept. [...]"

Now they're using these channels to put this into our mores, with our children" [Cameroon 1]. "France has [also] infiltrated us through schools and religion. Two levers of influence. [...] They have infiltrated the school book. [...] It's through this that even homosexuality is being promoted in school books. In science textbooks, they've taken it out because of the outcry from parents" [Cameroon 1]. Here, the participants refer to a polemic that reveals current tensions, particularly in Cameroon: in March 2018, the distribution of a new school textbook that dealt with sexuality for middle-schoolers provoked great controversy. "Passages of the book denounced, while assimilating, homosexuality, sodomy and zoophilia - all described as deviant and illegal. Despite its conservative content, the book [caused] controversy. Part of public and political opinion considered that this type of sex education "paved the way for the depravity of morals" and "trivialized pornography"³⁹. Homosexuality, "[a] thing that doesn't even have words in our languages" [Cameroon 2], would be totally exogenous to African societies. Questioned about the (proven) existence of ancient homosexual practices in Africa, a panelist from Benin wondered: "Well, I don't know if the whites are doing what they always do to produce studies to prove that we should continue. I know they're capable of it" [Benin 1].

In what is perceived as a vast Western offensive against "African values", French cultural companies such as Canal+ are particularly singled out: "You see, the French are even imposing homosexuality on us, which is not part of our customs. Can you imagine? Today Canal + has put this... In cartoons, we find homosexuals [...], which means that children have to follow it willingly or by force. These are all things we deplore! [Cameroon 1]. Yet the pay-TV operator is owned by Vincent Bolloré, known for his conservative political positions and active promotion of anti-gender ideas, including in Africa⁴⁰. But Canal+ is not seen as

the only face of cultural imperialism, and national TV channels are also said to be aligned with the West. For example, "when you watch television, especially the first [Ivorian] channel, RTI, they show films that have nothing to do with our culture. They alienate our youth. It's time we presented our culture, in terms of dance, cuisine and civility" [Ivory Coast 1]. Television, which would serve "the invasion of French culture" [Cameroon 2], thrived thanks to the weakness of states and the passivity of African elites: "Obviously we're not totally innocent, because our government isn't developing mechanisms to promote our culture as it should. We're not going to criticize France for selling its culture, but it's up to our governments to develop mechanisms to promote our culture and preserve and protect our values" [Cameroon 2].

However, the principle of French cultural hegemony is a matter of debate. Firstly, because "there is no French specificity, it's all Western. Everything that comes from the West is integrated" [Benin]. Secondly, the consumption of cultural goods has become globalized, and people are now turning their attention to other countries. For example, "80% of Gabonese don't eat French food. [...] French cinema is the least watched in Gabon. Even when it comes to soccer, you'll find that most people in Gabon will be talking about England. [...] On the other hand, for certain generations, like my father's, he refocused everything on France" [Gabon 1].

The issue of moral and cultural interference is also rooted in colonial history "Education programs are totally based on the French curriculum [...]. That's how we've spent all this time telling ourselves about other people's history. Saying that my great-grandparent is Gallic, that he's not [descended] from Yoko's Pygmies" [Cameroon 2]. The participants feel that they are subject to a form of dispossession of school narratives and curricula, which are said to be out of step with needs and realities: "In educational terms, all curricula are decided elsewhere. We know very well that all the programs taught in Niger do not correspond to the socio-cultural evolution of the Niger population. Programs manufactured elsewhere have been imposed, and others date back to colonization. It never spoke to our realities" [Niger].

Thus, **the former colonizer, and more broadly the West, would degrade, impose or pervert heteronormative values conceived as authentically African through the imposition of "gender theory" and the defense of sexual minorities. Feminism, homosexuality and birth control form the triptych of insidious "French thinking"**. Feminism is gaining ground here. We don't know how to develop it in our societies, so we think of it as in European societies" [Gabon 1]. Various statements made by French presidents about Africa's demographic growth being too dynamic are not only seen as paternalistic, but also as a desire to impose its power on Africa and decide the fate of Africans: "[Now] they want to sterilize Africa's population

Now [they] want to sterilize our daughters. They are financing programs to say that demography is not good. [...]

It was Sarkozy who said that [...] an African woman should not have such and such a number of children, because we have so many children" [Cameroon 1]. In the same way, polygamy is sometimes defended as an African cultural reality - even though it is practiced very differently across the continent - whereas "French culture imposes on us [to have] only one man and one woman, therefore monogamous. They don't want our polygamy" [Cameroon 2]. Even science can be a tool of falsification and domination: "When I talk about knowledge, I'm talking about scientific knowledge. So they [Westerners] study everything before they finally come and impose something on us. And it's always a function of our cultures, our systems and values" [Niger].

For most of those who took part in the panels and spoke on the subject, there are fundamentally distinct relationships to family, gender and sexuality between Westerners and Africans ⁴¹.

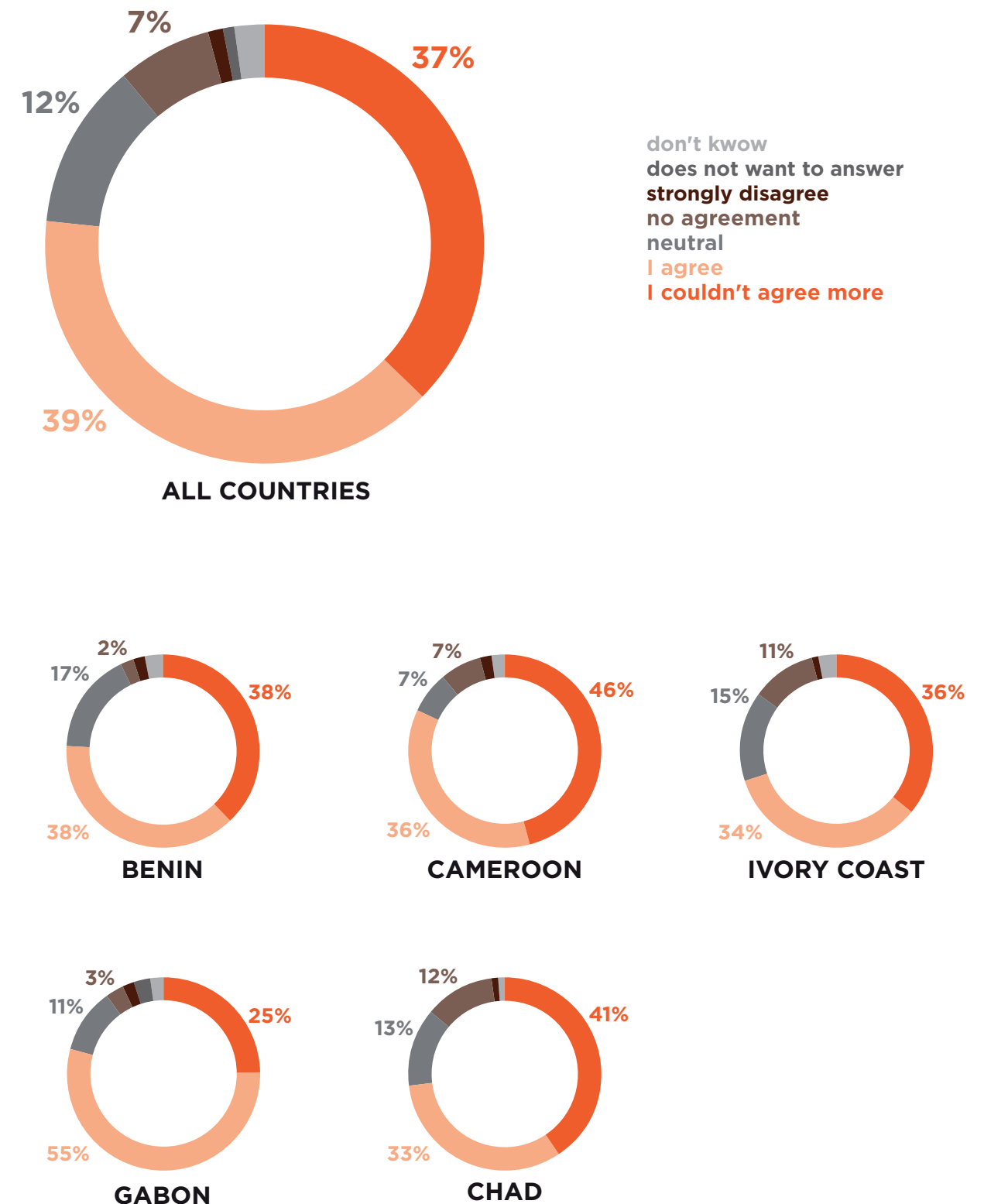
Underpinned by talk of an "authentic African identity", these perceived "African" values are put forward as weapons with which to stand up to the West. Over three-quarters of respondents to the quantitative survey, for example, believe that "African values" are preferable to "Western values" [Fig. 8]. In Cameroon and Gabon, approval levels rise to 82% and 80% respectively.

Cultural values become an issue of sovereignty, and this is undoubtedly one of the reasons why many members of social and civic movements embrace this discourse. The rejection of imperialism - in this case, French imperialism - crystallizes around "African values". **Gender, homosexuality, the family and "tradition" are referents and signifiers that situate each individual in his or her relationship with France.** For an activist, making free choices for oneself and one's country also means "respecting one's culture, values and ancestral values. He must preserve what he can preserve" [Niger].

Fig. 8

"African values" are preferable to "Western values" ?

Percentage answers to the question "Do you agree with the following statement: 'African values are preferable to Western values?'", by country of study.



Democratic fatigue and saving coups d'Etat



General Brice Oligui Nguema, President of the Transition in Gabon, during a military parade for Independence Day in Libreville on August 17th, 2024. Source: Brice Oligui Nguema's Facebook account

The current political and military situation on the African continent has repeatedly impacted on this study. When the study was launched, military juntas were already firmly installed at the helm of Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. In October 2020, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara was re-elected for a controversial third term. Five months later, on the death of President Idriss Déby Itno, his son Mahamat Idriss Déby, with the explicit support of France, took over as head of Chad. In this country, the repression of demonstrations organized in October 2022 to protest against the two-year extension of the transition led to dozens of deaths, hundreds of injuries and thousands of arrests⁴².

The first focus group was held in Niamey, Niger, at the beginning of June 2023. Barely two months later, the President of Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, was overthrown by the army. At the end of August, before investigations and workshops could resume, a coup d'état brought General Brice Oligui Nguema to power in Gabon, following a disputed presidential election. The political situation in Gabon was turned upside down. In Chad, the tensions that followed the assassination of political opponent Yaya Dillo, just a few days before the N'Djamena focus group, raised fears that it might not be possible to carry out the investigation in that country. Finally, the political crisis that shook Senegal after Macky Sall announced the postponement of the presidential election to February 2024 naturally featured in the discussions at the workshops in Benin, Ivory Coast and Gabon.

In such a context, the focus group discussions were extremely rich, with a wide range of positions. They add nuance to the results of the quantitative survey, naturally formatted by the administration of a questionnaire designed at the start of the process and subject to the biases of the researchers who developed it.

Beyond questions about democratic norms and values, and a certain ambivalence towards military juntas, it emerges that the vast majority of participants, often human rights activists, remain committed to the fundamental principles of democracy.

On these subjects, the results of the study are largely in line with those of the Afrobarometer 2024⁴³, which documents the evolution of African opinions on governance and democracy. According to this survey, support for democracy is weakening - down 7 percentage points on average across the 30 countries regularly surveyed by the Afrobarometer over the past decade - and more than half of Africans, especially young people, now say they are prepared to tolerate military intervention "when elected leaders abuse their power for their own interests". But two-thirds of those surveyed reject institutionalized military regimes, most (and a growing number) call for government accountability, and a strong majority remain committed to democratic norms such as freedom, elections, pluripartism, the rule of law and checks on presidential power. When Afrobarometer pollsters observe a decline in support for democracy, it is closely linked to a decline in the quality of elections, rising levels of corruption or growing deficiencies in the rule of law.

In our survey, **the assessment of the political situation in each country reflects multiple violations of civil and political rights, which in turn lead to a feeling of regression and a form of "democratic fatigue"**, which, it should be stressed, is far from being specific to sub-Saharan Africa. In the quantitative survey, almost 80% of respondents said they were little or not at all satisfied with the state of democracy in their country, with a slightly higher level of satisfaction in Ivory Coast alone (27% satisfied or very satisfied compared with 53% not or not very satisfied). Four out of five respondents consider non-compliance with the Constitution or infringements of civil and political rights (arbitrary arrests, political trials, etc.) to be major or very major threats to democracy in their country - here, the Ivorian respondents do not stand out - and almost nine out of ten consider this to be the case, too, for corruption. In Gabon, in the specific context of a military transition after 56 years of dynastic rule by the Bongo family, the threat of a coup d'Etat is perceived as less prevalent, with only a small majority (52%) worried about it. Foreign interference is also seen as an important or very important threat by 75% of respondents, and up to 95% in Chad, which stands out from other countries for its more acute perception of threats to democracy.

This deteriorating state of affairs naturally infused the focus group discussions. According to one Cameroonian panellist, the country is witnessing "an upsurge in the repression of public freedoms", with in particular "the imprisonment of hundreds of political activists and detainees, be it those detained in connection with the Anglophone crisis, or those detained in connection with the post-electoral crisis [...].

If we look at the last five years, we can see that Cameroon has plunged into permanent backsliding".

[Cameroon 1]

The same perception of profound democratic backsliding can be found in Ivory Coast, with its clientelist and communitarian excesses, and in Niger, "where freedoms are flouted, notably freedom of expression" and where "even children know that there are things they cannot say" [Niger]. As for Gabon, "elections [have] always [been] rigged. The population is not allowed to express itself. The ballot boxes are stolen! [Democracy cannot express itself! [Gabon 2]. Even Senegal, generally perceived as a democratic reference on the continent, seemed to be sinking into crisis: "Macky Sall calls himself a democrat, we call him a democratically elected president. When you see what he has done to all his opponents, the latest being Ousmane Sonko, and the frustration of Sene-

gal's youth, just because the man wants to stay in power... He has still [...] led to the death of fifteen people please [editor's note: we are then in June 2023]! And you call this person democratic?" [Niger].

These are all situations that call into question democracy, its standards, institutions and values, with appreciably different assessments depending on the country. It is in Chad and Cameroon, which have not seen an alternation of power for decades, that the desire for democracy appears to be strongest, with 61% and 50% of respondents respectively believing that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, compared with 26% and 36% who disagree with this statement [Fig. 9]. Adherence to this principle is much lower in Gabon, with a majority of respondents (53%) disagreeing with this statement - this may be seen here as adherence to a recent coup d'état perceived as liberating - but also in Ivory Coast, where only 30% of respondents perceive democracy as preferable to any other form of government (47% disagree with this statement). The "democratic fatigue" of activists from a country considered a model for West Africa is clearly evident here, but the weight of war and the post-conflict situation no doubt play a part in this distancing from democracy. **The survey also testifies to a very strong desire for efficiency in public action,** with a deep-seated weariness of corruption, embezzlement and clientelism, since 61% of respondents consider efficient government to



Military parade for Independence Day in Libreville on August 17th, 2024. Source: Facebook account of Brice Oligui Nguema

be preferable to democratic government [Fig. 10]. This demand for efficiency is particularly strong in the Central African states of Gabon (72%) and Cameroon (70%), and is in the majority in all the countries surveyed.

Some workshop participants distance themselves from this democratic system, describing it as an "imported" and "imposed" political model, which should be replaced by political management models more in line with local realities. As one panelist from Cameroon put it, "Africa doesn't know democracy, it has to come out. For us, it was the chiefs and power came from the people, and also from the gods, because we believe in the gods and in our ancestors. [...] We had our own system. So their democracy is not ours. But we have to follow them because they know they have us on a leash [...] We have to think about a system that takes our values into account" [Cameroon 1]. Democracy is seen as "a tool that we use, that the West uses, to distract us or to impose certain behaviors on us". Even "the defense of human rights has its limits" [Niger]. Democra-

tic principles and human rights are seen here from a cultural perspective, as the product of specific historical contexts that do not correspond to African "characteristics". Their universality is called into question, on the pretext of their regional, historical and/or Western specificity ⁴⁴ [see chapitre 5].

This position is far from shared by all the panelists. **Most of the participants do not question fundamental democratic principles, but rather the way in which norms and institutions have been imposed on African realities, and even more so a procedural, facade democracy at the service of French interests.** So, "if I take the example of Benin, it's [a] country colonized by France, with a mode of democracy modelled on the French model. Today, in our country, with our realities, are we ready to move in this direction? [...] Are we still going to base ourselves on a model [which] can be said to be imported, or are we going to sit down together and define yet another model, in relation to the experimentation we've had with democracy?" [Benin]. "Today's Western societies want us to understand that it's

their way of applying democracy that's better, that in their society we don't have cases of embezzlement, clientelism and all the rest. But it does exist! I'll take just one case: in Ukraine, they're in the middle of a war, but there are people embezzling money!" [Gabon 2]. Above all, "let's stop trying to boil [democracy] down to elections. I believe that democracy does not only mean elections. Unfortunately, we have the impression that in Niger, democracy is summed up in elections" [Niger]. The same is true of Chad, where "we have a democracy, but it's only a façade. It's true that we have political parties and freedom of expression [...] but in name only, because we can't stand up and say 'no' to our authorities" [Chad]. Finally, "our problem is not alternation at any price. [...] Whose alternation? Of men? Or of the system? It's the systems that need changing, not the men. Because if a French 'sous-préfet' replaces another French 'sous-préfet', the people don't want it" [Cameroon 1].

Fig. 9

Democracy is preferable to any form of government

Percentage responses to the question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements: 'Democracy is preferable to any other form of government'", by country surveyed.

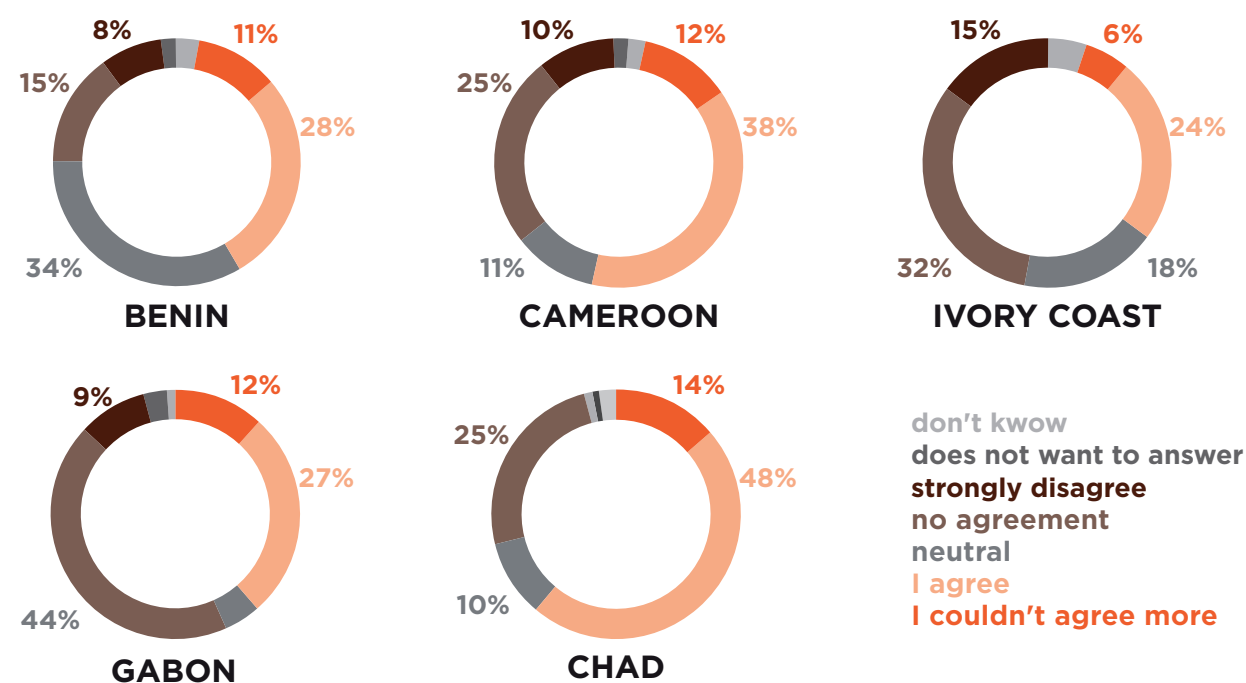
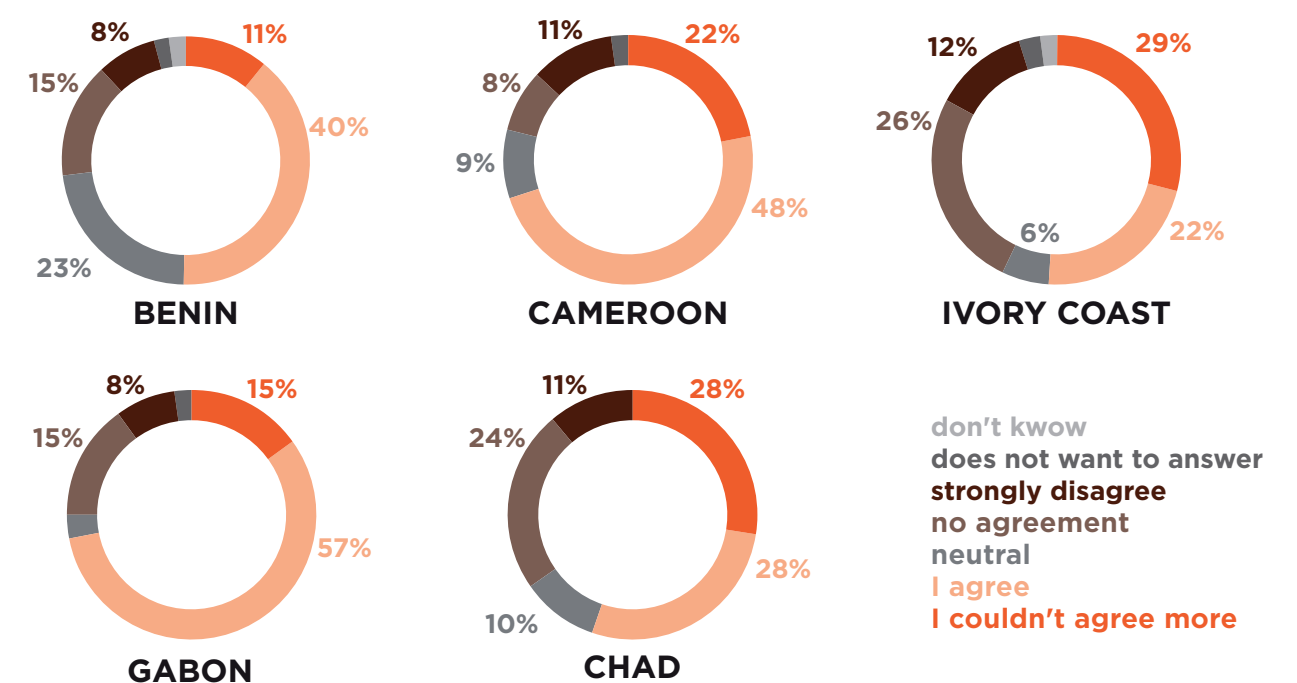


Fig. 10

Efficient government is preferable to democratic government

Percentage responses to the question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements: 'It is better to have an efficient government than a democratic one'", by country surveyed.



Discrediting Africa's regional institutions

Mistrust of African leaders and of French policy in Africa is spilling over into African institutions. And yet, **there is a strong desire for greater regional cooperation, particularly on monetary issues [see chapter 4].** For one panelist from Ivory Coast, "strengthening cooperation between African countries is essential [...]. [If] we take the example of the West, we see that the European Union is stronger than ever. Why is that? Because they are part of a system of regional and sub-regional cooperation between European states. [...] So, if in Africa we have cooperation between African states, this will enable the various African countries to be able, in a small way, to blossom, to lift themselves out of poverty before even having direct cooperation with the West". And he concludes that "better cooperation must be between Africans first" [Ivory Coast 1].

Far from meeting this aspiration, **regional institutions are in turn deemed incapable of guaranteeing freedom of movement** - "at the borders, when a Cameroonian wants to go to Guinea or Gabon, he is treated as if he wanted to go to France" [Cameroon 2] - **under the perfusion of foreign powers** "even the African Union, which is the reference organization, is financed by the European Union" [Ivory Coast 1] - **or instrumentalized by the former colonial power** - "sub-regional institutions like ECOWAS are French instruments" [Cameroon 2]. In other words, there would be "no cooperation between Africans without France sticking its nose in" [Chad]. The condemnations of Sahelian juntas by African regional institutions are seen as the fruit of this instrumentalization, and "we subject you to sanctions because we

absolutely want the 'French sub-prefects' to be in charge of these countries" [Cameroon 1]. Above all, as in the case of French diplomacy, they are criticized for their "double standards in the sub-region" [Benin], with condemnations and pressure of varying degrees with regard to coups d'état or constitutional arrangements. Against this backdrop, the first steps taken by the Association of Sahel States (AES), which brings together Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, are viewed positively by some panelists, for whom it represents a truly sovereign alternative to discredited regional institutions: "The AES has been built. I can't wait for us to create a group of states too! [Cameroon 1]

From this disenchanting panorama of African democracy come arguments to justify recent coups d'Etat, in stalemated political situations or when elected governments no longer respond to security challenges and popular aspirations. The military seizure of power is then "a response to a certain number of concerns that the population had" [Benin], "it's the consequence of bad governance, [...] it's the sign that there was a problem with governance, with democracy" [Cameroon 2]. "If people come out to applaud this kind of thing, it's because, at some point, they were tired of something" [Benin]. In other words, "a coup d'Etat cannot be an absolute evil. In some contexts, it is desirable. [If we take the example of Senegal] we agree that more than three-quarters of the population is against the continuity of Macky Sall. [...] He is stubbornly opposed to the entire Senegalese people, with the exception of a few people whom he maintains for his cause, and we can't wish him anything other than a coup d'état. It's desirable, that's what the people are demanding" [Niger]. Similarly, "whether in Burkina Faso, Mali or Guinea, it's the people's aspiration, [it's] the people who have demanded change" [Niger]. In Gabon, "people see [Brice] Oligui [Nguema] as a liberator" [Gabon 1] and his coup d'Etat as "a coup for freedom". "Ask a people who have lived for several years in a form of servitude what they think of a coup d'état, and believe me, they'll tell you it's the best thing in the world" [Gabon 1].

Support for military putschists is even clearer when it comes to breaking with the former colonial power and defending sovereignty. For one Ivorian participant, "coups in West Africa are justified because it's now that [these] leaders are fighting for true independence" [Côte d'Ivoire 1]. "It's a kind of liberation of the people. [...]

Mali is in the process of freeing the country from the colonial agreements. [...] In Niger, we are denouncing these agreements. [...] When coups d'état happen, they happen like a liberation".

[Cameroon 1]

"African populations [...] were fed up with European interference. [...] These coups d'Etat were caused by the interference of the superpowers in African politics in the sub-region, particularly France" [Ivory Coast 2]. Some par-

ticipants also criticized the media - and the French government - for denouncing military coups d'Etat, while at the same time showing complacency towards "constitutional coups": "tampering with constitutions is [also] a coup d'état, and we don't talk about it enough. [But] better a military coup that takes into account the needs of the people than [to] fiddle with constitutions!" [Cameroon 1].

For some participants, the young Sahelian putschists "have done better than the politicians" [Niger] and represent a hope: "I'll simply take the example [of the head of state] of Burkina Faso, who was very impressive during his speech in Russia. I tell myself that the vision is the same, whether in West Africa or Central Africa. We'd like to see these elders, like the Thomas Sankaras, like the Nelson Mandelas, embodied [in] these young people [...]. I think we have hope of seeing a new Africa!" [Gabon 2]. Juntas are expected to deal with issues of sovereignty and security, where they "play their part in restoring order" [Ivory Coast 1], and many are prepared to let them prove their worth: "I condemn these coups d'état, but I say to myself that if these military leaders think they can do better than the various political players, then we should let them do it and see what they can bring to their various populations" [Ivory Coast 2].

However, support for the coup is far from unanimous. In the quantitative survey, 47% of respondents opposed the intervention of the army to run the country, while 41% considered that certain circumstances could justify it [Fig. 11]. Responses were highly polarized by country, with opposition clearly strongest in Chad (65%), where activists face military rule on a daily basis, and in Ivory Coast (61%). Conversely, in Gabon, support for Brice Oligui Nguema's coup d'état translates into 81% support for the possibility of a military takeover. But here again, the focus groups helped to clarify perceptions: the Gabonese participants were delighted by the fall of Ali Bongo and the role played by the army, but did not place their trust in the military: they "like to present themselves as saviors of the population, of the people, when in reality they are also guilty, if I can put it that way, of all these misfortunes. [...] In most countries, presidents who have held on to power for a long time, who have not wanted to apply democracy as it should be, have been preserved by the military. It is these same soldiers who have often had to fire on the people. [...]

Today, these soldiers say they are the solution. I don't think they're the solution, no, they're not outside what happened". [Gabon 2]

Another participant concurred: "People see [Brice] Oligui [Nguema] as a liberator, which is somewhat legitimate in view of the act. But we often forget that these dictatorships relied on this army. Because, in 2016, if it hadn't been for the army, I don't know how Ali [Bongo] would have managed to stay in power. People often tend to think that the army, which was the dictator's tool of oppression, once that army turns against the dictator, the problem is solved. [...] In reality, is the army a solution?" [Gabon 1]

Far from there being general support for

the principle of military rule, there is, on the whole, a great deal of mistrust about the deep-seated motivations of the new masters. "We understand the coups d'Etat that are taking place, but we don't accept them all that much" [Niger], explains one panellist. With one widely shared fear, that of staying in power beyond the transition periods: "when you see the difficulty that these soldiers have, if you look at most of the military regimes in Africa today, in even respecting the terms of the transitions, you always get the impression that they have hidden agendas. [...] Coup d'Etats are like a new kind of scam. The one in Gabon, for example, could become a model. There were no deaths, no break-ins. If it ever ends in an election in which the military is the candidate, we're going to invent a new model of coup d'état [...] which will be an electoral hold-up perpetrated by the army" [Gabon 1]. Thus, "if we look at history, coups d'état, with a

few exceptions, [...] have not led the country to rebuild itself on democratic lines. Most of the time, people have left under military regimes. [...] You leave a civil dictatorship for a military one" [Gabon 1]. Finally, "when they come, they are applauded; but then they catch the virus of power and they want to stay in power forever" [Ivory Coast 1].

succinctly:

"In truth, when you're drowning, you can even catch a snake...".

[Cameroon 1]

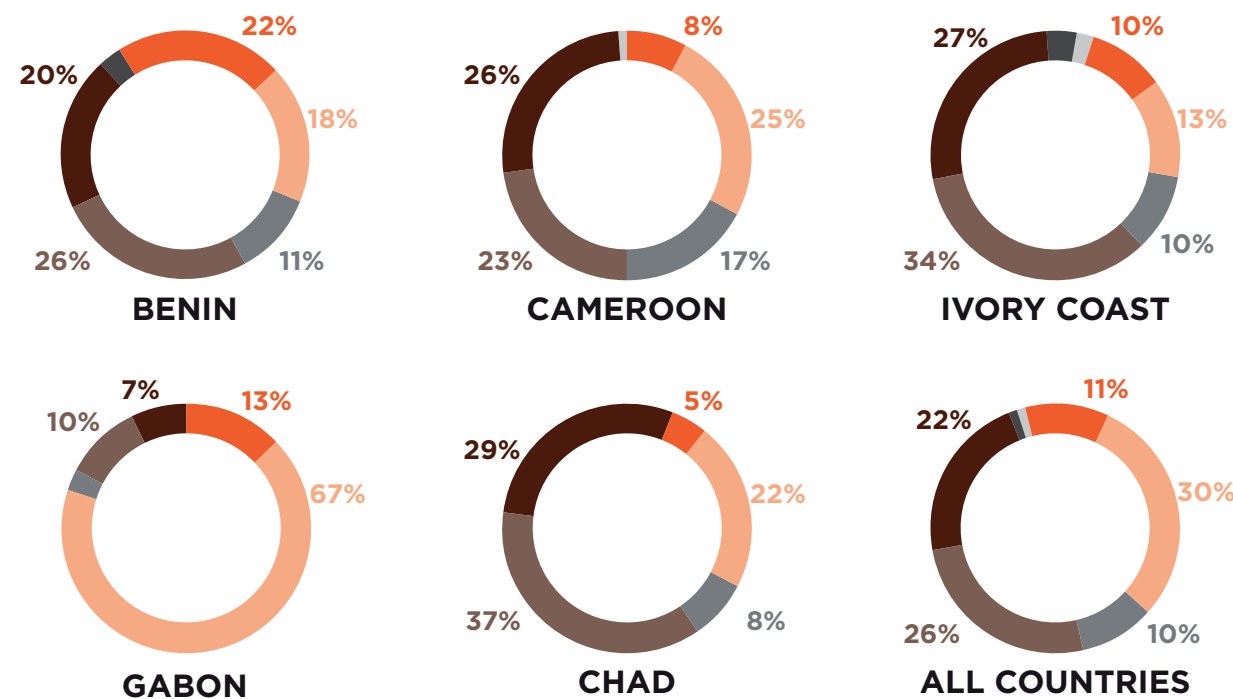
The army is not perceived here as the emanation or instrument of the people. Support for coups d'Etat, when it is expressed, is above all circumstantial support, in which the rejection of French policy in Africa crystallizes representations, rarely support of conviction. In a nutshell, it reflects the failure of pretend democracies.

As one panelist from Cameroon put it

Fig. 11

In certain circumstances, the army must intervene to run the country

Percentage responses to the question "To what extent do you agree with the following propositions: 'In certain circumstances, the army should intervene to run the country'" by country surveyed.

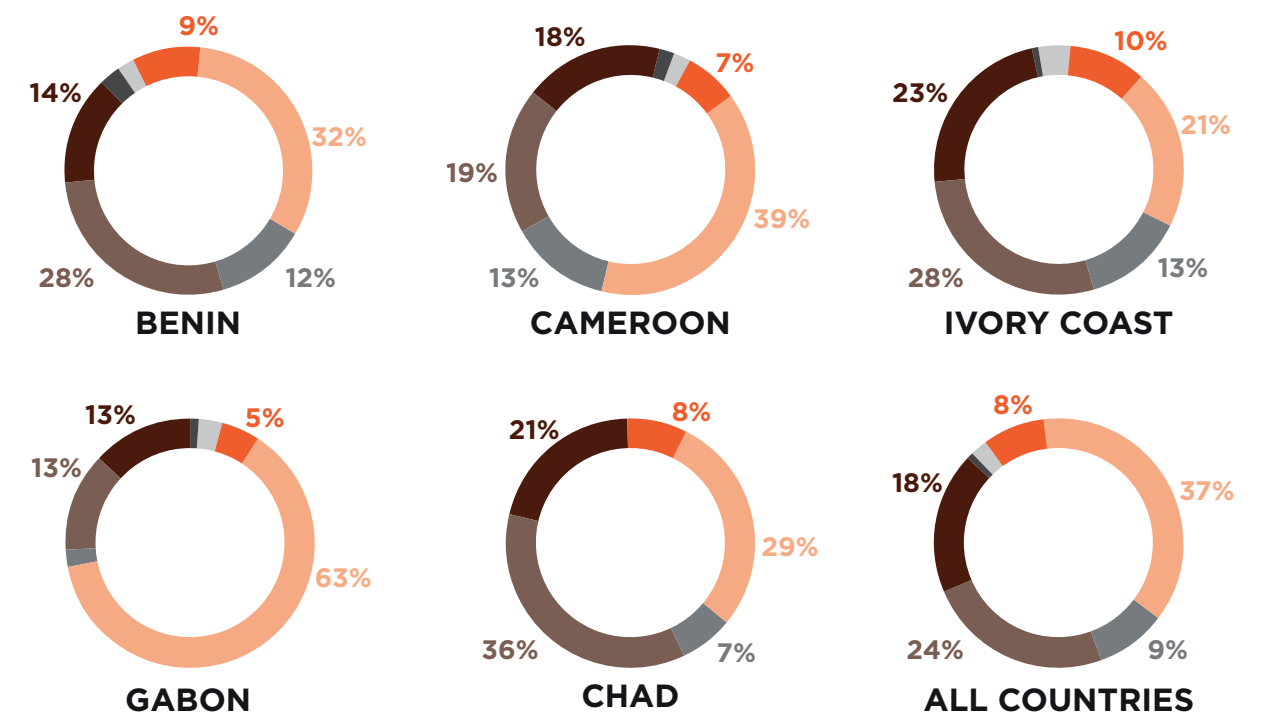


don't know • does not want to answer • strongly disagree
no agreement • neutral • I agree • I couldn't agree more

Fig. 12

In certain circumstances, a non-democratic government may be preferable to a democratic one

Percentage responses to the question "In certain circumstances, a non-democratic government is preferable to a democratic one", by country surveyed.



don't know • does not want to answer • strongly disagree
no agreement • neutral • I agree • I couldn't agree more

Rejection of France, a powerful factor in mistrust of African leaders

The perception of African leaders by respondents to the quantitative survey bears witness to the ambivalence of the activist world with regard to democratic issues [Fig. 13]. Distrust of leaders in one's own country is often highest - which partly explains the low scores of Mahamat Idriss Déby and Alassane Ouattara, leaders of countries included in the scope of this study. Conversely, the heads of state of Mali, Assimi Goïta, Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Traoré, and Rwanda, Paul Kagamé, probably bene-

fit from a confidence bias, as they come from countries where the survey was not deployed. In any case, no African leader really stands out from the pack - the first, Assimi Goïta, inspires confidence in one in five respondents - and current events in Senegal have undoubtedly weighed heavily on respondents' distrust of Macky Sall. More than the ranking of leaders, it is the reasons given for trusting or distrusting them that reveal the concerns of those questioned. Respondents who do not trust

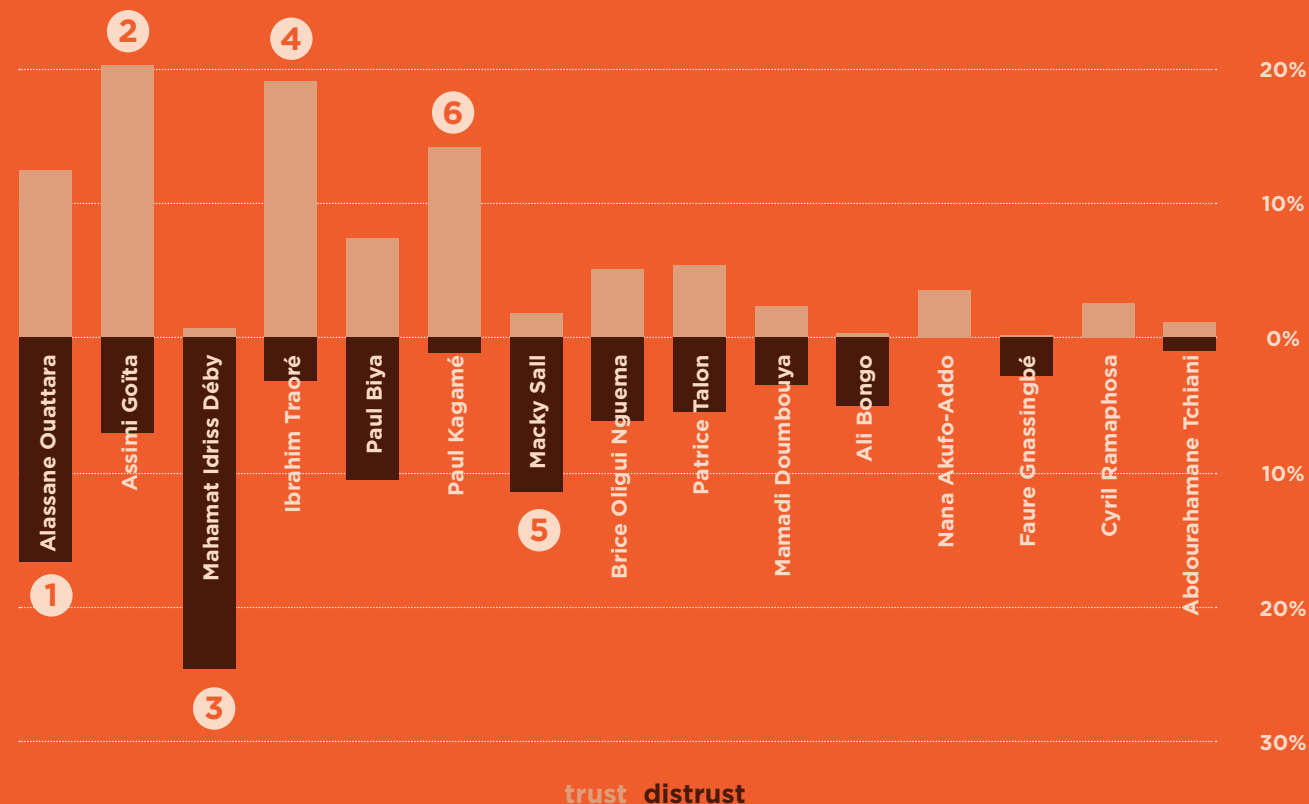
Mahamat Idriss Déby logically blame him for not respecting legality (22%) and the will of the people (15%). But the main reason (35%) for mistrusting him is that he is "in the pay of foreign powers", a reason which is also the first - and almost the only - cited by those who do not trust Alassane Ouattara and Macky Sall. For these three heads of state, reputedly close to French leaders, their proximity to the former colonial power is a powerful factor of rejection. On the other hand, Assimi Goïta and Ibrahim Traoré's trust is justified primarily (48% and 38% respectively) their efforts "to restore or preserve national sovereignty" far ahead of their efforts "to restore peace and ensure security in [their] country" (23% and 25%) or, even more so, "to respect the will of the people" (5% and 14%).

The respondents who have confidence in them are therefore not fooled by the authoritarian nature of these regimes, but their acts of breaking with France are the primary factor in their support. The trust placed in Paul Kagamé, also the head of an authoritarian regime, stems from a completely different register, that of effectiveness, since almost 50% of those questioned who trust him consider that he "has undertaken the reforms necessary to meet the country's needs" and 15% that he "is making efforts to restore peace and ensure security".

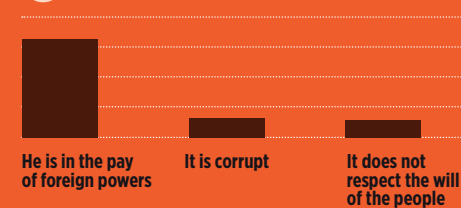
Fig. 13

Which African leader do you particularly trust/distrust?

Percentage answers to the questions "Which African leader do you trust the most?" and "Which African leader do you distrust the most? For the top three leaders, answers to the questions: "Why do you trust him?" and "Why do you distrust him?" (choice from a series of propositions).



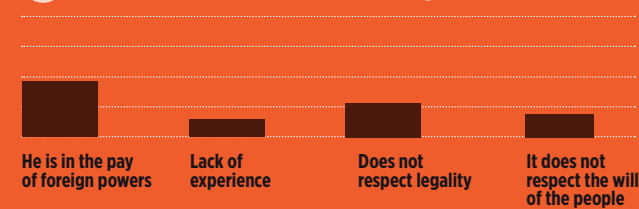
1 Alassane Ouattara



2 Assimi Goïta



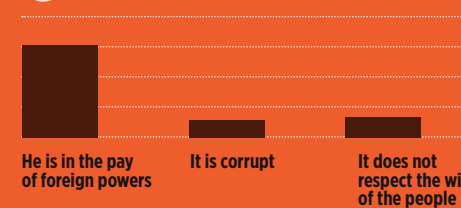
3 Mahamat Idriss Déby



4 Ibrahim Traoré



5 Macky Sall



6 Paul Kagamé





Supporters of the putschists demonstrate in Niamey against the presence of French troops in the country on August 27th, 2023.

Sovereignty / sovereignism

In the end, this survey of *"anti-French sentiment"* provided a better understanding of what is being expressed in Africa today in the form of new sovereignists. From the point of view of focus group participants, sovereignty can be apprehended and above all understood from three main overlapping perspectives. The first associates sovereignty with a certain idea of autonomy and freedom. For a country, being sovereign means being *"autonomous, independent"* and, above all, acting *"according to its own condition"* [Benin]. It also refers to the idea that *"a country [should be able] to make its own decisions, [without being] influenced by a great power or another regional power in the choice of its decisions"* [Ivory Coast 2]. Autonomy, independence and the ability to act without the influence of another state actor are essential elements in the understanding of sovereignty. If these points are particularly emphasized, it's because they provide information about the relationship to the idea of sovereignty in states where the French presence is present, and more broadly, where there are foreign presences.

The second perspective, closely associated with the first, emphasizes **non-submission**. Here, a state's sovereignty is conditional on its not being subject to any other state or actor. Sovereignty would thus be understood as *"the character of a country that is not subject to any other state. Simply"* [Cameroon 1]. Finally, a distinction seems to be drawn between this idea of non-subordination and the existence of external constraints in the dynamics of states, as emphasized by the same panelist from Cameroon: *"And speaking of Cameroon, I affirm that Cameroon does indeed exercise its sovereignty in its fullness. In all its fullness. Even if sometimes there are external constraints to contend with. But really, in its fullness, Cameroon is sovereign"* [Cameroon 1].

This third, more complex, **perspective links sovereignty to the functioning, logic and mechanisms of state government**. In this framework, sovereignty can be read first and foremost by the respondents, in the configurations that mark the ways in which states are governed. These can be expressed in the form of aggression, which interferes significantly with the internal workings of states. As one participant put it: *"In the Niger context, we're talking a lot more about sovereignty in the sense that we're experiencing external aggression in our decision-making, in our internal politics, whether political, economic or social. This is the sense in which we speak of sovereignty"* [Niger]. Here, a state's sovereignty is seen in a kind of negative light, since it is said to be absent as a result of interventions *"from outside"*. A similar observation is made in the case of Cameroon: *"French policy in Cameroon doesn't help us much, on the contrary, if we start from the principle that state sovereignty is the capacity of a state, the right of that state to decide its own affairs, to manage its own resources, we can see very clearly that France is rowing against the tide in relation to this. Through its history of the CFA Franc and its interference in the management of our resources, through these companies that it is installing here with the complicity of our leaders"* [Cameroon 2]. Beyond this, these configurations that mark the ways of governing or not governing can be traced back to singular historical trajectories, foremost among which is the colonial encounter. French colonization in these countries, and its after-effects as soon as they achieve independence, still weigh heavily on the fate of these countries, making it possible to apprehend and above all characterize their sovereignty. The weight of the French presence and certain agreements are evoked: *"I say that Cameroon is not sovereign. Cameroon is not sovereign because we were not colonized by France, but it is still our former tutelary power⁴⁵. [...] But let's not forget the weight of the leonine agreements we had with France. Everything had to go through France. Cameroon's subsoil belongs to France. I don't have the agreements in front of me, but they tell us that the subsoil is French! We even have to pay the debts! Before leaving, France said that everything it had done for us, it had come to help us... Until now, we're still paying the debt. We're not sovereign"* [Cameroon 1]. This excerpt also highlights the ambiguity and indeterminacy surrounding certain considerations of sovereignty, which are particularly fueled by generic discourses and rumors that end

up functioning as convictions. Representations of sovereignty, when understood in terms of the specific configurations that govern ways of governing, draw their sources from a variety of elements: from the weight of history to the omnipresence of rumors.

Sovereignty would then be perceptible in the way a state administers and regulates various sectors of its life in complete autonomy. Sovereignty can therefore be grasped through action, through the nature and quality of the *"state in action"*. Certain sectors or spheres of state life are particularly highlighted. This is illustrated by two contributions. The first stresses the need to combine these dimensions: *"Sovereignty needs to be seen from two angles, if not three. There's the economic, the political and the cultural. Perhaps that's why it's a little difficult to grasp. Because, when we talk about sovereignty, most Gabonese think we're politically sovereign, because we can elect whoever we want to the Assembly, and we can criticize our power. It's a form of sovereignty. But you only have to look at all the economic agreements with multinationals and others, and that's when people realize that, in reality, there's a gap"* [Gabon 1]. The second intervention emphasizes external constraint, sometimes taking the form of *"injunctions"* or *"orders"*:

"By sovereignty, we mean the character of a state that is not subject to another state. And in this case, we are not sovereign. Politically, economically, our states receive injunctions, orders, so they can't decide for themselves.

Take the history of the CFA franc, the history of cooperation... Sovereignty for our states is nothing but window-dressing" [Chad]. These extracts from two different national contexts emphasize the multidimensional nature of sovereignty (political, economic and cultural/social).

Finally, **sovereignty has to do with the specific characteristics of a state's political system, and in particular the way in which it organizes the choice of its leaders.** For some, *"a people is sovereign when it can decide its own future through an election. [When leaders are cut off from the people, this notion of sovereignty is called into question"* [Gabon 2]. For others, sovereignty *"is the power that a population gives. So a person decides to give, to confer, to a single person so that he can manage. So its source, I think, is power by the people and for the people"* [Niger]. In both cases, the essential role played by the singular and complex *"people"* in determining sovereignty is reaffirmed. Through their involvement and action in choosing the leaders of their states, the *"people"* are said to guarantee their full sovereignty, but this relationship with the people is also played out in the quality of the ties that exist between the *"people"* and their leaders. Sovereignty would be called into question if this *"people"/"leader"* relationship were interrupted or undermined. For the interviewees, sovereignty implies that the people can agree to management methods and appointment procedures that may not always be accepted by outside players. As one participant put it: *"If it's the dictator or the military regime that the people wanted, the majority of us have to accept it, if we really respect the people"* [Niger].

These various points allow us to discuss the question of sovereignty head-on, as it may be deduced from the material collected. Sovereignism has often been defined as a kind of political doctrine promoting the supremacy of the idea of national sovereignty. In the countries covered by the present survey, sovereignism emerges from the feeling expressed by a large proportion of participants of an absence of sovereignty in these countries. As one participant from Ivory Coast put it: *"My opinion is that no African country is sovereign. Let's look at the way we manage our crises, especially political ones. In several countries, we've seen white people interfering in the socio-political affairs of Africans, with their own decisions, their own*

opinions, without asking the Africans. We've seen what happened in Ivory Coast, [...] we've seen what happened in Rwanda, the genocide, what's happening now in the Congo.... We see that we ourselves have no decisions to make" [Ivory Coast 2]. This "interference", which encompasses political, economic and military aspects, is supported by local elites acting as relays for these external players. One of the key ideas is that "leaders are imposed by outside powers, as everyone in Niger knows. And when these leaders oppose the interests of these powers, they are removed by them" [Niger].

While France appears to have a very strong

political and military influence in the countries concerned, it is followed - by a long way - by the United States, as shown by the results of the quantitative survey [Fig. 14 and 15]. Here, the historical trajectories of the countries concerned, and their equally historical relationship with France, play a decisive role in the perception of foreign influence. Beyond that, these perceptions are also fueled by specific events and situations: colonization and its share of violence and atrocities, past interference (the case of Gabon), contemporary military presence and intervention (Operation Barkhane, French military bases in Ivory Coast and Gabon), and so on. It should be stressed that the American presence in certain African countries also helps to maintain a certain image of interference, or at least of "foreign"

Fig. 14 Perception of political influence

Percentage answers to the question "In your opinion, what political influence do these countries have on your country?"

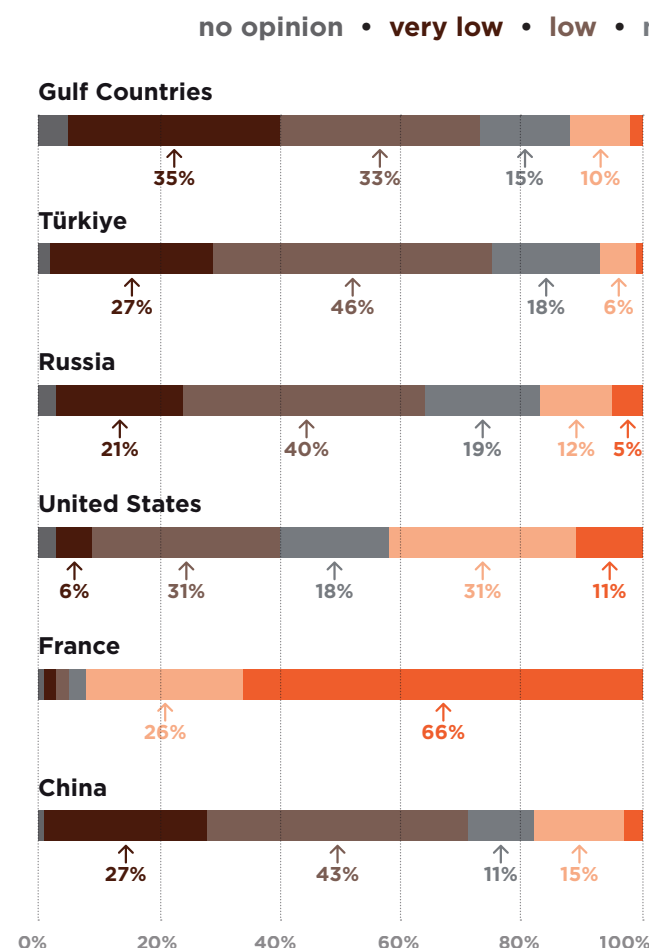
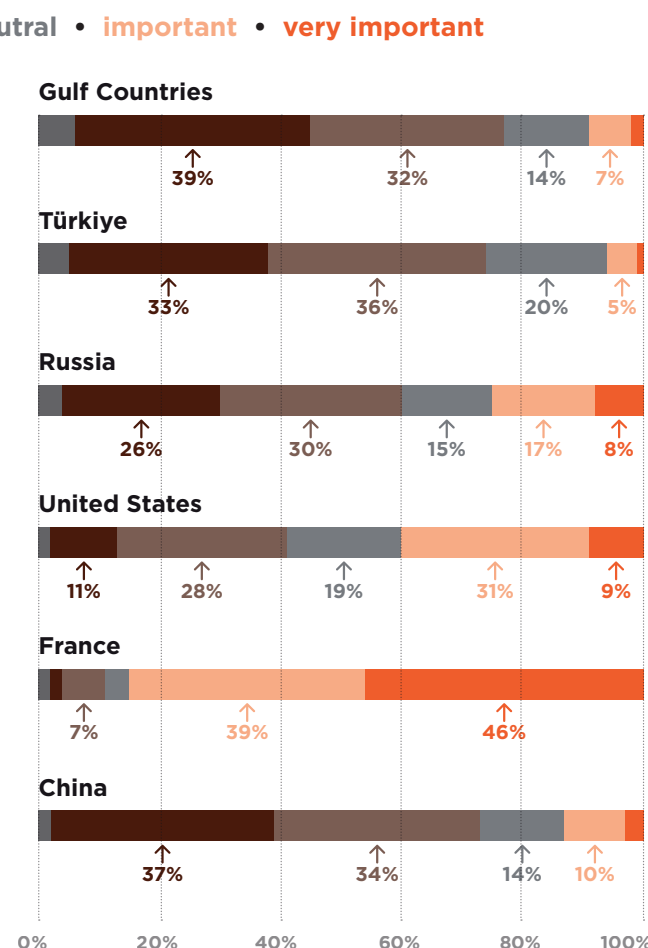


Fig. 15 Perception of military influence

Percentage answers to the question "In your opinion, what military influence do these countries have on your country?"



influence. While American influence is still less important than that of France, it appears to be greater than that of China and, to a lesser extent, Russia. The idea that French-speaking African countries are aligned with the decisions and positions of France extends to those of the United States. This aspect was particularly evoked in the case of positions taken in relation to the Ukraine-Russia conflict: "There was the war in Ukraine, and we saw that certain countries such as my country, Côte d'Ivoire, were not in a position to make their own decisions. [...] They were aligned on the same line as the various countries they follow. [...] Instead of deciding for themselves, on this subject, [...] they were influenced by the United States, France and the major powers, that's all. [...] It's a small example, [but] as far as I'm concerned, my country is not yet sovereign" [Côte d'Ivoire 2].

In their own way, these diverse and singular expressions of sovereignty fuel calls to action. The challenge for states is to regain control of their historical trajectories, and of the direction to be given to the transformation of their societies. This must include essential issues such as currency and the management of natural resources, in this case timber and mining [see Chapter 4]. In this respect, certain political figures are seen as embodying this will, and are perceived as inspiring more confidence than others. This perception of trust is based, among other things, on their speeches and actions, which reflect a return to control of their political and societal transformations, or which magnify positions seen as "pan-Africanist". In this respect, the three main leaders who inspire the most confidence among our respondents are particularly significant: Assimi Goïta (Mali), Ibrahim Traoré (Burkina Faso) and Paul Kagamé (Rwanda). In the case of the first two, it was mainly the efforts to "restore" and/or "preserve" national sovereignty that justified the respondents' choice [see box: "Rejection of France, a powerful factor in mistrust of African leaders"].

In this respect, political scientist Thomas Guegnolé distinguishes four possible types of sovereignty: ethno-cultural, civic, Marxist-revolutionary and economic⁴⁶. On examination, the sovereignist positions expressed in this survey combine some of the characteristics of these different categories. The ethno-cultural trend, for example, refers to positions of opposition to outside influences (notably in Niger, but

also in the sympathy shown to regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso). The economic trend allows for a form of criticism of foreign hegemonies, while at the same time being put forward by respondents as a marker and indicator of a "real" takeover of their destiny (the question of autonomy in the management of natural resources or that of leaving the CFA franc are just a few expressions of this). In a way, these aspects intersect with the idea of "neo-sovereignism", now in vogue on the continent, as discussed by Achille Mbembe. For Mbembe, this "neo-sovereignism" is a new kind of pan-Africanism, and today serves as fuel for a number of dynamics on the continent, notably those opposed to a certain French presence on the continent⁴⁷.

The Pan-African question appears heterogeneous in the way it is approached by the respondents. It sometimes refers to a call for the sovereignty of African states, against a backdrop of a call for patriotism. In a way, "one is first and foremost a patriot before being a Pan-Africanist" [Ivory Coast 2]. It also refers to a set of Afrocentric positions calling on African states to refocus their socio-political and cultural attention on themselves, while calling for greater solidarity between them in the face of external constraints. In the words of one focus group participant, "at the level of the international community, Africa is simply blocked and sometimes unrepresented in the institutions that can decide global policy" [Niger]. There is therefore a need for greater cooperation between African states.

Vladimir Putin, partner of sovereignty

The figure of Vladimir Putin is widely associated with positions hostile to the French presence in African countries. During anti-French demonstrations in Niger in September 2022, notably in Niamey and Dosso, slogans such as "Long live Putin and Russia" and "Down with France!" were heard⁴⁸. Signs celebrating Vladimir Putin were also seen at demonstrations denouncing France in Bangui in 2022 and 2023.

The Russian leader seems to enjoy strong sympathy among certain sections of the population. In the quantitative surveys, among thirteen non-African leaders, Vladimir Putin is by far the most trusted by respondents (over 50% trust, particularly in Gabon and Chad, much less in Côte d'Ivoire, and only 15% distrust) [Fig. 16]. Conversely, Emmanuel Macron is by far the least trusted non-African head of state (nearly 65% distrust on average across the five countries, and up to over 90% distrust in Chad).

The reasons given for rejecting the French head of state's personality are, first and foremost, that he would defend French interests (29%), that he would threaten the sovereignty of other countries (28%), but also his arrogance and contempt for African heads of state (24%). Vladimir Putin is also seen as a threat to the sovereignty of other states by 40% of those surveyed who don't trust him, but he is recognized above all for his respect for African partners (35% of those surveyed who trust him), and to a lesser extent for defending "just and humanist principles" (27%). Views are more divided when it comes to Chinese and American leaders. Joe Biden, for example, is credited with a high level of respect for his in-

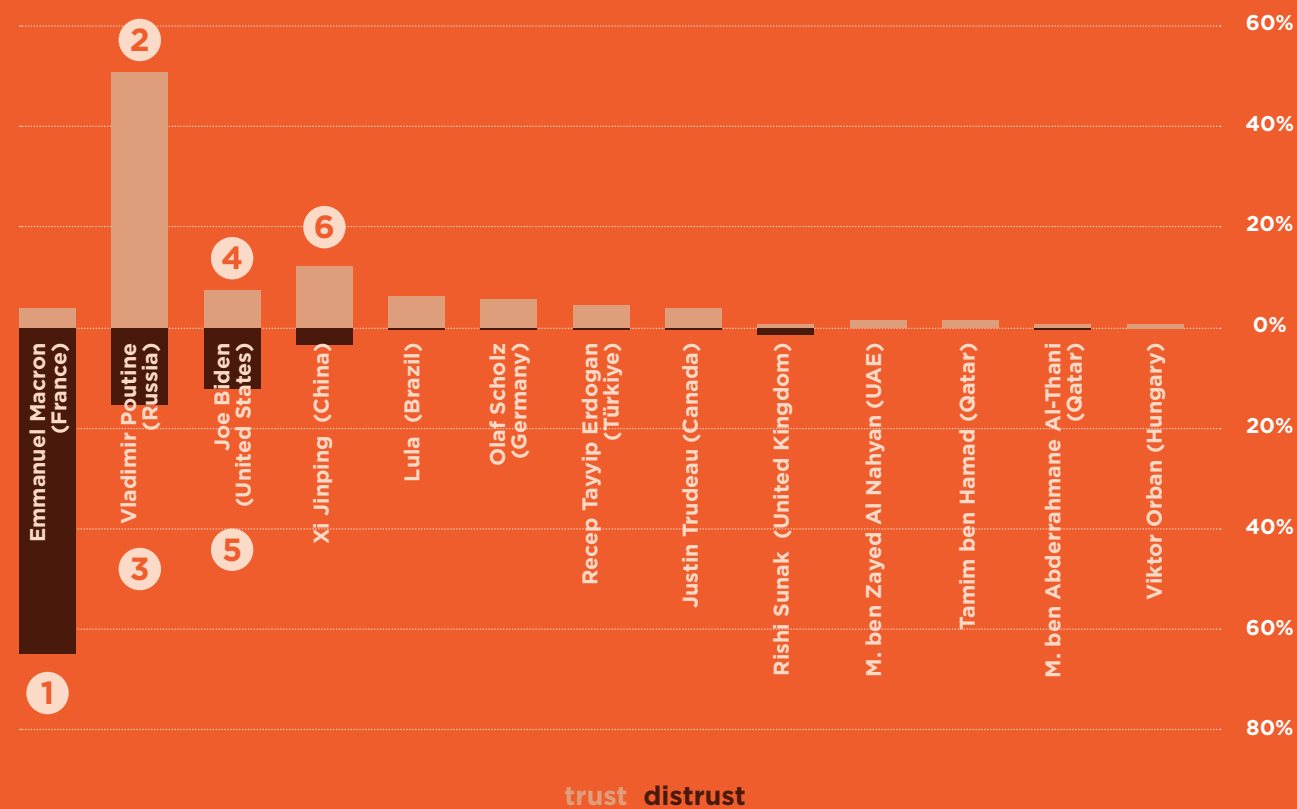
ternational commitments, and is not seen as arrogant or contemptuous towards African heads of state, even if he is perceived as defending US interests above all else, and as a threat to the sovereignty of other states.

Sovereign aspirations, which can be seen in many French-speaking African countries, make Vladimir Putin and his country reliable partners in this quest for independence. Russia is aware of the sympathy it arouses among young people in certain countries, just as it is aware of hostility to the French presence. It can therefore multiply or intensify its assertive diplomatic initiatives, at a time when it appears increasingly isolated on the international stage.

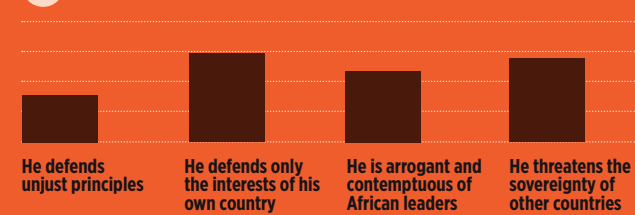
Fig. 16

Which non-African leader do you particularly trust / distrust?

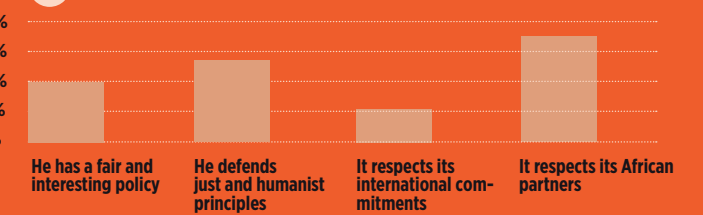
Percentage answers to the questions "Which non-African leader do you particularly trust?" and "Which non-African leader do you particularly distrust?". For the top three leaders, answers to the questions "Why do you trust him?" and "Why do you distrust him?" (choice from a series of proposals).



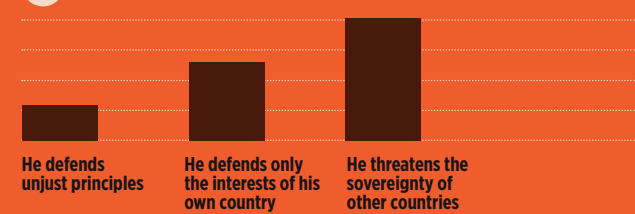
1 Emmanuel Macron



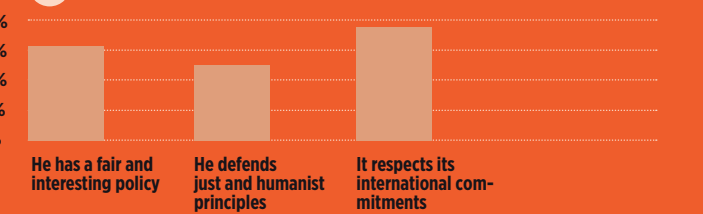
2 Vladimir Poutine



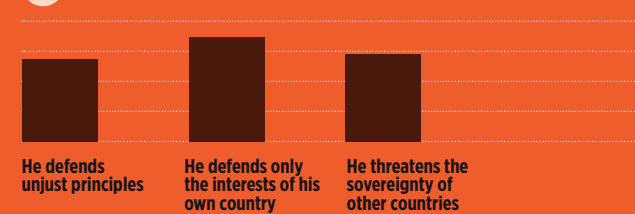
3 Vladimir Poutine



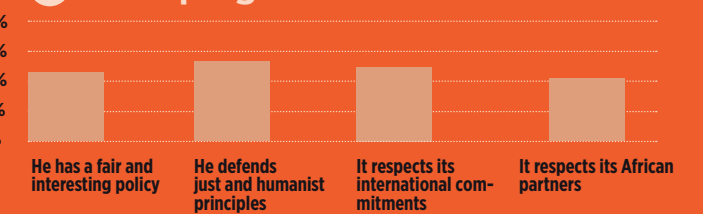
4 Joe Biden



5 Joe Biden



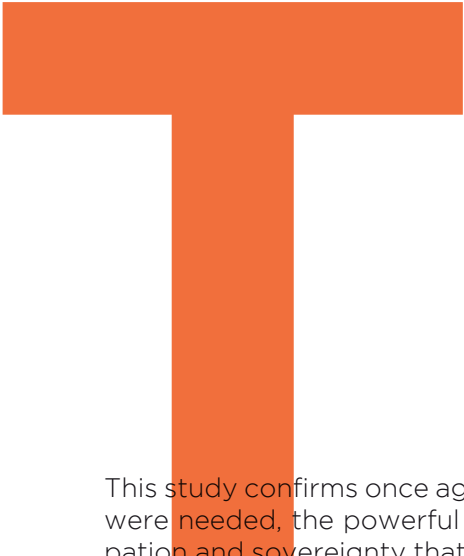
6 Xi Jinping



Can France change its Africa policy?



Emmanuel Macron and Alassane Ouattara during an official visit to Ivory Coast, December 2019. © Élysée



This study confirms once again, if confirmation were needed, the powerful desire for emancipation and sovereignty that runs through African societies. **Whether it's to ensure national security, build their political system or ensure their country's economic development, a second independence is necessary.** It is this determination that drives thousands of demonstrators to take to the streets to oppose repressive regimes, but also to reject France's presence on the continent. If this desire for autonomy and independence is sometimes recuperated and instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes to gain legitimacy, this should not mask the strength of this movement which is running through African societies.

The rupture with the French state is deep and, for some, irretrievable: *"France has to stop bothering us if it can't help us"* [Chad]. For many of those interviewed, France is incapable of listening to criticism and changing its strategy

"I think France can change on one condition. If Africa kicks it out, it comes back as a second partner". [Niger]

Unable to recognize its mistakes and change its policy, Paris is undeniably losing credit and influence on the continent. *"When France was kicked out of Mali, I thought the French would sit down and think. And understand for themselves that if they continue with this traditional way of managing Africa, they're going to have to leave Africa [...]. And then, I was surprised to see that in Burkina, they made the same mistake"* [Niger].

For many, the rupture is obvious, imminent and inexorable. Others believe that change is still possible, because *"I believe that France has realized that it is losing its influence. This will automatically lead it to reconsider certain practices"* [Gabon 1]. And *"if France can improve its economic policy, which should be based on fair and honest cooperation, [then] we'll stay with France. [...] Language is already an important factor, historical ties are important, no one can erase them.*

But first it's up to France to leave us or help us".

[Cameroon 2]

For despite all the grievances, France remains for many a singular partner: *"If I had a choice to make to continue with France, or Russia or China, I would continue with France, [but on new bases]"* [Gabon 2]. And this relationship will only change if African leaders commit themselves, if they *"show courage. [...] They must [question] all the treaties signed with France. Show the courage to choose good governance"* [Gabon 2].

As observers of French political life, our respondents understand the obvious link between domestic and foreign policy. Migration policy, racism and discrimination, and the fight against terrorism are all political issues in France as much as they are outside. Recurrent promises of a break with *Françafrique*, a staple of French presidential speeches on Africa, have gone unheeded, which is a source of irritation: *"France has to evolve [...]. It's as if France had remained cloistered in the 1960s. [...] Things have to change after 65 years!"* [Benin].

Emmanuel Macron's African policy is based on a staging of change, without any real break with the past: change everything so that nothing changes. Thus, *"[Emmanuel] Macron has been combing Africa [...] trying to rebuild relationships and partnerships. We know it's a system designed to put us to sleep"* [Niger]. Promises to reinvent Africa-France relations, which concluded the Montpellier summit in October 2021, failed to convince: *"I think France refuses to understand the message, [...] it organizes summits, it talks with young people, but that's not what we want"* [Chad]. For more than five years, the French president has been claiming to revolutionize Franco-African relations, in particular by selecting *"his"* own ci-

vil society and giving it a symbolic place of prominence at international events or within co-optation forums⁴⁹. This fool's game is no longer fooling many people. Only a genuine change of paradigm and practice will enable France to maintain lasting relations with the countries of French-speaking Africa.

French political decision-makers need to change their attitude. First and foremost, they need to listen to and take on board the views, including the critical views, of the people who are the first to be affected This is what this report proposes, and it is a prerequisite for rebuilding a relationship based on mutual respect. Listening also requires humility, to convince ourselves that the solutions to African problems lie first and foremost in African responses, and to accept the singular history of France's relations with its former colonies, in all its dimensions, including its many failures. Finally, we must be aware that the rupture is already underway, and that rebuilding balanced relations will take time. It will require openness, consultation and dialogue, in France as in Africa, with all stakeholders.



Recommendations

In April 2022, the Tournons La Page movement published a collective report entitled *"Bâtir de nouvelles relations entre la France et l'Afrique"* (Building new relations between France and Africa), articulated around a dozen recommendations:

#01

Move away from the posture that sees France as having an African *"vocation"*, a prerequisite for the country's *"greatness"* on the international stage.

#02

A necessary political and military *"withdrawal"* of Paris, simply accepting that France is a partner among others, and that African history can also be written without France.

#03

Put democracy, human rights, accountability and the rule of law at the heart of French foreign policy, in Africa and elsewhere.

#04

Respect the independence and sovereignty of the African peoples, and therefore their ability to decide on their own political and economic trajectory, as well as their alliances, and show humility with regard to France's so-called duties, to put an end to posturing and injunctions.

#05

Open a democratic debate in France on the rethinking of foreign policy in Africa, involving parliaments - both French and African - and giving full scope to dialogue with civil society.

#06

Give priority to multilateral approaches to security, environmental and economic issues.

#07

Put social, fiscal and climate justice at the heart of France's actions in international forums, by ensuring policy coherence in the areas of public aid, foreign trade, taxation and agricultural policy. Make international solidarity a way of building *"living together"*.



Today, these recommendations are strikingly echoed in the words of this survey. Let's hope that it contributes, in its own way, to a fairer and more mutually supportive rebuilding of relations between Africa and France.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Quantitative survey

Consent

Please inform the participant:

- (a) The subject and objectives of this study;
- (b) How this research will be conducted. The study, organized by Sciences Po Paris (a university in France) and the international network Tournons la Page, aims to observe perceptions of French politics and policy in 6 African countries. The study consists of a questionnaire, and focus groups conducted separately.
- (c) the type of data collected and how it is processed;
- (d) recipients of this study ;
- (e) the European Union's General Regulation (n°2016/679) on data protection and individual rights; and the fact that voluntary participation in this study.
- (f) I declare that I have been sufficiently informed about the study and have had the opportunity to ask any questions I felt necessary to understand.

I agree to participate in the study conducted by Sciences Po and Tournons La Page (TLP) and understand how my data will be processed, as described in this information notice

Yes No (if no, please find another respondent)

Q.1.1 Survey date

yyyy-mm-dd

Q.1.2 Name of facilitator

Respondent identification

Q.1.3 Sex of respondent

Male Female

Q.1.4 Age of respondent

Q.1.5 Country of origin

Q.1.6 Country of Residence

Togo Niger Chad
 Cameroon Ivory Coast Gabon

Q.1.7 Level of education

Primary education
 Secondary education
 Higher education - license
 Higher education - master's degree
 Higher education - doctorate
 No school education

Q.1.8 Socio-professional category

Farmer/market gardener
 Breeder
 Fisherman
 Retailer
 Housekeeper
 Salaried employee (not civil servant)
 Civil servant
 Craftsman
 Pupil/student/trainee
 Unemployed
 Other (please specify)

Q.1.9 You grew up in

Urban environment Rural environment

Q.1.10 Do you live

In the capital Outside the capital

Involvement in civil society

This section collects information on the respondent's activism.

Q.2.1 Are you

Member of a structured organization/association
 Independent activist

Q.2.1.1 Is your organization a member of the Tournons la Page (TLP) coalition?

Yes No Don't know

Q.2.2 What type of organization are you most active in?

Union organization
 Farmers' organization
 Human rights organization
 Environmental organization
 Youth movement
 Women's organization
 Organization of nationals
 Organization of journalists/alternative media
 Consumer organization
 Denominational organization
 Professional organizations
 Other non-governmental organization (NGO)
 Traditional associations (women's, youth)

Q.2.3 How long have you belonged to this organization?

Less than one year
 One to two years
 Three to five years
 More than five years

In addition to your main commitment, what other types of organization are you involved in?

Do not select the type of organization mentioned in question 2.2. Tick any other type of organization in which the respondent is involved.

No other organization
 Union organization
 Farmers' organization
 Human rights organization
 Environmental organization
 Youth movement
 Women's organization
 Organization of nationals
 Organization of journalists/alternative media
 Consumer organization
 Denominational organization
 Professional organizations
 Other non-governmental organization (NGO)
 Traditional associations (women's, youth)

Situation in country of origin/action

Situation in country of origin/action
The aim of this section is to gather the respondent's perceptions of the situation in their country.

Q.3.1 Are you satisfied with the situation in your country?

Yes No

Q.3.2 Generally speaking, in your country, how would you describe the situation...

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.2.1 Economic situation

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.2.2 Political situation

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.2.3 Safety situation

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.2.4 Environmental situation

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.2.5 Corruption management

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q. 3.2.6 Diplomatic situation - managing relations with other states

Very bad Bad
 Neither good nor bad Good Very good
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.3 How satisfied are you with the state of democracy in your country?

Not satisfied Not very satisfied Neutral
 Satisfied Very satisfied
 Don't want to answer

Q3.4 To what extent do you think these elements pose a threat to democracy in your country?

Q.3.4.1 Irrespect for the constitution

Not important Not very important
 Neutral Important Very important
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.4.2 Abuse of power by the government (political trial, arbitrary arrest, etc.)

- Not important Not very important
 Neutral Important Very important
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.4.3 Coups d'état/capture of power by elites

- Not important Not very important
 Neutral Important Very important
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.4.4 Corruption

- Not important Not very important
 Neutral Important Very important
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.4.5 Foreign interference

- Not important Not very important
 Neutral Important Very important
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.5 Are you satisfied with the state of sovereignty in your country?

- Not satisfied Not very satisfied Neutral
 Satisfied Very satisfied
 Don't want to answer

Q.3.6 Compared to the situation in your country at the beginning of the 2000s, would you say that your country's sovereignty is

- More threatened
 Neither more nor less threatened
 Less threatened Don't know

Q.3.7.A In order of importance, what would you say are the two main threats to your country's sovereignty? Choice 1

- Company privatizations
 Debts to foreign countries
 Pressure from the international community (UN, EU)
 Pressure from the regional community (ECOWAS, CEMAC)
 Foreign military interventions and/or the presence of foreign soldiers
 Armed conflict
 Exploitation of natural resources by foreign companies
 The monetary system
 Corruption
 Globalization and trade liberalization

Q.3.7.B In order of importance, what would you say are the two main threats to your country's sovereignty? Choice 2

Q.3.8 Do you think your government is doing enough to protect the country's sovereignty?

- Yes No Don't know

Q.3.9.A In your opinion, what are the two main measures to be taken to better guarantee the country's sovereignty? Choice 1

- Changing partnerships with Western countries
 Breaking partnerships with Western countries
 Diversify partnerships, especially with non-Western countries
 Strengthening the capabilities of the national defense and security forces.
 Strengthening respect for the rule of law
 Strengthening citizen participation and civil society involvement
 Nationalize the companies that exploit raw materials
 Change currency
 Other (please specify)

Q.3.9.B In your opinion, what are the two main measures to be taken to better guarantee the country's sovereignty? Choice 2

Q.3.9.A Other, please specify

Q.3.9.B Other, please specify

Q.3.10 Do you agree with the following statements?

Q.3.10.1 In certain circumstances, the army must intervene to run the country.

- Strongly disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.10.2 In certain circumstances, a non-democratic government may be preferable to a democratic one.

- Strongly disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.10.3 Efficient government is better than democratic government

- Strongly disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.10.4 Democracy is preferable to any other form of government

- Strongly disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.3.11 Would you say you are rather optimistic or pessimistic about the situation in your country?

- Optimistic Pessimistic

Perception of elites in Africa

This section aims to gather data on the perception of African elites.

Q4.1 Do you generally agree with the following statements?

Q.4.1.1 The leaders of my country respect the will of the people as best they can.

- Yes No Don't know

Q.4.1.2 The leaders of my country are under the influence of Western countries.

- Yes No Don't know

Q.4.1.3 The leaders of my country play politics for their own benefit.

- Yes No Don't know

Q.4.1.4 My country's leaders are creating new opportunities for the population

- Yes No Don't know

Q.4.1.5 My country's leaders give my country a good image abroad.

- Yes No Don't know

Q.4.2 Which African leader do you trust most?

- Assimi Goïta
 Mohamed Bazoum
 Abdourahamane Tchiani
 Patrice Talon
 Mahamat Idriss Deby
 Macky Sall
 Ibrahim Traoré
 Paul Biya
 Alassane Ouattara
 Mamadi Doumbouya
 Faure Gnassingbé
 Ali Bongo
 Brice Oligui Nguema
 Paul Kagamé
 Cyril Ramaphosa
 Nana Akufo-Addo
 Abdel Fattah al-Sissi
 Other (please specify)

Q.4.2. Other, please specify

Q.4.3 Why do you trust him?

- It makes efforts to restore/conserv national sovereignty
 He is working to restore peace and security in his country
 He respects the will of the people
 He undertook the reforms necessary to meet the country's needs
 He makes his mark on the international scene
 Other (please specify)

Q.4.3. Other, please specify

Q.4.4 Which African leader in particular do you distrust?

- Assimi Goïta
 Mohamed Bazoum
 Abdourahamane Tchiani
 Patrice Talon
 Mahamat Idriss Deby
 Macky Sall
 Ibrahim Traoré
 Paul Biya
 Alassane Ouattara
 Mamadi Doumbouya
 Faure Gnassingbé
 Ali Bongo
 Brice Oligui Nguema
 Paul Kagamé
 Cyril Ramaphosa
 Nana Akufo-Addo
 Abdel Fattah al-Sissi
 Other (please specify)

Q.4.4. Other, please specify

Q.4.5 Why do you mistrust it?

- It's corrupted
 He's in the pay of foreign powers
 He doesn't respect legality
 He lacks experience
 He does not respect the will of the people
 Other (please specify)

Q.4.5. Other, please specify

Q.4.6 How satisfied are you with your country's cooperation with other African countries?

- Not satisfied Not very satisfied Neutral
 Satisfied Very satisfied
 Don't want to answer

Q.4.7 In your opinion, would cooperation with African countries be preferable to cooperation with Western countries?

- Yes No Don't know

Q.4.8 Do you agree with the following statements?

Q.4.8.1 African cooperation would strengthen my country's sovereignty

- Strongly disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.4.8.2 Shared values would make African cooperation more effective

- Strongly disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly agree
 Don't know Don't want to answer

Q.4.8.3 African values are preferable to Western values

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- Don't want to answer

Q.4.8.4 Cooperation with African countries to better meet the needs of their populations

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- Don't want to answer

Q.4.8.5 It would be desirable to give up a little sovereignty to strengthen African cohesion and unity.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- Don't want to answer

Perception of non-African elites

This section aims to gather data on respondents' perceptions of non-African elites.

Q.5.1 Which non-African leader do you trust most?

- Olaf Scholz (Germany)
- Joe Biden (United States)
- Xi Jinping (China)
- Emmanuel Macron (France)
- Vladimir Putin (Russia)
- Lula (Brazil)
- Justin Trudeau (Canada)
- Rishi Sunak (United Kingdom)
- Tamim ben Hamad Al Thani (Qatar)
- Mohammed ben Zayed Al Nahyane (UAE)
- Mohammed ben Abderrahmane Al-Thani (Qatar)
- Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey)
- Other (please specify)

Q.5.1. Other, please specify

Q.5.2 Why do you trust him?

- He has a fair and interesting policy
- It respects its international commitments
- He respects his African partners
- It defends fair and humanist principles
- Other (please specify)

Q.5.2 Other, please specify

Q.5.3 Which non-African leader do you distrust most?

- Olaf Scholz (Germany)
- Joe Biden (United States)

- Xi Jinping (China)
- Emmanuel Macron (France)
- Vladimir Putin (Russia)
- Lula (Brazil)
- Justin Trudeau (Canada)
- Rishi Sunak (United Kingdom)
- Tamim ben Hamad Al Thani (Qatar)
- Mohammed ben Zayed Al Nahyane (UAE)
- Mohammed ben Abderrahmane Al-Thani (Qatar)
- Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey)
- Other (please specify)

Q.5.3 Other, please specify

Q.5.4 Why do you mistrust it?

- It threatens the sovereignty of other countries
- He defends unjust principles
- He only defends the interests of his own country
- He is arrogant and contemptuous of African leaders
- Other (please specify)

Q.5.4. Other, please specify

Q.5.5 In your opinion, what is the economic influence of these countries on your country?

Q.5.5.1 China

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.5.2 France

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.5.3 United States

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.5.4 Russia

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.5.5 Turkey

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.5.6. Gulf States (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE)

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.6 In your opinion, what is the political influence of these countries on your country?

Q.5.6.1 China

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.6.2 France

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.6.3 United States

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.6.4 Russia

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.6.5 Turkey

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.6.6. Gulf States (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE)

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.7 In your opinion, what is the military influence of these countries on your country?

Q.5.7.1 China

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.7.2 France

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.7.3 United States

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.7.4 Russia

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.7.5 Turkey

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Q.5.7.6. Gulf States (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE)

- Very weak
- Weak
- Neutral
- Significant
- Very important
- Don't know

Perception of France

This section focuses on respondents' perceptions of France and French politics.

Q.6.1 Are you generally satisfied with French policy towards your country?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q.6.2 If not, why not?

- French policy does not respect my country's sovereignty
- French policy hinders the country's development
- French politics are a source of instability
- France supports my country's leaders
- France plunders my country's wealth
- Other (please specify)

Q.6.2 Other, please specify

Q.6.3 Are you satisfied with the communication of French diplomats?

- Not satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Don't want to answer

Q.6.4 In your opinion, are these sectors under French domination in your country?

Q.6.4.1 Timber harvesting

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.2 Mining (gold, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.3 Oil production

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.4 Safety

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.5 Communication (telephone, internet)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.6 Transport

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.7 Trade

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.4.8 The bank

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not concerned

Q.6.5 In your opinion, are these sectors under non-French domination in your country?

Q.6.5.1 Timber harvesting

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.2 Mining (gold, etc.)

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.3 Oil production

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.4 Safety

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.5 Communication (telephone, internet)

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.6 Transport

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.7 Trade

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.5.8 The Bank

Yes No Don't know Not concerned

Q.6.6 Do you think that, in general, France is a reliable partner in the following sectors?

Q.6.6.1 Economy

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.2 Safety

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.3 Defending human rights

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.4 Defending democracy

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.5 Strengthening administration

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.6 Fight against corruption

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.7 Agriculture

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.8 Education

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.9 Health

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.6.10 Cultivation

Yes No Don't know

Q.6.7 In a word, how would you characterize the relationship between your country and France?

Facilitator's comments and remarks

This section offers space for the facilitator to leave comments and suggestions, as well as observations on the progress of the survey.

Comments on the conduct of the survey

Facilitator's comments and remarks

Appendix 2 - Focus group facilitation guide

Presentation

• This focus group is a contribution to a survey, carried out in collaboration between TLP and researchers, on how African movements and organizations assess France's African policy. Similar debates will be held in 6 different countries. The results could be used in TLP Europe's advocacy for a rethinking of French foreign policy, and to feed into strategic debates within the TLP network as a whole.

• Your opinion is very important. Express yourself freely, be spontaneous. Tell us everything that comes to mind. There are no judgments, no trick questions, no right or wrong answers. The idea is to really understand your opinion and your arguments.

• We don't judge each other's positions and/or the positions of organizations, nor do we seek to influence their positioning. We simply collect their assessments and analyses to enrich the TLP network's thinking and reinforce the relevance of its advocacy work.

• Give yourself time for exchange and debate, to identify consensus as well as possible divergences. You don't have to agree,

just listen to others and respect their point of view.

• Guaranteed anonymity of what is said, recording only for summary reports.

• Before we start, would you please introduce yourself in a few words: first name, age, place of residence, organization to which you belong/which you represent? How long have you been involved? Other commitments? Links with other movements?

[Do not use the expression "anti-French sentiment" whenever possible, but rather "rejection of French politics"].

	First name	M / F	Age	Country of residence	Type of organization*	Function in the organization
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						

- * 1. Independent activist
- 2. trade union
- 3. peasant organization
- 4. Human rights organization
- 5. Environmental organization
- 6. Youth movement
- 7. Women's organization

- 8. Organization of journalists or alternative media
- 8. Consumer organization
- 9. Faith-based organization
- 10. Professional organizations
- 11. Other non-governmental organization (NGO)
- 12. Traditional associations (women's, youth...)

Introduction

01 How satisfied are you with developments in your country over the past five years? What events (good or bad) have particularly impressed you?

Theme 1: Democracy and sovereignty

02 There's increasing talk of sovereignty in Africa and elsewhere. What does sovereignty mean to you? How would you define it?

03 If you were asked to illustrate your country's sovereignty (or lack of it), which images would you choose? What images come to mind?

04 Let's do the same exercise with democracy in your country: how would you define it? And what images could illustrate it?

05 What are the current threats to democracy in your country?

06 Since 2020, the number of coups d'état in the region has been on the rise. How do you assess this phenomenon?

07 When the military take power, they claim to be solving the problems that democratically elected governments have failed to solve. What do you think?

08 Are these new military regimes better able to meet the challenges of sovereignty we've just been talking about?

09 Does France play a role, or have a positive or negative influence, on democratization in Africa and in your country? What does this mean?

Theme 2: Security, stability and international intervention

10 Do you think that, generally speaking, African states can meet the security challenges they face on their own and without external military intervention? If so, under what conditions? If not, why not?

11 Do you think that, in general, international interventions help to limit insecurity or stabilize African countries, or on the contrary foster insecurity and destabilization? In what way(s)?

12 Do you consider France to be a reliable partner in stabilizing and combating insecurity in countries where its forces are present?

Theme 3: Economy

13 What are the main obstacles, the main limits, to your country's economic sovereignty?

14 Which foreign powers have an economic influence on your country?

15 Do any foreign companies play an important role, positive or negative, in your country's development? Which ones?

16 What role do French companies play in your country's development? Good examples? Bad examples? What problems? What assets?

17 Is the FCFA an asset or a problem for the economies of the countries concerned? Why or why not?

18 Should/could the FCFA be reformed, and if so under what conditions, or should the countries concerned simply break all monetary ties with France?

19 Do you think that the defense of sovereignty implies that each country should manage its own currency, or is it preferable for your country to have a common currency with other African countries?

Theme 4: Culture

20 There is also growing talk of cultural sovereignty and/or alienation in Africa. What does this mean to you? How does this manifest itself in your country?

21 What do you think of France's cultural influence in Africa? And what about the cultural influence of other partners and/or foreign powers?

22 What are the vectors of this influence (language, television, radio, press, social networks, cultural centers, etc.)?

Theme 5: Rejection of France's African policy

23 There's a lot of talk these days about demonstrations in the streets, in the media and on social networks, against France's policy in Africa. Do you think these demonstrations have always existed, or are they more numerous and more important today than in the past? Why or why not?

24 Have there been any such demonstrations in your country? When and how? Against what in particular? Can you tell us who took part? Did you take part yourself?

25 What do you think are the main reasons for these protests? What do you think fuels these protests the most?

26 When talking about these demonstrations, the French media and public authorities often use the expression "*anti-French sentiment*". What's your take on this?

27 They are also presented as the consequence of propaganda or communication actions carried out by populist agitators or competing powers? What do you think?

28 Do you think France's policy in Africa can change? In what way? Under what conditions?

Conclusion

29 What do you think of cooperation between African countries? Should it be strengthened or reduced? What are your expectations for such cooperation?

Notes

- 01 In the following pages, all quotations have been systematically anonymized, in line with our commitment to focus-group participants. On the other hand, the workshop from which the quote originates is systematically indicated at the end of the verbatim.
- 02 In general, the moderators were from local research centers, except in Niger, where the focus group was moderated by a representative of TLP's international secretariat, and in Benin, where the focus group was co-facilitated by a local TLP representative and a CERI-Sciences Po researcher. One of the focus groups in Côte d'Ivoire was co-facilitated by local researchers and CERI-Sciences Po researchers.
- 03 Martin Mourre, "Pour une histoire des sentiments (anti-français ou autres) en Afrique", *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 2024, 133, p. 81-88.
- 04 Building new relations between France and Africa: a contribution from the Tournons la Page movement, May 2022. https://tournonslapage.org/fr/outils-et-ressources/Memo-randum_Tournons-La-Page-web-FR-v2.pdf
- 05 Louis Staritzky and Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat, "Faire recherche en habitant. Une histoire populaire de la recherche-action" www.lecoleduterrain.fr/maniere-de-faire/faire-recherche-en-habitant
- 06 Tournons La Page is a movement made up of over 250 organizations in Europe and Africa, organized into national coalitions, i.e. a collective of associations. The 15 national African coalitions have autonomous governance and appoint representatives to sit on and lead the TLP movement internationally. TLP's international secretariat (salaried staff) is based in Paris.
- 07 Chantal Mouffe, *The Green Democratic Revolution*, Albin Michel, 2023
- 08 Thierry Vircoulon, Alain Antil, François Giovalucchi, "Thématiques, acteurs et fonctions du discours anti-français en Afrique francophone", *Études de l'IFRI*, IFRI, June 2023 www.ifri.org/fr/etudes/thematiques-acteurs-et-fonctions-du-discours-anti-francais-en-afrique-francophone
- 09 "Afrique: un sentiment anti-français ?", *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 2024, 133, p. 47-56.
- 10 Jonathan Guiffard, "Le sentiment anti-français en Afrique de l'Ouest, reflet de la confrontation autoritaire contre l'Occident collectif", *Institut Montaigne*, January 4, 2023 www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/le-sentiment-anti-francais-en-afrique-de-louest-reflet-de-la-confrontation-autoritaire-contre
- 11 Louis Staritzky, *Pour une sociologie des tentatives : Faire monde depuis nos vies quotidiennes*, Éditions du commun, 2024.
- 12 "Le sentiment anti-français", retour sur une expression contestée sur le continent africain | TV5MONDE - Informations. 2023 <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/le-sentiment-anti-francais-retour-sur-une-expression-contestee-sur-le-continent-africain> [accessed August 14, 2024].
- 13 Martin Mourre, "Pour une histoire des sentiments (anti-français ou autres) en Afrique", *La Revue internationale et stratégique*, 2024, 133, p. 81-88.
- 14 "Lionel Jospin warns the Juppé government against the "risk of a military spiral", *Le Monde*, January 7, 1997 www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1997/01/07/verbatim-lionel-jospin-met-en-garde-le-gouvernement-juppe-contre-le-risque-d-un-engrenage-militaire_3743500_1819218 [consulted on August 14, 2024].
- 15 Danielle Rouard, "Un net sentiment anti-français est en train de naître", *confie le porte-parole des mutins*, *Le Monde*, January 12, 1997. www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1997/01/12/un-net-sentiment-anti-francais-est-en-train-de-naître-confie-le-porte-parole-des-mutins_3737128_1819218 [consulted on August 14, 2024].
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- 23 The military influence of the United States is deemed significant by 40% of respondents, that of Russia by 25% (with the exception of Cameroon at 61%), that of China by 13% (28% in Chad) and that of Turkey by 6%.
- 24 8.5 km, or around ten minutes by car, separate the presidential palace from Camp de Gaulle in Libreville.

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- 26 See in particular Richard Banégas, "La politique d'intervention de la France en Afrique vue d'en bas. Réflexions à partir du cas de la Côte d'Ivoire", *Les temps Modernes*, 2017, 693-694, pp. 288-310.
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- 28 Abdourahmane Ndiaye, "La protestation AUCHAN DÉGAGE à Dakar", *Anthropology of food*, 2023, 17 <https://journals.openedition.org/aof/14180>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/aof.14180>
- 29 Orano's latest mining agreements in Niger (2019) have not been made public.
- 30 Perenco is a Franco-British company, the second largest French oil group after TotalEnergies, which operates fields in Cameroon, Congo, Gabon and the DRC.
- 31 Satom (Sogea-Satom) is a subsidiary of the Vinci group, founded in the 1950s and specializing in public works, civil engineering and construction in Africa.
- 32 The CFA franc, created in 1945, is based on the principle of a fixed parity with the euro (previously with the French franc), guaranteed convertibility (any holder of CFA francs can convert them, without limit, into euros) and the free transfer of capital and income between the CFA and euro zones. In return for its convertibility guarantee, France closely monitors monetary and budgetary policies. Franco-African monetary agreements require CFA zone countries to pool their foreign exchange reserves, and to deposit a portion of these reserves (at interest) in an operating account with the French Treasury. This latter obligation no longer applies to the West African CFA zone since the December 2019 reform.
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- 38 Eric Fassin, "La démocratie sexuelle et le conflit des civilisations", *Multitudes*, 2006, 26, p. 123-131
- 39 Ibid.
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- 42 See in particular: Collectif, "Tchad : La répression systématique des manifestations contre la prolongation de la période de transition doit immédiatement cesser", October 21, 2022 <https://tournonslapage.org/fr/actualites/tchad-la-repression-systematique-des-manifestations-contre-la-prolongation-de-la-periode-de-transition-doit-immEDIATEMENT-cesser>
- 43 Afrobarometer, African Insights 2024. Democracy at risk - the people's view www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Afrobarometer_FlagshipReport2024_French.pdf
- 44 Geneviève Médevielle, "La difficile question de l'universalité des droits de l'homme", *Transversalités*, 107, 2008, p. 69-91.
- 45 Cameroon was colonized by Germany from around 1884 to 1916. At the end of the First World War, and following the German defeat, the territory was placed under a League of Nations mandate, and later under UN trusteeship. The mandate and trusteeship were entrusted to France (for four-fifths of the territory) and Great Britain.
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- 47 See in particular: Achille Mbembe, "La critique de la Francafrique est devenue le masque d'une indigence intellectuelle", *Jeune Afrique*, August 9, 2023 www.jeuneafrique.com/1471632/politique/achille-mbembe-la-critique-de-la-francafrique-est-le-masque-dune-indigence-intellectuelle [accessed September 18, 2024]. and Achille Mbembe, "Les putschs en Afrique de l'Ouest annoncent la fin d'un cycle qui aura duré près d'un siècle", *le Monde*, August 4, 2023 www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2023/08/04/achille-mbembe-en-afrique-la-stabilite-passera-par-une-demilitarisation-effective-de-tous-les-domaines-de-la-vie-politique-economique-et-sociale_6184430_3232 [accessed September 18, 2024].
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