

En Route: The French Colonial Army, Emigration, and Development in Morocco

Awa Ambra Seck

Abstract :

Between 1830 and 1962, six million Africans living under colonial rule served in the French army. Most were deployed internationally to maintain order or fight French wars. After independence, all were repatriated and granted the right to move to France. We estimate the effect of military deployment on the soldiers' long-term outcomes, as well as on their communities of origin, using historical data on Moroccan soldiers, and exploiting the arbitrary assignment of troops to international locations. We show that, within a municipality, cohorts with a higher share of soldiers deployed to France were more likely to relocate there after independence. In contrast, deployment to other locations did not affect emigration. Consistent with the establishment of emigration networks, we find that the effects persist for decades after independence. Furthermore, communities with a higher share of soldiers deployed to France have experienced better economic outcomes and a shift from the agricultural to the service sector today. These results highlight the role that colonial rule played in shaping emigration networks from the colonies and in contributing to persistent changes in their patterns of economic development.