

Activist Disconnect: Social Movements, Public Opinion, and U.S. Military Bases Abroad

Word count: 9348 (excluding title page)

ABSTRACT

Social movements often face the challenge of winning public support while also maintaining the commitment of devoted activists. To what extent do common movement strategies—often crafted by leaders with strong ideological commitments—succeed in influencing the opinions of the typically more apathetic mass public? We examine this question via a study of social movements challenging the U.S. military presence overseas. Based on an online survey experiment with residents of communities hosting U.S. military bases in South Korea and Japan, we demonstrate a disconnect between anti-base movements and local residents. Local public opinion is most responsive to pragmatic framing of opposition by social movements and tangible information about the consequences of base expansion. Other common activist tactics have little effect and may even backfire. The results add to the literature showing that political elites, who are typically more ideological than the public, often misjudge which strategies will influence them.

Keywords

social movements, contentious politics, public opinion, political elites, U.S. military

INTRODUCTION

We seem to live in a “movement society,” in which protests have become a routine element of political participation.¹ From Black Lives Matter in the United States to the Indignados in Spain, activists in recent years have contested a variety of domestic and international policies by taking to the streets in protest. New technologies have lowered the barriers to protest organization and facilitated the dissemination of images and videos that help spur the committed to action.² Meanwhile, top-down policy-making by elected and appointed officials generates new grievances and disillusionment with traditional forms of political participation.³

Despite the recent surge in contestation, prominent, sustained, and successful movements are a rarity.⁴ One possible cause is the disconnect between the most devoted individuals and the fence-sitters that they seek to win over. By their very nature, social and political movements require a support base of some of the most politically motivated, ideologically committed individuals.⁵ At the same time, movement success crucially depends on the opinion of the less interested, less opinionated public.⁶ The dual, contradictory challenge movements face – appealing both to their core supporters and the broader public at the same time – raises the question of movement efficacy. Given the common disconnect between ideologically-oriented political elites, including social movement leaders, and the mostly non-ideological mass public,⁷ do movements strategies actually influence public opinion?

We explore this question in the cases of South Korea and Japan, where various social movement groups have long challenged the presence of U.S. military bases. Given the seemingly radical nature of their cause – both countries are treaty-bound allies of the U.S., with a strong consensus shared among top policymakers on the necessity of the alliances and, by extension, the U.S. military bases⁸ – the activist-public disconnect is potentially acute for these movements.

And yet, despite the growing academic interest in anti-U.S. base activism overseas, the effects of such movements on public opinion remains largely untested with individual-level data.

To assess the effect of common anti-base social movement strategies on local public opinion, we conducted online survey experiments in April–May 2017 with residents of four key host communities: Gyeonggi Province and Daegu Metropolitan City in South Korea, and Kanagawa Prefecture and Okinawa Prefecture in Japan. Treatment conditions varied the information that respondents were provided about U.S. bases in their community, in line with different strategies that movements themselves have employed. We examine the effect of these different informational treatments on support or opposition to U.S. bases in the respondent’s community. The research design and pre-analysis plan were registered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) prior to any study activities. We augment the quantitative analysis with evidence drawn from interviews of anti-base activists in both countries (listed in the Appendix).

Our results show that anti-base movements are sometimes misguided, or even self-defeating, in their efforts to shift attitudes against U.S. bases. Local public opinion is responsive to pragmatic framing of opposition to U.S. military bases and tangible information about how bases affect residents’ everyday lives. A different approach often employed by anti-base movements—drawing attention to high-profile crimes against locals committed by U.S. service members—has small and mostly insignificant effects. Other common strategies, such as making ideological or nationalistic appeals or drawing attention to the anti-base stance of local governments, either have no effect on local attitudes or may actually boost support for U.S. bases.

On the whole, our research demonstrates a disconnect between some of the common anti-base movement strategies and local attitudes. As such, it adds to the literature showing that elites,

despite their political knowledge and presumed savviness, often misjudge how their political strategies will affect the behavior and opinion of the public.

ELITE DISCONNECT, MOVEMENTS, AND U.S. BASES

Research shows that political elites are often out of touch with the public they ostensibly seek to court. A common mistake is to overestimate the resonance of ideological appeals among the mass public, a strategy that often falls flat and sometimes clearly backfires. In the United States, politicians often falsely assume that candidates at the ideological extremes are more electable than moderates and that their constituents have strong ideological preferences.⁹ In Mexico, opposition parties offering ideologically-defined “alternative visions” for the country struggled for many years to compete against the dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party, whose main appeal was its pragmatic governing capacity.¹⁰ In Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party’s use of ideological appeals in the 1990 local elections led to an unexpected electoral setback.¹¹

This elite-mass disconnect is also typical of the relationship between social movement leaders and the public. Movement organizers tend to be better informed and more politically savvy than the broader public, and their ideological commitments rank high among the most common motivations for movement participation.¹² In turn, maintaining and reinforcing such ideology is important in managing social movements.¹³ Some scholars go as far as to argue that social movements amount to “ideologically structured action.”¹⁴ On the other hand, the broader public, whose sympathy can decisively shape the fate of social movements, tends to be less politically and ideologically oriented. Activists cannot simply brush aside the attitudes of the masses; rather, influencing public opinion is a common goal for social movements.¹⁵ In formulating policy decisions in a democracy, elected officials and policymakers are naturally attuned to the

sentiments of the mass public; therefore, social movements seek to attain policy goals indirectly by changing public preferences to support their causes.¹⁶

Like their counterparts pushing other causes, social movements opposing U.S. military bases around the world routinely seek to gain sympathy among the mass public.¹⁷ Yet evidence suggests that anti-base activists often find themselves out of sync with local attitudes. Sometimes, as in Ecuador, local communities are apathetic or even hostile to anti-base movements that otherwise receive strong support at the national and international level.¹⁸ In South Korea and Japan, U.S. military bases have endured for a long time despite vigorous anti-base movements and a common perception that their presence is deeply unpopular. Tacit support for the bases or indifference among the local public might explain this apparent paradox. Even in Okinawa, where U.S. bases are heavily contested, there is a discrepancy between the supposedly strong local anti-base sentiments and the “pro-base voting record.”¹⁹

The potential disconnect between anti-base activists and the mass public raises the important question of how movement strategies influence public opinion. Yet the comparative literature on U.S. military bases has remained focused on the mobilization of activists and on movements’ policy outcomes.²⁰ By largely ignoring public opinion, this literature risks misattributing policy changes, or lack thereof, to the direct influence of movements. As Burstein warns,²¹ that impact of protests on policy outcomes is likely to be reduced once public opinion is accounted for.

Moreover, while some arguments in the base politics literature invoke public opinion at times, they tend to do so in passing, without subjecting these claims to empirical tests. Calder, for example, argues that high-profile crimes committed by U.S. servicemen “attract the attention – and often the resentment – of people who normally would not be conscious of base issues.”²² Kawato’s discussion of the efficacy of normative arguments also involves assumptions about

public opinion: “As norms are expectations of proper behavior that are commonly accepted, mobilizations to protest their violation can become very large, attracting people across social and political divisions.”²³ Likewise, Lutz implicitly invokes public opinion by arguing that established bases are “unremarkable, inevitable, and legitimate” and “may disappear into a normalized background,” whereas newer bases command more attention and, potentially, animosity.²⁴ Testing these implicit assumptions against empirical data thus advances our understanding of both social movement strategies and base politics.

Our analysis focuses on South Korea and Japan, which are an appropriate set of cases for several reasons. First, relations between host communities and U.S. military bases are often contentious in South Korea and Japan, especially in comparison to Germany and Italy, where there is much less cultural conflict with the U.S. military²⁵ and the nature of the alliance is less imperial.²⁶ Yet host communities are not uniformly opposed to the U.S. presence, allowing us to examine variation in attitudes as they relate to movement strategies. Second, the democratic nature of the two regimes ensures that public opinion can meaningfully influence policymakers’ decisions, unlike many hosts to U.S. forces in the Middle East. Third, given the institutionalized nature of Washington’s partnerships with Seoul and Tokyo,²⁷ attitudes toward the U.S. military are much less subject to whims of national-level politicians, unlike in Central Asia, where alliances are often manipulated by authoritarian leaders,²⁸ or Ecuador, where elites are ambivalent about the value of the partnership.²⁹ Rather, they are more likely to respond to the local-level variables that we examine in this paper. Lastly, the aforementioned robustness of the alliance relationships means that our theoretical focus on the elite disconnect may be a particularly salient feature of anti-base movements in the two countries.

While public opinion at multiple levels—local, national, and international—is relevant to the success of anti-base movements, our analysis focuses on the opinion of people living in the communities where bases are located. Even though basing decisions are made at the interstate and national level, the physical manifestations of such decisions are distinctively local, such as deafening noise from an airbase or a shooting range. Moreover, local public opinion is often disproportionately influential in the basing decisions of national governments. For example, in 1990, Pyeongtaek City in Gyeonggi Province emerged as a candidate site for the relocation of Seoul’s Yongsan Army Garrison because the government anticipated low local public opposition there.³⁰ Similarly, in 2010, Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio’s efforts to move the Futenma airbase outside Okinawa Prefecture failed in part because candidate localities vehemently opposed the move.³¹

MOVEMENT STRATEGIES AND THEIR HYPOTHESIZED EFFECTS

Anti-base activists in South Korea and Japan largely coincide in terms of their strategies for contesting the U.S. military presence. Below, we describe four common approaches and develop corresponding theoretical expectations of their effects on local public opinion toward U.S. bases. The survey experiment then tests our hypotheses—each of them pre-registered prior to the start of research activities—regarding the effects of these common movement strategies.

1) Trigger Events

High-profile G.I. crimes and accidents, which we call trigger events, often become an immediate rallying point for anti-base activists.³² Activists believe that crimes and accidents, however unfortunate, are how anti-base agendas get publicized to the otherwise indifferent

public. In line with the view that grievances can be “created” and even “manipulated” by social movement actors,³³ some activists argue that the effectiveness in publicizing events, rather than their severity, determines the level of public attention.³⁴ One such case in South Korea concerns the initially underreported death in 2002 of two teenage girls run over by a U.S. military vehicle. The wide circulation of graphic pictures of the bloody scene,³⁵ which enflamed the public, was the result of a tactical decision by activists who understood the power of images over words in conveying the message of injustice.³⁶

The social movement literature offers theoretical expectations on the potential impact of publicizing trigger events. A traditional take on social movements posits that the existence and the perception of grievances, followed by the assessment on how to address them, give rise to social movements.³⁷ The mere existence of grievances, however, fails to explain variation in the intensiveness of public sentiments; although bases across different host communities produce negative externalities of similar nature,³⁸ local sentiments still range from approval to apathy to indignation. Supposing that preexisting grievances can become part of everyday routine, there may be occasional triggers that serve as a sharp reminder to the public of their dormant grievances. Exposing the public to information on trigger events may influence sentiments towards military bases. Despite the literature’s emphasis on rational reasoning, emotions such as indignation and empathy, likely to be linked to trigger events, are actually conducive to mobilization.³⁹ Once trigger events happen, the subsequent absence of adequate punishment for perpetrators, often based on different cultural understandings of crimes and accidents, only adds to anti-base sentiments.⁴⁰

By priming trigger events, we are not testing the effect that these events had on public opinion when they first came to light. However, we can test whether reminding the public of these prior

events, as anti-base movements often do, plays a role in shaping public opinion toward U.S. bases.

H1: Informing about trigger events, which calls renewed attention to preexisting grievances, increases opposition to U.S. military bases.

2) Status Quo Disruption

Activists are quick to seize upon changes in the status of U.S. bases, such as those introduced by U.S. force posture realignments. Activists see such changes as a crack in the system and an opportunity to promote the anti-base agenda. In Pyeongtaek, South Korea, local civic groups in 2001 organized a coalition opposing an anticipated move to consolidate U.S. bases in the city, which already hosted two mega-sized bases. Through continued efforts to reach out to residents of the affected towns, who stood to lose farmland from the base expansion, activists eventually helped them organize a grassroots movement against the plan.⁴¹ In Yokosuka in 2001, anti-base activists began to protest an extension of a pier at the U.S. naval base, which they suspected was aimed at ultimately hosting a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.⁴² Their preemptive opposition, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, was vindicated in 2008 when USS George Washington became the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to be permanently based in Japan.

Research from social movement scholars, political psychologists, and behavioral economists offer a theoretical ground for predicting the effects of status quo disruption on local public opinion. Social movement research often focuses on movements seeking change, but some movements are organized to resist change.⁴³ Prospect theory shows people are risk-averse when it comes to loss, as opposed to gains;⁴⁴ people who experience disruption of taken-for-granted

normality, therefore, more readily mobilize than those who seek gains.⁴⁵ Political psychologists show that communities facing sudden changes in circumstances can develop new collective political identity, which translates into a basis of mobilization.⁴⁶ The sudden formation of group identity has been empirically demonstrated in the context of controversial construction projects.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, we expect that major changes to the status quo of bases in host communities ought to disrupt any “normalized background”⁴⁸ into which they have disappeared, potentially affecting public opinion. Such disruption is an example of an unanticipated, externally imposed “shock” that political sociologists argue leads to collective action.⁴⁹ Major changes include base expansion, relocation and closure, and their expected effect on public opinion differs. Base expansion can lead to displacement of local population, sometimes directly threatening their livelihood; latent collective identity as a base community can then become salient and politicize a population in the process of seeking redress.⁵⁰ Base relocation, reduction and closure, meanwhile, often mean the removal or amelioration of a specific source of grievances, though some U.S. presence in the region is typically maintained.

H2a: Informing about bases slated for expansion increases opposition to U.S. military bases.

H2b: Informing about bases slated for relocation and closure decreases opposition to U.S. military bases.

3) Framing

In propagating anti-base messages, activists adopt framing strategies to “mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists.”⁵¹

Following Calder,⁵² we categorize framing strategies as ideological, nationalistic, or pragmatic. A separate content analysis of anti-base rhetoric (omitted self-citation) shows that all three strategies are salient features of anti-base activism. While pragmatic framing is the most prevalent, ideological or nationalistic framing dominates at some key bases, such as naval bases in Yokosuka and Chinhae. Activists often employ multiple framing strategies at the same protest events, but it is useful to conceptually separate them in order to test their efficacy.

Nationalistic framing involves appeals to notions of sovereignty and national pride. While the groups protesting U.S. bases are almost always left-wing, nationalist framing adopts a language that is not the exclusive province of either the Left or the Right. For example, civic groups opposing Yongsan Garrison in central Seoul claimed in 2001 that the base “tramples on our nation’s pride and sovereignty” and is “undeniably a place of humiliation.”⁵³ By contrast, ideological framing employs language that is more readily identified as left-wing, such as critiquing American imperialism or embracing pacifism, a position closely associated with the Left in Japan.⁵⁴ For example, activists argue that deployment of nuclear-powered warships to naval bases in Yokosuka and Sasebo are a “tool” to get Japan involved in “ugly wars” led by the U.S.,⁵⁵ and that their visits amount to a “militarized use of a port”⁵⁶. South Korean activists similarly argue that U.S. base consolidation in Pyeongtaek “epitomizes ... the U.S. military hegemony in East Asia.”⁵⁷

While nationalistic or ideological framing is often activists’ first instinct, they also frequently adopt pragmatic framing to emphasize everyday grievances of noise, environmental contamination, crime and underdevelopment. For example, when condemning the accidental shipment of live anthrax to Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek in 2015, activists adopted a more restrained tone, emphasizing that “there has yet to be a thorough investigation into the

unauthorized transfer of biological weapons, banned by both the domestic and international laws.”⁵⁸ Okinawans’ frequent evocation of human rights and structural discrimination can also be subsumed under the broad category of pragmatic framing. Claims of violations of rights associated with the U.S. presence often come down to grievances of safety concerns, pollution of various kinds, and other quality-of-life issues. The notion of discrimination, epitomized by the universal expression “base burden (*kichi futan*),” indicates the pragmatic nature of Okinawans’ collective grievances – that the bases are too imposing to bear due to various externalities, and that it is unfair that Okinawa disproportionately shoulders the burden.

The literatures on social movements and public opinion offer insight as to the relative efficacy of different framing strategies. The frame alignment model in the social movement literature focuses on how movements frame social problems by defining, interpreting and constructing them.⁵⁹ Movements with similar levels of deprivation can achieve different outcomes due to different framing strategies employed.⁶⁰ The political communication literature offers an individual-level mechanism for this finding: framing potentially influences public opinion.⁶¹ We expect that any type of framing by anti-base activists will increase overall public opposition to U.S. bases, as it highlights negative aspects of the U.S. military presence and provides the public with information on why some people protest. Yet we also expect that some types of frames will be more influential than others. Generalizable theories have yet to emerge on the relative efficacy of different framing strategies.⁶² Still, in the realm of base politics, pragmatic protests may perform better than nationalistically and ideologically framed counterparts in terms of galvanizing local public opinion. Local base communities have diverse yet specific grievances they want to see addressed, whereas nationalistic and ideological grievances are more geared towards broader audiences. Framing strategies that appeal to people’s direct, everyday

experiences may have “greater potency.”⁶³ Calder notes high incentives and low costs associated with pragmatic framing, as it “represent[s] local sentiments ... and induce[s] the central government to heavily compensate.”⁶⁴

H3a: Any framing of anti-base protests, which highlights negative information on U.S. military bases, increases opposition to bases.

H3b: Pragmatic framing of anti-base protests leads to greater public opposition to U.S. military bases than framing protests as ideological or nationalistic struggles.

4) Local Defiance

Activists commonly rally around local political leaders with anti-base views. Local governments sometimes strongly dissent against national policies toward U.S. military bases.⁶⁵ In Iwakuni, activists rallied around mayor Ihara Katsusuke, who led a 2006 referendum against the transfer of aircraft to the local Marine Corps Air Station, and they supported the campaign of another anti-base candidate after Ihara’s election loss in 2008.⁶⁶ Protests in the mid-2000s against a proposed troop increase at Camp Zama featured the disgruntled mayors of its host cities, Ogawa Isao from Sagamihara and Hoshino Katsuji from Zama. A local civic group that holds regular sit-ins and marches in opposition to Camp Zama uses a quote from former Mayor Ogawa as its slogan: “If we keep quiet, we will still be a base town in 100 years.”

In employing these strategies, anti-base movements in South Korea and Japan are almost always acting in an effort to shift public opinion in their favor. U.S. military authorities routinely ignore their protests; it is only when these protests enjoy broad public support that the U.S. has made conciliatory gestures.⁶⁷ Sometimes the immediate goal is a more specific one, such as

electing an anti-base mayor or helping to organize an opposition movement among local residents directly affected by base expansion. Yet the effect of these tactics on local public opinion about bases more broadly, and on support for the anti-base movements themselves, is a key barometer of their success.

Various research traditions offer insight into the effect of anti-base movements highlighting local government defiance. Political leaders and protestors share mutual interests in working towards a common cause; the former get to act as true champions of the people, and the latter gain an elite ally.⁶⁸ In the presence of a sizable like-minded constituency, leaders are emboldened to press for their preferences in negotiations with counterparts of higher authority.⁶⁹ As Betchtel and Urpelainen show,⁷⁰ subnational governments similarly exert pressure on central governments with respect to international issues that concern them. The dynamics can be extended to base politics, where local governments face the dual challenges of ensuring the well-being of local residents and complying with central government demands in managing the U.S. presence.⁷¹ Local governments are thus uniquely positioned to play an influential role in base politics, especially when they, along with their equally emboldened constituency, voice strong dissent.⁷² Given that the central governments of South Korea and Japan remain fundamentally in synch with the U.S. in terms of basing policy,⁷³ local dissent increases the saliency of base issues in host communities, in part by inviting the central government to “assert its predominance” over defiant localities.⁷⁴ Central-local government conflicts over basing policy are often viewed as a larger debate on local administrative and political autonomy, or even a test for democracy, which in turn can generate support from local populations interested in defending those values.⁷⁵ Since region-specific decisions made by national authorities are filtered through local lenses, as in the

case of U.S. Supreme Court verdicts with region-specific consequences,⁷⁶ locals may be inclined to favor policy decisions made by locally mandated actors rather than national authorities.

H4: Informing about local leaders challenging U.S. base policy increases public opposition to U.S. military bases.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To test these hypotheses regarding the effect of common anti-base movement strategies on local public opinion, we conducted online survey experiments targeting adults living in four base host communities: Gyeonggi Province and Daegu Metropolitan City in South Korea, and Kanagawa Prefecture and Okinawa Prefecture in Japan. These four regions are comparable in multiple ways. They have similar administrative status and are largely urban settings with high population densities and constant needs for land. They have hosted multiple U.S. military bases for decades, and each is home to numerous social movements seeking to raise awareness on base issues. No other region comes close to their high concentration of U.S. installations, many of them key bases of enduring strategic importance.⁷⁷

We recruited respondents via Facebook advertisements, a well-established, low-cost method for online survey experiments targeting non-Americans.⁷⁸ Advertisements targeted respondents ages 18 and older in each of the four regions. The full sample consisted of 2,356 respondents, split approximately equally among Daegu (N=576), Gyeonggi (N=582), Kanagawa (N=600), and Okinawa (N=598). To boost representativeness, we sought to approximate a stratified sampling procedure by running separate advertisements for specific strata of age range and sex in each region, dynamically adjusting the advertising budget based on the cost of recruiting each group.

In the end, we ended up with a sample that perfectly matched the target population in terms of gender (49% male) and was not drastically younger (a median age of 42, versus 47 in the adult population). As shown in the Appendix, the sample is also fairly representative of the population in terms of ideology.

The Korea segment was run in April 2017, followed by the Japan segment in May. Facebook users in our target population were exposed to advertisements offering a chance to win a cash prize (50,000 KRW or 5,000 JPY, each about \$45) for taking a survey of their opinions on current affairs. Those who clicked on the advertisements were redirected to an external website, Qualtrics, which hosted the survey.

Subjects were randomly assigned with equal probability to one of the conditions listed in Table 1. Vignettes are based on real-life events that took place in each region. While this design choice introduces some asymmetry in treatment conditions, it significantly boosts external validity compared to fictional vignettes, which have been shown to generate unrealistically large treatment effects that cannot be replicated using real-world information (omitted self-citation). In designing these vignettes, we avoided using very recent events, which would be more likely to be widely known by the population, reducing the potential for treatment effects. For similar reasons, we also omitted well-known trigger events that resulted in national responses, such as the 2002 death of two South Korean girls.

Our experiment included two control conditions—a pure control that conveyed no text prior to our first outcome measure, and a regular control that included a generic statement about U.S. military bases providing both benefits and detriments for local communities. Our treatment conditions begin with this generic statement from the regular control, followed by additional information about U.S. bases. Thus, our research design ensures that respondents are exposed to

some information on the positive aspects of hosting bases, although our treatments, in line with movement strategies, emphasize negative aspects.

We examine treatment effects on support or opposition to U.S. military bases. This outcome was measured immediately after the delivery of treatment information, using the following question: “Please indicate how much you support or oppose the presence of U.S. military bases in [Gyeonggi/Daegu/Okinawa/Kanagawa]: Strongly support (1); Somewhat support (2); Neither support nor oppose (3); Somewhat oppose (4); Strongly oppose (5).” In the Appendix, we examine treatment effects on a second, behavioral outcome, the decision to donate a portion of one’s compensation to a specific South Korean or Japanese organization opposing U.S. military bases in their country; results are consistent with those examined here.

We use the following specification to test hypotheses 1–4:

$$Y_{ir} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_{ir} + \sum_{j=1}^k (\mu_j X_{ir}^j + \gamma_j X_{ir}^j \cdot T_{ir}) + \epsilon_{ir}$$

Y_{ir} is the outcome variable for individual i in region r , T_{ir} is the treatment indicator, X_{ir}^j is the j th pre-treatment covariate, and ϵ_{ir} is the disturbance term. X_{ir}^j are demeaned using the sample average and always include regional dummies. Because we demean the covariates and include their interaction with treatment, β_1 is a consistent estimator for the average treatment effect.⁷⁹

For each hypothesis, we calculate one estimate in which X only includes regional fixed effects and another in which we also control for a pre-specified vector of pretreatment covariates. These include age, sex, education level, financial situation, attitude towards voting, political efficacy, various forms of political participation (signing petitions, participating in boycotts and

demonstrations, and donating to organizations), ideology, attention to local and national news, expectations of a future conflict in the region, and the possibility of a U.S. intervention.

Because all of our pre-registered hypotheses are directional in nature, we employ one-tailed tests, as specified in the pre-analysis plan. “Don’t know” options were not provided for any question, and skipping was not allowed, so nonresponse is not an issue.

The survey included an Instrumental Manipulation Check, or Screener question, to check whether respondents were paying attention.⁸⁰ Average treatment effects for the subset of respondents who passed the screener are presented in the Appendix; results are similar to those reported below for the full sample.

[Table I here]

RESULTS

We graphically summarize average treatment effects compared with both pure and regular controls, with and without covariates, in Figure 1. The lines in the plot show 90 percent two-sided confidence intervals, equivalent to statistical significance at the 0.95 level for our pre-registered one-sided hypotheses tests (assuming effects are in the hypothesized direction). The valid N for each estimate is approximately 581, except for the base expansion and reduction estimates, which are about three-quarters and one-quarter as large, respectively. Tables of coefficients, standard errors, and valid N’s for each regression can be found in the Appendix.

Our results underscore that opposition to U.S. military bases is influenced by tangible information about how bases affect residents’ lives and pragmatic framing of opposition by social movements. The hypothesis on base expansion (H2a) found strong support, with a statistically significant increase in opposition to U.S. bases in three out of four specifications.

Across the four specifications, the average point estimate was 0.20. Pragmatic framing of opposition to U.S. bases by social movements (H3a) had similar, albeit slightly more moderate effects: an average point estimate of 0.17, significant in two out of four specifications. These effects are not particularly large compared to the distribution of the outcome variable, which has a standard deviation of 1.24, but they are detectable.

We found weaker support for the other hypotheses corresponding to tactics commonly used by anti-base movements. Reminding respondents of trigger events (H1) seems to have some small effect on opposition to U.S. bases—an average point estimate of 0.13—but it is significant in only one specification. We lack sufficient statistical power to distinguish between the magnitude of these effects and those corresponding to pragmatic framing or base expansion, but the point estimates for trigger events are always the smallest of the three. Our hypotheses regarding opposition by local leaders (H4) and nationalistic and ideological framing by social movements (H3a) were not supported in any specification. In fact, there is some evidence that ideological framing of opposition to U.S. bases may backfire, actually increasing support for the U.S. military presence. We should note, of course, that our pre-registered hypothesis was that all forms of framing would increase opposition, so this particular interpretation is post-hoc. Finally, there is no evidence that base reduction (H2b) has the opposite effect as base expansion. This estimate is noisy, however, as the hypothesis could be tested only in Daegu.

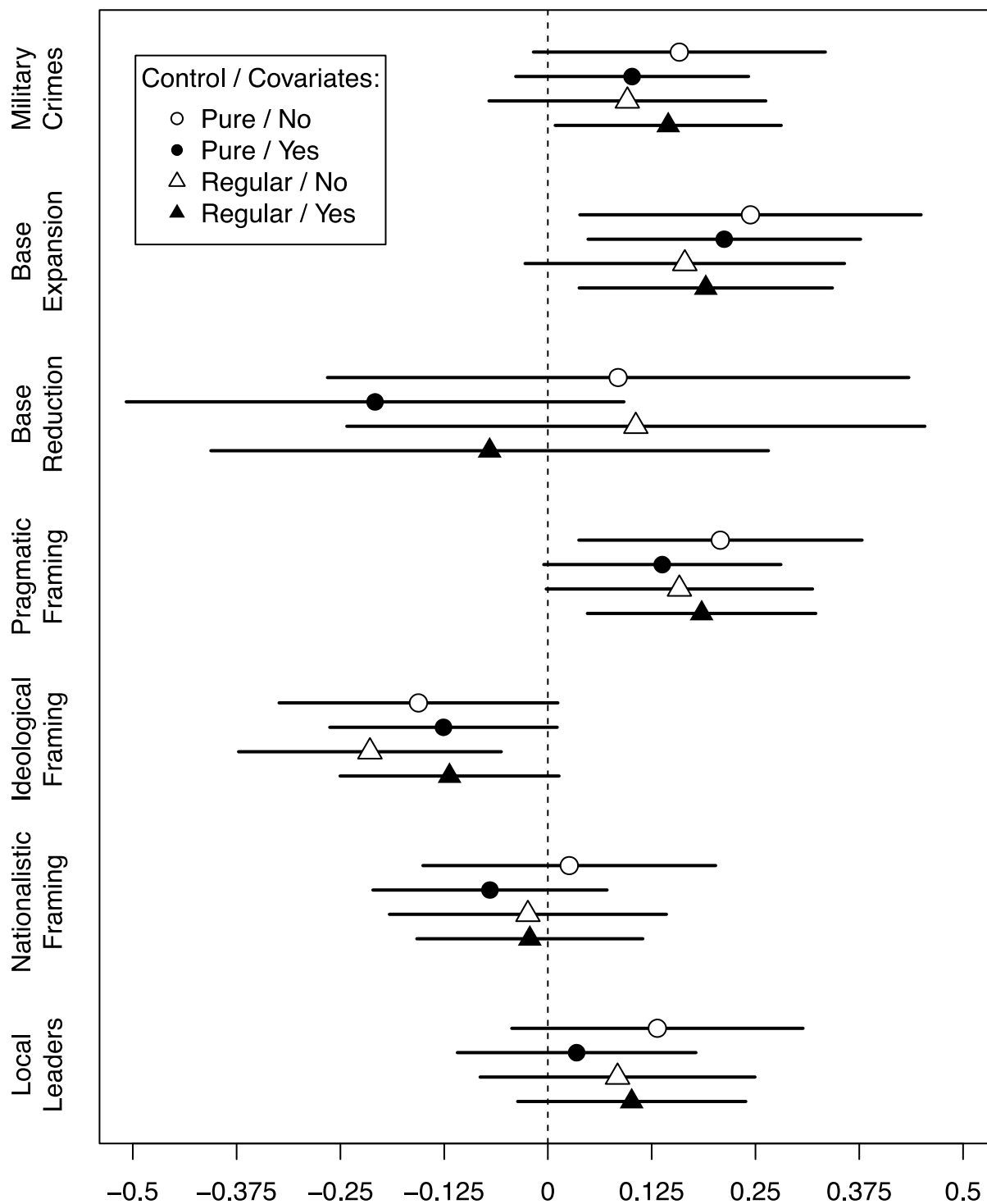
Given the contrast between the different framing effects, we found strongest support for our hypothesis that pragmatic framing would be most effective at boosting opposition to U.S. bases (H3b). Depending on the specification, differences between the “pragmatic” and “ideological” point estimates range from 0.29 to 0.37, significant at the 0.001 level. Pragmatic framing also

generated larger effects than nationalistic framing (differences of 0.18–0.20, significant at the 0.05 level or better for the pre-specified one-tailed test).

We argue that the weak and null findings for many common activist strategies are evidence of their limited efficacy and should not be attributed to the research design. In general, survey vignette experiments tend to overestimate rather than underestimate real-world treatment effects (omitted self-citation). The use of true information rather than fictional scenarios in our treatment conditions likely reduces this tendency. Yet other features of the experimental set-up, such as measuring the outcome at the bottom of the same screen where the treatment information is provided, would still lead to an expectation of larger-than-usual effects. In real life, informational effects on public opinion should decay over time, so one would expect them to be smaller than those estimated here. Moreover, the low-stakes nature of the outcome, self-declared support or opposition to U.S. military bases, ought to allow much larger treatment effects than we would obtain with alternative, costlier measures such as voting for an anti-base candidate or attending a protest.

It is possible that social movement leaders do not actually seek to influence public opinion with all of their strategies. Rather, they might seek to segment their appeals, mobilizing hard-core activists with certain messages while boosting broader public sympathy with others. If this were the case, nationalistic and ideological framing might indeed be effective for their intended purpose—firing up leftist sympathizers—even if they fall flat or potentially backfire among the general public. To test for this possibility, we interact the treatment indicators for ideological and nationalistic framing with a ten-point ideological self-placement scale. Results, reported in the Appendix, show that ideological and nationalistic appeals never significantly boost opposition to U.S. bases among left-wing respondents.

Figure 1: Treatment Effects on Opposition to U.S. Bases



Note: Dependent variable is a 1–5 Likert scale measuring opposition to U.S. military bases in the respondent’s region. Icons give point estimates and lines give two-sided 90 percent confidence intervals.

A final potential concern is that treatment effects were attenuated by the tense political environment surrounding North Korea in 2017. To gauge relevant attitudes, we included several questions from prior surveys. In our survey, 30 percent of South Koreans and 54 percent of Japanese believed that a military conflict in East Asia is likely to happen in the next ten years. A 2014 poll of opinion leaders in the two countries obtained very similar figures: 29 percent and 59 percent, respectively.⁸¹ Likewise, when asked whether the U.S. should intervene in the event of a North Korean attack, 85 percent of Koreans and 78 percent of Japanese said yes—figures quite similar to those from nationally representative surveys in 2016, in which 91 percent of Koreans and 70 percent of Japanese favored intervention.⁸² These findings suggest that our respondents were not unusually concerned with the North Korean security threat.

CONCLUSION

Social movements, which emerge “from below” and aim to give voice to the masses against the indifference or outright antagonism of policy-makers and elected officials, might seem well positioned to craft a discourse or engage in strategies that resonate with the public. The social movement literature juxtaposes activists with the political elites whose decisions they seek to influence. For its part, the field of public opinion research tends to define “elites” as high-social status opinion leaders, including politicians, appointed officials and journalists.⁸³ Social movement leaders are typically placed in the elite category only after they gain substantial prominence and wield at least some of their influence through formal political channels.⁸⁴ The vast majority of activists lack the bullhorn and public prominence of traditional political elites, whose influence on mass attitudes has long been acknowledged. If social movement leaders have

a comparative advantage in winning converts to their cause, it would presumably be the intensity of their mission as well as their more common touch and “ear to the ground.”

Yet social movement activists are similar to elite opinion leaders in one crucial respect: their higher levels of political interest, knowledge, and involvement, and their stronger (and typically more extreme) ideological self-identification.⁸⁵ Activists themselves tend to be motivated by, and naturally employ, more radical discourse and confrontational stances. Indeed, maintaining the commitment of a core group of activists may require such tactics.⁸⁶ Deviating from an established framing strategy, for instance in pursuit of public sympathies, risks resistance from hard-core supporters.⁸⁷ Yet achieving a more widespread appeal—and thus bringing electoral and public opinion pressure to bear on politicians and policy-makers—can be a key way for a social movement to meet its goals.⁸⁸ Whether through instinct, miscalculation, or being overly attentive to the preferences of their core supporters, activists also risk using language and tactics that fail to resonate with, or even actively alienate, the more apathetic and less ideological public.

In this study, we argue that social movement leaders opposing U.S. military bases in South Korea and Japan often employ strategies and craft messages that are out of touch with public opinion and, in the extreme, can lead to a backlash and loss of support. As we show, pragmatic messages from anti-base movements and tangible information about the impacts of base expansion do have some resonance with the public. Some anti-base activists recognize the value of such moderate discourse, strategically adopting pragmatic framing for their public messages even though they are motivated by nationalistic or ideological aims. Yet other activists persist in using more absolutist language, rallying around defiant local politicians, or emphasizing crimes and accidents committed by U.S. servicemen—factors that may motivate their own activism but

do less to move public opinion in their favor. At worst, their rhetoric may even backfire and lead to a loss of public support.

The limited effect of trigger events in our survey experiment also speaks to a disconnect between activists and public opinion. Our findings do not necessarily mean that people fail to react to trigger events when they first happen—only that reminding them of these events several years after the fact has little effect on public opinion. Yet activists persist in using this strategy, despite their frustrations with the limited public response. For example, the explosive anger generated by the 2002 death of two girls in South Korea has subsided over time; while leftist civic groups commemorate the anniversary of their death every year, recent events have been small in size and involved few local participants.⁸⁹ Likewise, to the frustration of some activists in Japan, the typical public response to trigger events is to treat them as unfortunate one-time events, rather than an inevitable byproduct of the U.S. presence.⁹⁰

Evidence from other countries suggests that our findings are not unique to East Asia; status quo changes and pragmatic concerns are the major factors catalyzing local public opposition to U.S. military bases in other countries as well. In Italy, for example, an otherwise stable base politics scenario was thrown into disarray due to fierce opposition to the expansion of a U.S. air base in Vicenza between 2006 and 2008.⁹¹ In Germany, present-day anti-base activism “almost entirely” revolves around pragmatic issues that directly influence the host communities, such as noise and environmental pollution.⁹²

Beyond the anti-base movement, the broader scope of Japanese and South Korean politics suggests that the efficacy of nationalist and ideological appeals has declined over time. In South Korea, anti-American nationalism was a dominant sentiment among pro-democracy student activists in the 1980s, but this discourse became much less potent by the 1990s, partially due to

radicalization of its practitioners.⁹³ In Japan, mass support for radical anti-American and pacifist positions peaked in the 1960s and 1970s with the movement against the U.S.-Japan security treaty and the Vietnam War. In recent decades, civil society has been dormant with respect to pacifist causes, partially due to the radicalization and the marginalization of these movements.⁹⁴

Recent mass protests in South Korea and Japan further underscore that pragmatic concerns, not ideology, are most effective at mobilizing the general public. South Korea's 2008 protests against U.S. beef imports were marked by horizontal associations of individuals concerned primarily about food safety. Even though they identified as "progressive," participants refused to follow instructions from traditional leftist groups.⁹⁵ In Japan, the brief revival of large-scale activism following the 2011 nuclear disaster similarly featured a loose network of ordinary citizens with no ties to political organizations.⁹⁶ These examples suggest that the mobilization of an otherwise non-politicized public, which increasingly distances itself from the traditional left, requires an emphasis on pragmatic concerns.

A key contribution of the present analysis is our extension of arguments about elite disconnect to the study of social movements. The elite-public disconnect has been well demonstrated in the study of elections, where political elites, who typically lie further to the ideological extremes than the mass public, often err in their assumptions about how people will respond to extremist tactics and ideological or radical appeals.⁹⁷ However, this same phenomenon has yet to receive much attention in the study of social movements and contentious politics. If anything, the social movement literature suffers from a tendency to "exaggerat[e] the ... causal significance of movements," given that most mobilization attempts are actually unsuccessful.⁹⁸ Failed movements may have many causes, but among them are strategies that lack resonance with the broader public. Movement leaders with an ironclad devotion to their

cause may blame nonparticipants for alleged ignorance and laziness while neglecting to consider their own inability to win over fence-sitters.⁹⁹

Going forward, scholars can do much more to examine the effect of social movement strategies on public opinion. For movements with local grievances that also seek a national or global stage, do the same strategies have different effects on different audiences, based on their direct connection to the issues at hand? Are ideological appeals and radical language more resonant in some areas than in others—for example, abortion or immigration? Do right-wing and left-wing social movements suffer from similar forms of activist disconnect? How does the “radical flank effect”¹⁰⁰ – whereby the public becomes more sympathetic to groups with moderate tactics in the presence of radical groups espousing the same cause – interact with this phenomenon? These and other related questions will be important for scholars to consider as they seek to connect the study of social movements with that of broader public opinion.

Table I: Treatment Conditions

Condition	Intro text	Gyeonggi text	Daegu text	Okinawa text	Kanagawa text
<i>Pure Control</i>					
<i>Regular Control</i>	There are multiple U.S. military bases in [Gyeonggi / Daegu / Okinawa / Kanagawa], which have elicited mixed	In September 2014, a 29-year-old American soldier in Gyeonggi Province strangled and beat a South Korean taxi driver while riding his car. The taxi crashed into the curb, leaving the driver injured. The soldier immediately ran away, returning to his base.	In November 2013, a member of the U.S. military police based in Daegu crashed into two cars while driving under the influence. He and his colleagues immediately drove away, and beat up a South Korean man who chased them after the crash. The 23-year-old American officer's blood alcohol concentration level far exceeded the legal limit.	In November 2009, a 27-year-old American soldier in Okinawa Prefecture ran over a Japanese man who was talking a walk. The soldier left the scene, leaving behind the 66-year-old victim who eventually died of a broken neck.	In November 2006, a 54-year-old civilian employee at a U.S. military base in Kanagawa Prefecture assaulted a 70-year-old Japanese man at a bar. The victim fell to the ground, hitting his head on the sidewalk. Four days later, the Japanese man died of brain contusion.
<i>Trigger Events</i>	reaction from the locals over the years. On the one hand, U.S. troops frequent local business and they	In December 2004, the parliament approved a plan to triple the size of a U.S. military base in Gyeonggi Province and turn it into the largest U.S. base overseas, which required large-scale land appropriations from local farmers.	In October 2009, South Korean and U.S. authorities agreed to return a portion of the land occupied by one of the U.S. military bases in Daegu. This move involves the removal of a heliport, which has caused noise pollution for residents near the base. The local government plans to turn the site into a park and build a public library.	In May 2006, the government announced that a new U.S. military base will be built in Okinawa Prefecture next to the already existing Marine base, which requires the construction of new runways in an area known for pristine nature.	Throughout the early-to-mid 2000s, there was a move at one of the U.S. military bases in Kanagawa Prefecture to expand the area where ships are docked, raising the possibility that the base would be become a permanent home port for U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carriers.
<i>Status Quo Disruption</i>	contribute to national defense. On the other hand, bases have witnessed occasional protests from groups of citizens who argue that they do more harm than good.	In particular, one group has been protesting polluted soil at the base sites after a probe found that the soil contamination level around the sites was up to 90 times higher than the national environmental standards.	In particular, one group has been protesting the presence of bases as they symbolize American military hegemony in the world; the group claims that the bases promote militarism and support U.S. imperialism.	In particular, one group has been protesting the alleged inequality and hierarchy between the U.S. and South Korea/Japan, which they say is demonstrated by the legal status of U.S. personnel in South Korea/Japan as specified in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The group sees the U.S. bases as a challenge to South Korea's/Japan's sovereignty.	
<i>Pragmatic Framing</i>					
<i>Ideological Framing</i>					
<i>Nationalistic Framing</i>					
<i>Local Defiance</i>		Between 2014 and 2015, following the announcement that one of the U.S. military bases in Gyeonggi Province originally slated for relocation will not leave, city officials and locals held protests for 200 days in a row to condemn the unilateral decision by the	In October 2010, the South Korean government, at the request of the U.S. forces, announced that it will designate two of the U.S. military bases in Daegu as military reservation areas. The local government strongly opposed the move, which they said will retard economic	In October 2015, the Okinawa prefectural government revoked the approval of land reclamation work required for the relocation of a U.S. military base there. The move was seen as a direct challenge to the longstanding policy objective of the central	In May 2005, local government officials delivered a petition signed by 60,000 locals living near one of the U.S. military bases in Kanagawa Prefecture to protest the move by the central government and the U.S. military to relocate an army unit from the U.S. to the

Table I: Treatment Conditions

		central government and the U.S. military.	developments and violate property rights of the locals.	government and the U.S. military.	local base and station more troops there.
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