

# **Opinions of a Hegemon: Local Attitudes Toward U.S. Military Bases Abroad**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Why do foreign publics sometimes resist the presence of U.S. military bases in their communities and sometimes welcome them? Do anti-base activists seeking to challenge the U.S. presence succeed in persuading the local population? While the comparative literature on base contestation often makes implicit causal claims about public opinion, these claims have never been tested empirically using individual-level data. Based on an online survey experiment with residents of communities hosting U.S. military bases in South Korea and Japan, this study shows that local public opinion is responsive to pragmatic framing of opposition by social movements and tangible information about the consequences of base expansion. Other common activist tactics have weak or null effects and may even backfire. The results thus speak to a broader literature showing that political elites, who are typically more ideological than the public, often misjudge which strategies will influence them.

## **Keywords**

U.S. military bases, public opinion, alliances

## INTRODUCTION

Why do foreign publics sometimes resist the presence of U.S. military bases in their communities and sometimes welcome them? While the comparative literature on base contestation often makes implicit causal claims about factors that influence local public opinion, these claims have not been tested empirically using individual-level data. Similarly, the burgeoning literature on anti-U.S. base movements has yet to test whether activist strategies and tactics are actually effective in influencing public opinion.

Research has shown that anti-base activists, like any other type of activist, make conscious efforts to optimize movement strategies for greater public resonance of their causes (Yeo 2006; C. J. Kim 2017). Given the common movement goal of influencing policy (Amenta et al. 2010), and the proven ability of stable opinion majorities to shape policy decisions (Page and Shapiro 1983), it is puzzling that little attention has been given to whether anti-base movements' strategies succeed in shifting public opinion in their favor. We fill this gap by offering the first empirical evidence from survey experiments examining what factors shape local communities' sentiment towards U.S. bases they host, and whether they align with commonly employed anti-base movement strategies. Theoretically, we bridge the disparate literatures on base politics and public opinion, testing a number of implicit, and occasionally explicit, causal claims made by prior studies about the relationship between anti-base movement strategies and local attitudes.

We focus on public opinion and social movements in South Korea and Japan, two major Asian allies that host 83 and 122 U.S. military installations, respectively (Department of Defense 2015, 6). To examine what influences local public opinion toward U.S. military bases, 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. 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 local public 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 speaks to a larger body of 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.

## **U.S. BASES, MOVEMENTS, AND PUBLIC OPINION**

The base politics literature has mostly focused on factors other than local public opinion. Rather, it has dealt with mobilization of anti-U.S. base movements and their policy outcomes (Calder 2007; Cooley 2008; Yeo 2011; Kawato 2015; Gresh 2015). Causal factors influencing mobilization and policy, according to these pioneering works, include regime types, elite-level security consensus, activists' normative persuasion of policymakers, and external and internal security threats. Cooley's

(2008) focus on regime type, or Gresh's (2015) emphasis on security threats, for example, does not allow much theoretical room to account for local responses. Yeo (2011)'s emphasis on security consensus within alliance partners, as well as Kawato (2015)'s focus on dynamics between activists and policymakers, largely bypasses public opinion. Impact of protests on policy outcomes, however, is likely to be reduced once public opinion is accounted for (Burstein 1998).

While some arguments in the existing literature invoke public opinion at times, they tend to do so only in passing, without subjecting these claims to any empirical tests. Calder (2007, 87), 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." 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" (Kawato 2015, 11). Likewise, Lutz (2009, 32) 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.

Testing the effect of anti-base movement strategies on public opinion is all the more important because evidence suggests that activists may not always be in 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 (Fitz-Henry 2015). Moreover, American military bases have endured for a long time in host countries such as South Korea and Japan, despite vigorous anti-base movements and a common perception that they are deeply unpopular. Tacit support for the bases or indifference among the local public might explain this apparent paradox. While media tend to focus on high-profile events (Woolley 2000), such as mass protests or denunciations by vocal individuals, that may not be representative of broader public opinion. 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” (Kagotani and Yanai 2014, 111). The operation of anti-base movements, in reality, does not necessarily go hand in hand with the direction of broader public opinion.

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. military (Calder 2007, 95; Rassbach 2010, 127) and the nature of the alliance is less imperial (Nexon and Wright 2007, 267). Yet host communities are not uniformly opposed to the U.S. presence, allowing us to examine variation in attitudes. 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 (Yeo 2011), 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 (Cooley 2008, 217-48), or Ecuador, where elites are ambivalent about the value of the partnership (Yeo 2011, 87-100). Rather, they are more likely to respond to the local-level variables that we examine in this paper.

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 (*Hankyoreh* 1990). 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 (Interview with Hatoyama, June 19, 2017).

## COMMON MOVEMENT STRATEGIES

When examining how different factors affect public opinion regarding U.S. bases abroad, it is important to consider the strategies of the main actor seeking to influence those opinions—social movements opposing the U.S. military presence in their communities. 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.

First, high-profile G.I. crimes and accidents often become an immediate rallying point for anti-base activists (Marten 2005, 159). 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 (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1215), some argue that the effectiveness in publicizing events, rather than their severity, determines the level of public attention (Interview with Bae Jong-jin, June 28, 2016). 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 (Calder 2007, 5), 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 (Interview with Kim Pan-tei, June 15, 2016).

Second, 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 (Interview with Kim Yong-han, July 3, 2016). 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 (Montgomery 2004). Their preemptive opposition, albeit unsuccessful, was vindicated in 2008 when USS George Washington became the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to be permanently based in Japan.

Third, in propagating anti-base messages, activists adopt framing strategies to “mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988, 198). Following Calder (2007, 84), we categorize framing strategies as ideological, nationalistic, or pragmatic. 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” (Campaign for Return of Yongsan Base 2001). 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 (Berger 1998). 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. (*Kyodo News* 2008), and that their visits amount to a “militarized use of a port” (Umeda 2014). South Korean activists similarly argue that

U.S. base consolidation in Pyeongtaek “epitomizes ... the U.S. military hegemony in East Asia” (S. Lee 2007). Finally, while nationalistic or ideological framing is often activists’ first instinct, they also frequently adopt pragmatic framing to emphasize everyday grievances of noise, pollution, 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” (H. Kim 2015).

Fourth, activists commonly rally around local political leaders with anti-base views. Japanese local governments sometimes strongly dissent against national policies toward U.S. military bases (Smith 2000). 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 (Interview with Ōkawa Kiyoshi, September 30, 2016). Protests in the mid-2000s against a proposed troop increase at Camp Zama featured the disgruntled mayors of its host cities, Ogawa Isao from Sagami-hara 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 (Interview with Shin Soo-yun, June 8, 2016). 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.

## **HYPOTHESIZED EFFECTS ON PUBLIC OPINION**

While anti-base activists seek to shift attitudes in their favor, the question of whether we would expect them to succeed is a theoretical one. Below, we develop hypotheses regarding the effect of anti-base activists' common strategies on local public opinion toward U.S. bases.

### **1) Trigger Events Hypothesis**

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 (Gurr 1970). 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 (Yeo 2011, 19), 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, defined as high-profile accidents and crimes for which American troops and bases are to be blamed, 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 (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2009). 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 (Marten 2005, 178–81).

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 Hypothesis**

Social movement research often focuses on movements seeking change, but some movements are organized to resist change (Zanden 1959). Prospect theory shows people are risk-averse when it comes to loss, as opposed to gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979); people who experience disruption of taken-for-granted normality, therefore, more readily mobilize than those who seek gains (Snow et al. 1998). Political psychologists show that communities facing sudden changes in circumstances can develop new collective political identity, which translates into a basis of mobilization (Klandermans 2014). The sudden formation of group identity has been empirically demonstrated in the context of controversial construction projects (Mannarini et al. 2009), for example. In a similar vein, we expect that major changes to the status quo of bases in host communities ought to disrupt any “normalized background” (Lutz 2009, 32) into which they have disappeared, potentially affecting public opinion. 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 (Klandermans 2014). Base relocation, reduction and closure, meanwhile, often mean the removal 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 Hypothesis

The frame alignment model in the social movement literature focuses on how movements frame social problems by defining, interpreting and constructing them (Benford and Snow 2000). Movements with similar levels of deprivation can achieve different outcomes due to different framing strategies employed (Snow et al. 1986). The political communication literature offers an individual-level mechanism for this finding: framing potentially influences public opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007). 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 (Chong and Druckman 2007, 117). 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" (Snow and Benford 1992, 141). Calder (2007, 85) 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."

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 Hypothesis**

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 (Tarrow 2011, 168). In the presence of a sizable like-minded constituency, leaders are emboldened to press for their preferences in negotiations with counterparts of higher authority (Schelling 1960; Putnam 1988). As Betchtel and Urpelainen (2015) show, 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 (Smith 1999). 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 (Smith 2000, 20). Given that the central governments of South Korea and Japan remain fundamentally in synch with the U.S. in terms of basing policy (Yeo 2011), 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 (Mulgan 2000, 161). 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 (Smith 1999; Mulgan 2000). 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 (Hoekstra and Segal 1996; Hoekstra 2000), 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 two base host communities each in South Korea and Japan: Gyeonggi Province and Daegu Metropolitan City in South Korea, and Kanagawa Prefecture and Okinawa Prefecture in Japan. These four regions are comparable in terms of their administrative status and their history of hosting multiple U.S. military bases for decades.

We recruited respondents via Facebook advertisements, a well-established, low-cost method for online survey experiments targeting non-Americans (Samuels and Zucco 2014). 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  $\epsilon_{ir}$  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,  $\beta_1$  is a consistent estimator for the average treatment effect (Lin 2013).

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 (Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances 2014). 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 1: 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 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 central government and the U.S. military.	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 developments and violate property rights of the locals.	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 government and the U.S. military.	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 local base and station more troops there.



## 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.

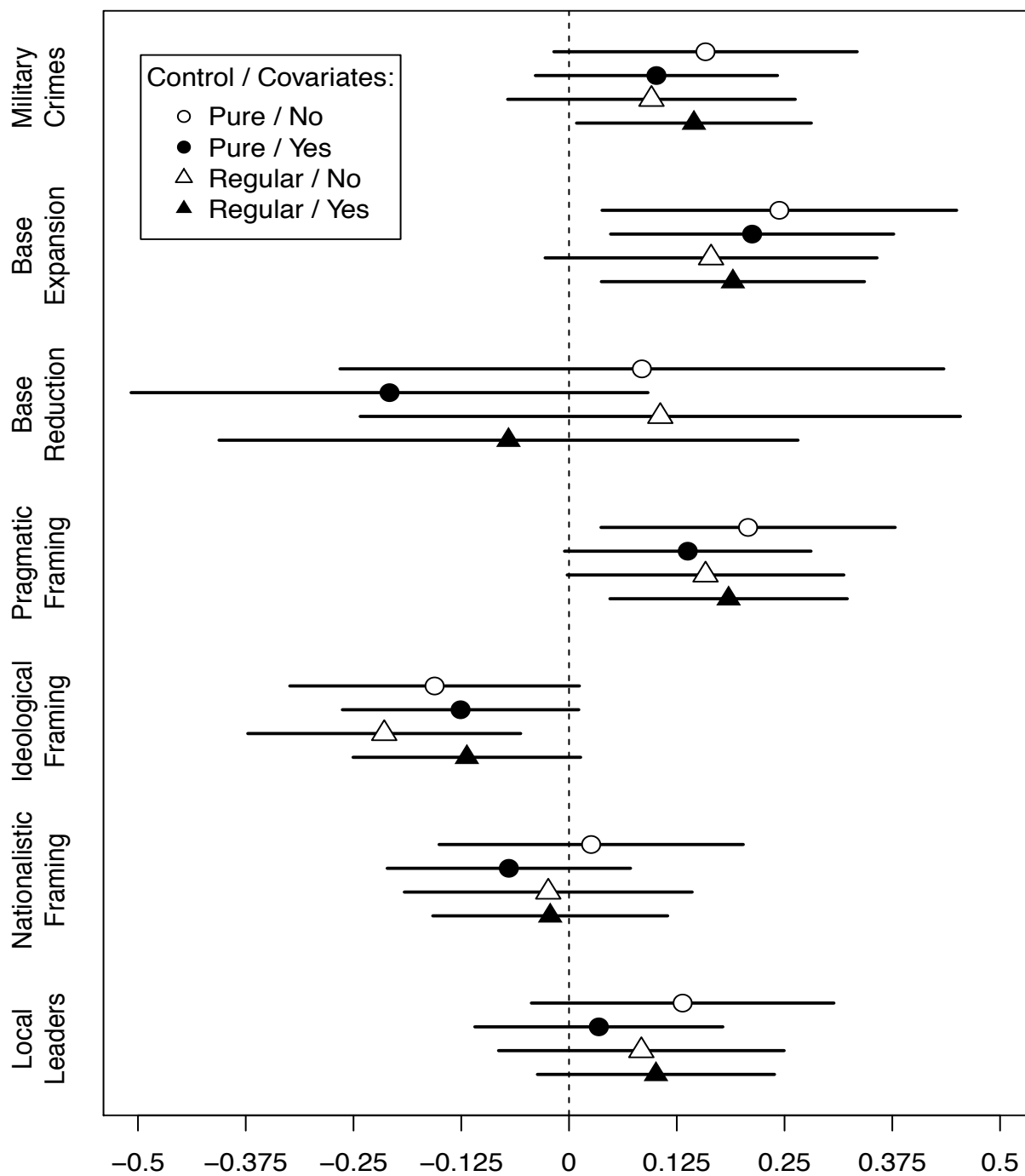
We found weaker support for the other hypotheses corresponding to tactics commonly used by anti-base movements. Reminding respondents of trigger events (H1) seems to have some small effect on opposition to U.S. bases—an average point estimate of 0.13—but it is significant in only one specification. We 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.

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.

One 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 (Genron NPO 2014). 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 (Genron NPO 2016). These findings suggest that our respondents were not unusually concerned with the North Korean security threat.

## **DISCUSSION**

The rather weak or null effects of many of our treatments call into question a number of common anti-base movement strategies. Our findings suggest that South Korea and Japanese anti-base activist leaders, like many political elites elsewhere in the world, 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. In general, activists lie further toward the ideological extremes than the mass public. The types of ideas, messages, and events that motivate someone to attend a street protest or organize a social movement are often different from those that win sympathy from the general public. Many anti-base activists recognize this fact, strategically adopting pragmatic framing for their public messages even though they are motivated by nationalistic or ideological aims. 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. Yet other activists persist in using more extremist 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.

In highlighting a disconnect between activists and the local public, our findings speak to a larger literature showing 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 (Broockman and Skovron 2015; Broockman et al. 2017; Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017). 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 (Klesner 2005, 135). In Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party’s use of ideological appeals in the 1990 local elections led to an unexpected electoral setback (Bosco 1994).

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 (Interview with two anonymous former activists, July 11, 2016). 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 (Interview with Nīkura Yasuo, October 4, 2016).

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 (N. Lee 2007). 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 (Y. Iida 2002, 126).

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 (Cho 2009). 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 (Oguma 2016). 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.

## **CONCLUSION**

The base literature has made causal claims based on implicit assumptions about public opinion. Similarly, despite the growing academic interest in anti-U.S. base activism overseas, the efficacy of

such movements remain largely untested. We offer new theoretical and empirical insights by leveraging the first individual-level data linking public opinion and anti-U.S. base movements. Our findings suggest that anti-base activists, contrary to the common media portrayals that play up their influence, may often be out of tune with what moves public sentiments. As such, our results speak to a larger literature on how 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 ideological or radical appeals.

Our findings also have resonance outside of East Asia, where evidence suggests that status quo changes and pragmatic concerns are the major factors catalyzing local public opposition to U.S. military bases. 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 (Yeo 2011, 100-106). 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 (Rassbach 2010, 125). There is also evidence that ideological attacks on the U.S. military presence may fall flat. In Ecuador, framing the anti-base movement as an anti-imperialist struggle left local people in host communities decidedly unsympathetic to these criticisms (Fitz-Henry 2015, 47–51). Tangible impacts on people’s lives seem to be the factors that matter most for local attitudes toward U.S. military bases, both in East Asia and beyond.

More broadly, the attention to sources of local grievances born out of elite-level interstate agreements addresses a conspicuous gap in the international relations literature, which has tended to focus on top-down decision-making rather than the local implications of these decisions. Anti-base movements are a reminder that the international system is often perceived as a hierarchy, not anarchy, and that the legitimacy of American power projection abroad is subject to constant questioning (Nexon and Wright 2007). The base politics literature partially fills this gap by

demonstrating the international origins of local struggles and their influence on interstate relations (Gourevitch 1978). Yet our research shows that a different local implication of interstate decision-making—namely, its impact on public opinion—may not parallel the reaction among the activists who staunchly oppose these agreements. The limited public resonance of common movement strategies calls into question the efficacy of anti-base movements themselves, since they rarely succeed in altering policy without significant local support. Hence, our research cautions against the tendency to “exaggerat[e] ... causal significance of movements” (McAdam and Boudet 2012, 181) in studies of the U.S. overseas presence.

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