Access and Influence? U.S. and Chinese Military Presence and Popular Support in Host Countries

1. Background

The ability to project military power abroad is a central means by which states exert influence in international politics, allowing them to defeat adversaries and reassure allies across large distances (Levy and Thompson 2010; Markowitz and Fariss 2013; Blankenship and Lin-Greenberg 2022). To project power, states need access to other countries' territory, often in the form of foreign military bases, which allow states to control territory, forward deploy personnel, and resupply their forces (Harkavy 1989; Posen 2003). Basing access, however, is often precarious. In the current international system, states typically rely on the consent of sovereign host states to build and maintain their foreign military presence. This strategy contrasts with earlier periods when states secured bases through force, coercion, and formal empire (Schmidt 2020). Because host states can grant or deny access, they are subject to pressure as great power rivals like the United States and China increasingly compete for access and influence worldwide.

The proposed project treats host support and major power competition as key variables to explore, asking two basic science research questions for international relations: What factors affect host support for foreign military presence? And how does competition from foreign powers, in turn, shape these factors?

The systematic study of overseas military basing and how it affects and is affected by host populations is still new. While military basing is a centuries-old practice, methods of securing military access have evolved. Traditionally, the ability to deploy troops in other states' territory primarily arose from conquest and colonialism. After World War II and into the period of decolonization, alliances, and regime change, they provided a path for the United States and the Soviet Union to have long-term military access to (or control over) other's territories. While the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a withdrawal from most Russian bases, the United States expanded its network to include most of the globe.

However, even a global basing network does not provide unfettered access. For example, the United States maintained between 2,000–3,000 troops in Turkey in the lead-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Yet, upon requesting the use of Turkey as a launching pad for its invasion, the Turkish parliament unexpectedly refused the U.S. request. As this example illustrates, access is an ongoing political and bargaining process that requires consent from the granting state. Moreover, this bargaining process often encounters internal challenges from domestic audiences within a host country who oppose the foreign military presence. Internal challenges are rooted in abstract ideas about infringement upon host sovereignty and the negative effects that bases impose on their environments, including noise, environmental pollution, traffic congestion, and crime committed by the basing power's service members.

To overcome these potential objections, basing countries use different policy tools to win both elite and popular support for a military presence. These include using financial incentives to curry favor—building infrastructure for the host population and hiring local labor—as well as taking steps to ensure that the host population has positive social interactions with military personnel (Allen et al. 2020; Blankenship and Joyce 2020; Martínez Machain et al. 2022). As reported by the Washington Post in April 2023, the U.S. Department of Defense believes that "the PLA likely will use tailored approaches to address local concerns as it seeks to improve relations with amenable countries and advance its overseas basing goals" (Hudson, Nakashima, and Sly 2023). The U.S. State Department similarly noted in 2018 that "the United States has created a strong Djiboutian constituency that favors our military presence, owing to increased local hiring and contracting with Djiboutian companies at Camp Lemonnier" (State Department 2018, 2).

Despite the importance of these tools in cultivating host support and the centrality of host support to bargaining over access, both support and its drivers remain understudied. This project builds on the work of three scholars (Allen, Flynn, and Martinez Machain) on this proposal to uncover the individual-level determinants of support. This project further builds on the work of the other two scholars (Blankenship and Joyce), which focused on explaining how competition shapes basing at the macro level to investigate the micro-foundations of how U.S.-China competition shapes public and elite sentiment in host countries.

In several ways, the emerging era of great power basing is distinctive from either the Cold War or post-Cold War periods. First, unlike the post-Cold War period, the United States faces geopolitical competition from near-peer great powers like China. As a result, the challenges to U.S. bases no longer

stem solely from internal forces—concerns among the population about crime, pollution, and infringements on sovereignty—but also have an essential external component.

Second, unlike the Cold War, China's challenge to U.S. bases is often more indirect and asymmetric than the Soviet Union. The U.S. and Soviet Union competed for bases directly but rarely had bases in the same countries (Nieman et al. 2021). China, by contrast, has pursued a lighter-footprint basing model and has often sought access and influence in countries that could or already do host a U.S. base. For example, in 2015 China established a permanent military base in Djibouti, which already hosted the largest U.S. base in Africa. Similarly, much of China's effort has focused on establishing military access to other states' existing military or commercial installations, such as dual-use commercial ports (Kardon 2022). China has thus followed a different power projection model that better fits with a strategy of avoiding confrontation and building political, economic, and military influence (Doshi 2021). For example, in December of 2023, the first Chinese military vessels docked in Cambodia's Ream Naval base, which had recently been renovated through Chinese grant funding (Gan 2023).

Moreover, much of China's challenge to U.S. bases is economic rather than directly military in nature. China has emerged as a massive source of global lending and foreign investment, particularly since the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, and many recipients of Chinese investment are U.S. base hosts, which poses two primary challenges for the United States. As two investigators on this project have shown in their previous research (Joyce and Blankenship 2023), this type of economic influence from a rival power poses at least two challenges to their competitors' basing efforts. First, that rival can actively seek to use its economic incentives to convince policymakers or the public within a host state to block access to a rival power seeking to build or expand a new military base. For example, the United States has actively pressured its ally, the United Arab Emirates, to scrap a plan to allow for the installation of a Chinese military facility near Abu Dhabi (Hudson, Nakashima, and Sly 2023). Second, the rival's economic engagement can crowd out the incentives the basing country offers or reduce the basing country's positive image by making it look worse by comparison (Joyce and Blankenship 2023).

To understand the dynamics of U.S.-China competition in this new era and answer the research questions—what factors affect host support, and how competition shapes these factors—we will compare the efforts of the United States and China in building influence among the public and elites in current and prospective basing and military-access countries. Public consent is a crucial determinant of military access. This required consent is necessary in democracies where political leaders hold office with the public's consent. Still, even in non-democracies, leaders have good reason to take public opinion into account lest anti-base protests snowball into a broader anti-regime movement. For basing countries, the possibility that the host country might democratize creates incentives to cultivate public consent (Cooley 2008).

The project focuses on three countries: Djibouti, Kenya, and Cambodia. In Djibouti, the United States and China have military presences dating to 2001 and 2015, respectively. The United States has a decades-old military presence in Kenya, while China has a significant economic presence but no formal base presence. In addition, a 2023 U.S. Department of Defense report notes that China's People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force "operates tracking, telemetry, and command stations" in Kenya (DoD 2023). Cambodia is a case where China has military access but the United States does not. In June 2022, a Chinese official announced that China would have military access to Cambodia's Ream Naval Base, although details remain limited (DoD 2023, 154).

This project has three overarching goals. First, it aims to understand how social and economic contact with major powers' military and civilian representatives shapes perceptions of the sending country and support for its military access and presence in the host country. Second, it seeks to assess how host country interactions with rival third-party countries moderate the effects of this contact. Third, it compares the impact of military contact to non-military contact to determine whether military interactions are more or less effective in building goodwill and support for hosting a foreign military presence.

2. Theory and Significance

This project tests factors that shape host support for foreign military bases and how those factors are shaped by competition between the United States and China. We have two primary sets of outcome variables—

support for hosting a U.S. and Chinese military presence and views of the United States and China—and two primary sets of independent variables—exposure to social contact and economic benefits from the United States and China. Our predictions are twofold. First, we expect positive social contact and economic benefits from the United States or China to increase support for hosting that country's military. Second, we expect competition will moderate these effects. Exposure to positive social contact and economic benefits from either the U.S. or China may effectively crowd out those of the other, reducing their effectiveness in increasing public support for bases. The findings will also allow us to examine whether the effects of exposure to social contact and economic incentives vary depending on the sender's identity— whether military or civilian and American or Chinese.

Our theory and empirical predictions draw upon our previous research. First, several investigators on the project have published work on public perceptions of U.S. bases (Allen et al. 2020; Martinez Machain et al. 2022). Their work emphasizes the importance of *social contact* and *incentives*. Specifically, their findings suggest that exposure to positive interactions with U.S. military personnel and economic benefits from the U.S. military presence increases favorable views of the U.S. presence. This project builds on these findings by testing whether they generalize across different base hosts; assessing whether they hold in the case of Chinese bases; and exploring the degree to which these effects are moderated by competition.

Second, other investigators on the project have studied the effects of economic competition from China on the United States' ability to maintain access to foreign bases (Blankenship and Joyce 2020; Joyce and Blankenship 2023). They find that economic incentives from China can crowd out the incentives offered by the United States for bases, forcing the United States to either increase its compensation or risk eviction. This project builds on these findings by exploring whether a similar pattern holds at the level of public opinion, with exposure to Chinese incentives decreasing support for hosting the U.S. military—or vice-versa. In doing so, it tests the micro-level foundations of theoretical mechanisms developed in our previous research.

More broadly, this project draws on and contributes to basic social science research in two bodies of scholarship. The first is the politics of foreign military bases and access, which has extensively studied the domestic politics of basing and great power competition for bases but traditionally has done so separately. We fill this gap by providing evidence of how great power competition shapes the domestic foundations of support for basing. In addition, we move beyond much of the U.S.-focused existing literature and consider Chinese power projection and basing. The second is the literature on power, influence, and competition in international politics, which studies how countries use a variety of economic, political, and military tools—including foreign aid, arms sales, and military training—to achieve goals ranging from favorable votes in the United Nations to assistance during wartime. This literature, however, has largely neglected military bases and access as an outcome of interest. This project thus contributes to our understanding of the uses and limits of economic, political, and military tools as instruments of foreign policy influence. In the remainder of this section, we summarize these two bodies of literature and describe how our project contributes to them in more detail.

A. The Politics of Foreign Basing

Early scholarship on bases focused on understanding how great powers use, acquire, and compete for bases. Perhaps most notably, Robert Harkavy's (1982, 1989, 2007) work offered sweeping accounts of great power bases over eight centuries, with particular emphasis on how the United States and Soviet Union attempted to acquire bases and deny them to each other using various economic, political, and military tools. Other scholars focus primarily on the United States, attempting to chronicle the scope and purpose of the vast U.S. basing network during and after the Cold War (Sandars 2000; Vine 2015; Moore and Walker 2016). This body of scholarship, however, is largely descriptive and almost exclusively focused on government-to-government interactions.

More recently, scholars have opened the black box of basing relationships to explore how domestic politics in host countries can shape the political viability of overseas bases and how basing countries, in turn, can adapt. Calder (2007), Cooley (2008), and Yeo (2011) all shed light on how domestic anti-base movements can pressure host governments to evict foreign militaries, particularly during periods of democratic transition. Building on this work, Allen, Flynn, Martínez Machain, and Stravers—the first three

of whom are investigators on this project—explore the micro-foundations of domestic support for foreign bases using surveys across fourteen countries, with findings suggesting that positive economic and social interactions between U.S. personnel and the host population can build support for the U.S. military presence (Allen et al. 2020; Martínez Machain et al. 2022).

These two strains of literature have mainly remained separate, leaving a gap in our understanding of how great power competition can shape the foundations of domestic support for hosting foreign bases. This competition can be directly military, as in the case of U.S.-Soviet competition for bases during the Cold War (Harkavy 1982; Nieman et al. 2021). But it can also be broader, with rivals seeking political and economic influence across the same countries. For example, China has primarily sought influence with economic tools, perhaps most notably through its Belt and Road Initiative, which has financed some $500 billion in infrastructure globally since 2008. China has relied on access to infrastructure like ports through the ownership rights of state-owned enterprises to project power, as in Cambodia (Kardon 2022; Kardon and Leutert 2022). Additionally, China acquired the rights to its first foreign military base in Djibouti in 2015, and since then has sought base rights in countries across Asia, Africa, and even the Americas (Hudson, Nakashima, and Sly 2023; Strobel and Lubold 2023). Leaks of Department of Defense documents, reported by the Washington Post in April 2023, revealed U.S. military estimates that "the PLA seeks to establish at least 5 overseas bases and 10 logistic support sites by 2030 to fulfill Beijing's national security objectives, including protecting its economic interests abroad." Even where China does not seek bases, its economic footprint poses problems for the United States, as China can use its influence and economic leverage to deny U.S. access. In Kenya, for example, U.S. officials have indicated their alarm at the country's willingness to hire a Chinese construction firm to complete upgrades to a joint Kenya-U.S. counterterrorism base unless the United States pays for the upgrades itself, fearing that the Kenyans could leverage geopolitical ties with China for economic gain (Phillips 2023).

The proposed project attempts to fill this gap by exploring how military, social, and economic contact with rival countries shapes those rivals' ability to curry influence and acquire and maintain foreign basing access. In doing so, it will shed light on additional mechanisms through which great power competition can shape foreign bases beyond government-to-government interactions. It will also explore how countries' influence attempts can be undermined (or not) by those of rival countries. Moreover, it will expand our understanding of great power competition for bases beyond the literature's focus on U.S.-Soviet Cold War relations and on bases in upper-income host countries in regions like Europe and East Asia. In the current environment, competition for bases occurs in a world characterized by strong norms of sovereignty, in which base access must be granted consensually and in which many hosts are either democratic or could democratize (Cooley 2008; Schmidt 2020). Therefore, understanding the mechanisms that govern the consent of domestic populations toward foreign military basing and deployments is crucial for comprehending the conditions under which great powers can project power abroad. This project highlights unique features of the China-U.S. relationship and presents new hypotheses on the interaction between democratic and autocratic powers in their competition for international influence.

B. Power, Influence, and Competition in International Politics

Scholars have long been interested in the sources of power and influence in international relations. Perhaps the most-studied source of power in international relations and political science is changing other actors' incentives to make it rational for them to comply with an actor's preferences (Dahl 1961). Aside from the threat or use of force—which has over time become a less common means of securing foreign bases (Lake 1996; Schmidt 2020)—states can use positive inducements to structure other actors' incentives. Indeed, the literature suggests that states often use tools of economic statecraft like foreign aid to buy foreign policy influence and secure access to bases (Carter and Stone 2015; Alexander and Rooney 2019; Blankenship and Joyce 2020; Joyce and Blankenship 2023). However, there is some evidence that this effect may vary across states. A recent study of U.S. and Chinese aid to 38 different African countries found a link between U.S. aid and positive views of the United States. However, Chinese aid did not affect public support or actively reduce it (Blair et al. 2022). This divergence suggests that major powers who compete for public approval using similar tools may not achieve similar effects, and highlights the need for research to see how such interventions may uniquely affect civilians in host countries.

Beyond structuring other actors' incentives, states can also attempt to elicit cooperation through what Joseph Nye (1990, 2004) called "soft power," which refers to how an actor can influence others by persuading them to adopt its preferences as their own, often by attracting them with a favorable image. Overseas military deployments can be a source of soft power (Atkinson 2014). First, the most obvious way military deployments can encourage soft power is through humanitarian missions where service members assist with health care or disaster relief. These acts build support for the basing country as it is clear that the assistance comes from the base power (Flynn, Martinez Machain, and Stoyan 2019). Second, service members integrated into overseas communities can build soft power, although this is harder to observe. Routine daily behavior by service members on and off base creates potential points of interaction that can build support for a basing country's mission in a host country. Research finds that interactions with service members can reduce stereotypes, build goodwill, and humanize a deployed force such that contact alone can produce positive assessments of a foreign-deployed army (Allen et al. 2022). States with an active, non-isolated presence can actively build support for their presence with local populations.

Additionally, existing scholarship indicates rival providers can undermine states' influence attempts. The literature on foreign aid and economic statecraft, for example, suggests that states and international organizations like the World Bank are less able to make their assistance conditional on policy concessions when recipients have alternative sources of aid and financing (Dunning 2004; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2016; Woods 2008; Kastner and Pearson 2021; Watkins 2022).

However, the literature leaves gaps in our understanding of great power inducements and influence. For one, tools of influence—such as foreign aid, military contact, and military training—are typically studied independently rather than comparatively. Research on influence and policy concessions also tends to ignore military bases and focuses on government-to-government interactions rather than government-to-public interactions, while work on influence and public opinion tends not to focus on public support for policy concessions and tends to ignore the role of foreign competition. Indeed, while the U.S. Department of Defense worries that the PRC targets countries for future military installations, we know little about the "host nation receptivity" to these intentions (Hudson, Nakashima, and Sly 2023). This project fills these gaps by offering evidence on the relative importance of different forms of power (soft power stemming from social interactions and goodwill versus hard power in the form of economic incentives) coming from different instruments (military versus non-military) and different actors (the United States versus China) under conditions of competition.

3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses
As described above, our overarching research questions are: What factors affect host support for foreign military presence? And how does competition from foreign powers, in turn, shape these factors? To answer these questions, we propose a one-year project to study how U.S.-China competition shapes the two major powers' ability to maintain support for their foreign military bases. We have selected three countries for our study based on variations in U.S. and Chinese military presence: Cambodia, Djibouti, and Kenya. Djibouti allows us to assess the interaction of U.S. and Chinese military presence directly, as it is the only country where both powers have bases. Kenya and Cambodia, by contrast, are cases where one power has a military presence but the other does not. In Kenya, the United States has a military presence, whereas China has a significant economic presence that U.S. policymakers worry might jeopardize U.S. access. Finally, Cambodia has had a Chinese military presence since as late as 2022.

This variation allows us to study how support for foreign bases varies across environments featuring different amounts and types of foreign competition. Djibouti, for example, will enable us to assess how the public and elites react when they are in close proximity with both U.S. and Chinese military personnel, while the other two cases allow us to study support for bases in an environment in which respondents are exposed to military contact with one of the two great powers but primarily non-military (economic and civilian) forms of contact with the other great power.

As described in more detail below, our project will combine evidence on the views of the public, measured using nationwide surveys in all three countries, with evidence from elites captured with fieldwork and interviews in Djibouti. By elites, we refer to individuals who either "have relevant expertise or occupy

positions that control significant foreign policy resources" or who "occupy high positions outside of foreign policy settings but are adjacent to or affected by foreign policy decisions (for example, business elites, or legislators with no direct foreign policy role or expertise)" (Saunders 2022, 222). We choose to study elites and the public separately, given that the two kinds of actors differ in their knowledge about policy outcomes and influence over policy, and that they may respond to different incentives.

We chose Djibouti as the site for fieldwork as it is the place that allows for military access by multiple countries and a higher chance for civilian interactions with foreign military personnel. Djibouti is a rare case where U.S. and Chinese military bases are in close geographic proximity within the same country. While the uniqueness of the situation may disqualify Djibouti as a generalizable case for fieldwork, it is important for a few reasons. First, such dual-access cases are likely to increase in the future. Djibouti may represent a wave of countries seeking favor from multiple countries simultaneously. Various countries in the Cold War sought support from both the United States and the Soviet Union instead of being an exclusive client of one major power, while others, like Egypt, switched their alignment from one major power to the other. Djibouti may be a model for other countries in the near future. Second, Djibouti offers the opportunity to examine interactions with both the United States and China within the same context, which is essential for studying how competition shapes publics' support for basing. Third, and importantly for basic science, we can assess the micro-foundations of influence at the ground level within the host country and whether one country is more capable of influence than another. Assessing whether influence is a zero-sum or positive-sum game cannot be done in isolation, and Djibouti allows us to see the direct competition between the two powers.

A. Theory-Building Research Objectives
Much of the work in this project aims at theory-building. For example, we know relatively little about how people view China's foreign military presence, as most of the existing literature has overwhelmingly focused on China's economic efforts to build influence. Similarly, while existing literature has studied public perceptions of economic inducements like foreign aid, and how contact with military personnel shapes public perceptions of the country that stations them, we know little about the relative effects of economic and social contact with military personnel and non-military civilians (work by two of the team members is a rare exception (see Flynn, Martinez Machain, and Stoyan 2019)).

- Theory-Building Research Questions
    o To what extent are members of the public aware that the United States and China have a military presence in their countries?
    o To what extent do members of the public and elites in actual or potential base host countries support the United States and China having a military presence in their countries?
    o To what extent do members of the public and elites in actual or potential base host countries hold favorable views of the United States and China?
    o Do members of the public and elites have more positive views of interactions with a country's military personnel or civilians, all else being equal?

B. Theory-Testing Hypotheses
We test a series of hypotheses on how exposure to contact with the U.S. and Chinese citizens and commerce shapes public and elite views on the United States, China, and their foreign military presence. As we describe in more detail below, we test these hypotheses using a combination of surveys and interviews that ask respondents about their contact with U.S. and Chinese citizens and whether they derive economic benefits from their military presences. Furthermore, we explore how support for hosting a foreign military is shaped in survey experiments that prime respondents with information about the economic benefits offered by one or both of the United States and China, whether through the mechanism of having a military base or through foreign aid and commerce. In the experiment, respondents will be primed with information about economic benefits from the United States, China, both, or neither, and will then be asked about their level of support for those countries' bases.

The first four hypotheses build on existing findings. The first two are rooted in the literature on social contact and soft power. Research suggests positive public diplomacy can improve foreign perceptions

of a sending state (Goldsmith et al. 2021; Mattingly and Sunquist 2022). A recent wave of literature suggests that this can also be true of military contact, with studies finding that contact with U.S. military personnel improves foreign perceptions of the United States (Flynn, Martinez Machain, and Stoyan 2019; Allen et al. 2020; Martinez Machain et al. 2022).

We derive the third and fourth hypotheses from the basing and foreign aid literature. Research on foreign aid suggests aid can increase public support for donors (Goldsmith et al. 2014; Blair et al. 2022) and secure policy concessions for the donor (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007; Carter and Stone 2015; Alexander and Rooney 2019). Similarly, economic tools are a central means states use to secure host consent for their foreign military bases, and studies have found that exposure to economic benefits increases support for a country's military presence and positive views of that country (Flynn, Martinez Machain, and Stoyan 2019; Allen et al. 2020; Blankenship and Joyce 2020; Martinez Machain et al. 2022; Joyce and Blankenship 2023).

- Theory-Testing Hypotheses
  - H1: Positive (negative) interactions between deployed personnel and citizens of the host country will increase (decrease) positive views of the deploying country.
  - H2: Positive (negative) interactions between deployed personnel and citizens of the host country will increase (decrease) support for hosting the deploying country's military.
  - H3: Exposure to economic benefits from the deploying country's military presence will increase positive views of the deploying country.
  - H4: Exposure to economic benefits from the deploying country's military presence will increase support for hosting the deploying country's military.

Finally, we test an additional hypothesis focusing on U.S.–China competition dynamics. Bases can bring a variety of negative externalities like crime, noise, pollution, traffic, and, more broadly, a perception that a country's sovereignty is being infringed upon (Cooley 2008; Yeo 2011; Hikotani et al. 2022). As a result, bases are more desirable to the extent they bring tangible benefits to offset their negative effects. In some cases, these benefits take the form of security guarantees, but in the cases that we propose to focus on, the benefits are primarily economic. Thus, if a foreign competitor can offer the same economic benefits, the host's need to accept a foreign base is lower, which may decrease support for that base (Joyce and Blankenship 2023). Research suggests that the United States and China often use their aid competitively to curry influence and secure policy concessions for themselves while denying them to each other (Vadlamannati et al. 2023; Joyce and Blankenship 2023).

  - H5: Exposure to economic benefits from the deploying country's military presence will decrease support for hosting the rival deploying country's military.

4. Preliminary Findings
In September 2023, we developed and deployed a preliminary survey in Kenya to assess the feasibility of our survey instrument and collect initial results related to our theoretical concept of interest. Due to budget constraints, we limited the theoretical scope and sample size of the pilot survey. We deployed the survey in English and Swahili to 1,023 Kenyans via cellphone. The survey contained 28 questions about demographics and topics related to our hypotheses. We asked questions related to both perceived and behavioral indicators of U.S. and Chinese influence by the respondents and how they perceived both actors. In addition to considering great power influence, we also included control questions to measure that influence versus influence by other regional and colonial actors. We collected the full sample over six days.

The initial sample contained useful distributional information. First, respondents skewed younger—most were in the 20–29 age bracket, while the next two largest fell into the 30–39 bracket. The full sample ranged from 18 to 69, with 80% of respondents aged 39 or younger. Purposely, we over-sampled Mombasa due to its size and possibility for international influence. Half of the responses came from Mombasa. The sample was slightly skewed male and, while most people reported their primary language being Swahili, most respondents opted to take the survey in English.

The preliminary results point to some interesting dynamics. 40% of respondents view China as having both "A lot" of influence and "Somewhat positive" or "Very positive" influence. Similarly, around 44% of respondents view the United States as having "A lot" of influence in Kenya and view that influence as "Somewhat positive" or "Very positive." Regarding military deployments, only 20% of Kenya respondents believed that China has military personnel operating in Kenya, compared with 72% of respondents who correctly responded that the United States has military personnel deployed to Kenya. Of those correctly identifying a Chinese military presence in Kenya, 63% viewed that presence as "Very positive" or "Somewhat positive." Similarly, of those who correctly identified a U.S. military presence in Kenya, 70% viewed that presence favorably. Figure 1 shows the joint distribution of respondents' answers to the questions about the presence of deployments and their evaluations of those deployments.
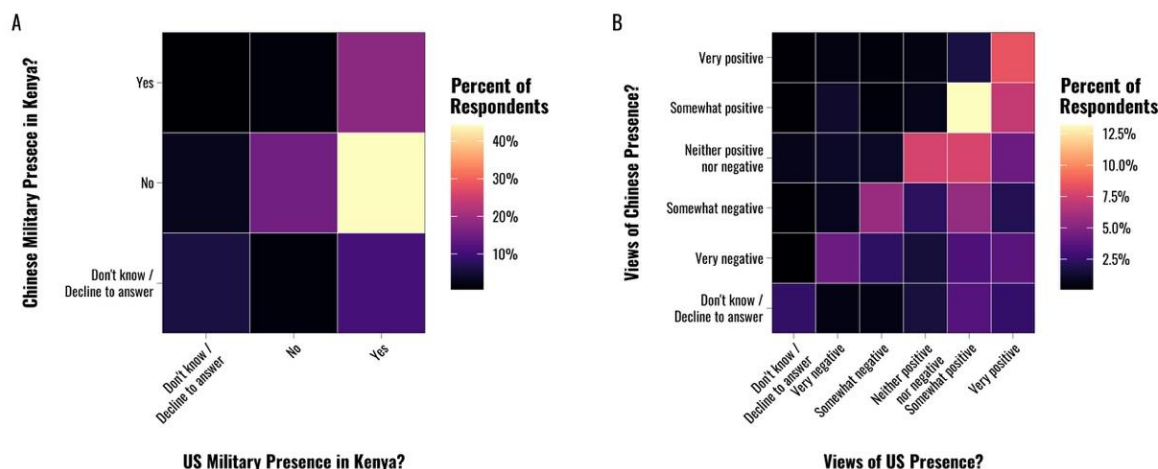

Figure 1: Panel A shows the joint distribution of respondents' answers to whether the U.S. and China have a military presence in Kenya. Panel B shows the joint distribution of respondents' answers to questions about their views of the U.S. and China having a military presence in Kenya. Shading represents the % of respondents who provided a given combination of answers.

These preliminary results suggest that public views of these major powers are comparable and potentially well-positioned for competitive influence campaigns. However, the United States and China also proceed from different starting points. A 2023 U.S. Department of Defense report notes that China's People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force has a limited number of personnel operating in Kenya, and expects China's pursuit of basing access to continue to grow in the future (DoD 2023). The United States has relatively high favorability levels and a long track record of basing in foreign countries. Given its relatively small military footprint to date, it remains to be seen if China can sustain such high levels of public approval as it expands the scope of its military-basing activities. Understanding the factors that shape public assessments of the costs and benefits of foreign basing will be key to understanding how this process will play out for the United States and China as they compete for access.

5. Broader Impacts

The project has several implications for national security. First, it enhances the understanding of the influence in the security domain by U.S. foreign policy decision-makers. How to get other people (or states) to do what one wants represents a central challenge in international security. While coercion—the threatened or limited use of force to persuade an adversary to do one's bidding—is well-studied, soft power is much less understood. This project explores the interpersonal and economic underpinnings of influence, shedding light on both the soft power sources of influence and their effects. More broadly, most studies of influence in international relations are dyadic, focusing on an influence-seeking state and a target. In practice, however, third-party states can undermine influence. Great powers regularly seek to acquire influence for themselves and deny it to their rivals. We move beyond dyadic conceptions of influence to explore the effects of multiple influence-seekers on public and elite opinion in host states by comparing the

effects of exposure to economic benefits from and contact with U.S. and Chinese citizens.

Second, this project enhances the understanding of sovereign bargaining over basing access. In the twenty-first century, a common way that states acquire basing access is to pay for them. Yet, to date, there is little work on the economic drivers of basing. By conducting interviews with elites alongside mass public surveys, this project provides new data and theory on how states buy access, contrasting base rents paid into regime coffers with economic incentives distributed into host societies. Importantly, this work measures the economic impact of basing on host population perceptions of basing countries—a question with theoretical and real-world implications for lower-income states where bases may have an outsized economic impact as well as for decision-makers in the U.S. deciding on military access strategies.

Additionally, this project has implications for U.S. national security policymakers and policymakers in base host countries. First, U.S. national security policymakers openly perceive China's growing economic reach as a potential threat to U.S. influence and access. Yet, unanswered questions remain as China's investments in other countries have grown. For example, are these investments perceived by receiving populations as exploitative, or does contact with Chinese people and Chinese money increase goodwill? And, crucially, does this goodwill come at the expense of U.S. access in those same countries? As explained in the following section, our surveys and interviews will allow us to explore whether individuals with more goodwill toward, who are exposed to positive interactions with, and who derive economic benefits from China are less likely to support hosting the U.S. military. This project will thus provide micro-level data enabling policymakers to assess these questions.

Second, by exploring the interactions and benefits that host populations derive from contact with deploying states, this project provides evidence that may increase the agency of host governments, facilitating more tailored arrangements with sending states that better serve the needs of host populations. Third, the U.S. basing network is fundamental to its ability to project power abroad, yet it relies on host governments' consent. That consent is more difficult, in turn, when the government faces popular opposition to hosting foreign bases. Thus, maintaining support and goodwill among host governments and their populations is critical to U.S. foreign policy. Our findings, in turn, will shed light on the factors that shape that support, allowing decision-makers to make informed policy.

Finally, this project will impact our campuses, providing educational opportunities for diverse student bodies. The project includes a mentoring plan for an undergraduate research assistant, who will learn the tools and techniques of survey and interview research. Within our research team, Martínez Machain has experience in the active mentoring of women, particularly from underrepresented groups, in part through the Pay It Forward initiative at the International Studies Association. Our recruitment of a research assistant from the University of Miami, a Hispanic-Serving Institution, will target NSF-defined groups of underrepresentation in the sciences by advertising investigators will take such status into primary consideration when hiring for the position. Moreover, we will use this project to host two events on the University of Miami campus: a graduate and undergraduate workshop on experimental design in surveys that will use our research to exemplify meaningful causal survey data and a research presentation for the general political science and public policy community that helps to disseminate our results, lessons learned, and methodological insight for the community. We will thus aim to, through undergraduate student training, diversify the future workforce in the area of security studies.

6. Technical Plan and Methodology

The project follows a two-pronged approach to understanding the phenomena of interest and follows our previous research strategy (Allen et al. 2022). The first strategy to assess influence and perception within the states of interest is to conduct large-scale public opinion surveys in the selected countries. We will deploy a survey to 1,000 people each in Kenya and Djibouti through live phone calls (CATI). An additional 1,000 will be surveyed through face-to-face (CAPI) surveys in Cambodia, as this is the survey mode recommended for Cambodia by the survey firm we are planning to contract with. This gives us a combined sample size of 3,000 respondents, which is sufficient to give us variation within the responses for data analysis while also providing a basis for representation across geography, income, and gender within surveyed countries.

Given substantial disparities in population distributions within the selected states, we will set a geographic quota on each country to ensure we have sufficient data to draw inferences in both geographic regions proximate to existing military installations and areas located farther from these installations. We will set a quota of at least 250 survey respondents (that is 25% of each country sample) in areas located close to military bases—Mombasa in Kenya, Djibouti City in Djibouti, and Preah Sihanouk province in Cambodia—with the remaining 750 respondents (i.e. 75%) randomly distributed throughout the remainder of the country. This helps ensure that the surveys are more likely to collect responses from people affected by the positive and negative externalities of the foreign military installations. This means we need to oversample geographic areas close to bases in Mombasa, Kenya and Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia, where the basing region is home to approximately 2–5% of the country's population (see Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2019; National Institute of Statistics 2020). Alternatively, Djibouti City, Djibouti is home to both U.S. and Chinese bases and approximately 60% of the population of Djibouti, meaning that we will not need to oversample the area around the base (UNdata 2024). We have already received quotes and confirmation of ability to survey in these three countries from GeoPoll, the same survey firm we worked with to implement our pilot project in Kenya. Importantly, GeoPoll works with local partners who are able to advise us on best practices for ensuring the safety of survey collectors and respondents.

Surveying a general population sample is important because members of the general public experience a wide range of costs and benefits of basing. The Kenyan pilot project has facilitated the refinement of our instrument. For the pilot survey, we worked with GeoPoll's local partners in Kenya and an independent consultant researcher, who pre-tested the survey instrument before launching it. Once we received results, we determined which questions worked best to measure our variables of interest. This is discussed in more detail in section 4 (Preliminary Findings), but one example of how the pilot has allowed us to refine the instrument was that, at the suggestion of a local consultant, we added a response option for respondents to report interactions with U.S. citizens through health facilities. We had originally not included this option in the survey instrument, but respondents frequently chose it.

The proposed surveys will use the questions we developed in the pilot survey while also introducing an experimental component. The base survey asks several questions to build relevant demographic profiles of the respondents, including gender, age, primary language, education level, income, and whether they have studied abroad. Also included are questions about their perception of Chinese and U.S. influence in their country in economic and military terms. We assess for other vectors of foreign influence as well, including films, television programs, sporting events, mobile app use, and whether they (or a family member) have studied abroad in a foreign country.

To test H1–H5, which involves contact with and economic reliance upon foreign nationals, we ask about the types of contact that responses have had with U.S. and Chinese nationals—whether economic or non-economic and with military personnel or non-military foreign civilians. These will serve as independent variables. Our previous research suggests that such self-reports can offer valuable insights (Allen et al. 2020; Martinez Machain et al. 2022). Additionally, we ask respondents to rate how favorably they view the United States and China in general and their level of support for those two countries having a military presence using five-point Likert scale response options. These will serve as dependent variables.

Our questions aim to measure and test our previously stated propositions. The survey provides correlational evidence of the relationship between host-state civilian contact with foreign nationals and their views of the great powers and their military presence. Questions about traditional and social media consumption provide additional information about the cross-pressures of U.S. and Chinese influence campaigns. By capturing multiple avenues of contact, we can account for the influence of potentially confounding factors using multivariate regression to isolate the impact of each form of contact by controlling for the others.

Additionally, we will pre-register a conjoint experiment design and deploy it with all surveys. Our primary research goal is to understand better the factors that shape mass attitudes towards hosting prospective foreign military bases and deployments. Citizens choose from various options, and we expect several factors to influence their decisions, including the specific basing power in question, possible economic benefits, the size of the base and deployment, and their individual geographic exposure to the

negative externalities of such deployments. Given the multidimensional nature of the competing options, we have chosen a conjoint experiment design to help us better assess the influence of these different factors. Conjoint designs are seeing increased use in political science to help researchers understand the influence of different treatment components, but they have been limited mainly to understanding individuals' vote choices or choosing between different policy options (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). In recent years, there has been some growth in the use of conjoint designs to study issues related to international relations and security policy (for example, Alley 2022). This project allows us to understand better how citizens choose when presented with competing options from major powers looking to build power projection capabilities in prospective host states.

We adopt a single-profile conjoint design where respondents are presented with a profile for a prospective foreign military base and asked if they would support or oppose hosting the base described, as well as whether they would support or oppose hosting an additional base from other basing powers. Each profile would consist of 1) a basing power, 2) the number of personnel expected to deploy to the base, 3) the number of jobs the base is expected to create, and 4) the distance from the respondent. We present each respondent with four randomly generated profiles and ask them if they support or oppose each. Research indicates that this number of rating tasks is at low risk of inducing decision fatigue in respondents (Bansak et al., 2018). In generating the profiles, we include the United States, China, France (Cambodia and Djibouti), and the United Kingdom (Kenya) as potential basing powers. We chose to include the U.K. and France to test whether the results generalize beyond the context of U.S.–China competition because these countries have historical ties as colonizing powers with current military bases located in some of these countries. For the deployment size, we include options of 100, 1,000, and 10,000 personnel. For jobs, we present 100, 500, 1,000, and 5,000 jobs. For distance, we include options for 5 km and 100 km away (roughly a 10-minute drive and an hour-long drive). This experiment will allow us to assess whether the explicit promise of economic benefits shapes support for basing, thus supplementing the non-experimental questions about contact with U.S. and Chinese nationals described previously.

The general public opinion surveys will provide new and unique data to assess mass attitudes towards foreign military bases in less developed and middle-income countries and insights into the causal factors that shape these attitudes. But these surveys are limited in depth and cannot provide more insight into elite decision-making processes and considerations. We thus complement the large number of general public surveys with a second approach of semi-structured elite interviews in Djibouti. We classify as elites local political leaders, foreign diplomats, U.S. service members, journalists, and activists/civil society leaders. As stated previously, we chose Djibouti as the site for fieldwork as it is the place that allows for military access by multiple countries and a higher chance for civilian interactions with foreign military personnel from different countries.

Elite, semi-structured interviews provide qualitative texture by allowing free-form responses to questions that try to uncover the mechanisms we are interested in. The team will use a snowball sampling method to target an initial population of government officials, local politicians, diplomats, U.S. service members, journalists, and activists/civil-society leaders that likely interact with or have domain over basing and access within Djibouti. We will identify our initial sample of targets by examining local news stories, official websites, and directories that point to high-level actors germane to our study area. We will contact these initial targets through phone or e-mail before traveling to schedule the initial batch of interviews before we arrive on the site. This is the same method we have used when conducting elite interviews during fieldwork in various countries. The interviews are semi-structured. We begin with anticipated questions but allow the interview to flow based on the interviewee's experience and responses. Semi-structured interviews allow for follow-up questions on facets we did not anticipate or are unique to an interviewee. For the snowball method of interview sampling, at the conclusion of each interview, we will ask the interviewee for additional, relevant contacts and use that information to build out our sample. This method has been effective in our past fieldwork efforts, giving us access to former heads of state, ambassadors, and senior commissioned officers, among others. Given our past success rates, we expect to interview no less than ten individuals and aim to interview 25.

We propose four team members conduct fieldwork so that we have at least two people in each

interview, allow for the possibility of someone becoming ill during travel, and schedule concurrent interviews when needed. We will include remote interview capabilities in our IRB proposal if we cannot meet with someone physically or have scheduling conflicts. We have experience shifting a project to remote interviews due to disruption during a previous interview series from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, given the reluctance of willing participants for remote interviews and the better interview interactions that arise from in-person interviews, the remote options are a contingency plan.

From this data collection project, we have three waves of analysis. The first wave will use multilevel Bayesian models to analyze the survey data. Using these models, as we have done previously, we can assess the correlations of influence and perception between contact, economic reliance, and other influence projects on individuals' perceptions of each country and their military. They also allow us to account for the nesting of respondents in particular geographic areas (for example, countries, provinces, etc.). This observational regression allows us to build initial evidence about whether, in aggregate, there is a relationship between contact with military personnel and how people view the military, using a multivariate regression to account for potential confounders. Second, our experiments allow for causal analysis of different basing options and individual support for those basing options. By pre-registering and deploying an experiment, we can see how different frames and country contexts affect views of the United States and China. We use differences of means comparisons and more advanced regression models to determine how we measure various attributes that condition the treatment effect. Random assignment of treatments allows us to isolate the effects of our variables of interest from any potential confounders. Finally, the fieldwork will provide context and texture to our quantitative results by incorporating first-hand accounts from Djibouti and to theory-build both for the current project and how the domain of competitive consent is developing in one of the most contested countries between the U.S. and China.

7. Deliverables
A. Scholarly Outputs
We plan to complete the following deliverables. All data collected for the project will be made publicly available by the project's completion date (regardless of the publication status of any of the deliverables) as detailed in our data management section. This will allow researchers and community members to build on our research.

- Three nationally representative surveys in Kenya, Djibouti, and Cambodia compare the local populations' perceptions of U.S. and/or Chinese military installations in their territories and their views on influence campaigns by both major powers.
- (At least) two peer-reviewed articles submitted to top journals such as Security Studies, the American Journal of Political Science, or the American Political Science Review.
- One article submitted to a policy-oriented outlet, such as Foreign Affairs.
- (At least) two articles targeting high-impact outlets aimed at policy and general audiences, such as The Conversation or War on the Rocks.
- Two survey-based workshops at the University of Miami for undergraduate and graduate researchers.

B. Dissemination
Dissemination to Scholars: We will disseminate our findings to the academic community primarily through the production of peer-reviewed articles (discussed under the scholarly outputs section). To publicize these findings, we will present our research at academic conferences such at the ISA, APSA, and Peace Science annual meetings. Research team members will also present this research at invited workshops and guest lectures. The members of this team have a strong record of participating in such events. In 2023 Martinez Machain participated in four invited guest lectures and four invitational academic workshops. Blankenship will have participated in six invited lectures and roundtables across 2023 and early 2024. We will also disseminate our findings to the academic community through blog posts in outlets like Good Authority (formerly The Monkey Cage), E-International Relations, and The Political Quarterly, which are aimed at scholarly audiences and for which we have previously written. We will also produce a publicly available

data dashboard that makes all gathered data available to other researchers at the time of the project's completion. The data will also be made available through Harvard's Dataverse platform.

Dissemination to Policymakers: This team is particularly well-positioned to disseminate findings to policymakers. We have extensive experience on this front, with team members having briefed officials with the U.S. Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of the Navy, and U.S. Strategic Command, as well as having attended American University's Bridging the Gap workshop, and presented research at military installations such as Mountain Home and Beale Air Force Bases. We will use our existing contacts to create opportunities to reach relevant policymakers and practitioners, particularly those in the defense community in the United States. We thus plan to disseminate our findings to policymakers and practitioners through briefings and research presentations. We will aim to give invited talks and briefings at defense and military-related institutions. We will also disseminate our findings to the policy community through blog posts in outlets such as War on the Rocks, Defense One, and The Conversation, which are aimed at policy and general audiences and for which we have previously written.

8. Project Team and Management
A. Team Management
The principal investigator on this project is Brian Blankenship (University of Miami). Michael Allen (Boise State University), Michael Flynn (Kansas State University), Renanah Miles Joyce (Brandeis University), and Carla Martinez Machain (University at Buffalo) will serve as co-PIs. All have published on power projection and influence topics and have extensive methodological skills, including fieldwork and survey experience in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. The team will organize workflow and communication through email and Discord, a threaded-chat program that allows file sharing, collaboration, and real-time text and voice conversation. Additionally, the team will have a standard biweekly meeting on Zoom to discuss immediate and long-term issues, evaluate project progress, and remedy any existing shortfalls in expectations through additional delegation or re-assignment of work.

B. Relevant PI experience, education, and project management roles
Brian Blankenship is an Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Miami. Research studies how countries bargain over the distribution of the costs and benefits of security cooperation and how great powers, and in particular the United States, use economic and security inducements to influence their partners. Blankenship has published widely on U.S. foreign policy, military alliances, and foreign basing, including on issues related to defense burden-sharing, alliance reassurance, and U.S.-China competition for bases. Blankenship has served as Principal Investigator on funded work from the Stanton Foundation related to defense burden-sharing and nuclear nonproliferation. His methodological training is in quantitative and qualitative methods. Blankenship's primary responsibilities will be in developing theory, designing the survey, managing and mentoring the undergraduate research assistant, leading the development of relevant public articles, coordinating the project's academic output, managing the budget in coordination with University of Miami Office of Research Administration, monitoring funded research progress, leading official reporting compliance, co-managing communication with survey firms and contacts in Djibouti, and delegating additional work to capture any shortfalls in productivity.

Michael A. Allen is a Professor in the School of Public Service, Boise State University. Research addresses the positive and negative externalities of U.S. troop deployments and the conflict and cooperation between asymmetric actors in the international system. Allen has published widely in assessing the effects of troop deployments, including defense expenditures, regional influences on troop deployments and defense expenditures, service members' effect on crime rates, and surveys on how troop deployments affect perceptions of the U.S. military, government, and people. Allen has served as Principal Investigator on funded work related to troop deployments (FOA#W911NF-18-1-0087). His methodological training is in quantitative methods. Allen will engage in theory building, writing, research design, managing Boise, leading the development of relevant public articles, coordinating the project's academic output, managing

the budget with Boise State OSP, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. He will also conduct fieldwork in Djibouti. The Boise State University provides Allen with office space and all software and computer equipment necessary to carry out the analysis.

Michael E. Flynn is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Kansas State University. His research focuses on U.S. foreign policy, the causes of overseas military deployments, and the social, economic, and political effects of overseas military deployments and basing. Flynn has published several articles on military deployments and how they relate to several topics, including crime, host-state defense spending, public opinion, and more. Flynn's methodological training is in quantitative methods, computational social science research, and Bayesian statistical modeling. He will serve as the principal data analyst on this project, developing computational workflow routines, statistical models, and analyzing and presenting the results of the data analysis. He will also contribute to theory building, survey instrument design, experiment design, writing academic research articles, and developing public-facing content based on research findings.

Renanah Miles Joyce is an Assistant Professor of Politics at Brandeis University. Her research studies how powerful states try to shape their security environments, focusing on hard and soft power tools of influence. Joyce has published extensively on U.S. foreign policy, security cooperation, and foreign military basing and has experience conducting fieldwork in Africa (Liberia and Guinea). She has access to U.S. government networks of security cooperation practitioners from her research and experience working for the Department of Defense as a civil servant prior to academia. Her methodological training is in quantitative and qualitative methods. She will build theory, write, collect data, and analyze. She will also conduct fieldwork in Djibouti.
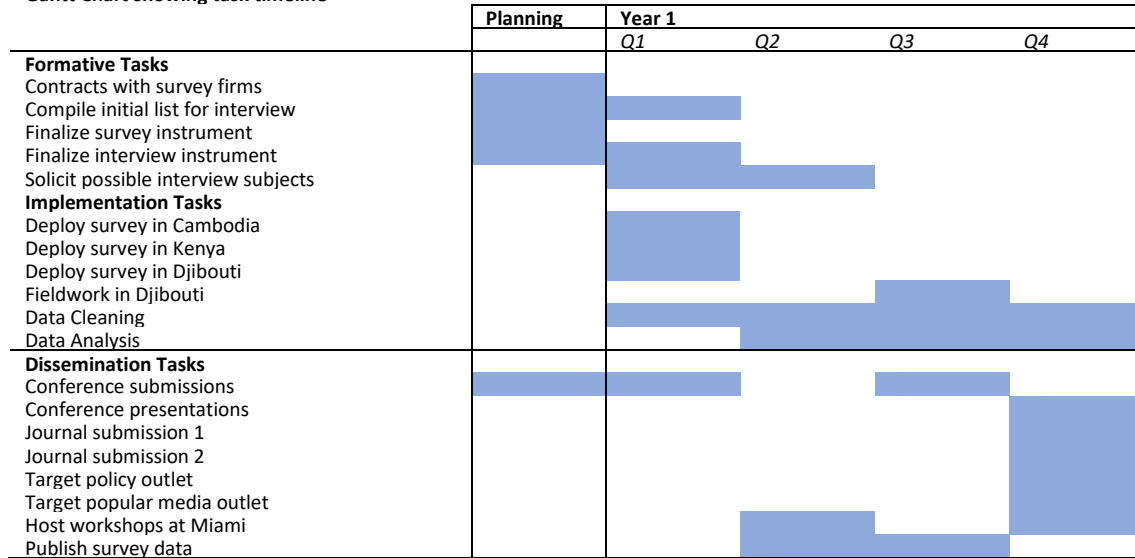
Carla Martinez Machain is a Professor of Political Science at the University at Buffalo. Her research focuses largely on U.S. foreign policy, specifically on great power competition in the realm of military basing agreements, as well as on using military deployments as a power projection tool. Martínez Machain's research has been published in key Political Science journals and is frequently cited by those studying military basing agreements and foreign military training. Martinez Machain has experience interviewing military members in her previous research and has an extensive network among military practitioners (as evidenced by the interviews referenced in her published work). She is trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods. She will engage in theory building, writing, research design, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. She will also conduct fieldwork in Djibouti. The University at Buffalo provides Martinez Machain with office space, access to a graduate research assistant, and all software and computer equipment necessary to carry out the analysis.

9. Project Timeline
Given the speed at which developments are occurring regarding Chinese increases in power projection, we aim to complete working drafts of all deliverables within one year. To achieve broad aims within a limited timeline, we are relying on a large team of researchers who will all be devoting two months of full effort over the summer of 2025 to the project, as well as partial effort during the rest of the year.

- Fall 2024: Finalize survey and interview questions and hold a survey design workshop to pre-test the survey experiments. Present initial research design and preliminary pilot findings at academic conferences.
- Spring 2025: Administer surveys in Kenya and Cambodia. Begin writing manuscript drafts and present research at academic conferences.
- Summer 2025: Conduct fieldwork in Djibouti, administering surveys and interviews. Continue writing manuscript drafts.
- Fall 2025: Revise and finalize manuscript drafts, send out for review. Publish survey data in the online dashboard and data repository. Write and disseminate policy-oriented articles.

Gantt Chart showing task timeline

	Planning	Year 1			
		Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Formative Tasks					
Contracts with survey firms	▓				
Compile initial list for interview		▓			
Finalize survey instrument	▓				
Finalize interview instrument		▓			
Solicit possible interview subjects		▓	▓		
Implementation Tasks					
Deploy survey in Cambodia		▓			
Deploy survey in Kenya		▓			
Deploy survey in Djibouti		▓			
Fieldwork in Djibouti				▓	
Data Cleaning		▓	▓	▓	▓
Data Analysis			▓	▓	▓
Dissemination Tasks					
Conference submissions	▓	▓		▓	
Conference presentations					▓
Journal submission 1					
Journal submission 2					
Target policy outlet					
Target popular media outlet					
Host workshops at Miami			▓	▓	
Publish survey data					

10. Project Risks

One of the current risks/barriers is COVID-19 and its implications for research activities. The survey firms we will contract with have experience conducting surveys during the pandemic and will be able to continue operations if a new mutation creates restrictive protocols for public safety. Additionally, the team will build remote interviews into its IRB protocols as a backup plan if in-person surveys become impossible to implement due to travel restrictions or social distancing requirements.

Participant recruitment can be difficult in a foreign country so we will employ several recruitment strategies. We will contact people before our arrival and recruit subjects for interviews after we arrive via snowball sampling. Based on experience, both strategies lead to interviews, with many possible subjects becoming willing to meet if researchers are present in the country and request a conversation. Among the countries that we plan to survey, the only one that could present risks for survey interviewers or respondents would be Cambodia, due to potential sensitivities around the government's willingness to host Chinese forces. We have consulted with GeoPoll, a survey firm we have worked with in the past, and they have identified a Cambodia partner who could implement the survey. We would work with the survey firm to edit our questionnaire to phrase questions in a way that would not be perceived as politically sensitive and would focus on perceptions of the United States and China (which would still achieve our research aims) and to obtain all required government letters that the interviewers would need for carrying out the surveys.

Regarding publication strategies, we have expertise in producing academic work for conferences, journals, and books. We will identify multiple journals for each of the two major works we plan with this project. If any given journal rejects an article submission, we will continue submitting to other suitable journals until we accomplish our deliverable plan. Regarding public-facing research, our team has experience and relationships with existing outlets that we will use to secure venues for disseminating our results to a wide audience.

11. Results from Prior NSF Support

The investigators have not received prior NSF support.