

Project Summary

The fundamental basis of power projection, regional influence, and crisis management by the United States has been through the deployment and maintenance of a global military basing network. Having a military force present in a region allows the U.S. immediate reaction to emergent threats, reassurance of allies, and effective extended deterrence. The United States' overseas troops serve not only as the forefront of U.S. hard power, but also the forefront of diplomacy and soft power that are unrivaled by other U.S. agencies solely devoted to those tasks. Foreign nationals are more likely to interact with a U.S. service member in their home territory than any other U.S. government official. The context of these interactions can impact host country perception, cooperation, and the ability for U.S. military abroad to accomplish key objectives. Despite the potential importance of these relationships, there is little social science research that empirically examines adverse interactions (i.e., criminal offending and victimization experiences) between U.S. military and foreign nationals/host-state civilians. To understand these important dynamics, we propose a three-year project surveying current and former military personnel on criminal offending and victimization experiences abroad. Year 1 will survey veterans and a stateside base for comparison, year 2 will survey a subset of the 35 major U.S. bases abroad, and year 3 will focus on a base site visit abroad and finalizing analyses. The project provides novel data and a new avenue for addressing the question: What are the characteristics, causes, and consequences of adverse interactions between servicemembers and host-state civilians?

Intellectual Merit

The proposed research project focuses on three basic science research aims that will result in major innovations in criminology theory and data, international relations theory, and policymaking: *1) Evaluate veterans' recollections of adverse interactions with civilian populations; 2) Collect cross-comparable data of active duty personnel service both domestically and overseas; and 3) Identify the causes and consequences of adverse interactions between U.S. servicemembers and host-state civilians.*

Current research examines news reports of events, government policy, limited interviews, or aggregated statistics; we have small snapshots of the issue, but not enough information to understand the scope, causes, or implications of service member criminal offending and victimization experiences with host-state civilians. Our data will address important questions that are fundamental to basic research that intersect several areas of academic inquiry. In criminology, understanding the interaction between the U.S. deployment of troops and a civilian host population lacks depth, but this unique interaction can allow us to test theories related to opportunity, offending, victimization, and the nexus of offending and victimization. In international relations, trust and acceptance by both civilian and military populations is fundamental to both U.S. and host-state foreign policies.

Broader Impacts

The research team assembled with the explicit purpose of engaging in interdisciplinary research on this topic. Each investigator hails from a distinct disciplinary background and brings unique expertise to answering the overarching research question. The team is purposeful in including diverse and underrepresented voices in the project. There is gender diversity among the investigators, and our recruitment of a research assistant will target NSF defined groups of underrepresentation in the sciences by advertising we will take such status into primary consideration when hiring for the position. The project includes mentoring plans for a student hired from criminology or political science. Additionally, we will use this project to host two events on Boise State's campus that will target graduate and undergraduate students: a workshop on experimental design in surveys that will use our research to exemplify how to get meaningful data in a traditionally observational situation, and a research presentation for the general community that helps to disseminate our results, lessons learned, and methodological insight for the community. This research also reaches across borders, demonstrating how members of the U.S. military interact with local civilian populations in multiple settings, with a goal of using this information to minimize the occurrence of these adverse interactions.