This project investigates how social and economic interactions with citizens of foreign countries affects support for hosting their military forces. While conventional theories of foreign military basing emphasize elite motivations, the significance of securing consent from local populations has increased as many nations democratize. Often, these populations are reluctant to host foreign military bases due to concerns related to crime, pollution, and violations of sovereignty. In response to such resistance, sending states offer various incentives. This project evaluates the effects of economic and interpersonal interactions on how the public and elites perceive the United States and China in countries where these great powers currently maintain military forces or seek military access.

This project has three primary goals. First, it aims to understand how social and economic interactions with foreign citizens and military forces affect perceptions of the sending state and support for its troop deployments. Second, it seeks to evaluate how competition from third parties moderates the effects of economic and social interactions. For instance, do positive interactions with US soldiers matter less when people are also benefiting economically from Chinese investments? Third, the project compares military to non-military interactions to determine which types of contact are most influential in gaining support for hosting bases. More broadly, the project delves into the microfoundations of power and explores a critical dimension through which Sino-American competition can affect the United States’ capacity to exert military influence beyond its borders. To achieve these goals, the project uses public surveys and elite interviews in Djibouti, Kenya, Cambodia, and the Solomon Islands, with a pilot survey currently underway in Kenya.