

**ABSTRACT:**

Since the end of WWII, the US has maintained a military presence in Japan with bases spread throughout the archipelago. Tensions emerge periodically between the base presence and the communities which host the bases. The US military presence in Okinawa has elicited more local resistance than its presence in mainland Japan, despite large and strategically important bases there. **What accounts for this disparity? Previous research on anti-US-base protests in Japan has taken for granted the disparity in protest activity between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, failing to examine the possible reasons for this difference.** This study seeks to discern why the US bases in Okinawa have elicited more protest than the bases on the Japanese mainland through a mixed-method analysis. Employing both regressions of an original dataset of anti-US-base protest events in Japan from 1990 to 2016 and qualitative case comparisons of anti-US-base activism in Okinawa and the Greater Tokyo Area, this study explores the relationship between social movement framing and political opportunity structures and their impact on protest mobilization. This study endeavors not only answer the question of anti-US protest disparity in Japan, but also to contribute to the understanding of under what conditions social movements emerge.

**METHODS**

1. Quantitative data collected via LexisNexis of newspaper reports of anti-US-base protests events in Japan from 1990 to 2016.
2. Event dataset analyzed via two series of negative binomial regression: one series predicts the number of protesters per protest event using anti-base frames and structural factors (such as the presence of US-led war). The other series predicts the number of protest events per year with the same predictors.
3. Qualitative data collected through interviews with activists, local politicians, and US military personnel and primary documents in the Greater Tokyo Area and Okinawa.

**RESULTS**

- Employing the frame categories used by Kim and Boas (2019) (ideological, sovereignty, pragmatic), the regression analysis finds that in Japan, **pragmatic frames are not only more likely to be used in protests against the US military but they are also more likely to be associated with a greater number of protesters.**
- However, while the regression analyses provide an overall picture of anti-US-base mobilization in Japan, they are not informative about why protests do not occur or why some people stay home. The analyses also fail to capture the causal mechanism behind why pragmatic frames tend to resonate more.
- I find that both Okinawa’s marginalization vis-à-vis the mainland and its long history of grievances related to the US base presence are the primary reasons for the comparatively strong anti-US base movement. Together, these factors have helped re-create an Okinawan identity that especially responds to sovereignty frames that emphasize Okinawan nationalism. As one informant reported, **they originally only thought of themselves as “Japanese”; now they are “Okinawan” first.** As many studies have shown, a collective identity facilitates protest mobilization (Melucci 1988; Klandermans 2014). Furthermore, pragmatic frames may be less likely to mobilize in Okinawa, as some explanations (ex. the environmental impacts of the Henoko relocation plan) may be too technical for the average person to understand. However, activists employ such frames to try to influence both domestic and US policy-makers directly. Conversely, activists in the Greater Tokyo Area may have difficulty mobilizing support using anything but pragmatics frames, meaning that strong opposition to the US bases will likely emerge in response to base-related incidents.

# A history of base-related incidents and marginalization vis-à-vis the Japanese mainland fostered the emergence of a contemporary collective Okinawan ethnic identity.



“[There is] more solidarity between Okinawans regardless of their perspective on the bases than between Okinawans and mainland Japanese with the same view of the bases.”

**Mobilizing Against the Military:  
An Analysis of Anti-US-Base Movements in Japan**  
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**NEXT STEPS**

- Disaggregate Okinawa and Greater Tokyo Area protest events
- Incorporate Japanese newspapers, possibly obtain protest permit information
- Fieldwork in 2020, primarily interviews in Kanagawa Prefecture
- Geographically Weighted Regressions

**Frame Types:**

- Pragmatic (emphasis on base-related incidents, accidents, noise pollution, contamination)
- Ideological (anti-war, anti-nuclear, pro-peace)
- Sovereignty (US bases as a violation of national sovereignty; occupation)

	Japanese Anti-Base Frames	Ideological Frames	Sovereignty Frames	Pragmatic Frames
Ideological Frames	-0.442 (0.396)	-0.560 (0.403)		
Sovereignty Frames	1.055 (0.815)		1.286 (0.810)	
Pragmatic Frames	-0.600 <sup>*</sup> (0.344)			-0.757 <sup>***</sup> (0.342)
Disruption	-0.696 <sup>*</sup> (0.394)	-0.463 (0.394)	-0.434 (0.386)	-0.807 <sup>***</sup> (0.393)
Transnational Protests	-0.925 (0.815)	-1.255 (0.827)	-1.199 (0.822)	-1.058 (0.823)
US-led War	0.993 <sup>**</sup> (0.484)	1.121 <sup>**</sup> (0.491)	1.388 <sup>***</sup> (0.487)	1.312 <sup>***</sup> (0.485)
Commemorative Event	0.190 (0.484)	0.708 (0.489)	0.783 (0.486)	0.635 (0.488)
AIC	1760.613	1761.724	1759.784	1759.630
BIC	1783.309	1779.377	1777.437	1777.262
Log Likelihood	-871.306	-873.862	-872.992	-872.815
Deviance	120.356	121.067	120.797	120.776
Num. obs	92	92	92	92

p < 0.001, p < 0.05, p < 0.1

**Figure 1: Number of Protesters and Frames**

	Japanese Anti-Base Frames	Ideological Frames	Sovereignty Frames	Pragmatic Frames
Ideological Frames	0.221 (0.144)	0.279 <sup>**</sup> (0.102)		
Sovereignty Frames	0.100 (0.293)		-0.055 (0.236)	
Pragmatic Frames	0.110 (0.074)			0.163 <sup>***</sup> (0.060)
Disruption	0.000 (0.087)	0.016 (0.083)	0.016 (0.082)	-0.014 (0.084)
Transnational Protests	-0.235 (0.253)	-0.255 (0.272)	0.031 (0.251)	0.045 (0.257)
US-led War	0.090 (0.062)	0.136 <sup>**</sup> (0.057)	0.114 <sup>*</sup> (0.060)	0.058 (0.059)
Commemorative Event	0.068 <sup>*</sup> (0.038)	0.074 <sup>**</sup> (0.034)	0.103 <sup>***</sup> (0.038)	0.071 <sup>**</sup> (0.034)
AIC	106.806	106.005	112.854	105.812
BIC	117.499	114.252	121.101	114.058
Log Likelihood	-44.403	-45.003	-49.427	-45.996
Deviance	11.310	14.509	21.357	14.315
Num. obs	24	24	24	24

p < 0.001, p < 0.05, p < 0.1

**Figure 2: Number of Protest Events and Frames**

	Okinawa	Greater Tokyo Area
Base-related issues (such as contamination, noise, crime)	Yes	Yes
High level of base concentration	Yes	Yes (though mostly in the suburbs)
Activists' use of pragmatic frames	Yes	Yes
Community-outreach by the US military	Yes	Yes
Socially acceptable to protest	Yes	No
Politician support for the US bases	No (though some variation, particularly in Nago)	Yes
Separate ethnic identity	Yes	No

**Figure 3: Comparison of Okinawa and Greater Tokyo Area**