Early Experiments in Soft Power:

State-Building in Haiti, 1915-34

Christian Fignole

Craig Palsson

Abstract

While soft power is primary goal of American foreign policy, the support for it came after a series of unpopular military occupations. How did these military disasters lead the U.S. to conclude that soft power was an attractive approach? We investigate this question looking at soft power initiatives in Haiti during the occupation of 1915 to 1934. We use an intelligence report from 1932 with data on the political leanings of over 1,100 prominent citizens around the country. One of the U.S.'s biggest initiatives was building roads, and we show that a one standard deviation increase in market access from navigable roads is associated with a 65% decrease in anti-occupation sentiment. We also show that the U.S.'s other major initiative, expanding education, is only weakly associated with lower anti-occupation sentiment.

Soft power is a core feature of US foreign policy. For example, in 2023 alone, the United States distributed $43.8 billion around the world through USAID.[1] Many of these soft power initiatives were strategic investments in currying international favor during the Cold War. But some of the earliest conceptions of soft power were embedded even earlier, in military doctrines. In the 1940s, the U.S. Marines published the *Small Wars Manual*, codifying lessons from occupations in places like Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. These doctrines emphasized state-building—roads, schools, hospitals—as essential for creating legitimacy and reducing resistance to occupation. Yet this raises a historical puzzle: the Marines developed doctrine advocating state-building precisely after experiences in occupations that were, at best, cautionary tales rather than exemplary case studies of success. For example, when the US left Haiti in 1934, it was celebrated as a second independence, comparable with its revolutionary break from France in 1804. Why, then, did the US codify an approach emphasizing infrastructure and institutional development when the occupations themselves seemed unable to yield clear successes?

In this paper, we examine the US's attempt to build soft power in Haiti during the occupation of 1915-1934. After a severe military suppression of a resistant insurgency, the Americans decided in 1921 to switch to state-building. It built roads, expanded education, and reduced bureaucratic corruption. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether the

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/02/06/what-the-data-says-about-us-foreign-aid/

support for soft power came because the government had evidence that these state-building projects were associated with higher support for the occupation.

To address this question, we combine archival data on state-building projects with a 1932 intelligence report on over 1,100 prominent citizens around Haiti. The intelligence reports recorded key information on prominent citizens, including data on their political affiliations and support for the occupation. Our primary empirical strategy is to compare support for the occupation between citizens who were more exposed to the projects to those with less exposure. This exposure design, however, does not identify whether the projects caused increased support for the occupation. The causal question faces two hurdles. First, there is the endogeneity of project placement, where feelings toward the occupation may influence site selection. Second, there is an issue of whether the intelligence reports include the citizens' sincere beliefs or just the perceptions of intelligence officers. But, we argue, the causal effect is not the only interesting parameter for addressing whether there was evidence of success. Officials establishing military doctrine or foreign policy did not have the tools of causal identification and recommended policy based on correlations. Thus, we focus on the correlation between projects and support.

We examine how attitudes vary with exposure to three occupation policies. The first strategic policy enacted was a counterinsurgency operation. The American occupation was prompted by a series of revolutions. From 1911 to 1914, seven different men held the

office of president. Many were deposed by a group of rebels called kakos. When the occupation began in July 1915, it faced fierce resistance from the kakos. The initial phase of counterinsurgency reorganized the kako operations, causing them to flee to the eastern-central region of the country, where they gathered in camps. By the end of 1920, the Marines had subdued them. Our first analysis examines how the prominent individuals exposed to these insurgent camps perceived the occupation. We geolocate a 1920 map of the 87 camps and find that individuals living in districts with camps were 15 percentage points less likely to oppose the occupation. We hypothesize that because the kakos had antagonized local villages, the locals appreciated the counterinsurgency actions.

Second, we look at the largest public works program implemented by the occupation: road construction. These roads enabled the use of motor vehicles and improved connections between markets. We examine their effect on occupation sentiments by looking at how roads changed a district's market access. Using a 1930s logistics table, we use the travel times between districts with the roads and create a counterfactual travel time assuming that roads had not been constructed. We use these travel times to measure how the roads changed market access. The regressions show evidence for these projects improving feelings towards the Americans: a one standard deviation increase in market access is associated with a 65% decline in anti-occupation sentiment. We confirm the importance of the economic opportunity created by the occupation by showing that

individuals with more market-connected professions were also less likely to oppose the occupation.

Finally, we look at the occupation's education initiative. The occupation emphasized vocational training and started rural farm schools around the country. We use reports on the number of schools, enrollment, and attendance by school district in 1922 and 1931, the major period of school expansion. While we find some support for a relationship between school expansion and favorable feelings towards the occupation, the results have weak statistical significance. This weak result may come from measurement error in the data, but it also is consistent with the occupation ending because of protests that started in these schools.

One concern about the data is that the intelligence reports, despite being mission-critical information, might not reflect the true feelings of the locals. While we argue that this hypothesis is hard to hold given the relationships we find, one could argue that they are spurious and the result of correlated factors that also influence how the occupation perceived local sentiments. We address this by using the 1918 constitutional referendum as a placebo test. The referendum, which was driven by the Americans to get a constitution more favorable to their goals, was reported to pass with 98,225 votes in favor and only 768 against. Since the votes in favor were a sham, we should not find a correlation with the occupation sentiment measure. Indeed, we do not. But we do find that the votes against correlate with increased anti-occupation feelings.

Our second response to the concern that the intelligence reports do not reflect the locals' true feelings is to argue that the true feelings are not as important as the perceptions. Historians have documented cases where the Americans believed an individual was in favor of the occupation while in secret he was acting against it (Alexis, 2021, p. 124). But we are not trying to identify the causal effect of the policies on sentiment. We are interested in whether the Americans believed there was an effect. If they saw a relationship between their policies and what they thought the locals felt, then that would have been sufficient for informing future policy. Since we find a relationship, we argue that the Haitian experience laid an experiential foundation for the hearts and minds doctrine.

This paper contributes to our understanding of how the U.S. came to see soft power as a strategic investment. One of the most famous cases for soft power comes through counterinsurgency operations. Previous work has shown that efforts to combat insurgents through winning the "hearts and minds" of the population were successful (Berman et al., 2011; Dell & Querubin, 2018). This paper uses a historical experiment that predated official military doctrine to show where the U.S. judged such approaches were consistent with military goals.

This paper also contributes by looking at the strategic outcomes of soft power. One of the earliest examples in soft power was the Marshall Plan. Previous work has shown that this plan achieved its objectives of transferring American technologies and

management techniques to Europe (Giorcelli, 2019). This paper shows that the U.S. had evidence for the success of development programs in rallying political support.

Historical context

Haiti began in 1804 as a country of people willing to overthrow its government, and that tradition continued over the next century. After their coerced labor made Saint Domingue one of the most productive territories in the West during the 1700s, the slaves of the French Empire revolted, gained independence, and started the nation of Haiti. But ideological conflicts led to the assassination of Haiti's first president, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, in 1806, and the country split into the Republic of Haiti in the South and the Empire of Haiti in the North (Stieber, 2020). Revolts became a common event, often happening at the local level. Peasant farmers regularly revolted against the state to weaken its capacity to enforce coercive labor laws (Chochotte, 2018). But sometimes these revolts would extend beyond local boundaries and reach the national level. As a result, the leadership of Haiti was perpetually instable. From 1806 to 1915, 17 of Haiti's 24 presidents were overthrown by revolution (Schmidt, 1971, p. 26).

These national-level revolts triggered the US occupation of Haiti in 1915. In July 1915, a revolt against President Guillaume Sam, the seventh man to hold the presidential office in four years, left him dead in the streets of Port-au-Prince. The U.S., fearing the

collapse of Haiti would give Germans the opportunity to gain a strategic foothold in the Caribbean, immediately landed Marines and started occupying the country.

Upon landing, the Marines' first objective was to neutralize the revolts, but since Haiti was one of the first occupied territories, the Marines had not yet developed a counterinsurgency doctrine. The Marines began with a two-pronged strategy (Long, 2016, p. 74; Schmidt, 1971, pp. 83–85). First, they tried an arms-buying/amnesty-granting approach where the Marines would buy guns from insurgents and allow them to reintegrate into society. Second, they used direct attacks against militant groups. These strategies proved effective against the resistance, and by the end of 1915 the insurgents were contained. The Marines felt the strategy in Haiti was so effective, it implemented similar strategies later in Nicaragua in 1928 (Long, 2016, p. 76).

But after the initial insurgent suppression, resistance began to build again. By 1919, the U.S. estimated there were 6,000-15,000 fighters resisting the occupation (Alexis, 2021, p. 88). The leader, Charlemagne Peralte, had effectively established a rival government, sending ministers around the country (Alexis, 2021, p. 84). In the face of such opposition, the occupation could not fight the insurgents without information from locals. American leaders pled with Haitians to find information on where the insurgents were located and what they planned to do (Alexis, 2021, pp. 93–96). Sometimes the requests were accompanied by threats to destroy homes, livestock, and crops of villages who were not cooperating (Alexis, 2021, p. 95). Other times, they were combined with bounties to

reward cooperation (Alexis, 2021, pp. 115–116). These tactics had varying success, with some Haitians delivering mission-critical information while many others feeding useless or bad information (Alexis, 2021, p. 127).

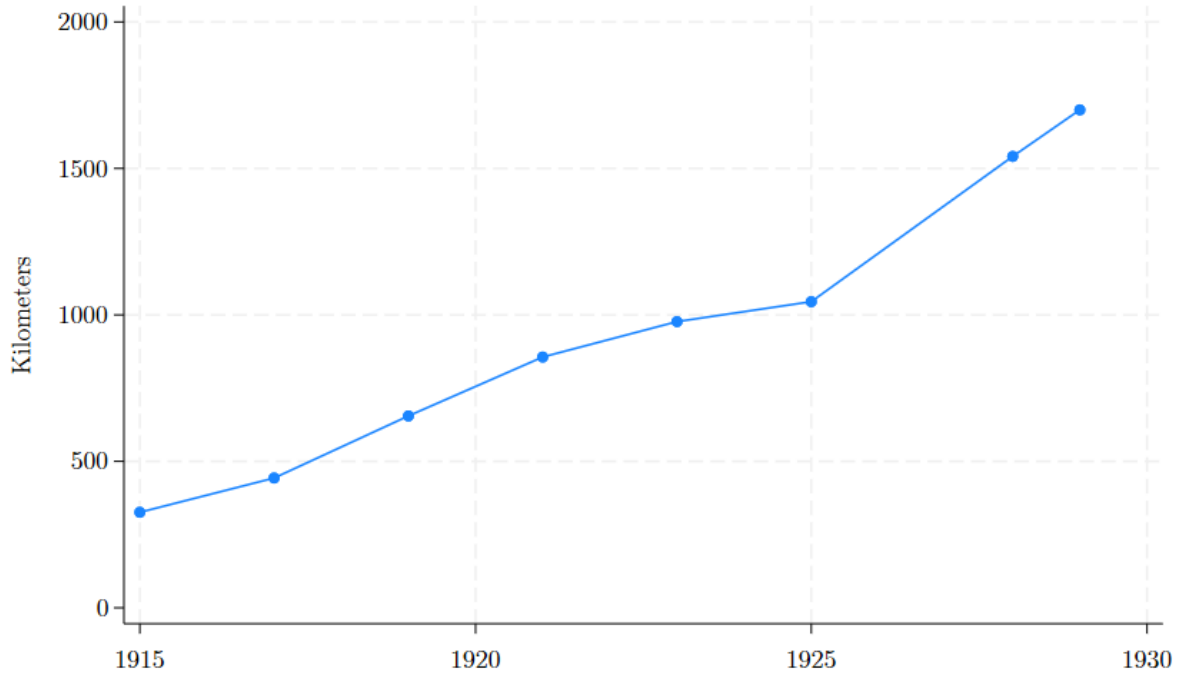
The occupation forces eventually defeated the active resistance, but it is unclear whether they won the people. The turning point in the counterinsurgency came in November 1919 with the assassination of Peralte. In the following year, Franklin D Roosevelt, who had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the initial occupation years, ran as the Democratic candidate for vice president. The occupation became an easy opportunity for Republicans to discredit Roosevelt, and they began a senate investigation. In the congressional testimony, Americans claimed they had won the support of the average Haitian (U.S. Senate, 1922). But the occupation may have misinterpreted the natives' actions and intents (Alexis, 2021, pp. 89, 124). In 1922, the investigation, despite uncovering several abuses by U.S. military, concluded that the situation was too unstable to withdraw troops and extended the occupation.

The extension was accompanied by a shift in strategy, but the occupation began to unravel at the end of the 1920s as new resistance mounted. From 1915 to 1922, the occupation focused strategy on stabilizing the political situation with only nominal attention to economic development. With the decision to stay, the occupation began focusing on development policy. Two of the main policies were road construction and school expansion. Both created mixed responses from the population.

From the beginning of the campaign, the occupation focused on road construction. Construction included "well-drained trails which are sufficiently wide and which have grades and curves of a character to permit the passage of a motor vehicle," generally including a gravel surface but sometimes, on heavily-trafficked roads, an asphalt surface (State Department, 1929, pp. 62–63). The roads served two purposes. First, they improved military logistics in the occupation's initial phase. Second, during the second phase, it was part of the occupation's development package. "While there is still great need of improvement in the National and departmental roads, there is even greater need for opening up rich areas which are now accessible only by trails which are traversed with difficulty even by animal traffic" (State Department, 1929, p. 62). Cumulative road construction from 1915 through 1929 is given in Figure 1.

The roads had countervailing effects on drawing support for the occupation. On the one hand, they improved travel between districts and facilitated exchange. On the other hand, in the early occupation, the roads were constructed with corvée labor, and this coercion was one of the primary drivers of insurgency (Schmidt, 1971, p. 100).

Figure 1. Cumulative road construction by the occupation, 1915-29



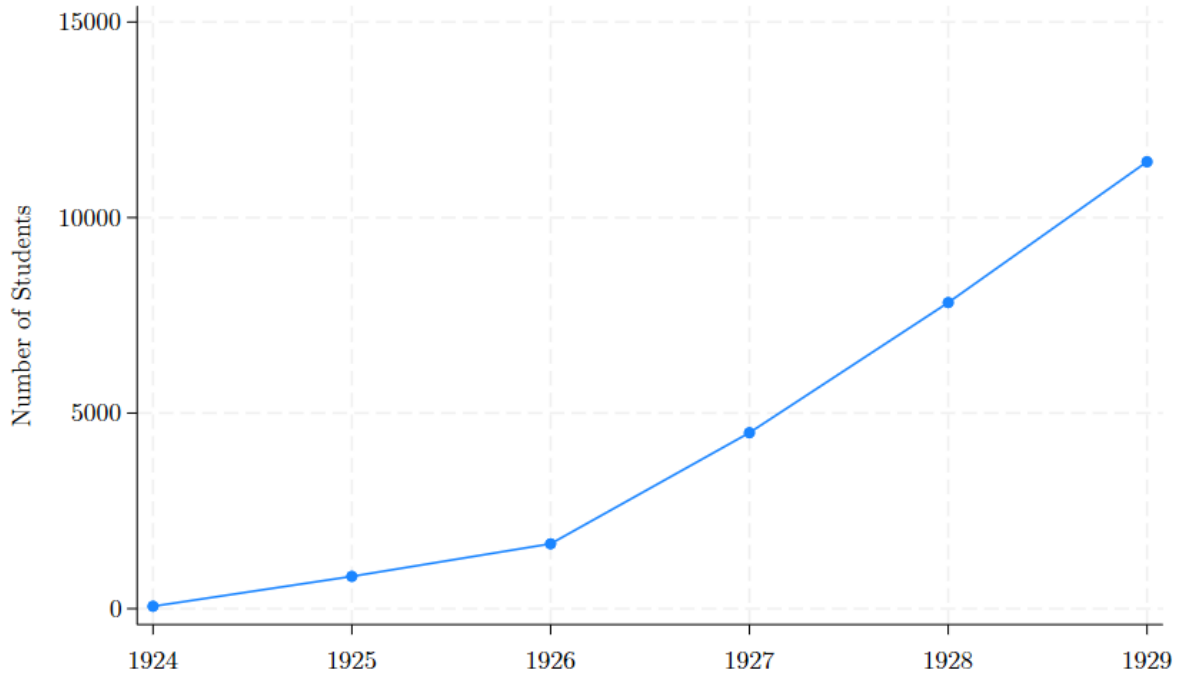
Source: State Department (1929)

The occupation's other signature achievement was the creation and expansion of rural farm schools. Established in 1923, these schools focused on vocational education related to agriculture. The government pushed for these schools to such an extent that the department of public instruction gave the service technique control of national rural primary schools in 1930 to get access to the larger budget (*Exposé Général de La Situation: Exercice 1930-31*, 1932, p. 93). Enrollment for schools from 1924 through 1929 is reported in Figure 2.

The occupation believed these farm schools were generating significant support. "Perhaps more significant than any other development is the continued drift of public

sympathy toward vocational and industrial education. Not only are men of affairs coming to recognize more and more the absolute necessity of teaching modern productive methods (both agricultural and industrial), but the young men themselves are learning the dignity of labor. They are discovering that the only sure road to personal prosperity lies in personal efficiency in some industrial line. This drift of sentiment is exhibited in the greater attendance at all of the industrial and agricultural schools" (State Department, 1927, p. 40).

Figure 2. Enrollment in rural farm schools, 1924-29



Source: State Department (1929)

But the school expansion sowed the seeds for the occupation's end. In 1929, students at the occupation's flagship school [confirm that Damien was flagship] walked out in protest and called for the resignation of the occupation's head of instruction (Schmidt, 1971, p. 196). This inspired other protests, culminating in a protest in Okay in December 1929 where marines massacred several protesters. The massacre became international news (Dalleo, 2016, p. 34), convincing the U.S. government that the occupation needed to come to a rapid end.

Today, the occupation is not regarded well. Most of the development projects did not endure after American withdrawal. For example, the roads quickly fell into disrepair because maintenance was too costly (Schmidt, 1971, pp. 233–234). But the memory of the abuses lasted. The one lasting contribution was the creation of effective military and gendarmerie personnel, a legacy that allowed political strongmen to more effectively control the country (Schmidt, 1971, p. 235). But we do not have a good understanding of how Haitians felt on the eve of the occupation's ending.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

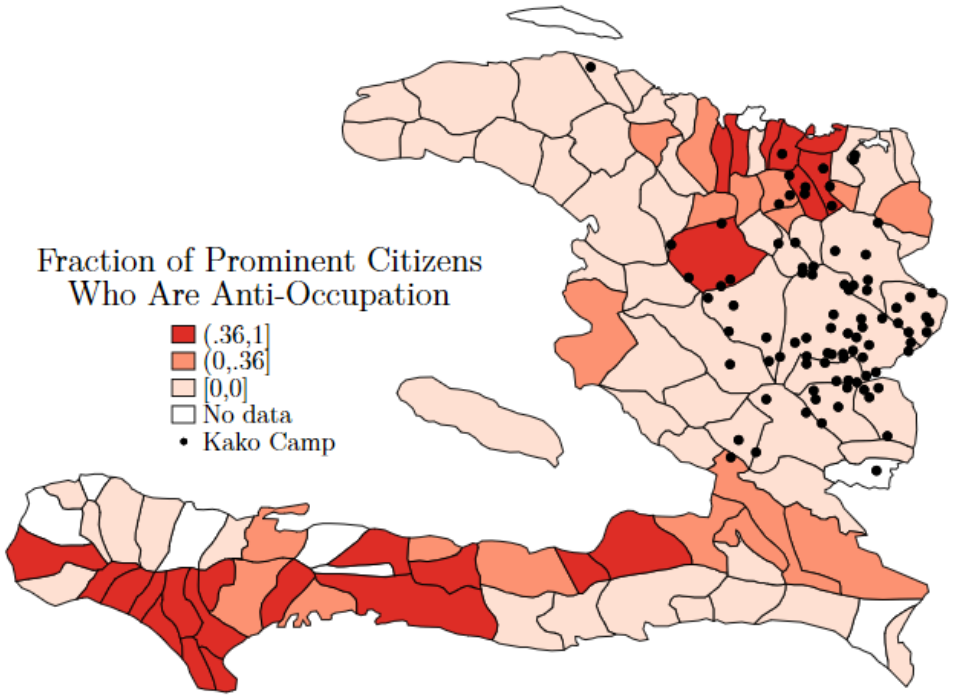
We collect data from several archival sources.

Bandit camps

We digitize a map of insurgent camps created by the marines in 1920. The camp charted the location of 87 camps, which we digitized. Figure 3 shows the spatial

distribution of the camps. With the exception of one camp in the North, all camps were located in the mountains in the East.

Figure 3. Map of bandit camps and anti-occupation sentiment



Political support

We collect data on political sentiments using an intelligence report written by the American occupation in the early 1930s. Since 1921, the occupation intelligence tracked "the reputation, influence, and attitude of all prominent Haitians toward the occupation" (Schmidt, 1971, p. 121). We collect our data from the 1932 report, which listed 1,127 prominent citizens around the country along with their demographic information and their political feelings.

Table 1. Characteristics of prominent citizens

Feature	Mean
Anti-Occupation	0.25
Age	48.0
Black	0.45
Brown	0.32
Highly Educated	0.27
Market-connected Profession	0.43

Notes: Sample has 1,127 prominent citizens. It is unclear whether citizens would agree with the classifications provided or if these are just the judgments of intelligence officers.

Since the primary purpose of the report was to track political attitudes, it reported two separate variables on political sentiments. First, it had the citizen's attitude towards the occupation; second, it had the citizen's political affiliation. While the variables were reported separately, the values were not standardized and there are cases where the values appear switched. For our analysis, we classify a citizen as anti-occupation if either the attitude or the political affiliation indicated a feeling or association opposed to the occupation or the occupation-controlled government. This includes an explicit declaration of "anti-occupation" or "anti-American," or it could be a citizen who belongs to the Union Patriotique, the primary political party organizing against the occupation. By this classification, as reported in Table 1, 25% of citizens were anti-occupation. Figure 3 maps the spatial distribution of anti-occupation sentiment.

Table 1 also lists some features of the prominent citizens. Their ages ranged from 19 to 95, with the average citizen aged around 48. The intelligence reports listed the skin color of each citizen, though it is most likely that the skin color was not self-identification but rather the discretion of the intelligence officer. We find that 45% were described as black and 32% as brown. The educational categories were not standardized, so in some cases there are explicit categorizations like "secondary" or "college," but in other cases it says "mediocre," "good," or "very good." We classify anyone with a secondary education or higher, or anyone classified as "very good," as highly educated. Table 1 reports 27% fell in this category. Finally, we create an indicator for whether the citizen is in a market-connected profession. We classify a profession as market-connected if it was likely engaged with markets in other villages and not if it was primarily engaged in local goods or services. For example, a lawyer or teacher is not a market-connected profession while a merchant or farmer is. Table 1 shows that 43% were market-connected.

Schools

One measure of public goods is through the number of schools in the district. We use two reports on schooling to calculate how school availability changed during the occupation. First, a 1930 report on the United States commission on education in Haiti reported data on the number of schools per district from 1922. These statistics report the combined total of national urban, national rural, and Presbyterial schools, as well as enrollment and average attendance. Second, a 1932 report gives the state of education in

the 1930-31 school year. This report offers more detail, separately reporting data by type of school, including more schools than the 1922 statistics. To make the data comparable, we only use the national urban, national rural, and Presbyterial schools from the 1931 data.

The data's timing is convenient for using it to measure the shift in education during the occupation. While the 1922 numbers come 7 years into the American occupation, they represent the state of schools when the Americans switched their strategy from establishing stability to promoting development (Palsson, 2023). The 1931 data come at the same time that the intelligence report was collected, making it the most relevant for the opinions.

The data were reported by school districts. Since we do not know the distribution of schools across political districts within each school district, we assign the school district numbers to each political district. For example, the 24 schools reported in the Saint Marc school district in 1931 are attributed to Saint Marc, and the same 24 are assigned to both La Chapelle and Verrettes. In the empirical work, the standard errors are adjusted to account for the common data across political districts.

Market Access

Another big source of occupation spending was on roads. As has been well established in economics, the importance of roads is not just having direct access to an

improved road, but the network of connections that road opens. We hypothesize that the most important impact of these roads is their effect on market access. We measure market access for district i as

$$MA_i = \sum_{i \neq j} e^{-\theta \tau_{ij}} M_j.$$

where M_j is the size of the market in district j, τ_{ij} is the travel time between between district i and j, and θ is a parameter that controls how quickly market access decays with travel time. Roads affect market access through τ_{ij}.

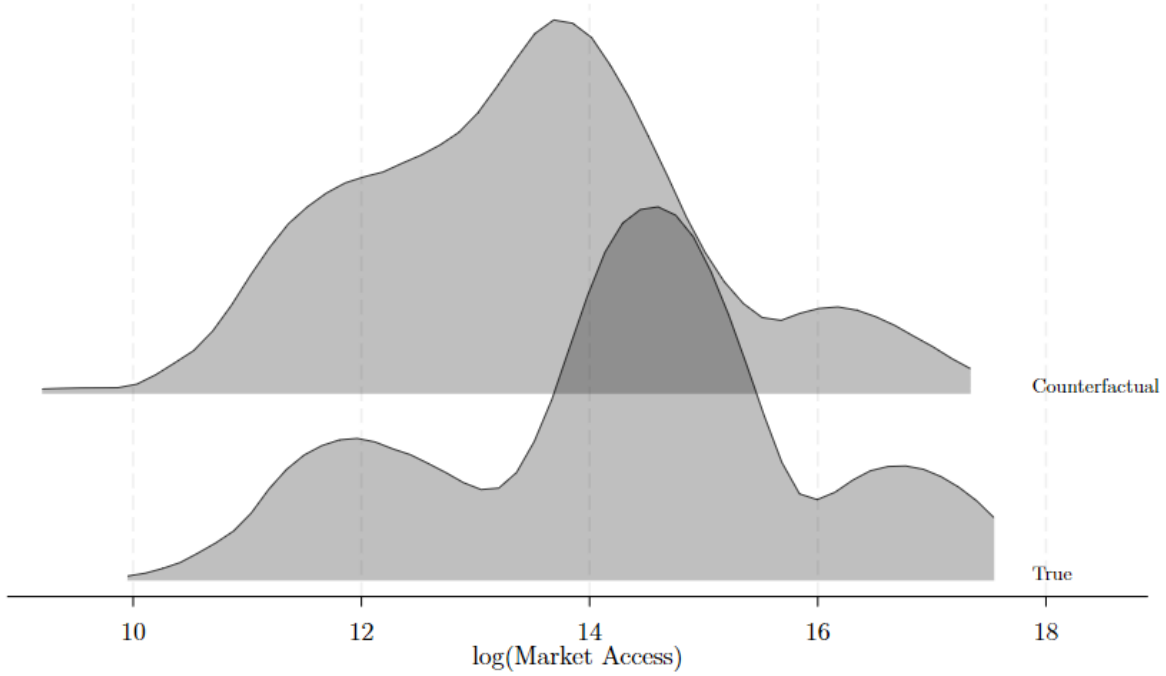
We measure the effect of roads on τ_{ij} using a logistics table from a marine intelligence report. The logistics table reports three key variables. First, it gives the distance between all districts in the same department. Second, it gives the travel time between all districts. Finally, it gives the transportation methods one needs for each trip. For example, Port-au-Prince is 95 km from Jacmel, and one can travel the entire distance in a car in 3.0 hours; Cornillon, on the other hand, is only 63 km from Port-au-Prince, but one must use a mix of car and horseback, so the trip takes 7.5 hours. We calculate the market access variable using the travel times reported in this logistics table for τ_{ij}. To get the effect of the roads, we calculate a counterfactual market access variable that assumes that removes cars. Using the trips within a department that use only horseback, we calculate the average travel speed. Then we use that horseback speed and calculate the time it would take to travel the distance of each trip, giving us a counterfactual, no-car

travel time. We then calculate the market access variable again using the counterfactual travel times.

The other pieces of the market access variable are derived either from data or by assumption. For market size (M_j), we use average annual district-level tax collections from 1925 to 1931 as a proxy for economic activity. We do not have data to estimate the decay function variable (θ), so we have to rely on some assumptions. This variable describes how important a market τ hours away is relative to the home market. We assume that a market at the median travel time (5.25 hours) is half as important as the home market, which gives us a θ equal to 0.13. In the appendix, we test the robustness of the results with respect to this assumption.

The distributions of the true and counterfactual market access values are reported in Figure X. Roads had the largest effect on the bottom half of the distribution. Many districts that would be relatively isolated because of long travel times on horseback became effectively closer to their neighboring districts through cars. The top of the distribution, on the other hand, saw only a little change. As one would expect, the biggest markets were already close to other markets.

Figure 4. Market access distribution: true vs counterfactual



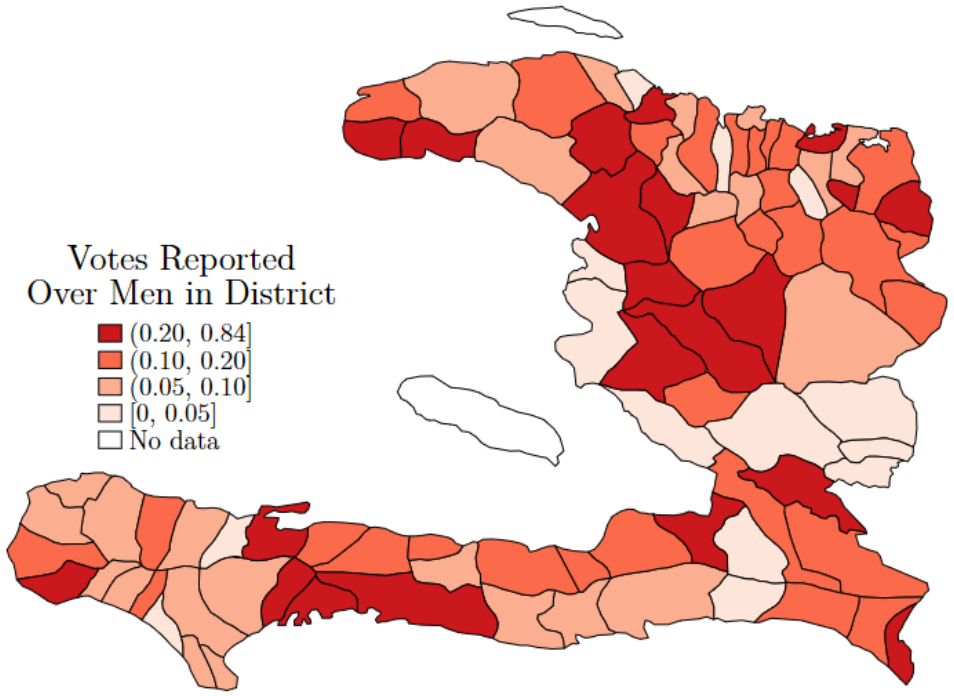
1918 Referendum

We also collect data on the 1918 constitutional referendum. The Americans tried to push a reform through the National Assembly to allow foreigners to own land. When it failed, the Americans dissolved the National Assembly and held a referendum. The results reported 98,993 votes, of which 98,225 voted in favor and only 768 voted against. The extremely lopsided vote has led many historians to conclude that the referendum was a sham.

We use vote district-level vote tallies found in the Marine archives. The tallies report the total number of yes and no votes by district. We also calculate the voter turnout

by district, assuming that only men were allowed to vote and that men were half the population of each district. The spatial distribution of reported voter turnout is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Reported voter turnout in the 1918 referendum



Despite the credulity of the reported votes, the data still serve three purposes. First, if they bear no relationship to the underlying feelings of the occupation, then they work as a placebo. Second, even if they do not represent the opinions of Haitians, they might represent the perceptions of the Americans. Finally, even though the occupation reported only 768 votes against the referendum, those votes might be more informative about opposition to the occupation.

Empirical Framework

We want to understand the relationship between the occupation's policies and feelings towards it. There are two relationships that are interesting. For policymakers, the interesting relationship is the causal effect. How much did the occupation policies cause perceptions to change? But there are two challenges to estimating the causal relationship. First, we have only one cross-section of political sentiments. There is no way for us to look at changes in sentiment. Second, we have no exogenous variation in occupation policies. Under the current setup, we cannot estimate the causal effect.

But for the purposes of history, the causal relationship is not the only interesting one. The occupation of Haiti was one of the biggest foreign military campaigns at this point, and it preceded several others. Even if there was no causal relationship between its policies and its support, future policymaking would have been shaped by the belief in such an effect. Thus, it is important to understand whether the occupation had any evidence that its policies were related to increased support.

Our empirical goal is to look at how support for the occupation varied by exposure to the occupation's policies. To do this, we run the following regression:

$$Support_{id} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Exposure_d + \Gamma X_{id} + \varepsilon_{id}$$

$Support_{id}$ is the support for the occupation by prominent citizen i in district d. We measure support as whether the intelligence report assesses the citizen as having anti-occupation or anti-government feelings, or if they are associated with parties that are anti-occupation. $Exposure_d$ is the treatment variable, exposure to a policy in district d. We investigate three policies: (1) counterinsurgency against the Kako camps; (2) road construction; and (3) schooling expansion. Since various factors influence whether someone opposes the occupation, we also include a series of demographic and district controls, X_{id}. These controls include the citizen's age, education, and reported race. Since exposure is at the district level, and since there is a spatial correlation in where policies were located, all regressions use Conley standard errors, adjusting for spatial correlations within 20 km. The coefficient of interest is β_1, the difference in anti-occupation sentiment between citizens living in districts more exposed to the policy and those living in districts that were less exposed. Since the outcome is whether the individuals held anti-occupation sentiments, the policy would be considered a success if β_1 is negative.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 reports our results with the kako camps. The dependent variable in each column is whether the individual had anti-occupation sentiments. The first column of the first panel shows that citizens in a district with any camps were 15.6 percentage points less likely to oppose the occupation. Table 1 shows the mean anti-occupation sentiment

was 25%, so these individuals were 62% less likely to oppose the occupation. The difference is significant at the 5% level using Conley standard errors.

One reason that anti-occupation sentiment could be lower is that the demographics of prominent citizens in the areas with camps were different from citizens in other districts. To account for this, column (2) includes controls for the citizen's age, educational status, and reported race. The difference holds and remains statistically significant at the 5% level.

One concern is that Hinche might be pulling a lot of weight in the regressions. Out of the 87 camps, 27% were located in Hinche. In column (3), we test the robustness of the results to dropping individuals from Hinche. For the "any camps" treatment, dropping Hinche has no effect on the results. But in the second panel, we see that dropping Hinche drastically increases the magnitude and significance of the coefficients. This suggests that the camps had diminishing effects on anti-occupation sentiments: just a few camps were just as powerful as 23.

Another factor that could be affecting the results is that the sentiments were measured within a few years of the Cayes massacre. This event received global recognition and set in motion the end of the occupation, and it obviously had local effects. In column (4), we add a control for how far the district is from Cayes (including Hinche again in the regression). The coefficient decreases in magnitude to 14.6 and the statistical significance decreases to only being significant at the 10% level.

Table 2. Relationship between insurgent locations and anti-occupation sentiment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Any Kako Camps	-0.154**	-0.153**	-0.152**	-0.132*
	[0.0707]	[0.0711]	[0.0721]	[0.0777]
N	1,127	1,127	1,113	1,127
R^2	0.269	0.275	0.276	0.281
Demographic Controls		X	X	X
Excluding Hinche			X	
District Population				X
Distance from Cayes				X

Notes: Dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if the individual opposed the occupation. Conley standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Market Access

One of the main impacts of the occupation was its effect on Haiti's economy. The initial military phase significantly increased Haiti's political stability, creating a more predictable economic environment and inducing more foreigners to operate in the country (Palsson, 2023). Then the second phase of the occupation focused on development projects, though these had little long-term effects. Also, the intelligence reports targeted the prominent individuals within a region. Presumably, many of these individuals owe their prominence to high economic standing. Thus, the occupation's objectives and the individuals' status naturally lead to hypotheses about the anti-occupation sentiments and the occupation's economic improvements.

We test two economic impact hypotheses. First, we test whether the increase in market access from occupation roads leads to lower anti-occupation sentiment. While the increase in market access will push some individuals toward supporting the occupation, the roads were built with forced labor and were a major driver of insurgency (Schmidt, 1971, p. 100). The net effect is an empirical question. Second, individuals in professions with greater ties outside their community might benefit more from the occupation's stability. We test this using the high-market-connection dummy described in the data section.

Table 3. Market improvements and anti-occupation sentiment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Δ ln(Market Access)	-0.209***	-0.222***			-0.220***
	[0.0775]	[0.0756]			[0.0731]
Market-connected			-0.0983*	-0.0947*	-0.0897**
Profession			[0.0550]	[0.0523]	[0.0449]
Any Kako Camps		-0.167**		-0.128*	-0.163**
		[0.0736]		[0.0748]	[0.0698]
N	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127
R^2	0.328	0.345	0.279	0.289	0.352

Notes: Dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if the individual opposed the occupation. All regressions contain the full set of demographic controls, district population, and the distance from Cayes. Conley standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The results of the market-based hypotheses are in Table 3. In column 1, we omit the Kako camp variable from the baseline regression and instead include the change in

market access. A one standard deviation increase in market access (0.72 log points) is associated with a 15 percentage point decrease in anti-occupation sentiment, significant at the 1% level. Column 2 reintroduces the Kako camp dummy. The market access variables remains significant, and the Kako camp dummy increases in magnitude and becomes significant at the 5% level. In column 3, we again omit the Kako camp dummy and use the market-connected profession dummy in its place. Individuals with a market-connected profession were 10 percentage points less likely to have anti-occupation sentiments. This result stays the same when the Kako camp dummy is reintroduced in column 4. In column 5, we include both market variables and the Kako camp dummy. The magnitudes remain the same, though the controls increase the precision and lead to statistically significant results for all three coefficients at the 5% level or higher.

Schools

Another point of focus for the occupation was education. The main achievement in education was the establishment of 68 farm schools educating nearly 9,000 students (Schmidt, 1971, p. 184). But, according to the national statistics, there was a sizeable increase in government schools, enrollment, and attendance from 1922 to 1931. Our next hypothesis tests whether this increase in schooling was associated with more favorable feelings towards the occupation.

The schooling results are reported in Table 4. The first column drops the Kako camp variable from the baseline and replaces it with the log-change in schools. The

coefficient is negative, but it is not statistically significant. When we include the Kako camp variable in the second column, the magnitude of the Kako camp coefficient becomes larger and significant at the 5% level, but the coefficient on schools remains statistically insignificant. This pattern is repeated when using the log-change in enrollment instead of schools. But when we use the log-change in attendance, we get the only statistically significant results from the schooling variables. A one standard deviation increase of log-change in attendance (0.46) decreases anti-occupation sentiment by 8 percentage points, significant at the 10% level.

There are a few things to note about the statistically insignificant effect. First, as explained in the data section, there is some measurement error in the estimate because the data came from school districts but the individuals are identified by political district. Second, despite only one set of statistically significant results, the sign for all coefficients is still negative, consistent with schools increasing support for the occupation. Perhaps if the measurement error was resolved the more precise estimate would confirm the hypothesis. Third, however, it is still plausible that the schools had no effect on the feelings towards the occupation. The Americans did not focus on general education, focusing more on vocational. Furthermore, the state of education was poor, with one Haitian official reporting that many of the teachers were tested and discovered to be illiterate (1932 expose p. 114). The expansion of schooling might not have expanded education, generating no additional support from the prominent citizens.

Table 4. Anti-occupation sentiment and schools

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Δ ln(Schools)	-0.0732	-0.133				
	[0.185]	[0.177]				
Δ ln(Enrollment)			-0.0476	-0.0669		
			[0.0934]	[0.102]		
Δ ln(Attendance)					-0.166*	-0.186*
					[0.0862]	[0.0994]
Any Kako Camps		-0.151**		-0.142*		-0.161**
		[0.0738]		[0.0778]		[0.0810]
N	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127	1,127
R^2	0.271	0.285	0.271	0.284	0.292	0.308

Notes: Dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if the individual opposed the occupation. All regressions contain the full set of demographic controls, district population, and the distance from Cayes. Conley standard errors in brackets. ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

1918 Referendum

The central assumption of this analysis is that the intelligence reports accurately reflect the feelings of the observed citizens. But one solution to the insurgency puzzle is that the occupation lied about its support. Since it was scrutinized for its actions around the insurgent camps, the occupation might have misreported the feelings of the citizens in the affected areas to avoid further investigation.

There are a few reasons why this explanation is not sufficient. First, the intelligence report was confidential. Unlike the annual reports on the occupation, there was no expectation that this would be seen by the public. Therefore, there was no incentive to lie to the public. Second, this report was used by the occupation in operations. A separate document from the intelligence service provided summaries of the towns around the country, explaining some basics about them and the military resources available. Each one contained a list of the prominent citizens, pointing readers to the intelligence report used in this study. This was mission-critical information that had to be reported accurately. Finally, the regressions show that these are not randomly generated data. There is a relationship between sentiment and real variables.

On this final point, one could counter that correlations with the real variables are spurious. Maybe the economic and schooling variables are correlated with other factors that also influence the way the occupation manipulated the data to inflate its reported support. To push against this hypothesis, we need a variable that is correlated with the incentives to alter the data but is uncorrelated with any information on true support.

We argue the data from the 1918 referendum satisfy these criteria. The referendum was early in the occupation and one of the most significant changes to the Haitian constitution in its entire history. In an attempt to show the referendum was popular, the occupation reported that it received support from over 99% of voters. This was clearly a

farce with the exact incentives that a critic of this analysis might claim is happening with the prominent citizen data.

The referendum data, then, can act as a placebo test. If the occupation sentiment data have been altered, then it is likely to follow similar patterns as the fraudulent referendum data. For example, both might inflate support in areas with greater resistance. But the referendum does not represent any actual sentiments. Thus, if there is a correlation between the referendum and prominent citizen data, that suggests the correlations are spurious.

Table 5 reports the results on using the referendum data. Since La Gonave did not report any votes, we lose 12 observations. We replicate the baseline analysis in column 1 to show that it is not sensitive to the exclusion of these observations and to provide a fair comparison for these regressions. Our first hypothesis is that inflated support will be manifested in turnout. Occupation officials might have exaggerated how many people voted in some areas with higher resistance. Column 2 adds the reported turnout as an explanatory variable, but it is not statistically significant. The next hypothesis is that it is not turnout but just the number of "Yes" votes. In column 3, we use the log of the number of "Yes" votes. But, again, there is no correlation.

The one piece of useful information from the referendum report might be the "No" votes. In a report with over 98,000 "Yes" votes, it is interesting that they bothered reporting the 768 "No" votes. While we cannot know how many of the "Yes" votes were

real, we do know there were some real "No" votes. After the referendum, the National School of Medicine dismissed six of its professors for voting against the constitutional reform (Logan, 1930, p. 450).[2] Thus, "No" votes could indicate opposition that was willing to overcome extreme pressures. Column 4 uses a dummy for whether the district reported any "No" votes. This is the only referendum variable with statistical significance, and it is consistent with the strong opposition hypothesis: individuals in districts with at least one "No" vote were 24 percentage points more likely to express anti-occupation sentiment (significant at the 5% level).

[2] The professors were later reinstated by President Dartiguenave at the insistence of the minister of public instruction, M. Dantès Bellegarde (Logan, 1930).

Table 5. Relationship between insurgent locations and anti-occupation sentiment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Any Kako Camps	-0.131*	-0.128*	-0.130*	-0.146*
	[0.0784]	[0.0753]	[0.0769]	[0.0773]
Reported 1918 Turnout		-0.335		
		[0.379]		
ln("Yes" Votes in 1918)			-0.045	
			[0.0588]	
Any "No" Votes in 1918				0.237**
				[0.113]
N	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115
R^2	0.280	0.285	0.284	0.324

Notes: Dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if the individual opposed the occupation. Conley standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined the puzzle of how the U.S. developed a doctrine for cultivating soft power after a series of poorly executed military occupations. Using intelligence reports from the Haitian occupation of 1915 to 1934, we find that occupation officials perceived that beneficiaries of development programs were more likely to support the occupation. While we do not claim a causal effect, we argue that the correlation would have given the Americans reason to believe that soft power was a worthy policy goal.

References

Alexis, Y. (2021). *Haiti Fights Back: The Life and Legacy of Charlemagne Péralte*. Rutgers University Press.

Berman, E., Shapiro, J. N., & Felter, J. H. (2011). Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq. *Journal of Political Economy*, *119*(4), 766–819. https://doi.org/10.1086/661983

Chochotte, M. (2018). The Twilight of Popular Revolutions: The Suppression of Peasant Armed Struggles and Freedom in Rural Haiti during the US Occupation, 1915–1934. *The Journal of African American History*, *103*(3), 277–308. https://doi.org/10.1086/698523

Dalleo, R. (2016). *American Imperialism s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*. University of Virginia Press.

Dell, M., & Querubin, P. (2018). Nation Building Through Foreign Intervention: Evidence from Discontinuities in Military Strategies*. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *133*(2), 701–764. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjx037

Exposé Général de la Situation: Exercice 1930-31. (1932). Imprimerie du Service National de l'Enseignement Professionel.

Giorcelli, M. (2019). The Long-Term Effects of Management and Technology Transfers. *American Economic Review*, *109*(1), 121–152. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20170619

Logan, R. W. (1930). Education in Haiti. *The Journal of Negro History*, *15*(4), 401–460.

Long, A. (2016). *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK*. Cornell University Press.

Palsson, C. (2023). "A Whirligig of Revolutionary Presidents": State Capacity, Political Stability, and Foreign Business in Haiti, 1910-1920. *European Review of Economic History*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ereh/head025

Schmidt, H. (1971). *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*. Rutgers University Press.

State Department. (1927). *Fifth Annual Report of the American High Commissioner at Port Au Prince, Haiti: 1926*. Government Printing Office.

State Department. (1929). *Eighth Annual Report of the American High Commissioner at Port Au Prince, Haiti*. Government Printing Office.

Stieber, C. (2020). *Haiti s Paper War: Post-Independence Writing, Civil War, and the Making of the Republic, 1804 1954*. New York University Press.

U.S. Senate. (1922). *Inquiry Into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and The Dominican Republic: 67th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Report No. 794.1*.