

# Millennial+ Voices in Okinawa:

An Inquiry into the  
Attitudes of Young  
Okinawan Adults  
toward the Presence  
of U.S. Bases

*By Charles E. Morrison and Daniel Chinen*



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A Report of an East-West Center Project  
Supported by a Grant from the U.S.-Japan Foundation





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### Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of findings on the attitudes of younger Okinawans toward the U.S. bases on Okinawa. The study was done by the East-West Center with funding from the United States-Japan Foundation. Focused on 20- to 45-year-olds, it uses the term “Millennial+” [M+] to refer to Okinawans who were born and grew up after the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972. M+ Okinawans are approximately one-third of the Okinawan population and 40 percent of the eligible voters. These post-reversion adults have been Japanese citizens all their lives and were educated in accordance with the national educational curriculum. Throughout their lives, the U.S. bases were an established, stable element in Okinawan life, although they were not involved in any active East Asian combat operations.

The study was conducted in the first half of 2018, a period when no major crimes or accidents involving U.S. service personnel or operations occurred. In an effort to gauge dominant views among more educated M+ Okinawans, we conducted in-depth interviews with some 60 Okinawans in this age group, conducted an on-line survey with 199 respondents, and held several group sessions. The study was enhanced by comments on an interim report and later dissemination sessions in Okinawa and the United States. The survey as well as most interviews were conducted in Japanese. The findings do not represent a scientific polling of Okinawan attitudes and is a single snapshot, but we believe they are broadly reflective of contemporary thinking of post-reversion adults in the island of Okinawa.

## Findings

**Mixed views and some fluidity in the attitudes of M+ Okinawans toward the presence of the bases.** Fully one-half the survey respondents and many of the interviewees could not say whether they were “for” or “against” the base presence as such. Some gave arguments for both positions, and many others professed not having thought seriously about the issue. More of those who did have positions opposed or strongly opposed the U.S. presence; these opponents constituted about one-third of all the sample respondents. They and those older Okinawans with opposed views continue to drive public opinion and dominate prefecture-wide politics as it relates to the bases.

**Strong perception of an unfair burden.** A majority of our interlocutors favored the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty with varying degrees of intensity, but there was a strong belief—regardless of gender, age, or educational level—that Okinawa hosts far more than its fair share of U.S. forces. This belief is combined with resentment against the central Japanese government for allowing this situation and not giving Okinawa an effective seat at the table on base issues. The construction of a replacement base at Cape Henoko is widely regarded as a betrayal of Okinawa to broader Japanese interests and prejudices, even though the purpose is to close the Futenma base in a more densely populated part of the island. Even some supporters of the U.S. base presence in Okinawa oppose the new construction at Cape Henoko.

**Few actively protest.** The vast majority of those we interviewed and surveyed have never been involved in protests against the U.S. presence, and only a handful were regularly involved in protests. They typically said they were too busy or disagree with the position or behavior of the protesters. The rise of a protest culture in the older generation in Okinawa came as a result of expropriations of land in the 1950s. The younger generation has mixed feelings about protests; many feel they are ineffective, inconvenient, or even “un-Okinawan.” Specific incidents, however, can trigger large demonstrations.

**Positive views of U.S. service personnel.** The most common descriptor of U.S. service personnel as individuals, cited by two-thirds of survey respondents, was that they are “friendly,” followed by “helpful.” Few of those interviewed or surveyed cited negative characteristics of service personnel. However, crime, accidents, noise, environmental issues, and traffic were regarded as base problems that should be “fixed.” There is little concern about too many base-associated foreigners in Okinawa; many saw this foreign presence as an asset that could be better used.

**Widespread desire for more cooperation and exchange with the base community.** There was very broad support among M+ respondents for enhanced contacts between the bases and Okinawan communities for mutual benefit. This desire was especially strong among the younger 20–30 age group. It decreased with age, but was still positive for the 31–45 year age group and among the small number of respondents aged 46 and above. The Okinawa Prefectural Government officials we spoke with also affirmed a desire for more cooperation with the base community.

## Policy Implications

The study focused on describing post-reversion-born adult attitudes and did not have explicit policy objectives. However, the findings suggest implications for U.S. and Japanese policies that deserve greater study and attention.

**Major opportunity for U.S. public relations and public diplomacy.** The desire of M+ Okinawans for greater contact with the base community and the fluidity of attitudes on base presence appear to provide a potentially important opportunity for the American military and diplomats to strengthen base-Okinawan relations. While individual branches of the U.S. military work hard at community relations and sponsor numerous

activities, these are often couched in old-fashioned terms (“service” rather than “partnering”), appear compartmentalized, and seem to reach relatively narrow groups. Few of our interlocutors had been involved. These programs could be reviewed and redesigned in cooperation with Okinawans to give special attention to engaging younger age groups on an island-wide basis. Increased opportunities to visit bases for educational and cultural activities could be an important component of this effort.

#### **Updating the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).**

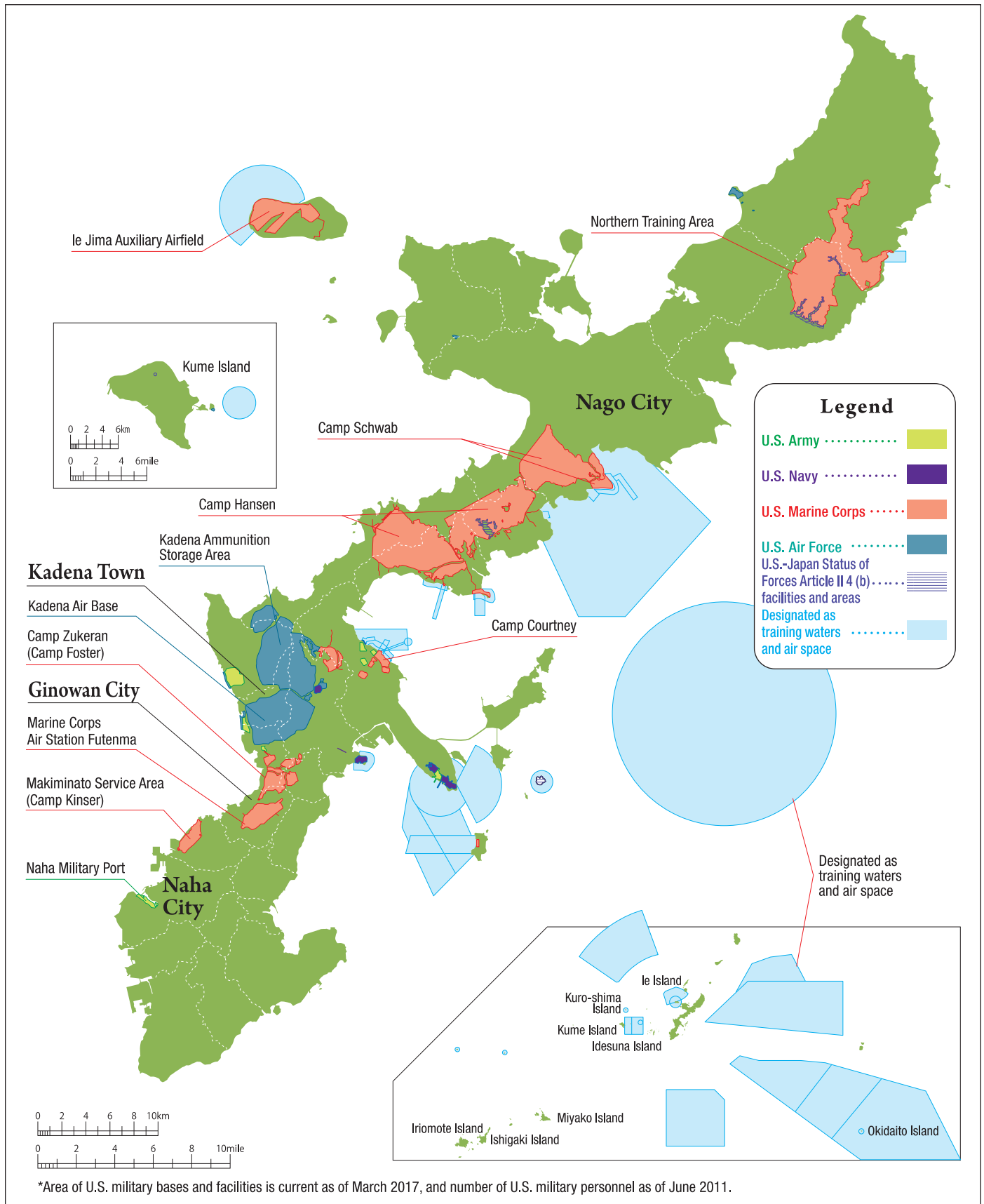
The operation of the U.S.-Japan SOFA is not well understood in Okinawa. We found that even well-educated people often believe that the agreement allows service personnel to commit crimes off-duty and off-base without punishment. There is also deep concern about environmental issues. The agreement could be reviewed by the two governments, with input from local sources and with reference to the SOFAs with American NATO allies—both to update the agreement, if needed, and to better publicize its provisions and help correct misperceptions within Okinawa. This exercise alone, with sufficient transparency, could be useful in improving attitudes.

**Building a more multidimensional U.S.-Okinawa relationship.** The U.S. relationship with the people and local governments (prefectural and below) in Okinawa is centered on the military dimension. Given the desire for educational and cultural linkages expressed by our interlocutors, increasing attention to these dimensions could place the relationship on a broader base. Special U.S. attention to this one Japanese prefecture is justified by the out-sized role that Okinawa plays in the alliance relationship and in preserving peace and security in the Pacific.

**Future of the construction at Cape Henoko.** Our study suggests that the construction of the Henoko Marine facility will continue to be controversial within Okinawa and will be opposed by large segments of the public and local government. Clearly, the notion that Henoko must be built to close Futenma has little resonance in Okinawa. The outcome of the September 2018 gubernatorial election in favor of Dennis Tamaki, who staunchly opposed the Henoko project, reflected this wide sentiment, as did the 72 percent negative vote on Henoko in a February 2019 prefecture-wide referendum. The Japanese government is committed to construction of the base but will face continued legal and local opposition. Opposition to this facility, however, should not be equated with an unwillingness to host a U.S. presence.

**Addressing the resentment problem.** Our interviews and survey suggest mixed messages that are of importance to the government in Tokyo. Okinawans appear to feel more Japanese than ever. Contrary to some beliefs expressed abroad, especially in China, we found no significant support for the concept of Okinawan independence. But there is a strong sense of distinct identity and local pride that appears to be frequently coupled with a resentment narrative that Okinawa is under-appreciated by the rest of Japan, as demonstrated by the heavy concentration of foreign bases, unfairly “burdening” Okinawa. This leads to a prickliness in the relationship between local and central authorities that will not be resolved, and could even be accentuated, by special financial subsidies. There is no easy solution, but the findings suggest the need to be especially sensitive to Okinawan feelings and make special efforts to honor the distinctive and rich Okinawan culture and its contributions to Japanese diversity.

# Map 1. U.S. military bases in Okinawa



Source: Okinawa Prefectural Government (2018). *What Okinawa wants you to understand about the U.S. military bases*. Washington, D.C.: Okinawa Prefectural Washington D.C. Office. <http://dc-office.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/E-all.pdf>.

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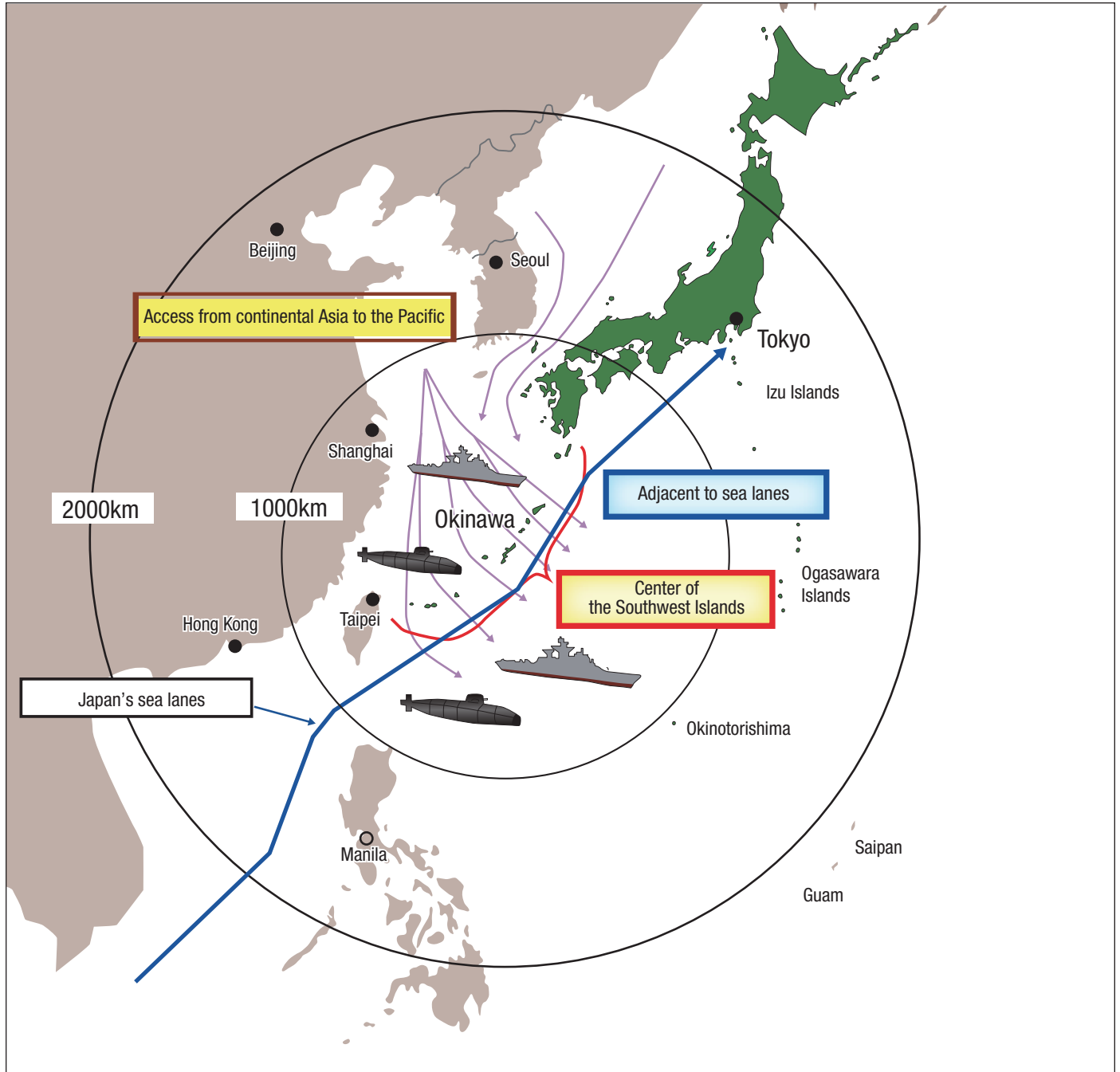
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## Map 2. Geopolitical position and significance of the U.S. Marine Corps stationed in Okinawa



Source: Japan Ministry of Defense (2015). *Defense of Japan 2015* (Annual White Paper). Tokyo: Ministry of Defense.

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## An Inquiry into the Attitudes of Young Okinawan Adults toward the Presence of U.S. Bases

### Why This Report?

Okinawa is remembered as the site of one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific theatre of World War II. Some 100,000 Japanese soldiers, 13,000 American soldiers, and perhaps 100,000 Okinawan civilians—one-third of the island's population—died during the Battle of Okinawa from April through most of June, 1945. The victorious Americans, expecting to have to use Okinawa as a launching pad for an invasion of the main Japanese islands, took over the former Japanese military facilities and built new ones. The invasion, of course, never happened, but in the 1950s and 1960s, the Cold War led to an expansion of the U.S. bases in Okinawa. In particular, the Third Marine Expeditionary Force was withdrawn from the main islands of Japan and transferred to Okinawa. During this period, Okinawa remained under U.S. control, while sovereign rights were restored to the rest of Japan. The concentration of U.S. bases in Okinawa was driven partially by strategic reasons, but also simply because Okinawa remained longer than the rest of Japan under U.S. occupation.

When Okinawa Prefecture was restored to Japanese control in 1972, the U.S. bases occupied about 20 percent of the main island of Okinawa. In addition, large off-shore areas were reserved for U.S. military training. While the U.S. presence stabilized and even shrank after the end of the Vietnam War, Okinawa is still the site of the largest foreign U.S. base complex in the world outside an active combat zone. All the U.S. armed services are represented, with Marines the most numerous. Of the dozens of U.S. bases around the world, only in Okinawa are there regular protests against both existing facilities and new construction. The persistence of these protests often comes as a surprise to the U.S. military and government officials because they tend to perceive the bases as serving primarily to protect the people of Okinawa and Japan in an uncertain security environment.

As allies, with common and complementary strategic interests, the American and Japanese governments view the U.S. bases in Okinawa as an essential strategic asset for the preservation of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. Both governments have long struggled with the question of how to make the large U.S. base presence in Okinawa more

acceptable to the local population. Over the past several decades, some base areas have been restored to their original Okinawan land owners, and this effort continues. Modifications have also been made in the practical operation of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and in military practices and operations in and around Okinawa.

The most significant proposal for change came in 1996 after extensive study and debate following the gang rape of a schoolgirl the previous year that sparked enormous protests. The study recommended the closing of the Futenma Marine Air Station in a densely populated area of Ginowan, the downsizing of the Marine presence in Okinawa, and the building of additional facilities in Guam and in a sea-based Marine replacement facility in Okinawa or elsewhere in Japan. In 2012, the U.S. and Japanese governments reaffirmed their commitment to these changes and their determination to move ahead with developing the replacement facility at Cape Henoko in Okinawa's mid-north Nago area. But the Henoko construction has been controversial in Okinawa. A combination of developments, including the time taken to select the Henoko site, fiscal considerations, and legal challenges from the Okinawa Prefectural Government significantly delayed the now more than 20-year-old plan to close Futenma. The central government has recently reaffirmed its determination to proceed and has resumed landfill work.

While the continuing controversies regarding U.S. bases in Okinawa have spawned a literature on possible alternative realignments of U.S. facilities, there has been virtually no study of changing Okinawan opinions by age. This is surprising since many Japanese and Americans have anecdotally observed that Okinawans born after Okinawa reverted to Japan have a different historical experience and that most of the active protesters are older people.

This study, enabled by funding from the United States-Japan Foundation, is an effort to address this missing element. We regard it as only a beginning, requiring additional enquiry and validation. It focuses on the attitudes of adults aged 20–45, a demographic group that we call the “Millennial+ Voices,” or “M+” for short. This group comprises

**Box 1. Abbreviations used for age groups in this report**

M+:	Millennial plus Okinawans, ages 20–45
M30–:	Younger subset of M+ Okinawans, ages 20–30
M31+:	Older subset of M+ Okinawans, ages 31–45
O46+:	Okinawans born before Okinawa’s reversion to Japan in 1972, ages 46 and above

about one-third of the Okinawan population and 40 percent of eligible voters. The “+” signifies that the age group we focus on extends by several years on both sides beyond the usual understanding of “millennials” as within the 22–37 age range and is slightly longer than a single generation. We further subdivide this demographic group into 20–30-year-olds (M30–) and 31–45-year-olds (M31+). The common experience of the M+ age group as a whole is that the bases were already long in existence at the time of their birth, in a basically stable configuration, and not engaged in active combat operations in the region. For these Okinawans, the presence of the bases has been a constant, not a new imposition.

The study is intended to provide insights into the thinking of young Okinawan adults that we hope will help inform Okinawan and Japanese as well as American policy-makers. We come away from this study with a strong sense that the Okinawan bases will continue to be an irritant in Japan-U.S. security relations and in the relationship between Okinawa, the central government in Tokyo, and the U.S. military. Our work suggests that while M+ Okinawans have learned to live with the base presence and are less inclined toward protests than older Okinawans, there remains widespread resentment about Okinawa’s “burden” of hosting foreign bases combined with widespread aspirations to reduce the foreign base presence, especially when changing geopolitical conditions reduce the necessity of maintaining them. The M+ Okinawans also want to reduce practical problems they associate with the base presence and to strengthen relationships between the base communities and the U.S. military. We found very little resentment of the U.S. government or of American military personnel as individuals—nor even of the U.S. military as an institution—and quite a bit of evidence of a desire to turn the base presence into an asset for Okinawa beyond the strictly security dimensions. We hope that some of the ideas and aspirations coming from M+ voices will help improve the base environment and the relationship between the U.S. bases and Okinawan host communities.

**A Changing Okinawan Environment**

Okinawa Prefecture, with an area of 877 square miles (1,221 square kilometers, smaller than the smallest U.S. state, Rhode Island) consists of more than 150 islands scattered over an ocean area stretching from Kagoshima Prefecture to Taiwan. The principal island, with the same name as the prefecture, accounts for about one-half the prefecture’s land area, 466 square miles (80 percent of the size of Oahu), and 90 percent of its population, 1.4 million people. Almost all the U.S. bases are concentrated on Okinawa island, where they occupy about 15 percent of the land area (see Map 1). In this report, our use of “Okinawa” usually refers to the island. We will add the word “prefecture” when referring to the larger political entity.

Of Japan’s 47 prefectures and other prefecture-level subdivisions, Okinawa Prefecture stands out in several ways beyond its extreme southwestern location. It is the only prefecture that was once an independent kingdom with its

**Box 2. Okinawa: Some basic facts**

- Okinawa, the main island of Okinawa Prefecture, consists of 466 square miles (v. 597 sq mi for Oahu, 210 sq mi for Guam)
- Okinawa island has a population of 1.4 million (v. 1.0 million for Oahu, 163,000 for Guam)
- Okinawa was administered by the United States until 1972, when it was returned to Japan
- Okinawa has growing military and strategic importance, both to Japan and the United States
- 32 U.S. bases occupy about 15 percent of total land area on Okinawa island (v. about 21 percent of land area in Oahu, 28 percent in Guam)
- Okinawa hosts about 25,000 U.S. military personnel (v. 40,000 in Oahu, 7,000 in Guam)
- Okinawa has 0.6 percent of Japan’s total land area but provides about 62 percent of the area occupied by U.S. bases
- Japan and the U.S. agreed in 1996 to return Futenma base to civilian use and reduce the number of Marines in Okinawa in exchange for a new Marine replacement facility
- An increasingly important development in Okinawa is the expansion of the tourism industry, including international tourism

own rulers, foreign relations, and distinctive languages. It has long been Japan's poorest prefecture. The Okinawan population has the highest life expectancy in Japan, a country noted for longevity, and Okinawa is one of the few prefectures that is not currently losing population. Because of its relative poverty, Okinawa experienced out-migration for many decades, primarily to other parts of Japan and to the Americas, especially Hawaii and Brazil. While other prefectures in southern and western Japan also experienced out-migration, Okinawa's distinctive culture helped to maintain vibrant links between the prefecture and its international diaspora.

Five longer-term changes that are affecting Okinawa Prefecture should be noted as background to our study:

- Okinawa is increasingly integrated into Japan proper. There is tremendous awareness and pride in the Okinawan identity, but Okinawans overwhelmingly speak Japanese as their native language, their educational experience conforms to national Japanese policy and standards, and they participate in the popular, internet, and sports cultures that are part of the national fabric. Many spend part of their lives in, or emigrate to, the main Japanese islands.

- Tourism is changing the dynamics of the Okinawan economy. Okinawa Prefecture is not just strategic in a military security sense, but also in the world of tourism, as about one-quarter of the world's population lives within a three-hour flight from Okinawa's capital, Naha. In recent years, dynamic growth in the tourism sector has given Okinawans significantly more confidence about their economic well-being, even in the absence of bases or subsidies. In 2017, for the first time, Okinawa Prefecture surpassed Hawaii as a tourist destination, with 9.5 million visitor arrivals. Once almost totally dominated by domestic tourists, in the past few years Okinawa has experienced skyrocketing international tourism. Of 2017 visitors, 2.7

million, more than one-quarter, came from abroad. More than 800,000 of these came from Taiwan, and more than 500,000 each came from mainland China and South Korea.

- Okinawa's strategic military importance in East Asia is not diminishing, but rather increasing in the context of heightened geopolitical rivalry in the region. Okinawa Prefecture is the part of Japan that forms what Chinese refer to as "the first island chain," astride passages from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and the U.S. bases in Okinawa are critical to U.S. defense and balancing roles in East Asia (see Map 2).

- Okinawans are increasingly concerned with environmental issues. Opposition to U.S. base activities in the 1950s was largely rooted in conflict over land use, while noise, crime, and traffic have also been touchpoints of controversy over the years. Today environmental issues have joined these, and Okinawans are deeply aware of the importance of the environment for their tourism industry as well as their daily lives and health.

- Finally, there appears to be a kind of "base fatigue" in Okinawa among M+ respondents. Our interlocutors were strongly opposed to the construction at Henoko and in favor of addressing noise and other base-related problems, but there appears to be growing impatience with centering local politics so much over base opposition. "That was our parents' and grandparents' issue," said one, "but we are more interested in the future of the economy and our education system." Many expressed little interest in base issues. However, a serious crime, accident, or inconvenience can easily trigger more widespread concern.

## The Research Design

This study does not attempt to provide a precise or scientific assessment of M+ views in Okinawa. Rather it is an attempt to get a feel for the dominant attitudes—especially among more vocal, younger Okinawans—and how they may be shifting. The study was conducted through interviews and an on-line survey, most intensively in March through May 2018. During that period, there were no emotionally charged incidents or accidents that might have affected the results, but there were on-going tensions over the proposed Camp Henoko facility, then strongly opposed by the late Governor Takeshi Onaga.

Over the course of the three months, 199 people in the M+ age category and 21 individuals above age 45 answered a detailed survey (see Appendix I), many adding notes and comments. Some 60 people were interviewed, mostly in one-on-one sessions. There were also some group discussions. Originally, it was intended to put more emphasis on focus



Figure 1. Billboard in Singapore advertising travel to Okinawa

Photo: Charles E. Morrison

groups, but this was quickly found to be difficult because the respondents preferred to give their views privately and anonymously. This may have something to do with Japanese culture more generally, with prevailing political correctness in Okinawa, or with the respondents' lack of strong views on the subject, but some of our interlocutors, particularly those who supported the base presence, noted that it was awkward to speak honestly and openly about base issues in group settings. Many did not want to speak at all. Because the interviews and discussions were more free-flowing and designed to elicit nuanced views, the issues addressed were not uniform and are not subject to tabulation. In contrast, the survey results are uniform, and many are tabulated in the main body of this report and in Appendix II. The conclusions from the interviews and survey responses were broadly consistent. The quotations cited in this report come from interviewees, written response comments, and discussion sessions. Although individuals are quoted, the quotations have been chosen because they illustrate more general sentiment.

The survey and most interviews were conducted in Japanese. As explained in Appendix I, the interviewees and survey groups tended to come from the more-educated, well-traveled, politically vocal, and international-minded segment of Okinawan society. Of the M+ survey respondents, about 75 percent had a university education, and 72 percent had lived at some point outside Okinawa, mostly elsewhere in Japan but many abroad. One-half reported that they always vote, and another one-quarter usually do so.

### The Millennial+ Demographic

In a general sense, M+ Okinawans are probably not much different from their counterparts elsewhere in the developed world. They believe themselves to be more individualistic in thought and less ideological or religious than their elders. They are more inclined to get information over the internet and through social media networks and are less likely to read print newspapers. Many are skeptical of the accuracy of all news sources. They report that older Okinawans are more mindful of tradition; nonetheless, they themselves actively engage in some cultural traditions, particularly Okinawan singing and dancing. The Okinawans over age 45 (O46+) interviewed or responding to the survey also agree that younger Okinawans are more individualistic, less tradition-minded, and less ideological or political. However, the M+ and O46+ groups both think that their own age group is more respectful of the opinions of others.

One particular characteristic is clearly associated with age—fluency in the traditional Okinawan language (shimakutuba or “island language”). Strikingly, not a single

one of the respondents below age 46 regarded himself or herself as fluent in Okinawan (Appendix II, Figure A1). For both the M31+ and the M30– age groups, English was a far more common second language after Japanese than shimakutuba (Appendix II, Figure A2).

### Perceptions of Identity and Okinawan Pride

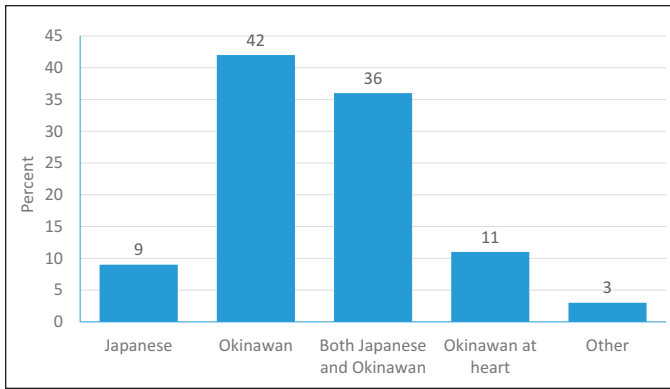
Okinawan or “Uchinanchu” is a powerful and exclusive Okinawan identity. When asked, more M+ respondents identified themselves only as “Uchinanchu” than as “both Japanese and Uchinanchu.” Other descriptors—“Japanese,” or “Okinawan-at-heart” (people who live in Okinawa but are not ethnic Okinawans)—were much less preferred. The Uchinanchu and the both-Uchinanchu-and-Japanese groups comprised three-fourths of the survey respondents. Some respondents had more specific ways of describing their identities, for example, “Japanese when I am overseas and Okinawan when I am in Japan.” About two-thirds of survey respondents described themselves as feeling Okinawan “more than average” or “very much.”

About one-half were “very proud” to be Okinawan; only one respondent indicated no pride in being Okinawan. We have no historical baseline for this study, but when the question of Okinawan pride was discussed with older Okinawans, some commented that the sense of Okinawan pride has been growing, not just within Okinawa itself but throughout the Okinawan diaspora. The establishment in the 1990s of the Worldwide Uchinanchu Business (WUB) network, the Worldwide Uchinanchu Festivals every five years, and Okinawan television programs featuring overseas Okinawans have all been part of a renaissance of Okinawan pride, both at home and abroad. We know of no other Japanese prefecture with this level of local identity.

Okinawan identity, as such, appears to have little or no relationship to the base-related attitudes and issues we studied. When self-identified Uchinanchu are compared to the full survey group, the responses on base issues are virtually identical (See Appendix II, Figure D1). It is certainly possible to be staunchly Uchinanchu and either support or oppose the base presence. But the strong sense of Okinawan identity lies behind resentment toward Tokyo, an important factor in opposition to the Henoko construction as discussed below.

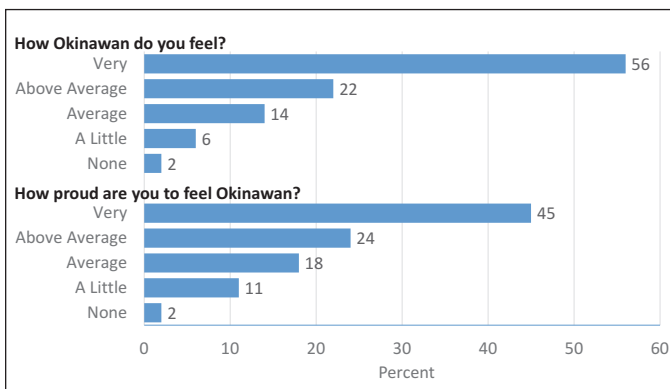
### Fluidity and Base Fatigue

While Americans primarily think of Okinawa through the prism of the U.S. base presence and U.S. bases remain an ever-present part of Okinawan life and island and prefectural politics, our research suggests that base issues are significantly less salient for young adults born after Okinawa reverted to



**Figure 2. Most on-line survey respondents identified as Okinawan or both Okinawan and Japanese**

Note: “Okinawan at heart” refers to residents of Okinawa who are not ethnic Okinawan. “Other” comprises mostly Okinawans with non-Japanese identities, for example, American or South American Okinawans.



**Figure 3. Most on-line survey respondents reported strong Okinawan identity and pride**

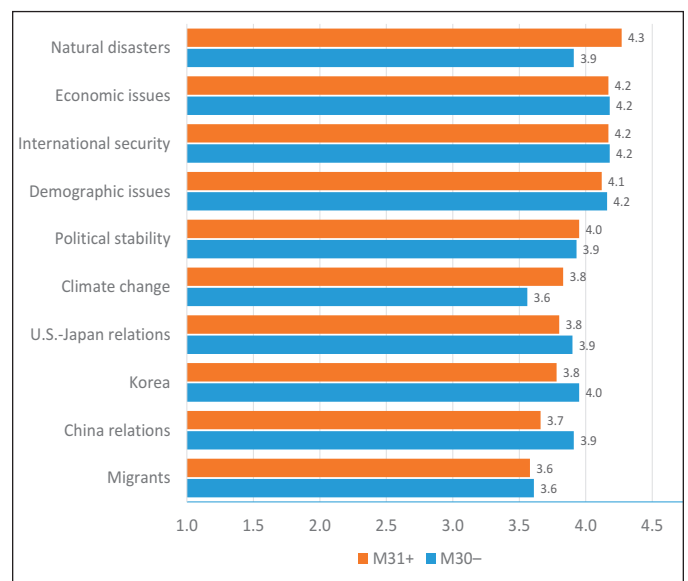
Japan than for older people. For the M+ group, the bases have been a fact of life all their lives, and the bases (and the American military) are now less visible in many ways than they were in the past. In fact, the interviews left the impression that many younger Okinawans do not think very much or deeply about the bases—many were indifferent and uninterested in base issues. One-half of the M+ survey respondents reported that they had not formed a conclusion on whether the presence of the U.S. bases is good or bad for Okinawa. Few were actively involved in protests. Another sign of this lack of interest may be the February 2019 referendum on the construction of Henoko when almost one-half of eligible voters did not bother to vote.

Okinawans under the age of 45 do see international security as a national priority, both because of China’s rise and increasingly provocative behavior and because of continued uncertainty about the future of the Korean peninsula. Yet international security ranks as similar in importance with several other national issues—the economy, population aging, and vulnerability to natural disasters. Some interviewees

and on-line respondents expressed a belief that the bases help meet national-security needs, but when the survey group as a whole was asked to agree or disagree with a statement that the bases in Okinawa were needed for Japanese national security, there was more disagreement than agreement.

When it comes to personal concerns as individuals, national security drops below several other issues. The most prominent personal concerns were associated with the economy, jobs, health, and other aspects of daily living. Jobs, personal finance, education, and care for aging parents are also more important than the presence or future of the bases. In responding to a write-in survey question, only three of the 199 M+ respondents listed U.S. bases as among their highest personal concerns.

Several interviewees commented on what they believed to be the M+ demographic’s lack of historical context for the Okinawan bases. A female historian in a focus group said that “younger Okinawans have no understanding of what happened here. Therefore, they cannot imagine a different Okinawa.” A senior male university professor in a separate interview reported that he had asked his class of 60 what the significance of May 15th was for Okinawa, and not a single student could identify it as the anniversary of Okinawa’s reversion to Japan in 1972. To ask younger Okinawans whether they are for or against the presence of the bases has little meaning for them, he continued, because they lack context for evaluating the base presence. In his view, this reflected the growing Japanese-ness of Okinawa and the natural focus on educational material relevant to passing



**Figure 4. On-line survey respondents considered several challenges important for Japan over the next 25 years**

Note: Average values on a scale of 1 for “least important” to 5 for “most important.”

national examinations. A senior Okinawan who advocates independence had a different way of expressing it: “They have been brainwashed,” he asserted.

When interviewees and on-line survey respondents were asked about their knowledge of events related to the U.S. involvement with Okinawa, there was more familiarity with recent incidents, such as a helicopter crash in 2004 and a murder in 2016. Survey respondents, especially those under 31, felt that they knew more about these incidents than they did about the 1995 schoolgirl rape that mobilized huge demonstrations at the time and generated the base realignment plans still to be carried out. Generally, respondents were more familiar with crimes and accidents than with policy changes—for example, they were more familiar with the rape than with the policy changes that followed. In general, M+ Okinawans professed to know little about two major policy developments that gave rise to the current situation: the U.S. land expropriations in the 1950s (which enlarged the base areas, led to a protest culture, and resulted in some redress) and the Japan-U.S. agreement of 1996, which stemmed from the recommendations of the Special Action Committee on Okinawa. This agreement involved land return and changes in operation of the SOFA and other procedures and foresaw the eventual closure of Futenma Air Station in return for a Japanese-built sea-based replacement facility to carry out its most critical functions. Of the events listed in the survey, there was least awareness of the American assistance to Japan in dealing with the 2011 Tohoku tsunami and nuclear power disaster. Although not directly related to Okinawa and occurring in distant northern Honshu, American military personnel based in Okinawa were engaged in assistance operations. Aside from the distance, the lack of awareness of this assistance may also reflect what some respondents regard as a persistent under-reporting in the Okinawa media of positive aspects of American forces in Japan.

It is not just that the national education system gives little attention to the history of Okinawa or the U.S. bases, but the passing down of knowledge within families or among friends is also limited. Obviously, the passage of time has had an impact. The generation that experienced the Battle of Okinawa has largely passed away or were only young children at the time, and even those who experienced the land expropriations and the rise of protests in the 1950s are now elderly. Today, the U.S. bases appear to be less central to Okinawan discussions with family and friends than many outsiders may imagine. About one-half of M+ survey respondents said that they discussed the bases a lot with family members or friends, another 35 percent said they did not discuss the bases a lot, and the others failed to respond. For those without university

degrees, only 40 percent said they discussed the bases a lot, and 40 percent said they did not. Some interviewees indicated that they do not discuss the bases with family and friends because, unless there is a significant accident or crime, there is “nothing much” to talk about. One asserted that there is little tradition of family discussions of political issues in Okinawa, or in Japan more generally.

“People now often think the protests arose out of left-wing radicalism,” one local university political scientist explained. “But it was really about land, survival, and justice, never ideology. Initially, the expropriations of farmland were carried out in a heavy-handed way without compensation adequate for survival. Since Okinawa was still occupied at that time, farmers had no effective legal appeal in either the American or the Japanese system, and protests were the only means of resistance. And they partly worked. Younger Okinawans may not much like the bases today, but they are not facing those kinds of stark survival issues without avenues of redress.”

### Sources of Information

Asked about their sources of information on base-related issues, M+ Okinawans indicated that local newspapers remain the principal source of information for base-related news, cited by almost two-thirds of survey respondents. Interviewees, especially younger ones, often reported that even if they did not have their own subscriptions to local newspapers, they usually had access through libraries, family, or friends. Our survey found that local television was the second most significant source of information. National television, internet news, and Facebook were cited by about one-half of respondents. One-quarter of respondents cited “other,” and of these, many explained that they did not rely on a single news source. Many respondents were skeptical of the accuracy and objectivity of all news sources.

“I do not trust the mass media,” said one M30– woman. “Nothing is reliable,” said another. “Each media has its own position and opinion. I cannot choose which to trust,” an M30– man lamented, adding that NHK (national public television) programs seemed to be the most objective. Another M30– man believed that “experts from outside Okinawa who live in Okinawa” are the most objective. Other comments also expressed frustration, for example: “I don’t know,” “no news is objective,” “there is no such thing as an objective news article,” “they only report the negative aspects of the bases,” “I cannot figure out what to trust,” and “first and foremost, we Okinawans should reform the media here as we have a right to unbiased news.” Many interviewees commented that while local newspapers and television provide the most information, they are also biased against

the base presence. Reflecting this, one survey respondent pointedly reported that she consults every source except the local news media. One interviewee who opposed the base presence reported that, nonetheless, she had cancelled her subscription to a local newspaper because she felt its anti-base bias had become so strong that it did not seem to be a reliable source of information. Growing skepticism about local media objectivity may be a factor in discouraging some younger Okinawans from even thinking about base issues beyond easily grasped events such as accidents and crimes.

### Little Involvement in Protests

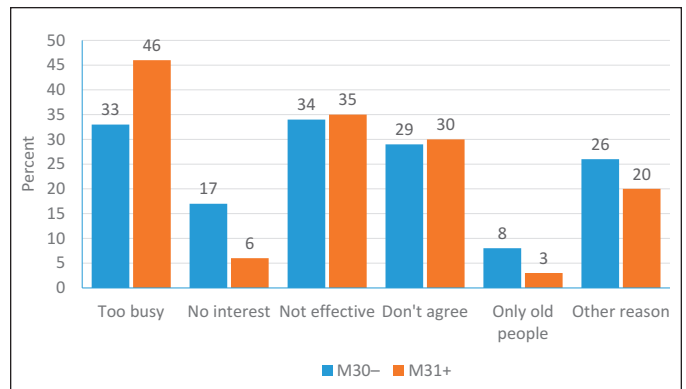
As another sign of “base fatigue,” few of our interlocutors regularly participated in protests or found protesting very effective. Two-thirds of all the M+ survey respondents said that they had never participated in a protest, and this proportion was more than 90 percent for those without a university education. Only about 6 percent of survey respondents had been involved in six or more protests. Because of the bias toward educated people in our samples, our results for involvement in protests are probably higher than the rate for 20–45-year-old Okinawans as a whole. Our figures are also high for contemporary Japan, where protests are unusual and often confined to a few activists and their followers.

Group	Percent who have participated in a base protest				
	Never	1–2 times	3–5 times	6–10 times	More than 10 times
M+ all	69	17	8	2	4
M30-	72	16	5	1	5
M31+	65	18	11	4	4
M+ males	67	29	2	0	0
M+ females	69	13	12	3	6
M+ less education	94	2	2	0	2
M+ more education	59	23	10	3	5
O46+	53	21	11	0	16

**Table 1. Most on-line survey respondents had never participated in a base protest**

Note: Totals do not necessarily add exactly to 100 because of rounding.

When asked why they do not participate in protests or participate more often, one-third of M30– and almost one-half M31+ survey respondents reported that they are too busy and do not have time, or, put differently, do not find it a priority. About one-third of both M+ groups said they feel protests are ineffective, and about one-third said they do not agree with the protesters, referring mostly to their tactics rather than their objectives. With regard to Henoko, some respondents said that it was too far away from where they lived or worked to travel for a protest. A few interviewees also reported that their jobs



**Figure 5. On-line survey respondents gave several reasons for not participating in protests**

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

with the Japanese government, the U.S. military, or even private-sector companies discouraged them from protesting.

Some who do not protest themselves said that they appreciate the purposes of the demonstrators. “If there is no one demonstrating,” one said, “people would think we don’t care, and the bases will simply become accepted.” But, on the other hand, there are signs of growing impatience with the protests. Some respondents, especially those who do not oppose the bases, believe that many protesters are from outside Okinawa and are paid to protest. One respondent said: “Mainland groups pay wages for people to come to Okinawa to protest. They cause traffic and noise, and this annoys us local people.” However, those who participated in protests said that they rarely meet people from outside Okinawa, that none are paid, and that the protesters are ordinary Okinawans who pay for their own bus fares and lunches. “If someone were paying,” a member of a focus session commented derisively, “many other Okinawans would happily join the demonstrations. They don’t need to fly people in.” Another reported that the rumor of paid protesters arose because one social-media organization paid its blogger’s travel expenses to report from Okinawa. The story expanded with the retelling, he added. An M31+ male interviewee said, “The protesters are all Okinawans of two kinds: the small group of smart ones who are committed and who organize, and the others who are just persuaded to come along.”

In an atmosphere of resentment against the unfair burden of the bases, a particularly notorious crime can trigger very large protests. These, however, typically focus on the incident itself rather than the existence of the bases, although base opponents seek to use such incidents to call for complete removal of the bases. For the respondents as a whole, there was moderate support for a statement that they accept the existence of the bases but want the problems associated with them fixed.



## Support of and Opposition to the Bases

Several interviewees commented that it is important not to interpret the apathy toward the base protests, or the lack of intense debate or discussions about bases, as acceptance. Although one-half of survey respondents said they have no position on the bases, of the one-half who do, two-thirds oppose or strongly oppose the bases. The other one-third (of the one-half with positions) support the base presence, but not a single respondent reported that he or she “strongly” supports their presence. A majority would prefer an Okinawa without foreign bases in the future and hope that geopolitical changes will make the bases unnecessary. A survey statement that the bases should be phased out in 25 years had a fairly high rate of agreement (Appendix II, Figure F2). Some respondents said 25 years is too long, but others felt that base closures should depend on the geopolitical situation at the time. Although M+ respondents expressed more opposition than support for the presence of U.S. bases, many, including some base opponents, appeared somewhat conflicted.

### Box 3. Interviewees expressed conflicted views on the presence of U.S. bases

“I am very opposed to the bases, but I understand that [if they close] many people will lose their jobs.”

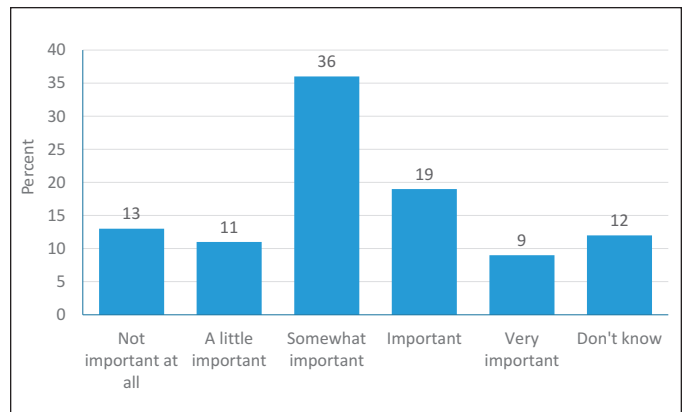
“There might be some good from having bases, but I personally am against them.”

“I have personal experience with the noise from the military aircraft, but I enjoy the Westernizing influence the base has on our community.”

“I understand there must be a base, but I don’t think they need to build a new one, especially through land-fills.”

Those who supported the bases usually couched their arguments in security or economic terms. “I think the base issues are small compared to Okinawa being invaded and occupied by China,” said one. “From a global strategic standpoint, we need to do our part,” said another. “Japan is not able to defend itself from China, and therefore we need a military base presence and should thank the U.S. military,” said a third. “If they go away completely, there could be an attack from another country,” wrote an M+ male survey respondent, diplomatically not naming the country.

By a wide margin, the M+ respondents agreed that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is useful for Japan’s national security, but this support was somewhat tepid. About one-



**Figure 6. On-line survey respondents expressed tepid agreement on the importance of the Japan-U.S. security treaty for Japan’s national security**

quarter felt that the treaty is not at all important or were unsure of its importance, while another one-quarter felt it is “important” or “very important.” About one-half believed it to be “a little” or “somewhat” important. Overall, support in Okinawa appears to be somewhat less than indicated in most polls of national Japanese sentiment.

In possibly a change from previous decades and reflecting increased confidence in the tourism economy, those opposed to the base presence often emphasized economic arguments. “We need to use our land for the best advantage to promote tourism,” said one. Several noted that the Okinawa Prefectural Government and academic specialists had done studies showing the base land could be put to better economic use.

## Resentment Against the Japanese Government

There is a strong belief, even among those who support the presence of foreign bases in Okinawa, that Okinawa shoulders an unfair burden vis-à-vis the rest of Japan. Several respondents cited the statistic that Okinawa has only 0.6 percent of Japan’s land area but provides 70 percent of all the land area designated for exclusive use by U.S. bases. Thus, even some who support the presence of U.S. bases oppose construction of the Futenma replacement facility in Henoko because it does not move this U.S. facility outside Okinawa, as they think it should. One of the most prominent individuals with this view, whom we were unable to interview, was the late governor Takeshi Onaga, who supported the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty but argued that the rest of Japan should shoulder more of the “burden.” Current governor Denny Tamaki takes a similar stance.

We asked survey respondents to agree or disagree with a series of statements, and none received a stronger level of agreement than one about an “unfair” burden. This agree-

ment held across all age, gender, and educational-attainment subgroups, with only slightly less agreement among men and those without university education (Appendix II, Table B1).

The only other statement that attracted such widespread agreement was that “the Japanese government does not show consideration for Okinawans.” Although this and the previous statement were not located near each other in the list of agree/disagree questions in the survey, they were clearly closely associated in the minds of many interviewees and respondents. Our impression is that the widespread resentment against the Japanese government reflects the complicated long-term relationship between the central government and Okinawa, as well as acknowledged historical discrimination. There is a strong belief that the concentration of bases in Okinawa reflects central government preferences and prejudices rather than military and security considerations. Moreover, Okinawans believe that Tokyo should be supporting Okinawa rather than “imposing” on it.

Okinawans may also regard the well-intentioned compensation programs initiated by the Japanese government as demeaning. Some of those we spoke with resented financial assistance from the central government, which they regarded as a blatant attempt to buy off Okinawan resistance. Some Okinawans also believe that there are officials in Tokyo who see Okinawans as “extortionists,” whipping up anti-base sentiment for the purpose of extracting funds from the central government. M+ Okinawans, whether opposing or supporting the base presence, appear to dislike the notion of a bargaining process with the central government. For example, one M31+ female respondent said that “Okinawa should get its own regular budget like other prefectures—not a ‘special budget’.” One of the statements eliciting the strongest level of disagreement among survey respondents was that Okinawa should accept the bases to provide bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the central government (Appendix II, Table B2).

Resentment against the central government is also rooted in the fact that negotiations on most base issues are conducted between Tokyo and Washington without “a seat at the table” for Okinawa and with only indirect input, at best, from Okinawans. Since issues important to Okinawa that are mediated through Tokyo are not resolved satisfactorily in Okinawan eyes, the perception arises that Tokyo is not representing Okinawan interests sufficiently. “People should listen to Okinawan local voices instead of the Japanese central government,” an M31+ woman said, “I do not understand why things that are not allowed in America or elsewhere in Japan are permitted in Okinawa.” An M30–woman thought that “Okinawa should have the same rights

#### **Box 4. Interviewees expressed resentment concerning the relationship between Okinawa and the central Japanese government**

“If the bases stay in Okinawa, Okinawa needs the right of self-government and to determine its own path.”

“Since a burden has been imposed on Okinawa, its right to speak should be guaranteed.”

“The Japanese government should respect the will of the Okinawan people.”

“Okinawa is a part of Japan. We demand equal treatment from the Japanese government.”

“The current situation, sacrificing Okinawa for the rest of Japan, has to be changed.”

as other prefectures, and the Japanese government should listen to Okinawan voices.” An M31+ woman suggested there should be an Okinawan “veto” on base-related issues.

Another M31+ woman said that when she looked at Japanese national news or school textbooks, she felt that Japanese outside Okinawa do not consider Okinawa a part of Japan. “All Japanese know about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as they are mentioned repeatedly, but the forced suicides in Okinawa merit only one sentence in school textbooks,” she said. Other respondents deplored what they thought was a lack of knowledge about and attention to Okinawa in the rest of Japan.

These results suggest that there is no set of expectations of the U.S. government, or at least of the U.S. military, similar to the expectations that young Okinawans have of the Japanese government. Asked whether the U.S. military shows consideration for Okinawans, responses were almost neutral on average, with equal shares agreeing and disagreeing. Even when an incident occurs involving the U.S. military, blame may be directed toward the Japanese government rather than the United States because it is the Japanese government that should “take action.”

“Whenever an incident happens, the Okinawa Prefectural Government protests and demands jurisdiction on behalf of the Okinawan people,” one respondent noted, “but the central government seems passive. It seems that our national politicians and bureaucrats are more concerned about relations with the United States than with the people of Okinawa.”

An American Embassy official, commenting on such statements, said that “it sure doesn’t feel that way to us.” He regarded the Japanese government as a close and trusted

security partner that values the U.S. presence in Okinawa but asserted that the Japanese government staunchly supports Okinawan interests whenever negative incidents occur.

A retired Japanese central government official who worked on Okinawan issues in the 1990s said that he believes current Japanese political leaders do show less interest in Okinawa than in the past. “There was a feeling of guilt and indebtedness toward Okinawa earlier, and prime ministers such as Ryutaru Hashimoto and Keizo Obuchi had genuine affection toward the island and wanted to make things better. I don’t sense the same feeling with the current leadership. When he’s there, Prime Minister Abe looks like he can’t wait to leave.”

### Little Support for Okinawan Independence

There is an organized independence movement in Okinawa, but despite the resentment toward Tokyo and Okinawa’s ancient history as a separate people and kingdom, we found little support for independence among M+ Okinawans. Nor was there any sign of support for a separate or closer relationship with China. Okinawans appear to share the same anxieties about China’s rise as many other Japanese, enhanced by the fact that the disputed Senkaku Islands (Diaoyutai to the Chinese) are in Okinawa. “The biggest problem is China,” one said, “China is trying to enlarge its territory.” “China’s economic expansion will continue, and North Korea will not change,” said another. “China and North Korea are becoming more powerful,” an M31+ woman said, even as other respondents felt encouraged by the reduced tensions in the Korean Peninsula beginning in early 2018.

While such considerations induce caution, Okinawans are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with what they feel is the overly heavy hand of the central government, and not just on the base issues. There is also resentment that local history and culture receive so little attention in the national curriculum required for school examinations and that so many local issues require some degree of central approval. Asked to consider local-central options for the future, only one in five survey respondents was satisfied with the status quo. Forty-three percent suggested more local authority for all prefectures, and 19 percent preferred some form of special autonomy for Okinawa. Just one in 20 of the M+ respondents supported independence.

### Opposition to Construction at Henoko

In light of these attitudes, it is hardly surprising that in a prefecture-wide referendum on February 24, 2019, an overwhelming 72 percent of voters opposed the construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility at Cape Henoko. While the purpose of constructing this new base is to close the

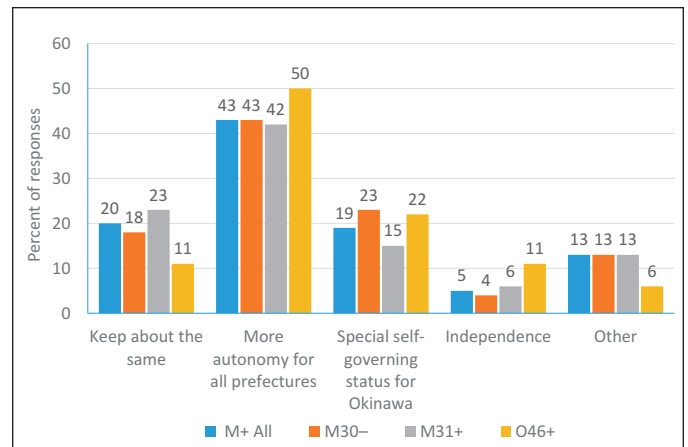


Figure 7. Most on-line survey respondents favored more autonomy from the central Japanese government

Futenma Marine Corps Air Station and move this part of the U.S. footprint away from the most densely populated part of the island, a strong majority of respondents disagreed with a statement that Henoko “should be built” to close Futenma (Appendix II, Table B2). There was also strong disagreement with a statement that the construction of Henoko cannot be avoided. There was modest agreement with the statement that Henoko should be opposed no matter what the cost (Appendix II, Table B2). This opposition to Henoko is broader than the opposition to the presence of U.S. bases generally. It was not unusual for those who were neutral toward or even supported the U.S. base presence generally to oppose the replacement facility at Cape Henoko. “I am neither for nor against the base presence, but I am against Henoko,” one M31+ woman put it succinctly.

While Henoko opposition appears to be largely associated with the unfairness issue, the landfill and construction of runways into the ocean have also engendered significant environmental concerns. “We should not be against the base,” one M30– woman said, for example, “but I don’t want them destroying the coral reef. Futenma does not affect Ginowan Bay’s natural environment. If Okinawa’s nature is protected, I am not against the Henoko base itself.”

A few respondents and interviewees did support the construction at Cape Henoko. These included a businessman from the Nago area, where Henoko is being built, because construction would help economic development in his area and industry. Some base supporters noted that in the February 2018 mayoral election in Nago, where Henoko is located, the anti-base mayor was defeated. In contrast, in the September prefecture-wide gubernatorial election, Denny Tamaki, who took a strong anti-Henoko stance, won with 55 percent of the vote. While a majority of our respondents were from areas well south of Henoko that would not be

much affected by its construction and seemingly should be in favor of closing much-nearer Futenma, they opposed Henoko principally because the issue is so deeply rooted in the issue of fairness. In other words, the Futenma–Henoko trade-off, despite its logic to those outside Okinawa, has not resonated with a majority of our interlocutors. Henoko is in many respects an emotional issue, not a logical one.

This study points to three implications for policymakers. The first is that Henoko will remain controversial because the arguments in its favor made by the Japanese central government and U.S. military are not convincing to many Okinawans, including those born after Okinawa reverted to Japan. Continued political and legal opposition can be expected from prefectural-level politicians because this position is popular with the Okinawan people. This appears to be especially true of older Okinawans, who still account for a majority of the prefecture’s voters, but the unfairness issue also resonates with M+ voters. The second implication is that the environmental concerns regarding the construction are real, mentioned by many respondents. The third implication is that even were the Henoko plan reconsidered, it would not necessarily lead to the dismantling of all U.S. bases on Okinawa. Henoko represents the building of a new base (even as a replacement), which is a change in the status quo of several decades. As a change, it sharply raises the fairness issue and provokes an emotional reaction, unlike the continued presence of a long-existing base. It may be that once Henoko is built and Futenma is closed, Henoko will eventually be more widely accepted as other U.S. bases generally are, but in the meantime, resentments reinforce the Okinawan belief that they are being sacrificed for Japanese national interests.

### Important Base Issues

A majority of our M+ respondents referred to crime, military accidents, noise, traffic, and environmental pollution as the main concerns associated with U.S. bases. Slightly fewer were concerned about the extensive land area they occupy. Respondents did not believe that there were problems of too much Western influence or too many foreigners (Appendix II, Figure D3). To the contrary, most appeared to regard the presence of foreigners as a positive, and, as described below, desired more interaction with the base communities.

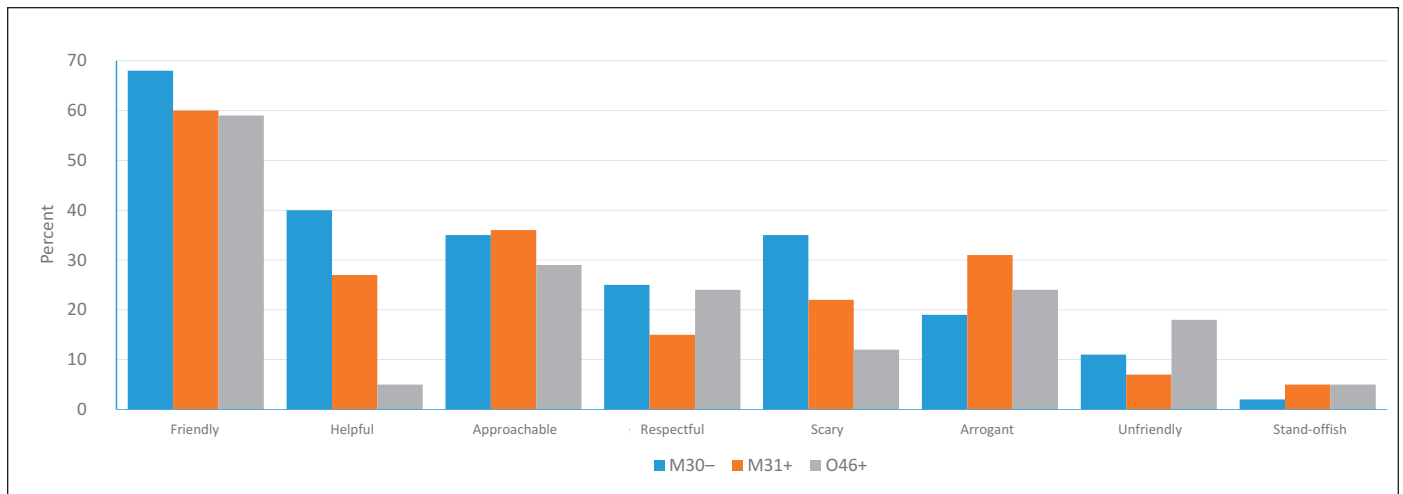
Although we did not list base access as an issue, many interviewees and survey respondents referred to it, particularly with respect to improving community relations. The land area of the bases may be less of an issue than the security measures that appear to Okinawans to bifurcate the island into two separate jurisdictions and wall off their access to

large parts of their own island. “The people of Okinawa should be permitted to enter the bases as freely as Americans can travel around Okinawa,” an M+ woman said. “If this is not possible, children should have an opportunity to ‘study abroad’ on base,” she added. Other respondents, however, understood that bases require a high degree of security and instead sought less burdensome access to residential and recreational areas. A few suggested that more bases be designated for joint use or become formally Japanese bases with Japanese commanders. The long and close alliance between Japan and the United States, they felt, as in Europe, facilitated such arrangements.

Several interviewees and on-line respondents referred to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The SOFA appears to be widely misunderstood as allowing American servicemen to commit crimes and escape punishment under Japanese law. Local governmental officials, however, expressed more concern with the lack of regulatory oversight on large parts of the island and felt that measures could be taken to improve this without over-burdening the bases or degrading military security, capability, or training functions. It was obvious that local authorities do not trust national-level oversight in these areas. Some felt that if the SOFA were revised, the bases would be less controversial: “I think the bases can coexist, but the SOFA should be revised,” one M30– respondent said.

### Perceptions of U.S. Service Personnel

Two strong conclusions from the study were that the M+ respondents tended to have positive views of U.S. service personnel as individuals and that they strongly desired greater, not less, interaction between the bases and Okinawan communities. Asked whether they think the bases try to help the local communities around them, about two-thirds responded affirmatively. Asked to characterize U.S. military personnel, the single most important characteristic cited was “friendly.” “The soldiers I have met were all very polite,” said one M30– woman, adding, “I started viewing them as Americans rather than as soldiers.” Another frequently cited characteristic was “helpful,” mentioned particularly often by survey respondents age 30 and below. “When I had a flat tire, a soldier helped me. All the local people ignored me,” one M30– woman said by way of illustration. But M30– respondents were also more likely to find U.S. military personnel “scary” or “unapproachable.” The M31+ subgroup was less likely to find the U.S. military personnel “scary” but more inclined than M30– respondents to see them as “arrogant.” Rather few respondents found U.S. military personnel “unhelpful” or “stand-offish.”



**Figure 8. Most on-line survey respondents reported positive attitudes toward U.S. military personnel**

Many respondents commented, however, that the survey question was difficult to interpret. “I have no image of the U.S. military people as a whole. Everyone is different,” an M31+ man wrote. A similar comment distinguished the overall from the individual perspective: “The image of the military seems scary and arrogant, but many individual soldiers appear friendly.” An M30– woman wrote that “they are the same as Okinawans and Japanese. We are all human beings.” Another said that “they try to make Okinawa a nice place through their activities. Only a few are bad.”

Some respondents said that they had a difficult time typing American military personnel simply because they don’t know them. “I never had opportunities to talk with them,” “I have no military acquaintances, so I do not know,” and “I have never encountered any” are typical comments. In fact, despite the large size of the base areas, most Okinawans in day-to-day life have limited contact with American military personnel, and the M+ respondents wanted more.

### **Desire for Greater Contact**

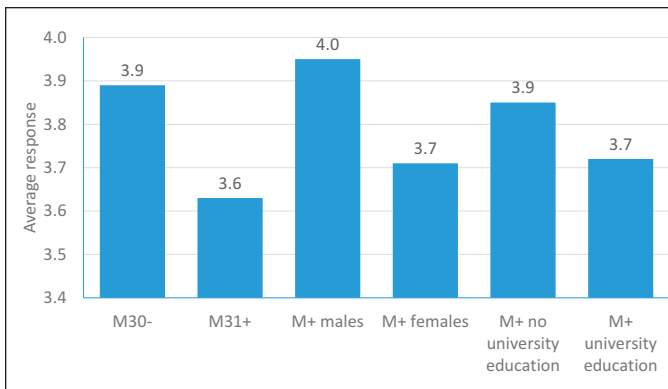
Asked if they had U.S. military friends, about one-third of the respondents reported that they had “some” friends, but less than 5 percent said that they had many. As a whole, the interviewees and on-line survey respondents were more likely to have some or many friends among American civilians. Some 80 percent said they had never worked with members of the American military. Only about 4 percent, including the three M30– survey respondents currently employed on the bases, said that they often interact with the American military community. Eleven percent of M30– respondents and 12 percent of M31+ respondents said they had been involved in community-service activities involving members of the base community, with the most widely cited activity being the

“Kadena Special Olympics.” We regarded this as a rather low figure considering the English language ability of most of our respondents. Of those who reported that they had been involved with such programs, four-fifths said that participation did not affect their views of the U.S. military (Appendix II, Figure E5). “It is just a cultural-exchange event and does not change my opinion that I accept the bases,” said an M+ woman.

While 12 percent of the M30– subgroup had never been on a U.S. base, only 2 percent of the M31+ group had not. Some 70 percent of M30– respondents and 80 percent of M31+ respondents reported that they had been on a base “a few times,” while much smaller percentages reported “sometimes” or “often” (Appendix II, Figure E6). Those who reported more frequent visits usually had attended the American school or currently worked or once worked on a base.

Asked to consider what they thought could improve the relationship between the U.S. military and the Okinawan community, some respondents used this opportunity to reiterate their strong opinions, for example: “to establish a definite plan to move the bases outside Okinawa,” “to get rid of the bases,” “for the Japanese government to respect the will of the Okinawan people,” “for the Okinawa media to balance reporting and tell about the good deeds of the U.S. military,” and “to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance.”

Most responses, however, focused on access, communication, and exchange opportunities. “We should use the bases to connect to tourism and English education,” one respondent said. “There should be more exchanges between Okinawan people and base people,” said another. Although such suggestions are not always realistic or comply with intergovernmental protocols, they illustrate a strong desire for greater interaction. In fact, for the survey respondents, the question of whether



**Figure 9. Most on-line survey respondents agreed that there should be more interaction between Okinawans and the base communities**

Note: Average of responses from 5 being “strongly agree” to 1 being “strongly disagree.”

there should be more interaction between the base community and the local population had one of the highest areas of agreement, particularly among men, the M30– subgroup, and those without university degrees.

Some respondents were frustrated by what they see as a lack of impetus from the U.S. military for greater contact and interaction with the Okinawan population. “Only a handful want to communicate with the local people,” observed one. Another remarked that “they are young, so they do not understand other cultures.” Several complained that it is hard to meet military personnel because they live so separately. These comments aligned with the earlier observation that respondents desire greater access to the bases.

#### Box 5. Interviewees made several suggestions for increasing base-community activities

“There need to be opportunities to talk with each other, such as homestay programs for children.”

“Social gatherings of both senior and grass-roots people.”

“Exchange programs to learn English at local schools and nursing programs.”

“More sports events.”

“My wish is that people can enter and exit the base freely.”

“The Okinawan, Japanese, and American governments should host a joint event.”

“Provide a forum for Okinawa-U.S. discussion without the Japanese government representatives.”

This desire for interaction should provide an opportunity for U.S. military and diplomatic officials to introduce new outreach and community-activity programs in cooperation with Okinawan governmental and nongovernmental counterparts. These programs should be specifically designed to appeal to M+ Okinawans. Okinawan prefectural officials have told us that they would welcome and work with such efforts. While we understand that some such efforts are being considered, the question is how to ensure sufficient acceptance and buy-in by the local population. The need for these to be designed jointly, and not just by Americans, and to focus on shared interests cannot be over-emphasized.

#### Desire for More Research and Discussion

While we were struck by the indifference of many younger Okinawans toward base issues, those who did take the time to be interviewed (which could take up to an hour) or to fill out the on-line questionnaire (which could take 20 minutes or longer) expressed appreciation for the research as a whole. A few survey recipients thought it might have been designed to favor a particular point of view (these were about equally divided between those who thought the point of view was pro-base or anti-base), but most felt the process helped them think through issues that were important to Okinawa but to which they had not given much thought. “This survey made me think a lot,” one said. “Many questions made me think hard about the Okinawan problems,” reported another. “More people should take this,” a third commented on the survey. “I am interested in knowing how people my age think about these issues because I don’t have opportunities to talk about this topic with them,” another observed.

Several respondents felt that the topic of U.S. bases was either taboo or highly politicized. It is difficult, they complained, to talk about these topics openly. “In Okinawa I feel it is taboo to talk about the bases, and I want to change that,” said an M30– man. The survey instrument, given its anonymity, provided a good vehicle for individuals to express themselves more freely. “I could answer when I was alone,” one respondent said, “but I have a hard time expressing my opinion on base issues when I am with other people.”

Some base opponents and base supporters felt that the base issues were not sufficiently discussed or appreciated by their contemporaries. Opponents felt constrained because opposition to the bases is associated with a group of older, activist protesters, while those with a more neutral or positive attitude toward the bases said that their views were drowned out in the public media and prevailing discourse.

In line with the notion of “base fatigue,” there was also a desire for increased interaction with Americans outside the

framework of base relations. “It is not just about Okinawa, the U.S., and Japan,” one said, “It is about peace and protecting the oceans and nature.” “There need to be discussions of Okinawa’s economy, raising children, and the environment,” another opined. “The U.S. relationship with the prefecture is currently largely conducted through military channels,” a Japanese diplomat with experience in Okinawa said, adding that “there should be greater business, educational, and cultural exchanges to balance out the relationship.”

Those who expressed appreciation for the research also felt that a continuing process of discussion, particularly of national and regional peace and security issues, would be useful in Okinawa. One thoughtful Japanese observer who was not from Okinawa noted that there is a tendency for Okinawans to view the U.S. bases through the narrative of Japanese discrimination against Okinawa or to become interested only when a highly visible crime or accident occurs. “Since Okinawa has no responsibility for the bases, Okinawans often ignore their own security interests in the bases. If Okinawa were an independent country,” he speculated, “its leaders might well want U.S. bases to protect Okinawa’s own security.”

### Policy Implications

This study focused on describing the attitudes of young adults born after the establishment of U.S. bases in Okinawa. The study did not have explicit policy objectives, but the findings suggest implications for policy that deserve greater study and attention. Some of these findings have already been mentioned, but this section summarizes them.

**Major opportunity for U.S. public relations and public diplomacy.** The desire of M+ Okinawans for greater contact with the base community and the fluidity of attitudes on base presence appear to provide a potentially important opportunity for the American military and diplomats to strengthen base-Okinawan relations. While individual branches of the U.S. military work hard at community relations and sponsor numerous activities, these are often couched in old-fashioned terms (“service” rather than “partnering”), appear compartmentalized, and seem to reach relatively narrow groups. Few of our interlocutors had been involved. These programs could be reviewed and redesigned in cooperation with Okinawans to give special attention to engaging younger age groups on an island-wide basis. Increased opportunities to visit bases for educational and cultural activities could be an important component of this effort.

**Updating the Status of Forces Agreement.** The operation of the U.S.-Japan SOFA is not well understood in Okinawa. We found that even well-educated people often believe that the agreement allows service personnel to commit crimes off-duty and off-base without punishment. There is also deep concern about environmental issues. The agreement could be reviewed by the two governments, with input from local sources and with reference to the SOFAs with American NATO allies—both to update the agreement, if needed, and to better publicize its provisions and help correct misperceptions within Okinawa. This exercise alone, with sufficient transparency, could be useful in improving attitudes.

**Building a more multidimensional U.S.-Okinawa relationship.** The U.S. relationship with the people and local governments (prefectural and below) in Okinawa is centered on the military dimension. Given the desire for educational and cultural linkages expressed by our interlocutors, increasing attention to these dimensions could place the relationship on a broader base. Special U.S. attention to this one Japanese prefecture is justified by the out-sized role that Okinawa plays in the alliance relationship and in preserving peace and security in the Pacific.

**Future of the construction at Cape Henoko.** Our study suggests that the construction of the Henoko marine facility will continue to be controversial within Okinawa and will be opposed by large segments of the public and local government. Clearly, the notion that Henoko must be built to close Futenma has little resonance in Okinawa. The outcome of the September 2018 gubernatorial election in favor of Dennis Tamaki, who staunchly opposed the Henoko project, reflected this wide sentiment, as did the 72 percent negative vote on Henoko in the February 2019 prefecture-wide referendum. The Japanese government is committed to continue construction of the base but will face continued legal and local opposition. Opposition to this facility, however, should not be equated with an unwillingness to host some U.S. base presence.

**Addressing the resentment problem.** Our interviews and on-line survey suggest mixed messages that are of importance to the government in Tokyo. Okinawans appear to feel more Japanese than ever. Contrary to some beliefs expressed abroad, especially in China, we found no significant support for the concept of Okinawan independence. But there is a strong sense of distinct identity and local pride that appears to be

frequently coupled with a resentment narrative that Okinawa is under-appreciated by the rest of Japan, as demonstrated by the heavy concentration of foreign bases, unfairly “burdening” Okinawa. This leads to a prickliness in the relationship between local and central authorities that will not be resolved, and could even be accentuated, by special financial subsidies. There is no easy solution, but the findings suggest the need to be especially sensitive to Okinawan feelings and make special efforts to honor the distinctive and rich Okinawan culture and its contributions to Japanese diversity.

## Conclusions

Astride the major north-south sea and air routes in East Asia, the U.S. bases in Okinawa remain critical to an effective U.S. forward presence, the defense-oriented Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, the broader system of U.S. global alliances, and stability, peace, and security in East Asia as a whole. Despite the hope that geopolitical relationships may change, it appears that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the U.S. bases in Okinawa will be regarded in both Japan and the United States as an important guarantor of a stable balance of power for the foreseeable future. Therefore, a less contentious, more comfortable relationship between the U.S. military and its Okinawan hosts remains a priority.

Given the concentration of U.S. bases in Okinawa and the simple fact that they are “foreign,” it is almost inevitable that the bases will remain contentious to some degree. The history of the island as a battlefield and then under American occupation for more than a quarter century, as well as the Okinawan perception of discrimination by the central Japanese government, complicate the U.S.-Okinawa relationship. The construction at Cape Henoko, even as part of a plan to shrink the U.S. footprint and make it safer, is currently the most contentious aspect of this relationship and one that

burdens Tokyo-Naha relations most directly. In addition, a serious crime or military accident could occur at any time, despite every effort at prevention, and such incidents will always create outrage and spike tensions. The attitude of the Okinawan community toward the bases will inevitably be characterized by long periods of relative quiescence punctuated by large public outrage whenever a dangerous accident or serious crime sparks resentment.

This research, however, suggests that the existence of the bases themselves is becoming increasingly accepted by young Okinawan adults and is even regarded as an asset and opportunity for security, economic, and cultural reasons. It is striking, for example, that Okinawa has marketed its U.S. connection for the benefit of its tourist industry, for example, establishing an “American Village” for shopping, eating, and entertainment for both the local population and tourists.

The central challenge for the United States is to build on possibilities to connect more closely with these younger Okinawans in a positive and respectful manner as if the bases were located in the United States. “Please remember that you are our guests as our ally,” one M30– woman emphasized. While there may have been changes that have reduced noise and improved environmental safeguards, many people we spoke to believe that U.S. base operations do not meet the same standards applied to domestic military bases in the United States or U.S. foreign bases in Europe. “More needs to change,” said one retired senior U.S. officer with a deep commitment to Okinawa.

We hope that this report can pave the way for continued and deeper dialogue between Okinawans and American and Japanese government officials on practical means to address base issues and enhance the bases as an asset, not just for mutual peace and security but also for the daily lives of Okinawans.



# Appendix I:

## A Note on the Methodology Used in this Study

This inquiry into the attitudes of young Okinawan adults toward U.S. bases was mostly carried out in the first half of 2018. It struck us that very little work had been done on the implications of generational change despite several excellent books in Japanese and English on the issue of U.S. bases in Okinawa. It is also striking that publicly available polls of Okinawan attitudes by the mass media do not seem to break down the results by age, despite some obvious generational differences. This study was intended to address this gap with a preliminary description of the views of the generation of adult Okinawans who were born after the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972.

We originally designed the project to include one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and an on-line survey. It turned out, however, that many younger Okinawans were reluctant to discuss the U.S. bases in a group setting, so the results presented here are based on the interviews and the on-line survey. The interviews and on-line survey were anonymous, although several individuals did give their names.

We developed and tested the on-line survey instrument in February 2018, and had it translated into Japanese. The Japanese and English surveys are available on the East-West Center website at [www.eastwestcenter.org/ZqL](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/ZqL) and [www.eastwestcenter.org/Zqb](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/Zqb). Mr. Chinen distributed the survey on-line to friends and contacts whom he knew largely through his association with the University of the Ryukyus and 10 years living and working in Okinawa. Most of these primary contacts' views on the base issue were unknown. These contacts were asked to send the survey to others, including non-university friends, but they were instructed not to bias the report by sending the survey only to those who had strong opinions on the U.S. bases. About 200 business cards with a link to the on-line survey were also handed out to strangers randomly encountered after giving a brief introduction of the survey's purpose. Most of the business cards were distributed in Naha city and on or near the University of the Ryukyus campus.

We considered publicizing the survey on-line through social media but were warned that the survey could be

tampered with by outside groups with strong anti- or pro-base positions attempting to distort the results. We decided against publicizing the survey and remained vigilant against survey tampering.

After Dr. Morrison tabulated and analyzed the first 50 survey responses, an interim report was prepared at the beginning of May 2018. This report was used to elicit further comment. We also decided at this time to add a small number of respondents over age 46 to see if there were any striking differences among age groups. For this older group, we sought people who could be described as opinion leaders. We used many East-West Center alumni and friends of alumni as the basic reference group.

The on-line survey was closed at the beginning of June 2018, and respondents that we deemed not to be appropriate (did not live in Okinawa, had no right to vote, etc.) were removed. The final respondent base included 199 individuals from the Millennial+ age group (20–45), all resident in Okinawa, plus 21 respondents age 46 and older. The Millennial+ group was almost evenly divided between younger (age 20–30) and older (age 31–45) respondents.

Most of the interviews were also conducted during this period, mostly by Mr. Chinen in Japanese or English (depending on the interviewee's preference). Only about 20 percent of the primary contacts responded to the on-line survey, and most of those approached to be interviewed declined. While this may be a typical or even a high response rate for a survey in Japan, it may also be explained as reflecting a palpable lack of interest in base issues ("base fatigue") or some feeling that the issues were too sensitive (several respondents had base-related or government-related jobs).

Most of those who agreed to be interviewed or completed the on-line survey were born in Okinawa. A few were of Okinawan heritage but born elsewhere or were born in the main Japanese islands but had lived in Okinawa for a long time. Like most Okinawans, most of the respondents lived on the southern, populous end of Okinawa island. Two-thirds reported that they did not live close to a U.S. base.

More women responded to the on-line survey than men by a two-to-one margin, despite efforts to achieve balanced gender sampling. Moreover, as a whole, the women were more expressive than the men, for example, writing longer responses to open questions in the survey or expressing their opinions more vigorously in interviews. Several interlocutors suggested that surveys in Japan generally have a lower response rate for men than for women and that men tend to be more impatient in responding to long surveys (this survey, according to some participants, required about 20 minutes to complete). There was also, not surprisingly, a higher rate of responses from university-educated Okinawans than from Okinawans who had not completed university.

There were enough men and non-university-educated respondents in the sample, however, to allow comparison of responses across these demographic groups, and this report notes where there were gender or educational differences in responses to particular questions. There was some evidence that men are more concerned about international security issues and more inclined to accept the bases, while women are more concerned about education, care of the elderly, and other social issues. On most issues relating to the bases, however, there were few strong differences between male and female respondents. Non-university-educated respondents appeared to be less interested in the U.S. bases, to protest

less, to be less concerned about the construction of the replacement base at Henoko, and to be more accepting of the status quo.

We took special precautions to prevent tampering with the survey results. We tabulated results from the first 50 respondents and compared these with responses that were received over the next few weeks. There was very little change in percentage results despite a four-fold increase in the number of respondents, suggesting that there was no organized interference in the survey during this time. Survey respondent IP addresses were also checked for any discrepancy. Moreover, given the complexity of the survey and the detailed knowledge of Okinawa that it required, it would have been difficult to organize tampering by outsiders. Finally, the results of the survey and the impressions from the interviews correspond.

Only the on-line survey results were used to generate the tables and charts presented in the text and in Appendix II. These results can be compared with quotations from the interviews, also presented in the text. Both the on-line-survey and the interview respondents were chosen informally, and the sample is not necessarily representative of the entire population. The similarity of results from the interviews and the on-line survey suggest, however, that while the study was not scientific, the results are broadly representative of the opinions of Okinawans in the Millennial+ age group.

# Appendix II:

## On-line Survey Results

This appendix describes the survey respondents and gives some results from their responses. While these are the elements of the study that can be tabulated, it should be remembered that the full results of the survey are also based on non-quantifiable interviews and group discussions. Some of the tables and

charts presented in this appendix are also included in the text. Throughout this report, M+ refers to Okinawans aged 20–45, M30– refers to the subset of M+ Okinawans aged 20–30, M31+ to the subset of M+ Okinawans aged 31–45, and O46+ to Okinawans aged 46 and above.

### A. Characteristics of the on-line survey respondents

**Table A1. Number and composition of the on-line survey respondents**

Groups	Number of respondents
All millennial+ (age 20–45)	199
All females (age 20–45)	146
All males (age 20–45)	52
No university education (age 20–45)	60
University education (age 20–45)	137
M30– (age 20–30)	106
M31+ (age 31–45)	93
O46+ (age 46 and above)	21
Total number of respondents	220

*Note:* One respondent did not indicate gender. Two respondents did not indicate level of education.

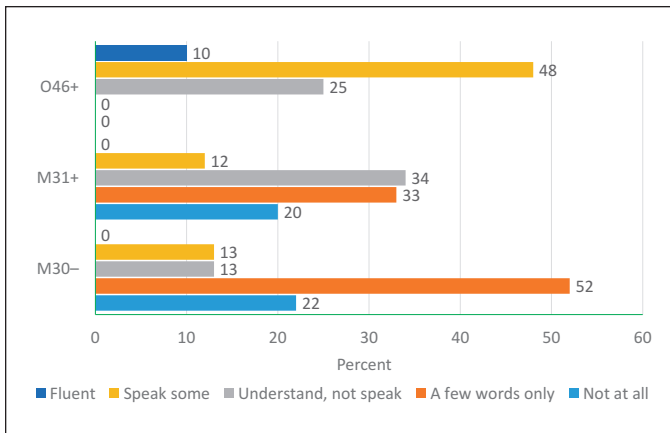
**Table A2. General characteristics of the on-line survey respondents**

Characteristic	Percent
Married	35
Has lived outside Okinawa*	72
Always or usually votes	73
Does not feel Okinawan	2
“Above average” or “very” proud to be Okinawan	78
Has university or graduate education	69

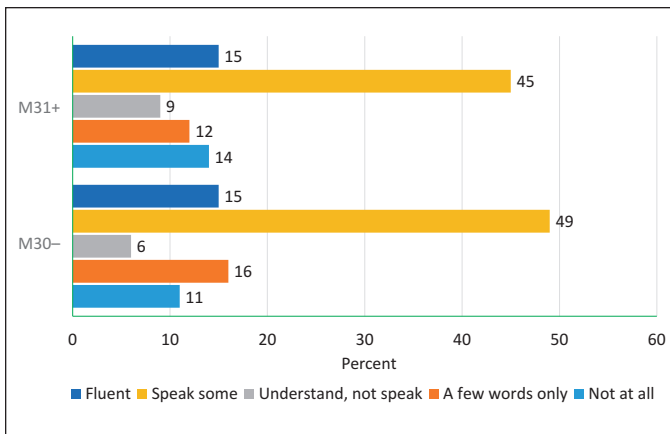
*Note:* Percentage of all 199 M+ respondents, except that one respondent omitted the question about voting and another respondent omitted the question about feeling Okinawan.

\*Mostly in the main Japanese islands, but also abroad.

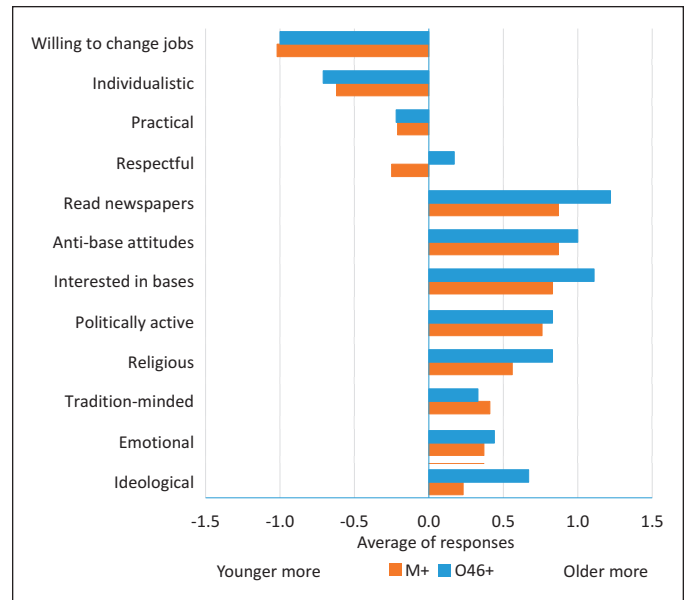
**A. Characteristics of the on-line survey respondents** *continued*



**Figure A1.** The older on-line survey respondents were more likely than the others to speak some Okinawan



**Figure A2.** Close to one-half of the M+ on-line survey respondents spoke some English



**Figure A3.** On-line survey respondents perceived several differences between younger and older generations

*Note:* Respondents were asked whether younger people were more or less of a category than older people, and their responses were averaged. Responses ranged from -1.5 for younger much more to 1.5 for older much more.

**Table A3.** Awareness of historical events varied widely among on-line survey respondents

Event	Age group	
	M30-	M31+
<b>Events with highest awareness</b>		
2004 helicopter crash	3.84	3.98
2016 murder	3.58	3.95
1945 Battle of Okinawa	3.71	3.79
1972 reversion to Japan	3.52	3.68
1995 rape	3.13	3.54
<b>Events with lowest awareness</b>		
1996 SACO Agreement	2.51	3.01
1950s land acquisitions	2.53	2.75
2011 Response of U.S. military to Tohoku tsunami	2.42	2.63

*Note:* The awareness measure is an average of responses from 5 being “very aware” to 1 being “not aware.”

## B. Attitudes toward Japanese government treatment of Okinawa and Henoko construction

**Table B1. On-line survey respondents felt strongly about unfairness and lack of consideration by the Japanese government**

Groups	Average agreement	
	Okinawa hosts more than its fair share of U.S. bases	Japanese government does not show consideration for Okinawans
All M+	4.02	3.89
Ages 20–30	4.02	3.89
Ages 31–45	4.01	3.88
All M+ males	3.77	3.49
All M+ females	4.10	4.01
Less-educated M+	3.67	3.52
More-educated M+	4.15	4.01
O46+	3.84	4.32

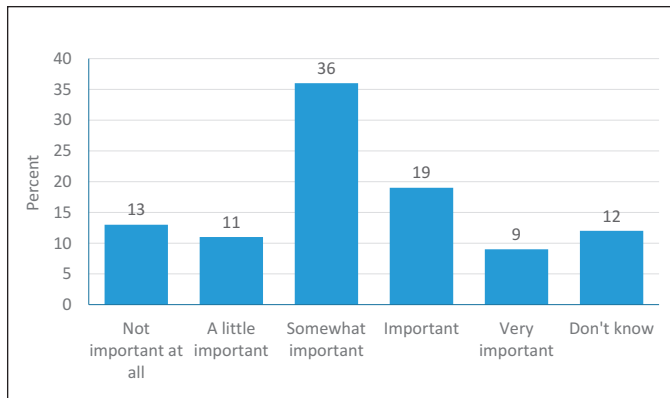
Note: Average of responses from 5 being “strongly agree” to 1 being “strongly disagree.”

**Table B2. On-line survey respondents expressed mixed feelings about U.S. bases and construction of Henoko**

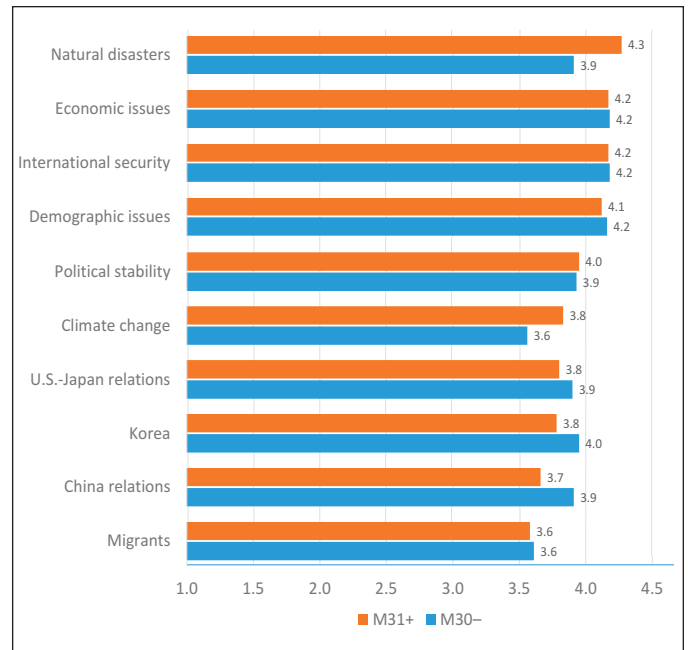
Statement	Average agreement
Accept bases but fix problems	3.29
Older generation opposes the bases	3.28
Henoko should be opposed no matter the cost	3.23
Okinawa should accept bases as they provide bargaining leverage	2.23
Henoko should be built to close Futenma	2.23
Henoko cannot be helped	2.45
Okinawa should host bases for national security reasons	2.51
Protests are an effective means of change	2.58
U.S. bases are important for Okinawan economy	2.70

Note: Average of responses from 5 being “strongly agree” to 1 being “strongly disagree.”

## C. Perceptions of security issues



**Figure C1. On-line survey participants expressed moderate agreement on the importance of the Japan-U.S. security treaty for Japan’s national security**



**Figure C2. International security was one of several challenges considered important for Japan over the next 25 years**

Note: Average values on a scale of 1 for “least important” to 5 for “most important.”

### D. Perceptions of U.S. bases

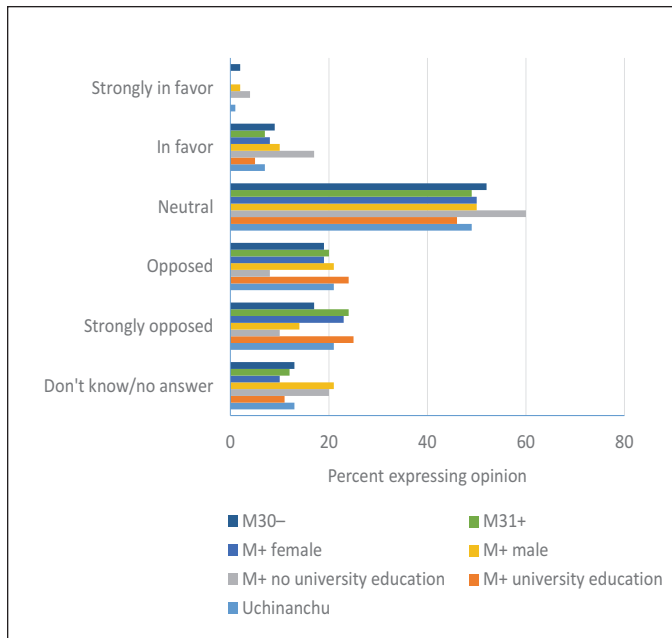


Figure D1. Most on-line survey respondents expressed a neutral opinion on the presence of U.S. bases in Okinawa

Table D1. Most on-line survey respondents had never participated in a base protest

Group	Percent who have participated in a base protest				
	Never	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-10 times	More than 10 times
M+ all	69	17	8	2	4
M30-	72	16	5	1	5
M31+	65	18	11	4	4
M+ males	67	29	2	0	0
M+ females	69	13	12	3	6
M+ less education	94	2	2	0	2
M+ more education	59	23	10	3	5
O46+	53	21	11	0	16

Note: Totals do not necessarily add exactly to 100 because of rounding.

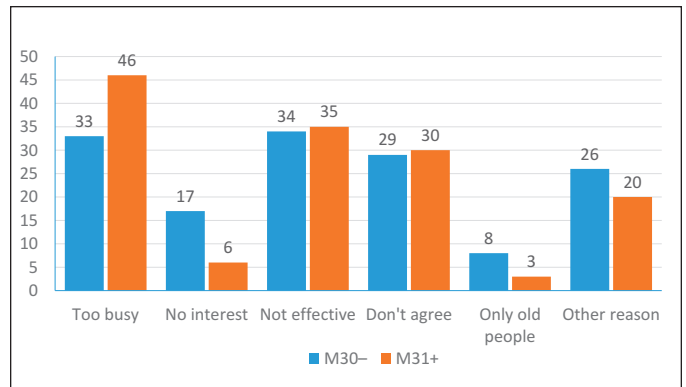


Figure D2. On-line survey respondents gave several reasons for not participating in protests

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

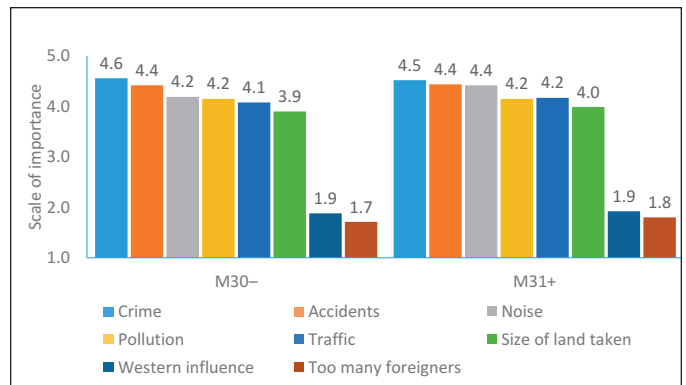
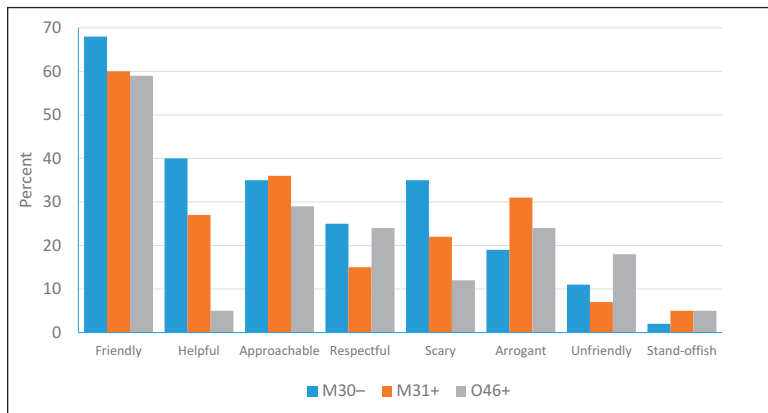


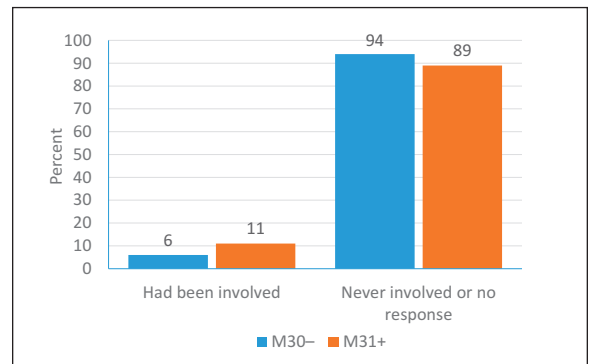
Figure D3. On-line survey respondents felt that crime, accidents, noise, pollution, traffic, and size of land taken were all important problems associated with the U.S. bases

Note: Average values on a scale of 1 for "least important" to 5 for "most important."

### E. Perceptions of U.S. military personnel and outreach programs

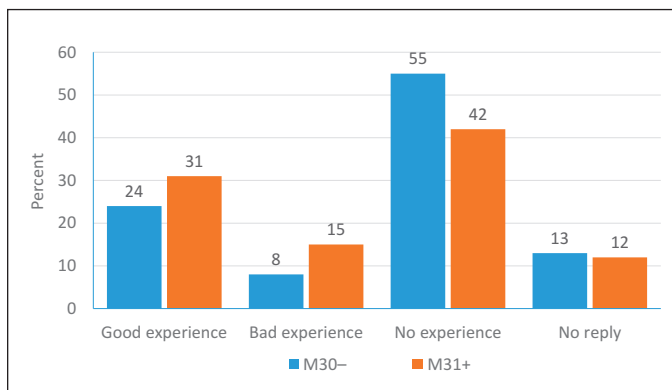


**Figure E1. Most on-line survey respondents reported positive attitudes toward U.S. military personnel**

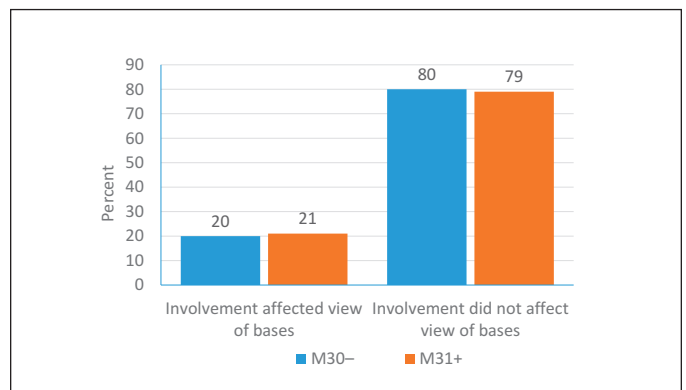


**Figure E4. On-line survey respondents were unlikely to have ever been involved in U.S. military community-service activities**

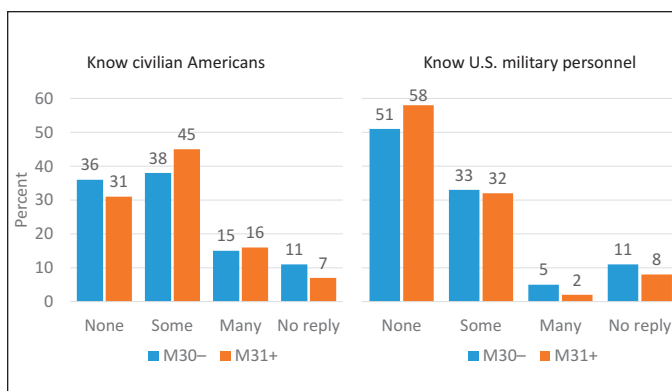
*Note:* Most M30- respondents did not reply to this question, while more than 80 percent of M30+ respondents responded negatively and very few did not reply. We assumed that no response was the equivalent of responding “no,” so we combined these categories.



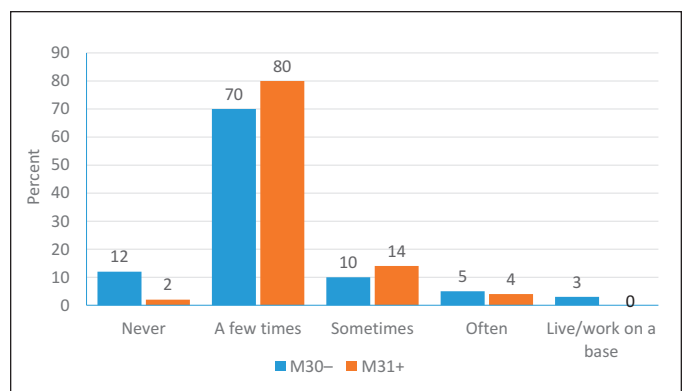
**Figure E2. Many on-line survey respondents reported that they had no personal experience with U.S. military personnel**



**Figure E5. Most on-line survey respondents reported that involvement with the U.S. military did not affect their views of the bases**

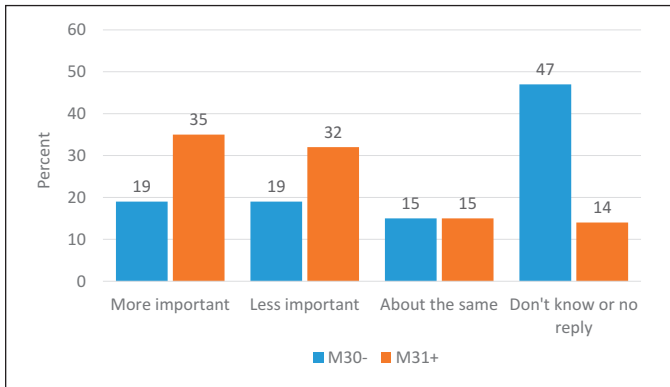


**Figure E3. On-line survey respondents were more likely to know civilian Americans than U.S. military personnel**

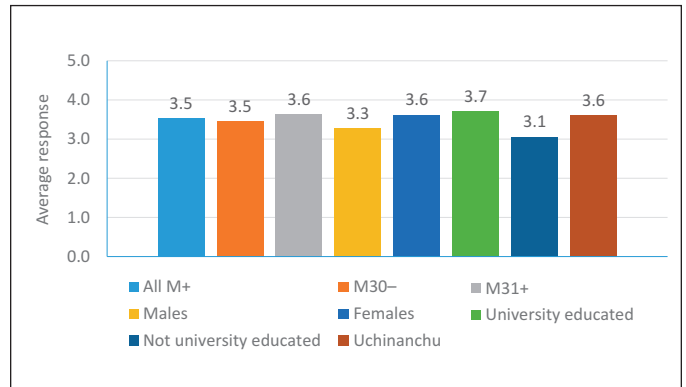


**Figure E6. Most on-line survey respondents had visited a U.S. base a few times**

## F. Aspirations for the future



**Figure F1. On-line survey respondents had mixed opinions on whether the Japan-U.S. security treaty will be more or less important in 25 years**



**Figure F2. All groups of on-line survey respondents moderately agreed that the U.S. bases should be phased out over the next 25 years**

*Note: Average of responses from 5 being "strongly agree" to 1 being "strongly disagree."*



## About the Authors

**Charles E. Morrison** is an Adjunct Senior Fellow in the Research Program at the East-West Center. A former U.S. Senate aide, Dr. Morrison has served in many positions at the East-West Center including as the Center's President from 1998 to 2016. He has also worked with the Japan Center for International Exchange as a Non-Resident Fellow and has visited Okinawa many times, starting in 1980. Dr. Morrison has a Ph.D. in International Studies from the Johns Hopkins University. He can be reached at [MorrisonC@EastWestCenter.org](mailto:MorrisonC@EastWestCenter.org).

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# Millennial+ Voices in Okinawa:

## An Inquiry into the Attitudes of Young Okinawan Adults toward the Presence of U.S. Bases

*By Charles E. Morrison and Daniel Chinen*

The largest U.S. military complex in an allied country occupies 15 percent of the 466-square-mile island of Okinawa. This is the only place in the world where continuing demonstrations occur against a U.S. base presence and where the presence of U.S. bases dominates local politics and media. It has long been observed that most protesters are elderly. But what do Okinawans born since 1972, when Okinawa reverted to Japanese sovereignty, think about the U.S. presence? Through interviews and an on-line survey, this study begins to fill an important knowledge gap, suggesting that post-reversion Okinawans may be resigned to the bases, weary of base-dominated politics, and eager to have greater personal contact with the U.S. military community. Okinawans in this age group also strongly believe that Okinawa hosts more than its fair share of U.S. bases in Japan, however. Most want to fix what they perceive as base-related problems, and they oppose building a new base at Henoko to replace the old, urban, and dangerous Marine Corps Air Station at Futenma. The study urges a review and redirection of U.S. public diplomacy programs in Okinawa.



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