

Early Experiments in Nation Building:

The U.S. Occupation of Haiti, 1915-34

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Abstract

While state-building is a standard tool of American foreign policy, the support for it came after a series of unpopular military occupations. How did these military disasters lead the U.S. to conclude that state-building was a policy goal? We investigate this question looking at state-building initiatives in Haiti during the occupation of 1915 to 1934. We use an intelligence report from 1932 with data on the political leanings of over 1,100 prominent citizens around the country. We find evidence that the occupation's counterinsurgency, road-building, and schooling projects were all associated with decreased opposition to the occupation.

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State-building has long been a central, though contested, tool of American foreign policy. Historically, many of these efforts have been strategic attempts to shape political outcomes and foster alignment with U.S. interests, especially during the Cold War. But some of the earliest conceptions of state-building were embedded even earlier in military doctrines. In the 1940s, the U.S. Marines published the *Small Wars Manual*, codifying lessons from occupations in places like Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. These doctrines emphasized state-building interventions, such as building roads, schools, and hospitals, as essential for creating legitimacy and reducing resistance to occupation. Yet this raises a historical puzzle: the Marines developed doctrine advocating state-building after experiences in occupations that were, at best, cautionary tales rather than exemplary case studies of success. As a striking counterexample, after the Vietnam War, many American military officers believed nation building had been a harmful distraction (Fitzsimmons, 2008). Why, then, did the US codify an approach emphasizing infrastructure and institutional development when the occupations themselves seemed unable to yield clear successes?

In this paper, we examine the US's attempt at state-building in Haiti during the occupation of 1915-1934. After its initial counterinsurgency policy came under congressional scrutiny, the occupation decided in 1921 to focus on state-building. It built roads suitable for cars and expanded vocational training through new rural farm schools. While U.S officials claimed their projects were winning local support, others believed that

Haitians opposed the interventions. This paper seeks to empirically examine whether American officials would have seen evidence suggesting its state-building policies were generating political support on the ground.

To address this question, we collect novel archival data on individuals' feelings towards the occupation. We measure sentiment using a 1932 military intelligence report with mission-critical information on more than 1,100 prominent Haitians. We classify citizens as for or against the occupation based on the report's notes on each person's political affiliation and stance toward the occupation. Since these reports were confidential and operationally important, they more accurately reflect how Americans viewed public opinion than their public statements. The reports also list the individuals' home district, which allows us to measure their exposure to three major U.S. policies: counterinsurgency operations, road construction, and school expansion.

We measure exposure to occupation policies through additional archival data. First, we classify a citizen as exposed to counterinsurgency operations if their home district contained at least one insurgent camp, using locations recorded on a 1920 military map. Second, we measure exposure to road construction using the change in market access caused by the roads. We calculate market access using 1930s tax revenue as a measure for local economic activity and a 1932 logistics table that gave district-to-district distances, travel times, and transportation methods. We recover the road construction's effect on market access by calculating the difference between observed market access and a

counterfactual that assumes the upgraded roads were not available. Finally, we measure exposure to school expansion by whether their district received a rural farm school, using locations from a 1929 report.

Since military and foreign policy doctrine relied on observed associations rather than experimental evidence, we first focus on correlations that occupation officials would have been able to observe. Our primary empirical strategy compares support for the occupation between citizens who were more exposed to the projects to those with less exposure. Nevertheless, it is easy to argue that any correlation is not a reflection of project success but instead a sign that projects were targeted based on pre-existing support. We address this endogenous placement issue by using vote counts from the 1918 constitutional referendum, which was heavily influenced by American coercion. We show that the votes in favor of the referendum frequently predict greater exposure to state-building projects, and that votes against it predict less exposure. Thus, we include specifications that control for pre-existing support and argue that the remaining relationships reflect the political feedback Americans believed their projects were generating.

Across all three measures of state-building, we find consistent evidence that greater exposure is associated with lower opposition to the occupation. Citizens living in districts that contained at least one insurgent camp were 14 percentage points less likely to oppose the occupation (significant at the 10% level), consistent with the occupation's claims that these districts supported the counterinsurgency strategy. A one-standard-deviation

increase in market access is associated with a 11 percentage point decline in opposition (significant at the 1% level), and the presence of a rural farm school corresponds to a 21 percentage point decline (significant at the 5% level). These magnitudes are sizable relative to the sample mean opposition rate of 25%. As expected, given concerns about endogenous targeting, controlling for pre-existing support reduces the estimated coefficients, though the signs and general patterns remain unchanged. Finally, because of concerns about simultaneous implementation, we estimate specifications that include all exposures simultaneously. The associations remain negative, substantial, and statistically significant, indicating that each project is independently correlated with lower opposition.

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

This paper contributes to the literature on how effective public good provision can increase government legitimacy. The evidence for this is mixed (Mcloughlin, 2015). In contexts where a weak government is trying to expand its legitimacy, the citizens do not necessarily interpret the increase in projects as an increase in legitimacy, mostly because they do not even notice that the projects were implemented (Blattman et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2022). To increase legitimacy, projects need to be visible (Krause, 2024) or implemented effectively, which is more likely to happen in places where state capacity is already high (Blattman et al., 2022). Our findings are consistent with the literature, since investments in roads and schools would have been highly visible and executed well. But while these papers focus on increasing legitimacy of a sovereign government, we show that these projects are also effective in increasing legitimacy of an occupying government.

Our work, therefore, also aligns with the literature on development assistance and conflict. In a conflict between the state and insurgents, one of the key factors in determining the victor is which side can control the flow of information among civilians (Berman et al., 2011). Thus, one indicator that development projects increase state legitimacy is if they reduce violence. But the relationship between development projects and violence is highly contextual. Such projects reduce conflict when they are connected to the government's success (Crost et al., 2016), increase the opportunity cost of joining insurgents (Fetzer, 2020), or are designed in close collaboration with local communities (Dell & Querubin, 2018). Unfortunately, because insurgents are aware that they increase

citizen support for the government, such projects sometimes increase violence as insurgents try to preempt them (Croft et al., 2014; Khanna & Zimmermann, 2017). Even without direct effects on violence, development projects may increase legitimacy in conflict environments through citizens' perceptions. The evidence on this mechanism is still being studied: some work shows that aid during the occupation of Afghanistan increased citizens' faith in the state (Böhnke & Zürcher, 2013) and increased positive attitudes towards the state (Beath et al., 2025), while other work in Afghanistan finds that aid reduces confidence in local government and increases sympathy for insurgents (Sexton & Zürcher, 2024). Our findings are consistent with findings on development projects improving perceptions, though they are perceptions filtered through the military's observations.

Insurgency, Information, and Development under Occupation

Haiti began in 1804 as a country of people willing to overthrow its government, and that tradition continued over the next century. After their coerced labor made St. Domingue one of the most productive territories in the West during the 1700s, the slaves of the French Empire revolted, gained independence, and started the nation of Haiti. But ideological conflicts led to the assassination of Haiti's first president, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, in 1806, and the country split into the Republic of Haiti in the South and the Empire of Haiti in the North (Stieber, 2020). Revolts became a common event, often happening at the local level. Peasant farmers regularly revolted against the state to weaken its capacity to enforce coercive labor laws (Chochotte, 2018). But sometimes these

revolts would extend beyond local boundaries and reach the national level. As a result, the leadership of Haiti was perpetually instable. From 1806 to 1915, 17 of Haiti's 24 presidents were overthrown by revolution (Schmidt, 1971, p. 26).

These national-level revolts triggered the US occupation of Haiti in 1915. In July 1915, a revolt against President Guillaume Sam, the seventh man to hold the presidential office in four years, left him dead in the streets of Port-au-Prince. The U.S., fearing the collapse of Haiti would give Germans the opportunity to gain a strategic foothold in the Caribbean, immediately landed Marines and started occupying the country. The Americans quickly faced resistance from Haitians, pushing them into what we would today call an asymmetric, information-centric conflict (Berman et al., 2018).

The conflict was asymmetric because the U.S. arrived with significantly more firepower. Upon landing, the Marines' first objective was to neutralize the revolts. They gained an early victory with a two-pronged strategy of (1) arms-buying/amnesty-granting and (2) direct attacks against militant groups (Long, 2016, p. 74; Schmidt, 1971, pp. 83–85). But after the initial insurgent suppression, resistance began to build again. By 1919, the U.S. estimated there were 6,000-15,000 fighters resisting the occupation (Alexis, 2021, p. 88). Continuing the military campaign, the Marines complemented ground attacks with aerial bombs, making Haiti the first conflict where the U.S. used air force (Alexis, 2021, p. 128; Chochotte, 2018).

But the military advantage was insufficient because the conflict was information centric. The leader, Charlemagne Péralte, had effectively established a rival government, sending ministers around the country (Alexis, 2021, p. 84). In the face of such opposition, the occupation could not fight the insurgents without information from locals. American leaders pled with Haitians to find information on where the insurgents were located and what they planned to do (Alexis, 2021, pp. 93–96). Sometimes the requests were accompanied by threats to destroy homes, livestock, and crops of villages who were not cooperating (Alexis, 2021, p. 95). Other times, they were combined with bounties to reward cooperation (Alexis, 2021, pp. 115–116). These tactics had varying success, with some Haitians delivering mission-critical information while many others feeding useless or bad information (Alexis, 2021, p. 127).

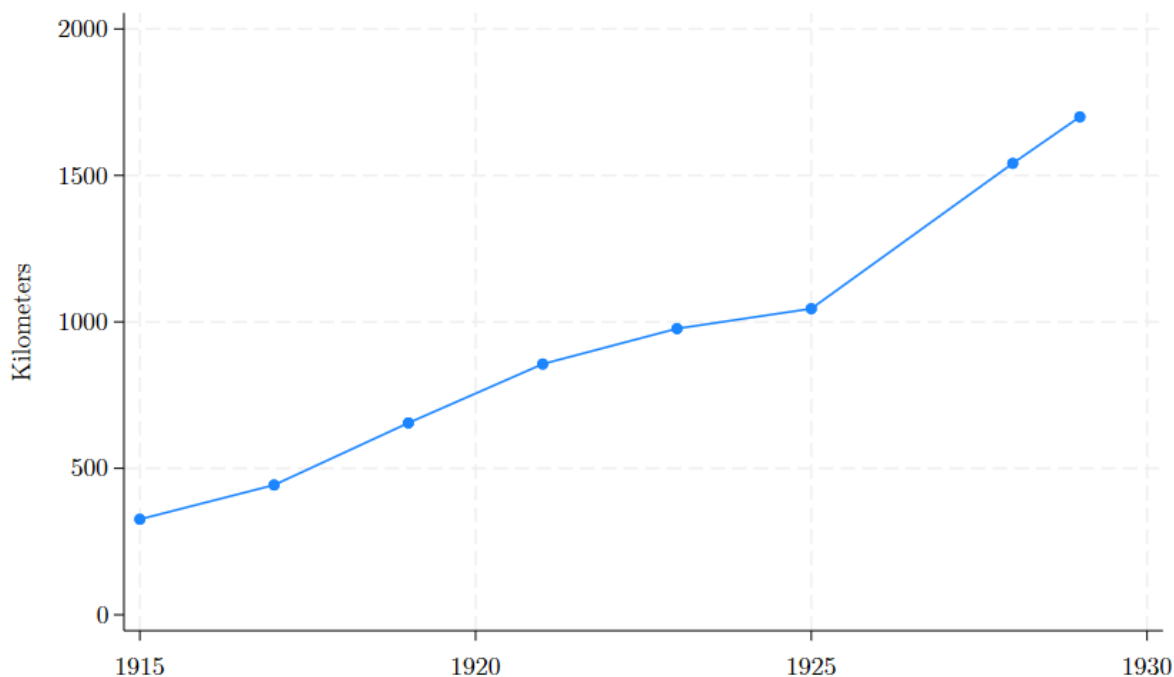
Despite the non-traditional conflict, the Marines dealt a decisive blow to the insurgency with the November 1919 assassination of Péralte, but it is unclear whether they ever won the people. In the following year, Franklin D Roosevelt, who had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the initial occupation years, ran as the Democratic candidate for vice president. The occupation became an easy opportunity for Republicans to discredit Roosevelt, and they began a senate investigation. In the congressional testimony, Americans claimed they had won the support of the average Haitian (U.S. Senate, 1922). But the occupation may have misinterpreted the natives' actions and intents (Alexis, 2021, pp. 89, 124). In 1922, the investigation, despite uncovering several

abuses by U.S. military, concluded that the situation was too unstable to withdraw troops and extended the occupation.

The extension was accompanied by a shift in strategy, transitioning from a purely military campaign to development assistance. From 1915 to 1922, the occupation focused strategy on stabilizing the political situation with only nominal attention to economic development. Even though policy did not focus on development, stabilizing the political environment had an immediate effect on the economy (Palsson, 2023). When America committed to a long-term occupation, it began focusing on development policy and nation building. Two of the main policies were road construction and school expansion. Both created mixed responses from the population.

From the beginning of the campaign, the occupation focused on road construction. Construction included “well-drained trails which are sufficiently wide and which have grades and curves of a character to permit the passage of a motor vehicle,” generally including a gravel surface but sometimes, on heavily-trafficked roads, an asphalt surface (State Department, 1929, pp. 62–63). The roads served two purposes. First, they improved military logistics in the occupation’s initial phase. Second, during the second phase, it was part of the occupation’s development package. “While there is still great need of

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



Source: State Department (1929)

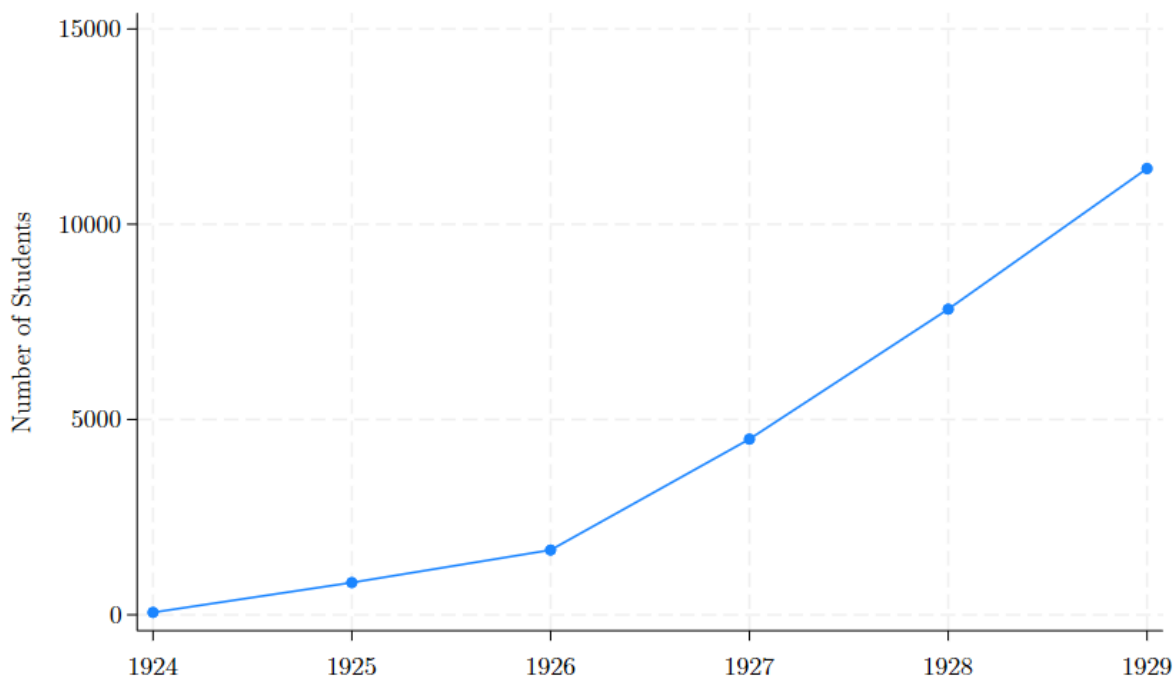
improvement in the National and departmental roads, there is even greater need for opening up rich areas which are now accessible only by trails which are traversed with difficulty even by animal traffic” (State Department, 1929, p. 62). Cumulative road construction from 1915 through 1929 is given in Figure 1.

The roads had countervailing effects on drawing support for the occupation. On the one hand, they improved travel between districts and facilitated exchange. On the other hand, in the early occupation, the roads were constructed with *corvée* labor, and this coercion was one of the primary drivers of insurgency (Schmidt, 1971, p. 100). Thus, we do not know the net effect of the roads on support for the occupation.

The occupation's other signature achievement was the creation and expansion of rural farm schools. While school attendance in Haiti was compulsory since at least 1912, in 1922 only about one in four children attended (Commission on Education in Haiti, 1930, p. 7). Furthermore, the schools focused on classical education, while the occupation believed that Haiti's education should center on vocational training (Schmidt, 1971, pp. 182–183; State Department, 1927, p. 70). Thus, in 1923, rural farm schools were established to support agricultural training. The government pushed for these schools to such an extent that the department of public instruction relinquished control of national rural primary schools in 1930 to get access to the larger budget (Haiti, 1932, p. 93). Enrollment for schools from 1924 through 1929 is reported in Figure 2.

The occupation believed these farm schools were generating significant support. “Perhaps more significant than any other development is the continued drift of public sympathy toward vocational and industrial education. Not only are men of affairs coming to recognize more and more the absolute necessity of teaching modern productive methods (both agricultural and industrial), but the young men themselves are learning the dignity of labor. They are discovering that the only sure road to personal prosperity lies in personal efficiency in some industrial line. This drift of sentiment is exhibited in the greater attendance at all of the industrial and agricultural schools” (State Department, 1927, p. 40).

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



Source: State Department (1929)

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

Today, the occupation is not regarded well. Most of the development projects did not endure after American withdrawal. For example, the roads quickly fell into disrepair

because maintenance was too costly (Schmidt, 1971, pp. 233–234). But the memory of the abuses lasted. The one lasting contribution was the creation of effective military and gendarmerie personnel, a legacy that allowed political strongmen to more effectively control the country (Schmidt, 1971, p. 235). While the long-term opinions on the occupation are negative, we do not have a good understanding of how Haitians felt on the eve of the occupation’s ending. Or, at least, we do not know what Americans thought Haitians felt.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

To explore the connection between occupation policies and political support, we collect data from several archival sources.

Political support

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

Two features of the data are crucial for contextualizing our analysis. First, the sample is intentionally unrepresentative of the average Haitian. The intelligence reports

Table 1. Characteristics of prominent citizens

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

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

cover individuals the occupation believed were influential or strategically important (“prominent citizens”). Other reports reference these individuals alongside town infrastructure and security resources, suggesting they were central to operational planning. While not a random sample, these elites likely shaped public opinion (Garbiras-Díaz et al., 2024).

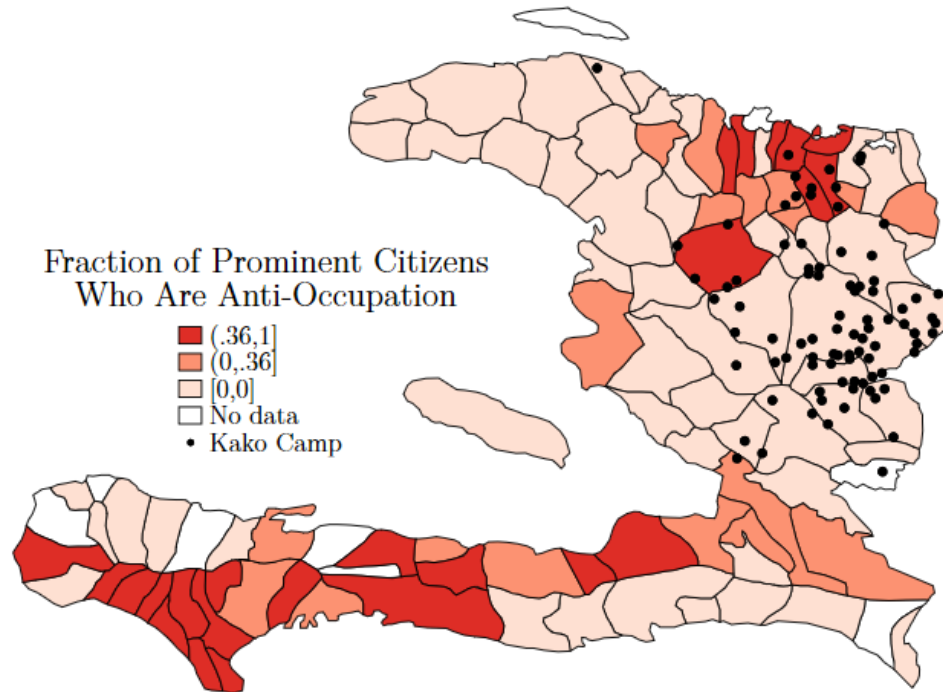
Second, the data reflect the Americans’ perceptions, not necessarily Haitians’ own views. That includes our dependent variable, anti-occupation sentiment, which, even if it was directly solicited, could misrepresent actual beliefs due to preference falsification (Kuran, 1997). But it also affects classifications like race and education, which were recorded without standardized criteria. For example, the distinction between “Black” and “Brown” may reflect both skin tone and social cues filtered through American racial categories. While such subjectivity complicates interpretation, it also emphasizes our

central claim: we are studying how American officials perceived their environment, and those perceptions are what informed the policies they developed.

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

Table 1 also lists some features of the prominent citizens, as reported by the Americans. Their ages ranged from 19 to 95, with the average citizen aged around 48. The intelligence reports described 45% of these citizens as Black and 32% as Brown. The educational categories were not standardized, so in some cases there are explicit categorizations like "secondary" or "college," but in other cases it says "mediocre," "good," or "very good." We classify anyone with a secondary education or higher, or anyone classified as "very good," as highly educated. Table 1 reports 27% fell in this category.

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



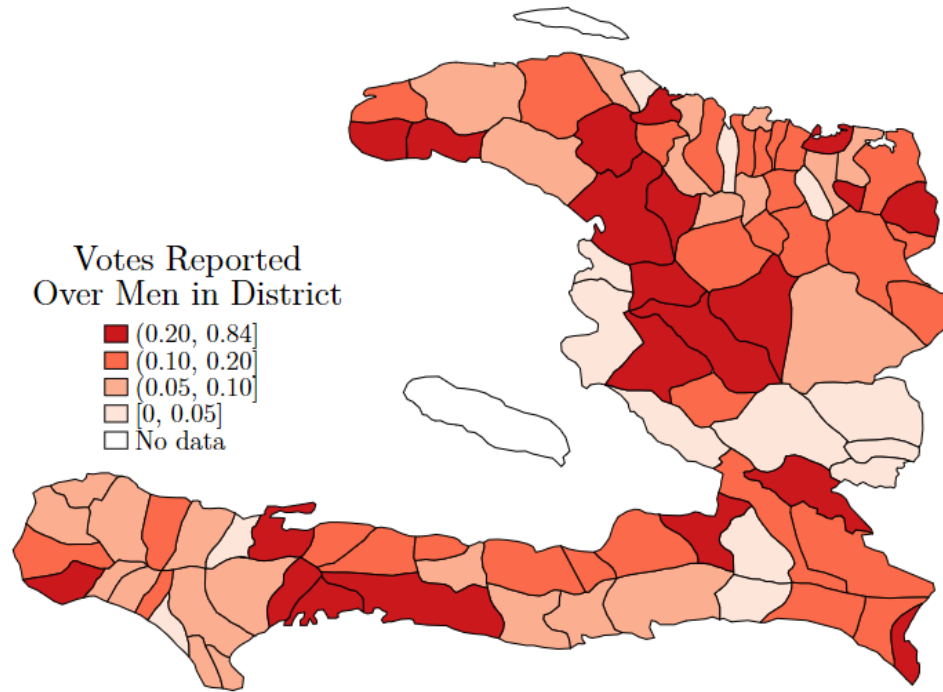
Source: See text.

Finally, we create an indicator for whether the citizen is in a market-connected profession. We used OpenAI's 4o model to one-shot classify whether a profession was likely engaged with markets in other villages and not if it was primarily engaged in local goods or services (see Appendix for prompt). For example, a lawyer or teacher is not a market-connected profession while a merchant or farmer is. Table 1 shows that 43% were market-connected.

1918 Referendum

We also collect data on the 1918 constitutional referendum. In 1917, the Americans tried to push a reform through the National Assembly to allow foreigners to own land. When it failed, the Americans dissolved the National Assembly and in 1918 held a referendum. The results reported 98,993 votes, of which 98,225 voted in favor and only

Figure 4. Reported voter turnout in the 1918 referendum



Source: See text.

768 voted against. The extremely lopsided vote was a result of American intervention and Haitian protests, as discussed below in our Empirical Framework section.

We use vote district-level vote tallies found in the Marine archives which report the total number of yes and no votes by district. Despite the credulity of the election, the data still serve two purposes. First, the “yes” votes are indicative of the occupation’s ability to mobilize supporters. Second, even though the occupation reported only 768 votes against the referendum, taking a stand against the Americans was costly, so those votes are informative about opposition to the occupation. The spatial distribution of reported voter turnout is shown in Figure 4.

Bandit camps

We digitize a map of insurgent camps created by the Marines in 1923 (Intelligence Unit Gendarmerie d’Haiti, 1923). The map charted the location of 87 camps, shown in Figure 3. With the exception of one camp in the North, all camps were located in the mountains in the East.

Road Building and Market Access

One of the occupation’s biggest nation-building projects was building roads. The importance of roads is not just having direct access to an improved road, but the network of connections that road opens. We hypothesize that the most important impact of these roads is their effect on market access. We measure market access for district i as

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

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

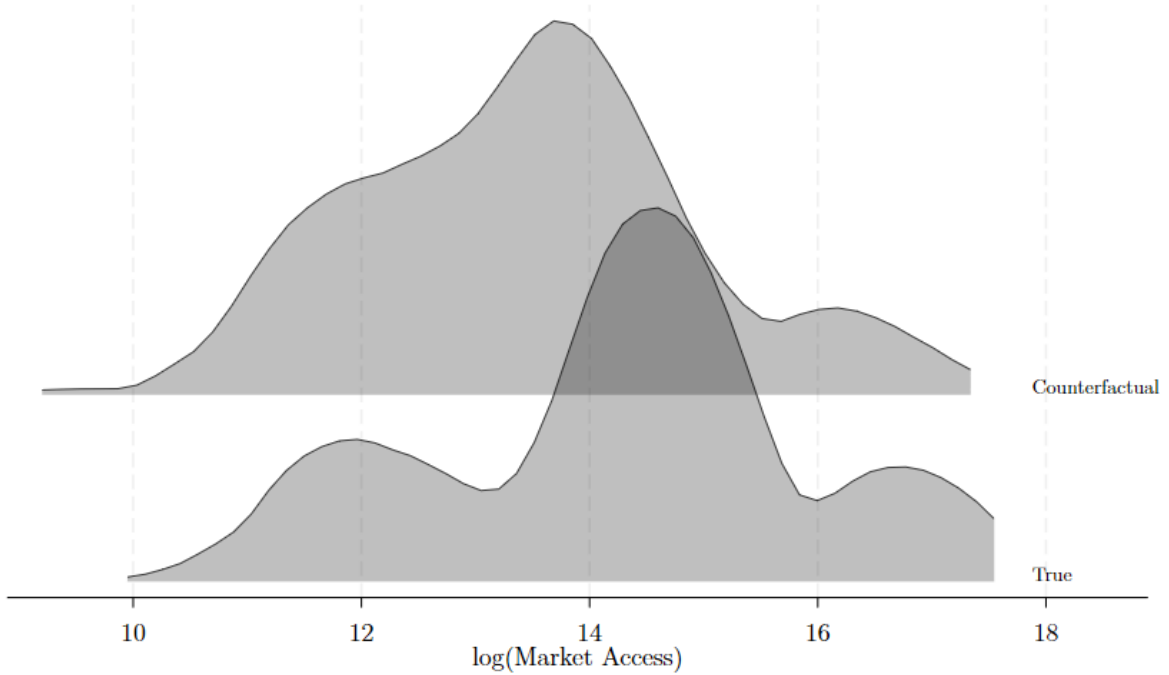
We measure the effect of roads on τ_{ij} using a logistics table from the marine intelligence report. The logistics table reports three key variables. First, it gives the distance between all districts in the same department. Second, it gives the travel time between all districts. Finally, it gives the transportation methods one needs for each trip. For example, Port-au-Prince is 95 km from Jacmel, and one can travel the entire distance

in a car in 3.0 hours; Cornillon, on the other hand, is only 63 km from Port-au-Prince, but one must use a mix of car and horseback, so the trip takes 7.5 hours. We calculate the market access variable using the travel times reported in this logistics table for τ_{ij} . To get the effect of the roads, we calculate a counterfactual market access variable that assumes there are no cars. Using the trips within a department that use only horseback, we calculate the average travel speed. Then we use that horseback speed and calculate the time it would take to travel the distance of each trip, giving us a counterfactual, no-car travel time. We then calculate the market access variable again using the counterfactual travel times.

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

The distributions of the true and counterfactual market access values are reported in Figure 5. Roads had the largest effect on the bottom half of the distribution. Many districts that would be relatively isolated because of long travel times on horseback became effectively closer to their neighboring districts through cars. The top of the distribution,

Figure 5. Market access distribution: true vs counterfactual



on the other hand, saw only a little change. As one would expect, the biggest markets were already close to other markets.

Schools

The other significant nation-building project was the expansion of schooling. The occupation pushed vocational education through rural farm schools. We use a 1929 report from the government department running the schools (Technical Service of the Department of Agriculture and Professional Education, 1929) to identify the location of 22 farm schools. We define treatment as an indicator for whether the district received a rural farm school.

We can also look at the expansion of non-occupation schools. We collect the total of number national urban, national rural, and Presbyterian schools, as well as enrollment and average attendance for two years of the occupation: 1922 (Commission on Education in Haiti, 1930) and 1931 (Haiti, 1932). The data's timing is convenient for using it to measure the shift in education during the occupation. While the 1922 numbers come 7 years into the American occupation, they represent the state of schools when the Americans switched their strategy from establishing stability to promoting development (Palsson, 2023). The 1931 data come at the same time that the intelligence report was collected, making it the most relevant for the opinions.

The non-farm schooling data were reported by school districts. Since we do not know the distribution of schools across political districts within each school district, we assign the school district numbers to each political district. For example, the 24 schools reported in the Saint Marc school district in 1931 are attributed to Saint Marc, and the same 24 are assigned to both La Chapelle and Verrettes.

Empirical Framework

We aim to understand the relationship that U.S. occupation officials could plausibly observe between their policies and local political sentiment. While modern policy evaluation often seeks causal effects, causal identification is not necessary for understanding how doctrine developed. Instead, we ask whether the Americans would have seen evidence that their state-building efforts were associated with greater support

for the occupation. We treat these associations not as proof of impact, but as the empirical patterns that could have informed their beliefs.

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

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

$Support_{id}$ is the support for the occupation by prominent citizen i in district d . We measure support as whether the intelligence report assesses the citizen as having anti-occupation or anti-government feelings, or if they are associated with parties that are anti-occupation. $Exposure_d$ is the treatment variable and measure’s district d ’s exposure to a nation-building policy. We investigate three policies: (1) counterinsurgency against the Kako camps; (2) road construction; and (3) schooling expansion. Since various factors influence whether someone opposes the occupation, we also include a series of demographic and district controls, X_{id} . The individual controls include the citizen’s age, education, and reported race. The district control is the log-distance to Les Cayes, the source of the 1929 massacre that made international news and hastened the end of the occupation. Since exposure is at the district level, and since there is a spatial correlation in where policies were located, all regressions use Conley standard errors, adjusting for spatial correlations within 20 km. The coefficient of interest is β_1 , the difference in anti-occupation sentiment between citizens living in districts more exposed to the policy and those living in districts

that were less exposed. Since the outcome is whether the individuals held anti-occupation sentiments, the policy would be considered a success if β_1 is negative.

While we are not interested in identifying a causal effect, there are two factors that would confound even the learning aspect of an observed correlation. First, the occupation may have placed projects according to pre-existing sentiment. It may have rewarded districts that already supported it, or it may have tried to garner support in areas where it was low. If such targeting occurred, officials would have known the correlation was not a sign of program success but an artefact of program design. Second, there is the concern that the occupation intelligence report did not reflect actual sentiments but instead was a piece of propaganda. There is evidence that the intelligence officers believed they had the support of individuals who were covertly working against the occupation's interests (Alexis, 2021, p. 124). If there was a correlation between projects and support, it may have been artificial. As in the first case, officials would have been aware of the factors driving the observed correlation and would not have learned from it.

We address these concerns with the 1918 constitutional referendum. The referendum was a vote to eliminate the ban on foreign property ownership, and the occupation pushed to guarantee the result. Ahead of the vote, it suspended its use of coerced labor and even sponsored local barbecues to garner support (Schmidt, 1971, p. 99). But it also threatened to arrest Haitians who publicly opposed the measure. This pressure was significant enough that it co-opted the local journalists, with articles

appearing the day after the election condemning the opposition as deserters and unpatriotic.¹ After the referendum, the National School of Medicine dismissed six of its professors for voting against the constitutional reform (Logan, 1930, p. 450).² Thus, it is not surprising that the official counts show that 99% of voters supported to amendment, with 72% of districts reporting no votes opposed.

We use district-level data from the election to measure pre-project sentiment. Since the occupation suppressed the opposition, the results do not measure the true feelings towards the occupation. But we argue there are two variables that still signal local feelings. First, the number of “yes” votes in each district, conditional on population, reflects the occupation’s ability to mobilize supporters. Second, the 28% of districts who registered at least one opposition vote show that there were locals with strong enough convictions against the occupation that they were willing to risk the threats of reprisal.

In Table 2, we examine the relationship between these two variables from the 1918 election and the outcomes and treatments in this paper. In the first column of the first panel, we show that there is a weak relationship between the 1918 votes and the 1934 anti-occupation sentiments. The coefficient on “yes” votes is positive, as we would expect, but it is not statistically significant. But the coefficient on any “no” votes is positive and statistically significant at the 10% level. Despite the election manipulation, the results

¹ *Le Matin*, 13 June 1918, “La Constitution Nationale”

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

Table 2. Pre-existing sentiment and project placement by district

	Anti- Occupation	Any Camps	$\Delta \ln(\text{MarketAccess})$	Any Farm Schools
$\ln(\text{Votes Yes})$	-0.04 [0.066]	0.004 [0.054]	0.16** [0.068]	0.051 [0.058]
Any No Votes	0.15* [0.081]	0.14 [0.12]	-0.58*** [0.15]	0.094 [0.10]
$\ln(\text{Population})$	0.03 [0.046]	-0.036 [0.063]	0.16 [0.10]	0.14*** [0.052]
N	100	100	100	100
	$\Delta \ln(\text{Schools})$	$\Delta \ln(\text{Enrollment})$	$\Delta \ln(\text{Attendance})$	
$\ln(\text{Votes Yes})$	0.056** [0.024]	0.092*** [0.033]	0.088** [0.040]	
Any No Votes	-0.026 [0.046]	-0.14* [0.075]	-0.15** [0.062]	
$\ln(\text{Population})$	0.048* [0.027]	0.077* [0.040]	0.14*** [0.038]	
N	100	100	100	

Notes: The level of observation is the district. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

have some information about local sentiment 16 years later. We do not find a relationship between the 1918 votes and the location of the kako camps where counterinsurgency operations would take place. But the remaining columns in Table 2 show that the “yes” votes predict more market access, schools, enrollment, and attendance, while the “no” votes predict less.

Thus, in addition to the baseline specification, we also estimate an augmented specification:

$$Support_{id} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Exposure_d + \beta_2 \ln(Yes\ Votes_d) + \beta_3 AnyNo_d + \Gamma X_{id} + \varepsilon_{id}.$$

This specification controls for the pre-project sentiment using the district-level 1918 election results. These controls for the pre-period should absorb the variation caused by project targeting, meaning the β_1 is a better approximation of what the occupation learned from the intelligence reports.

Results and Discussion

Counterinsurgency

Table 3 reports our results on responses to counterinsurgency operations. The dependent variable in each column is whether the individual had anti-occupation sentiments. The first column of the first panel shows that citizens in a district with any camps were 13.1 percentage points less likely to oppose the occupation. Table 1 shows the mean anti-occupation sentiment was 25%, so these individuals were 52% less likely to oppose the occupation. The difference is significant at the 10% level using Conley standard errors. Column 3 of Table 3 uses a Poisson regression and the number of kako camps in the district, with a similar negative coefficient. In columns 2 and 4, we control for the 1918 votes. The coefficient on the kako camp dummy increases by 15%, though the difference between the two coefficients is not statistically significant, and the coefficient itself is only significant at the 10% level.

While the results' statistical significance is only moderate, the size and direction are noteworthy. It is natural to think that the insurgents placed their camps in areas

Table 3. Relationship between insurgent locations and anti-occupation sentiment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Any Kako Camps	-0.131*	-0.146*		
	[0.0784]	[0.0763]		
Number of Kako Camps			-0.0144*	-0.0140*
			[0.00843]	[0.00836]
1918 Controls		X		X
N	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115
R ²	0.28	0.331	0.276	0.323

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

sympathetic to their cause. But the intelligence reports show that these areas were the less likely to have prominent citizens who opposed the occupation. There are a few interpretations of these results. First, the prominent citizens might not represent the average citizen. Second, since finding camps required the help of locals, the map might reveal where citizens were most sympathetic to the occupation. Finally, the citizens in these areas might secretly oppose the occupation but publicly support it to deter the Americans from further invasive actions.

Road Building and Economic Improvements

Table 4 reports the results from road building and the changes in market access. A one standard deviation increase in market access (0.72 log points) is associated with a 15 percentage point decrease in anti-occupation sentiment, significant at the 1% level.

Table 4. Market improvements and anti-occupation sentiment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
$\Delta \ln(\text{Market Access})$	-0.212*** [0.0798]	-0.155*** [0.0456]			-0.210*** [0.0768]	-0.155*** [0.0459]
Market-connected Profession			-0.0994* [0.0554]	-0.0922** [0.0433]	-0.0949** [0.0481]	-0.0926** [0.0433]
1918 Controls		X		X		X
N	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115
R ²	0.328	0.341	0.278	0.325	0.336	0.348

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

Column 2 controls for the 1918 referendum, which reduces the magnitude of the one-standard deviation increase to 11.1 percentage points decline in anti-occupation sentiment, consistent with the political targeting of the projects, but it is still significant at the 1% level. In column 3, we use the market-connected profession dummy. Individuals with a market-connected profession were 10 percentage points less likely to have anti-occupation sentiments, significant at the 10% level. The magnitude stays the same with the 1918 controls, though the precision increases, leading to statistically significant results at the 5% level. Since the two treatments could be related, we include both in columns 5 and 6, but the magnitudes and statistical significance all remain.

Table 5. Anti-occupation sentiment and schools

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Any Farm School	-0.21** [0.08]	-0.17*** [0.05]						
<u>Non-Farm Schools</u>								
$\Delta \ln(\text{Schools})$			-0.08 [0.19]	-0.04 [0.17]				
$\Delta \ln(\text{Enrollment})$					-0.05 [0.09]	-0.004 [0.105]		
$\Delta \ln(\text{Attendance})$							-0.17* [0.09]	-0.11 [0.08]
1918 Controls		X		X		X		X
N	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115	1,115
R ²	0.299	0.336	0.270	0.317	0.271	0.317	0.292	0.326

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

Schools

The schooling results are reported in Table 5. If a district received a rural farm school, citizens in that district were 21 percentage points less likely to oppose the occupation, significant at the 5% level. After controlling for the 1918 referendum, the coefficient shrinks to 17 percentage points, consistent with the targeting hypothesis, but it is still significant, this time at the 1% level.

The non-farm schools serve as a placebo test. Since the occupation focused on rural farm schools, changes in the non-farm schools should not be associated with occupation

Table 6. Assessing anti-occupation sentiment accounting for simultaneous implementation

	(1)	(2)
Any Kako Camps	-0.167** [0.0744]	-0.166** [0.0715]
$\Delta \ln(\text{Market Access})$	-0.200*** [0.0645]	-0.147*** [0.0465]
Any Farm School	-0.138** [0.0603]	-0.133*** [0.0509]
1918 Controls		X
N	1,115	1,115
R ²	0.36	0.37

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

sentiment. Indeed, whether we use the log-change in schools, enrollment, or attendance, we do not find a strong relationship between non-farm schools and anti-occupation sentiment. The only statistically significant result is the change in attendance, which is significant only at the 10% level. After we add the 1918 controls, the magnitudes for all regressions shrink and no results are significant at conventional levels.

Simultaneous Implementation

One concern about the empirical results is that statistically significant findings across all three projects may indicate that the implementation of the projects were correlated. It might have been easier to create a farm school in a district that had also

received improved roads. Thus, the separate regressions do not adequately control for the total package of projects the district received.

To address this concern, we run a specification that includes all three treatments. Table 6 reports the regression of anti-occupation sentiments on exposure to counterinsurgency, changes in market access, and access to rural farm schools. The results show that all three projects remain statistically significant, even when the 1918 controls are included. This is evidence that it was not the general characteristics of the district that were related to both receiving a project and being less opposed to the occupation but that each project held its own importance.

Discussion and Conclusion

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

Not only do the results contribute to the intellectual history of state-building in conflict and post-conflict countries, it helps us understand the role of process legitimacy and performance legitimacy in interventions. The US occupation of Haiti failed to establish process legitimacy: the Haitian presidents were widely seen as American puppets, and in

1918 the occupation dissolved the legislature and manipulated a plebiscite to amend the constitution. This paper suggests that the elite evaluated the occupation not on process but on performance.

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Appendix

To get the market-oriented professions, we used the following prompt:

For the following professions, rate them as either High or Low based on how important access to neighboring markets is for their success. If they are likely to produce goods or services that will then be traded to neighboring communities, rate them high. If they mostly produce for local businesses or consumers, rate them low. Assume everyone is self-employed.

[List of professions]