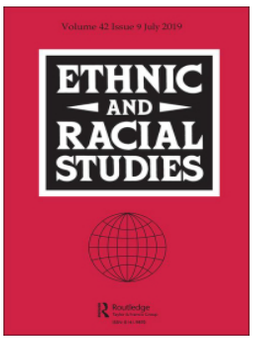

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Do natives prefer white immigrants? Evidence from Japan

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ABSTRACT

Does public support for immigration depend on race? One set of literature argues that natives focus on reaping economic benefits and prefer to admit high skilled immigrants. Yet, a second group of studies challenges the notion that natives evaluate skills in a race-neutral fashion. Recent qualitative work argues that natives socially construct the value of foreign workers' skills. Furthermore, recent experimental studies find that Americans and Europeans prefer immigrants from developed White-majority countries. Do these findings reflect a general preference for White immigrants which also shapes immigration attitudes in non-western countries? Our study explores this question using a survey experiment fielded in Japan at a time when that country was grappling with economic pressures to admit more immigrants. Consistent with the social construction of skills literature, we find that Japanese unevenly apply skill requirements to prospective immigrants based on nationality but that they do not necessarily prefer White immigrants.

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KEYWORDS Immigration; skills premium; social construction of skills; Japan; race and migration; survey experiments

Introduction

Does race play a role in public support for immigration? Several experimental political science studies have argued that natives prefer to admit high skilled immigrants irrespective of race (Valentino et al. 2019). According to this (skills premium) argument, public support for immigration is based on socio-tropic concerns about the capacity of foreign workers to benefit the local economy (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). This theory assumes that natives neutrally assess the economic value of immigrants' skills.

However, recent interdisciplinary work challenges the premise that natives objectively evaluate immigrants' skills (Liu-Farrer, Yeoh, and Baas 2021). According to these studies, native employers and state officials *socially construct* the

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value of immigrants' skills based on socio-cultural, political, and racial considerations (Ribeiro 2018; Walton-Roberts 2020). In this way, the social construction of skills literature implies that public support for immigration may depend on native attitudes toward specific groups, racial or otherwise.

Consistent with the social construction of skills literature, recent experimental studies find that Americans and Europeans prefer to admit immigrants from developed White-majority countries (Newman and Malhotra 2019; Ford and Mellon 2020). However, the current literature on public support for immigration is ambiguous on whether the preference for White immigrants is based on: (a) White natives' desire to admit co-ethnics (limited to White-majority countries); or (b) positive stereotypes about people of European descent that proliferate in many western and non-western contexts.

With the aim of testing the race neutral assumption underlying the skills premium argument in a non-western context, our study explores Japanese immigration attitudes. Japan is a crucial case when explaining why natives may support (or oppose) the admission of foreign workers. Since 1945, Japanese politicians have sought to prevent large-scale settlement migration (Strausz 2019). Though it continues to discourage low skilled foreign workers' settlement, the Japanese government has made it easier for high skilled immigrants to obtain visas and permanent residence with a new points-based system (Oishi 2021). Moreover, the Abe administration's 2018 reforms spurred public discussions of whether Japan should admit more immigrants to reap economic benefits. In other words, we explore immigration attitudes in a developed Asian country known for its relatively high degree of ethnic homogeneity during a time when it faces pressures to admit more foreign workers.

Our study complements qualitative work that theorizes and identifies natives' racialized assessment of immigrants' skills by using an experimental design to measure their causal effects. Specifically, we build on recent ethnographic studies that argue natives in East Asian countries view immigrants' skills through a racial lens based on an association between White racial identity and competence (Hof 2021; Iwata and Nemoto 2018). Drawing on analysis from a survey experiment, we find that Japanese unevenly apply skill requirements to prospective immigrants based on nationality but that they do not necessarily prefer White immigrants. In sum, our findings advance the notion that public support for immigration is based on natives' *subjective* evaluation of immigrants' skills.

The new debate on public attitudes towards immigration: race neutral or racially biased skill requirements?

For several years, scholars have used observational studies to explore public opposition to immigration. Much of this literature argues that natives tend to

view immigrants as economic or cultural threats. Economic threats include natives' fear of having to compete with foreign workers for jobs (Scheve and Slaughter 2001) and concerns that immigrants will adversely impact public services (Emmenegger and Klemmensen 2013). Cultural threats include fears that immigrants threaten natives' privileged socio-cultural status and/or will fundamentally change social norms within the host country (Ivarsflaten 2005). Indeed, several studies have shown that natives tend to prefer immigrants from culturally proximate source countries (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013).

With the proliferation of experimental studies, theorizing public attitudes toward immigration has evolved from the debate between economic and cultural anxieties toward a growing chorus of studies which argue that natives prefer highly skilled immigrants. Moving beyond vaguely worded survey questions, which may evoke context-specific images of and encounters with local immigrant populations, experiments allow researchers to manipulate individual-specific attributes. Several experimental studies argue native citizens across the developed world prefer to admit high skilled foreign workers because of the perceived benefits to the local economy also referred to as the skills premium argument (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Valentino et al. 2019).

Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) has led the way in articulating and presenting evidence for the skills premium argument. This ground-breaking study argues that there is a consensus on what types of immigrants should be admitted which transcends Americans' socio-economic status, ethnocentric attitudes, and political affiliation (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, 538–544). Hainmueller and Hopkins claim that when given the choice, natives tend to prefer well-educated and highly skilled immigrants from developed countries but show less support for admitting those from developing countries (538–540). Similarly, Valentino et al. (2019) tests the skills premium argument using a cross-national study (including settler societies and recent countries of immigration), it produces findings consistent with Hainmueller and Hopkins' but also shows that natives tend to discriminate against immigrants from Muslim-majority countries. While these studies highlight the importance of socio-tropic economic concerns, they also show that natives care to some degree about immigrants' ethno-cultural heritage.

Newman and Malhotra's 2019 study challenges the race neutral assumption underpinning the skills premium argument. Re-examining Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) results, Newman and Malhotra demonstrate that Americans seem to prefer immigrants that were the least likely to enter the US at the time the experiment was run—that is, well-educated and highly skilled immigrants from White-majority countries (Newman and Malhotra 2019, 155–156). Newman and Malhotra also re-analyze and replicate Hainmueller and Hopkins' findings to show that highly prejudiced Americans applied

high skill requirements to profiles of Mexican immigrants but no skill requirements to their counterparts from White-majority countries (159–160). Overall, Newman and Malhotra's analysis suggests that natives evaluate immigrants' skills subjectively.

The fact that Europe-focused studies have produced similar findings adds weight to Newman and Malhotra's (2019) argument. Ford and Mellon use an experimental design that asks respondents to rate their preference for admitting high or low skilled migrants from a European or non-western sending country (Ford and Mellon 2020, 6–8). Ultimately, Ford and Mellon's study finds that natives prefer to admit European foreign workers in several national contexts and apply higher skill requirements to non-European immigrants (2, 12-15). Furthermore, as Newman and Malhotra do, Ford and Mellon find that racial prejudice strongly predicts natives' propensity to select high skilled immigrants (Ford and Mellon 2020, 2, 15–17). In sum, recent studies suggest that natives of developed White-majority countries prefer to admit immigrants from other developed White-majority countries.

What remains less clear is whether the preference for White immigrants is limited to developed White-majority countries or reflects a larger trend. Do natives in non-western countries, where people of European descent would be considered visible minorities, prefer immigrants from developed White-majority countries? This hitherto unexplored question is worth considering because it helps scholars more closely examine implicit associations natives may make between immigrants' skills and ethnic or racial identity. Our study addresses this gap by investigating public attitudes toward immigrant selection in a developed non-western country, Japan.

A racially biased skills premium?

As outlined above, recent experimental studies have presented conflicting arguments about whether public support for immigration depends on race neutral or racially biased evaluations of immigrants' skills. In this section, we draw on qualitative studies that conceptualize notions of White racial identity to contribute to the theoretical debate on what influences public support for immigration. We focus on theorizing the preference for admitting White immigrants in non-western countries. Based on insights from migration studies and critical race theory, we hypothesize that natives in non-western countries may prefer to admit White immigrants because the former associate White racial identity with competence and intelligence.

As Newman and Malhotra do, we challenge the premise that natives evaluate immigrants' skills in an objective manner based solely on economic factors. Recent studies argue that receiving states and local employers socially construct skills, often considering immigrants' value based on their racial and national identities (Liu-Farrer, Yeoh, and Baas 2021). In addition

to meeting formal skill requirements imposed by state authorities who grant visas and employers who offer jobs, foreign workers must also navigate natives' assumptions about them and work to understand informal practices to secure employment (Ribeiro 2018; Walton-Roberts 2020). For instance, native employers may routinely demand that all employees begin at low level positions within their respective firms while they undergo in-house training while refusing to hire or promote foreign workers who acquired the same skills by completing a degree (Liu-Farrer and Shire 2021). Similarly, the fact that Japanese policymakers have recently expanded the legal definition of "skilled" migration to include immigrants without tertiary educations to fill domestic labour shortages illustrates how skill requirements reflect ongoing negotiations between different societal actors (Oishi 2021).

If local state officials and employers tend to view immigrants' skills subjectively, it is reasonable to assume that the wider public does so as well. Given that natives' support for immigration depends on their views of specific immigrant groups (Konitzer et al. 2019), we argue that support for admitting immigrants of European descent in non-western countries can be explained by notions of racial hierarchy. We acknowledge that natives' preference for White immigrants in developed White-majority countries may reflect a preference for admitting co-ethnics. We theorize that natives in non-western countries who support immigration from such countries do so because they associate White racial identity with competence and intelligence. This racially biased skills premium argument is based on the premise that, as critical race theorists have argued, ethnic Europeans or White people may benefit from a kind of unearned status that manifests in social privileges rooted in racist beliefs and practices (McIntosh 1989; Garner 2007; Nayak 2007). In this sense, White racial identity may provide social and economic benefits to those who embody it, including those who pursue employment opportunities abroad reflecting underlying racist beliefs shared by state officials, employers, and the wider public.

Several qualitative studies have explored how White foreign workers may benefit from unearned privileges in Asian countries attributing them to natives' racist beliefs. Some of these studies rely on interviews with White immigrants who reflect on how they have received positive or even special treatment while living abroad (Lundström 2014; Hof 2021). Other studies provide more direct evidence that Asians prefer White immigrants. Iwata and Nemoto (2018) illustrates how White immigrants benefit from locals' racist beliefs (associating competence and intelligence with White racial identity) by analyzing in-depth interviews with Japanese adults. Similarly, Rivers and Ross (2013) uses a survey experiment to show that Japanese ESL students tend to prefer White teachers, which suggests that the former view the latter as most competent. Collectively, these studies imply that positive images of White people influence public attitudes toward immigration in non-western contexts.

Building on the insights of previous studies, we hypothesize that natives in a developed Asian country like Japan are likely to prefer White immigrants because of deeply embedded beliefs that people of European descent are innately intelligent and highly capable. This preference for White immigrants does not contradict existing conceptions of Japanese ethno-nationalism which often manifests in beliefs that Japan's ethno-cultural homogeneity plays a key role in that country's postwar social stability and economic growth (Strausz 2019) and/or animosity toward Chinese and Koreans based on historical grievances (Kobayashi et al. 2015). Furthermore, the affinity for White immigrants is consistent with recent studies that show Japanese are far more likely to support immigration from East and West European countries than from other East Asian countries such as China or South Korea (Kage, Rosenbluth, and Tanaka 2021). We test the race neutral skills premium argument against this racially biased variant using a survey experiment that manipulates different attributes including but not limited to nationality and skill level (discussed below). Applying this method, our analysis explores whether Japanese would apply skill requirements equally to prospective immigrants from all nationalities (as predicted by the skills premium argument), or if they would prefer to admit immigrants from developed White-majority countries (consistent with the racially biased variant).

Our analysis is guided by two opposing hypotheses. If natives evaluate immigrants' skills in a race neutral manner, Japanese respondents will prefer to admit all high skilled immigrants regardless of their nationality (H1). This means we should observe a direct correlation between immigrants' skill level and their likelihood of being preferred for admission. If natives evaluate immigrants' skills based on a preference for ethnic Europeans, Japanese respondents will confer a lower skill requirement on immigrants from developed White-majority countries while maintaining a higher skill requirement for immigrants from non-western countries (H2). In essence, we should observe a strong correlation between immigrants' nationality and their likelihood of being preferred for admission.

H1. Japanese citizens will apply a higher skill requirement to immigrants *regardless* of source country.

H2. Japanese citizens will apply a lower skill requirement to immigrants from developed White-majority countries but apply a higher skill requirement to immigrants from developing non-western countries.

The Japanese case and its importance

Our study focuses on Japan to advance theorizing on public support for immigration as well as address an empirical gap. First, Japan has a strict

immigration policy legacy but currently faces pressures to admit larger numbers of foreign workers. In this sense, exploring Japanese public attitudes allows us to investigate a crucial case for the (race neutral) skills premium argument. Second, Japan is a non-western country. Studying Japan enables us to test whether preferences to admit immigrants from developed White-majority countries extends to non-western countries where White immigrants would be in the racial minority. Finally, it is noteworthy that our study also fills an empirical gap by investigating Japanese immigration attitudes. To date, there are no studies that compare Japanese public support for admitting immigrants from specific developed White-majority and developing non-western countries where natives are presumed to be people of colour.

Known for its relatively high degree of ethnic homogeneity, Japan has a history of imposing barriers to settler migration (Flowers 2009). For many decades, most foreign residents were phenotypically similar to Japanese such as Koreans, Chinese, and ethnic Japanese from Latin America referred to as *nikkeijin* (Chung 2010). Scholars have argued this strict policy legacy can be explained by a widely held view that Japan's social cohesion and economic prosperity depend on limiting ethno-cultural diversity (Strausz 2019). While much of this strict policy legacy endures, facing a rapidly ageing population and labour shortages, the Japanese government has recently introduced reforms that will significantly increase the number of short-term foreign workers and make it easier for highly skilled workers to settle (discussed in detail below). These reforms have triggered public discussion of Japan's future as a country that hosts phenotypically and culturally distinct immigrants (Deguchi 2018).

To grasp the significance of Japan's recent immigration reforms, it is important to understand that country's complicated history with immigration. Since the development of a modern Japanese state, Japan has periodically relied on admitting foreign workers to help it meet labour shortages. Prior to its democratization after the Second World War, much of this labour came from neighbouring Asian countries including mainland China, Taiwan, and Korea (Morris-Suzuki 2010). After 1945, Japanese firms pursued alternatives to hiring foreign workers and the government imposed strict immigration policies (Strausz 2019, 2–3). Based around several categories of short-term renewable visas, Japan's immigration system has limited settler migration and, until recently, denied direct entry to those lacking tertiary education officially referred to as "unskilled" foreign workers (Akashi 2014). Policymakers made exceptions for Japan's former colonial subjects and *nikkeijin* by granting them special visas that allowed for long-term stays and settlement, but Japanese postwar immigration policy has emphasized the rotation of foreign workers (Tian and Chung 2018). Until the 2010s, Japan's strict immigration policy legacy effectively prevented large numbers of

foreign workers from settling with exceptions made for phenotypically similar immigrant populations.

Japan introduced reforms during the 2010s that have led to academic and public speculation about whether the country will accept settlement migration in the future (Hollifield and Orlando Sharpe 2017; Tian and Chung 2018). We identify two major policy changes. The first set of reforms were intended to attract workers with advanced skills and training. Though high skilled migrants seeking to work in Japan have never been subject to quotas or market tests, the Japanese government has introduced a series of measures to attract more foreign academics, engineers, ICT (information and communication technology) workers as well as business managers and executives (Oishi 2014). In 2012, these changes culminated in the creation of a points system intended to make it easier for high skilled foreign workers to settle in Japan.

The second set of reforms Japan introduced were designed to attract workers with essential skills but who may not possess tertiary educations. In December 2018, the Abe administration revised the Immigration Control and Refugee Protection Act to create new visa categories for foreign workers with skills required to fill jobs in a variety of manufacturing and service industries (Oishi 2021). This second reform is significant because it expands the legal definition of "skilled" migration allowing foreign workers in 74 job categories working in specific sectors without tertiary educations to stay in Japan for longer periods of time, though barriers to family reunification and settlement remain (Immigration Bureau of Japan, Ministry of Justice and Human Resources Development Bureau, Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 2017; Osaki 2018). In this sense, contemporary Japan is an important case because it allows us to test the (race neutral) skills premium argument in a setting where policymakers have credibly committed to admitting immigrants largely for economic reasons.

To date, few studies have explored Japanese public attitudes toward immigrant selection. Existing studies of Japanese immigration attitudes have tended to focus on phenotypically similar immigrant populations and suggest that Japanese do not view these groups favourably. For instance, Nagayoshi (2008) and (2009) both find that Japanese who live near larger immigrant communities (Brazilian *nikkeijin* and Korean) tend to have negative feelings towards immigrants. Similarly, Okada (2011) finds evidence that Japanese tend to view Chinese immigrants more negatively as compared with migrants from other countries. Furthermore, Green (2017) shows that Japanese who live in regions with larger Brazilian *nikkeijin* and Korean communities are more likely to oppose immigration. These quantitative studies are complemented by qualitative studies that show political elites have viewed co-ethnic foreign workers (*nikkeijin* from Latin America) as a potential security threat and do not necessarily welcome their long-term settlement in

Japan (Sharpe 2014; Kalicki 2019). Collectively, these studies provide important insights into how the Japanese public views immigration. However, it is important to draw a distinction between older immigrant populations, such as former colonial subjects and *nikkeijin*, who came to Japan under special circumstances and newer immigrant groups who typically enter the country on a short-term basis.

Multiple experimental studies suggest that Japanese prefer to admit high skilled immigrants, but most of this work focuses on attitudes toward immigrants from developing countries. Kobayashi et al. (2015) finds that Japanese tend to prefer high skilled immigrants when considering who should be awarded citizenship. Similarly, Valentino et al. (2019) and Peters et al. (2019) use experiments to show that Japanese apply skill requirements to immigrants from non-western countries. Kage, Rosenbluth, and Tanaka (2021) compares public support for immigration from East and Southeast Asia as well as Western and Eastern Europe. While valuable, most of the existing studies on Japanese immigration attitudes are based on surveys run several years before Japan's 2018 immigration reforms were being considered or came into effect. Furthermore, unlike Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015), none of these studies allow respondents to compare individual profiles of immigrants from specific White-majority against those from non-western countries. Our study addresses these gaps.

Experimental design

Our study employs a modified Japanese language version of the experiment featured in Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015 study of American attitudes toward immigration (see Tables 1 and 2). Using a choice-based conjoint design, Hainmueller and Hopkins' experiment asks respondents to imagine that they are immigration officers who must choose to admit one of two immigrant profiles to the US (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, 533–535). The experiment includes nine separate attributes that are randomly assigned to each

Table 1. Example of immigrant profile.

Imagine that you are tasked with deciding whether or not to allow the following person to come to Japan. Would you allow this person to enter Japan?
Low skilled worker (for example, a labourer, cleaner, or farm worker)
(from) Syria
(coming to Japan for) short-term work
who has applied for a visa before
1 = I would permit entry (ACCEPT) 0 = I would *not* permit entry (REJECT)

Table 2. Randomly assigned attributes of immigrant profiles.

Attribute	Level (wordings in the vignette)
HISTORY	has applied for a visa before
	has not applied for a visa before
NATIONALITY	(from) Australia
	(from) China
	(from) Malaysia
	(from) The Philippines
	(from) Syria
SKILLS	High skilled worker (for example, a software engineer, a doctor, or university professor)
	Medium skilled worker (for example, a nurse, auto-mechanic, or office worker)
	Low skilled worker (for example, a labourer, a cleaner, or farm worker)
VISA	(coming to Japan for) short-term work
	(coming to Japan to) claim asylum
	(coming to Japan to) study
	(coming to Japan to) settle

profile including: gender; education; language ability; source country; profession; job experience; job plans; reason for coming to the US; and prior trips to the US. Recognizing person-positivity bias as a limitation of Hainmueller and Hopkins' research design (Kobayashi et al. 2015), experimental designs that manipulate the identity of groups run the risk of producing measurements that cannot disentangle specific immigrant attributes that may be correlated with one another such as nationality, (perceived) skill-level, and reason for migration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, 533). In this way, Hainmueller and Hopkins' choice-based conjoint design is innovative because it allows respondents to compare different immigrant profiles enabling researchers to isolate the effects of individual-specific attributes. As discussed below, we adopted a modified version of Hainmueller and Hopkins' experiment.

For the purposes of our study, we address two major issues with Hainmueller and Hopkins' choice-based immigrant selection conjoint here. First, their design configures the main dependent variable in such a way that respondents must accept at least one immigrant profile. By asking respondents to choose one of two profiles, the experimental design makes it harder for respondents to express their preference to admit no immigrants. To address this, our design allows respondents to accept or reject individual profiles of hypothetical immigrants. Specifically, respondents were asked to determine whether they would permit the hypothetical immigrant to enter the country or not. Given the fact that our study tests public attitudes in a country with a restrictive immigration policy legacy and a smaller immigration population (roughly two percent of Japan's population) we believe that this modification is justified.

The second methodological challenge we faced is determining baseline categories for conducting analysis, a challenge common to conjoint survey experiments. Hainmueller and Hopkins' study assesses respondents' preferences by calculating the average marginal component effects (AMCEs). Yet,

subsequent studies have shown that with large numbers of values for each attribute, the baseline values used to conduct analysis were chosen arbitrarily leading to imprecise and potentially misleading interpretations of the experiment's results (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020; Clayton, Ferwerda, and Horiuchi 2020). To minimise the issues of baseline arbitrariness in estimating average marginal component effects (henceforth, AMCEs), we use a smaller number of attributes with fewer categories. The trade-off here is that our design provides less detail than it might otherwise had we included more attributes and/or values, but the advantage is that we are able to maximise statistical power and avoid complex interpretation issues.

We also modified the values of randomly assigned attributes to reflect what is plausible in the Japanese context. As alluded to above, our study recognizes the ways in which Japan's older immigrant populations influence Japanese public opinion but focuses on newer immigrants who usually enter the country on short-term visas for theoretical and empirical reasons discussed above. When designing our experiment, we consulted the 2017 Immigration Bureau's statistics. Moreover, we conducted interviews with Immigration Bureau officials in the fall of that year to ensure that our experiment reflected Japan's contemporary immigration trends.

Immigration Bureau statistics show that most of the immigrants who arrive in Japan come for work on short-term visas with a majority coming from China and Southeast Asia (Immigration Bureau 2017). Chinese comprise the largest group of foreign nationals residing in Japan since 2007 (Immigration Bureau 2017). In addition to the numerous categories of work visas, the Japanese government has also created multiple visas that have allowed local businesses to recruit both high and low skilled labour (Author interview with senior Immigration Bureau Officials 1 and 2, November 27, 2017, Tokyo, Japan). Most notable among these is the Technical Intern and Trainee Program, which has been used to recruit tens of thousands of low-skilled workers (Chung 2014). By contrast, Japanese immigration policy makes family reunification quite difficult (Seol and Skrentny 2009). Finally, unlike countries with a long history of immigration such as the US, Japan does not have a large population of immigrants who entered the country illegally.

Given the nature of the Japanese immigration system, our design does not include the category for job plans because most visas are tied to work. Our design uses a modified version of the prior trips attribute because of Japan's strict policy towards illegal immigration, and because it requires most immigrants to enter the country on pre-approved visas except for refugees who may be issued temporary visas and tourists from select developed countries (Author interview with senior Immigration Bureau officials 1 and 2, November 27, 2017, Tokyo, Japan). Rather than including a variable for prior trips to Japan, we included a variable that separates immigrants who have

applied for a visa before from those without any experience with the Japanese immigration system (HISTORY). In our survey, this variable appears in a dichotomous form as "New Applicant" or "Repeat Applicant" (Table 1).

Moreover, we chose to randomly assign common types of visas to capture the purpose of migration (VISA). In our survey, we include four types of visa categories that represent most people who came to Japan as immigrants in the 2010s such as students ("Study"), foreign workers on short-term visas ("Short-Term Work"), and asylum-seekers ("Claim Asylum") (Japanese Immigration Bureau 2017). We also created an attribute to serve as a proxy for permanent residency ("Settle"). We referred to this last attribute as settlement as opposed to long-term work because of recent policy reforms (which later came into effect, but which Japanese policymakers were considering at the time) that allow foreign workers in certain sectors to reside in Japan for long periods of time (see above). In other words, we wanted respondents to associate this last visa category with settlement in Japan.[1] In effect, this modification of the immigrant's purpose of trip allows us to test Japanese public attitudes towards short- and long-term, as well as economic and humanitarian migrants in a similar manner to that of Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) experiment.

We selected a small number of source countries (NATIONALITY) based on two criteria. Following Newman and Malhotra's (2019) design, we included a developed White-majority country that has sent a considerable number of foreign students and workers to Japan (Australia) and several developing non-western countries. Based on a review of the Immigration Bureau's statistics for 2017 and interviews with Immigration Bureau officials, we selected China and the Philippines as both are major sending countries in terms of students, foreign workers, and asylum-seekers (Japanese Immigration Bureau 2017; Author interview with senior Immigration Bureau officials 1 and 2, November 27, 2017, Tokyo, Japan). Moreover, we included Muslim-majority countries, one which Japanese authorities recognize as a legitimate refugee-sending country (Syria) and one deemed by them to be safe, but which has a history of sending immigrants to Japan (Malaysia) (Japanese Immigration Bureau 2017; Author interview with senior Immigration Bureau officials 1 and 2, November 27, 2017, Tokyo, Japan).

Given the nature of our experiment, it is worth considering source countries we chose to exclude. First, we could have included the US as a stand-in for developed White-majority countries. Yet, because of its complex relationship with Japan, such a move would have run the risk of conflating respondents' views of US foreign policy with individual-specific traits. Second, we could have varied wealth among the White-majority source countries in our study. Toward this end, we could have included a poor East European country in our study, such as Albania. We agree this would have made sense if we ran our experiment in a context where

natives recognize East Europeans as a prominent immigrant population. Yet, this is not so in Japan because very few East Europeans immigrate to that country. Moreover, recent studies suggest that Japanese respondents would not have drawn a significant distinction between immigrant profiles from Eastern Europe and other White-majority countries (Zorko and Debnár 2021; Kage, Rosenbluth, and Tanaka 2021).

Third, it would have been ideal to include a source country with a similar culture to that of Japan such as Taiwan or South Korea. However, because Japan has large populations of former colonial subjects whose ancestors came from these countries, it would have been difficult to distinguish Taiwanese and Koreans who have grown up in Japan from newer immigrants who technically share the same national identity as these older immigrant populations but who have completely different ties to Japan. Due to our focus on newer immigrant populations recognizable to Japanese and in the interest of reducing potential confounding factors, we chose to exclude these three sets of source countries from our study (Table 2).

We used a single variable to capture skill-level (SKILLS). Our design operationalizes work experience in the immigrant's home country as skill-level. This attribute provided respondents with clear categories of high, medium, and low skilled migrants by listing examples of job categories that fit each skill-level in parenthesis. We identified professions that are characterized by manual labour as low skilled (a labourer, cleaner, or farm worker); those professions which require some formal training or a college degree as medium skilled (a nurse, auto-mechanic, or office worker); and professions that require advanced training or graduate degrees as high skilled (software engineer, doctor, university professor). This operationalization of skill-level allows us to maximise statistical power as well as preserve the nuance of skill-levels that Hainmueller and Hopkins include in their experiment.

In summary, our rating-based conjoint design consists of a dichotomous dependent variable (ACCEPT), and four migrant-specific attributes namely, HISTORY (2 values), NATIONALITY (5 values), SKILLS (3 values), and VISA (4 values). Overall, our rating-based conjoint design uses a relatively simple factorial design ($2 \times 4 \times 3 \times 5$) that yields 120 possible combinations. Because our study only randomized four types of immigrant attributes, we are unable to measure the effects of other traits, such as the Japanese language ability, education, or family situation of immigrants who may apply for a visa. However, the trade-off is that by restricting the number of immigrant characteristics we can observe the effects of all attributes as all possible combinations are observed in the data. This design varies all possible combinations of attributes on the same scale thereby allowing us to compare the relative importance of each attribute. In this way, our experiment was crafted to minimise the risk of encountering significantly different AMCE results by shifting the baseline value of a given attribute.

Our study uses a combination of the cjoint and cregg R packages to estimate marginal means (henceforth MMs) and AMCEs for our experiment followed by a series of logistic regression (logit) models–standard practice for conjoint analysis. Moreover, we follow the advice of Leeper and colleagues to check the validity of experimental results by including respondent attributes as a robustness check (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020). First, we calculated and compared the MMs and AMCEs using our main treatments (HISTORY, NATIONALITY, SKILLS, VISA). These results are presented in Figures 1–3 and Tables 4 and 5 (see below). For our purposes, the MMs give us a descriptive reference point for respondents' admission rates. Second, we compare two AMCE models, with and without interaction effects between NATIONALITY and SKILLS. Third, we also checked the results of our AMCE models using four logit models to validate our results and provide a more thorough exploration of our findings. Following the advice of Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, we validate our hypothesis by examining congruency of results using AMCE models that focus on responses to experimental treatments and logit models that include and exclude respondent attributes (with non-standardized coefficients). The first logit model is identical to the first AMCE model and the third logit model matches the second AMCE model, while the second and fourth logit models include respondent attributes (see Tables 4 and 5 below).

Sample and respondent attributes

Our sample was drawn from Macromill, a Japanese survey company that maintains opt-in online panels of samples that approximate the Japanese adult population (see Table 3). Macromill compensates survey participants with points that they can redeem for coupons or cash. A key limitation of Macromill's sample is that it relies solely on quota-based sampling through online panels. As such, our sample is biased in that it cannot reach people outside of existing online panels. Despite this bias, it should be recognized that using online samples has become common practice within the social sciences and that most Japanese have internet access.

Our results are based upon a single wave study which includes 1034 respondents who filled out our Japanese language survey online via computer or mobile device from March 19-20, 2018. All participants encountered the conjoint at the end of the survey and completed one iteration of the question. As Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) does, our study controls for respondents' age, sex, geographic location, socio-economic status, political views, and likelihood of holding prejudiced attitudes towards people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds. We measure socio-economic status by household income, which has been matched with 2017 Japanese census data (Official Statistics of Japan (e-Stat) 2018) using weights.

Table 3. Respondent attributes.

Attributes		Respondents	Approximate Share of Sample
Sex	Men	517	0.5
	Women	517	0.5
Weighted Household Income	More Than 20 Million Yen	8	0.007
	15–20 Million Yen	13	0.013
	10–15 Million Yen	77	0.07
	8–10 Million Yen	85	0.08
	6–8 Million Yen	125	0.12
	4–6 Million Yen	217	0.21
	2–4 Million Yen	196	0.2
	Less Than 2 Million Yen	73	0.07
	Unknown	240	0.23
Old/Young	Younger	505	0.49
	Older	529	0.51
Urban/Rural	More Rural	506	0.49
	More Urban	528	0.51
Prejudice	Older and Rural	252	0.24
	Older and Urban	277	0.27
	Younger and Rural	254	0.25
	Younger and Urban	251	0.24
Trust in Government	1 = Very confident	21	0.02
	2 = Somewhat confident	350	0.34
	3 = Not very confident	509	0.49
	4 = Not at all confident	154	0.15
Trust in Immigration Policy	1 = Very confident	12	0.01
	2 = Somewhat confident	276	0.27
	3 = Not very confident	559	0.54
	4 = Not at all confident	187	0.18
Political Stance	1 = Conservative	152	0.15
	2 = Right-Leaning	324	0.31
	3 = Centrist	406	0.39
	4 = Left-Leaning	121	0.12
	5 = Progressive	31	0.03

Furthermore, weights based on census data were used to ensure that age, sex, and geographic location captured in our sample approximates the Japanese adult population. Through a combination of Macromill's recruitment of respondents based on demographic quotas and our use of weights, our sample approximates a representative sample of Japanese adults (Table 3).

To measure respondents' political views, we asked three questions. First, we asked respondents to rate their trust in the government's handling of immigration. Second, we asked respondents to rate their overall trust in Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party-led coalition government. Both questions use a four-point scale (1 = strong trust, 2 = moderate trust, 3 = moderate distrust trust, 4 = low trust). The timing of this survey was several months after a national election which saw the LDP win a large majority of seats in the Lower House of the National Diet. At this time, the Abe government maintained an approval rating of roughly 40 percent (Harris 2018). Third, we adopted a metric of political stance used by the Japanese General Social

Survey that asks respondents to rate their political beliefs on a five-point scale with 1 as conservative and 5 as progressive (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research 2010). The advantage of using this five-point scale is that it allows us to get a more precise measure of respondents' political views in a way that does not depend on their support for any specific party. Considering that Japan's mixed member district electoral system tends to produce a lot of smaller opposition parties on the left and right, this combination of metrics provides us with a more nuanced measure of political stance than party affiliation.

Though our survey did not include a direct measure of respondents' likelihood of holding prejudiced attitudes, we use an indirect measure to compensate. Observational studies show that older Japanese tend to hold more negative views of foreigners, and that contact with Chinese immigrant communities makes Japanese natives more tolerant of immigrants (Green and Kadoya 2015; Green 2017), many of which are clustered in more urban prefectures. Hence, we assume that older Japanese who live in rural areas are more likely to hold xenophobic or racist attitudes while younger Japanese who live in urban areas are less likely to hold prejudicial views.

Based on this assumption, we measured prejudice indirectly by grouping together respondents aged 46 and older who live in more rural Japanese prefectures which we use as a proxy for high prejudice while grouping together respondents younger than 46 who live in more urban Japanese prefectures which we use as a proxy for low prejudice. Our cut-off point for distinguishing between old and young is because 46 was the average age of a Japanese adult according to 2017 census data. Using this method, we were able to subdivide our respondents into four groups that comprised roughly 25 percent of the full sample: younger and more urban (low prejudiced); younger and more rural; older and more urban; older and more rural (high prejudiced).

Results

To get a clear sense of respondents' preferences, we calculated the MMs of admission rates for HISTORY, NATIONALITY, and VISA by SKILLS as this would allow us to check the results of our AMCE models. Given that most foreign workers have come to Japan on temporary work visas we chose "Short-Term Work" as a baseline setting for VISA. As our focus is on testing whether natives conditionally apply skill premiums to immigrants from developing non-western countries we have set "High Skilled," and "Australian," as the baseline settings for SKILLS and NATIONALITY. Finally, we selected "New Applicant," as the baseline category for HISTORY.

Overall, as shown in Figure 1, more than half of our respondents chose to admit the randomly generated immigrant profile they encountered (59 percent). When comparing our experiment's unadjusted MMs and AMCEs,

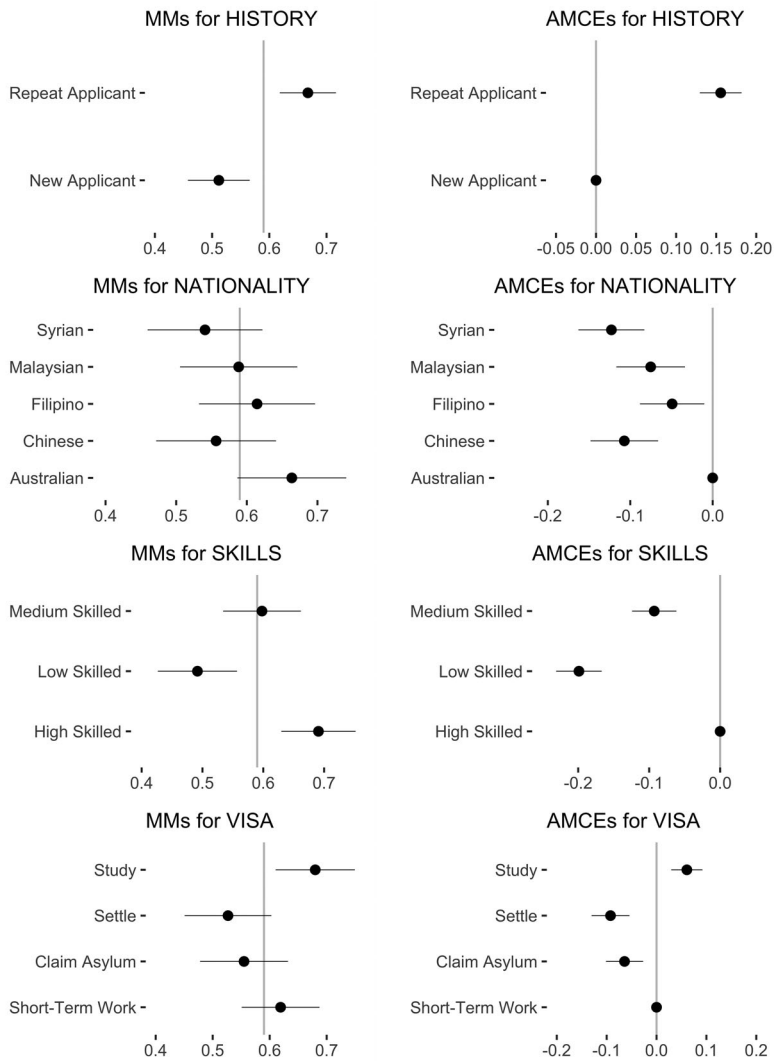

Figure 1. Marginal Means (MMs) and Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs). Note: All panels are based on the same non-parametric model in which only randomly assigned attributes are used.

we found that Japanese respondents seemed to express the strongest preferences on immigrants' skill-level, nationality, and experience applying for visas to come to Japan. By contrast, our study found that respondents had more ambiguous views on visa type. Though respondents expressed a slight preference for immigrants coming to Japan as students (69 percent admitted), it was not statistically significant in any of the four logistic regression models (see Tables 4 and 5). Settler migrants had the lowest admission rate of any

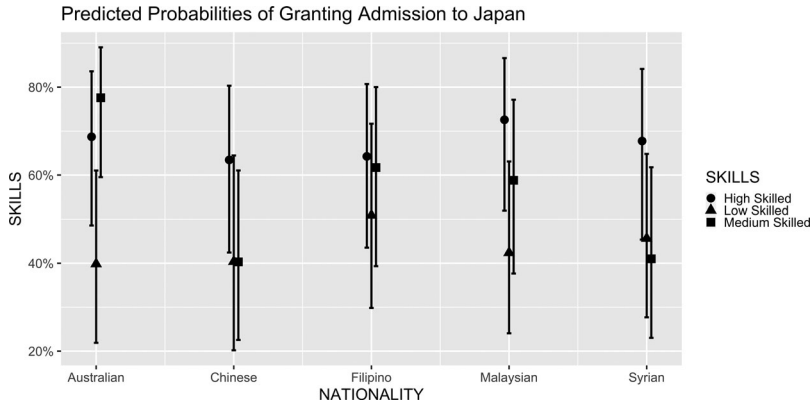

Figure 2. Predicted probability of admission by SKILLS.

visa category (53 percent), but this visa category was not statistically significant in logistic regression models including respondent attributes. Finally, we found that respondents who identified as politically conservative or who expressed low confidence in Japan's immigration policy were significantly less likely to admit immigrants.

Turning our attention to causal analysis, we found that respondents routinely applied skill requirements when assessing immigrant profiles. Consistent with H1, respondents expressed a clear preference for admitting higher skilled immigrants. Respondents admitted about 70 percent of high skilled immigrants (see Figure 1). Moreover, all models predict that respondents were likely to reject low skilled immigrants, along with respondents' propensity to admit repeat applicants, this is one of the most significant findings in our analysis. At first glance, these our findings are consistent with the (race neutral) skills premium argument, but further analysis demonstrates that respondents did not confer skill requirements equally.

Upon closer inspection, however, our results suggest that the Japanese public prefers immigrants from developed White-majority countries relative to immigrants from some but not all developing non-western countries. When we examine the unadjusted marginal means and the results of our primary AMCE model (see Figure 1) we observe that respondents applied a skill premium, but they did not apply it consistently. Low skilled immigrants had the lowest admission rate (49 percent) followed by those filing new visa applications (51 percent) and Syrians (54 percent), all of which were (negatively) statistically significant in every AMCE and logit model (see Tables 4 and 5). The first AMCE model as well as the first and second logit models show that respondents were significantly less likely to admit Chinese and Syrians relative to Australians. When examining interaction effects between NATIONALITY and SKILLS in the second AMCE model as well as the third

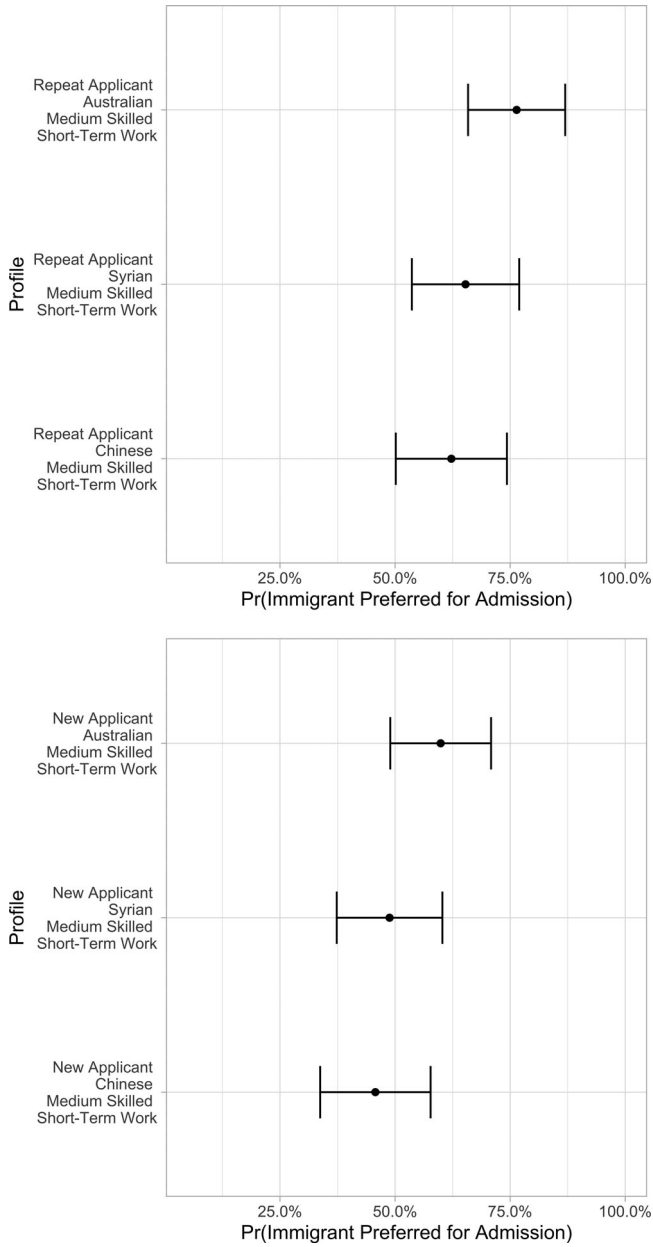

Figure 3. a and b. Select immigrant profiles' likelihood of admission.

and fourth logit models, we observe that respondents were even less likely to admit medium skilled Chinese (see Figures 2 and 3, Tables 4 and 5). If we compare these results to the MMs, we also find that respondents applied considerably stricter skill requirements to Chinese and Syrians than they did to

Table 4. Marginal effects of randomly assigned immigrant attributes.

	Dependent Variable: Permit Entry to Japan					
	AMCE Models		Logit Models			
	1	2	1	2	3	4
NATIONALITY *(ref: Australian)*						
Chinese	−0.14* (0.06)	−0.13* (0.06)	−0.64** (0.21)	−0.66** (0.22)	−0.24 (0.36)	−0.24 (0.37)
Filipino	−0.06 (0.06)	−0.05 (0.06)	−0.27 (0.21)	−0.20 (0.22)	−0.37 (0.35)	−0.20 (0.36)
Malaysian	−0.05 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.06)	−0.21 (0.21)	−0.24 (0.21)	0.17 (0.40)	0.20 (0.41)
Syrian	−0.11* (0.06)	−0.11* (0.06)	−0.50* (0.20)	−0.47* (0.21)	−0.21 (0.39)	−0.04 (0.41)
VISA *(ref: Short-Term Work)*						
Claim Asylum	−0.06 (0.05)	−0.05 (0.05)	−0.27 (0.19)	−0.24 (0.19)	−0.24 (0.19)	−0.21 (0.19)
Settle	−0.09 (0.05)	−0.08 (0.05)	−0.40* (0.18)	−0.32 (0.19)	−0.38* (0.19)	−0.31 (0.19)
Study	0.07 (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	0.30 (0.19)	0.31 (0.20)	0.38 (0.20)	0.40 (0.21)
HISTORY *(ref: New Applicant)*						
Repeat Applicant	0.17*** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.73*** (0.13)	0.70*** (0.14)	0.72*** (0.13)	0.70*** (0.14)
SKILLS *(ref: High Skilled)*						
Low Skilled	−0.20*** (0.04)	−0.20*** (0.04)	−0.89*** (0.17)	−1.0*** (0.17)	−1.14** (0.36)	−1.20*** (0.37)
Medium Skilled	−0.10* (0.04)	−0.10* (0.04)	−0.45** (0.16)	−0.46** (0.17)	0.37 (0.38)	0.46 (0.39)
Interaction Effects *(ref: High Skilled x Australian)*						
Low Skilled x Chinese	—	0.04 (0.14)	—	—	0.19 (0.55)	0.26 (0.53)
Low Skilled x Filipino	—	0.18 (0.14)	—	—	0.80 (0.51)	0.65 (0.53)
Low Skilled x Malaysian	—	−0.02 (0.13)	—	—	−0.08 (0.52)	−0.08 (0.53)
Low Skilled x Syrian	—	0.08 (0.15)	—	—	0.36 (0.51)	0.28 (0.53)
Medium Skilled x Chinese	—	−0.29** (0.13)	—	—	−1.35** (0.51)	−1.40** (0.52)
Medium Skilled x Filipino	—	−0.09 (0.13)	—	—	−0.46 (0.53)	−0.56 (0.54)
Medium Skilled x Malaysian	—	−0.20 (0.13)	—	—	−0.99 (0.54)	−1.07 (0.56)
Medium Skilled x Syrian	—	−0.28* (0.13)	—	—	−1.30* (0.54)	−1.56** (0.57)
Constant	—	—	0.88*** (0.21)	1.14* (0.39)	0.68* (0.30)	0.89* (0.44)
Observations	1034	1034	1034	1034	1034	1034

Note: standard errors displayed in brackets; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Marginal effects of respondent attributes.

	Dependent Variable: Permit Entry to Japan					
	AMCE Models		Logit Models			
	1	2	1	2	3	4
Sex *(ref: Men)*						
Women	—	—	—	0.05 (0.14)	—	0.06 (0.14)
Household Income *(ref:10-15 Million Yen)*						
< 20 Million Yen	—	—	—	0.70 (0.87)	—	1.01 (0.88)
15–20 Million Yen	—	—	—	0.04 (0.62)	—	0.00 (0.64)
8–10 Million Yen	—	—	—	−0.16 (0.37)	—	−0.16 (0.37)
6–8 Million Yen	—	—	—	−0.23 (0.33)	—	−0.18 (0.33)
4–6 Million Yen	—	—	—	−0.16 (0.31)	—	−0.11 (0.32)
2–4 Million Yen	—	—	—	−0.26 (0.30)	—	−0.22 (0.30)
> 2 Million Yen	—	—	—	−0.38 (0.31)	—	−0.31 (0.31)
Unknown	—	—	—	−0.27 (0.40)	—	−0.27 (0.41)
Prejudice *(ref: Older and Rural)*						
Older and Urban	—	—	—	−0.07 (0.19)	—	−0.09 (0.19)
Younger and Rural	—	—	—	0.19 (0.19)	—	0.20 (0.19)
Younger and Urban	—	—	—	−0.13 (0.20)	—	−0.10 (0.20)
Trust in Government (*ref: Not at all confident*)						
Very confident	—	—	—	−0.39 (0.51)	—	−0.54 (0.51)
Somewhat confident	—	—	—	0.15 (0.17)	—	0.12 (0.17)
Not very confident	—	—	—	0.04 (0.25)	—	0.00 (0.25)
Trust in Immigration Policy (*ref: Not at all confident*)						
Very confident	—	—	—	0.33 (0.77)	—	−0.40 (0.77)
Somewhat confident	—	—	—	−0.07 (0.18)	—	−0.07 (0.18)
Not very confident	—	—	—	0.56* (0.24)	—	−0.55* (0.24)
Political Stance *(ref: Centrist)*						
Progressive	—	—	—	0.62 (0.41)	—	0.54 (0.42)
Left-Leaning	—	—	—	0.48* (0.23)	—	0.41 (0.23)
Right-Leaning	—	—	—	0.17 (0.16)	—	0.11 (0.17)
Conservative	—	—	—	−0.74*** (0.21)	—	−0.83*** (0.22)
Constant	—	—	0.88*** (0.21)	1.14* (0.39)	0.68* (0.30)	0.89* (0.44)
Observations	1034	1034	1034	1034	1034	1034

Note: standard errors displayed in brackets; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

Malaysians and Filipinos. Thus, our findings are sufficient to reject the race neutral skills premium argument (H1), but only partially support the racially biased variant (H2) as we have operationalized it.

Concluding discussion

Much ink has been spilled over the question of what drives public support for immigration. Recent ethnographic and experimental studies have allowed scholars to develop more nuanced concepts and theories to explain the types of immigrants that natives prefer. A growing number of political science studies argue that natives prefer to admit high skilled immigrants and that public support for immigration is based largely on an economic cost–benefit analysis while conceding that public opposition is triggered by a range of factors including but not limited to racism. By contrast, recent developments in the migration studies literature highlight the ways

in which employers and receiving states socially construct skill requirements raising questions about whether public support for immigration is also based on arbitrary factors including but not limited to race and ethnicity. This second body of literature casts doubt on the argument that natives evaluate immigrants' skills objectively.

As Newman and Malhotra (2019) demonstrates, how natives evaluate prospective immigrants' skills reflects a combination of economic and ethno-cultural factors that are difficult to pull apart. On closer inspection, recent experimental studies suggest that natives in developed western countries prefer immigrants who are likely to be of European descent. Do natives in non-western immigrant receiving countries have similar preferences? This is an important question because it helps draw a distinction between preferences for co-ethnics and the effects of group-based stereotypes. In this article, we focused on addressing this question using analysis from a survey experiment fielded in Japan during a time when that country faces significant economic pressures to admit more foreign workers.

Our study produces two major findings that are consistent with the social construction of skills literature. First, our findings cast further doubt on the premise that natives support immigration purely for economic reasons. Relative to immigrants from Australia, the developed White-majority country included in our experimental design, we found that Japanese respondents were significantly less likely to admit Chinese and Syrians. We also found that natives were not likely to discriminate against Filipinos and Malaysians relative to Australians. These findings suggest that Japanese apply inconsistent skill requirements that are conditioned by prospective immigrants' ethnic or racial identity. Put differently, our analysis supports the proposition that public support for immigration is based on natives' *subjective* evaluation of immigrants' skills.

Second, our findings suggest that the preference for White immigrants is relative and may reflect deeply rooted animosity toward specific non-White immigrant populations who natives associate with negative stereotypes. We found that the Japanese respondents applied less stringent skill requirements when considering Filipino and Malaysians for admission implying that the former hold more ambiguous or even positive feelings toward these groups. Given that Chinese may be associated with historical grievances, territorial disputes, and China's authoritarian regime, it is likely that many respondents who participated in our study hold negative views toward Chinese. The situation is likely to be more complex when it comes to Syrians. On the one hand, our survey was run during the Syrian refugee crisis may have led some respondents to feel sympathy toward this group. On the other hand, the fact that respondents applied higher skill requirements to Syrians suggests that anxieties about cultural differences and/or negative stereotypes could have been present.

Unfortunately, a key limitation of this study is that our survey design did not allow us to gather direct information about respondents' views of specific nationalities included in our experiment. Another limitation is that respondents may have interpreted the "Settlement" visa category differently which may explain why we did not observe stronger opposition to settler migrant profiles. Despite these limitations, we interpret our findings to mean that the preference for White immigrants is based on notions of racial hierarchy and that natives instrumentally use higher skill requirements to justify their rejection of individuals who represent groups they view negatively.

Overall, our study suggests that natives' use of skill requirements to justify discrimination against immigrant populations they view negatively extends beyond developed White-majority countries. Our findings suggest that natives' tendency to discriminate against immigrants may be limited to groups associated with positive (or negative) stereotypes. Researchers should further investigate this trend by considering how public images of various immigrant populations create group-specific stereotypes. Moreover, future studies of public support for immigration should further test the skills premium argument by incorporating recent insights from the social construction of skills literature given its importance and relevance. Japan-specific studies should use qualitative and quantitative methods to compare public attitudes toward older and newer immigrant populations to help scholars develop a more nuanced understanding of how receptive Japanese are to settlement migration relative to specific immigrant populations.

Note

1. Given that our survey was translated into Japanese with the assistance of Macromill, which regularly fields surveys in Japan, we assume that respondents understand all visa categories. However, it is important to point out that for "Settle," category we used the word *ijuu* which can be interpreted as either "move to," or "immigrate to." We acknowledge this ambiguity in terminology is a limitation of our design.

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