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# Norms to be prejudiced: List experiments on attitudes towards immigrants in Japan

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## ABSTRACT

Are anti-prejudice norms against immigrants shared worldwide? Although previous studies found that prejudice against immigrants is considered socially undesirable, these studies were conducted exclusively in Western societies and we have little knowledge of the awareness of anti-prejudice norms against immigrants outside of these societies. We use the case of Japan, where people tend to believe that the society is ethnically homogeneous, expecting that this context-specific notion mitigates the awareness of anti-prejudice norms. We conducted two list experiments using online surveys and compared the answers to those of list experiments and direct questions about attitudes towards immigrants to reveal Japanese citizens' perceptions of norms. The results show that Japanese citizens attempt to show more negative attitudes upon direct questions than in list experiments, indicating that it is normative to express prejudice against immigrants rather than suppressing it. These results suggest anti-prejudice norms against immigrants are context-dependent and not universally shared.

## 1. Introduction

Although discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities is still a social issue, many countries have witnessed a decline in prejudice against them (Schuman et al., 1985; Coenders and Scheepers, 2008; Strom et al., 2017).<sup>1</sup> This decline is partly explained by the diffusion of anti-discrimination and anti-prejudice norms. People tend to follow anti-prejudice norms even when they are not in accordance with his/her actual beliefs, because violation of such norms often results in formal or informal sanctions (e.g., lowering their reputations). Using experimental methods, scholars have continuously shown that citizens are aware of anti-prejudice norms and attempt to suppress their negative attitudes towards immigrants in accordance with these norms (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman, and O'Brien, 2002; Zitek and Hebl, 2007; Janus, 2010; Creighton et al., 2019) in North American and Western European societies.

While we acknowledge the importance of these studies, previous research is almost exclusively focused on North American and Western European societies (but see Harris et al., 2018 as an important exception), which are characterized by large immigrant numbers, salience of immigrant issues, and diverse ethnic groups. Despite the limited focus, Beyer and Liebe (2015: 343), for example, stated that "in democratic societies the communication of prejudices and other forms of discriminatory behavior is considered socially undesirable". Contrary to their statement, however, we have little knowledge how aware people are about anti-prejudice norms against immigrants outside the North American and Western European contexts, specifically in less ethnically heterogeneous locations

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<sup>1</sup> However, the Netherlands has experienced the opposite trends (Thijs et al., 2018).

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where immigrant numbers are not high.

In such a context, we can expect two opposing possibilities. On one hand, according to norm diffusion schools (e.g., Meyer, 2010), norms are transferred across countries; thus, it is possible that anti-immigrant norms are shared among countries regardless of its history and salience regarding immigration and ethnic heterogeneity. Contrarily, norms can be context-dependent (e.g., De Franca and Monteiro, 2013; Álvarez-Benjumera and Winter 2020), and in a society that has a considerably smaller immigrant size and a more ethnically homogeneous population than those of the societies that previous studies examined, it is possible that different types of norm prevail (e.g., Knoll, 2013).

In this study, we use Japan as a case. Although Japan shares many economic and political features with North American and Western European societies, it is distinctive in terms of its immigrant population and history, ethnic diversity situation, and citizens' belief in ethnic homogeneity (e.g., Befu, 2001; Lie, 2001; Liu-Farrer, 2020). These environmental factors may allow Japanese people to not hide their negative attitudes towards immigrants. Alternatively, if norm diffusion is applicable, Japanese people should be motivated to hide their negative attitudes towards immigrants. As previous studies have been concentrated in Western contexts, experimental studies in Japan testing the prevalence of anti-prejudice against immigrants are rare.

To measure citizens' awareness of norms, we compare respondents' reactions to a list experiment and a direct question. List experiments are a useful method to maintain the anonymity of responses and to reveal trustworthy answers to sensitive questions (e.g., Coutts and Jann, 2011; Creighton and Jamal, 2015; Creighton et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2018; Li and van den Noortgate, 2019), whereas answers to direct questions are assumed to be influenced by social desirability, reflecting the norms that prevail in a society. By comparing the answers to a list experiment and to a direct question, we can measure the extent to which anti-prejudice norms, if any, prevail in Japan. To validate the results of the list experiment, we conduct two studies using different samples and different items in the list experiment at different times. In Study 1, we examine Japanese prejudice against immigrants without specifying ethnicity, whereas in Study 2, we specify the ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese and South Koreans, which are the largest immigrant groups) and attempt to replicate the results of Study 1.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Norms and possibility of diffusion

A norm refers to a "standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given society" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891). Because violating norms involves sanctions and damages one's reputation, citizens are inclined to obey a norm, even when it is not in accordance with their personal values and beliefs. Psychological studies have revealed that perceptions of norms against racial/ethnic prejudice lead citizens to hide socially unacceptable negative opinions towards immigrants and ethnic minorities (e.g., Crandall, et al., 2002; Zitek and Hebl, 2007). These tendencies have been confirmed in North American and Western European societies. Using experimental methods, multiple studies have shown that U.S. citizens tend to hide their negative attitudes towards immigrants (An, 2015; Creighton and Jamal, 2015; Creighton et al., 2015; Janus, 2010). These tendencies are similarly observable in the UK (Creighton and Jamal, 2020), Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2020), Germany (Krumpal, 2012), the Netherlands (e.g., Creighton, et al., 2019), and Norway (Creighton and Strabac, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

Are these anti-prejudice norms shared in unstudied contexts? Norm diffusion schools are positive about this possibility. Meyer and colleagues proposed the idea of world society, that acts as a political arena where transnational actors (e.g., the United Nations and international NGOs) interact with and define new models of policy that ultimately influence citizens' sentiments and behaviors (Meyer et al., 1997). These actors in the political arena value the principles of universalism, liberalism, and individualism and thus, naturally, human rights and anti-prejudice norms (Hadler, 2012; Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer, 2010). According to this theory, norms internationally diffuse through exposure to transnational actors and education (Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer, 2010). Transnational actors have channels by which to directly contact local actors, making norms easily diffused (Gurowitz, 1999). Furthermore, education, especially higher education, plays a crucial role in linking citizens to "universalistic and rationalized cultural rules" (Meyer, 2010: 9). Consistent with this idea, previous studies have shown that as a consequence of norm diffusion, attitudes towards intimate partner violence (Pierotti, 2013) and sexual minorities (Hadler, 2012; Roberts, 2019) become convergent between countries. These studies suggest that growing exposure to global norms changes citizens' attitudes and behaviors to be consistent with the norms.

Alternatively, it is possible that anti-prejudice norms are not shared in some contexts, because social desirability is highly contextually dependent. Social norms develop based on the culture, history, and political institution of the society (e.g., Becker et al., 2016; Licht et al., 2007; Nunn and Wantchekon, 2011), and each society has distinctive experiences in these spheres. As a result, "the sensitive character of a piece of research seemingly inheres less in the topic itself and more in the relationship between that topic and the social context within which the research is conducted" (Lee and Renzetti, 1993: 5). Supporting these arguments, cross-national studies have shown different patterns of normative attitudes and behaviors across countries, including honest behaviors (Cohn et al., 2019), rule violations (Fisman and Miguel, 2007), and attitudes towards sexual and ethnic minorities (Hadler and Symons, 2018). Furthermore, previous studies showed that exposure to norms does not change citizens' attitudes in countries whose fundamental values contradict global norms, as exemplified by the rejection of same-sex marriage in Muslim countries (Hadler, 2012; Roberts, 2019). These results may support the argument that isomorphic development of norms does not occur, and citizens across

<sup>2</sup> However, also see Aronow et al. (2015), who reported that there are no significant differences between direct question and list experiment results.

countries may form attitudes and behaviors based on different normative standards.

In summary, we can argue that in North American and West European countries, it is normative to be anti-prejudice. When we apply these findings to unstudied contexts, we foresee two possibilities: norms are diffused regardless of context, or norms are not accepted in specific contexts. As we test anti-prejudice norms against immigrants in Japan, in the following section, we will describe Japanese contexts that can attenuate the effects of anti-prejudice norms.

## 2.2. Japanese contexts and the possibility of non-acceptance of anti-prejudice norms

How are anti-prejudice norms against immigrants possibly attenuated in Japan? We propose that persistent belief in ethnic homogeneity may generate distinctive normative patterns in Japan compared to Western societies.

We briefly illustrate the immigrant and ethnic minority contexts in Japan. For half a century since the end of WWII, the immigrant share in Japan was lower than 1%. Although since 1990, the Japan government has loosened restrictions of immigration policies in reaction to a labor shortage, the current immigrant share still remains approximately 2%. The small proportion of immigration has brought little ethnic diversity to the Japanese society. We should acknowledge that there are national minority groups such as Okinawans and Ainu. However, most Japanese assume Okinawans as ethnic Japanese and not as a national minority, and Ainu are seen as a “virtually vanished and vanquished group” (Lie, 2001: 46). These environments—the small proportion of immigrants and low perceived ethnic diversity—become a basis for widespread belief in ethnic homogeneity.

Since the end of WWII, a belief in ethnic homogeneity, which is the notion that “Japan is made up by only one ethnic group with the same origin, culture, and bloodline” (Oguma, 1995: 7), has become an important discourse. The belief has been widespread to the public through *Nihonjinron* (Japaneseness) literature, which claims the uniqueness of Japanese culture and values developed by and shared among Japanese people, who are those with Japanese nationality and Japanese ancestry (Sugimoto, 1999). Although the Japanese sometimes regard ethnic homogeneity as a source of problems in the Japanese society (e.g., its inability to keep up with globalization), ethnic homogeneity is often believed to bring national integration, social stability, economic strength, and peace to the society by making internal variations of Japanese residents trivial (Befu, 2001; Lie, 2001; Liu-Farrer, 2020; Oguma, 1995). Even today, public opinion surveys show that Japanese citizens tend to regard having Japanese ancestry as a necessary condition for being Japanese (Burgess, 2010; Ishida, 2016).

As the belief in ethnic homogeneity became widely accepted, Japanese people became inclined to think that those who do not possess Japanese nationality, ethnicity, and culture are not legitimate members of Japanese society. These groups—in most cases, immigrants—are regarded as outsiders of Japanese society, regardless of how long they live in Japan and how much they culturally assimilate into Japan (Arudou, 2015; Liu-Farrer, 2020). Differentiating and treating non-Japanese people as social outsiders, in turn, results in subordination of the groups, who are ineligible for equal treatments (Arudou, 2015). Nagayoshi (2011) empirically showed that Japanese with stronger ethno-national identity (i.e., identifying someone having Japanese nationality, ancestry, and culture as a Japanese) tend to support multicultural ideas and oppose immigrants’ rights, because they wish to keep culturally separating immigrants to maintain the Japanese ethnic and cultural community intact.

Under these situations, we can expect that it is not normative to hide their negative attitudes towards immigrants. Because exclusive views towards immigrants are consistent with the widely shared belief in ethnic homogeneity, people may not consider to be sanctioned when they express negative attitudes towards immigrants. As a result, people may not attempt to hide their “true” feelings towards immigrants. In this case, Japanese people’s “true” attitudes and attitudes influenced by social desirability bias do not differ.

On the other hand, if the ideas of norm diffusion schools apply, it is also possible that anti-prejudice norms have been extended to Japan, and people will attempt to hide their negative attitudes towards immigrants, despite the contexts of a prevailing belief in ethnic homogeneity.

To test these two opposing hypotheses, we use a list experiment, which is also known as the item-count technique. List experiments have the advantages of concealing respondents’ answers to sensitive questions from researchers and maintaining anonymity so that respondents’ answers are trustworthy and assumed to not be influenced by the normative requirements of a given society (Blair and Imai, 2012). In contrast, respondents are more willing to follow norms when they respond to a sensitive issue asked in a direct question (i.e., a “normal” survey question). Therefore, by comparing the answers to list questions and direct questions, we can detect the extent to which Japanese respondents attempt to follow anti-prejudice norms. On one hand, if attitudes in the list experiments are more negative towards immigrants than those in direct questions, these results indicate that respondents follow norms to suppress negative feelings. Thus, similar to the previous studies conducted in North American and European societies, we can say that anti-prejudice norms are institutionalized in Japan. On the other hand, if there are no significant differences between attitudes in the list experiment and direct questions, we can argue that Japanese citizens feel no need to hide their negative feelings towards immigrants, indicating that anti-prejudice norms are not well integrated into Japanese society.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Null effects of differences between direct questions and list experiments may suggest that natives internalize norms and do not feel the need to hide their negative attitudes (because everyone takes anti-prejudice norms for granted and does not hold prejudicial views of immigrants, there is no difference between their “true” response and the “socially desirable” response). However, since this situation is highly unlikely, we hypothesized that null differences indicate no anti-prejudice norms. We could identify whether or not a norm was highly internalized or not by analyzing the averaged values of the responses.

### 3. Study1

#### 3.1. Data

To determine whether Japanese citizens are aware of norms against prejudice, we conducted a list experiment using an online survey. The survey was conducted from February to March 2017 with respondents who were registered with NTTCom Online Marketing Solutions (hereafter, NTTCom), which is one of the largest online survey companies in Japan. The population for this data is thus limited to the pool of those opt-in participants in NTTCom, which is a non-probabilistic sample and should be expanded in future studies to a representative survey. We targeted respondents aged from 20 to 64 using quota sampling based on cohort and gender. Respondents whose parents had Japanese nationality were included in the analysis. Based on the recommendation by [Corstange \(2009\)](#) that researchers should collect at least 1000 respondents for list experiments, we obtained a total sample size of 1032. Respondents who took an excessively short time to answer questions were removed from the sample. We compared the descriptive results and the census dataset in terms of age, gender proportion, and educational level (see [Table A1](#) in [Appendix I](#)). We should note that although the age and gender are relatively proportional to estimates from census data, the educational level in NTTCom data is higher than those in official statistics, which is a frequently reported characteristics of web-survey samples, and the obtained results could be influenced by the skewed sample. To overcome this possibility, we divided the sample into subgroups to confirm that the main results were not influenced by data skewness.

#### 3.2. Experimental design

We randomly split the respondents into two groups: a control and a treatment group. The control group was required to answer questions about the following list of items after reading the following statement:<sup>4</sup>

Some people agree with the following opinions, and others oppose them. How many of these opinions do you agree with? Please indicate the number of opinions you agree with. You don't need to answer which opinion you agree with.

- a) It is acceptable to divorce when one is not satisfied with his/her spouse.
- b) It is acceptable to live a restricted life to some extent for crime control.
- c) The government should enhance economic support for small or medium sized firms.
- d) The government should raise the consumption tax.

Respondents assigned to the treatment group were presented with the identical statement and list of items used in the control group, but the following item was also included:

- e) The government should restrict the acceptance of foreign workers.

Since respondents were required to answer the *number* of items with which they agreed, this experimental design completely shielded their true opinions from the researchers; thus, the respondents were not influenced by social desirability (and norms). The number of chosen items was averaged for the treatment and control groups, and the difference between these two values was identical to the estimated proportion that agreed with the additional list item. Using this sensitive item, we attempted to reveal respondents' preferences concerning immigrants as a labor force, which becomes increasingly salient in the Japanese context.

To estimate the extent to which people follow norms, we also asked a direct question about attitudes towards foreign workers to respondents who were assigned to the control group. After the list experiment, respondents in the control group were presented with the question, "Do you think the government should restrict the acceptance of foreign workers?" with a dichotomized choice of "agree" or "disagree" (or "don't know"). Because researchers know the respondents' answers to the direct question and the respondents are aware of this fact, answers to a direct question are assumed to be influenced by norms. A comparison of answers to this question and the estimate of the proportion in agreement with the additional list item can identify the permeability of norms.

We should note that the list question and the direct question included a "don't know" option. As presented in [Table 1](#), the number of respondents who chose "don't know" was not sizable. However, because the "don't know" option may bias the results ([Berinsky, 1999](#)), we address this issue in Study 2.

#### 3.3. Evaluation of the experimental design

Following previous studies with list experiments (e.g., [Blair and Imai, 2012](#); [Lax et al., 2016](#)), we evaluated the quality of our experimental design from three perspectives: floor and ceiling effects, the design effect, and random assignment. First, floor and ceiling effects emerge when a considerable number of respondents perceive that other respondents answer "yes" or "no" to all nonsensitive items. These situations do not make respondents feel that their answers are masked and fail to detect "true" answers (violating the "no

<sup>4</sup> The original wordings in Japanese is as follows: a) 結婚しても、相手に満足できないときは、いつでも離婚すればよい、b) 犯罪の取り締まりのために、生活がある程度不自由になっても構わない、c) 中小企業への経済的な支援は強化すべきだ、d) 消費税は増税すべきだ、and e) 日本に働きにくる外国人の受け入れを制限すべきだ。

**Table 1**  
Distributions of the number of “agree” answers.

Response value	Treatment		Control	
	Percentage including DK	Percentage excluding DK	Percentage including DK	Percentage excluding DK
0	6.4	6.9	7.4	8.0
1	25.4	27.5	35.4	38.7
2	35.0	37.8	36.6	40.0
3	20.2	21.9	11.0	12.1
4	4.3	4.6	1.2	1.3
5	1.2	1.3		
DK	7.6		8.5	
n	515	476	517	473

liar” assumption of the list experiment). We present the observed distribution of the number of “agree” answers in [Table 1](#). The table shows that the number of respondents who chose 5 (or 0) seems small. Ceiling (or floor) effects happen when those response values that were supposed to be 5 (or 0) were actually 4 (or 1) to mask respondents’ true opinions. To address this possibility, we estimated the proportion of potential liars using the ML estimator method proposed by [Blair and Imai \(2012\)](#) with the *list* package in R. We found that the proportion of liars (both ceiling and floor) was close to zero, indicating that no ceiling or floor effects were present.

In the control group excluding the “don’t know” category, 6.9% of respondents agreed with all items and 1.2% did not agree with all items. Notably, approximately 8% of the respondents chose the “don’t know” option in both the control and treatment groups, indicating that including the statement about the acceptance of foreign workers did not incline the respondents to choose the “don’t know” option.<sup>5</sup>

Second, we should be careful about the design effect of the list experiment. A design effect is present when respondents’ tendencies to select nonsensitive items change due to the presence of a sensitive item. Because list experiments rely on differences in the average number of items chosen between the treatment and control groups, the behavior of choosing nonsensitive items should not be influenced by the presence of sensitive items ([Blair and Imai, 2012](#)). To test the existence of the design effect, we employed the method proposed by [Blair and Imai \(2012\)](#) using the *list* package in R (estimated respondent types are presented in [Table A2](#) in [Appendix I](#)). The results suggest not rejecting the null hypothesis of no design effect. All of the estimated proportions of response types were nonnegative, yielding p-value for the null hypothesis identical to 1. These results indicated that we can assume that there was no design effect, and the average numbers of chosen nonsensitive items chosen were not significantly different between the treatment and control groups.

Third, we tested whether respondents were randomly assigned to the treatment group regardless of their demographic and political ideology variables. We conducted logistic regression with assignment to the treatment group as the dependent variable and included age, gender, educational level, and support for the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan and the Democratic Party of Japan (conservative and liberal parties, respectively) as independent variables. The results indicated that assignment to the treatment and control groups was random with regarding to these variables (see [Table A3](#) in [Appendix I](#)).

### 3.4. Results

[Table 2](#) shows the estimated proportion of those who “agreed” with the opposition to an increase in foreign workers in the list experiment and the direct question. Among respondents who were assigned to the direct question group, 59.2% agreed to the restriction of immigration. In other words, more than half of respondents were negative towards immigration. Next, in the List column, we present the difference between treatment and control groups in the mean values of the number of statements agreed upon. The list experiment revealed that 32.6% of respondents had negative attitudes towards immigration. The differences in these values between the direct question and list experiments are significant. These results indicate that, contrary to most previous studies and our two opposing hypotheses, Japanese respondents show more negative attitudes towards immigration in a direct question than in a list experiment. These results are unexpected because they suggest that respondents attempt to exaggerate their negative attitudes towards immigrants when their answers are not anonymous.

To check whether these results were similarly applicable to the subgroups, we divided the samples into several groups. The results are presented in [Table 3](#).<sup>6</sup> The results indicate that almost all of the subgroups reacted similarly to the respondents as a whole with

<sup>5</sup> For the direct question, 34.0% of the respondents chose “don’t know” option. If we included these respondents in our calculation, the proportion of the respondents who agreed with the restriction of acceptance of foreign workers was 39.6%, which was close to that estimated from the list experiment. However, this means that the respondents hide their “true” positive attitudes towards immigrants by choosing “don’t know” in response to a direct question. Thus, the implication of the results does not change.

<sup>6</sup> Low education indicates those with upper secondary education or less, while high education indicates those with more than upper secondary education. Political orientation was measured by a feeling thermometer for the Liberal Democratic Party, which is the ruling and conservative party in Japan. The respondents were asked to what extent they were favorable towards the party. Responses were given on a seven-point scale from -3 to 3. We categorized the respondents into three groups: conservative (1-3), liberal (-3 to -1) and middle (0). There was a “do not know” option for political orientation, and the respondents who chose this option were excluded from the subsample.



**Table 2**  
Estimated proportions of agreement to restriction of immigrants.

	Direct (a)	List (b)	Difference (b-a)
Estimated proportions	.592 (.027)	.326 (.073)	-.266*** (.078)

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . The numbers in the parentheses are the standard errors.  $n(\text{direct}) = 329$ ,  $n(\text{list}) = 949$  (the sum of respondents answering for treatment and control questions).

regard to the list experiment and the direct question. Although the differences between the list experiment and the direct question were not significant according to the traditional criteria for some groups (right- and left-leaning people), answers to the direct questions were more negative than answers to the list experiment, and the differences in the coefficients were substantial. We can argue that the results in Table 2 are not due to some groups that have extreme tendencies but rather indicate that the general tendency of the Japanese respondents.

#### 4. Study 2

In Study 1, we found that Japanese citizens tended to be more negative towards immigrants in response to the direct question than in the list experiment. Because these results are highly contradictory to those of previous studies and our hypotheses and because some researchers frame this type of results as a “failure” of list experiments (Kramon and Weghorst, 2019), we conducted another list experiment using different samples and different wordings of sensitive and nonsensitive items at different time. Conducting Study 2 was advantageous for our research in the following three ways.

First, previous studies on list experiments showed that how people hide their true attitudes depends upon whether they are presented with a general immigrant group or particular ethnic subgroups (e.g., Creighton and Jamal, 2015; Creighton et al., 2019). It is possible that the results in Study 1 were obtained because we used rather rough group categorization. To validate the results, which concerned attitudes towards immigrants in general, we specified immigrants’ country of origin. Specifically, we focused on attitudes towards Chinese and South Korean immigrants because they are the largest immigrant groups and are the most negatively treated groups in Japan (Tanabe, 2019; e.g., Korean residents became a main target group of hate speech). Because these groups are salient, anti-prejudice norms are most likely to work for them. If we obtain the same results as in Study 1 (i.e., a norm of exaggerating negative attitudes), these results will indicate that anti-prejudice norms do not work, regardless of the target ethnic group. In addition, the focus on economic migration in Study 1 could have generated unexpected results. Immigrants are often regarded as economic competitors (e.g., Lance and Pardos-Prado, 2013), and showing more negative attitudes towards them in this case could be normative. In Study 2, instead of attitudes towards economic immigration, we asked about different aspects of attitudes towards immigrants by employing questions on intergroup social relations (e.g., Schachter, 2016).

Second, studies in social science are experiencing a crisis of replication (Open Science Collaboration, 2015; Shrout and Rodgers, 2018). These issues are especially applicable to the current results, which are unexpected and contradict those of previous studies. A new examination is recommended to confirm the results with “two experiments that are grounded in the same reasoning, testing logically equivalent but differentially operationalized predictions, and carried out on independent samples” (Sniderman, 2018: 270). Conducting Study 2 can validate the unexpected results obtained in Study 1.

Third, the results in Study 1 could have been obtained because the design of the experiment was not ideal regarding the inclusion of the “don’t know” option and the existence of an inattentive sample. In Study 1, approximately 8% of respondents answered “don’t know”, and this design may have caused bias. Previous studies have shown that respondents conceal socially undesirable attitudes by choosing the “don’t know” option (Berinsky, 1999). If respondents choose “don’t know” to hide their undesirable feelings towards immigrants, excluding those respondents from the analysis may underestimate the negativity towards immigrants and detract from the advantage of the list experiment in revealing trustworthy answers. In addition, the experiment in Study 1 did not address inattentive samples but simply removed respondents who took an excessively short time to answer questions. Because inattentive samples bias the results of the list experiment (Alvarez et al., 2019), we may need to address inattentive samples more seriously.

We conducted the second experiment using different web survey companies at different times with different frames of the experiments. In Study 2, we asked about attitudes towards Chinese and South Korean immigrants in terms of social relations, removed the “don’t know” option and addressed inattentive sample issues.

##### 4.1. Data

The survey was conducted in March 2020. We distributed the survey questionnaire to online panels registered with Rakuten Insight Inc., which is a subsidiary company of Rakuten Inc., one of the largest Japanese online retailing companies. Rakuten’s customers were invited to be part of a panel for Rakuten Insight. Importantly, we employed a different web survey company from that in Study 1 because members of the same institutions may have similar characteristics and tendencies (e.g., Lupton, 2019). To represent the Japanese population, we quota sampled respondents based on gender, age cohort, and living area. Respondents who had non-Japanese nationality and those who could not pass inattentive check questions were removed, resulting in 1729 total respondents. Again, the population of this data is not nationally representative but is an opt-in web survey sample, which should be overcome in future studies. We compared the descriptive results and the census dataset in terms of age, gender proportion, and educational level (see Table B1 in Appendix II). Similar to Study 1, age and gender were proportional to the census data, but the educational level was higher. In line with

**Table 3**  
Estimated proportions of agreement with the restriction of immigrants by subgroups.

	Direct (a)	n	List (b)	n	Difference (b-a)
Education: Low	.595 (.049)	99	.318 (.122)	296	-.277* (.131)
High	.591 (.033)	230	.324 (.089)	653	-.267** (.094)
Gender: Male	.564 (.037)	179	.311 (.096)	470	-.253* (.103)
Female	.625 (.039)	150	.357 (.110)	479	-.268* (.117)
Age: 20 to 44	.604 (.037)	172	.350 (.098)	480	-.254* (.106)
45 to 64	.579 (.039)	157	.304 (.101)	469	-.275* (.109)
Political Orientation: Right	.672 (.045)	105	.451 (.148)	297	-.221 (.155)
Middle	.688 (.049)	87	.301 (.135)	283	-.387** (.145)
Left	.469 (.049)	107	.235 (.111)	278	-.233 (.121)

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . The numbers in the parentheses are the standard errors. The sample size for the List column is the sum of respondents answering for treatment and control questions.

Study 1, we divided the samples into two groups for each variable to validate the main results.

#### 4.2. Experiment design

We used list experiments including different nonsensitive items. The list of items was as follows. In contrast to Study 1, which asked how many items with which the respondents agreed, in Study 2, we asked how many items they opposed.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we used different situational aspects of attitudes towards immigrants from Study 1 to confirm that the results we obtained were not due to the framing of immigrants as economic competitors. In Study 2, we used preferences for having immigrants as neighbors, reflecting social relationships (e.g., Schachter, 2016).

- a) Reducing social security spending
- b) Professional athletes earn hundreds of millions a year
- c) Male or female couples becoming adoptive or foster parents
- d1) Increase in the number of Chinese immigrants coming and living in your neighborhood
- d2) Increase in the number of South Korean immigrants coming and living in your neighborhood

We randomly divided the respondents into a control group, a Chinese treatment group, and a South Korean treatment group. The control group received the list of items from a) to c), and was then directly asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following two items: "Increase in the number of Chinese immigrants coming and living in your neighborhood" and "Increase in the number of South Korean immigrants coming and living in your neighborhood". The Chinese treatment group received (a) to (d1) (and not d2), and the South Korean treatment group received (a) to (d2) (and not d1). The order of the item lists was randomized.

#### 4.3. Evaluation of the experimental design

We evaluated the experimental design in a similar way to that used for Study 1. Table 4 presents the distribution of answers to how many items the respondents oppose. First, more than 40% of respondents in the control group opposed no items, indicating a potential risk for floor effects. We estimated the population proportion of ceiling liars and floor liars using the suggested method by Blair and Imai (2012). The results indicated that the proportion of ceiling liars was 0.022 and the proportion of floor liars was 0.024 for those in the South Korean treatment group, and the proportion of ceiling liars was 0.012 and the proportion of floor liars was 0.072 for those in the Chinese treatment group, all of which are acceptable values according to previous studies (e.g., Meng et al., 2017). In addition, we conducted ceiling and floor liar-adjusted models, but the estimations did not substantially alter the main findings. However, despite these estimations, future studies should improve the nonsensitive items to obtain better distributions of response values (e.g., Glynn, 2013).

Second, we tested the design effects in the same way as in Study 1. The results showed that all of the estimated proportions of response types were nonnegative; therefore, we could not reject the null hypothesis of no design effects (also see Table B2 in Appendix II). Third, we conducted multinomial logistic regression with the three groups as dependent variables and age, gender, educational level, political ideology, and former experiences of contact with Chinese and South Koreans as independent variables (see Table B3 in Appendix II). With this test, we confirmed that assignments to the three groups were random and not influenced by the respondents' characteristics.

<sup>7</sup> The list of items in Japanese was as follows: a) 生活保護費を削減すること, b) プロのスポーツ選手が年間数億の収入を得ること, c) 女性どうし、男性どうしのカップルが養親や里親になること, d1) あなたがお住まいの地域に中国人が増えること, and d2) あなたがお住まいの地域に韓国人が増えること.

**Table 4**  
Distribution of responses.

Response value	Chinese treatment	South Korean treatment	Control
0	18.05	23.35	40.51
1	43.25	42.25	43.58
2	29.11	24.06	13.38
3	7.64	7.84	2.53
4	1.95	2.50	
n	615	561	553

**Table 5**  
Estimated proportions of opposition to Chinese and South Korean immigrants.

	Direct question (a)	List (b)	Difference (b-a)
Estimated opposition to Chinese	.793 (.017)	.543 (.043)	-.250*** (.046)
Estimated opposition to South Koreans	.732 (.019)	.427 (.044)	-.304*** (.048)

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001. The numbers in the parentheses are the standard errors. n(direct) = 553, n(Chinese List) = 1,168, n(South Korean List) = 1114. The sample sizes for the List groups are the sum of respondents answering for treatment and control questions.

4.4. Results

The results are presented in Table 5. First, the direct questions captured Japanese opposition to increases in the numbers of Chinese and South Korean immigrants influenced by norms. Attitudes towards Chinese immigrants were slightly more negative than those towards South Koreans, which is consistent with previous studies on Japanese hierarchical attitudes towards Chinese and South Korean (Igarashi 2015). The results indicate that 79.3% and 73.2% of respondents oppose Chinese and South Korean respectively.

In the List column, we present the differences in the mean chosen items between the treatment and control groups, which indicate covert attitudes towards immigrants. The results show that 54.3% and 42.7% of Japanese citizens oppose Chinese and South Koreans living as their neighbors. These values are significantly lower than those of the direct questions, indicating that Japanese people express more negative attitudes in direct questions than in list experiments. These results are similar to those in Study 1, and we can say that Study 1 was successfully replicated. Because we used different web survey companies, different experiment designs, and different nonsensitive items, eliminated sources of potential bias including inattentive samples and answer choices, and distributed the questionnaires at different time points, the replicated results indicate the robustness of the results obtained in Study 1. We should note that the level of negativity was higher than that in Study 1, which could be attributed to the framing of the question (i.e., social aspect of attitudes), trends, or the specification of nationality. In addition, the gap between responses to the direct question and responses to the

**Table 6**  
Estimated proportions of opposition to Chinese and South Korean immigrants by subgroups.

	Estimated attitudes towards Chinese					Estimated attitudes towards South Koreans				
	Direct (a)	n	List (b)	n	Difference(b-a)	Direct (a)	n	List (b)	n	Difference(b-a)
Education: Low	.821 (.022)	152	.522 (.057)	327	-.299*** (.062)	.749(.026)	152	.470 (.056)	331	-.279*** (.061)
High	.762 (.026)	401	.574 (.062)	787	-.187** (.068)	.712(.028)	401	.367 (.076)	837	-.345*** (.080)
Gender: Male	.765 (.026)	265	.535 (.063)	530	-.230*** (.069)	.753(.026)	265	.431 (.063)	560	-.322*** (.068)
Female	.818 (.023)	288	.556 (.056)	584	-.262*** (.060)	.711(.027)	288	.430 (.061)	608	-.281*** (.067)
Age: 18 to 48	.762 (.026)	278	.578 (.053)	550	-.183** (.059)	.665 (.028)	278	.433 (.060)	594	-.233*** (.066)
49 to 80	.824 (.023)	275	.519 (.066)	564	-.305*** (.070)	.800(.024)	275	.425 (.065)	574	-.374*** (.069)
Political Orientation: Liberal	.744 (.023)	360	.512 (.053)	734	-.232*** (.058)	.677(.025)	360	.512 (.052)	755	-.165** (.058)
Conservative	.884 (.023)	193	.610 (.071)	380	-.274*** (.075)	.833(.027)	193	.381 (.082)	413	-.451*** (.086)
Contact with Chinese/South Korean	.744 (.029)	235	.619 (.057)	459	-.125* (.063)	.647(.032)	235	.399 (.069)	493	-.249** (.076)
No contact	.829 (.022)	318	.483 (.061)	655	-.346*** (.065)	.786(.023)	378	.450 (.059)	735	-.335*** (.063)

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001. The numbers in parentheses are the standard errors. The sample size for the List column is the sum of respondents answering for treatment and control questions.



list experiment was smaller for attitudes towards Chinese immigrants than for attitudes towards South Korean immigrants. These results indicate that “true” prejudice is higher towards Chinese immigrants than towards South Korean immigrants, while the “socially desirable” levels of prejudice towards both groups are almost the same.

As a robustness check, we divided the samples into subgroups and tested how the subgroups differed in their responses to the list experiment and the direct questions. The results are presented in Table 6 and were mostly similar to the main findings.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Discussion

It has been widely believed that anti-prejudice norms prevail in the democratic countries (e.g., Beyer and Liebe, 2015). However, previous studies examining norms have exclusively focused on North American and Western European societies, which accommodate large proportions of immigrants and exhibit ethnic diversity (e.g., Creighton, et al., 2019; Janus, 2010), and we still know little about how citizens residing in outside of these contexts form anti-prejudice norms. We employed the case of Japan, where the immigrant share and perceived ethnic diversity are considerably low and belief in ethnic homogeneity is held, to test how Japanese citizens perceive norms using two list experiments.

We obtained unexpected results in the list experiments. Japanese citizens are more likely to be negative towards immigrants when their answers are visible to researchers, while their masked “true” answers are actually more positive. These results indicate that norms in Japan are not consistent with conventional norms—it is normative for Japanese citizens to hold *negative* attitudes towards immigrants regardless of their country of origin. The evaluations of the quality of the list experiments indicate that these results are likely not due to failure of the experiments. In addition, we successfully replicated the results in two studies using different participants, different timings, and different framings of sensitive and nonsensitive items. Furthermore, analyses using subsamples divided by their socio-demographic characteristics and political orientations did not change the results. These tests confirmed a consistent tendency of Japanese to hold norms of being more negative towards immigrants.

Why did we obtain these unexpected results? We believe that two contextual factors contribute to the negative gaps between overt and covert attitudes towards immigrants: the small proportion of immigrants and the prevailing belief in ethnic homogeneity. First, as we mentioned, the proportion of immigrants in Japan has remained at approximately 1–2% for decades. Because of the small number of immigrants, Japanese may perceive that the negative impacts of immigrants on society are not considerable (e.g., Quillian, 1995) and be less likely to form “true” negative attitudes. These arguments can be indirectly supported by the comparison of “true” attitudes in Studies 1 and 2—attitudes towards South Korean and Chinese, which are the two largest immigrant groups in Japan, in Study 2 are more negative than those towards immigrants in general in Study 1, presumably because respondents can concretely imagine the impact of these specific ethnic groups.

These relatively lower “true” negative attitudes are masked, and Japanese tend to exaggerate their attitudes towards immigrants because of the prevalent belief in ethnic homogeneity. In a society where most people consider that having the same nationality, ethnicity, and culture are requirements for being legitimate members of the society, immigrants are perceived as outsiders and a subordinate group. Segregating and rejecting these groups may be perceived to help maintain cultural and blood linkages among the Japanese people, and the Japanese people believe that it is socially desirable to be exclusive against immigrants. In other words, positive attitudes towards immigrants may signal that these groups are to be equally treated, which is against the shared belief of group boundary making based on the same nationality, ethnicity, and culture. In summary, on one hand, belief in ethnic homogeneity generates perceived needs to show exclusive views towards social outsiders from the society and exaggerated negative attitudes, and on the other, the small proportion of immigrants results in relatively lower “true” negative attitudes. Upon combining these two contextual situations, we observe that there are gaps between overt and covert attitudes and Japanese attitudes towards immigrants asked in response to direct questions are highly negative.

One of the striking findings is that highly educated and the liberal individuals, who are supposed to share anti-prejudice norms in the norm diffusion hypothesis (e.g., Meyer, 2010), seem to obey pro-prejudice norms. These results suggest that the belief in ethnic homogeneity is deep rooted in Japanese society; thus, exposure to anti-prejudice norm through (higher) education cannot change one’s tendency to obey the pro-prejudice norms. We should note that previous studies tested the associations between educational level and social desirability bias with mixed results (e.g., An, 2015; Heerwig and McCabe, 2009). Further studies are required to confirm how educational level and political ideology and norm internalization are related.

These results are distinctive from previous studies showing that citizens tend to hide their true negative attitudes and pretend that they are positive towards immigrants (e.g., Creighton, et al., 2019; Janus, 2010). The social desirability of attitudes towards immigrants is, thus, not universally shared across the world, but rather, contextually dependent. Then, to what extent are the results of our studies generalizable to other contexts? Because we speculated the results using a belief in ethnic homogeneity, some may argue that this is Japanese exceptionalism. We should note that Japan is not exceptional in these results, and belief in ethnic homogeneity is not the only reason generating negative estimates of the list experiment. A good example can be found in Knoll’s study of American nativist

<sup>8</sup> Low education indicates those with upper secondary education or less, while high education indicates those with more than upper secondary education. Political orientation was measured by a 5-point left-right scale. We operationalized the variable so that respondents who were at the average (3.16) or higher on the scale were considered conservative, while those lower than the average were considered liberal. Contact with Chinese or South Korean immigrants was measured with two dichotomized questions to examine whether respondents had experiences of contact with Chinese or South Koreans. We used the variable of contact with Chinese and South Koreans to estimate the proportions of attitudes towards Chinese and South Koreans, respectively.

attitudes (2013). By comparing answers to a direct question and list experiments, Knoll showed that Americans feel social pressure to express their nativist attitudes regardless of their “true” feelings because “nativism has historically also been associated with more socially desirable attitudes like nationalism and patriotism” (p.1588). Knoll’s findings, together with those of our studies, suggest the possibility that the historically rooted contexts may strongly resist the acceptance of norms shared in other contexts.

Our studies also provide implications for the evaluation of the results of list experiments. The results of negative estimates of list experiments are sometimes framed as “failures” and are attributed to respondents’ cognitive skill (e.g., Kramon and Weghorst, 2019). However, as we showed in two studies that negative estimates are obtainable when prevailing norms are opposite to conventional ideas. We should not frame negative estimates as failures of list experiments but as signs for understanding how and what kinds of norms prevail in a society.

Despite the novelty of findings, this study has several limitations that should be addressed in future. First, the responses in Study 2 were not distributed in an ideal way. Future studies will improve the choices of nonsensitive items (e.g., Glynn, 2013) to eliminate the possibility of lying. Second, the sample that we used in this study was not representative but is an opt-in web-sample, which resulted in, for example, higher educational level than that of the general population. Because we experimentally compared control and treatment groups and compared subgroups, we believe that employing a representative sample may not drastically change the results. However, for generalizability of the results to the whole population, future studies are required to expand the sample to be representative.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

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