

# International Reputation Costs and Assurances: A Case of East Asia

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# Abstract

How can states credibly commit to peace and assure other countries? One source of credible assurances that previous studies identify is international reputation costs. When a state violates a previous commitment to peace, it loses its international reputation, which is costly in many ways. These reputational costs, in turn, should work as a tying-hands signal that makes peaceful commitments credible. Nonetheless, we only have a scarce empirical investigation about whether and under what conditions such reputation costs emerge. To address this problem, this study conducts a preregistered survey experiment in the United States using a hypothetical scenario of military buildups of China and Japan. The results indicate that the violation of commitments to peace hurts the credibility of future commitments, especially for a rival country. The findings suggest that, with some limitations, international reputation costs can be a reliable mechanism for the credibility of assurances.

# 1 Introduction

Assurances, defined as “a strategy of seeking to persuade another state that one harbors no aggressive intentions toward it” (Knopf 2012, p.383), are important but difficult to achieve. In contemporary East Asia, for example, one of the key issues is whether China has an aggressive intention toward neighboring countries. China has committed to peace with a slogan of “peaceful rise,” later reframed as “peaceful development,” since the Hu Jintao era (e.g., Buzan 2010). However, because of its growing military spending and provocative activities, other Asian countries are becoming cautious about China’s intentions (e.g., Luo 2022). Though the failure of credible assurances results in various significant consequences, assurance is still an underinvestigated topic in general, and we still do not know much about how states can credibly assure other countries in particular.

One such source for credible assurances is tying-hands costs. If domestic or international audiences impose costs for a country that fails to follow through on commitments to international peace, these costs should work as a tying-hands signal and thus the state can credibly assure other states. Nonetheless, we do not have a sufficient empirical investigation into the existence of such domestic and international costs. On domestic audience costs for the violation of peaceful commitments, evidence is only mixed. On the international variant, only a few studies address whether and under what conditions international reputation costs emerge. This study addresses the latter issue.

Relying on the context of China-Japan relations, I conduct a preregistered survey experiment with a sample of 1,515 American adults. Overall, I find evidence of international reputation costs for the violation of commitments to peace, especially for a rival country. However, respondents still express a desire to cooperate on issues of mutual concern, even when states are perceived as lacking credibility on other issues. The results obtained here suggest that, with some caveats, reputation costs can be a reliable mechanism for credible assurance.

## 2 Assurances, Domestic Audience Costs, and International Reputation Costs

According to Knopf (2012), there are four types of assurances: assurance as a component of deterrence, assurance as alliance commitment, reassurances, and non-proliferation-related security assurances. In this paper, my interest is in reassurances, that is, how to signal non-aggressive or peaceful intentions toward other countries. Making assurances credible is an important task. If a state fails to assure other countries, it is hard to make coercive diplomacy successful (Jakobsen 2000) and/or a security dilemma is more likely to emerge (Glaser 1997; Jervis 1978; Kydd 2000). Despite its importance, regardless of the type, assurance is an underinvestigated concept because previous scholars in International Relations (IR) primarily focus on the credibility of threats, not that of assurances (Cebul, Dafoe and Monteiro 2021; Knopf 2012). While recent studies have recurrented attention to assurances (Cebul, Dafoe and Monteiro 2021; Haynes and Yoder 2020; Pauly 2024; Yoder and Haynes 2020), it is still unclear what makes assurances credible.

Scholars identify audience costs as a mechanism of credible assurances (Kydd and McManus 2017; Quek 2017). Audience costs are domestic political costs for leaders incurred when they fail to follow through on international promises (Fearon 1994; Levy et al. 2015). Since violating international commitments can hurt a country's reputation (Fearon 1994; Guisinger and Smith 2002; Tomz 2007) or demonstrates a leader's incompetence (Smith 1998), domestic audiences have incentives to punish such a leader. Scholars expect that these audience costs, in turn, should work as a tying-hands signal, enhancing the credibility of commitments (Fearon 1997; Morrow 2000).

Nonetheless, whether domestic audience costs can be a reliable source of credible assurances is controversial. For instance, a survey experiment by Levy et al. (2015) shows that U.S. citizens disapprove more of the president who fails to follow through on his commitment to staying out of a conflict. With a similar experimental design, Quek (2017) also finds that

domestic audiences punish a leader for violating a commitment to peace. On the other hand, in their replication study of Levy et al, Takei and Paolino (2023) fail to replicate the results of domestic audience costs due to backing in, which suggests whether this type of audience cost emerges may depend on time and context.

Then, how about international reputation costs? Reputation costs can be analogous to domestic audience costs as a tying-hands mechanism (Post and Sechser 2024; Lupton 2024). Theoretically, international reputation costs are expected to bolster the credibility of assurances (Kydd and McManus 2017, pp. 334-5). Literature contends that not only domestic but also international audiences such as adversaries (Zhang 2023) and allies (Crescenzi et al. 2012) can impose costs for a state that violates international commitments. By increasing international reputation costs by, for example, committing to peace publicly, a state may credibly signal its peaceful intentions to other countries.

Reputation literature is closely related to commitment credibility (and their lack of it). The violation of international commitments of a country is internationally costly because it hurts the credibility of commitments. States without peaceful reputations will face more aggression from other countries (Crescenzi 2018). The loss of credibility also results in a country's difficulty in eliciting international cooperation such as the formation of military alliances (Crescenzi et al. 2012; Gibler 2008). Moreover, if the credibility of commitments is interdependent (Huth 1997; Schelling 1966), the credibility loss of one type of commitment (e.g., assurance) may lead to the loss of another (e.g., deterrence) because the country's reputation for honesty is hurt (Sartori 2005). Despite the theoretical advancement, except for Cebul, Dafoe and Monteiro (2021), the systematic empirical investigation of the role of international reputation costs in the context of assurance is limited.

Based on the discussion above, I expect that, on average, international audiences incur costs for a state that takes provocative action such as massive military buildups more harshly when they are informed that that behavior is a deviation from the country's previous commitment to peace. Also, the emergence of international reputation costs may be

conditional. One important context that affects opinions on foreign policy is the difference between rivals and allies (Carnegie and Gaikwad 2022). International audiences should be afraid of the increase in military spending by a rival because it should decrease the security of the country they live in. On the other hand, since audiences pay attention to not only inconsistency but also policy substances (Chaudoin 2014), an ally’s military buildups may not cause large reputation costs even if they can be considered a violation of previous commitments because they can be favorable for a country’s security. Thus, I formulate the following two hypotheses:

*H1: International reputation costs for a country that announces a massive military buildup are larger when audiences are informed that it can be considered a violation of its previous commitment to peace.*

*H2: International reputation costs due to violating an international commitment to peace are larger for a rival of a country of the audiences than an ally.<sup>1</sup>*

### 3 Research Design

I test the said hypotheses by focusing on a case of China-Japan relations and how U.S. citizens perceive them. I employ a survey experiment with a sample of 1,515 U.S. adults. The sample is nationally representative on gender, race, and partisanship. The survey design was pre-registered at the Open Science Framework (OSF) prior to the implementation. This survey was fielded in May 2024 via Prolific, a cloud-sourcing platform increasingly used in political science (e.g., Diamond 2020) and international relations (e.g., Takei 2024). Research shows that subjects recruited through Prolific are more diverse and provide a higher quality of responses than other platforms (Peer et al. 2017).

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<sup>1</sup>When the design was pre-registered, I used the phrase international “audience” costs rather than “reputation.” I made this change because reputation is more commonly used in the IR literature. Since I analogously treat international reputation costs with domestic audience costs, the consequence will be minimal.

There are at least three advantages to conduct an experiment in the U.S. by using a scenario on China-Japan relations. First, military buildups of both countries are and will be an important issue in East Asia. Though China previously committed to its peaceful rise/development, China's military budget has significantly increased (Wu and Bodeen 2024). Meanwhile, Japan has also shown a willingness to pursue military buildups, despite its commitment to military restraint since World War II (Lind 2022). Due to the military buildups as well as increasing military activity of both sides, scholars are concerned about the security dilemma in East Asia (Christensen 1999; Liff and Ikenberry 2014). Second, U.S.-China-Japan relations are an appropriate case for testing my hypotheses. While China is (and will be) a rival of the United States, Japan is one of the most important U.S. allies, especially for the regional stability of East Asia. It makes sense that U.S. citizens perceive China's violation of its commitment to peace as unfavorable but do less so against Japan's regression from its pacifism because Japan's military buildup is desirable for the United States in many ways. Third, given their lack of knowledge of international issues (Council on Foreign Relations 2019), most of the U.S. citizens should not know the previous commitments by China and Japan.<sup>2</sup>

After answering questions on standard demographic and attitudinal characteristics, the respondents read a hypothetical scenario on China-Japan relations that could happen in the future. The vignette starts with a paragraph saying, "China and Japan are engaged in conflict over several security-related issues in East Asia, chief among these include ownership over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and the status of Taiwan. In the latter case, China has not abandoned the use of force as an option for resolving the Taiwan issue while Japan has encouraged a peaceful resolution. Because of these Chinese-Japanese tensions, the stability of the East Asian region is of concern. Please read a hypothetical situation below and answer the following questions." This survey experiment is a 2-by-2 factorial design and the respondents are randomly assigned to one of the four groups. The first treatment arm is whether China or

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<sup>2</sup>Consistent with this claim, the results show evidence for international reputation costs, which is unlikely if most U.S. citizens know about the previous commitments by China and Japan.

Table 1: Experimental Design

| Group   | Which Country Builds Up? | Commitment Information? | <i>N</i> |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Group 1 | China                    | No                      | 379      |
| Group 2 | China                    | Yes                     | 375      |
| Group 3 | Japan                    | No                      | 382      |
| Group 4 | Japan                    | Yes                     | 379      |
| Total   |                          |                         | 1,515    |

Japan announces a massive military buildup in 203X. Second, some respondents are informed that this massive military buildup is a deviation from the previous commitment of China or Japan, while others are given no information. The use of such hypothetical scenarios can allow researchers to avoid deceptions while we make them sufficiently realistic. Table 1 shows the experimental design. My power analysis suggests that we require around 392 respondents per group (effect size = 0.2, alpha = 0.05, power = 0.8), which justifies the sample size of each group.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, even if I find the null results, it is unlikely to be due to a lack of statistical power.

After reading one of the vignettes, the respondents answered how likely they would believe commitments made by China/Japan in the future. I use the survey question of Levy et al. (2015) with a slight modification. As discussed, the loss of credibility from adversaries and allies causes significant international consequences (Zhang 2023; Crescenzi et al. 2012). This measure takes a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (=Very unlikely) to 4 (=Very likely). I also construct a dichotomous variable that takes a value of 1 when the answer is “Very likely” or “Somewhat likely,” 0 otherwise.

Following H1, I expect that U.S. citizens perceive China and Japan’s future commitments as less credible when informed that the current massive military buildups can considered a violation of their previous commitments to peace. Also, the operational hypothesis of H2

<sup>3</sup>I employed a power analysis after pre-registering the experimental design at OSF. Given that Takei and Paolino (2023) report the null findings of such domestic audience costs unlike Levy et al. (2015) and Quek (2017), I assume a small effect size to avoid false negatives. I calculated the power with RStudio using the `pwr` package.



Table 2: International Reputation Costs (China)

| Measure                     | Mean<br>Group 1   | Mean<br>Group 2   | <i>Difference</i>    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Credibility (4-Point Scale) | 2.10 [2.02, 2.19] | 1.71 [1.64, 1.78] | -0.40 [-0.51, -0.29] |
| Credibility (Dichotomous)   | 0.31 [0.26, 0.36] | 0.13 [0.10, 0.17] | -0.18 [-0.24, -0.12] |

Note: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Reported first differences may differ slightly due to rounding.

Table 3: International Reputation Costs (Japan)

| Measure                     | Mean<br>Group 3   | Mean<br>Group 4   | <i>Difference</i>    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Credibility (4-Point Scale) | 3.07 [3.00, 3.14] | 2.91 [2.84, 2.97] | -0.17 [-0.26, -0.07] |
| Credibility (Dichotomous)   | 0.84 [0.80, 0.88] | 0.78 [0.75, 0.83] | -0.05 [-0.11, 0.00]  |

Note: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Reported first differences may differ slightly due to rounding.

is that, given the difference that China is a rival and Japan is an ally of the U.S., the loss of commitment credibility is larger for China than Japan. H1 is tested through a series of t-tests.<sup>4</sup> If, for example, the credibility of China's future commitments is lower when respondents are informed of the previous Chinese commitment to peace, that constitutes support for the hypothesis. For the test of H2, I use ordinary least-squared regression models and the linear combinations of the estimated parameters.<sup>5</sup>

## 4 Results

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the series of t-tests. Overall, I find evidence for H1 and H2. For China, when the respondents get information on a previous commitment to its peaceful rise, there are a 0.40-point decrease in the 4-point scale ( $p=0.000$ ) and an 18-percentage point drop in the dichotomous measure ( $p=0.000$ ). The results on Japan show a similar pattern, but the evidence is weaker. When the respondents are informed that Japan's

<sup>4</sup>All the tests are two-tailed.

<sup>5</sup>While they are not pre-registered, I also conduct the ANOVA and multiple comparisons (Tukey-Kramer method) to address concerns for a high false positive rate of t-tests. The results do not meaningfully change.

Table 4: International Reputation Costs (China)

| Measure            | Mean<br>Group 1   | Mean<br>Group 2   | <i>Difference</i>    |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Support            | 1.85 [1.75, 1.94] | 1.75 [1.66, 1.75] | -0.09 [-0.04, 0.23]  |
| Work With          | 3.40 [3.28, 3.51] | 3.39 [3.27, 3.52] | -0.00 [-0.17, 0.17]  |
| Trust (Government) | 1.96 [1.86, 2.05] | 1.79 [1.70, 1.88] | -0.16 [-0.29, -0.03] |
| Trust (Citizen)    | 3.02 [2.93, 3.12] | 2.90 [2.81, 3.00] | -0.12 [-0.25, 0.02]  |

Note: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Reported first differences may differ slightly due to rounding.

massive military buildup can be considered a breach of its commitment to military restraint, the mean of the 4-point scale measure drops from 3.07 to 2.91 ( $p=0.001$ ). However, when we look at the result of the dichotomous variable, it indicates a 5-percentage point decrease, but it is not statistically significant ( $p=0.056$ ). The results of the regression models and the linear combination of the parameters show that the differences in international reputation costs between China and Japan are statistically significant ( $p$ -value is 0.002 for a 4-point scale, 0.003 for a dichotomous).

The results of a series of robustness checks on credibility are reported in the Appendix. First, I employ ordinary least-squared regression models with many demographic and attitudinal variables (e.g., gender, income, partisanship, ideology, feeling toward and knowledge of China and Japan). Second, I also estimate the models dropping inattentive respondents or those who fail to pass manipulation checks. These changes do not change the findings in the main text. Third, using the pre-treatment variables, I check the heterogeneous effects of the violation of peaceful commitments on commitment credibility. I find that the effect is largely homogenous across different demographics and attitudes.

The finding of this study has a meaningful difference from Cebul, Dafoe and Monteiro (2021) that also examine the role of reputation in assurances. They conduct a survey experiment in the U.S. and find evidence that the credibility of assurances is perceived as low when a country has a history of violating a commitment to restraint. However, their experiment only supports the independent effect of reputation: The interaction terms of a country's

Table 5: International Reputation Costs (Japan)

| Measure            | Mean<br>Group 3   | Mean<br>Group 4   | <i>Difference</i>    |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Support            | 3.63 [3.53, 3.73] | 3.48 [3.37, 3.58] | -0.16 [-0.30, -0.02] |
| Work With          | 3.98 [3.88, 4.09] | 3.92 [3.81, 4.03] | -0.07 [-0.22, 0.08]  |
| Trust (Government) | 3.56 [3.47, 3.66] | 3.42 [3.33, 3.52] | -0.14 [-0.27, -0.01] |
| Trust (Citizen)    | 3.99 [3.90, 4.07] | 3.94 [3.86, 4.04] | -0.04 [-0.16, 0.09]  |

Note: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Reported first differences may differ slightly due to rounding.

power and reputation are not statistically significant in any model (pp. 985-7). In contrast, the present experiment confirms the expectation that the difference between a rival and an ally conditions the magnitude of reputation costs. This study corroborates the claim that IR scholars should switch the focus from whether reputation matters to under what conditions (Jervis, Yarhi-Milo and Casler 2021).

While the finding on credibility strongly supports the hypotheses, one cautionary tale is that, as reported in Tables 4 and 5, it is not robust when I use different measures of international reputation costs. For instance, when respondents are asked “Do you support or oppose [China’s/Japan’s] change in its foreign policy?,” international reputation costs occur only for Japan. Also, the commitment information significantly decreases the trust in the Chinese and Japanese governments, which constitutes additional evidence for international reputation costs, but the effect sizes on China and Japan are comparable. The results of the other two measures (i.e., willingness to work with the Chinese/Japanese governments and trust in Chinese/Japanese citizens) are null. Therefore, future studies might want to investigate what forms of reputation costs a failure to honor peaceful commitments creates and when the difference between a rival and an ally matters.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper examines whether and under what conditions international reputation costs are generated due to the violation of a commitment to peace. The results suggest that, with some limitations, these costs can be a reliable mechanism of credible assurances. While this study is an important first step, there are many directions that future studies can pursue. For instance, while this study shows that reputation costs exist, whether such costs contribute to the credible of international commitments is a different question, though the findings of Cebul, Dafoe and Monteiro (2021) suggest so. Also, considering that the magnitude of international reputation costs depends on the relationship among states, one interesting avenue for future studies is to assess which country faces larger reputation costs. Relatedly, decision-makers may be concerned about how to increase international reputation costs to make a credible commitment. Some past studies suggest that public threats are more credible than private ones because of larger political costs for the former (Fearon 1997; Morrow 2000; Takei 2024). It might be intriguing for future works to see whether the advantage of the publicity of commitments can apply to the context of assurances.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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# Appendix

## Instrument for the Survey Experiment

### GENERAL OPENING PROMPT PROVIDED TO ALL RESPONDENTS

China and Japan are engaged in conflict over several security-related issues in East Asia, chief among these include ownership over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and the status of Taiwan. In the latter case, China has not abandoned the use of force as an option for resolving the Taiwan issue while Japan has encouraged a peaceful resolution. Because of these Chinese-Japanese tensions, the stability of the East Asian region is of concern. Please read a hypothetical situation below and answer the following questions.

Prompt: Group #1 (China/No Commitment Information)

In 203X, China announced a massive military buildup. The Chinese leader stated that the decision to bolster their military capabilities was in response to the growing Japanese threat. In contrast, the Japanese government criticized China's move, arguing that it could destabilize international security in East Asia.

Prompt: Group #2 (China/Commitment Information)

In 203X, China announced a massive military buildup. The Chinese leader stated that the decision to bolster their military capabilities was in response to the growing Japanese threat. In contrast, the Japanese government criticized China's move, arguing that it could destabilize international security in East Asia.

*Given China's prior commitment to its peaceful rise, this military buildup could be viewed as a breach of its dedication to promoting peace.*

Prompt: Group #3 (Japan/No Commitment Information)

In 203X, Japan announced a massive military buildup. The Japanese leader stated that the decision to bolster their military capabilities was in response to the growing Chinese threat. In contrast, the Chinese government criticized Japan's move, arguing that it could destabilize international security in East Asia.

Prompt: Group #4 (Japan/Commitment Information)

In 203X, Japan announced a massive military buildup. The Japanese leader stated that the decision to bolster their military capabilities was in response to the growing Chinese threat. In contrast, the Chinese government criticized Japan's move, arguing that it could destabilize international security in East Asia.

*Given Japan's prior commitment to military restraint, this military buildup could be viewed*



*as a breach of its dedication to promoting peace.*

## QUESTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION COSTS

Credibility (For Groups 1 and 2): How likely would you believe commitments made by China in the future?

- Very unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Somewhat likely
- Very likely

Credibility (For Groups 3 and 4): How likely would you believe commitments made by Japan in the future? (For Groups 3 and 4)

- Very unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Somewhat likely
- Very likely

Support (For Groups 1 and 2): Do you support or oppose China's change in its foreign policy?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Don't care/ Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Support (For Groups 3 and 4): Do you support or oppose Japan's change in its foreign policy?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Don't care/ Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Work With (For Groups 1 and 2): Do you agree or disagree that it is a good idea for the US government to work with the Chinese government on some international issues/foreign affairs in the future?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Don't care/ Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Work With (For Groups 3 and 4): Do you agree or disagree that it is a good idea for the US government to work with the Japanese government on some international issues/foreign

affairs in the future?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Don't care/ Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Trust (Government) (For Groups 1 and 2): After the move made by the Chinese government on the expansion of military spending, do you trust the Chinese government?

- Strongly trust
- Somewhat trust
- Don't care/ Neither trust nor distrust
- Somewhat distrust
- Strongly distrust

Trust (Government) (For Groups 3 and 4): After the move made by the Japanese government on the expansion of military spending, do you trust the Japanese government?

- Strongly trust
- Somewhat trust
- Don't care/ Neither trust nor distrust
- Somewhat distrust
- Strongly distrust

Trust (Citizens) (For Groups 1 and 2): After the move made by the Chinese government on the expansion of military spending, do you trust Chinese citizens?

- Strongly trust
- Somewhat trust
- Don't care/ Neither trust nor distrust
- Somewhat distrust
- Strongly distrust

Trust (Citizens) (For Groups 3 and 4): After the move made by the Japanese government on the expansion of military spending, do you trust Japanese citizens?

- Strongly trust
- Somewhat trust
- Don't care/ Neither trust nor distrust
- Somewhat distrust
- Strongly distrust

## Variable Codings

Condition: Indicator for the experimental group, where 1 = China/No Information; 2 = China/Information on Commitment; 3 = Japan/No Information; 4 = Japan/Information on Commitment.

Credibility: How likely would you believe commitments made by [China/Japan] in the future? (1 = Very unlikely; 4 = Very likely.)

Support: Do you support or oppose [China's/Japan's] change in its foreign policy? (1 = Strongly oppose; 5 = Strongly support.)

Work With: Do you agree or disagree that it is a good idea for the US government to work with the [Chinese/Japanese] government on some international issues/foreign affairs in the future? (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

Trust (Government): After the move made by the [Chinese/Japanese] government on the expansion of military spending, do you trust the [Chinese/Japanese] government? (1 = Strongly distrust; 5 = Strongly trust.)

Trust (Citizens): After the move made by the [Chinese/Japanese] government on the expansion of military spending, do you trust the [Chinese/Japanese] citizens? (1 = Strongly distrust; 5 = Strongly trust.)

Male: 1 = Male; 0 = Female.

Age: 1 = 18-24 years; 2 = 25-34 years; 3 = 35-44 years; 4 = 45-54 years; 5 = 55-64 years; 6 = 65 years or older.

White: 1 = White, 0 = Otherwise.

Ideology: 1 = Extremely Conservative, 2 = Conservative, 3 = Slightly Conservative, 4 = Moderate, Middle of the Road, 5 = Slightly Liberal, 6 = Liberal, 7 = Extremely Liberal.

Democrat: 1 = Democrat, 0 = Otherwise.

Republican: 1 = Republican, 0 = Otherwise.

Voting (2020 Presidential Election): 1 = Yes, 0 = No.

Income: 1 = Less than \$25,000, 2 = \$25,000 - \$49,999, 3 = \$50,000 - \$74,999, 4 = \$75,000 - \$99,999, 5 = \$100,000 - \$124,999, 6 = \$125,000 - \$149,999, 7 = \$150,000 - \$174,999, 8 = \$175,000 - \$199,999, 9 = More than \$200,000

Education: 1 = Bachelor's degree or higher, 0 = Otherwise.

Feeling (China): 1 = Strongly unfavorably, 7 = Strongly favorably.

Feeling (Japan): 1 = Strongly unfavorably, 7 = Strongly favorably.

Knowledge (China): Who is the current leader of China? (Choice: Jiang Xemin, Xi Jinping, Hu Jintao, Deng Xiaoping, Don't know.) 1 = Xi Jinping, 0 = Otherwise.

Knowledge (Japan): Who is the current prime minister of China? (Choice: Shinzo Abe, Yshihide Suga, Fumio Kishida, Yoshihiko Noda, Don't know.) 1 = Fumio Kishida, 0 = Otherwise.

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics

| Variable                            | Obs   | Mean     | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|-------------------------------------|-------|----------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Group 1                             | 1,515 | .250165  | .4332509  | 0   | 1   |
| Group 2                             | 1,515 | .2475248 | .4317167  | 0   | 1   |
| Group 3                             | 1,515 | .2521452 | .4343876  | 0   | 1   |
| Group 4                             | 1,515 | .250165  | .4332509  | 0   | 1   |
| Credibility                         | 1,507 | 2.453218 | .9188349  | 1   | 4   |
| Support                             | 1,515 | 2.685149 | 1.316699  | 1   | 5   |
| Work With                           | 1,515 | 3.674587 | 1.155817  | 1   | 5   |
| Trust (Government)                  | 1,515 | 2.689769 | 1.234733  | 1   | 5   |
| Trust (Citizens)                    | 1,515 | 3.469307 | 1.034837  | 1   | 5   |
| Male                                | 1,494 | .5060241 | .5001311  | 0   | 1   |
| Age                                 | 1,515 | 3.183498 | 1.294993  | 1   | 6   |
| White                               | 1,515 | .679868  | .4666811  | 0   | 1   |
| Ideology                            | 1,509 | 4.245858 | 1.817938  | 1   | 7   |
| Democrat                            | 1,511 | .347452  | .4763184  | 0   | 1   |
| Republican                          | 1,511 | .3163468 | .465204   | 0   | 1   |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) | 1,511 | .8570479 | .3501404  | 0   | 1   |
| Income                              | 1,490 | 4.083221 | 2.190964  | 1   | 9   |
| Education                           | 1,490 | .5890139 | .4921756  | 0   | 1   |
| Feeling (China)                     | 1,490 | 3.354497 | 1.466139  | 1   | 7   |
| Feeling (Japan)                     | 1,515 | 5.468647 | 1.265136  | 1   | 7   |
| Knowledge (China)                   | 1,515 | .7617162 | .4261743  | 0   | 1   |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   | 1,515 | .3240924 | .4681893  | 0   | 1   |

## Balance Check

Table 7 shows a series of t-tests to check the balances across demographic and attitudinal variables. The results suggest that the randomization of the treatment was successful. Out of 39 coefficients, only 4 are statistically significant at a 95% significance level, which suggests that imbalances are caused by chance. In addition, the results in the main text hold when controlling for these variables in the regression models as shown in Table 8.

Table 7: Difference in Means of the 4 Point Scale Credibility Measure (with T-test P-values) between Covariate Mean for Respondents in Group 1 and....

| Covariants                          | Group 2 | Group 3 | Group 4 |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Male                                | -0.031  | 0.000   | 0.007   |
| Age                                 | -0.047  | -0.048  | 0.005   |
| White                               | 0.016   | 0.068*  | 0.024   |
| Democrat                            | -0.027  | -0.080* | -0.044  |
| Republican                          | 0.039   | 0.081*  | 0.054   |
| Ideology                            | -0.001  | -0.190  | -0.090  |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) | 0.024   | 0.010   | 0.029   |
| Income                              | -0.011  | -0.073  | -0.132  |
| Education                           | -0.019  | -0.054  | -0.039  |
| Feeling (China)                     | 0.214*  | -0.079  | 0.191   |
| Feeling (Japan)                     | 0.040   | -0.062  | 0.005   |
| Knowledge (China)                   | -0.000  | -0.012  | -0.005  |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   | -0.019  | 0.018   | -0.008  |

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$

Table 8: Controlling for Demographic and Attitudinal Variables

|                                     | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)                   | (4)                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                                     | Continuous            | Dichotomous           | Continuous            | Dichotomous           |
| China/Commitment                    | -0.350**<br>(0.0528)  | -0.165**<br>(0.0295)  |                       |                       |
| Japan/Commitment                    |                       |                       | -0.161**<br>(0.0472)  | -0.0487<br>(0.0283)   |
| Male                                | 0.103<br>(0.0558)     | 0.0658*<br>(0.0312)   | 0.0841<br>(0.0495)    | 0.0297<br>(0.0297)    |
| Age                                 | -0.0570**<br>(0.0213) | -0.0276*<br>(0.0119)  | 0.0153<br>(0.0194)    | 0.00170<br>(0.0117)   |
| White                               | -0.0803<br>(0.0603)   | -0.0537<br>(0.0337)   | 0.0656<br>(0.0528)    | 0.0497<br>(0.0317)    |
| Ideology                            | 0.0433<br>(0.0245)    | -0.00554<br>(0.0137)  | -0.0291<br>(0.0223)   | -0.00784<br>(0.0134)  |
| Democrat                            | -0.144<br>(0.0752)    | -0.0112<br>(0.0420)   | -0.0103<br>(0.0648)   | -0.0176<br>(0.0389)   |
| Republican                          | 0.0974<br>(0.0830)    | 0.0282<br>(0.0464)    | -0.0882<br>(0.0749)   | -0.0361<br>(0.0450)   |
| Income                              | -0.00411<br>(0.0131)  | -0.00576<br>(0.00734) | -0.00434<br>(0.0116)  | -0.00288<br>(0.00695) |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) | 0.0298<br>(0.0803)    | 0.0442<br>(0.0449)    | -0.00905<br>(0.0697)  | 0.0105<br>(0.0418)    |
| Education                           | 0.107<br>(0.0588)     | 0.0286<br>(0.0328)    | -0.0577<br>(0.0526)   | -0.0209<br>(0.0316)   |
| Feeling (China)                     | 0.209**<br>(0.0197)   | 0.0655**<br>(0.0110)  | -0.0513**<br>(0.0169) | -0.0217*<br>(0.0102)  |
| Feeling (Japan)                     | -0.0719**<br>(0.0210) | -0.0276*<br>(0.0117)  | 0.190**<br>(0.0199)   | 0.0804**<br>(0.0119)  |
| Knowledge (Chinn)                   | -0.0970<br>(0.0696)   | -0.0469<br>(0.0389)   | -0.0351<br>(0.0623)   | -0.0430<br>(0.0374)   |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   | 0.0673<br>(0.0611)    | 0.0565<br>(0.0341)    | 0.0579<br>(0.0548)    | 0.0349<br>(0.0329)    |
| Constant                            | 1.781**<br>(0.202)    | 0.333**<br>(0.113)    | 2.289**<br>(0.192)    | 0.505**<br>(0.115)    |
| Observations                        | 720                   | 720                   | 724                   | 724                   |
| $R^2$                               | 0.257                 | 0.138                 | 0.166                 | 0.084                 |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Attentiveness

All the subjects correctly answered the attention check question, which suggests their attentiveness is high. As additional exploratory analyses, I run the models excluding those whose response time is below 5 or above 95 percentiles. Whether or not control for the demographic and attitudinal variables, as Tables 9 and 10 show, the results in the main text still hold.



Table 9: Excluding Inattentive Subjects (DV=Credibility, Continuous)

|                                     | Model 1              | Model 2               | Model 3             | Model 4               |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| China/Commitment                    | -0.397**<br>(0.0595) | -0.345**<br>(0.0547)  |                     |                       |
| Japan/Commitment                    |                      |                       | -0.130*<br>(0.0518) | -0.137**<br>(0.0506)  |
| Male                                |                      | 0.0909<br>(0.0578)    |                     | 0.0779<br>(0.0530)    |
| Age                                 |                      | -0.0557*<br>(0.0220)  |                     | 0.0138<br>(0.0207)    |
| White                               |                      | -0.106<br>(0.0630)    |                     | 0.0722<br>(0.0567)    |
| Ideology                            |                      | 0.0539*<br>(0.0252)   |                     | -0.0328<br>(0.0241)   |
| Democrat                            |                      | -0.159*<br>(0.0778)   |                     | -0.0147<br>(0.0690)   |
| Republican                          |                      | 0.133<br>(0.0853)     |                     | -0.0759<br>(0.0799)   |
| Income                              |                      | -0.00489<br>(0.0136)  |                     | 0.000818<br>(0.0124)  |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) |                      | -0.00164<br>(0.0826)  |                     | 0.00477<br>(0.0749)   |
| Education                           |                      | 0.111<br>(0.0607)     |                     | -0.0695<br>(0.0559)   |
| Feeling (China)                     |                      | 0.210**<br>(0.0205)   |                     | -0.0679**<br>(0.0181) |
| Feeling (Japan)                     |                      | -0.0801**<br>(0.0219) |                     | 0.182**<br>(0.0212)   |
| Knowledge (China)                   |                      | -0.0670<br>(0.0716)   |                     | -0.0216<br>(0.0661)   |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   |                      | 0.0622<br>(0.0634)    |                     | 0.0207<br>(0.0583)    |
| Constant                            | 2.093**<br>(0.0420)  | 1.796**<br>(0.207)    | 3.059**<br>(0.0365) | 2.369**<br>(0.206)    |
| Observations                        | 685                  | 661                   | 677                 | 643                   |
| $R^2$                               | 0.061                | 0.266                 | 0.009               | 0.162                 |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 10: Excluding Inattentive Subjects (DV=Credibility, Dichotomous)

|                                     | Model 5              | Model 6               | Model 7             | Model 8               |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| China/Commitment                    | -0.175**<br>(0.0308) | -0.159**<br>(0.0305)  |                     |                       |
| Japan/Commitment                    |                      |                       | -0.0351<br>(0.0295) | -0.0340<br>(0.0299)   |
| Male                                |                      | 0.0579<br>(0.0323)    |                     | 0.0212<br>(0.0313)    |
| Age                                 |                      | -0.0280*<br>(0.0123)  |                     | 0.00517<br>(0.0123)   |
| White                               |                      | -0.0622<br>(0.0352)   |                     | 0.0400<br>(0.0335)    |
| Ideology                            |                      | 0.000316<br>(0.0141)  |                     | -0.00828<br>(0.0143)  |
| Democrat                            |                      | -0.0204<br>(0.0434)   |                     | -0.0127<br>(0.0408)   |
| Republican                          |                      | 0.0394<br>(0.0476)    |                     | -0.0183<br>(0.0472)   |
| Income                              |                      | -0.00385<br>(0.00758) |                     | -0.00470<br>(0.00733) |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) |                      | 0.0290<br>(0.0461)    |                     | 0.0246<br>(0.0443)    |
| Education                           |                      | 0.0196<br>(0.0339)    |                     | -0.0176<br>(0.0331)   |
| Feeling (China)                     |                      | 0.0631**<br>(0.0114)  |                     | -0.0277*<br>(0.0107)  |
| Feeling (Japan)                     |                      | -0.0310*<br>(0.0122)  |                     | 0.0769**<br>(0.0125)  |
| Knowledge (China)                   |                      | -0.0307<br>(0.0399)   |                     | -0.0377<br>(0.0391)   |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   |                      | 0.0585<br>(0.0354)    |                     | 0.0124<br>(0.0345)    |
| Constant                            | 0.303**<br>(0.0217)  | 0.341**<br>(0.116)    | 0.839**<br>(0.0208) | 0.531**<br>(0.122)    |
| Observations                        | 685                  | 661                   | 677                 | 643                   |
| $R^2$                               | 0.045                | 0.137                 | 0.002               | 0.081                 |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Manipulation Check

As manipulation checks, I asked whether the previous scenario mentioned that the Chinese government was committed to its peaceful rise (The correct answer is “No” for Groups 1, 3 and 4, and “Yes” for Group 2) and whether the previous scenario mentioned that the Japanese government was committed to military restraint (The correct answer is “No” for Group 1, 2 and 3, and “Yes” for Group 4). Table 11 reports the result of manipulation checks. The passing percentage is significantly lower in Group 2 than in the other groups ( $\chi^2 = 162.14$ ,  $p=0.029$ ). According to the feedback from some respondents, it appears that they are confused about whether “committed” means the previous commitment or the current behavior. Dropping those who fail to pass manipulation check questions can introduce biases, especially when a large number of subjects are dropped and when the number who are dropped varies by condition (Aronow, Baron and Pinson 2019). Fortunately, the exploratory models excluding these subjects shown in Tables 12 and 13 produce comparable results to those in the main text.

Table 11: Manipulation Check

| Group   | Which Country Builds Up? | Commitment Information? | <i>N</i> (All) | <i>N</i> (Pass) | %  |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----|
| Group 1 | China                    | No                      | 379            | 185             | 49 |
| Group 2 | China                    | Yes                     | 375            | 65              | 17 |
| Group 3 | Japan                    | No                      | 382            | 222             | 58 |
| Group 4 | Japan                    | Yes                     | 379            | 211             | 56 |
| Total   |                          |                         | 1,515          | 683             | 45 |

Table 12: Excluding Those Who Fail to Pass Manipulation Checks (DV=Credibility, Continuous)

|                                     | Model 1             | Model 2               | Model 3              | Model 4              |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| China/Commitment                    | -0.431**<br>(0.116) | -0.351**<br>(0.110)   |                      |                      |
| Japan/Commitment                    |                     |                       | -0.222**<br>(0.0612) | -0.178**<br>(0.0597) |
| Male                                |                     | 0.146<br>(0.105)      |                      | 0.0697<br>(0.0635)   |
| Age                                 |                     | -0.118**<br>(0.0400)  |                      | 0.00124<br>(0.0239)  |
| White                               |                     | 0.0286<br>(0.117)     |                      | 0.0805<br>(0.0670)   |
| Ideology                            |                     | 0.0968*<br>(0.0452)   |                      | -0.0171<br>(0.0273)  |
| Democrat                            |                     | -0.117<br>(0.136)     |                      | -0.0285<br>(0.0803)  |
| Republican                          |                     | 0.269<br>(0.153)      |                      | -0.109<br>(0.0928)   |
| Income                              |                     | -0.000371<br>(0.0242) |                      | 0.00312<br>(0.0144)  |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) |                     | 0.123<br>(0.153)      |                      | -0.00960<br>(0.0901) |
| Education                           |                     | 0.140<br>(0.107)      |                      | -0.199**<br>(0.0669) |
| Feeling (China)                     |                     | 0.173**<br>(0.0358)   |                      | -0.0511*<br>(0.0239) |
| Feeling (Japan)                     |                     | -0.0497<br>(0.0369)   |                      | 0.152**<br>(0.0252)  |
| Knowledge (China)                   |                     | -0.0609<br>(0.129)    |                      | 0.0689<br>(0.0824)   |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   |                     | -0.0325<br>(0.108)    |                      | 0.0728<br>(0.0674)   |
| Constant                            | 2.076**<br>(0.0581) | 1.448**<br>(0.380)    | 3.104**<br>(0.0427)  | 2.477**<br>(0.248)   |
| Observations                        | 247                 | 237                   | 433                  | 412                  |
| $R^2$                               | 0.053               | 0.253                 | 0.030                | 0.176                |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 13: Excluding Those Who Fail to Pass Manipulation Checks (DV=Credibility, Dichotomous)

|                                     | Model 1              | Model 2              | Model 3               | Model 4               |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| China/Commitment                    | -0.200**<br>(0.0607) | -0.178**<br>(0.0619) |                       |                       |
| Japan/Commitment                    |                      |                      | -0.0971**<br>(0.0369) | -0.0700<br>(0.0375)   |
| Male                                |                      | 0.0979<br>(0.0589)   |                       | 0.0230<br>(0.0400)    |
| Age                                 |                      | -0.0555*<br>(0.0225) |                       | 0.00480<br>(0.0150)   |
| White                               |                      | 0.0709<br>(0.0659)   |                       | 0.0656<br>(0.0421)    |
| Ideology                            |                      | 0.0202<br>(0.0254)   |                       | -0.00613<br>(0.0172)  |
| Democrat                            |                      | -0.0225<br>(0.0762)  |                       | -0.0111<br>(0.0505)   |
| Republican                          |                      | 0.102<br>(0.0861)    |                       | -0.0614<br>(0.0583)   |
| Income                              |                      | -0.00181<br>(0.0136) |                       | -0.00349<br>(0.00904) |
| Voting (2020 Presidential Election) |                      | 0.0918<br>(0.0861)   |                       | -0.0107<br>(0.0567)   |
| Education                           |                      | 0.0503<br>(0.0599)   |                       | -0.0529<br>(0.0421)   |
| Feeling (China)                     |                      | 0.0474*<br>(0.0201)  |                       | -0.0175<br>(0.0150)   |
| Feeling (Japan)                     |                      | -0.00502<br>(0.0207) |                       | 0.0697**<br>(0.0159)  |
| Knowledge (China)                   |                      | -0.0564<br>(0.0727)  |                       | -0.00591<br>(0.0518)  |
| Knowledge (Japan)                   |                      | 0.00822<br>(0.0609)  |                       | 0.0421<br>(0.0424)    |
| Constant                            | 0.281**<br>(0.0304)  | 0.0455<br>(0.214)    | 0.865**<br>(0.0258)   | 0.552**<br>(0.156)    |
| Observations                        | 247                  | 237                  | 433                   | 412                   |
| $R^2$                               | 0.043                | 0.136                | 0.016                 | 0.089                 |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## The Heterogenous Effect of Demographic and Attitudinal Variables

Since my sample is representative in terms of gender, race, and partisanship, the effect reported in the main test should be close to the population average treatment effect. Nonetheless, international reputation costs may be generated by a specific subpopulation. I report the result of a series of exploratory analyses for the heterogenous effects of demographic and attitudinal variables from Figures 1 to 11 on China and Figures 12 to 22 on Japan.

The results indicate a few variables cause heterogeneous effects. As for China, males ( $p=0.047$ ) and non-democrats ( $p=0.029$ ) generate larger audience costs. Also, international reputation costs for Japan emerge only among those who voted in the 2020 presidential election ( $p=0.045$ ) or have a favorable feeling toward Japan ( $p=0.008$ ). However, the results suggest that the effect of information on a previous commitment to peace is largely homogeneous.

Figure 1: The Heterogenous Effects of Gender (Japan)

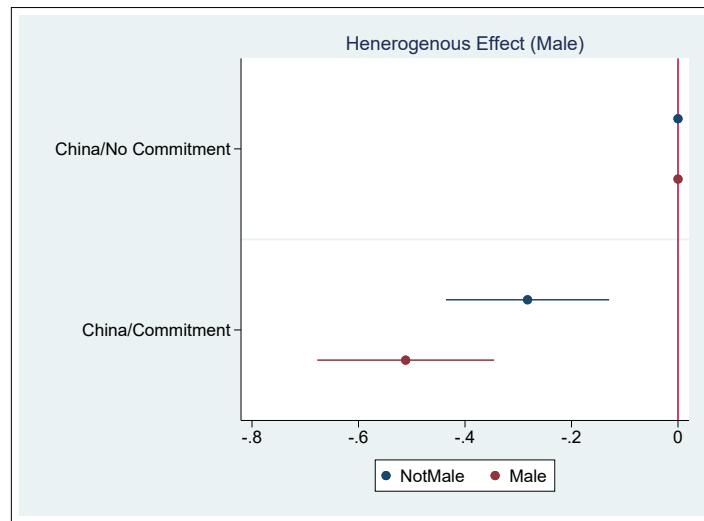


Figure 2: The Heterogenous Effects of Age (China)

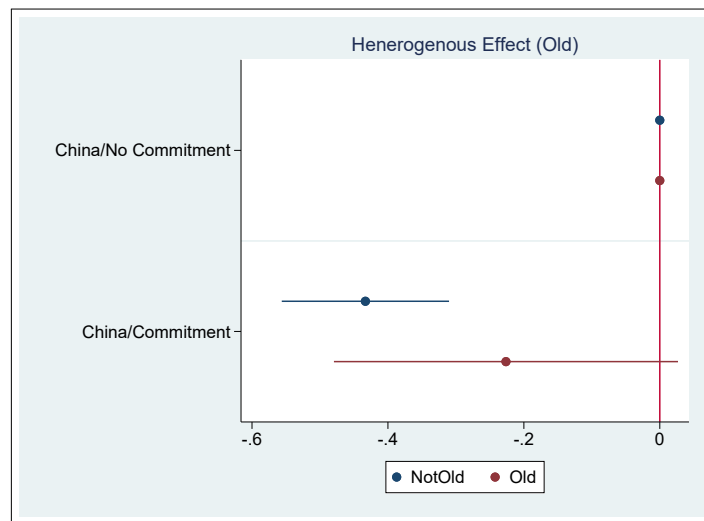


Figure 3: The Heterogenous Effects of Race (China)

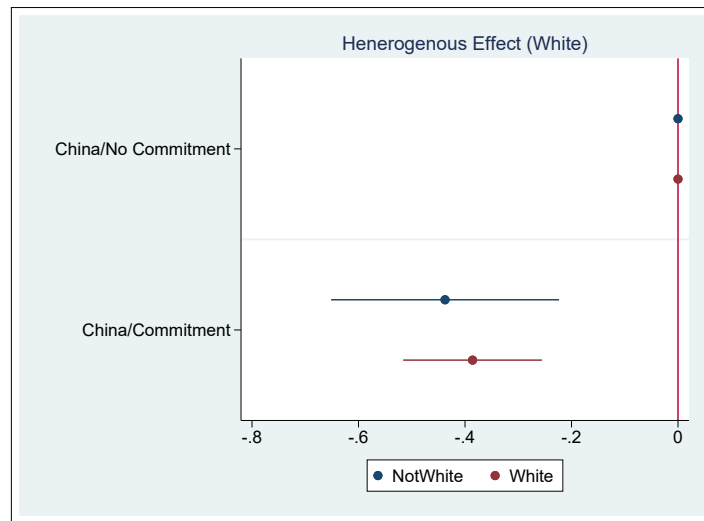


Figure 4: The Heterogenous Effects of Ideology (China)

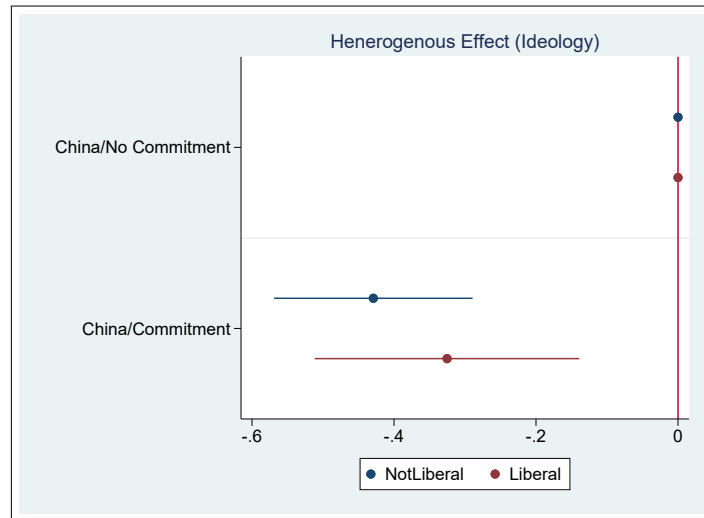




Figure 5: The Heterogenous Effects of Democrat (China)

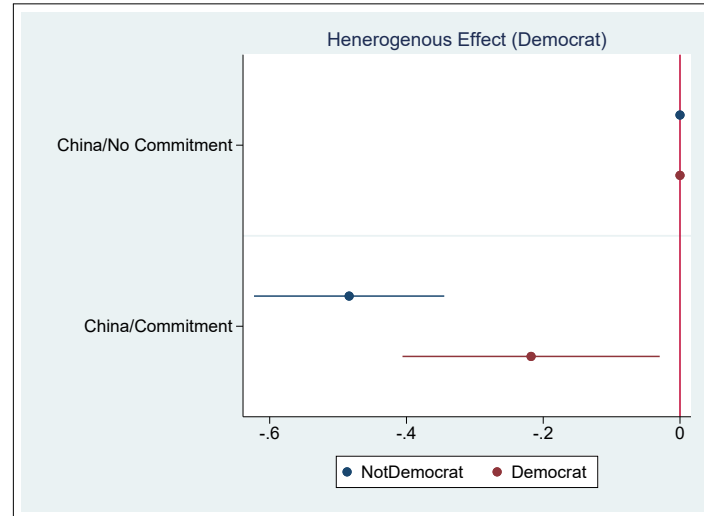


Figure 6: The Heterogenous Effects of Republican (China)

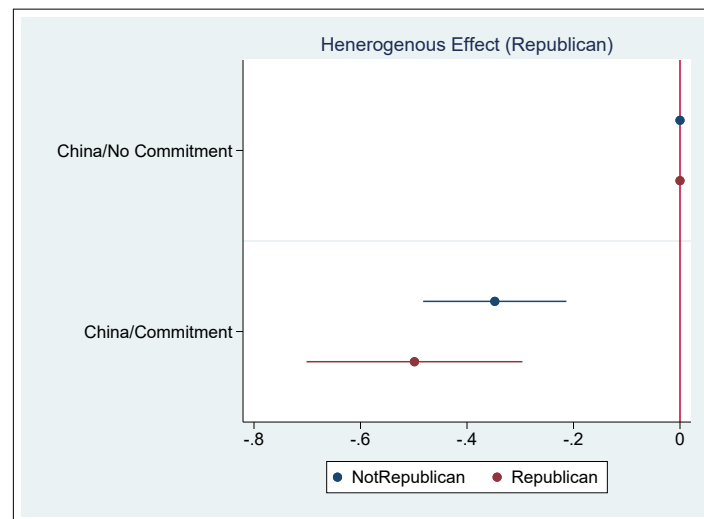


Figure 7: The Heterogenous Effects of Voting (China)

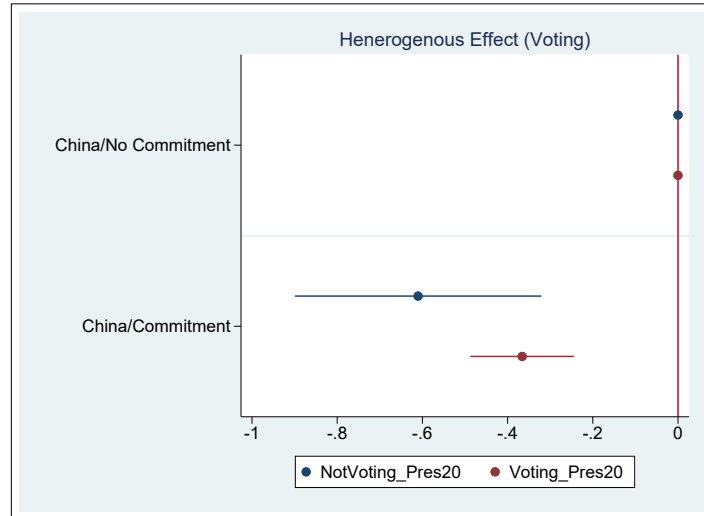


Figure 8: The Heterogenous Effects of Income (China)

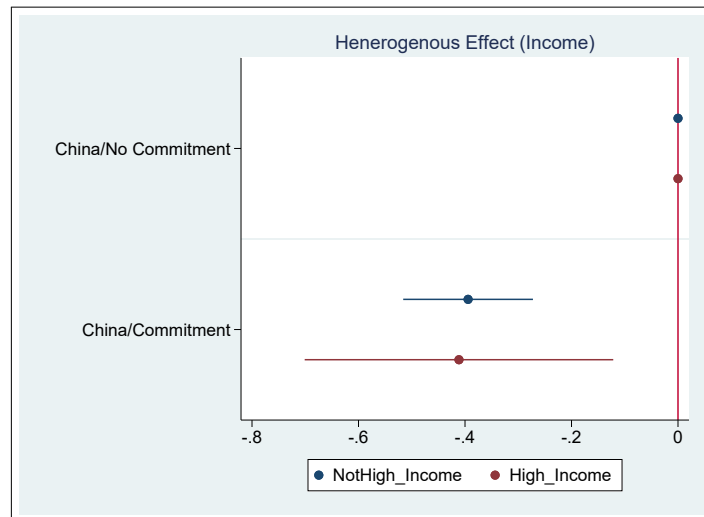


Figure 9: The Heterogenous Effects of Education (China)

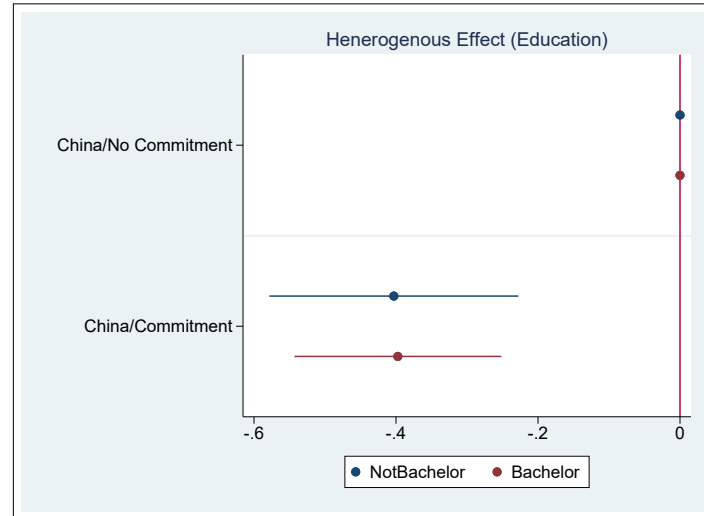


Figure 10: The Heterogenous Effects of Feeling toward China (China)

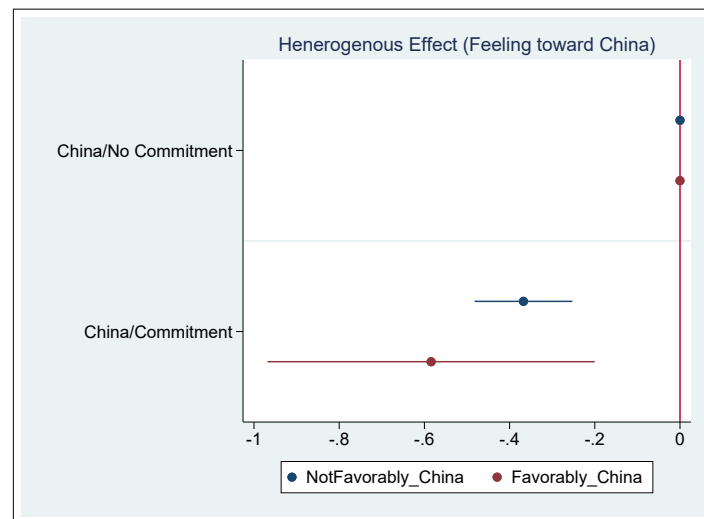


Figure 11: The Heterogenous Effects of Knowledge on China (China)

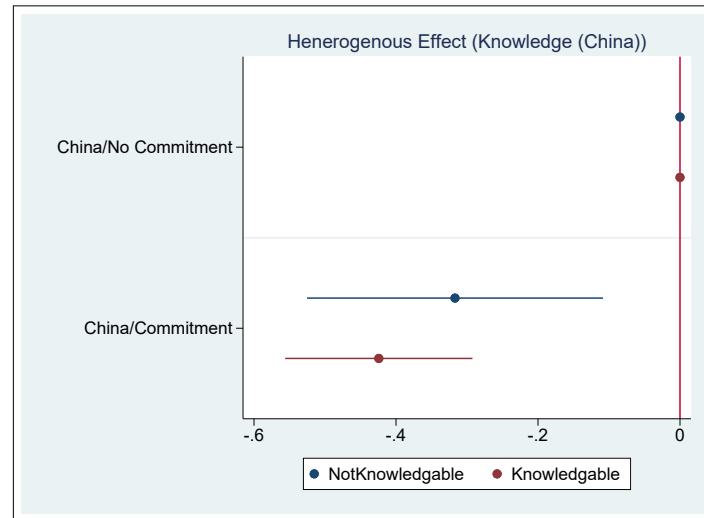


Figure 12: The Heterogenous Effects of Gender (Japan)

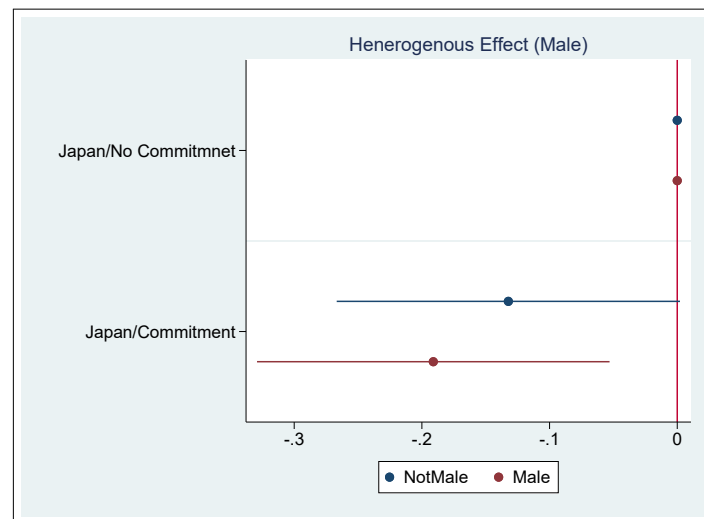


Figure 13: The Heterogenous Effects of Age (Japan)

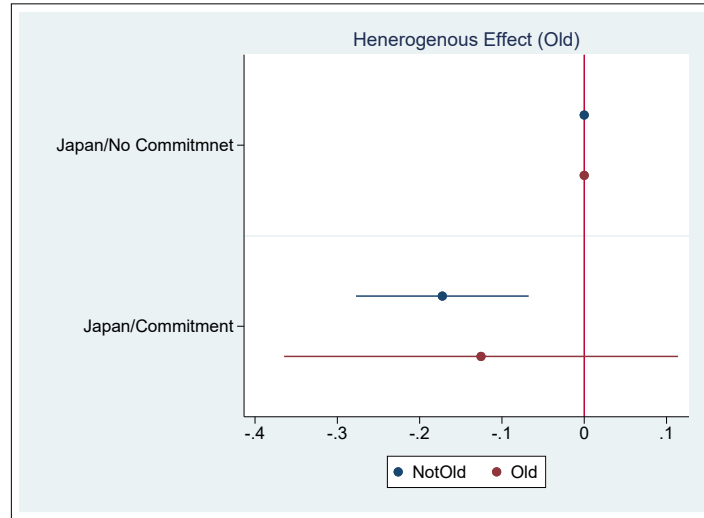


Figure 14: The Heterogenous Effects of Race (Japan)

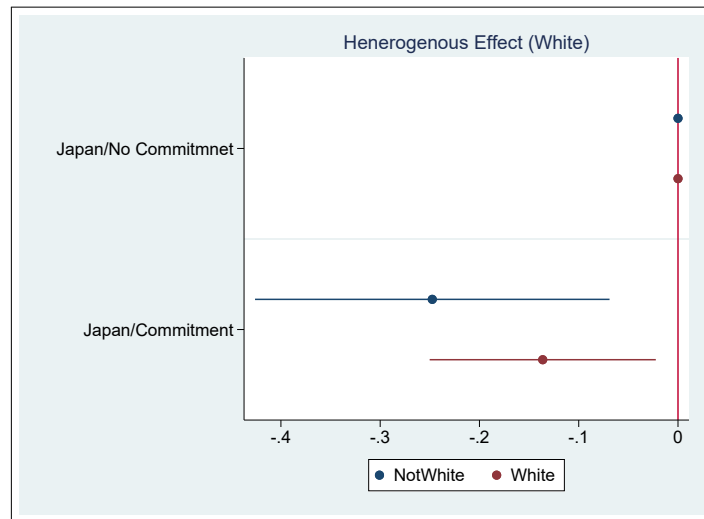


Figure 15: The Heterogenous Effects of Ideology (Japan)

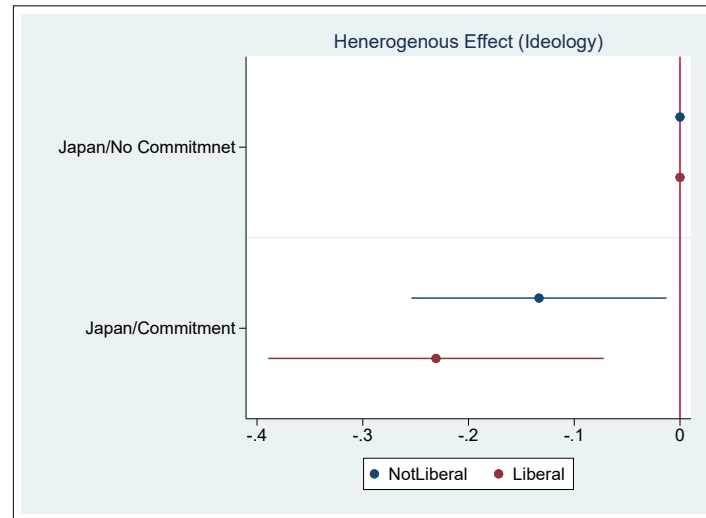


Figure 16: The Heterogenous Effects of Democrat (Japan)

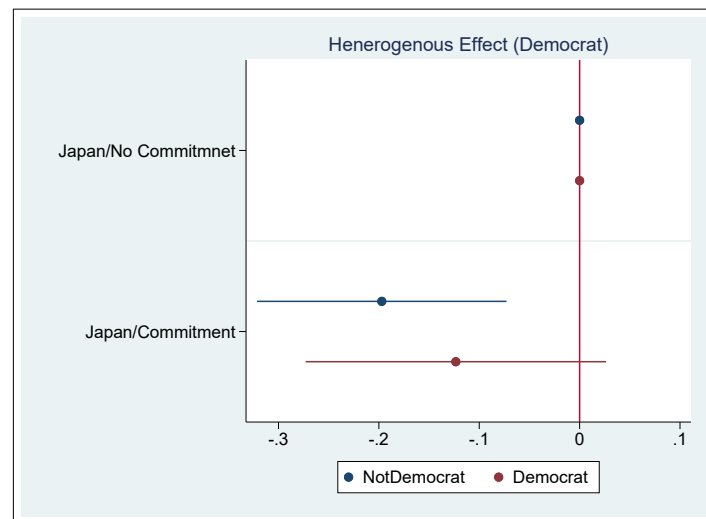


Figure 17: The Heterogenous Effects of Republican (Japan)

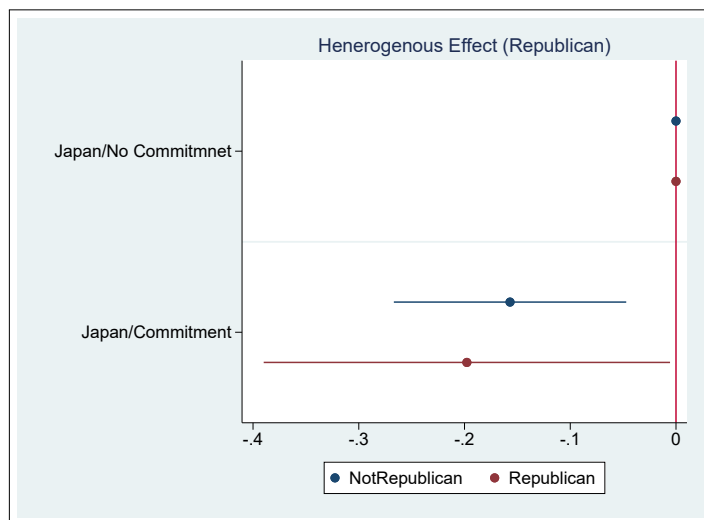


Figure 18: The Heterogenous Effects of Voting (Japan)

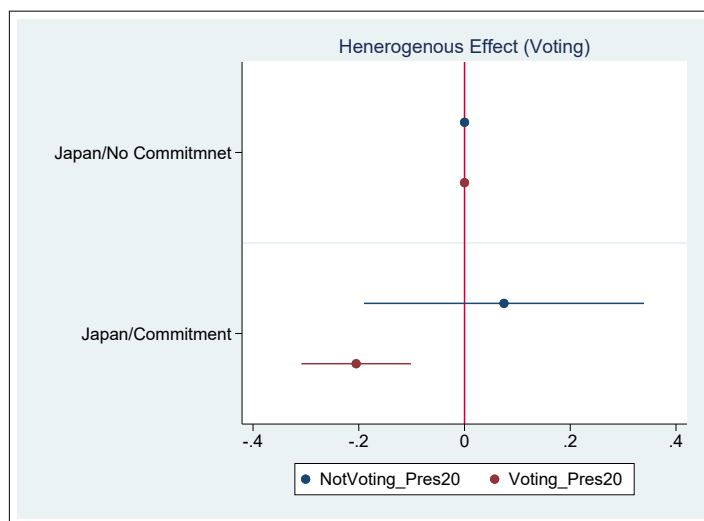


Figure 19: The Heterogenous Effects of Income (Japan)

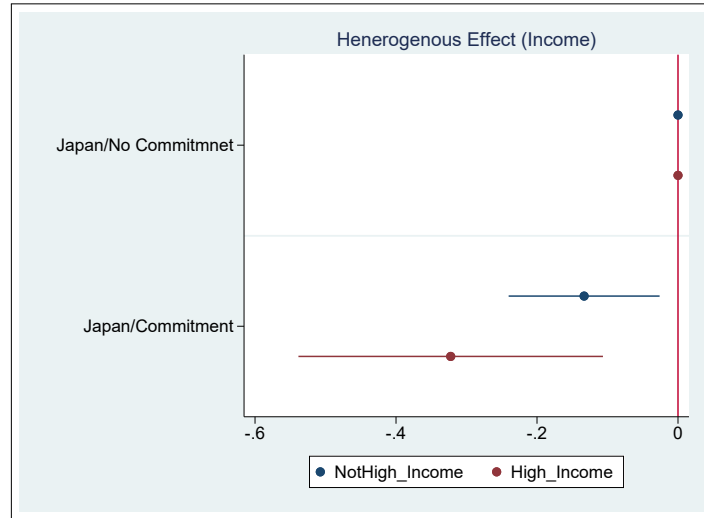


Figure 20: The Heterogenous Effects of Education (Japan)

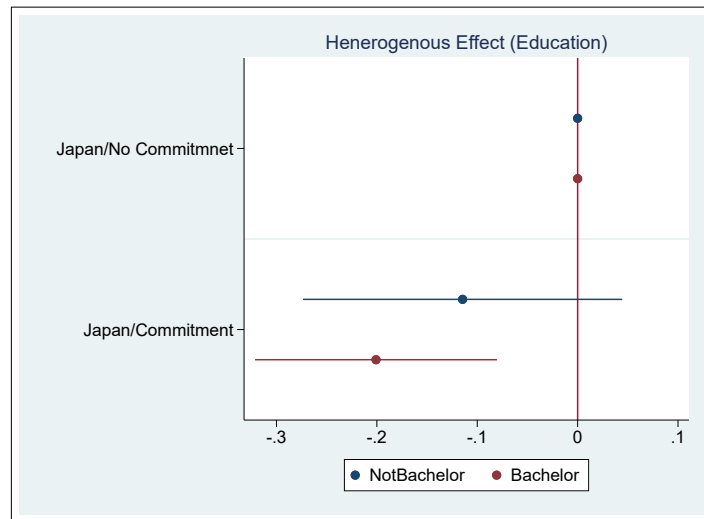




Figure 21: The Heterogenous Effects of Feeling toward Japan (Japan)

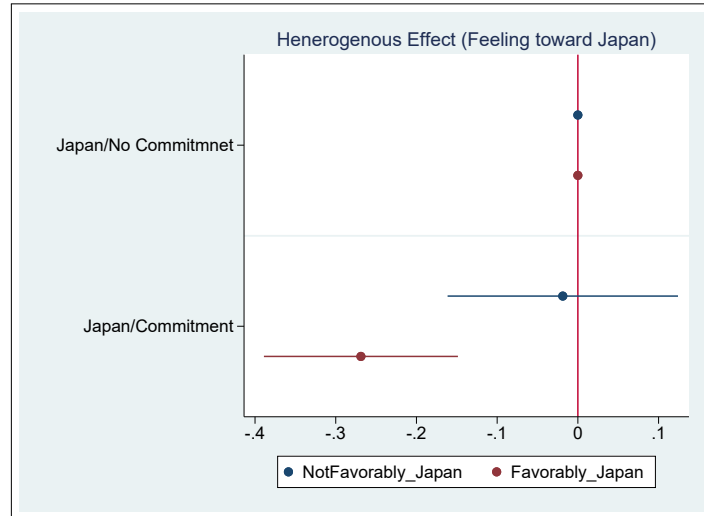


Figure 22: The Heterogenous Effects of Knowledge on Japan (Japan)

