

# The Boundaries of Belonging: An Experimental Approach to National Identity Measurement in Taiwan and South Korea

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## Abstract

How do citizens in historically ethnic nations that have undergone democratic transitions define national belonging? This study investigates the question using a two-stage conjoint experiment to assess public attitudes toward national belonging. The design addresses key limitations of traditional surveys, including weak construct validity and the inability to capture complex trade-offs. Focusing on Taiwan and South Korea, two recently democratized societies experiencing increasing social diversity, the study evaluates how citizens judge hypothetical co-nationals based on a range of identity-related attributes. Results show that voluntarist and civic traits, especially national self-identification and support for democracy, strongly influence perceptions of membership. However, ascriptive criteria such as ancestry and nativity remain important. Comparatively, Taiwan exhibits a more open and civic-oriented conception of national identity than South Korea. These findings demonstrate the value of conjoint experiments for analyzing multidimensional inclusion preferences and point to the need for combining generalizable frameworks with context-specific measurement in national identity research.

**Keywords:** national identity, nationalism, survey experiments, Taiwan, South Korea

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# 1 Introduction

How do citizens in historically ethnic nations that have undergone democratic transitions define national belonging? Taiwan and South Korea provide compelling contexts in which to explore this question. Both are exemplary cases of mid-sized, highly industrialized third-wave democracies. They emerged from authoritarian regimes that promoted pan-ethnic identities linking their populations to compatriots in rival communist states. In recent decades, both societies have undergone significant democratization and demographic diversification. Scholars have observed a shift in national identity discourse away from exclusive, ethnonationalist conceptions toward more civic and inclusive understandings rooted in shared political values and institutional membership de-linked from pan-ethnic conceptions of the nation (Chu and Lin 2001; Shen and Wu 2008; Moon 2012; Kim 2014; Lie 2015). Yet, measuring the actual content of national identity and the extent to which it has become more territorially bound and inclusive remains a persistent challenge.

Traditional survey instruments face several limitations in capturing how people evaluate national membership. Most notably, they do not require respondents to prioritize among competing criteria such as ancestry, birthplace, and political allegiance. As a result, individuals frequently endorse multiple criteria as equally important, masking the relative weight they assign to each one (Mutz 2011; Sniderman and Grob 1996; Citrin, Wright, and Wand 2012). Moreover, survey items often rely on vague or underspecified language, such as “shared culture” or “respect for institutions,” which invites divergent interpretations and weakens construct validity (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; vom Hau, James, and Obert 2023). These issues are especially acute in identity research, where symbolic cues and context strongly influence interpretation (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Finally, conventional surveys elicit responses in isolation from real-world evaluative contexts, heightening the risk of socially desirable or normatively driven answers.

To address these limitations, this study employs a choice-based conjoint (CBC) experiment, presenting respondents with profiles of hypothetical individuals that vary across

identity-related attributes. The forced-choice format requires respondents to make trade-offs between characteristics, revealing the relative importance of each attribute and reducing the interpretive ambiguity found in direct survey items (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). Originally developed for research on political preferences and policy trade-offs, CBC designs are particularly well-suited to uncovering multidimensional attitudes in constrained decision environments. Prior work has demonstrated the method's capacity to detect subgroup variation, reduce satisficing, and improve measurement reliability on sensitive topics (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hopkins 2021; Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020), yet its application to national identity remains limited.

Our CBC experiments were fielded through nationally representative online surveys conducted in 2023 and 2024 ( $N = 2,050$  in Taiwan and  $N = 2,006$  in South Korea). Respondents completed two conjoint tasks: one based on general identity criteria common across national surveys, and another using country-specific attributes tailored to each society's political and historical context. This design allows us to compare the influence of civic, voluntarist, and ascriptive attributes within and across cases.

The findings show that voluntarist and civic attributes, particularly national self-identification and support for democracy, are central in shaping perceptions of national membership. Nonetheless, ascriptive traits such as common ancestry and nativity continue to matter. Taiwan exhibits a greater reliance on voluntarist criteria, suggesting a more civic and inclusive identity structure. In contrast, South Korea assigns relatively more weight to ascriptive markers, reflecting the legacy of ethnonationalist narratives rooted in monoethnic statehood and Cold War-era ideology.

These patterns reflect divergent historical trajectories of identity formation and regime legitimization. Taiwan's national identity has increasingly centered on civic affiliation and political distinctiveness from China, shaped by democratization and the geopolitics of China-Taiwan relations (Schubert 2002; Harrison 2006). South Korea, while politically liberalized, retains a strong ethnocultural conception of the nation that continues to inform judgments

about belonging (Shin 2006; Chung 2020; Hur 2022).

Methodologically, this study advances research on national identity by demonstrating the utility of conjoint experimental designs for disentangling multidimensional preferences. The results demonstrate how democratic publics weigh identity criteria in evaluating the conditions of national inclusion. Although the cross-sectional design does not permit temporal comparisons, the findings provide valuable insights into how national identities evolve in third-wave democracies.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. We first situate our research in the literature on national identity and democracy, emphasizing the typologies of identity and their links to political institutions. We then critique conventional measurement strategies and introduce the conjoint experiment as a methodological alternative. Next, we describe the historical and political development of identity discourses in Taiwan and South Korea. This is followed by the data and methods section, where we explain our conjoint design. We then present the findings and analyze cross-national patterns. We conclude by discussing the theoretical implications and directions for future research.

## 2 Boundaries of Identity: Concepts, Measurement, and Regime Variation

### 2.1 National Identity Types and Democratic Inclusion

National identity refers to a collective sense of belonging to a nation, grounded in shared history, culture, and values that distinguish one group from others (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Smith 1991). Classic typologies divide national identities into ethnic and civic categories. Ethnic identity emphasizes descent-based attributes, such as ancestry, language, and cultural heritage, defining membership primarily through lineage (Connor 1994; Smith 1991). Civic identity, by contrast, centers on shared political principles and formal citi-

zenship, emphasizing legal equality and institutional participation (Kohn 1955; Brubaker 1992).

This dichotomy has been widely critiqued as overly rigid. In reality, most national identities incorporate both ascriptive and civic elements (Brubaker 1996; Mylonas and Tudor 2023). Some scholars have thus proposed a third category: voluntarist national identity, which places primacy on self-identification and individual alignment with national values over inherited characteristics or legal status (Tamir 1993; Habermas 1996; Kymlicka 2001). While civic identity often assumes participation in state institutions or possession of formal citizenship, voluntarist identity relaxes these thresholds, allowing individuals to be seen as members of the nation based on shared norms and subjective affiliation.<sup>1</sup>

These identity types are closely tied to regime type. Democratic systems, by their nature, tend to encourage civic and voluntarist identities because democratic norms emphasize equality, pluralism, and inclusion (Snyder 1993; Nodia 1994; Shulman 2004; Mansfield and Snyder 2005; Banting et al. 2020). Stable democratic institutions create space for a national identity grounded in civic participation and political community rather than in ethnicity or cultural homogeneity. By contrast, authoritarian regimes often rely on ethnocultural definitions of nationhood to reinforce legitimacy, unify the population, and suppress dissent through appeals to ancestry, cultural purity, or shared heritage (Connor 1994; Smith 1991; Hechter 2000; Myers 2011).

However, democratic inclusion does not automatically displace inherited identity frames. Even consolidated democracies frequently retain ethnic or ascriptive elements within ostensibly civic identity narratives (Ivarsflaten 2007). The relationship between regime type

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<sup>1</sup>Mylonas and Tudor (2023) introduce the concept of identity ‘thickness’ to describe variation in national membership criteria along a continuum, where thicker forms of identity entail greater degrees of ascriptive closure (e.g., ancestry, birth, culture) while thinner forms relax these conditions. While this continuum-based view captures important gradations in inclusion, it assumes that ascriptiveness varies along a single dimension. In contrast, our approach treats ethnic, civic, and voluntarist identities as categorically distinct ideal types, each defined by qualitatively different membership logics. While valuable, the scalar framework risks reifying inclusion as a matter of degree rather than kind. Our approach departs from this logic by treating ethnic, civic, and voluntarist identities as analytically distinct categories with each structured by different logics of belonging, rather than gradations on a single identity continuum.

and national identity is thus contingent, not deterministic. It requires empirical investigation of how different identity components coexist, compete, or reinforce one another under democratic conditions. Doing so demands measurement strategies that capture the multidimensional nature of identity and the structure of underlying preferences.

## 2.2 Measuring the Contents of National Identity

Using observational survey designs, social scientists have long sought to measure the content of national identity – that is, to determine which attributes people consider important for being a “true” member of the nation (vom Hau et al. 2023). The most common approach has been direct survey questions asking respondents to rate or agree with statements about potential criteria.<sup>2</sup>

While cross-national analyses using such batteries have identified recurring ethnic, civic, and voluntarist dimensions (Jones and Smith 2001; Kunovich 2009; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Dawkins and Hanson 2022), standard survey designs face well-documented limitations. First, they obscure trade-offs. Respondents often rate multiple items as equally important, without clarifying which they prioritize when attributes are in tension (Mutz 2011; Citrin, Wright, and Wand 2012). A respondent may, for instance, say both language and ancestry are “very important” – yet these responses offer no insight into how they would evaluate a person who speaks the language but lacks ancestral ties. This masks how real-world judgments about belonging are actually made.

Second, the phrasing of survey items is often abstract or vague. Concepts such as “shared culture” or “respect for national institutions” are open to diverse interpretations, depending on the respondents’ backgrounds or ideological orientation (vom Hau et al. 2023). This interpretive ambiguity undermines construct validity and complicates cross-national or subgroup comparisons. Moreover, as Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016) demonstrate through latent

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<sup>2</sup>One of the most prominent examples of this approach is the International Social Survey Programme’s (ISSP) National Identity module, which includes a standardized battery of questions asking how important specific attributes (e.g., birthplace, language) are for being ‘truly’ part of the nation (ISSP Research Group 2015).

class analysis, many individuals hold hybrid or even contradictory conceptions of identity.

Third, conventional surveys are prone to social desirability bias and normative signaling. Because they present identity attributes in isolation and in a non-consequential context, respondents may endorse civic criteria out of normative conformity, not because these guide their actual judgments, particularly in relation to sensitive attributes like ethnicity or religion (Sniderman and Grob 1996; Citrin et al. 2012). This makes it difficult to discern whether preferences for inclusion criteria are genuine or performative.

In short, traditional survey methods lack inferential clarity, contextual realism, and the ability to capture preference hierarchies. They are ill-suited to disentangle how people weigh different identity attributes when forced to make a choice.

We propose a choice-based conjoint (CBC) approach to address these limitations. In this design, respondents evaluate randomized profiles of hypothetical individuals that vary across key identity-relevant traits (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). A profile might include combinations of birthplace, ancestry, language use, civic commitment, or self-identification. Participants are asked to choose which profile is more national or to assess whether each meets a threshold for national membership.

This design compels respondents to make trade-offs between profile attributes, enabling estimation of the marginal effect of each trait on perceived belonging. By randomizing profile attributes and estimating their average marginal effects, we can isolate the causal influence of each trait on perceptions of belonging (Mutz 2011; Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). This allows us to disaggregate inclusion logics and uncover underlying preference structures that would be obscured in traditional surveys (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015).

Conjoint designs also reduce ambiguity by presenting identities as structured combinations of attributes, in line with efforts to treat identity as a variable with measurable components (Abdelal et al. 2006). Embedded in a comparative and impersonal task, the approach mitigates social desirability bias and reveals conditional attitudes toward national membership (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hopkins 2021; Horiuchi et al. 2022).

As a method for studying multidimensional judgments, particularly those involving normatively sensitive domains such as immigration, welfare, and identity, conjoint analysis is now widely recommended in political science and adjacent fields (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020). National identity evaluations, which often require respondents to weigh symbolic, legal, and cultural signals, are precisely such a case. By employing a CBC design, this study captures how individuals parse the boundaries of national belonging with greater nuance and realism.

### 2.3 National Identity in Taiwan and South Korea

While the preceding section outlined how national identity can be more accurately measured through a conjoint framework, it is necessary to contextualize these measurement strategies within specific empirical settings. The following section examines Taiwan and South Korea, where national identity has evolved through distinct political histories, institutional developments, and boundary-making narratives.

Both countries followed parallel trajectories through much of the 20th century, including periods of colonization, war, authoritarian nation-building, and eventual democratization, which makes them suitable for comparison. However, the specifics of their nationhood narratives and the inclusiveness of their national identities have also diverged in important ways.

First, there is a common background. Taiwan and South Korea are products of the post-World War II order in East Asia, where new states emerged under the shadow of Cold War division. Each experienced Japanese colonial rule in the first half of the 20th century, which fostered early stirrings of nationalist consciousness. After 1945, both regimes became authoritarian, championing an ethnic conception of the nation. In Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) government, having retreated from Mainland China in 1949, imposed a pan-Chinese nationalism on the island. A Mainland Chinese elite ruled over the native Taiwanese majority and portrayed the state as the rightful representative of all of China.

This regime cultivated an ascriptive national identity grounded in Chinese ethnicity and culture, deliberately downplaying the island's unique historical identity (Ho 2022a).

Similarly, in South Korea, the early republic and subsequent military governments, especially under Park Chung-hee in the 1960s–1970s, promoted the ideology of *dan-il minjok* (unitary ethnic nation). Ethnic homogeneity was touted as the essence of Korean identity, serving to unify the population against external threats (North Korea, communism) and justify authoritarian rule. In both cases, national identity during the Cold War era was intentionally exclusive, defined by bloodline, ancestral homeland, and a singular culture, as a means of political legitimization (Shin, Freda, and Yi 1999).

Second, there is a shared transition story and parallel identity changes. Democratic transition opened the door for reimagining national identity in both countries. Taiwan's democratization in the late 1980s was driven by, and subsequently encouraged further, the rise of a distinct Taiwanese identity (Chu and Lin 2001; Yang 2007; Kaeding 2011; Ho 2022b). With the end of martial law in 1987 and the advent of free elections, public discourse increasingly acknowledged Taiwan's separate political and historical identity from Mainland China. Local languages and history were rehabilitated, and by the 1990s, a new curriculum emphasized Taiwan's multiethnic heritage and distinctiveness from China (Tu 1996; Wang and Liu 2004; Simon 2007; Chen 2013; W.-L. Chen, Lin, and Yang 2023).

Identification surveys show a dramatic shift: whereas a large share of Taiwan's population once considered themselves "Chinese," today, the vast majority (over 60% in 2023) identify exclusively as Taiwanese (Election Study Center, NCCU 2024). This reflects a transformation of national identity from a pan-Chinese ethnonational framework to a more civic conception centered on the island's polity (Song 2009; Qi and Chang 2021). While Taiwanese identity also has ethnic and cultural components, it is first and foremost a political category. It signals identification with Taiwan's polity and distinction from China, by the primarily ethnically Han Chinese citizens of Taiwan. Arguably, Taiwan illustrates a case where democratic development and localization have pluralized national identity. The

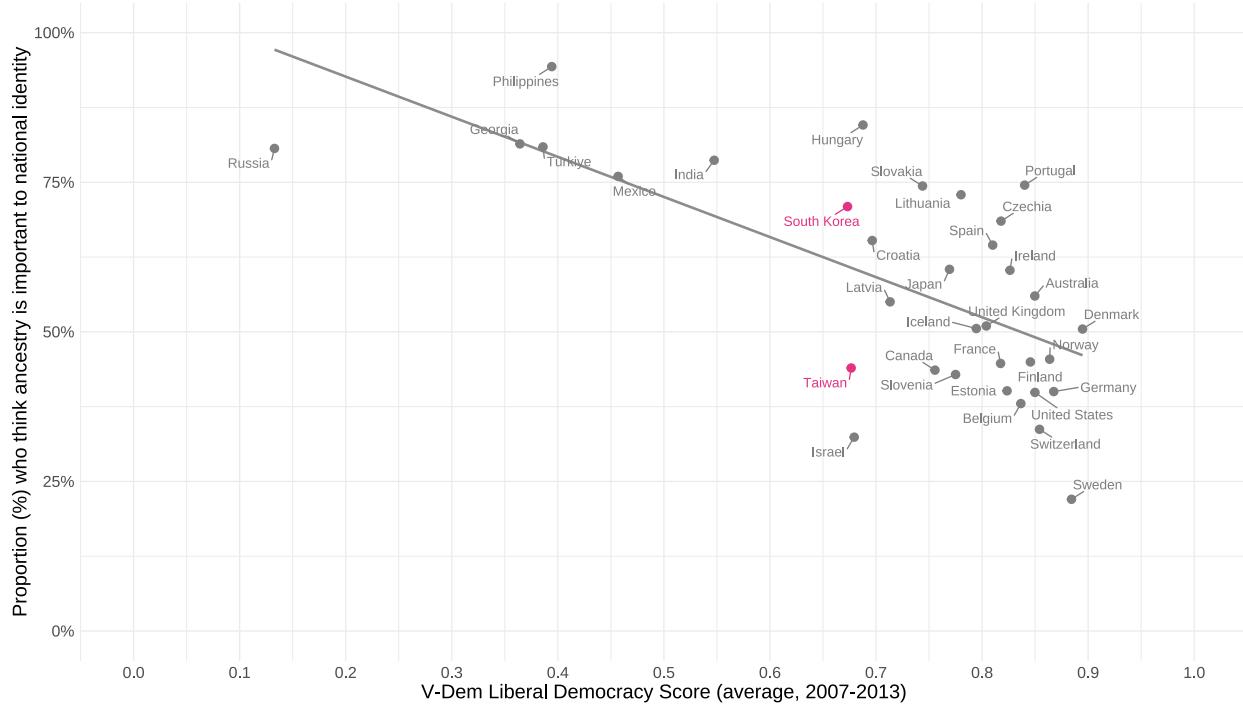
nation is increasingly defined in terms of civic belonging and self-identification with Taiwan rather than exclusively by Han Chinese lineage.

South Korea's identity evolution has been more gradual. Democratization in 1987 ushered in a new constitutional order affirming universal citizenship and human rights (Kim 2000), theoretically aligning the nation's identity with civic ideals. During the 1990s and 2000s, South Korea became integrated into the global economy and began to experience rising immigration and multiculturalism. An influx of foreign workers, marriage migrants, and refugees meant that, for the first time, not everyone in South Korea was of Korean ancestry (Chung 2020). This prompted some reexamination of what it means to be "Korean". The government and civil society initiated efforts to foster a more inclusive national identity—for example, revising school textbooks to recognize Korea's growing diversity and portray the nation as a multicultural society (Won and Huntington 2021). These changes signaled an official shift toward a civic notion of the Korean nation, one that could include naturalized citizens and their children. A similar pattern is noted by Moon (2012) and Cho and Park (2016), who document how textbook narratives increasingly address diversity, rights, and multicultural justice, although often in a compartmentalized and contradictory fashion.

In practice, change has been tempered by the enduring strength of ethnic nationalism in society. Unlike Taiwan, whose democratization required an active project of differentiation from China, South Korea's post-authoritarian identity emphasizes ethnonational continuity with pre-democratic narratives. This continuity is reinforced by the logic of unification, which positions North Koreans as part of the same ethnic nation and lessens the perceived need to reconceptualize Koreanness (Jo 2024). For instance, educational materials and public discourse in the post-transition period often continued to emphasize shared ancestry and cultural continuity as core elements of national identity (Moon 2012; Cho and Park 2016), even amid reforms promoting a more socially diverse nation, especially compared to North Korea (Won and Huntington 2021). Despite democratization, many South Koreans continue to view ancestry as a core criterion for national belonging (Shin 2006). Between 2010 and

2015, public support for a multicultural conception of Korean identity declined markedly, with a corresponding uptick in ethnic exclusivism, even among younger and more educated respondents (Hwang 2016; Yoon 2016).

Thus, despite their similar postwar trajectories, Taiwan and South Korea exhibit markedly different degrees of inclusiveness in national identity. In Taiwan, the decoupling of national identity from ethnic Chinese heritage has proceeded substantially, such that civic loyalty and self-identification are now widely accepted as sufficient grounds for national membership (Corcuff 2002; Rigger 2011). By contrast, South Korea continues to define nationhood through descent-based criteria. Figure 1 illustrates this divergence, highlighting the relationship between liberal democracy and the prevalence of ethnic conceptions of national identity across a range of democracies. While countries with stronger democratic institutions generally show lower emphasis on shared ancestry as a criterion for national belonging, Taiwan and South Korea complicate this pattern. Despite comparable levels of democratic development, South Koreans continue to emphasize ethnic ancestry significantly more than their Taiwanese counterparts.



**Figure 1:** Democracy and exclusivity of national identities

*Note:* Data are drawn from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (average liberal democracy scores, 2007–2013) and the 2013 wave of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) on national identity. For countries missing in 2013, data from the 2003 wave are used. The plot includes a line of best fit illustrating the relationship between democracy levels and the importance of ancestry in national identity. Survey weights, when supplied, were applied. Taiwan and South Korea are highlighted.

The discrepancy points to a broader theoretical and methodological issue: conventional survey methods alone struggle to capture why two democracies at similar institutional levels differ substantially in their national identity content. Understanding these differences requires an approach capable of simultaneously disentangling multiple identity dimensions. Given the complexity and case-specific patterns observed, an appropriately complex methodological approach is required to assess how inclusive these national identities truly are. Next, we turn to our research design, detailing the conjoint experiment that enables such a comparative assessment.

## 3 Data and Methods

### 3.1 Experimental Design and Measurement

This study uses choice-based conjoint experiments to determine how citizens in Taiwan and South Korea evaluate national identity boundaries. The theoretical foundation assumes that both generalizable and context-specific attributes shape perceptions of national belonging. General attributes, such as birthplace, language ability, or legal citizenship, are common across societies. Context-specific attributes, by contrast, reflect political, historical, or cultural elements unique to each case, such as the inclusion of pan-Korean and diaspora identities in South Korea, and cross-strait identity categories in Taiwan, as well as country-specific variation in attitudes toward democracy and authoritarianism. Accordingly, we implement two separate choice-based conjoint (CBC) experiments to capture these dimensions.

In each CBC, respondents are shown pairs of hypothetical individuals described by randomly assigned identity-related attributes, and asked to choose which person they consider more truly a member of the nation. This design allows preference elicitation through forced trade-offs, addressing the limitations of conventional surveys that fail to reveal priority structures (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014).

The first CBC focuses on general identity criteria, using attributes commonly found in standard survey batteries, including birthplace, length of residence, language proficiency, citizenship status, and political allegiance. The second CBC incorporates attributes and values that are specifically relevant to debates about nationhood in Taiwan and South Korea. While the overall structure of the profile remains the same, the second design substitutes generalized items with locally resonant identity cues, such as stance on cross-Strait relations or opinions about North Korea. This design follows Brutger et al. (2022) in prioritizing contextual precision over generalizability, thereby enhancing construct validity.

Respondents see both CBCs in a fixed order: general, then specific. The second CBC makes clear that they will repeat the exercise, but with different information. Within each

task, the order of attributes and values is fully randomized. We deliberately administered the general conjoint before the country-specific one to facilitate task comprehension and minimize cognitive overload. Instructions preceding the tasks prompt respondents as follows:

People have different opinions about what makes someone a true national. Some things are seen as important, while others are not. Below, you will find the profiles of two individuals, along with their characteristics. Read each profile carefully and choose which person you think is more truly [South Korean/Taiwanese].

For the Taiwanese sample, we used the phrase “a national of our country” rather than explicitly stating “Taiwanese” in the survey prompt. In the Taiwanese context, the term “Taiwanese” is contested in the discourse on Taiwanese and Chinese identity, and using it could have biased responses by implicitly endorsing one concept over the other. Instead, we allowed this identity cleavage to be captured directly through the national identification attribute. Each hypothetical profile includes six attributes. In the general CBC, attributes reflect cross-nationally comparable criteria. In the country-specific CBC, attribute levels were adapted to reflect salient identity divisions in each country. Table 1 presents the general attributes and their levels, with corresponding identity types based on a confirmatory factor analysis using supplementary observational data (see Appendix B for more details).<sup>3</sup>

Table 2 provides the contextualized design for each country (CBC 2). Most attributes are adapted versions of those used in the general conjoint, tailored to reflect context-specific identity cleavages in Taiwan and South Korea. One new attribute was introduced in the country-specific conjoint: opinion of culture and values. This item was added to capture how attitudes toward cultural conformity and diversity shape inclusion judgments. Because it reflects both value alignment (voluntarist) and normative fit with dominant civic ideals

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<sup>3</sup>This mapping of attribute types aligns closely with prior efforts to classify national identity dimensions using observational survey data and dimensional reduction techniques (Kunovich 2009; Jones and Smith 2001). We rely on supplementary observational data to conduct the factor analysis because conjoint experiments, by design, randomly assign attribute levels and thus do not permit the kind of inter-item correlation structure required for valid factor extraction. The observational data, collected using identically worded items from the same national samples, offer a meaningful basis for assigning theoretical identity types (e.g., ascriptive, civic, voluntarist) to each CBC attribute in a conceptually grounded and empirically replicable manner.

(civic), we classify it as a "mixed". Table C.1 in the Appendix of the SI provides a fuller overview of the rationale for selecting each attribute and its associated levels. Attribute order and level assignment were randomized independently for each task.

Attributes	Levels	Associated Identity Type
National sentiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feels Taiwan/South Korean</li> <li>- Does not feel Taiwan/South Korean</li> </ul>	Voluntarist
Views on political institutions and laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has respect for Taiwan/South Korea's political institutions and laws</li> <li>- Shows little regard for or knowledge of Taiwan/South Korea's political institutions and laws</li> </ul>	Voluntarist
Views on history and tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understands Taiwan/South Korea's history and traditions</li> <li>- Does not know much about Taiwan/South Korea's history and traditions</li> </ul>	Voluntarist
Origins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Born in Taiwan/South Korea</li> <li>- Not born in Taiwan/South Korea</li> </ul>	Ascriptive
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Han Chinese/Ethnic Korean</li> <li>- Non-Han person/Non-Ethnic Korean</li> </ul>	Ascriptive
Citizenship status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Taiwan/South Korean citizen</li> <li>- Not a Taiwan/South Korean citizen</li> </ul>	Civic
Residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has lived most of life in Taiwan/South Korea</li> <li>- Has lived most of or all of life outside of Taiwan/South Korea</li> </ul>	Mixed - civic/ascriptive
Language capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Speaks Mandarin Chinese/Korean</li> <li>- Does not speak Mandarin Chinese/Korean</li> </ul>	Mixed - civic/ascriptive

**Table 1:** National identity choice-based conjoint: General design

*Note:* Identity types were assigned to each attribute based on conceptual reasoning and supported by principal component analysis of parallel observational survey items collected from the same national samples (see Appendix B).

Attribute	Levels	Associated Identity Type
National sentiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primarily identifies as Taiwanese/South Korean</li> <li>- Does not identify as Taiwanese/South Korean</li> </ul> <p><i>Taiwan-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primarily identifies as Chinese</li> <li>- Both Taiwanese and Chinese</li> <li>- Neither Taiwanese nor Chinese</li> </ul> <p><i>South Korea-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Holds a pan-Korean identity tied to the entire Korean Peninsula</li> <li>- Identifies as a member of the Korean diaspora</li> </ul>	Voluntarist
Opinion of the political system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has no opinion about politics</li> <li>- Thinks democracy is a good system despite its flaws</li> <li>- Strongly opposes socialism/communism</li> <li>- Thinks democracy is too chaotic and prefers single-party authoritarian rule</li> </ul>	Voluntarist
Country of birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Taiwan/South Korea</li> <li>- Mainland China/North Korea</li> <li>- Indonesia</li> <li>- United States</li> </ul>	Ascriptive
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Han Chinese / Ethnic Korean</li> <li>- Non-Han person / Non-ethnic Korean</li> </ul>	Ascriptive
Legal status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Temporary resident</li> <li>- Permanent resident</li> <li>- Citizen</li> </ul>	Civic
Civic involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stays at home in their free time or meets friends for coffee</li> <li>- Participates in community and civic events when possible</li> <li>- Participates in local political campaigns</li> </ul>	Civic
Residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 7 years or less</li> <li>- 14 years</li> <li>- 21 years</li> <li>- Most or entire life</li> </ul>	Mixed – civic/ascriptive
Language capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fluent</li> <li>- Limited proficiency</li> <li>- Unable to speak the language</li> </ul>	Mixed – civic/ascriptive
Opinion of culture and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thinks people's cultural practices and beliefs are personal matters, and society shouldn't impose specific values or traditions on anyone.</li> <li>- Thinks that to truly belong to this country, upholding and respecting our shared traditions and values is important.</li> <li>- Believes society is enriched by its residents' diverse cultures, traditions, and values, and we should embrace this diversity.</li> </ul>	Mixed – civic/voluntarist

**Table 2:** National identity choice-based conjoint: Country-specific design

*Note:* Identity types match those assigned in Table 1, with the addition of the "culture and values" attribute.

The experiment was fielded in Taiwan and South Korea between October 2023 and June 2024 using nationally representative online samples recruited through Qualtrics. In total, we collected valid responses from 2,050 native-born Taiwanese and 2,006 native-born South Koreans. Quotas were set to match the most up-to-date national demographic parameters, and multiple quality assurance measures were implemented. These included Qualtrics' in-built quality control tools, manual attention checks, and validation items designed to detect inattentiveness and verify comprehension of the conjoint tasks. Responses failing these checks were replaced after review in consultation with the project manager, ensuring data quality and representativeness. Demographic characteristics of the final samples are presented in SI Tables A.1 and A.2.

Respondents completed four tasks for the first CBC experiment and six for the second CBC. Because each task involved evaluating two profiles, this yields an effective sample size of 8 profile evaluations per respondent for the first experiment and 12 for the second. Given our final sample of 2,050 native-born Taiwanese and 2,006 native-born South Koreans, the total number of profile evaluations is 16,400 and 16,048 for CBC 1, and 24,600 and 24,072 for CBC 2, respectively. These figures reflect the total number of observations used to estimate marginal means and interaction effects, and represent the unit of analysis in our regression models. Balance tests for all surveys is provided in Appendix C (Tables C.1-C.4).

In addition to the forced-choice outcome, respondents were also asked to rate each profile on a 1–7 scale of national desirability. This rating task offers a complementary measure of perceived belonging and serves as a robustness check on the forced-choice outcomes. It allows respondents to penalize profiles with undesirable attributes that they may still choose under binary conditions. Figure 2 reproduces the visual layout of the task as seen by respondents.

	<b>Person A</b>	<b>Person B</b>					
Opinion of culture and values	Believes society is enriched by its residents' diverse cultures, traditions, and values, and we should embrace this diversity.	Believes society is enriched by its residents' diverse cultures, traditions, and values, and we should embrace this diversity.					
Language capacity	Fluent in Korean/Mandarin Chinese	Limited proficiency in Korean/Mandarin Chinese					
Length of residence	21 years	7 years or less					
Civic engagement	Participates in local community volunteer activities	Participates in political campaigns					
Perspective on political systems	Has no opinion about politics	Thinks democracy is a good system despite its flaws					
Ethnicity	Han Chinese/Korean	Not Han Chinese/Korean					
Country of birth	Mainland China/North Korea	Indonesia					
Legal status	Temporary resident	Taiwan citizen					
National identity	Primarily identifies as Taiwanese/South Korean	Does not identify as Taiwanese/South Korean					
<b>Of the two people, please select the person you most consider to be a national of South Korea/Taiwan.</b>							
	<input type="radio"/> Person A	<input type="radio"/> Person B					
<b>Then, rate how much each person belongs to the national community, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely).</b>							
<b>Person A:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Person B:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Table 3:** The experimental design

*Note:* This schematic represents the structure of the second conjoint experiment. Respondents evaluated two randomly generated profiles by both choosing the one they considered a national and rating each on a 1–7 scale of national belonging. The attribute wording was consistent across country contexts, with the appropriate country (Taiwan or South Korea) substituted as needed.

The main analysis of the country-specific conjoint experiment focuses on five theoretically central attributes: *ancestry*, *country of origin*, *legal status*, *national sentiment*, and *political system orientation*. These capture the core dimensions of national identity theorized in the literature: ascriptive, civic, and voluntarist. Ancestry and origin reflect descent- and birth-based criteria tied to ethnic nationalism and nativist logics. Legal status (citizen vs. permanent resident) represents civic inclusion based on formal membership. National sentiment, or the subjective identification with the national community, embodies the voluntarist logic. Political system orientation, operationalized as support for democracy versus authoritarian alternatives, is likewise treated as voluntarist, reflecting alignment with perceived national values rather than institutional status.<sup>4</sup> These five attributes serve as the primary quantities of interest for estimating patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

The remaining attributes included in the country-specific CBC design – language proficiency, length of residence, civic engagement, and cultural values – serve two purposes. Substantively, they represent additional, meaningful dimensions of national identity often invoked in public and scholarly discourse. Methodologically, they enhance profile realism and allow for a more ecologically valid decision environment. While not the focus of the main analysis, these attributes are randomized and controlled for in all models.

To enable conceptually consistent cross-country comparisons, we harmonized the national sentiment attribute into three analytically equivalent categories: "Strong national ID", "Weak/Complex national ID", and "Non-national ID". Respondents were coded as having a Strong ID if they identified solely with the focal national label (Taiwanese in Taiwan or South Korean in South Korea). Dual identifiers (e.g., Taiwanese and Chinese), diaspora, or pan-Korean identifiers were grouped into the Weak/Complex category. Those explicitly

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<sup>4</sup>We classify political-system orientation as voluntarist rather than civic because the attribute taps respondents' judgement of an individual's value alignment with the nation, not their formal relationship to its institutions. In classical civic nationalism, membership is granted by compliance with institutional rules (citizenship, taxation, military service, etc.). By contrast, voluntarist nationalism stresses a self-conscious commitment to a shared political creed (e.g., "democratic ideals") that can be professed irrespective of legal status. Empirically, we also find that political system its correlate more closely with other voluntarist markers (self-identification, national sentiment) than with strictly civic ones (citizenship status). See Table B.1 in the Supplementary Information.

rejecting both national labels (e.g., “does not identify as Taiwanese or Chinese”) were coded as Non-national ID. This recoding preserves the structure of national identity variation in each context while enabling consistent estimation of voluntarist effects across countries.

Empirically, we estimate average marginal component effects (AMCEs) to identify the causal impact of each attribute level on the likelihood of being chosen as a “true” national, averaging over all other attributes. AMCEs are standard for conjoint analysis in political science and allow for interpretable estimates of each attribute’s marginal effect (Hainmueller et al. 2014). To explore subgroup and interaction effects, we use marginal means, which represent the average predicted outcome for each level of an attribute, marginalizing over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes. Marginal means are less model-dependent and better suited for disaggregated/subgroup analysis (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020).

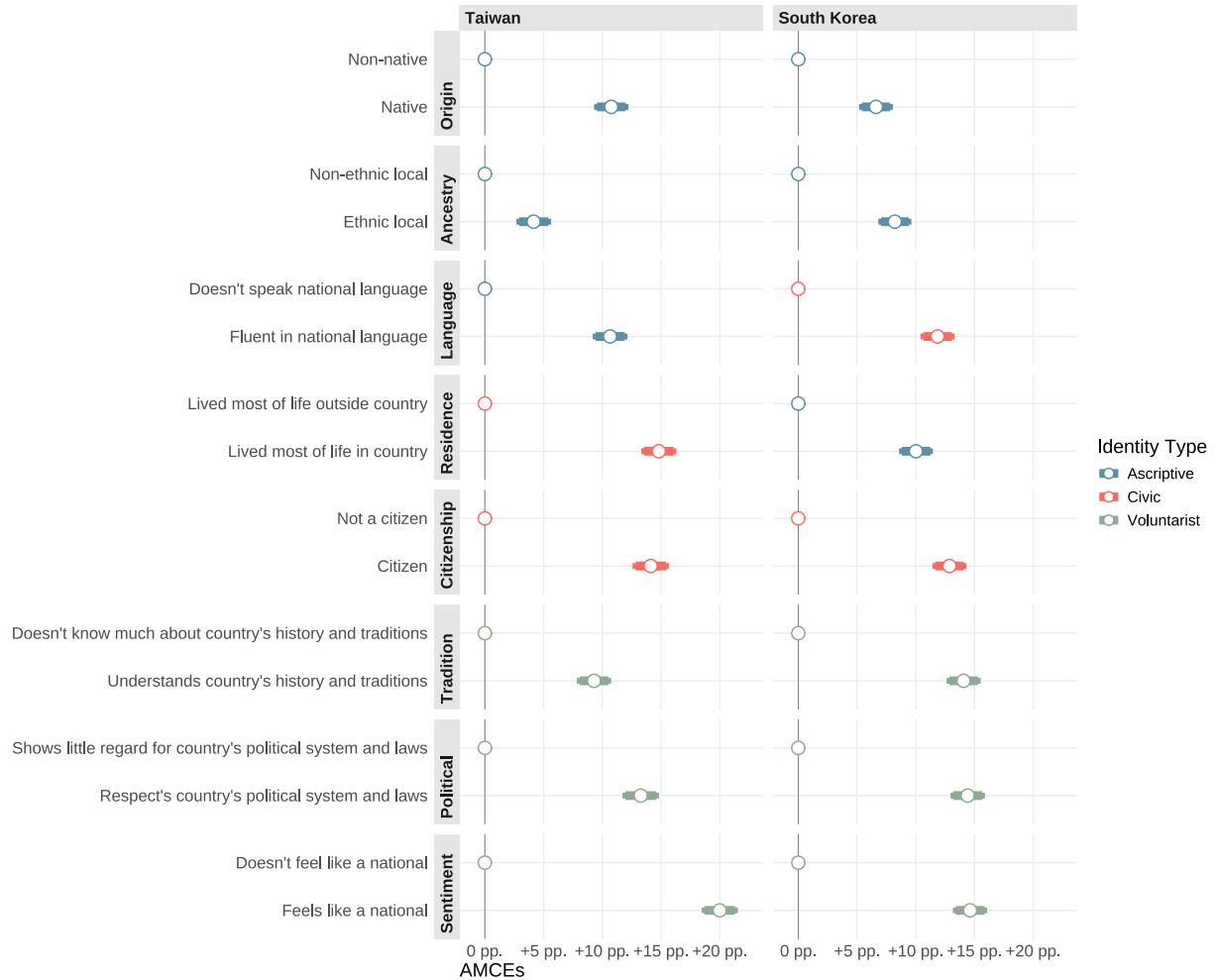
In addition to estimating the average effects of each attribute, we examine interaction effects between our selected attributes and country of origin, which we collapse into a binary indicator for nativity (native-born vs. immigrant). We focus on origin as the basis for ascriptive exclusion because it offers the most direct and demanding test of civic and voluntarist inclusion. While shared ancestry may signal ethnic proximity, being born outside the country marks one with a clear outsider status. If foreign-born individuals can nonetheless be viewed as “true” nationals when they express national sentiment or endorse democratic norms, this constitutes strong evidence for the conditional power of chosen affiliation or value alignment. These interaction tests thus allow us to assess whether the exclusionary force of inherited traits can be mitigated by voluntarist or civic signals.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 CBC 1: General Attributes

Figure 2 displays the AMCEs for the first choice-based conjoint. Results are plotted by sample populations (using color and shape) and aligned with corresponding identity types

identified in Table 1 above.



**Figure 2:** Average Marginal Component Effects for all attributes in Taiwan and South Korea from the general design conjoint

*Note:* Based on the benchmark OLS model with clustered standard errors, the AMCEs estimate the average change in the outcome variable associated with a particular attribute level, relative to a reference level, averaged across the distribution of all other attributes. The error bars represent 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals. Identity types are assigned based on the Confirmatory Factor Analysis reported in Appendix B.

These results provide insights into how general identity attributes influence public perceptions of national belonging in Taiwan and South Korea. We find that all affirmative attribute levels, such as being ethnically Korean or Han Chinese, or expressing national feeling, positively influence the probability that a profile is selected as a "true national." However, the magnitude of these effects varies notably across countries and attributes.

In South Korea, the strongest predictors of inclusion are expressions of national sentiment (e.g., "feels Korean"), respect for the political system, and an understanding of the nation's history and traditions, each associated with an approximate 15 percentage point increase in AMCE. These findings suggest that civic and cultural integration, rather than inherited traits, are central to national identity perceptions. In contrast, being born in the country (6pp) or being ethnically Korean (8pp) are less influential, signaling a move toward more inclusive conceptions of belonging that de-emphasize descent and nativity.

In Taiwan, feeling Taiwanese emerges as even more decisive, yielding an AMCE of 20 percentage points. This reflects a heightened emphasis on voluntarist self-identification with the polity as the primary marker of national identity. Legal and residency-based attributes, such as living most of one's life in Taiwan (15pp) or holding citizenship (14pp), also matter, though slightly less. Respect for the political system (13pp) remains important, indicating a similar civic orientation to that in South Korea.

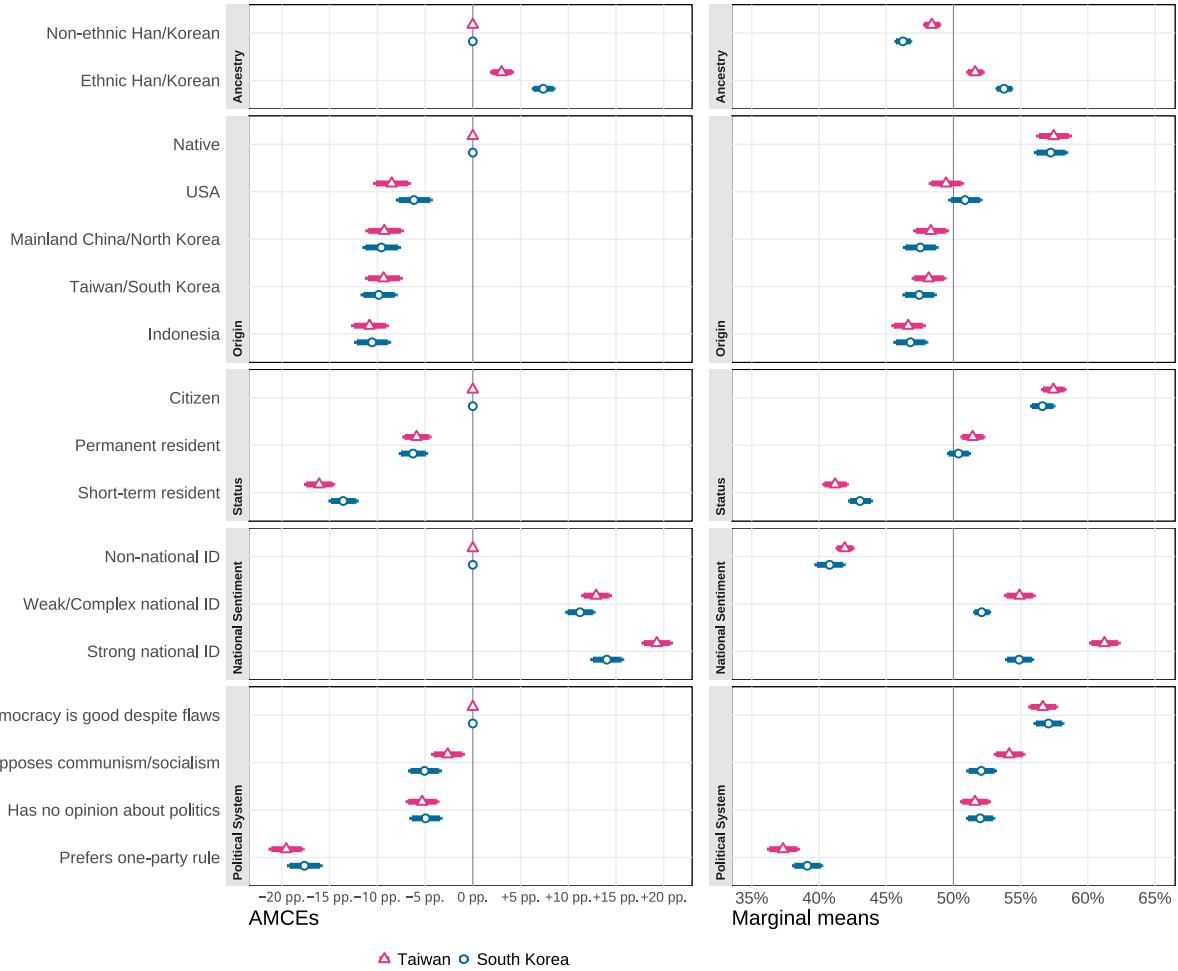
While ethnicity and birthplace remain secondary in both contexts, their relative salience diverges. Ethnicity is more influential in South Korea, whereas birthplace holds greater weight in Taiwan. This contrast suggests a deeper attachment to ethnic continuity in South Korea and a stronger emphasis on territorial belonging in Taiwan. Taken together, the results indicate that South Korea increasingly defines national identity through civic and cultural criteria, whereas Taiwan emphasizes voluntarist affiliation and legal membership. Both cases show a decline in reliance on strictly ascriptive traits, but to differing degrees. South Korea's pattern reflects cultural and institutional integration, while Taiwan's reflects political and legal belonging more grounded in democratic pluralism.

These findings highlight the pivotal role of voluntarist attributes – particularly national self-identification and institutional respect – in shaping contemporary understandings of national membership. Ascriptive traits like ethnicity and nativity continue to play a role, but with diminished centrality. To further unpack these dynamics, we now turn to direct comparisons of voluntarist and ascriptive attribute effects in each country. Notably, we can reproduce our main findings using the alternative, ratings-based outcome measure (see Figure C.3 of the SI).

## 4.2 CBC 2: Country-Specific Attributes

We now turn to the results from the country-specific conjoint experiment (CBC 2). This analysis focuses on five theoretically grounded attributes – ancestry, country of origin, legal status, national sentiment, and political orientation – that reflect competing logics of national inclusion. These attributes allow us to disentangle the relative weight of ascriptive traits (e.g., ethnicity, nativity), civic qualifications (e.g., legal status), and voluntarist signals (e.g., self-identification and democratic values) in shaping perceptions of belonging. Full results, including all attribute levels, are provided in Appendix C of the SI (see Figure C.1). Figure 3 shows the AMCEs for the selected ascriptive and voluntarist attributes.

The results demonstrate that in both countries, voluntarist signals, especially national self-identification and democratic alignment, strongly shape perceptions of national membership. However, the relative weight of these attributes diverges: Taiwan places greater emphasis on subjective affiliation and political differentiation from China, whereas South Korea continues to exhibit stronger preferences for ethnic and native-born people, reflecting a more persistent ascriptive foundation.



**Figure 3:** Average marginal component effects and marginal means for selected national identity attributes in Taiwan and South Korea

*Note:* The analysis is based on an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model with clustered standard errors. Marginal means represent the expected value of the outcome variable for each attribute level, holding all other attributes at their average levels. The AMCEs estimate the average change in the outcome variable associated with a particular attribute level, relative to a reference level, averaged across the distribution of all other attributes. The error bars represent 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals.

Turning first to ascriptive attributes – ancestry and origin – we observe co-ethnic and native-born advantages in both countries, though their magnitude varies. In South Korea, being ethnically Korean increases the probability of inclusion by approximately eight percentage points (pp), compared to 3pp for ethnic Han Chinese identity in Taiwan. Marginal means reflect this gap: ethnic co-nationals are chosen 54 percent of the time in South Korea versus 52 percent in Taiwan. While both publics favor ethnic in-group members, the co-ethnic bias is stronger and more stable in South Korea.

Country of origin effects are also pronounced. Native-born individuals are favored in both countries (marginal means greater than 55% in both countries), though the preference is not driven by pan-ethnic political symbolism. Profiles indicating birth in Mainland China or North Korea are penalized similarly to other foreign origins (e.g., Indonesia or the U.S.). This suggests limited public endorsement of state-driven pan-national narratives linking compatriots across divided regimes.

Turning to civic attributes, legal status also shapes perceptions of belonging. In both countries, holding citizenship increases the probability of being selected as a “true national”. The marginal mean for citizen profiles is 56 percent in South Korea and 57 percent in Taiwan. Permanent residency has a negligible impact, with marginal means hovering near the neutral midpoint.

Among voluntarist attributes, national sentiment exerts a powerful effect. In Taiwan, identifying as Taiwanese increases inclusion likelihood by about 19pp, with a marginal mean of 61.5 percent, compared to 14pp in South Korea (marginal mean of 55%). These effects underscore the centrality of subjective national affiliation, particularly in Taiwan, where national self-identification operates as a primary criterion of belonging. These results indicate that formal legal status continues to matter, but less decisively than subjective affiliation or value alignment.

Political orientation also matters. Expressing support for democracy leads to a 5pp increase in selection probability in both countries. Conversely, support for single-party rule

sharply reduces inclusion likelihood by almost 18pp in South Korea and 15pp in Taiwan. These patterns indicate a strong normative commitment to democratic values and widespread aversion to authoritarian values, and especially those aligned with geopolitical rivals (Mainland China, North Korea).

These results confirm that voluntarist criteria, particularly national sentiment and democratic alignment, are decisive in shaping judgments of national belonging. While ascriptive traits such as ethnicity and birthplace continue to exert influence, their relative importance is eclipsed by expressions of subjective identification and value congruence. South Korea retains a stronger baseline preference for co-ethnics, but both countries elevate voluntarist signals as key inclusion criteria.

### 4.3 CBC 2: Place of Birth Interactions

The interaction analysis provides a more stringent test of civic and voluntarist inclusion by examining whether the exclusionary effects of foreign birth can be mitigated by subjective national affiliation or value alignment. Figure 4 presents marginal means for profiles varying by country of origin (native vs. immigrant) and cross-cutting attributes of ancestry, status, national sentiment, and political orientation. By focusing on origin as the key ascriptive boundary, we isolate the clearest expression of identity inclusion: whether individuals born abroad can nonetheless be judged as belonging to the “circle of we” when they exhibit core identity-aligned traits.

Ethnic ancestry continues to influence perceptions of national belonging, but its impact is conditional and context-specific. In South Korea, being an ethnic Korean immigrant yields a small positive effect on selection likelihood, suggesting that co-ethnicity carries some residual weight even in the absence of nativity. In Taiwan, Han ancestry among immigrants has no meaningful effect. More striking is the consistent penalty for individuals who are not co-ethnic, especially when also foreign-born. Yet this exclusion is not absolute. Native-born non-coethnics are still widely accepted, suggesting that territorial ascription (i.e., being born

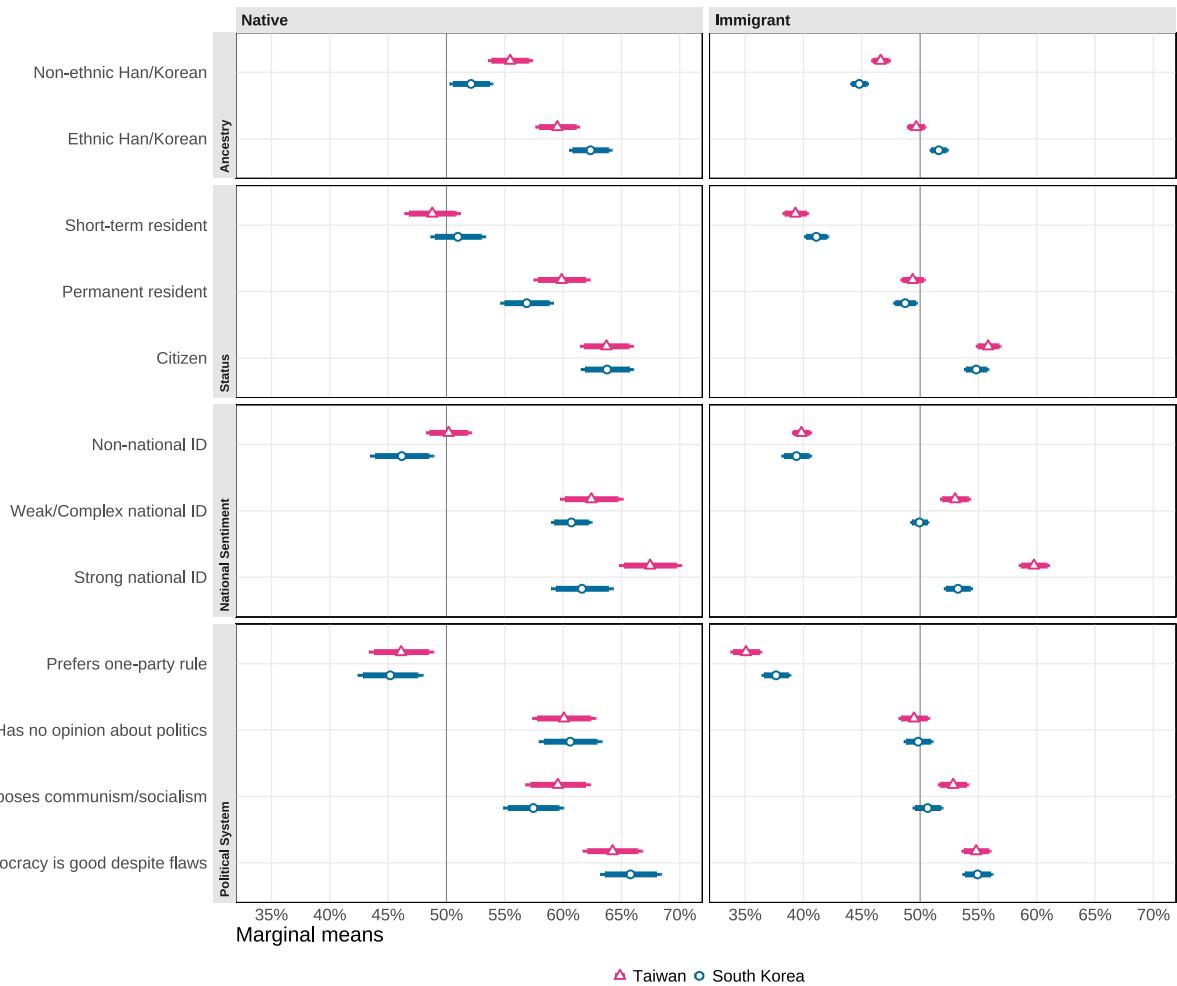
in the country) can offset ethnic difference. This indicates a potential shift from descent-based exclusivity toward a more territorial-bound conception of belonging, particularly in Taiwan.

Legal status also shapes inclusion, albeit more modestly. Foreign-born citizens are selected 58 percent of the time in Taiwan and 55 percent in South Korea – just above the neutrality threshold, but well below native-born co-ethnics. In both countries, citizenship status increases acceptability.

Voluntarist signals significantly increase the acceptability of immigrant profiles, particularly in Taiwan. An immigrant who identifies as Taiwanese has a 60 percent likelihood of selection. This is lower than the 67 percent rate for native-born identifiers, but well above the neutral 50 percent threshold, indicating a relatively strong effect. In South Korea, the corresponding rate is 53 percent, compared to 61 percent for native identifiers, reflecting a much weaker but still positive and statistically significant impact.

Political orientation also shapes evaluations of immigrant profiles. Support for democracy yields a modest and positive effect (55% marginal means in both cases). By contrast, favoring one-party rule sharply reduces the likelihood of national inclusion across native and immigrant profiles. Even native-born individuals who support single-party governance are penalized, underscoring the normative weight of democratic alignment and the social cost of sympathizing with external authoritarian regimes such as Mainland China or North Korea. In Taiwan, immigrants expressing anti-communist views slightly improve inclusion (53% marginal mean); in South Korea, opposition to North Korea yields no discernible benefit.

These findings confirm that voluntarist signals, especially national identification and democratic alignment, can meaningfully offset ascriptive disadvantages, particularly in Taiwan. While South Korea remains more anchored in ethnic and nativity-based preferences, both countries exhibit conditional openness when identity is expressed through values and self-affiliation. The full interaction model is provided in Figure C.2 of the SI.



**Figure 4:** Interaction effects between origin and selected national identity attributes in Taiwan and South Korea

*Note:* Based on the benchmark OLS model with clustered standard errors. The marginal means represent the expected value of the outcome variable for each attribute level, averaging over the distribution of all other attributes. The error bars represent 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined whether national identities in Taiwan and South Korea have become more inclusive in the context of their democratic transitions and increasing societal diversity. Using a dual-structured choice-based conjoint (CBC) design, the study addresses well-documented limitations of conventional survey instruments by eliciting preferences about hypothetical co-nationals under conditions of attribute randomization and forced choice comparison (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014; Mutz 2011; Sniderman and Grob 1996).

The findings indicate that both countries exhibit inclusive conceptions of national identity. Voluntarist and civic attributes, particularly self-identification with the nation and endorsement of democratic principles, exert strong influence on judgments of national belonging. However, ascriptive attributes such as ancestry and nativity remain relevant, albeit to varying degrees. This suggests that inclusionary shifts do not entail a wholesale rejection of ethnonational or ascriptive elements but rather a reconfiguration of their relative importance.

The cross-national comparison underscores clear differences in how national belonging is defined. In Taiwan, profiles with strong self-identification and support for democracy are consistently favored, even among non-co-ethnics and foreign-born individuals. This reflects an identity formation process that is increasingly structured around civic allegiance and voluntarist self-identification. While South Koreans also value national sentiment and democratic alignment, ethnicity remains a more important criterion. These findings affirm that inclusive orientations are emerging but do so within historically specific constraints.

The observed differences can be reasonably attributed to each country's unique trajectory of nation-building and democratic transition. Taiwan's national identity evolved through a contested process of state legitimization vis-à-vis China, fostering a civic and territorially bounded conception of the nation. Democratization facilitated the decoupling of identity from Chinese ethnonationalism, leading to broader acceptance of civic and self-identified

membership (Schubert 2002; Harrison 2006). In South Korea, by contrast, ethnic nationalism was central to both state formation and social cohesion during the Cold War. Democratization liberalized political institutions but did not fully displace descent-based notions of nationhood (Shin 2006; Chung 2020). In fact, the state-society link bound by ethnicity is a source of some democratic strength (Hur 2022). As a result, inclusive elements coexist with enduring ethnocultural boundaries.

These findings challenge the assumption that democratization naturally produces civic or voluntarist national identities, a view Brubaker (1996) critiques as conceptually misleading and historically unfounded. They underscore the importance of attending to how institutional histories, geopolitical pressures, and elite narratives shape the meaning of national membership. The fact that both countries exhibit sensitivity to democratic allegiance and penalize authoritarian leanings illustrates the normative centrality of regime values in contemporary constructions of national identity.

Several limitations and other features merit further reflection. First, the analysis reflects a cross-sectional snapshot and does not track temporal dynamics. Second, while the conjoint design allows for multidimensional analysis, it necessarily limits the range of included attributes. The national sentiment variable, for instance, is collapsed for analytic clarity, while other potentially salient and important attributes, such as language fluency or political behavior, are analyzed separately in Appendix C. Third, operational differences in identity indicators between the Taiwan and South Korea samples limit strict comparability across cases.

A related consideration concerns the national sentiment attributes – found to be strong predictors of national inclusion, especially in Taiwan – which were operationalized differently across the two country-specific CBCs. These differences were not arbitrary but reflect meaningful variation in how subjective identification manifests in each context. In Korea, identity debates often revolve around pan-ethnic kinship, diaspora status, and the implications of national division, leading us to distinguish among pan-Korean, South Korean, diaspora, and

non-identifying individuals. In Taiwan, by contrast, identity cleavages center more sharply on the China–Taiwan divide and whether individuals identify exclusively as Taiwanese or also as Chinese. These distinctions informed the design of each CBC and were necessary to capture the most politically salient expressions of national identification in each setting.

Still, one might reasonably ask whether the stronger effect of self-identification in Taiwan is simply a product of these differing operationalizations. To address this concern, we point to the results of the general CBC experiment, which used a uniform “identifies as [national]” format across both countries. There, too, we observe that identifying as Taiwanese is the strongest positive predictor of national inclusion, while identifying as South Korean yields more modest effects. This consistency across experiments strengthens our confidence that the observed cross-national difference is not an artifact of survey design but reflects a deeper divergence in how subjective national identity is socially validated.

We thus conclude that, overall, the conjoint method used here significantly improves the empirical study of national identity. By forcing trade-offs and embedding sensitive attributes in realistic evaluative contexts, it overcomes known shortcomings of traditional survey designs, such as the inability to reveal prioritization, the abstraction of identity concepts, and vulnerability to socially desirable responding (Mutz 2011; Citrin, Wright, and Wand 2012; vom Hau et al. 2023; Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022). It enables researchers to identify preference hierarchies, assess conditional inclusivity, and simulate real-world judgments with greater ecological and construct validity. This approach should inform future work on citizenship, migration, and identity boundaries, particularly in democratizing or multiethnic societies.

Future research should extend this agenda by examining popular fragmentation – that is, the extent to which populations are internally divided over identity criteria and political allegiance (Mylonas and Tudor 2023). For example, Jo (2024) shows how divergent public narratives can exacerbate elite polarization, further entrenching identity cleavages. Hur and Yeo (2023) demonstrate that polarization over national identity in East Asia can reflect

competing visions of democracy and sovereignty. Conjoint designs, which trace how different subgroups respond to combinations of political, cultural, and historical attributes, are well-suited to assessing the structure and scope of such fragmentation. Investigating how distinct segments of the population assign meaning to national membership may reveal not just the contours of identity but the political tensions that surround its maintenance and transformation.

## 6 Funding

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## 7 Ethics Statement

This research follows standards set out by the University of Vienna Ethics Committee and was reviewed under decision no. 00997. All participants provided informed consent prior to taking part in the study.

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Supplementary Information for “The Boundaries of Belonging: An Experimental Approach to National Identity Measurement in Taiwan and South Korea”

## **Appendix A Additional Survey Information**

Between October 2023 and June 2024, we collected responses from 2,050 native-born Taiwanese and 2,006 native-born South Koreans using Qualtrics' online panels. Recruitment followed national quotas based on the most recent demographic benchmarks to ensure representativeness. To maintain data quality, we implemented a multi-tiered screening process, combining Qualtrics' automated quality controls with custom-designed attention and comprehension checks. Cases that failed these criteria were reviewed and replaced in coordination with the Qualtrics project manager. We are confident that the resulting dataset meets high standards of validity and quality. Basic demographic characteristics of the final samples are reported in Tables A.1 and A.2.

Variable	Count	Proportion
<b>Age</b>		
≤25	260	13%
26-35	479	23%
36-45	580	28%
46-55	404	20%
>55	327	16%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	1088	53%
Female	962	47%
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
< 16 years of formal schooling	544	27%
16 years of formal schooling or more	1506	73%
<b>Region</b>		
New Taipei City	461	22%
Taipei City	353	17%
Taichung City	255	12%
Kaohsiung City	242	12%
Taoyuan City	211	10%
Tainan City	177	9%
Changhua County	63	3%
Hsinchu City	39	2%
Hsinchu County	37	2%
Pingtung County	33	2%
Yunlin County	31	2%
Keelung City	27	1%
Chiayi City	23	1%
Miaoli County	23	1%
Chiayi County	19	1%
Yilan County	17	1%
Nantou County	16	1%
Hualien County	10	<1%
Taitung County	8	<1%
Penghu County	3	<1%
Kinmen County	2	<1%

**Table A.1:** Summary Counts and Proportions: Taiwan

Variable	Count	Proportion
<b>Age</b>		
≤25	240	12%
26-35	336	17%
36-45	402	20%
46-55	433	22%
>55	595	30%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	1015	51%
Female	991	49%
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
No University	382	19%
University (including technical colleges)	1624	81%
<b>Location</b>		
Seoul	203	20%
Busan	71	7%
Daegu	49	5%
Incheon	57	6%
Gwangju	28	3%
Daejeon	29	3%
Ulsan	22	2%
Sejong	8	1%
Gyeonggi Province	238	24%
Gangwon Province	31	3%
North Chungcheong Province	31	3%
South Chungcheong Province	35	4%
North Jeolla Province	37	4%
South Jeolla Province	38	4%
North Gyeongsang Province	54	5%
South Gyeongsang Province	65	7%
Jeju	12	1%

**Table A.2:** Summary Counts and Proportions: South Korea

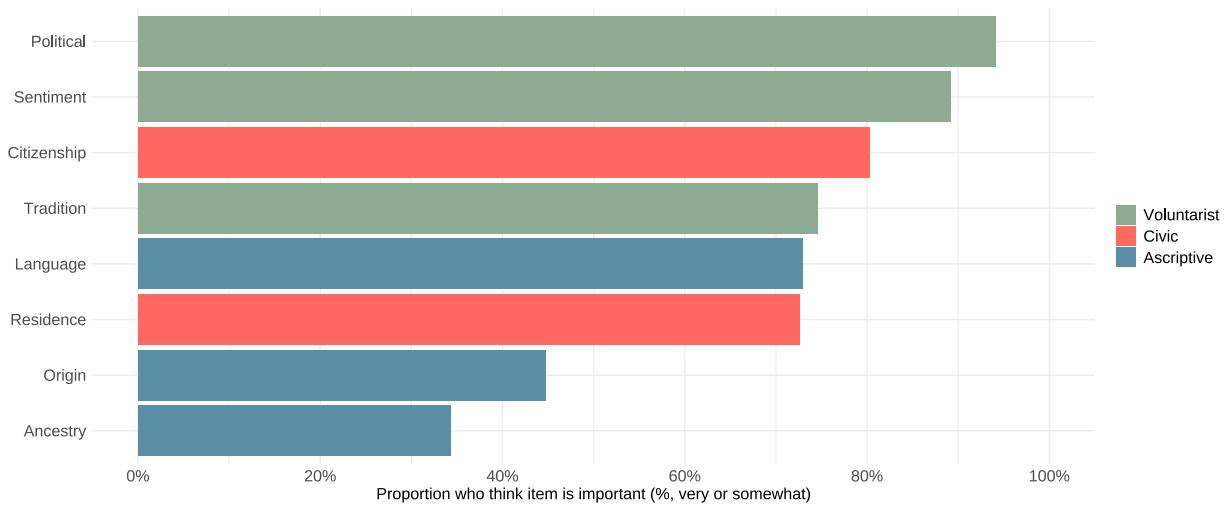
## Appendix B Additional Analysis: Direct Questions

As discussed in the Data and Methods section of the manuscript, we administered the common battery of national identity questions. There were several reasons for doing this. First, it serves as a baseline for beliefs about the conditions for nationhood and belonging using commonly used direction questions. Second, we used responses to these questions to determine identity types (civic, voluntarist, ethnic) based on confirmatory factor analysis. Lastly, we use the responses to check the validity of our experimental data findings; while we attest to the improvement of our new measurements, any considerable differences in findings should give us pause as to the validity of the measurement. For a summary, the questions used read as follows:

In order to be truly [nationality], how important is it to...

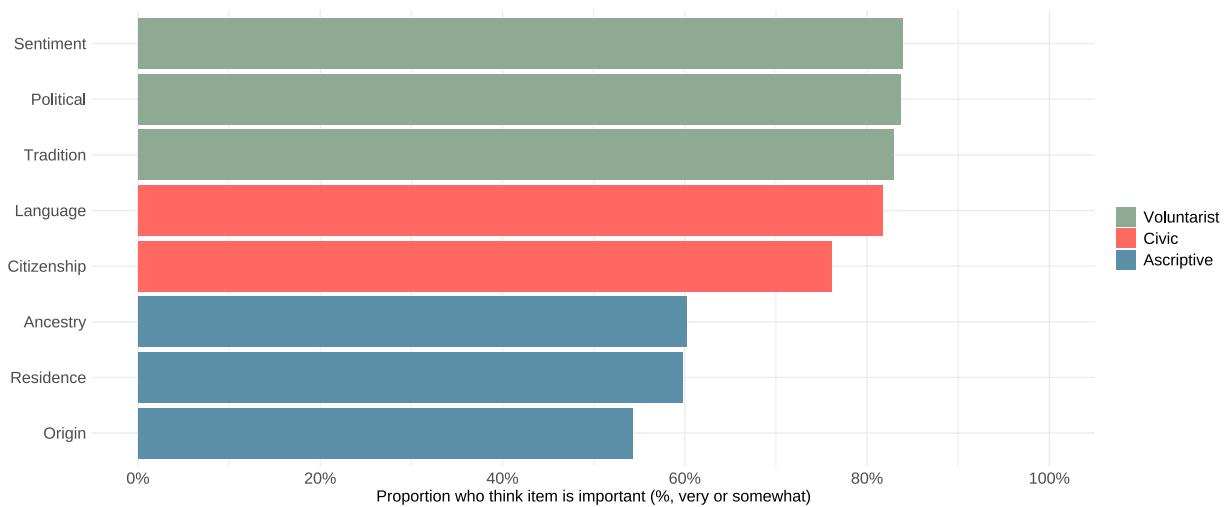
1. To be [main ethnicity]?
2. Be born in [country]?
3. Live most of one's life in [country]?
4. Have [country's] citizenship?
5. Speak the [national or majority spoken] language?
6. Act in accordance with [country's] laws and its political system?
7. Understand [country's] history and follow [country's] traditions?

Respondents answered using a standard 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "very important" to "not important at all." Figures B.1 and B.2 show the proportion of the Taiwanese and South Korean populations answering "very" or "somewhat" important for each item, respectively. The geom bars are colored by the factor to which they belong, as per our confirmatory factor analysis (Table B.1). We note that the factor analysis shows "cleaner" identity types in South Korea than Taiwan.



**Figure B.1:** National Identity Content and Types: Taiwan

Note: N=2,050. Identity type labels derived from PCA analysis in Table B.1.



**Figure B.2:** National Identity Content and Types: South Korea

Note: N=2,006. Identity type labels derived from PCA analysis in Table B.1.

	Taiwan						South Korea					
	RC3	RC2	RC1	$h^2$	$u^2$	com	RC2	RC3	RC1	$h^2$	$u^2$	com
Blood	0.68	-0.21	0.22	0.56	0.44	1.4	0.82	0.25	-0.04	0.73	0.27	1.2
Birth	0.54	-0.08	0.51	0.56	0.44	2.0	0.82	0.08	0.15	0.69	0.31	1.1
Citizen	0.05	0.17	0.81	0.69	0.31	1.1	0.25	0.30	0.63	0.55	0.45	1.8
Language	0.55	0.12	0.31	0.41	0.59	1.7	0.09	0.25	0.78	0.68	0.32	1.2
Sentiment	0.08	0.75	0.13	0.59	0.41	1.1	0.20	0.79	0.09	0.66	0.34	1.2
Politics	-0.05	0.78	0.17	0.64	0.36	1.1	-0.06	0.60	0.44	0.56	0.44	1.9
Tradition	0.70	0.46	-0.20	0.74	0.26	1.9	0.09	0.72	0.26	0.60	0.40	1.3
Residence	0.30	0.21	0.54	0.43	0.57	1.9	0.65	-0.08	0.44	0.62	0.38	1.8
SS loadings	1.65	1.53	1.44				1.89	1.72	1.49			
Proportion Var	0.21	0.19	0.18				0.24	0.21	0.19			
Cumulative Var	0.21	0.40	0.58				0.24	0.45	0.64			
Proportion Explained	0.36	0.33	0.31				0.37	0.34	0.29			
Cumulative Proportion	0.36	0.69	1.00				0.37	0.71	1.00			

**Taiwan:**

Mean item complexity = 1.5

Test of the hypothesis that 3 components are sufficient.

The root mean square of the residuals (RMSR) is 0.12 with the empirical chi square 1607.29 with prob <0

Fit based upon off diagonal values = 0.71

**South Korea:**

Mean item complexity = 1.4

Test of the hypothesis that 3 components are sufficient.

The root mean square of the residuals (RMSR) is 0.11 with the empirical chi square 1243.82 with prob <2.4e-264

Fit based upon off diagonal values = 0.88

**Table B.1:** Principal Component Analysis results for Taiwan and South Korea

*Note:* Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation

## **Appendix C Additional Analysis: Conjoint**

In this section, we review the design rationale for attributes and levels from the country-specific choice-based conjoint (Table C.1), provide conjoint experiment balance tests (Tables C.2-C.3), then present the full baseline models for the national identity conjoint (Figure C.1), the full origins interaction models (Figure C.2), and the ratings-based models (Figure C.3).

## Design Rationale for Attributes and Levels

∞

Attributes	Design Rationale
National sentiment	<p>National identification is central to voluntarist conceptions of national identity. In Taiwan, identification with the nation is shaped by contested sovereignty and ambiguous international status. We follow established survey practice in capturing self-identification along five categories: Taiwanese, Chinese, both Taiwanese and Chinese, neither, and don't know (Chang and Wang 2005; ESC-NCCU 2024). These categories reflect the main identity cleavages in Taiwanese society and map onto competing nationhood narratives. In South Korea, identity alternatives are structured differently. While the baseline is identification as South Korean, we include additional options capturing pan-Korean identification, diaspora affiliation, and rejection of South Korean identity. These reflect salient identity positions rooted in ethnic nationalism (Shin 2006), pan-Korean nationalism embracing both North and South as a single Minjok (Kim 2005), state-led diaspora engagement (Kim 2016), and emerging non-identifying or cosmopolitan orientations (Campbell 2016). Given the structural asymmetries between cases, the two designs are not fully symmetric but allow for functional comparison of strong, weak/complex, and non-identifying orientations.</p>
Opinion of the political system	<p>This attribute captures political value alignment across four perspectives, including pro-democratic, anti-democratic, anti-communist, and politically disengaged orientations. In Taiwan, support for democracy is closely tied to national identity and the effort to distinguish Taiwan from authoritarian China (Ho 2022). In South Korea, democratic commitment has become a civic norm linked to national belonging, especially in contrast to the North (Hur 2023). These distinctions allow us to examine how political ideology structures judgments of national membership, particularly in societies shaped by democratic transition and persistent geopolitical threat.</p>

*Continued on next page*

Table C.1 – *Continued from previous page*

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Design Rationale</b>
Country of birth	The native-born category serves as a baseline. Mainland China and North Korea function as “national others”, capturing the dynamics of divided nations. Indonesia introduces cultural and religious distance; Taiwanese views of Southeast Asian immigration are heavily influenced by such perceived cultural difference (Rich et al. 2022). The United States, as a high-status, distant comparator, reflects the role of globalization and Western influence. Finally, including Taiwan in the South Korea sample and vice versa helps assess the effects of regional proximity and relative status. Evidence from South Korea shows that origin cues like cultural affinity and perceived economic contribution significantly shape judgments about inclusion that likely track for East Asia (Denney and Green 2021).
Ethnicity	This attribute distinguishes between co-ethnics (Han Chinese in Taiwan, ethnic Koreans in South Korea) and non-co-ethnics. It probes the extent to which ethnic background shapes perceptions of national belonging. In South Korea, where ethnic nationalism has long defined the boundaries of the nation (Shin 2006), co-ethnicity often aligns with presumed membership. In Taiwan, civic conceptions of identity have expanded, yet Han Chinese ethnicity remains the dominant frame (Ho 2022). This binary classification captures how ethnic homogeneity or diversity informs inclusion preferences in both cases.
Legal status	This attribute measures legal affiliation with the state – citizen, permanent resident, or temporary resident – as a key signal of national belonging. Citizenship, the main quantity of interest, is widely recognized as a mechanism for social and political integration, not merely a symbolic endpoint (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Pietrantuono 2017). It marks a formal commitment to the polity and often serves as the threshold for full inclusion in the national community, making it a core feature of civic nationalist conceptions of identity (Brubaker 1992).
Civic involvement	This attribute captures behavioral participation in public life, ranging from personal leisure to active political engagement. Civic republicanism, as explored by thinkers like Kymlicka, emphasizes the importance of active citizen participation and the cultivation of civic virtues for a healthy democracy (Kymlicka 2001). Similarly, Smith (1997) highlights how civic identity in democratic societies is not merely inherited but enacted through engagement. Civic involvement thus functions as a behavioral expression of civic-national belonging.

*Continued on next page*

Table C.1 – *Continued from previous page*

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Design Rationale</b>
Residence	The attribute of total time spent living in a country serves to assess the influence of residency duration on the perception of national identity. Length of time individuals spend within the country is sometimes associated with deeper socio-cultural integration and identification with national values and practices (Denney and Green 2024).
Language capacity	This attribute classifies respondents by language ability – fluent, limited proficiency, or non-speaker – to assess how linguistic competency affects perceived national belonging. Immigration research finds language proficiency vital for integration and civic participation, as it enables social inclusion and access to public life (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Sociological analysis similarly emphasizes that national identity comprises cultural as well as civic elements – language acting as a core cultural competency that reinforces belonging (Kunovich 2009). Consequently, language capacity serves both as a practical facilitator of participation and as a symbolic marker of civic integration.
Opinion of culture and values	This attribute draws on standard “culture and tradition” items in observational surveys to examine how attitudes toward cultural norms and diversity affect perceptions of national belonging. Respondents are presented with three positions – cultural traditionalism, pluralist multiculturalism, and individual relativism. This attribute is meant to capture how views on cultural conformity versus diversity shape inclusion judgments. Cultural attitudes have long been central to conceptions of national identity, often functioning as symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Bonikowski 2016; Koopmans and Statham 1999).

**Table C.1:** Attributes and design rationale for the second choice-based conjoint

## Balance Tests

To assess the quality and diagnosability of the conjoint designs, Tables C.1-C.4 report the distribution of attribute levels across all profiles shown to respondents in the Taiwan and South Korean samples. These tables summarize the raw counts and proportions of each attribute level, collapsed across all tasks and profiles. They provide a record of how often each level appeared in the design, helping to confirm that randomization yielded balanced exposure. The distributions are nearly uniform within each attribute block, consistent with the underlying design specification. Minor deviations from exact uniformity are expected due to random sampling.

Level	Count	Proportion (%)
<b>Ancestry</b>		
Non-ethnic Han	8313	50.7
Ethnic Han	8087	49.3
<b>Citizenship</b>		
Taiwanese citizen	8310	50.7
Not a Taiwanese citizen	8090	49.3
<b>Feeling</b>		
Feels Taiwanese	8280	50.5
Doesn't feel Taiwanese	8120	49.5
<b>Language</b>		
Speaks Mandarin	8225	50.2
Doesn't speak Mandarin	8175	49.8
<b>Origin</b>		
Born in Taiwan	8274	50.5
Not born in Taiwan	8126	49.5
<b>Political</b>		
Respects Taiwan's political system and laws	8302	50.6
Shows little regard for Taiwan's political system and laws	8098	49.4
<b>Residence</b>		
Lived most of life outside of Taiwan	8201	50.0
Lived most of life in Taiwan	8199	50.0
<b>Tradition</b>		
Understands Taiwan's history and traditions	8250	50.3
Doesn't know much about Taiwan's history and tradition	8150	49.7

**Table C.2:** Attribute level distribution across all profiles: Taiwan Sample

Level	Count	Proportion (%)
<b>Ancestry</b>		
Non-ethnic Korean	8950	50.1
Ethnic Korean	8930	49.9
<b>Citizenship</b>		
South Korean citizen	8971	50.2
Not a South Korean citizen	8909	49.8
<b>Feeling</b>		
Feels South Korean	9018	50.4
Doesn't feel South Korean	8862	49.6
<b>Language</b>		
Speaks Korean	8964	50.1
Doesn't speak Korean	8916	49.9
<b>Origin</b>		
Not born in South Korea	8940	50.0
Born in South Korea	8940	50.0
<b>Political</b>		
Respects South Korea's political system and laws	9006	50.4
Shows little regard for South Korea's political system and laws	8874	49.6
<b>Residence</b>		
Lived most of life outside of South Korea	9018	50.4
Lived most of life in South Korea	8862	49.6
<b>Tradition</b>		
Doesn't know much about South Korea's history and tradition	8940	50.0
Understands South Korea's history and traditions	8940	50.0

**Table C.3:** Attribute level distribution across all profiles: South Korea Sample

Level	Count	Proportion (%)
<b>Ancestry</b>		
Non-Han Person	12336	50.1
Han Chinese	12264	49.9
<b>Civicness</b>		
Stays home or meets friends for coffee	8303	33.8
Helps with community clean-up	8183	33.3
Participates in local politics	8114	33.0
<b>Culture</b>		
Thinks cultural practices and beliefs are personal	8284	33.7
Thinks diversity should be embraced	8166	33.2
Thinks one should respect Taiwan's values and traditions	8150	33.1
<b>Language</b>		
Limited proficiency	8297	33.7
Cannot speak Mandarin	8199	33.3
Fluent Mandarin	8104	32.9
<b>Origin</b>		
Indonesia	4955	20.1
South Korea	4946	20.1
USA	4918	20.0
Taiwan	4913	20.0
Mainland China	4868	19.8
<b>Politics</b>		
Democracy is good despite flaws	6363	25.9
Prefers one-party rule	6100	24.8
Has no opinion about politics	6069	24.7
Strongly opposes communism	6068	24.7
<b>Residence</b>		
7 years or less	6199	25.2
Lived most/entire life in Taiwan	6170	25.1
21 years	6162	25.0
14 years	6069	24.7
<b>Sentiment</b>		
Does not identify as Taiwanese or Chinese	6201	25.2
Identifies as both Taiwanese and Chinese	6173	25.1
Identifies as Taiwanese	6140	25.0
Identifies as Chinese	6086	24.7
<b>Status</b>		
Short-term resident	8228	33.4
Permanent resident	8208	33.4
Taiwanese citizen	8164	33.2

**Table C.4:** Attribute level distribution across all profiles: Taiwan

Level	Count	Proportion (%)
<b>Ancestry</b>		
Non-ethnic Korean	12801	50.1
Ethnic Korean	12747	49.9
<b>Civicness</b>		
Stays home or meets friends for coffee	8605	33.7
Participates in local political campaigns	8490	33.2
Helps with community clean-up	8453	33.1
<b>Culture</b>		
Thinks cultural practices and beliefs are personal	8632	33.8
Thinks one should strongly respect Korea's values and traditions	8556	33.5
Thinks diversity should be embraced	8360	32.7
<b>Language</b>		
Can't speak Korean	8584	33.6
Limited proficiency	8490	33.2
Fluent	8474	33.2
<b>Origin</b>		
North Korea	5175	20.3
USA	5143	20.1
South Korea	5140	20.1
Taiwan	5114	20.0
Indonesia	4976	19.5
<b>Politics</b>		
Prefers one-party rule	6510	25.5
Democracy is good despite flaws	6365	24.9
Has no opinion about politics	6362	24.9
Strongly opposes socialism	6311	24.7
<b>Residence</b>		
21 years	6476	25.3
7 years or less	6385	25.0
Lived most/entire life in Korea	6359	24.9
14 years	6328	24.8
<b>Sentiment</b>		
Identifies with a pan-Korean identity	6450	25.2
Identifies as South Korean	6431	25.2
Does not identify as Korean	6335	24.8
Identifies with the Korean diaspora	6332	24.8
<b>Status</b>		
Permanent resident	8571	33.5
Short-term resident	8522	33.4
Korean citizen	8455	33.1

**Table C.5:** Attribute level distribution across all profiles: South Korea

## Full Baseline Models

Figure C.1 shows the marginal means for all attribute values in the second conjoint experiment. While the main manuscript focused on primary voluntarist (national sentiment, political orientation), civic (citizenship), and ascriptive (ancestry, origin) criteria, here we extend the analysis to include all attribute values across both country samples.

First, a range of attributes associated with civic participation, cultural integration, and behavioral assimilation –including civic engagement, cultural attitudes, language capacity, and length of residence – appear to have limited and/or uneven effects on perceptions of national belonging. Behavioral indicators such as participating in local politics, engaging in community cleanup, or expressing pluralist or traditionalist cultural views are evaluated neutrally. As shown in the full origins interaction model (Figure C.2), these traits carry even less weight for immigrant profiles, suggesting they represent baseline expectations for native-born individuals rather than meaningful inclusion signals.

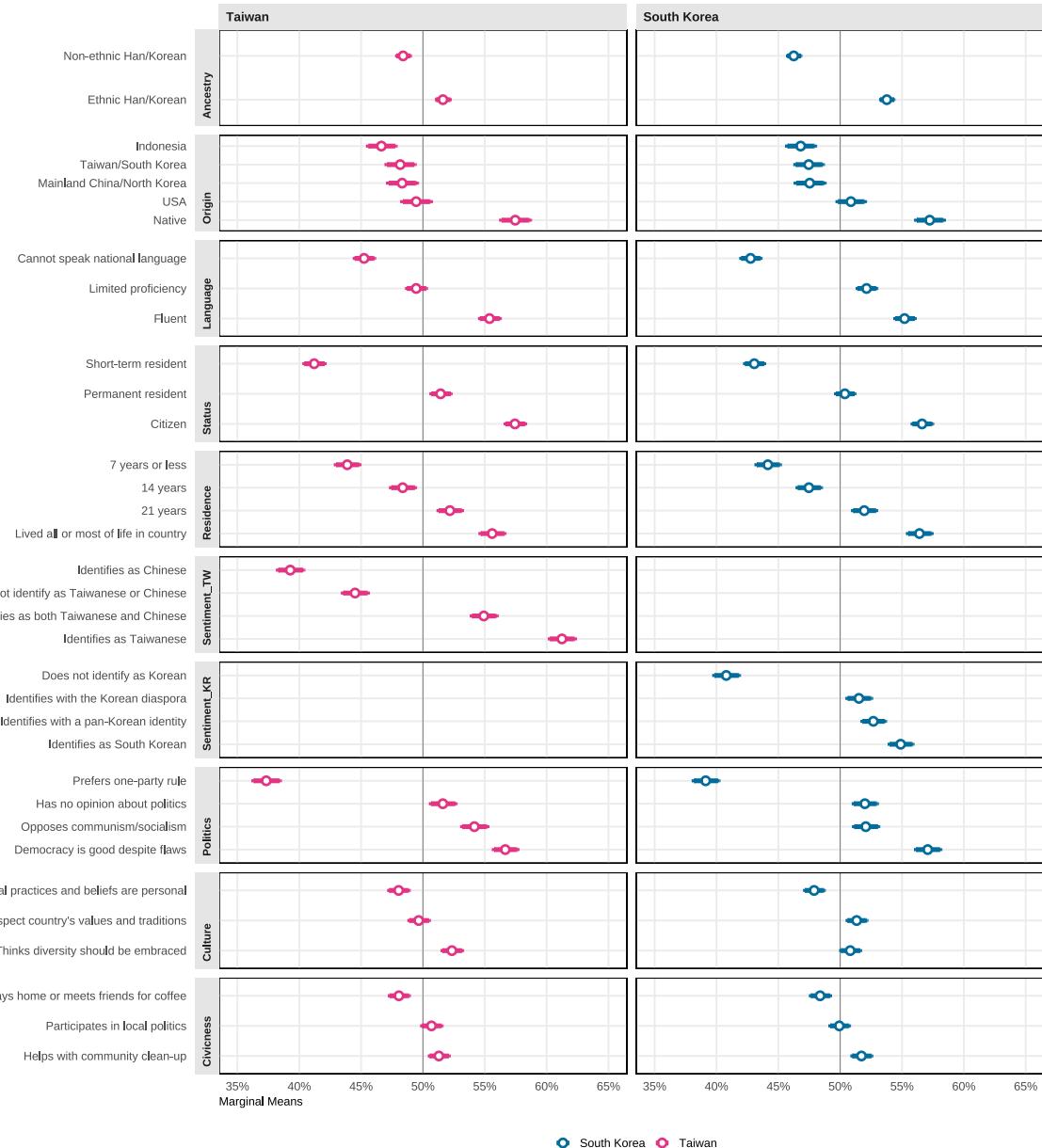
Within this broader category of additional attributes, language capacity emerges as the strongest predictor. Fluency in Mandarin Chinese or Korean increases the likelihood of being seen as a true national, while the inability to speak the national language is consistently penalized. Though not central to our theoretical framework, language functions as a high-salience marker of cultural integration, educational background, and socialization, and likely signals embeddedness within the national community.

By contrast, length of residence has only a weak and inconsistent effect. There is little difference in how respondents assess individuals based on whether they have lived in the country for 7, 14, or even 21 years. The one value that meaningfully increases perceived belonging – having lived “most or all of one’s life” in the country – closely approximates nativity, suggesting that time alone is insufficient. As with civic behaviors and cultural values, residence appears to require complementary signals, such as legal status or identity alignment, to serve as a credible basis for inclusion.

A second key finding involves national sentiment. In Taiwan, we use a categorical identity

measure commonly employed in the literature. Results show that identifying as Taiwanese strongly increases perceived belonging, while any identification with Chinese identity, either exclusive or dual, is penalized. This reflects the geopolitical and symbolic tension between Taiwanese civic identity and the Chinese Communist Party’s transnational conception of a shared “Chinese” people. The negative effect of Chinese identification highlights how deeply identity in Taiwan is tied to political differentiation from Mainland China.

By contrast, the South Korean pattern is more accommodating. Respondents evaluated pan-Korean and diaspora identities positively, even when these depart from a strict “South Korean” subjective identification. This suggests that in South Korea, broader ethnic or transnational identities remain compatible with membership in the nation. These findings reinforce our broader claim that ethnicity continues to serve as a key reference point in South Korean nationhood, while Taiwanese identity has become more tightly linked to civic allegiance and state-based belonging.



**Figure C.1:** Full national identity conjoint results for all attributes in Taiwan (L) and South Korea (R)

*Note:* Based on the benchmark OLS model with clustered standard errors, the marginal means show the mean outcome of any given attribute level, averaged across all others. The error bars represent 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals. The attribute for national identification (i.e., sentiment) is reported separately for each country.

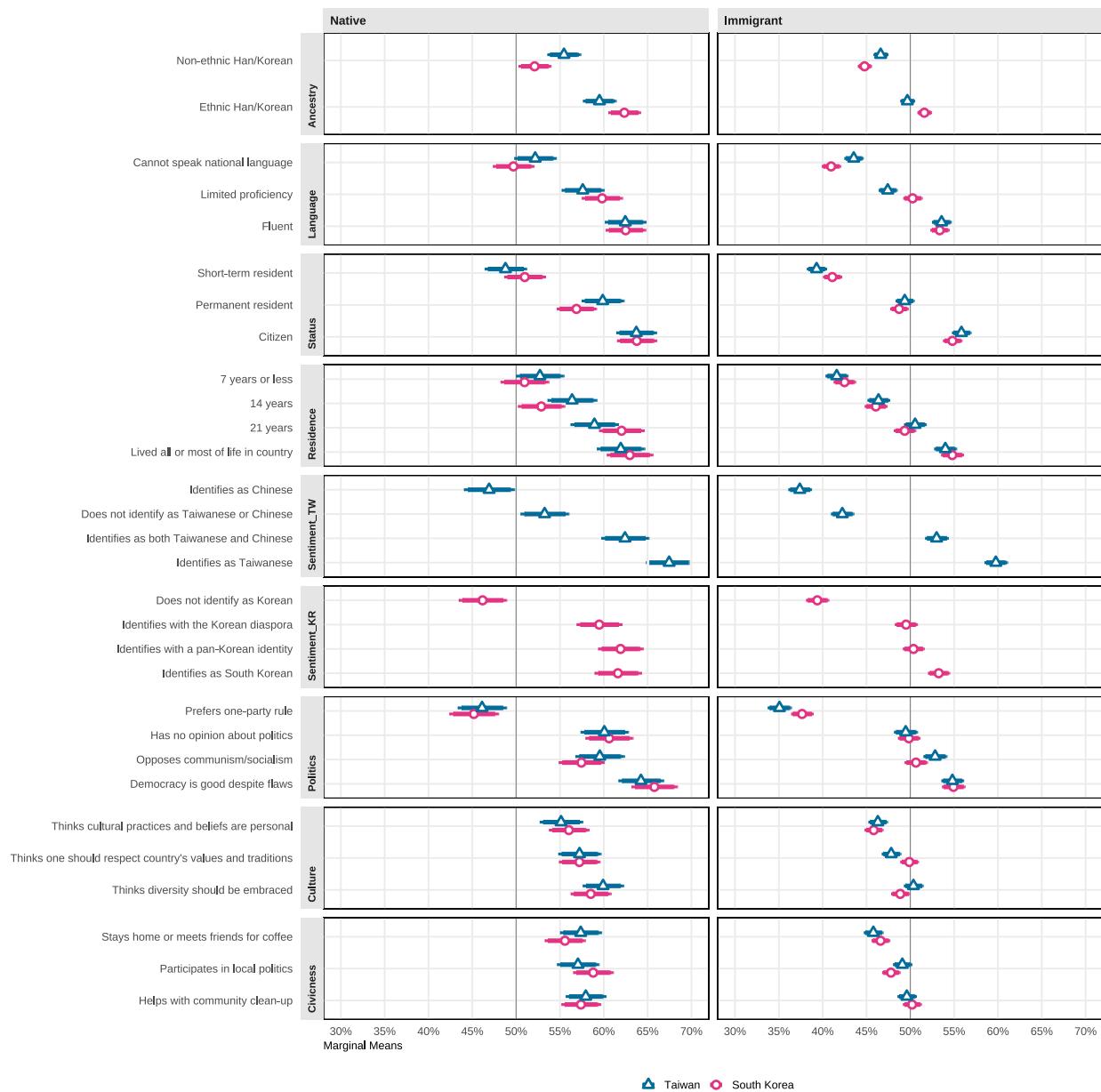
## Full Origins Interaction Models

Figure C.2 presents the full set of interaction effects between origin (native vs. immigrant) and all other attribute values. While key differences in the weight of voluntarist, civic, and ascriptive traits were reported in the main text, this expanded model shows several additional findings to note.

First, as noted in the full baseline models above, some attributes remain unremarkable in their effects. Cultural attitudes and civic engagement continue to show little influence across both native and immigrant profiles, confirming that these behavioral signals are weak membership cues, especially for those born outside the country. Similarly, the duration of residence shows minimal differentiation by origin. Even long-term residence offers limited gains in perceived belonging unless paired with more substantive identity or legal signals.

More notably, the interaction model shows that language capacity is far more consequential for non-natives. Fluency increases immigrant inclusion, while a lack of language proficiency strongly reduces it. For native-born individuals, differences in language ability do not significantly change perceptions of their belonging, likely because fluency is assumed by default – similar to citizenship status.

Finally, the sentiment attribute displays interesting interaction variation. In Taiwan, immigrant profiles that affirm a Taiwanese identity, either fully or in part, are rated far more favorably than those who express Chinese or neither, suggesting that subjective identification helps overcome outsider status. In South Korea, subjective identification with any of the “Korean” identities has only a modest effect for identifying as South *Korean*.



**Figure C.2:** Interaction effects by origin for Taiwan (L) and South Korea (R)

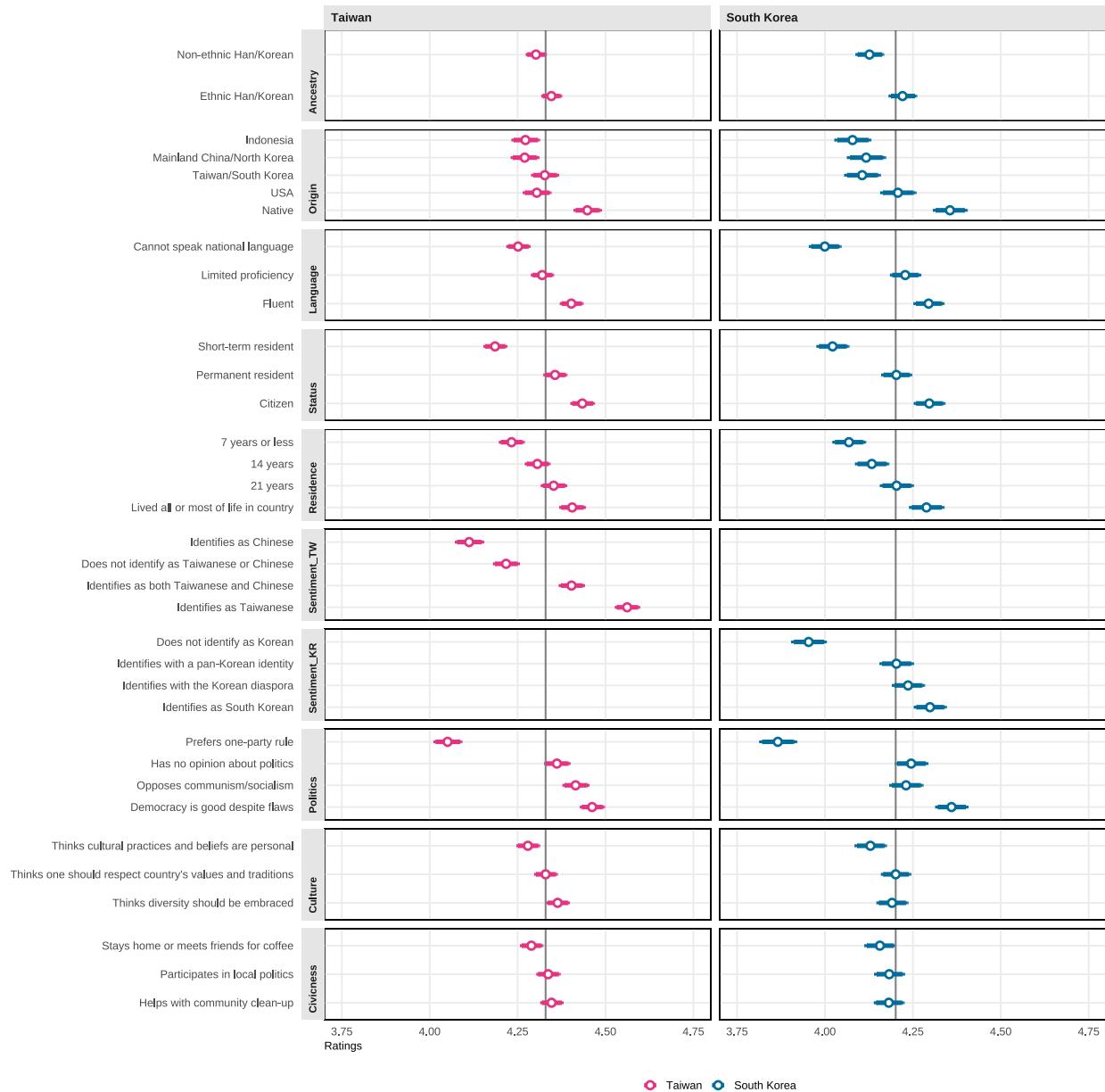
*Note:* Based on the benchmark OLS model with clustered standard errors, the marginal means show the mean outcome of any given attribute level, averaged across all others. The error bars represent 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals. The origin attribute is collapsed into Native (Taiwan or South Korea) and Immigrant (all other origins).

## Ratings-Based Models

In addition to the forced-choice outcome analyzed in the main manuscript, we estimated a secondary model using the 7-point rating scales, where respondents rated each profile's belonging to the national community. This approach offers an alternative measure of perceived inclusion and allows us to assess whether attribute effects persist across response modes.

The ratings-based estimates are derived from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression on the 7-point national belonging scale and plotted in Figure C.3. The vertical lines represent the median rating scores, which serve as a reference point for interpreting the relative favorability of each attribute level. The model includes the same attribute structure and covariate specification as the forced-choice analysis.

The results corroborate the main findings from the forced-choice conjoint analysis. The patterns of marginal effects across attributes are highly consistent, with voluntarist and civic traits (e.g., national identification, political alignment) and select ascriptive traits (e.g., nativity, language fluency) influencing preferences for belonging similarly. Behavioral and cultural traits remain weak predictors under this outcome, further confirming their limited role in driving inclusion judgments.



**Figure C.3:** Marginal effects based on the ratings-based outcome for Taiwan (L) and South Korea (R)

*Note:* Based on an OLS model using the 7-point national belonging rating as the outcome variable, with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. The values represent the predicted average rating for each attribute level, averaging over the distribution of all other attributes. Vertical dashed lines indicate the median score across all profiles. Error bars reflect 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals.

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