AJPS AMERICAN JOURNAL of POLITICAL SCIENCE

Target, Information, and Trade Preferences: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in East Asia

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Abstract: *Protectionist measures often have target countries, and public support for such measures depends on who the targets are. We identify such target effects on protectionist sentiments and examine the effects of information in tempering protectionist sentiments in East Asia. Using an original survey experiment in China, Japan, and South Korea, we test how providing information about the costs of protectionism changes public attitudes toward targeted protectionist measures. We found that providing a target country identity increased public support for protectionism by 8.6%. Providing cost information, on the other hand, reduces support for protectionism by 10%. We also found that information and target effects persist in the presence of the other: Receiving cost information reduces support for both general and targeted protectionism but does not necessarily mute the target effect. Similarly, when reputation and retaliation costs are associated with protectionism, knowing a target country identity still increases public support for protectionism.*

Verification Materials: The data and materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science Dataverse* within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BXPKHG.

Existing studies of individual trade preferences have examined general public sentiments toward government policy on international trade (e.g., Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). But protectionist measures often have either implicit or explicit targets. Especially in the context of the "weaponization" of trade (i.e., the use of trade as a coercive tool in political disputes), citizens' support for such protectionist measures is highly dependent on the identity of the target country.

Despite the importance of target-related factors in public support for protectionist policies, few studies have examined empirical evidence on the effect of target-related information on public support for protectionist policies. Also, to our knowledge, no study has shown whether the provision of information concerning the costs of such measures can temper protectionist sentiments toward the target country. In this article, we tackle these questions using an original survey experiment fielded in China, Japan, and South Korea.

The coexistence of deep economic integration and recurring trade disputes spurred by political tensions in East Asia provides a unique opportunity to test the effects of target identity and cost-related information on public support for protectionist measures. East Asia is one of the most integrated regions in the world, with a

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We are grateful to Han Il Chang, Brandon Ives, Haillie Na-Kyung Lee, Sijeong Lim, Chungshik Moon, Taehee Whang, Byungwon Woo, and attendees of the Political Economy Workshop in Seoul held in March 2021 for very helpful comments and suggestions. We also thank Seowoo Chung, Sunhee Kim, Sara Lim, Sangyong Son, Junwoo Suh, and Yehzee Ryoo for exceptional research assistance and for the KDI School of Public Policy and Management for administrative assistance. The authors' names are in alphabetical order. Authors contributed equally to this work. This research was supported by the National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences (2020-068). Sung Eun Kim was supported by the Korea University Research Grant (K2302471). Jong Hee Park was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (2021S1A5A2A01066158).

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 0, No. 0, February 2023, Pp. 1–17

 DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12783

significant share of intraregional trade and a high dependence on intermediate trade (Athukorala 2011; Nguyen and Wu 2020).[1] Trade volumes in intermediate goods have consistently increased over the past two decades, making countries in the region indispensable trade partners to each other (Obashi and Kimura 2018). However, deep economic integration has not ameliorated political tensions among East Asian countries and instead is "weaponized" at times, with countries responding to political tensions using economic measures.

What makes the case of East Asian countries particularly interesting is the fact that citizens not only show strong support for trade restrictions but also engage in economically costly political actions, such as large-scale consumer boycotts against target countries despite their own country's economic interdependence with the target (Li and Liu 2017; Vekasi and Nam 2019).

For instance, when the Japanese government restricted exports of semiconductor manufacturing materials to South Korea over historical disputes,[2] more than 70% of Japanese citizens favored the government's export controls.[3] Between China and Japan, disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands triggered the mobilization of Chinese consumer boycotts of Japanese products (Li and Liu 2017). East Asia therefore presents itself as a hard case for testing the effects of cost-related information on individual trade preferences.[4]

In untangling public support for targeted protectionism in East Asia, we first divide the costs of protectionist policy into three categories (retaliation cost, interdependence cost, and reputation cost) and examine how different types of cost-related information affect public attitudes toward targeted protectionism. First, a target country may *retaliate* against the initiator's protectionist policy by restricting trade with the initiator. This retaliation imposes economic costs on affected industries in the initiating country. Second, a country's use of protectionist measures can be costly to its own economy due to *economic interdependence* with the target. Even without any retaliation from the target, restricting imports from the target can be economically costly for an initiating country that is dependent on trade with its target. Lastly, an initiating country may pay *reputational costs* for violating World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. The targeted country may file a complaint with the WTO accusing the initiator of adopting protectionist measures, which can cause a loss of reputation.

To estimate the effects of different types of cost-related information on public support for targeted protectionism, we designed a survey experiment using respondents in China, Japan, and South Korea (2,259 subjects from China, 2,392 subjects from Japan, and 2,101 subjects from South Korea). Our survey experiment randomly switches (1) the information on the cost of protectionism and (2) the main target of the trade restriction measures planned by respondents' home countries. More specifically, we assigned survey respondents to one of four hypothetical cases that specify the cost condition (no information, retaliation cost, economic interdependence cost, and reputation cost) and three different targets (an unnamed foreign country and two neighboring countries). We were able to estimate the distinct effects of target information (e.g., the effect of knowing who the target country is) and cost information (e.g., the effect of knowing the cost of a protectionist policy), as well as the effects of target-specific information (e.g., the effect of reputation cost information from a protectionist policy aimed at a specific target country), using this factorial design.

The results of our experiment reveal that knowing about a target country identity as one of two neighboring countries raised public support for protectionism by 8.6% among Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean respondents, compared to not knowing about a target country identity. Providing cost information (economic interdependence, reputation, or retaliation), on the other hand, reduces public support for protectionism by 10%, compared to not knowing about costs accompanied by protectionist measures. Our findings suggest that individuals weigh a variety of costs and benefits in forming their trade preferences: individuals take into account not only cost-related information but also a target country identity, which existing research on public support for trade policies have paid scant attention to.

Our findings also allow us to investigate the conditional effects of target (cost) information when cost (target) information is provided. These conditional effects help us better grasp how "persistent" the impacts of each knowledge are. We found that information effects and target effects are sticky in the sense that receiving cost (target) information decreases (increases) support for both general and targeted protectionism but does not necessarily mute the effect of target (cost) information.

[1] As of 2017, intraregional trade accounted for 36% of total trade in East Asia (statistic from Asia Regional Integration Center, ADB, accessible at https://aric.adb.org).

[2] Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry 2019.

[3] (Cho 2019).

[4] Similar trilateral relations exist in every corner of international relations. In social network theory, the triadic relationship is viewed as a microcosm of a larger network. Thus, examining three countries that share history, culture, and economic transactions can shed light on how information affects protectionist sentiments against multiple neighboring countries.

More specifically, knowing a target country identity still increases public support for protectionism either when no information is provided or when reputation and retaliation costs are associated with protectionism. Also, knowing cost information still decreases public support for protectionism either when no target identity is provided or when China and South Korea are presented as target countries. When we decompose these effects at the country level, we found that the average effect of cost information is driven by respondents in Japan and South Korea, while Chinese respondents do not show statistically significant preference shifts away from targeted protectionism after receiving cost information.

Trade Partners, Information, and Individual Attitudes toward Trade

Existing accounts of individual trade preferences examine public attitudes toward international trade in general, without considering specific trade partners. The interest-based explanations consider the distributive effects of trade liberalization (e.g., Mayda and Rodrik 2005).

However, a series of studies provide evidence that individual trade preferences are not necessarily consistent with the predictions of standard economic models (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017; Rho and Tomz 2015). Rho and Tomz (2017) suggest that economic ignorance accounts for the gap between economic self-interest and trade preferences, and this gap can be bridged by providing information on the distributional consequences of international trade. Studies indeed find that individual citizens can learn about trade policies' implications for their own well-being via personal experience or from coworkers, politicians, or labor unions and align their preferences with their material interests (e.g., Dür and Schlipphak 2021; Fordham and Kleinberg 2012; Margalit 2011; Naoi and Urata 2013).

One trend in this literature on individual trade preferences is the increasing use of survey experiments.[5] Hiscox (2006) was one of the first to examine the effects of issue framing on trade preferences. The study finds that individuals are sensitive to information on the possibility of job losses from international trade, which makes them far less likely to support international trade, whereas protrade information has no discernable effect on public attitudes.

Another line of studies examines how individuals consider the effects of international trade on their national economy. For instance, Mansfield and Mutz (2009) show that individuals form attitudes toward international trade based on their understanding of how their country as a whole is affected by it. In a similar vein, Schaffer and Spilker (2019) examine how information on the effects of international trade on a country as a whole shapes individual preferences. They find that individuals are more sensitive to egocentric information, whereas sociotropic information only amplifies the existing egocentric effect.

Following this line of research, we further examine how individuals consider trade policy's impact on their trading partners' economies in addition to their own economy. One country's protectionist policy against another country may incur costs for both the initiator and the target due to economic interdependence. We examine how information about different types of costs of protectionism affects individual trade preferences toward specific trade partners.

Target Effects and Information Effects on Support for Protectionism

In this article, we assume that public support for targeted protectionism is subject to two theoretically distinct factors: *target effects* and *information effects*. First, individual support for a protectionist policy may change depending on who the target country is; we call this "target effects." A country's protectionist policy often has explicit or implicit targets. For example, on January 23, 2018, US President Trump announced that he had imposed tariffs on solar panels and washing machines. At that moment, most citizens did not realize which country these tariffs targeted. However, the next day, the media reported that the action "prompted outcry from China and South Korea, the primary targets of the measure."[6] By reading this news article, voters learned the potential target of the Trump administration's protectionism. In this example, target effects would refer to the extent to which voters' attitudes towards the Trump administration's protectionism change when they learned which countries were being targeted by the policy.

Second, "information effects" refer to the extent to which individuals change their attitudes toward a protectionist policy after receiving information. Such information can come from various sources, including government agencies, interest groups, think tanks, experts, or news organizations. Here, we focus on the contents of information about the cost or benefit of protectionist

[5] For a comprehensive overview, see Kuo and Naoi (2015) and Naoi (2020).

[6] BBC, "Trump says no trade war despite Asia outcry over tariffs," January 23, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-42786995.

measures. On August 7, 2020, Canada announced that it had imposed $3.6B in tariffs in retaliation for Trump's aluminum tariff.[7] The information of Canada's retaliatory tariff provides important information about the cost of the Trump administration's protectionist policy, which could affect some voters' attitudes toward the protectionist measure. We highlight that finding empirical evidence that indicates what type of information is most effective in changing voters' support for protectionism has important implications, both theoretically and in practice.

Target Effects: Trade Preferences toward Partner Countries

The formation of individual trade preferences depends on the consideration of who the target country is. In other words, one's interest-based calculation or feelings-based preferences may significantly vary depending on trade partners. Indeed, debates on trade policy in the real world often center on whether to expand or reduce trade with specific countries. For example, a recent Pew Research Center poll shows that Americans who view economic ties with China as bad are "much more likely than those who think the nations have good economic ties to have overall unfavorable views of China (71% versus 47%)."[8]

Recently, a few studies began to examine which countries are preferred as partners for preferential trade agreements. For example, Spilker, Bernauer, and Umaña (2018) asked respondents in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Vietnam to choose between two hypothetical preferential trade agreements that varied with regard to membership, scope of liberalization, environmental and labor standards, and labor market access. The findings of their conjoint experiment show that feelings such as sympathy or antipathy toward particular countries are the most important factor shaping people's trade preferences in all three countries. In all three countries, individuals were far less likely to prefer trade agreements that include India as a trade partner, compared to those that include the European Union as a trade partner.

Another strand of research examines how trade preferences change depending on political relationships with trade partners. DiGiuseppe and Kleinberg (2019) find that individuals were less likely to support trade agreements not only with a rival, but also with a rival of the rival or a country that cooperates with the rival. Carnegie and Gaikwad (2022) also find that citizens prefer trading with allies over adversaries, which provides microlevel evidence for the security externality hypothesis. Building on these findings, we further contribute to the discussion by demonstrating how provision of information affects individual support for targeted protectionism and how the effects depend on the targets.

Information Effects: Retaliation, Interdependence, and Reputation

We consider three types of costs the initiator of a protectionist policy can incur. The first is *retaliation*. A targeted country may take retaliatory actions against the initiator's protectionist policy. Retaliation, broadly speaking, can take two forms—"government-driven" (or top-down) or "grassroots" (or bottom-up) retaliation. Government-driven retaliation is when a targeted government takes counteractions to coerce the initiating government to change the protectionist policy. Various types of retaliatory actions are available, including antidumping and countervailing duties, export regulations, countertariffs, and noneconomic measures such as diplomatic sanctions. For example, in response to the Japanese government's restriction on exports of key semiconductor manufacturing materials to South Korea in 2019, citizens in South Korea actively mobilized consumer boycotts against Japanese products. The Japanese economy incurred substantial costs as a result of the boycott, mainly due to a drastic decline in sales of a wide range of Japanese consumer goods in Korea.[9]

The second type of significant cost due to targeted protectionism comes from *economic interdependence*. As noted by Hirschman (1945), a high level of economic interdependence can be an effective means of exerting political pressure and coercion because economic interdependence is usually asymmetrical. However, the use of economic interdependence as a political strategy can hurt the economy of the initiating country, and its citizens (and firms) may oppose the measure once they know the full cost of the action. Moreover, the use of economic interdependence as a political strategy takes the

[7]CBC, "Canada to impose $3.6B in tariffs in response to Trump's move against Canadian aluminum," August 8, 2020 (https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/freeland-aluminum-imports-tariffs-trump-1.5677757).

[8]Pew Research Center, "U.S. Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions" August 13, 2019 (https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/08/13/u-s-views-of-china-turn-sharply-negative-amid-trade-tensions/).

[9]See Justin McCurry "South Korean boycott of Japanese goods hits beer and carmakers," *The Guardian*, September 4, 2019 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/04/south-korea-boycott-japanese-goods-beer-car-sales, Accessed April 12, 2021).

form of cutting or downsizing existing trade relations with the target country, which can produce unexpected outcomes such as benefiting a third country, weakening the competitiveness of the initiating country's firms or economy, or disrupting world trade. For instance, Japan's export restriction on key semiconductor manufacturing materials to South Korea, intended to hurt South Korea's semiconductor industry, also imposed economic costs on Japanese industries independent of the impact of the consumer boycotts, as Japanese companies lost an important exporting market.[10]

One important fact about economic interdependence is that citizens can anticipate the economic costs of a protectionist action coming from interdependence rather easily without further information about target's responses. Moreover, if citizens and interest groups are informed that they will bear main costs of forgoing economic interdependence due to a protectionist action, citizens and interest groups can protest their governments to refrain from the planned protectionist move (Carnegie and Gaikwad 2022). In this regard, we expect that when individuals are informed about the economic interdependence with a foreign country, they may become more reluctant in supporting the use of protectionist measures against the target country.

The last type of significant cost due to targeted protectionism is a cost to *reputation*. Targeted protectionism can taint the initiator's national reputation in various ways. The immediate reactions to the protectionist action from the global media and the target country's government would be the first stage of reputational sanction. In this stage, the initiating country argues for the necessity of the protectionist measure, defending its position, and reputational loss is not obvious. We argue that the most significant blow to the national reputation of the initiator comes from the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism (DSM). If the targeted country files a complaint with the WTO and wins the case, it becomes obvious that the initiator's action was illegal. Previous studies have shown that when a country reneges on international commitments, it can be branded a violator of international law, undermining its reputation as a law-abiding member of the international community (Simmons 2000; Tomz 2008). In the realm of international trade, scholars argue that the WTO's DSM heightens the reputational costs of noncompliance by serving as an independent arbitrator and by disseminating information about compliance (Dai 2007; Kono 2007). The authoritative third-party rulings by standing DSM tribunals are viewed as legitimate and are less politicized than the judgments of other ad hoc tribunals and are thought of as representing the "will of the international community" (Kono 2007; Simmons 2010). Thus, once ruling is made by the WTO, the defendant can face significant reputational costs that can weaken the country's future bargaining position in later disputes or in trade negotiations (Bechtel and Sattler 2015).

If citizens care about reputation costs to their country, they will punish leaders who pursue foreign policy that may damage the country's international reputation (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Brutger and Kertzer 2018). This raises the question of whether *the anticipation of legal defeat in the WTO DSM deters ordinary voters in the initiating country from supporting a protectionist policy.* That is, what we are interested in is not the ex post punishment mechanism but the ex ante punishment mechanism via citizens' anticipation of legal outcomes at the WTO.

Recently, scholars of international political economy have increasingly paid attention to the reputational effects of legal defeats in formal WTO rulings. Pelc (2013), for example, shows that US citizens were concerned about their country's reputation when it was involved in a WTO dispute. Moreover, using a survey experiment with a hypothetical trade dispute, Chaudoin (2014) shows that citizens tend to disapprove of the trade practices that can be subjected to adjudication at the WTO due to reputational concerns. We thus expect that individuals would be less likely to support targeted protectionist measures when they are informed about the possibility of an international dispute at the WTO and related reputation losses.

Experimental Design

It is difficult to disentangle target and information effects in an observational study because in reality, these two effects are intermingled. For example, the same news article about tariffs on solar panels and washing machines cited above also informed readers of decisions by China and South Korea to bring the case to the World Trade Organization. Thus, readers of this news article are exposed to two treatments at the same time. Moreover, reading this article is a voluntary decision that cannot be captured in an observational setting.

To untangle target effects from the three types of information effects, we designed a survey experiment for subjects in China, Japan, and South Korea to assess the factors that change their support for a protectionist

[10] "Korean semi-conductor industries make a smooth transition to depart from Japan." *The Nikkei.* February 7, 2021. Available at https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGKKZO68906810W1A200C2EA5000/. Accessed on April 13, 2012.

policy.[11] Among various protectionist tools available to government, we focus on import restrictions—economic policies that restrict imports to protect domestic industries from foreign competition, following earlier experimental studies on public attitudes toward protectionism (e.g., Bearce and Moya 2020; Wu 2019).

Using a private polling company (Qualtrics), we recruited samples of 2,259 respondents in China, 2,392 respondents in Japan, and 2,101 respondents in South Korea.[12] The Qualtrics recruited survey participants via quota sampling in terms of the population's gender and age (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and above).[13] The subjects participated in an online survey in November 2020. See Section A in the online supporting information for our sampling strategy and descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of survey participants.

In our experiment, all respondents were provided with a hypothetical scenario in which their country is considering import restriction measures to protect their domestic industry in the face of the economic downturn due to COVID-19. As all three countries had already suffered from economic recessions due to the pandemic at the time of the survey, we referred to COVID-19 to make the scenario as realistic as possible. By referring to COVID-19, we also try to avoid presenting a scenario in which a country would violate the rules of the WTO. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the WTO members are allowed more flexibility in adopting "trade measures deemed necessary to protect public health and public welfare (including import and export bans, quantitative restrictions on imports and exports, and non-automatic import licensing)."[14] Moreover, our focus on the economic downturn was intended to prime respondents to focus on the economic logic of protectionism, relative to their feelings toward a particular country. Thus, any findings of target effects in this experiment could arguably be considered as conservative estimates.

Our experimental treatments follow a 4×3 factorial design, which randomly flips (1) the information on the costs of protectionism and (2) the main target of the imports restrictions. Respondents are randomly assigned to 12 groups of approximately 150–244 respondents each. The first dimension is designed to examine whether different types of information reduce public support for a protectionist policy. The second dimension is designed to capture whether the public support for protectionism varies depending on the target country. With the two dimensions combined, the factorial design allows us to estimate target effects separately from information effects and also examine their joint effects.

In the following section, we briefly explain the sequence of our experiment. First, we assigned respondents into four groups—a control group that was not provided any information about costs and three groups of randomly assigned participants that were each provided information on one of the three types of potential costs associated with protectionist policies, namely potential retaliation from the target country, mutual economic costs due to interdependence, and reputational costs.

Table 1 presents the exact treatment information provided to respondents using the experimental conditions in South Korea as an example. Examples of the treatment information that the respondents in China, Japan, and South Korea received are presented in Figures A1–A3 (pp. 5–7). Respondents in China and Japan were respectively provided with hypothetical scenarios in which their own respective country is considering ways to reduce imports. In the control group, respondents read a simple description that said their country is considering ways to reduce imports due to the economic downturn, while the other three groups received the additional information on the potential costs of such protectionist measures. The retaliation treatment examines whether individual support for protectionism decreases when a respondent recognizes the possibility of a tit-for-tat response from the target country that would also hurt their own country's economy. The interdependence treatment also provides information on the costs of protectionist measures on the national economy, but with a focus on the economic interdependence of

[11] We have registered a preanalysis plan (PAP) on a commonly used repository, but we are unable to provide the details due to confidentiality in the blind review process. We are happy to provide more details of the PAP as needed or upon request.

[12] Our estimations are in fact based only on attentive respondents. For more details, see Section A in the online supporting information. Tables A1 and A2 show the summary statistics of demographic characteristics of the survey respondents and the distribution of age, respectively (pp. 3–4).

[13] As we rely on online survey, our sample overrepresents younger population especially in China. However, the Qualtric's quota sampling allows us to better capture older population compared to other crowdsourcing online surveys such as Zhubajie (Li, Shi, and Zhu 2018).

[14] For details, see https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/faqcovid19_e.htm. While our scenario focuses on the use of protectionist measures during COVID-19, our findings are also applicable to other contexts because member countries use a different set of vague protectionist's measures even during the normal circumstances and do not necessarily strictly adhere to the rules of the WTO. Also, the use of antidumping measures can be another example that closely resembles this scenario in that the WTO members are allowed to invoke antidumping measures that can target specific products from specific countries.

TABLE 1 Experimental Conditions, by Information on Costs of Protectionism

Control Group
Korea is considering ways to reduce imports from [a foreign country/China/Japan] to protect the domestic industry in the face of the economic downturn due to COVID-19.
Retaliation Treatment Group
Korea is considering ways to reduce imports from [a foreign country/China/Japan] to protect the domestic industry in the face of the economic downturn due to COVID-19. However, taking such measure is likely to hurt the Korean exports, as [the foreign country/China/Japan] may take a retaliatory action.
Interdependence Treatment Group
Korea is considering ways to reduce imports from [a foreign country/China/Japan] to protect the domestic industry in the face of the economic downturn due to COVID-19. However, taking such measure is likely to hurt the exports of both Korea and [the foreign country/China/Japan], as the two countries' economies re closely connected.
Reputation Treatment Group
Korea is considering ways to reduce imports from [a foreign country/China/Japan] to protect the domestic industry in the face of the economic downturn due to COVID-19. However, taking such measure is likely to hurt Korea's international reputation, as it can lead to a defeat in the WTO panel

Notes: Table presents the exact treatment information provided to respondents using the experimental conditions in South Korea as an example.

their own country and the target country. While the two conditions both provide information on the potential costs to the initiating country's exports, they differ in the mechanisms through which such costs are incurred. The two conditions also differ in that the interdependence treatment emphasizes the costs to the target country as well. This allows us to examine whether citizens respond simply to the costs information or respond more strongly to either the retaliation or the interdependence information. The reputation treatment examines whether citizens are concerned about a possible WTO dispute and their country's international reputation.[15] If citizens are concerned about a defeat at the WTO panel and the associated reputational costs, they may become less likely to support their government's protectionist measures.

Second, we randomly assign information about the target country. As we are interested in examining whether citizens' support for protectionist measures depends on the target country, we randomly flip the information on the target among a hypothetical foreign country and each of the two specific neighboring countries. For instance, Chinese survey respondents were randomly presented with three scenarios in which their government is considering import restriction measures against (1) an unnamed foreign country, (2) Japan, or (3) South Korea. Likewise, Japanese respondents were randomly assigned scenarios in which import restriction measures were targeted against (1) an unnamed foreign country, (2) China, or (3) South Korea.[16]

After presenting a hypothetical scenario, we ask respondents about their support for their own country's use of protectionist measures as follows:

- How much do you support or oppose your government's consideration of such measures to reduce imports?

Answers to this question were measured on a 5-point scale as follows: (1) strongly oppose, (2) oppose, (3) neither support nor oppose, (4) support, and (5) strongly

[15]The effects of a WTO ruling can be multifaceted, including not only reputational risks but also potential retaliation by other member countries that can shape public opinion toward the trade measures. While it is difficult to clearly unbundle those two different mechanisms, in this article, we aim to capture the reputational effects of the WTO adjudication by explicitly providing an informational cue about potential reputational consequences.

[16]Existing literature (e.g., Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Tomz 2007) suggests that the use of generic country best provides the necessary control over the scenarios to isolate the causal impact while preventing some idiosyncratic features driving the results. Nonetheless, we conduct a follow-up experiment in April 2022 to test whether if our results are driven by such use of generic name in the control. The results and the related discussion presented in Section H of the online supporting information show findings consistent with the results from the original experiment.

support. Throughout the analysis, we use a binary measure that classified the top two categories on the 5-point scale (*strongly support* and *support*) as support for protectionist measures.

One potential concern in our factorial design is the sample imbalance between treatment arms. Covariate balance test results, available in Figures A10 through A12 in the online supporting information (pp. 15–17), show some persistent signs of covariate imbalance between the control and the treatment groups. To adjust this observed imbalance between the groups, we use the covariate balancing propensity score (CBPS) method, which models treatment assignment while optimizing the covariate balance (Fong, Hazlett, and Imai 2018; Imai and Ratkovic 2014, 2015).[17] CBPS computes weights that maximize the covariate balance and the prediction of treatment assignments at the same time. Using these weights, we can compute the average treatment effects in the form of weighted regression estimates. We included 29 covariates covering basic demographic information, ideology, and socioeconomic status: age, gender, income, employment status (7 categories), industry (11 categories), and ideology (8 categories). Detailed information is available in Section D in the online supporting information. We highlight that all of these covariates were collected prior *to* the random assignment to experiment arms to avoid posttreatment bias (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016; King and Zeng 2006; Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018). The results of CBPS analysis are presented in Figures A13–A15 (pp. 18–20).

Our estimations are based only on attentive responses. Our sample excludes any respondents who did not pass the Qualtric's quality checks. We also included our own question that asked respondents to skip and not to click any numbers between one and nine. We excluded those respondents who chose any random numbers between one and nine despite the instruction.

Results

Does the provision of cost information change public support for general and targeted protectionism? Does knowing which country is the target alter the effect of cost information on public[17] support for protectionism? In this section, we provide the findings of our experiment to these questions. First, we report the average effect of target identity and cost information. Then we discuss how the cost-related information affects public attitudes toward targeted protectionism differently across countries, targets, and information types.

[17]We also present the average treatment effects in Figures A4-A9 in the supplementary appendix (pp. 8–13).

Average Target and Information Effects

The first four columns and the first four rows of Table 2 summarize the main results of the experiment. We report the standard error of information effects and target effects in Table A5 (pp. 22). The numbers indicate the proportion of public support for protectionist policies averaged over the three sample countries. The numbers in parentheses are standard error. Column Control shows the mean level of public support for protectionism when no cost-related information is provided. Columns Retaliation, Interdependence, and Reputation show the mean levels of public support for protectionism when specific cost-related information is provided. Each row contains the target specification, with "Foreign" denoting an unnamed target, and the remainder denoting targets of China, Japan, and South Korea, respectively. The last column shows information effects for each target country, and the last row shows target effects for each information condition.

The *information effects* given a specific target h is defined as

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\mathbb{E}\left[Y_{1ijh}\right] - Y_{0ijh}|H = h\right] = \frac{1}{3}\left(\sum_{k\in\{(2),(3),(4)\}} \frac{1}{N_k}\sum_{\mathrm{i}} y_{ijh,k}\right) - \frac{1}{N_{(1)}}\sum_{\mathrm{i}} y_{ijh,k=(1)}, \quad (1)$$

where i denotes individual respondents, j denotes i's country, and k indicates the assigned cost information. In words, the information effect measures the magnitude of the change in public support for targeted protectionism when (one of the three types of) cost information is provided. Note that the effects are averaged over individuals, countries, and information treatments, *conditional upon* the target information.[18]

We define the *target effects* given a specific cost information k similarly:

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\mathbb{E}\left[Y_{1ijk}\right] - Y_{0ijk}|K = k\right] = \frac{1}{2}\left(\sum_{h\in\{(b),(c)\}} \frac{1}{N_h}\sum_{\mathrm{i}} y_{ijk,h}\right) - \frac{1}{N_{(a)}}\sum_{\mathrm{i}} y_{ijk,h=(a)}. \quad (2)$$

[18]The standard error of information effects is computed by combining standard error of each group, which can be calculated by iteratively applying the following formula (Tatebe 2005).

$$\text{Average SE of group } i \text{ and group } j = \sqrt{\frac{N_i^2 - N_i}{N^2 - N}s_i^2 + \frac{N_j^2 - N_j}{N^2 - N}s_j^2 + \frac{N_i N_j\left(\mu_i - \mu_j\right)^2}{(N^3 - N^2)}},$$

where N_i is the sample size of group i and $N_i + N_j = N$. μi and s_i are the mean and standard deviation of group i.

TABLE 2 Decomposition of Causal Effects

	Control	Treatment			Information Effects
	No information	Retaliation	Interdependence	Reputation	
Foreign	0.587	0.519	0.490	0.450	−0.100
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.025)
China	0.613	0.448	0.554	0.433	−0.135
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.030)
Japan	0.708	0.648	0.638	0.683	−0.052
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.029)
South Korea	0.699	0.614	0.612	0.579	−0.097
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.029)
Target effects	0.086	0.051	0.111	0.115	
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.025)	

Notes: Each cell presents the mean support for a protectionist policy in each experimental group. Information effects and target effects are defined in Equations (1) and (2), respectively.

In words, the target effects measure the magnitude of the change in public support for targeted protectionism when the target is clearly identified.

The last column of Table 2 shows that the provision of cost-related information reduces public support for protectionism by 10% when a target identity is not provided. Except the case of Japan as a target country, the information effects are all negative and statistically significant, indicating that providing cost-related information significantly decreases public support for protectionism. The size of information effects is largest when the target country is identified as China, indicating the common concern among Japanese and South Korean respondents toward China as a target.

On the other hand, the last row of Table 2 shows that *the provision of a target identity increases public support for protectionism by 8.6% when cost information is not provided.* The target effects are still statistically significant and positive when cost information related to interdependence and reputation is provided. Interestingly, when respondents are informed about retaliation cost, the provision of a target identity does not make a statistically meaningful change in public support for protectionism.

To better understand sources of target and information effects, we disaggregate target effects by country, as shown in Table 3. It is clear that positive target effects are driven by respondents from Japan and South Korea. When reminded of the interdependent cost borne by protectionist policies, Chinese respondents reduced their support for protectionism by 9.1%. By contrast, Japanese respondents increased their support for protectionism when the target country information switches from a foreign country into either China or South Korea, regardless of the type of cost information. South Korean respondents increased their support for protectionism when the target country information switches from a foreign country into either China or Japan, only in the context of interdependence or reputation cost information. Also, Japan and South Korea have quite different reactions to

TABLE 3 Target Effects by Country

	Control	Treatment		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
China	−0.051	−0.091	0.068	0.041
	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.039)
Japan	0.184	0.170	0.131	0.101
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.038)
South Korea	0.090	0.033	0.121	0.192
	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.045)

Notes: Each cell presents the estimated treatment effects and standard errors in parentheses. Column (1) presents the target effects for the control group, while columns (2), (3), and (4) report the target effects of retaliation, interdependence, and reputation cost information, respectively. Target effects are estimated from different combinations of target countries among China, Japan, and South Korea. For example, Chinese respondents in treatment groups receive target information of South Korea and Japan, whereas Japanese respondents in treatment groups receive target information of China and South Korea. Thus, effects must be compared across countries with caution.

target information and cost information. South Korean respondents show the largest target effect in the presence of reputation information, whereas Japanese respondents show the largest target effect when there is no cost information. Note that the country-level target effects are averaged over different target countries. Thus, it is our next step to examine target-specific information effects (or conditional effects of information given a target identity) to better understand public sentiments toward targeted protectionism.

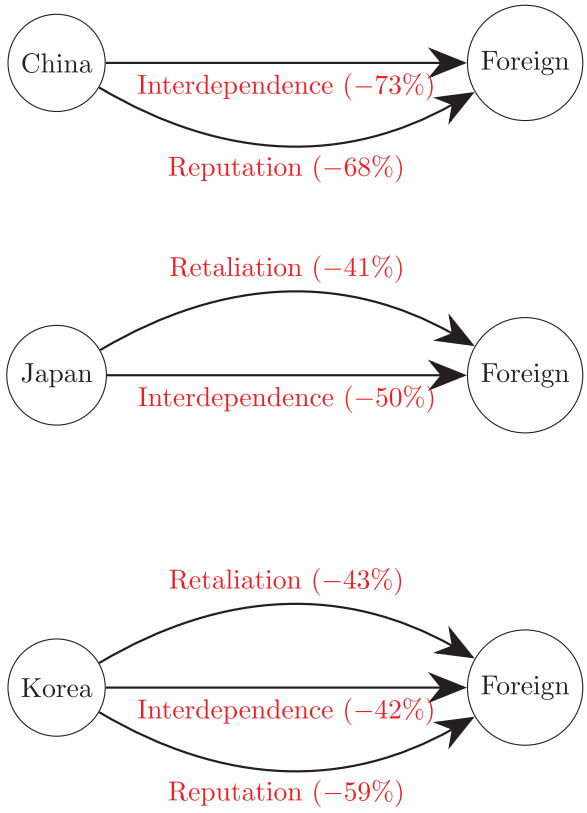
Target-Specific Information Effects

Target-specific information effects measure the extent to which respondents of a home country (e.g., Chinese respondents) change their attitudes on targeted protectionism against a target country (e.g., South Korea) after they receive specific information about the cost of targeted protectionism (e.g., retaliation cost). Because there are many moving parts in our discussion of target-specific information effects, we use a simple diagram that summarizes the main findings of our experiment.

We begin with the baseline case, in which respondents do not know which country is being targeted. Figure 1 summarizes our findings from general protectionism by odds ratio changes.[19] More detailed information is presented in Table A3 in the online supporting information.[20] The arrow lines in Figure 1 indicate that respondents in a sender country are likely to decrease their support for protectionist policies if they learn either retaliation, interdependence, or the reputation cost of protectionist policies. Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that the cost information of protectionist policies significantly decrease the support for protectionism in all three countries. Only the cost of interdependence shows a consistent effect across three countries, demonstrating that respondents from three East Asian countries generally value economic interdependence, and they are willing to change their protectionist positions if the measure is expected to disrupt

economic interdependence. Interestingly, information on costs due to interdependence has the largest

FIGURE 1 Information Effects Given an Unnamed Target



Notes: Reported numbers are quasibinomial logistic estimates. An arrow indicates that respondents in the sender country are willing to withdraw protectionist support if they were informed protection brings either retaliation, interdependence, or reputation cost with regard to the unknown target country.

effect among Chinese respondents. Also, the effect of reputation cost information has the largest effect among Chinese respondents. These findings imply that Chinese citizens are more concerned about the economic and reputational effects of domestic trade policy than with the political ones.

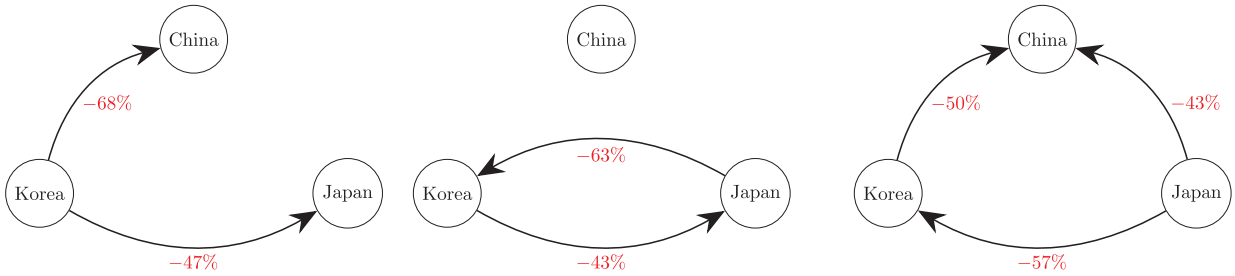
Figure 2 reports the findings of target-specific information effects *when a target country is identified*.[21] One of the most prominent differences from the unnamed target case in Figure 1 is the lack of significant responses to cost information from Chinese respondents. If we consider the diagrams in Figure 2 as a social network, China is either an isolated (interdependence) or absorbing (retaliation and reputation) node while Japan and South Korea interact with each other by one of cost-information paths.

[19]Odds (Supporting Protectionism | Specific Cost Information) Odds (Supporting Protectionism | No Cost Information).

[20]We developed a simple bingo card table to effectively summarize the statistically significant joint effects ($\surd$) across the three treatment information groups and two of the three target identities. t indicates an insignificant effect, and an empty cell indicates that no experiments were conducted on the given combination, for cases that correspond to the nonsensical scenario of self-targeting protectionism. Regression results are summarized in the right side of the table.

[21]Numerical results are available in Table A4 in the online supporting information (p. 21).

FIGURE 2 Target-Specific Information Effects



(a) Retaliation (b) Interdependence (c) Reputation

Notes: An arrow indicates that respondents in the sender country are willing to withdraw protectionist support if they were informed protection brings either retaliation, interdependence, or reputation cost with regard to the target country.

We interpret the results in more details starting from the top panel in Figure 2. Retaliation cost information decreases the odds ratio of supporting targeted protectionism only for Korean respondents by 68% toward China and 47% toward Japan. Two factors can explain South Korean respondents' sensitivity to retaliation cost information. The first factor is historical. South Korea is the only country that recently received targeted protectionism from the two neighboring countries. China has sanctioned South Korea for the deployment of THAAD since 2015, and Japan has sanctioned South Korea since 2019 for the South Korean court's decision on the case filed by victims of forced labor during Japan's colonial rule over Korea. The sensitivity to retaliation information among South Korean respondents must reflect these two ongoing sanctions by China and Japan. The size of the economy is the second factor. The economy of South Korea is smaller than that of China or Japan, creating a sense of vulnerability and insecurity (Hirschman 1945; Keohane and Nye 1989). As of 2019, China's economy was more than seven times larger than that of South Korea's, and Japan's economy was four times larger than that of South Korea's. Also, South Korea's trade dependence (trade as a share of GDP) is significantly higher (69%) than that of both China (31%) and Japan (34%) as of 2020 according to the World Development Indicator.[22]

The top-right panel of Table A4 (pp. 21) in the online supporting information shows the effects of interdependence cost information on public support for targeted protectionism against a named neighbor country. Interdependence cost information changes public attitudes of respondents in both Japan and South Korea. Holding other covariates constant, the provision of interdependence cost information decreases the odds that respondents from Japan will support targeted protectionism against South Korea by 63% and that respondents from South Korea will support targeted protectionism against Japan by 43%. That is, respondents from Japan and South Korea are willing to rethink their support for targeted protectionism against each other when they learn about the potential costs due to the economic interdependence of the two countries.

The symmetrical efficacy of information on interdependence costs in modifying the attitudes of respondents from Japan and South Korea has significant policy implications for how the two countries' policymakers might address bilateral issues. The findings imply that domestic audiences' support for targeted protectionism toward one another can be tempered by the detailed information on how intertwined their trade patterns and economies are. It is interesting to find that despite their substantial economic connection with China, neither Japanese nor South Korean respondents demonstrate significant shifts in attitude when informed that their economies are inextricably linked to China and that targeted protectionism will harm both countries. Although additional data are needed to validate this, this finding suggests that citizens of democracies are more likely to value economic interdependence with another democracy than with nondemocracies as noted by Russett and Oneal (2001).

Lastly, the bottom panel of Table A4 shows the effects of reputation-cost information on public support for targeted protectionism directed at a specific neighboring country. Similar to the case of interdependence cost information, reputation-cost information modifies respondents' protectionist attitudes only in Japan and South Korea. Keeping other factors constant, providing knowledge about reputation costs reduces the odds of supporting protectionist policies by 43% (against

[22]https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?locations=CN-JP-KR.

China) and 57% (against South Korea) among Japanese respondents. Provision of information on reputation costs reduces South Korean respondents' odds of supporting targeted protectionism by 50% (against China). The presence of reputation effects among South Korean and Japanese respondents could be another indication of *democracy effect* in international litigation. Existing studies have shown that voters in democratic countries are more likely to respect the international legal process and worry about maintaining their reputation countries where the "rule of law" is followed compared to their counterparts in nondemocracies (Dixon 1993; Gaubatz 1996). Citizens of democracies do not wish to hurt their reputation by taking unlawful actions against a neighboring country. Although the information of losing a case at the WTO deters Japanese respondents from supporting targeted protectionism regardless of whom the target country, we could not find a corresponding effect from South Korean responses toward Japan as a target country. South Korean respondents withdrew their support for targeted protectionism only when they learned the prospect of losing a WTO case against China. The findings of the South Korean respondents must be linked to South Korea's recent WTO complaint against Japan's export control of semiconductor materials, which was filed in 2019. The case drew a lot of attention from the South Korean press.[23] The findings from the South Korean case show that loss of reputation due to a defeat in the litigation may not be a significant deterrent when the litigation with the target country is considered to have a high stake. Instead, even if the chances of winning a case are low, Koreans may believe that legal proceedings with Japan should not be avoided.[24]

Individual-Level Analysis

In this section, we analyze treatment effects at the individual respondent level using various demographic information. We emphasize that the demographic data for this analysis were obtained prior to the random assignment of participants to experiment arms, and so there is no possibility that respondents changed their responses as a result of the information supplied in the experiment.

First, we examine the determinants of support for targeted protectionism using the logistic regression model and the support for protectionism as the dependent variable. Responses of "Support" or "Strongly Support" are coded as 1, and otherwise as 0. We use observations from the control group to check the baseline support for targeted protectionism.[25] Figure 3 summarizes the logistic regression results. Starting with the pooled country sample in the first panel, we notice that across the three countries in our sample, respondents who are female, have less education, have a higher income, have greater nationalistic sentiment, or who work in the manufacturing sector are more likely to support protectionist measures across three countries in our sample.[26] However, there are some noticeable variations across the three countries. For instance, female respondents are more protectionist than male respondents in China and South Korea, but not in Japan. While holding a college degree is statistically significant in the pooled sample, it is not a statistically significant predictor of protectionism in any of the country-level samples. Higher levels of nationalism, on the other hand, are consistently found to be statistically significant across all three countries, at the conventional 95% significance level in China and Japan, and at the 90% significance level as in South Korea.

Focusing on this last factor of nationalism, we next turn to examine whether nationalistic individuals respond to cost information differently from how others respond. The reason we focus on nationalistic individuals is clear. They are the group expected to most strongly advocate for protectionism aimed at a particular country and the group that has the smallest information effect. Furthermore, the provision of information can lead to unpredictable reactions among these individuals.

Due to the small subgroup-level sample sizes, here we pool the information across target countries. The results, shown in Figure 4, reveal an interesting pattern between the level of nationalism and the effect of information treatments. Respondents with higher levels of nationalism (in China and Japan) are more responsive to the treatment providing information about reputation

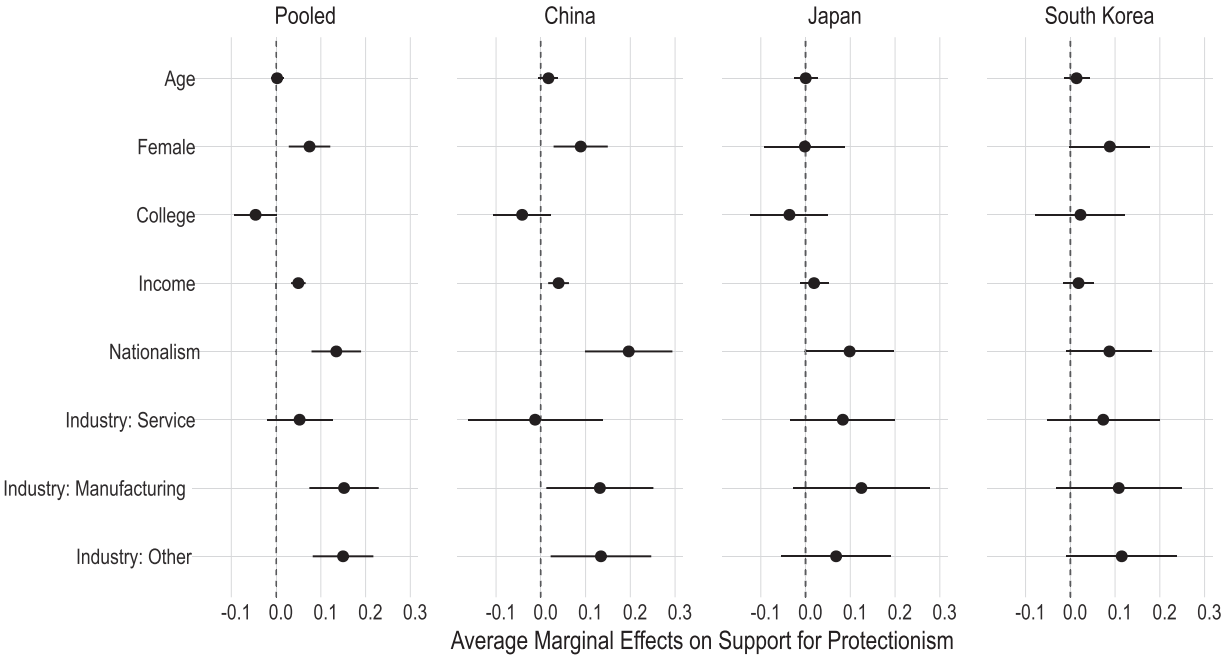
[23] Between 2019 and 2022, the total number of South Korea's domestic news articles containing the terms "Japan, WTO, and export control" is 8,434. The search was conducted using an online search engine of Korean newspaper (https://www.bigkinds.or.kr/).

[24] In 2019, South Korea won the WTO dispute over import bans imposed on Japanese seafood in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster when the WTO Appellate Body ruled against a panel decision that had initially found in favor of Japan's position. This event was hailed as a national victory against Japan. The case information is available at https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds495_e.htm.

[25] The respective sample size for each of the columns are as follows: Pooled ($N = 1{,}626$), China ($N = 536$), Japan ($N = 583$), and South Korea ($N = 507$).

[26] The income variable is based on self-reported income level from 1 to 8. The nationalism variable utilizes the response to the question, "*How proud are you to be a Chinese/Japanese/Korean?*" The respondents could choose between *very proud, quite proud, not very proud,* and *not at all proud.* We collapse these responses into a binary code where 0 indicates not proud, and 1 indicates proud.

FIGURE 3 Individual Characteristics and Support for Protectionism, by Survey Countries



Notes: Solid dots are coefficients of logistic regression models and horizontal bars are 95% confidence interval based on heteroskedasticity-consistent standard error (MacKinnon and White 1985). Reference Category for Industry and Employment are "Unemployed."

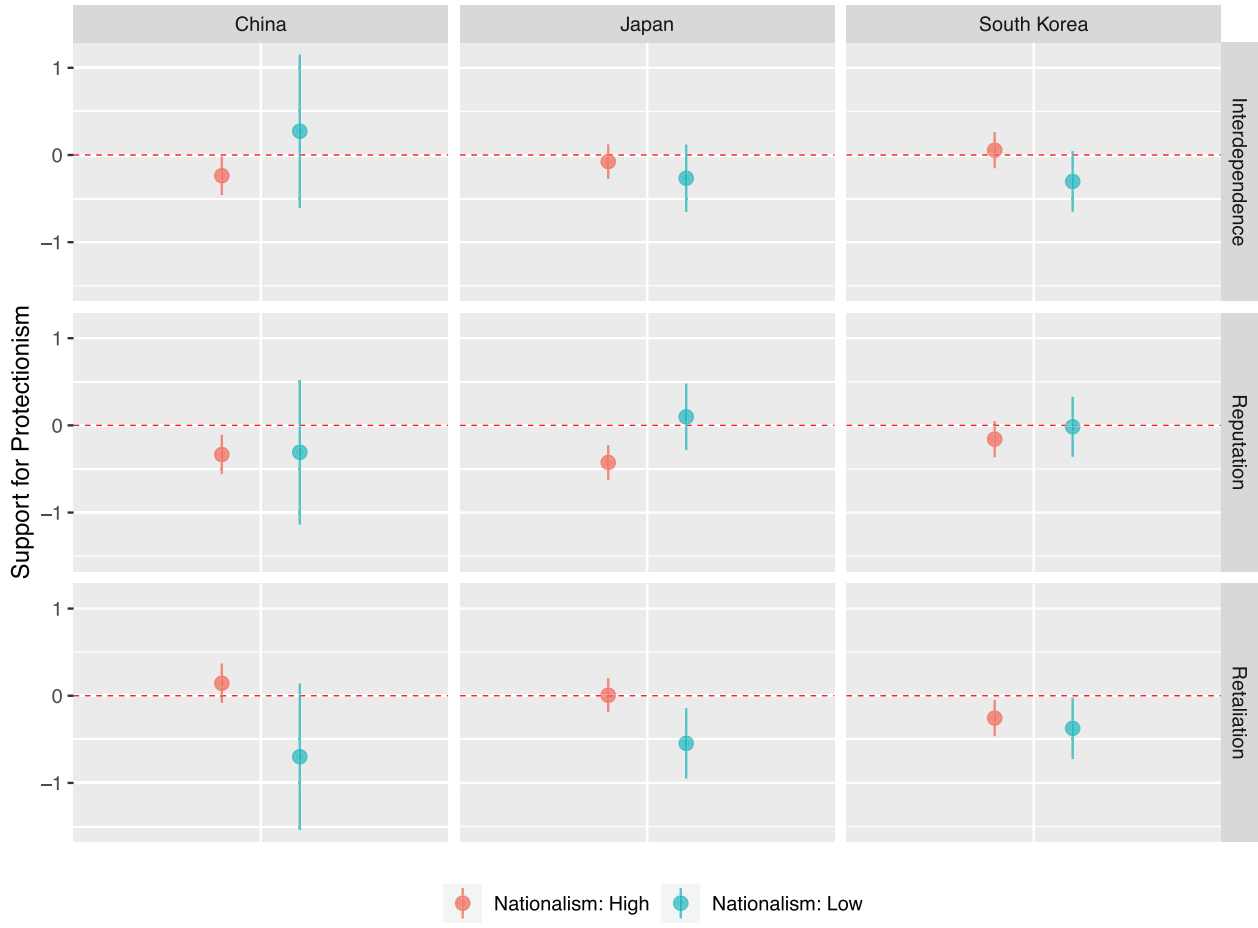
costs, whereas less nationalistic respondents (in Japan and South Korea) are more responsive to the treatment that provides information about retaliation costs. One possible explanation is that individuals with high levels of nationalism may care more about maintaining their "national honor" with regard to keeping an international agreement and may respond more strongly to treatment information concerning reputation. These types of citizens tend to believe that inconsistent decisions by policymakers, such as a failure to follow through on international commitments, damage the country's honor and reputation (Brutger and Kertzer 2018; Fearon 1994; Kertzer and Brutger 2016; Nomikos and Sambanis 2019). In contrast, those with weak nationalist sentiment consider the economic costs of retaliation as significant as or more significant than sovereignty and national honor. Strong nationalists worry about the damage from a legal defeat at the WTO because they may believe that a legal defeat at the WTO is a national humiliation hurting the country's image and credibility in international affairs (Chaudoin 2014).

Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the formation of public preferences for targeted protectionism in East Asia using the concept of target and information effects. We estimated average and conditional effects of target and cost information among respondents of China, Japan, and South Korea using a survey experiment that assigns respondents into various information settings for target identities and cost information.

Our experiment demonstrates that both target identities and cost information affect popular support for targeted protectionism, although the effects vary across target identities, cost information types, and respondents' nationalities. Most surprisingly, when we examined information effects directed towards an unnamed target country, we discovered that respondents from all three countries were not significantly different: cost information reduces public support for targeted protectionism. We also found that information effects and target effects are "persistent" in the presence of the other in the sense that receiving cost information reduces support for both general and targeted protectionism but does not necessarily mute the effect of target information. Similarly, when reputation and retaliation costs are associated with protectionism, knowing a target country identity still increases public support for protectionism. It is when the target country is identified as one of two neighboring countries that the cross-country differences become pronounced. While Chinese respondents did

FIGURE 4 Support for Protectionism, by Survey Countries



Notes: The estimation method is the quasi-binomial logistic regression model weighted by the CBPS method.

not shift their support for targeted protectionism significantly in response to cost information, respondents in Japan and South Korea significantly withdrew support for targeted protectionism after learning about the costs associated with targeted protectionism against one of the neighboring countries.

Although the evidence in our experiment comes from three East Asian countries, our findings have several broader implications beyond East Asia. First, an increasing number of studies have examined nonmaterial sources of trade preferences, such as other-regarding preferences (Lü, Scheve, and Slaughter 2012), nationalism, and ethnocentrism (Mansfield and Mutz 2013; Margalit 2012). In these studies, feelings of ingroup favoritism, national superiority, or patriotism are consistently found to be the key sources of individual trade preferences (Mutz and Kim 2017; Rankin 2004). According to our findings, individual support for protectionism can be mitigated if voters are provided information on the costs of targeted protectionism. While individuals' feelings toward specific countries are an important determinant of their trade attitudes, these feelings do not necessarily trump cost-related calculations. When individuals are informed about the material and reputational costs of protectionist measures, they become less supportive of protectionism. In particular, although the effects depend on the target and the type of information, we find that the median respondents in Japan and South Korea tend to withdraw their support for targeted protectionist measures when informed about the economic interdependence between their own country and the target and the potential loss of reputation that could result from targeted protectionist actions.

Second, the findings of our article demonstrate how and under what conditions cost-related information successfully reshapes citizens' views and feelings toward targeted protectionism. Given citizens' low levels of knowledge about trade policy and its consequences,

previous studies have largely focused on the role of information in bridging the disconnect between personal interests and policy preferences. For instance, Rho and Tomz (2017) find that individuals' trade preferences become more aligned with their self-interests when the individuals are informed about the distributional consequences of trade liberalization. Similarly, Schaffer and Spilker (2019) show that individuals are less likely to support trade liberalization when they are exposed to information regarding its negative impact on their own industries. In this article, we show that individuals not only respond to information about their self-interests but also to information concerning sociotropic concerns, such as the expected economic and reputational costs of protectionism to their country as a whole.

Third, individual citizens are highly concerned with protecting their country's international reputation as a rule-abiding country. Informing citizens in Japan and Korea about the possibility of a WTO dispute significantly reduces their support for the use of targeted protectionist measures against their neighbors (with the exception of Korea targeting Japan). This highlights the important role of the WTO as an independent arbitrator (Dai 2007; Kono 2007). Along with previous findings that have shown that the public pays attention to the WTO disputes and disapproves of trade practices that may be subject to disputes (Chaudoin 2014; Pelc 2013), we add further evidence that citizens are less willing to support targeted protectionism when informed that it may lead to a WTO dispute. It is also notable that these effects are more pronounced among nationalistic individuals, who are often considered to be more supportive of "weaponizing" economic interdependence during periods of political disputes. The results imply that the WTO, as an authoritative third party, can mitigate public support for protectionism and discourage countries from using protectionist policy as a coercive tool.

Finally, our study sheds important light on the extent to which public support for protectionist measures is based on political tensions with trade partners and in what ways public support for protectionism can be mitigated by providing information on the costs of protectionism. So far, the literature on political tensions and international trade has mostly focused on aggregate-level trade flows and consumer boycotts (e.g., Davis and Meunier 2011; Pandya and Venkatesan 2016). We believe that recent events, such as China's export regulation of rare earth products to Japan, the trade war between the United States and China, and Japan's export regulations of semiconductor supplies to South Korea, clearly show that the nexus between political tensions and international trade is an emerging fault line in international politics.

The evidence we presented suggests that raising awareness about the interdependent nature of the global economy can significantly contribute to tempering targeted protectionism in East Asia and between Japan and South Korea in particular. As citizens of democratic countries, respondents in Japan and South Korea appear more responsive to information about economic interdependence than to information about possible retaliation. While individuals tend to view trade in terms of "us-versus-them" terms and favor "winning more than them" in a trade relationship (Mutz and Kim 2017), information about economic interdependence may weaken this attitude by highlighting the linked fates of the two neighboring countries.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Survey Sample
Appendix B: Treatment Texts
Appendix C: Average Treatment Effect
Appendix D: Balance Test Results for Subgroups
Appendix E: Results of CBPS Analysis
Appendix F: Target-Specific Information Effects
Appendix G: Standard Error of information Effects and target Effects
Appendix H: Generic Country Names as a Control Condition