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# Has Trump Damaged U.S. Imaged Abroad?

## Decomposing the Effects of Policy Messages on Foreign Public Opinion\*

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## Abstract

The U.S. President Donald Trump has frequently made foreign countries central to his political messages, often conveying animosity. But do foreign citizens react more to the speaker of these messages—Trump himself—or their content? More generally, when people are exposed to messages sent from foreign countries, are their attitudes influenced by information heuristics or information content in messages? Although related studies are abundant in the literature of American public opinion, these questions are not fully examined in the literature of foreign public opinion. To address them, we used Japan as a case and fielded a survey experiment exposing citizens to U.S. policy messages that varied by source, policy content, and issue salience. Results suggest that while the source cue (Trump attribution) causes negative perceptions of the U.S., the policy content (cooperative vs. uncooperative) has a larger effect in shaping opinion of the U.S. Furthermore, analysis of interaction effects shows that only when U.S. policy approach is uncooperative does the Trump attribution have significantly negative and large effects. We conclude that foreign citizens rely more on policy content in transnational opinion formation—an aspect that past research in this area has overlooked. Substantively, these findings may demonstrate that even under a presidency that has alienated foreign countries and seemingly undermined U.S. stature in the world, foreign opinion toward the U.S. does not hinge entirely on its political leader. In short, Trump has not irreparably damaged U.S. image abroad.

**Keywords:** foreign public opinion, political psychology, political communication, heuristics, cues, Japan, Trump

*“Well, you know, my critics are only saying that [my rhetoric is increasing tensions with foreign countries] because it’s me. If someone else uttered the exact same words that I uttered, they would say what a great statement, what a wonderful statement.”*

— U.S. President Donald Trump, on August 11, 2017

## 1 Introduction

Observing worldwide anti-Iraq-war demonstrations in 2003, *the New York Times* once stated, “[T]here may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion”.<sup>1</sup> With expanded media coverage of protests on international issues, such as wars, trade conflicts, and human rights, as well as the increased availability of cross-national opinion surveys, global public opinion has become an important topic in scholarly research over the past decade (e.g., Dragojlovic, 2013; Goldsmith, Horiuchi and Inoguchi, 2005; Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2009; Holsti, 2008; Katzenstein and Keohane, 2007; Walt, 2006). Based on empirical analysis, some of these studies show that the image of a foreign country in the minds of ordinary people can bring about policy changes and influence the outcomes of international relations (Datta, 2009, 2014; Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2012), an idea often understood in terms of how much “soft power” a country holds in relations with foreign countries (Nye, 2004).

But how is the image of a foreign country itself shaped? Specifically, when people are exposed to policy messages sent from foreign countries, are their attitudes influenced by information heuristics, such as message sources, or by the actual policy content of these messages? Although related studies are abundant in the literature of American public opinion, these questions are not fully examined in the literature of transnational public opinion. There are some studies estimating the determinants of foreign public opinion. For example, Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2009) examine the impacts of U.S. leaders’ visits to foreign

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<sup>1</sup>Patrick E. Tyler, “Threats and Responses: News Analysis; A New Power In the Streets.” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2003. <https://nyti.ms/2oqFX0I> (last accessed: July 5, 2018).

countries on public opinion about the U.S. in these countries, and Goldsmith, Horiuchi and Wood (2014) examine the impacts of U.S. foreign aid on public opinion about the U.S. in aid-recipient countries. In a recent article, based on randomized experiments, Balmas (forthcoming) shows that information about behaviors and personal characteristics of a foreign leader affects the images of the portrayed leader's country and people. But little research evaluates the impacts of *policy statements* on foreign public opinion and, more importantly, decomposes various elements contained in such statements. Schatz and Levine (2010) and Dragojlovic (2011) present some relevant evidence based on randomized experiments, but focus on message source and do not manipulate message content. Their studies, which were fielded under the previous administrations, also do not help us understand foreign public reactions to U.S. policy messages during a new presidency, that of Donald Trump.

The election of Trump has provided a new context, and thus new questions to researchers. Throughout the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign, Trump often made international relations and foreign countries central to his political messages. The now-president's rhetoric largely conveyed animosity, representing a clear divergence from the prior Obama administration. At different moments in his political career, Trump questioned the NATO alliance; took issue with previous U.S. support for allies, such as Germany and South Korea; suggested Japan and South Korea use nuclear weapons as a way to relieve the U.S. of its burdens; described China as an enemy; and generally depicted foreign countries as exploiting and dumping their problems on U.S. citizens.<sup>2</sup> Statements such as these can potentially influence not just American public opinion, but also the attitudes of foreign individuals in countries targeted by Trump.

Therefore, an important question given the paucity of literature on global public opinion, as well as on this new international context with Trump, is whether foreign citizens' reactions

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<sup>2</sup>“Donald Trump on Foreign Policy: 2016 Republican nominee for President, 2000 Reform Primary Challenger for President.” On The Issues, last updated on March 3, 2018. [http://www.ontheissues.org/2016/Donald\\_Trump\\_Foreign\\_Policy.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/2016/Donald_Trump_Foreign_Policy.htm) (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

to Trump’s policy messages, which often carry hostile tones, are influenced more by the speaker of the messages—Trump himself—or the content of the messages. In response to increasingly acute criticisms by the media, Trump himself offered an answer to this question, as quoted at the beginning of this paper.<sup>3</sup> Does his claim gain empirical support? Would foreign citizens respond differently when the exact same policy statement is made by someone else? To the best of our knowledge, no study has examined these questions. In fact, given Trump’s unusual characteristics as the U.S. president, we consider our focus on Trump as an ideal “most likely” (e.g., Rohlfing, 2012, chs. 3 and 8) case for where powerful source cue effects on foreign public opinion might emerge. Through this inquiry, therefore, we hope to make broader contributions beyond just understanding the effects of Trump specifically.

To address our questions of interest, we fielded an online randomized survey experiment in Japan. Japan serves as an interesting case for two reasons. First, Japan is one of the countries that Trump frequently made a part of his presidential campaign focus (in his platform, policies, speeches, etc.).<sup>4</sup> Second, Japan has had positive relations with the U.S. in terms of policy cooperation with the U.S.,<sup>5</sup> and in terms of public opinion concerning the U.S (Wike, Poushter and Zainulbhai, 2016). This makes for a country suitable for assessing whether Trump’s policy statements potentially constrain or maintain U.S. relations with foreign countries, through changing foreign citizens’ attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Dan Merica, Jeremy Diamond and Melissa Gray, “Trump speaks with Macron amid mounting tensions with North Korea.” CNN Politics, updated 4:37 PM ET, Saturday August 12, 2017, <http://cnm.it/2fzGOL3> (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>4</sup>Donald Trump, On The Issues, last updated on June 15, 2017. [http://www.ontheissues.org/Donald\\_Trump.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Donald_Trump.htm) (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Bruce Stokes, “How Strong Is the U.S.-Japan Relationship?” Foreign Policy, April 14, 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/14/united-states-japan-relationship-poll-washington-tokyo/> (last accessed: July 5, 2018).

<sup>6</sup>An alternative would be to choose another country with a larger share of citizens with anti-U.S. sentiment. But with an assumption that Trump’s rhetoric tends to decrease, rather than increase, foreign individuals’

In our survey experiment, we exposed Japanese study participants to a short statement that varied by two main attributes, source cue and policy content, and an additional attribute, issue salience, after which we measured participants’ perceptions of various aspects of the U.S. The results of our statistical analysis suggest that while the source cue (i.e., attribution to President Trump, as compared to an anonymous Congressman) causes some negative attitudes, the policy content (i.e., uncooperative policy as compared to cooperative policy) has the largest effect in worsening opinion of the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, analysis of interaction effects shows that the Trump attribution has no statistically discernible effect when the policy content is cooperative. By contrast, the Trump attribution effect is much larger when the policy message is hostile. These findings imply that, at least in the case of Japan,<sup>8</sup> foreign opinion toward the U.S. does not unconditionally hinge on its political leader. By extension, they suggest that Trump has not irreparably damaged U.S. image abroad. Based on these results, we conclude foreign citizens may rely more on policy information in transnational opinion formation—an aspect past scholarly research in this area has overlooked.

## 2 Transnational Effects of Cues vs. Policy Content

This section introduces two bodies of the relevant literature. We then piece them together, and discuss our expectations.

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favorable attitudes toward the U.S., choosing such a country in a study could suffer from a “floor” effect.

<sup>7</sup>As we introduce later, these effects are independent of issue salience, which has largely insignificant independent or moderating effects on Japanese people’s attitudes toward the U.S.

<sup>8</sup>We discuss a potential concern about the use of Japan as a case in the concluding section and introduce additional results of statistical analysis to address this.

## 2.1 Message Cues and Policy Content

Our study is motivated by the extensive literature on the persuasiveness of policy messages and their influence on public opinion formation. Much of this work centers on assessing the relative strength of associated cues—“piece[s] of information that allow individuals to make inferences without drawing on more detailed knowledge” (Druckman et al., 2010)—and the actual content of a message in shaping opinion. Among different types of cues, the source of a message has been widely recognized as one of the most influential and prevalent heuristics (Nicholson, 2012), particularly when a political elite constitutes this source (Zaller, 1992). Scholars conceptualize elite cues as having the power to persuade politically like-minded citizens, but also as having dissuasive effects on non-like-minded people (Gilens and Murakawa, 2002). Nicholson (2012) offers an example of this phenomenon, finding that policy statements attributed to a political elite with a disagreeable political background creates a negative reaction among citizens when they form their opinion (e.g., Democratic voters reacting negatively to a Republican politician’s policy statement).

Another important aspect of policy messages is of course the content and direction of these messages. While studies applied in the context of transnational opinion formation are limited, as we noted earlier, numerous studies on American opinion formation contrast the strength of elite source cues *vis-à-vis* that of policy information. Much of political science research views elite cue reliance in the interpretation of a policy message as predominating over consideration for that message’s content (Berinsky, 2007; Cohen, 2003; Iyengar and Valentino, 2000). A compelling recent test of this issue, for example, suggests cues in messages from U.S. legislators (i.e. elites) substantially influence mass opinion while policy considerations have little role (Broockman and Butler, 2017). In contrast to the dominant strain of findings on this subject, however, Bullock (2011) argues that exposure to substantial information about a policy results in policy content having a stronger influence on public opinion than elite cues do.

The strength of a message can also depend on whether it contains threatening information



for individuals. In the context of priming different political and social identities, Klar (2013) demonstrates how messages that contain threatening policies for these identities have particularly persuasive effects on their political preferences (also as described by Busby, Flynn and Druckman, 2017). Along similar lines, Brader (2006) describes a process by which new incoming information—when perceived as threatening—interrupts usual reliance on political predispositions for judgment. Instead, individuals increase their attentiveness and consider this threatening information more closely. It has also been shown that people are more likely to change their political preferences when confronted with threatening changes that could come about in the future (Miller and Krosnick, 2004). Nevertheless, no study has examined how threatening foreign policy messages—such as the ones often made by Trump—would affect opinion of citizens in targeted countries.

Finally, issue salience has been discussed for many decades as a key concept for understanding citizens’ political attitudes and their choices of parties or candidates (e.g., Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida, 1989; Miller, Krosnick and Fabrigar, 2016; Rabinowitz, Prothro and Jacoby, 1982). When it comes to the debate over how much people rely on heuristics as opposed to how much they react to policy information, Ciuk and Yost (2016) show that people are more likely to incorporate policy content for a high salience issue. For a low salience issue, on the other hand, people rely more on cues. This finding, along with a similar one from Arceneaux (2008), motivates the manipulation of issue salience—in addition to source cue and policy content—in our experiment studying transnational opinion formation.

## **2.2 Transnational Opinion Formation**

Much of the knowledge about the effects of source cues and message content has evolved in the context of American politics. We seek to build on this past research, extending some of the key aspects of the debate to a transnational context. A few directly related past studies offer some insight and direction.

Schatz and Levine (2010) investigate foreign public opinion of the U.S. in terms of public diplomacy. Specifically, in a survey experiment conducted in two Central Asian countries, they treated individuals with different messages and experimentally manipulated their source. They find more negative opinions about the U.S. when respondents read a statement attributed to President George Bush, who had a broadly negative public perception—and thus low level of credibility—during his presidency. This study underscores the importance of source credibility in messages and reliance on source cues for opinion formation in a transnational context.

Similarly, Dragojlovic (2011) examines foreign public opinion toward the U.S. in Canada during President Barack Obama’s presidency, manipulating source attribution in issue statements presented to survey respondents. The attribution to Obama causes participants to express more positive feelings toward the U.S., owing to the effects of positive source credibility. The study provides further evidence of source cue influence in shaping transnational opinion and the dependence of this influence on perceived credibility. The same potency of source cues is also established in contexts that do not include an American political elite, as Dragojlovic (2013) shows similar effects when issue statements attributed to German and French political leaders are presented to Canadian respondents.

Drawing on these studies, most recently, Balmas (forthcoming) undertook online survey experiments in Israel and the U.S., in which the contents of a fictitious news article about a foreign leader were randomized. Specifically, similar to Schatz and Levine (2010) and Dragojlovic (2011), Balmas (forthcoming) manipulated the object of the news (Angela Merkel, Tayyip Erdogan, or Benjamin Netanyahu, *vis-à-vis* a fictitious citizen). In addition, she manipulated the tone of news content, either describing a leader as having positive characteristics (e.g., trustworthy and warm) or negative characteristics (e.g., untrustworthy and cold). The results show the psychological effects of *personal projection*; namely, study participants’ assessment of a foreign leader influences their images of the portrayed leader’s country and people.

While instructive for understanding the effects of source cues or a prominent “exemplar” (Balmas, forthcoming) in various transnational contexts, no study on transnational opinion formation has attempted to identify the effects of source cues and the effects of policy content separately. Indeed, Balmas (forthcoming) explicitly designed her experimental treatments to avoid referring to the leader’s foreign policy. Moreover, no study has directly examined whether foreign citizens react more to the information source or the message content when the new president, Trump, sends messages to foreign countries.

## 2.3 Theoretical Expectations

With these bodies of literature and the specific context in which our experiment was administered (i.e., Japanese public opinion toward the U.S. under the Trump administration) in mind, we developed some theoretical expectations.

First, given existing evidence of a predominantly unfavorable Japanese view toward Trump (e.g., Wike, Poushter and Zainulbhai, 2016), we expected that Japanese citizens would perceive a policy message attributed to Trump as a strong negative, non-like-minded source cue. If public opinion formation in Japan follows a similar structure as the one in the U.S. (Gilens and Murakawa, 2002; Nicholson, 2012) and the dynamic found in past transnational opinion research (Dragojlovic, 2011; Schatz and Levine, 2010), this negative source cue should strongly shape Japanese opinion toward the U.S. Specifically, it should make their attitudes toward the U.S. more negative.

Figure 1 provides some evidence to support this. The data come from questions included in the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project.<sup>9</sup> While this large-scale project covers many countries around the world, this figure specifically shows the results of surveys fielded in Japan. The left panel is based on a question about favorable/unfavorable opinion of the U.S., while the right panel is based on another question asking confidence in the U.S. President.

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<sup>9</sup>The aggregate data are downloadable from their Global Indicators Database, <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/> (last accessed on March 14, 2018). See their website for exact question wordings.

As we noted earlier, and as other studies (e.g. Wike, Poushter and Zainulbhai, 2016) point out, Japanese citizens' general attitudes towards the U.S. tend to be high compared to many other countries. Nevertheless, when it comes to the U.S. President, their attitudes clearly fluctuate. The percentage of Japanese study participants who do not have much confidence or no confidence at all in the U.S. President ranged from 25% to 35% during the last three years of the George W. Bush Administration. This percentage was substantially higher, ranging from 60% to 85%, when Barack Obama was the President. It then sharply dropped from 78% in 2016 to as low as 24% in 2017 after Donald Trump assumed the presidency. For our study, it is important to note that the Pew Global Attitudes Project's question about confidence specifically mentions the full name of the U.S. President. Therefore, the 2017 sharp drop in Japanese confidence in the U.S. leader seems to suggest that the leader—Trump—source cue is particularly pronounced in the mind of Japanese citizens and thus is likely to have a strong dissuasive impact on their opinion of the U.S. more generally. Needless to say, however, we cannot make any *causal* interpretation based only on the patterns shown in Figure 1.

Second, in light of Trump's past hostility toward Japan,<sup>10</sup> policy content—made up of cooperative or uncooperative policy messages that imply positive or negative consequences to Japan—should figure into Japanese public opinion toward the U.S. This may be especially true given that Trump's (mostly) antagonistic rhetoric toward Japan departs sharply from Obama's more cooperative approach. Past studies reveal the influence of threatening information on political attitudes, which is particularly strong when study subjects consider a future threat (Brader, 2006; Miller and Krosnick, 2004)—for example, hostile actions Trump may take toward Japan in the near future.

Finally, issue salience should be another variable factoring into transnational public opin-

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<sup>10</sup>Compared to Trump's statements during the campaign period, his statements toward Japan after becoming the president may seem less hostile. This change, if any, and its impact on any change of Japanese public opinion are subjects for future research.

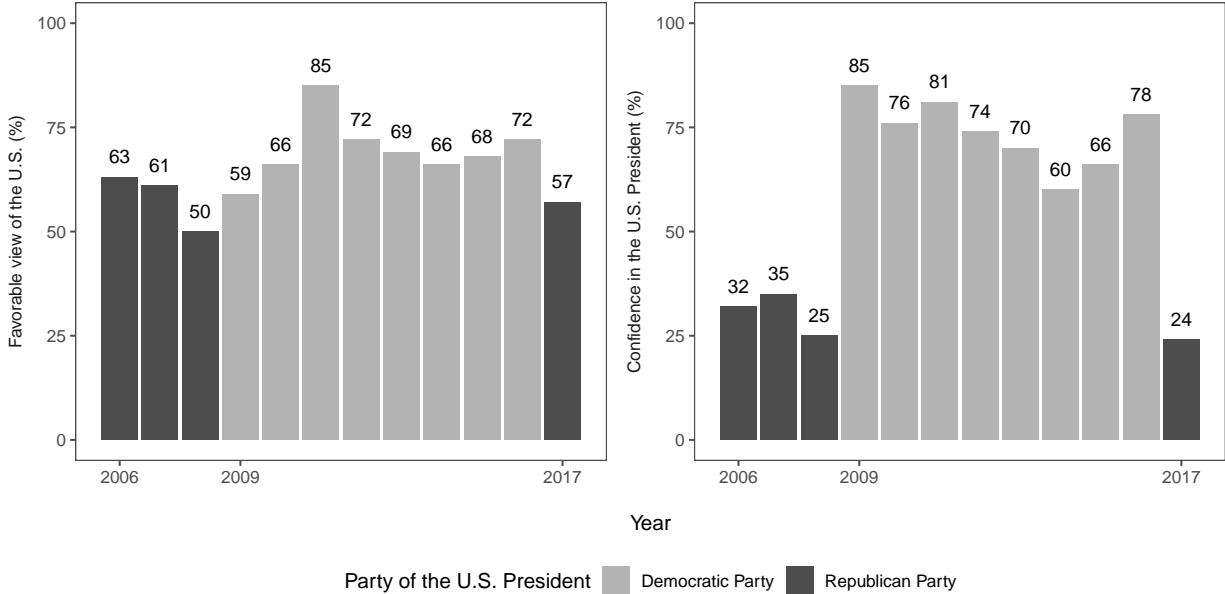


Figure 1: Japanese Public Opinion Toward the U.S. *Note:* The question wordings are “Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the U.S.?” (left panel) and “How much confidence do you have in the U.S. President?” (right panel). Favorable combines “very favorable” and “somewhat favorable” responses, and confidence combines “a lot of confidence” and “some confidence” responses. *Source:* Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Project.

ion. Existing literature shows that issue salience moderates the impact of foreign public opinion on foreign policy decisions; specifically, it moderates the relevance of cues vs. policy information when people shape their political attitudes (Arceneaux, 2008; Ciuk and Yost, 2016). Given this literature, we manipulated issue salience independently from our other two main factors to investigate how issue salience would interact with the source cue treatment (i.e., the attribution to Trump) and influence Japanese public opinion.

### 3 Experimental Design

To test the theoretical expectations discussed in the previous section, we designed an online randomized survey experiment<sup>11</sup> and administered it in Japan from April 26 to May 2, 2017

<sup>11</sup>The entire survey is described in English here, but was translated into and appeared in Japanese for respondents. The original survey data, a complete set of computer scripts in R, and the survey questionnaire

on CrowdWorks, a crowdsourcing marketplace in Japan similar to Amazon Mechanical Turk where participating workers complete tasks for monetary compensation.<sup>12</sup> A total of 3,198 Japanese citizens of voting age (at least 18 years old) completed the survey.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1 Treatment Variables

After an initial set of questions about survey-takers' political attitudes,<sup>14</sup> participants were randomly assigned with equal probability to one of eight treatment conditions, which involved reading a two-sentence policy message. While Bullock (2011) uses substantial content size for his treatment message (newspaper articles with 627–647 words) and demonstrates its significant consequences, our messages are shorter, amounting to roughly 40 words each. An advantage of Bullock's construction, which contains detailed and unambiguous messages, is

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(in Japanese) are available at one of the authors' dataverse, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/SVXPS0>.

<sup>12</sup>This survey experiment was approved by Dartmouth College's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (ID: STUDY00030273) and preregistered at Evidence in Governance and Politics (ID: 20170428AA), <https://egap.org/registration/2488>. Past studies show that CrowdWorks is a valid platform for recruiting subjects for behavioral and cognitive research (Majima et al., 2017; Majima, 2017), offering support for our use of it in this study. However, the resulting sample does differ from Japan's adult population in terms of key demographic variables. As Table A.1 in the Supplementary Materials shows, our sample includes participants who are younger and more well-educated than the population, and has higher percentages of participants who are female and from higher income households. In the Supplementary Materials, we show the results of testing the three hypotheses with post-stratified sampling weights and discuss some implications.

<sup>13</sup>In an initial test run of the survey experiment, we paid 54 Japanese Yen to the first 100 respondents. We increased the amount to 86 Japanese Yen for the remainder of the respondents after observing a slow pace with the initial lower compensation. We excluded 13 participants who did not answer a question about income and/or answered "other" to a question about education to make the weighted and unweighted data comparable. The results including these participants (in unweighted analysis) are only marginally different from the results presented in this paper.

<sup>14</sup>We use these questions for further exploratory analyses, a balance check, and robustness tests. For these results, see the Supplementary Materials.

that it could administer the policy information treatment to subjects more strongly. Yet, as other scholars (e.g., Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014) note, given that people are more commonly exposed to relatively brief policy information such as through news article excerpts or headlines, presenting a shorter message in our experiment grants a greater degree of external validity. This is particularly relevant in our study because Trump sends messages to global audiences through his tweets, which can be only up to 280 characters.<sup>15</sup>

The message manipulated in our experiment varies by source cue (Trump or an anonymous U.S. Congressman), policy content (cooperative or uncooperative), and issue salience (security, high salience; or educational/cultural exchange programs, low salience):

**Cooperative × Exchange Program:** “[U.S. President Donald Trump / A U.S. Congressman] stated the U.S. should strengthen educational and cultural exchange programs with Japan and applauded past U.S. budget spending to promote mutual understandings with these countries. He also said that such programs should foster trustful relations with foreign countries.”

**Cooperative × Security:** “[U.S. President Donald Trump / A U.S. Congressman] stated that the U.S. should help Japan with paying for its own protection and applauded past U.S. defense spending for the protection of Japan. He also said the U.S. should maintain defense cooperation with Japan.”

**Uncooperative × Exchange Program:** “[U.S. President Donald Trump / A U.S. Congressman] stated that the U.S. should abolish educational and cultural exchange programs with Japan and denounced past U.S. budget spending to promote mutual understandings. He also said that the country’s budget should rather be used for American people.”

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<sup>15</sup>Moreover, the length of our treatment materials is comparable to that in other studies (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Ciuk and Yost, 2016). If anything, as Bullock (2011) himself notes, his use of fairly long policy statements represents more of an exception in this literature.

**Uncooperative × Security:** “[U.S. President Donald Trump / A U.S. Congressman] stated that Japan should pay entirely for its own protection and denounced past U.S. defense spending for the protection of Japan. He also said that the U.S. should not get involved in Japan’s defense policy.”

The statements used in our experiment, particularly those with uncooperative policy content, were slightly altered but still based on actual statements made by Trump during his presidential campaign,<sup>16</sup> or constructed from other pertinent information such as language used in a budget proposal.<sup>17</sup> In other cases, the statements are tied to actual statements but modified; specifically, for changing a statement from an uncooperative policy approach to a cooperative one.

Some further justifications and explanations for our treatments are in order.

### **Source Cue Treatment Construction**

Two factors motivated our selection of an anonymous “U.S. Congressman” as the appropriate comparison case to Trump in designing the source cue treatment. First, we attempted to produce a generic baseline politician that would not prime any preexisting positive considerations (e.g., through the use of former President Barack Obama) or negative ones. This serves to better isolate the effect of Trump. Second, we aimed to minimize connections to Trump (e.g., the Vice President Mike Pence, or any leader of the Republican Party) to reduce the potential for respondents to *think of* Trump when we do not want them to do so in this source cue control condition. Our comparison choice makes it clear that it is a political figure distinct from the presidency but still from the U.S. Using the U.S. administration, president

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<sup>16</sup>“Trump v Clinton on foreign policy.” Kim Ghattas, BBC News, Washington. May 8, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-36232271> (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>17</sup>“America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again.” Office of Management and Budget. 2017. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/2018\\_blueprint.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/2018_blueprint.pdf) (last accessed on July 5, 2018).



(without Trump’s name), leader, or other non-presidential politicians still associated with the current presidency could result in survey-takers conflating this figure with Trump and therefore undermine the experimental manipulation.<sup>18</sup>

### **Tone vs. Content of Policy Messages**

We did not further decompose the effect of policy content into the effect of a tone and the effect of specific policy content, because when a policy is cooperative (uncooperative)—namely, when study participants are likely to perceive that a policy will have a positive (negative) impact on their country—it is unlikely that the policy message is delivered with an uncooperative (a cooperative) tone. We could have designed treatments with a more neutral tone with varying direction, but such treatments could have made the content of a policy and its consequences more ambiguous. More importantly, Trump’s policy statements tend not to be neutral. For these reasons, our use of treatments with either cooperative or uncooperative policy content seems justifiable from a perspective of external validity.

### **Validity in Source Cue × Policy Content Treatments**

In our design, we included the *Source Cue* × *Policy Content* interaction to examine whether the effect of Trump attribution is conditional on uncooperative policy content. Some might view one of the resulting combinations—Trump attribution and cooperative policy—as a non-credible vignette for survey-takers, which could undermine the experiment’s validity. This represents a potential issue with our experimental design, in which participants were asked to read a short *hypothetical* policy message but still expected to reflect a plausible real

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<sup>18</sup>One possible concern was that our use of Trump vs. a U.S. congressman would motivate participants to consider the difference between the presidency and the Congress in the policy-making process. If participants knew the detailed process of policy-making under the U.S., their attitudes toward the U.S. might be influenced by this difference. But we argue that this is unlikely, because average Japanese people do not fully understand the different roles that the two branches in the U.S. federal government play in the foreign policy-making process.

world scenario. However, patterns in Trump’s *actual* rhetoric should relieve much of this concern.

A few months before fielding our experiment, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Trump in a meeting that made international news and received much attention in Japan.<sup>19</sup> *The New York Times*, for example, reported that Trump pledged close security cooperation with Japan, and during this visit, Trump said the following: “We are committed to the security of Japan ... and to further strengthening our very crucial alliance.” This exemplifies cooperative messages from Trump toward Japan having occurred in the real world. Japanese individuals can still overwhelmingly view Trump and his messages with disdain, as public opinion data would indicate (e.g., Wike, Poushter and Zainulbhai, 2016), but they may also recognize that he can take either hostile or friendly stances toward Japan. Furthermore, this inconsistency in Trump’s policy approach toward Japan fits well with his known history of vacillating on several policy areas,<sup>20</sup> a habit that the public (in and outside the U.S.) may observe.

A related concern is that uncooperative U.S. policy messages—even from an anonymous source—could evoke images of Trump for Japanese individuals in a way that makes the two treatments, *Source Cue* and *Policy Content*, inseparable *in the minds of study participants*. If this were true, then Japanese citizens should react to an uncooperative message in a similar manner regardless of whether the messenger was explicitly mentioned as Donald Trump or an anonymous congressman. But this is an empirical question, which we examine in the results section.

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<sup>19</sup>“In Welcoming Shinzo Abe, Trump Affirms U.S. Commitment to Defending Japan.” Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Peter Baker, *The New York Times*. February 10, 2017. <https://nyti.ms/2kWRSmE> (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>20</sup>“The 141 Stances Donald Trump Took During His White House Bid.” Jane C. Timm, *NBC News*. November 28, 2016. <http://nbcnews.to/1MAY10z> (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

## Explanation of Issue Salience Manipulation

Accounting for issue salience in studies of the relative strength of source cues and policy content is difficult because salience largely cannot be manipulated at the level of individual study participants (but see Mullinix, 2016). Instead, we can only manipulate issue areas with varying levels of importance to national political debate as, for example, Arceneaux (2008) does effectively. Along similar lines, as Ciuk and Yost (2016) describe, we can assume that some issues are “hot” on the political agenda and receive more attention than others. On these high salient issues, as compared to lower salient ones, individuals are more often exposed to relevant information and thus retain more considerations about the issue in recent memory when probed for their opinion (Zaller, 1992).

In our experimental design, national security represents an issue at the center of public attention in Japan. For example, security policy played a key role in Japan’s recent 2017 election, with Prime Minister Abe making his national security track record central to his campaigns.<sup>21</sup> While U.S.–Japan exchange programs are not entirely unknown among Japanese citizens, it is highly unlikely that they match national security issues in the space they occupy in the national “political agenda.” Therefore, we argue that our manipulation of issue salience should be effective in terms of general prominence in national attention and discourse.

We also note that our study in Japan coincided with a period of heightened security concerns in the East Asian region, with rhetoric from the U.S. escalating possible conflict.<sup>22</sup> Not only should the issue of security become further salient for our study’s subjects, but it should also carry a negative connotation in the context of Japanese evaluations of the U.S. Thus,

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<sup>21</sup>“Shinzo Abe won big on Sunday. This is what it means for Japan’s national security policy.” Michael Green and Zack Cooper, *Washington Post*. October 25, 2017. [http://wapo.st/2yNY3zU?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.49eef4ef2665](http://wapo.st/2yNY3zU?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.49eef4ef2665) (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>22</sup>“Trump Warns That Major, Major Conflict With North Korea Is Possible.” Gerry Mullany, *The New York Times*. April 27, 2017. <https://nyti.ms/2qcRX1M> (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

all else being equal, exposure to the U.S. taking a position on security—compared to taking a position on a less salient issue like exchange programs—should engender more negative Japanese views of the U.S. given these recent U.S.-security considerations in memory.

### 3.2 Outcome Variable

The outcome variables are based on responses to questions about perceptions of the U.S. To capture the multidimensional aspects of the U.S. image in the minds of foreign individuals, we asked four questions using five-point, bipolar Likert scales: “*Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of [the United States, United States foreign policy toward Japan, Americans, or Donald Trump]?*” The same scale ensures consistency and ease of comparison across all the outcome variables.<sup>23</sup> This type of survey question about favorability has been regularly asked in one of the most prominent global public opinion surveys, the Pew Global Attitudes Project.<sup>24</sup> Because we are interested in capturing *general* attitudes toward the U.S. among Japanese citizens, we use a composite index created from averaging the four questions, which encapsulates the different dimensions of foreign opinion toward the U.S. The pairwise correlation coefficients between each question scale are all positive and range from 0.23 to 0.50. Given that these are all in the same direction and moderately correlated, we consider averaging across the four variables to be a sensible approach.<sup>25</sup>

In additional analysis, we examine these four perception variables independently, present all the results in the Supplementary Materials, and summarize them in Section 4. We

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<sup>23</sup>Favorability towards the U.S.—the broadest perception of the four—was always asked first. The other three questions appeared in random order to minimize question order effects.

<sup>24</sup>“Global Indicators Database.” Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewglobal.org> (last accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>25</sup>In addition, the Cronbach’s alpha, which measures how closely these four measures are related, is 0.71. This serves as further justification for our decision to collapse these four different measures into a uni-dimensional scale.

are reluctant to delve further into this inquiry because we do not have good theoretical expectations for the effects on *specific* attitudes toward the U.S.

### 3.3 Hypotheses

In our statistical analysis, we use the degree of *unfavorability* as our outcome variable,  $y$ , ranging from 1 (most favorable) to 5 (most unfavorable). There are three dichotomous treatment variables: *Source Cue* takes on a value of 1 for a Trump attribution and 0 for a U.S. Congressman attribution, *Policy Content* takes on a value of 1 for uncooperative policy content and 0 for cooperative policy content, and *Issue Salience* takes on a value of 1 for a security issue and 0 for an exchange program issue. Given these variables, we test three preregistered hypotheses using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. Below, we introduce two main hypotheses. The third hypothesis and the results of testing it are presented in the Supplementary Materials.

The first hypothesis is based on a simple additive model:

**Hypothesis 1:** In an additive model,  $y = b_0 + b_1 \cdot \text{Source Cue} + b_2 \cdot \text{Policy Content} + b_3 \cdot \text{Issue Salience} + \epsilon$ , the estimated coefficients for the three treatment variables,  $\hat{b}_1$ ,  $\hat{b}_2$ , and  $\hat{b}_3$  are all positive (where, again, higher values on the outcome correspond to more negative views).

The source cue effect ( $b_1$ ) is motivated by existing evidence pointing to unfavorable Japanese views toward Trump, and the importance of source cues and associated source credibility level (e.g., Chong and Druckman, 2007; Nicholson, 2012; Wike, Poushter and Zainulbhai, 2016). When Japanese study participants have this source cue available, their negative attitudes toward Trump should be more likely to be activated and consequently affect their opinions toward the U.S.

The policy content effect ( $b_2$ ) draws from past research showing the potency of threatening messages and information for shaping public opinion (e.g., Klar, 2013; Brader, 2006; Miller

and Krosnick, 2004). Thus, those who are exposed to an uncooperative statement (relative to those exposed to a cooperative statement) are more likely to express greater unfavorability toward the U.S.

The issue salience effect ( $b_3$ ) is informed by past research showing that issue salience is relevant in the study of foreign public opinion (Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2012). We examine the effect of issue salience itself as an exploratory check, as no study has tested whether it has an independent effect on public opinion. Because the study was undertaken after Trump became the U.S. president and international security issues under his presidency have often had negative connotations, we expected that study participants would tend to build some negative images of the U.S. when they were exposed to information about this contentious topic, regardless of direction of the policy content. Similarly, as discussed in Section 3.1, U.S.–security rhetoric around the time of our experiment should lead to more negative Japanese reactions in this domain. Thus, exposure to a U.S. figure taking a position on this fraught issue could possibly move opinion. However, existing research suggests that it is more relevant as a moderator.

We also estimated a two-way interaction model, in which the main variable of our interest—*Source Cue*—is interacted with the two other treatment variables:

**Hypothesis 2:** In a two-way interaction model,  $y = c_0 + c_1 \cdot \text{Source Cue} + c_2 \cdot \text{Policy Content} + c_3 \cdot \text{Issue Salience} + c_4 \cdot \text{Source Cue} \cdot \text{Policy Content} + c_5 \cdot \text{Source Cue} \cdot \text{Issue Salience} + \epsilon$ , the estimated coefficients for the two interaction variables,  $\hat{c}_4$  and  $\hat{c}_5$ , are nil, while  $\hat{c}_1$  is positive.

Although some studies suggest interactions of various factors shape American (Ciuk and Yost, 2016) and foreign (Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2012) public opinion, in the context of our study, the effect of Trump attribution is expected to be so strong that it does not vary across type of policy content or issue area. This means that the average level of unfavorable attitudes is indistinguishable between *Trump*  $\times$  *Security* and *Trump*  $\times$  *Exchange Program* conditions. Similarly, the average should not be different between *Trump*  $\times$  *Uncooperative*

and *Trump*  $\times$  *Cooperative* conditions. In other words, the source effect of Trump attribution outweighs all other factors.

Strong past evidence of people predominantly relying on source cues over policy content in opinion formation (as summarized by Bullock, 2011) motivates this hypothesis. Moreover, the sharp drop in the percentage of favorable attitudes toward the U.S. president in 2017, as described in Section 2.3, further suggests an especially powerful Trump influence on Japanese opinion. Although more recent work in American politics argues for a stronger effect of policy content, strongly negative images of Trump in the minds of Japanese people (Wike, Poushter and Zainulbhai, 2016) led us to believe that the source cue and its credibility would be overwhelmingly important for Japanese opinion formation.

## 4 Results

The second column of Table 1 shows the results of testing Hypothesis 1 based on the additive regression model. Our hypothesis mostly receives support. The Trump source cue (*Source Cue*) makes Japanese people’s perceptions of the U.S. significantly more unfavorable. Specifically, it increases the unfavorability score by 0.08 points and this effect is significant at the 0.01 level. As expected, this suggests that respondents use the source of a message they read and associated credibility level—which is presumably negative for Trump—for forming their opinion on the U.S. (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Schatz and Levine, 2010). The results can also be understood in terms of the Trump attribution functioning as a potent negative cue for swaying foreign public opinion (Nicholson, 2012). That said, the substantive effect is not particularly large, covering only 2% of the range of the dependent variable, which ranges from 1 (Most favorable) to 5 (Most unfavorable).

The *Policy Content* treatment produces a substantively much larger and highly significant effect. Relative to a cooperative policy content, on the same five-point scale, an uncooperative statement increases unfavorable views toward the U.S. by 0.32 points, and this effect is

Table 1: Results of Regression Analysis

	<i>Model for:</i>	
	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2
Constant	2.771*** (0.026)	2.793*** (0.032)
Source Cue	0.078** (0.026)	0.033 (0.045)
Policy Content	0.320*** (0.026)	0.225*** (0.036)
Issue Salience	-0.025 (0.026)	0.025 (0.036)
Source Cue $\times$ Policy Content		0.189*** (0.051)
Source Cue $\times$ Issue Salience		-0.099 (0.051)
Observations	3,198	3,198
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.048	0.053

*Note:* The standard errors are in parentheses. The outcome variable is the composite index of unfavorability toward the U.S. ranging from 1 (“Most favorable”) to 5 (“Most unfavorable”).

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

significant at the 0.001 level. The average difference between cooperative and uncooperative policy content covers 8% of the outcome’s scale, four times as much as the source cue effect does. Again, this is consistent with our expectations based on literature from American politics. Japanese citizens respond strongly to the policy approach expressed in the American messages they receive (Bullock, 2011). Our empirical analysis itself does not show the specific mechanism at play. But given our treatment construction (i.e., a statement that the U.S. should abolish educational and cultural exchange programs with Japan, or a statement that Japan should pay entirely for its own protection without help from the U.S. on a threatening issue), we infer that Japanese people perceive a message with uncooperative policy content as a threat to their (national) identity (such as described by Klar, 2013) or to their well-being through future policy changes (Miller and Krosnick, 2004).



In contrast to these significant increases in unfavorable U.S. perception from the source cue and policy content treatments, the treatment for *Issue Salience* has little effect. Relative to the low salience issue baseline that contained information about educational and cultural exchange programs, the high salience security issue treatment does not cause any change in Japanese opinion. The effect is small ( $-0.02$ ) and not significant at the conventional level.

Next, the third column of Table 1 shows the results of testing Hypothesis 2 based on the two-way interaction model. We observe several intriguing results. First, the effect of Trump attribution in the baseline conditions (i.e., the estimated coefficient for *Source Cue* without an interaction with the other treatment variable) is small (0.03 points) and not significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that contrary to our expectation, when Japanese people are exposed to a cooperative policy statement (baseline) on exchange programs (baseline), *even when it is made by Trump*, their attitudes do not move (as compared to a statement made by an anonymous U.S. Congressman).<sup>26</sup>

Second, and most importantly, the interaction of Trump attribution and uncooperative policy (*Source Cue*  $\times$  *Policy Content*) moves Japanese U.S. perception an *additional* 0.19 points in the more unfavorable direction, as seen in the third column of Table 1. This effect is significant at the 0.001 level, and covers about 5% on the outcome scale. This result breaks with our hypothesis. The impact of the Trump attribution on people’s unfavorable attitudes is amplified when it comes to an uncooperative policy statement. Therefore, the presence of a Trump source cue effect is *conditional on policy content*. We interpret these results as evidence of Japanese individuals’ strong reaction to the content of policy messages, suggest-

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<sup>26</sup>The interaction model includes two other non-interaction terms. Although these coefficient estimates are not our main interests, they also warrant inspection. The effect of an uncooperative policy message given the baseline conditions is large (0.22 points) and highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). This means that people become more unfavorable toward the U.S. when they are exposed to an uncooperative (baseline) policy statement made by an anonymous U.S. Congressman (baseline). The effect of exposure to a salient issue (national security) given the baseline conditions is small (0.03) and insignificant at any conventional level. This is consistent with the results based on our additive model.

ing they incorporate the clear positive or negative policy implications that the statements convey to form their opinion toward the U.S. This result also offers support for the credible separation of message content and message source, which we discussed earlier.

Table 1 also shows that the marginal effect of Trump attribution and security issue (*Source Cue*  $\times$  *Issue Salience*) is negative rather than positive ( $-0.10$  points). When policy content is cooperative (baseline), compared to a statement made by a U.S. Congressman (baseline) on educational and cultural exchange programs (baseline), opinion becomes more *favorable* toward the U.S. when a policy statement on security is made by Trump. This may sound like a counterintuitive result, but it is only marginally significant at the 0.10 level and so not especially strong. Therefore, we are inclined to conclude that contrary to the claim made by Ciuk and Yost (2016), issue salience does not work as a moderator.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 2 shows the marginal effects of Trump attribution under each of the  $2 \times 2$  conditions. Specifically, we calculated the predicted average unfavorability scores for all  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  conditions based on the linear combinations of estimated regression coefficients. We then took the differences between *Source Cue* = 1 (Trump) and *Source Cue* = 0 (U.S. Congressman) given the values for *Policy Content* and *Issue Salience*, and then tested their statistical significance. The numbers above the bars are the estimated average treatment effects of Trump attribution. The numbers in parentheses are F statistics, and the effects

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<sup>27</sup>The study by Ciuk and Yost (2016) suggests the importance of looking at another interaction—that of issue salience and policy content. Because estimating all interaction effects with a focus on issue salience was not our main research interest, we did not preregister a hypothesis on this additional interaction. But the results of running a model with an interaction of *Policy Content* and *Issue Salience* show that the interaction is in fact insignificant. This result is contrary to the finding in Ciuk and Yost (2016). One might expect that uncooperative policy on a charged issue like security would motivate people to consider policy implications more closely, compared to a less strained area like exchange programs. Nevertheless, Japanese respondents react equally to cooperative or uncooperative policy statements regardless of issue area. This suggests that U.S. image abroad can suffer (or improve) from policy directions taken in several issue domains, regardless of their importance to international debate.

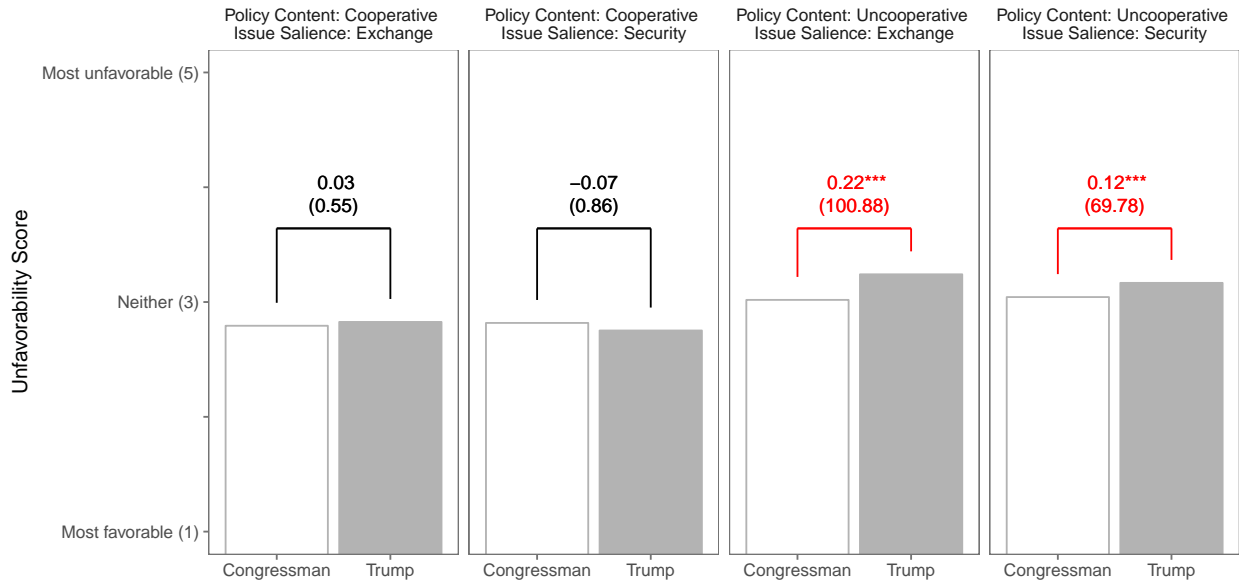


Figure 2: Testing Hypothesis 2. *Note:* The numbers in parentheses are F statistics. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

that are statistically significant at the 0.05 level are highlighted in red. Because our primary focus is the Trump attribution, conditions with Trump as the source are highlighted with a gray bar.<sup>28</sup>

The figure clearly shows that the *Source Cue* effects are statistically significant only when the policy content is uncooperative. The source cue effect is the largest when a policy message is uncooperative on exchange programs. This is perhaps not necessarily a puzzling result given the extensive literature on “negativity bias” (e.g., Kahneman and Tversky, 1984; Levin, Schneider and Gaeth, 1998). A surprising message that the U.S. should abolish the successful U.S.–Japan exchange programs induces strongly negative feelings toward the U.S. among Japanese people when the message is delivered by Trump (as compared to an anonymous congressman). The effect is stronger than the effect of an uncooperative message on security issues, which still increases unfavorable attitudes toward the U.S. In any case, the strongest and most consistent result from Figure 2 is the predominance of policy content

<sup>28</sup>The same is done for all figures in the Supplementary Materials.

in shaping opinion.

**Robustness Tests** Using some additional pretreatment variables included in our survey, we undertook further exploratory analyses and robustness checks. Overall, we find little treatment effect heterogeneity. Our results are also robust to the attentiveness of study participants, though we identify some nuanced differences when we use post-stratification weights based on demographic variables. See the Supplementary Materials for these results.

**Results with Individual Response Questions** Finally, we briefly discuss how these results vary across the different aspects of the U.S. on which Japanese individuals expressed opinions. As mentioned in Section 3.2, participants indicated their U.S. favorability on four dimensions. We have thus far used the average of these scores as our outcome variable. Figures A.3, A.4, and A.5 in the Supplementary Materials show the results of testing our hypotheses using these four response questions individually. They reinforce, and add some nuance to, our main findings from the sections above.

On Hypothesis 1, small but significant source cue effects and null issue salience treatment effects hold across the individual outcome variables, though interestingly the attribution to Trump does not worsen unfavorability of “Americans” among Japanese people. The policy content treatment effects are all significant on these variables, but their effect magnitudes vary in an important way: the perception of the U.S. as a whole and perception of U.S. policy toward Japan capture much larger effects compared to the other two outcome variables measuring attitudes toward people and its leader. Greater movement on these perceptions of the entire country and policy is notable given arguments that these images are the most consequential in transnational opinion’s potential impact on foreign relations (Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2018).

With regard to Hypothesis 2, the source cue effects for either of the cooperative policy messages are significant for five of eight outcomes but vary in direction; for example, a cooperative message from Trump actually improves Japanese perceptions of Americans. The

effects are, however, small as in our main analysis (Figure 2). By contrast, for either of the two uncooperative policy messages, the source cue effects are large and significant for every outcome except perceptions of American people. This is perhaps an interesting and important finding worth investigating further. Although the attribution to Trump in an uncooperative policy message tends to induce negative attitudes toward the U.S. as a country, its policy, and its leader, it does not affect Japanese people’s attitude toward American people.

## 5 Conclusion

This study sought to measure the impact that the nascent Trump presidency could have on foreign public opinion toward the U.S., using Japan as an important case. To this end, we administered a survey experiment and presented policy statements that varied by source cue, policy content, and issue salience to Japanese individuals, whose subsequent opinions on several dimensions of perceptions of the U.S. were recorded. We find that the policy content treatment—whether a statement expressed a cooperative or uncooperative policy approach—has the strongest and most consistent effects in influencing Japanese opinion of the U.S. Most importantly, our analysis of an interaction model shows that a significant negative source cue effect—whether a statement is made by Trump or an anonymous U.S. Congressman—is present only when the policy content is uncooperative, making it conditional in nature.

Because our work concerns just one country, policy content’s predominance over source cues may not extend to the rest of the world. As a country with one of the highest levels of education,<sup>29</sup> citizens in Japan may have greater political knowledge and sophistication—and perhaps a greater ability to make use of, and react to, policy details when interpreting a policy message—than citizens in most other countries do. Nevertheless, we find that the

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<sup>29</sup>“OECD Chart: Population with tertiary education, 25-34 year-olds / 55-64 year-olds, % in same age group, Annual, 2016,” available at <https://data.oecd.org/chart/5dV1> (last accessed July 5, 2018).

strength of the average policy content treatment effect does not differ by levels of education (see A.8 and A.9 in the Supplementary Materials). Therefore, Japan’s high level of education and likely high level of political knowledge do not necessarily preclude us from making general claims.

Broadly speaking, our findings have two important implications. Theoretically, our study extends the American politics literature on *information-driven* versus *cue-driven* opinion formation (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Bullock, 2011) to a transnational domain. The results point to greater consideration for policy content than reliance on source cues when individuals form their opinion about another state, a dynamic that past transnational public opinion research had not discovered.

The design of our experiment itself also bears importance for the literature on global public opinion moving forward. As we noted earlier, past research in this area is limited in decomposing the effects of transnational messages. Previous work found elite source cue effects on opinion (Schatz and Levine, 2010; Dragojlovic, 2011), but these effects’ conditionality in light of other message contents remained largely untested. As this study shows, varying different aspects of transnational messages is crucial for better contextualizing the strength of source cues, such as message attribution to a president. Similar experimental manipulations—and greater focus on consideration of policy information—should be explored in this field. More broadly, extension of similar policy message exposure to other foreign publics will be especially valuable for generalization and further understanding of transnational opinion dynamics.

Beyond contributions to the aforementioned scholarly debates, we believe that this study has substantive implications concerning international relations. Given that our survey experiment was conducted just months after Trump’s inauguration as the President of the U.S., our finding that the mere addition of Trump’s name to a policy message moves foreign opinion about the U.S. could be consequential for how global public opinion reorients itself toward the U.S. during this new presidency. By extension, in light of the soft power

framework of Nye (2004), this could shape international relations in a negative way for the U.S.

On the other hand, the established conditionality of source cue effects on policy content in a message is instructive. This result suggests that not sending excessively and unnecessarily hostile messages and taking more cooperative stances by the U.S. can still possibly ameliorate foreign public opinion of the U.S. regardless of who the U.S. leader is. In other words, the Trump source effect is not as strong as we expected (and laid out in our second hypothesis); foreign opinion does not hinge entirely on a leader in a way that the U.S. has lost all claim to soft power with Trump in office. If our case of Japan is any indication, Trump's damaging effect on the U.S. international image might not be as irreparable as many in and outside of the U.S. believe it to be.

Finally, it is also worth noting—as the inconclusive findings related to the issue salience treatment would imply—that policy content can affect perceptions of the U.S. no matter the importance of an issue in international relations. Slightings of any kind (whether about national security concerns or less important issues, such as cultural and educational exchange programs) can conceivably influence foreign opinion of the U.S. by a large amount. As Henry Ford once said, “There are no big problems, there are just a lot of little problems.” This is perhaps also true in a country's efforts to maintain and improve its perception among foreign publics.

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# Supplementary Materials

## Additional Figures

*\* All figures are presented at the end of Supplementary Materials.*

**Table A.1** Demographic variable distributions by sample vs. population

**Figure A.1** Testing the Balance of Pretreatment Variables

**Figure A.2** Testing Hypothesis 3

**Figure A.3** Testing Hypothesis 1 using individual response questions

**Figure A.4** Testing Hypothesis 2 using individual response questions

**Figure A.5** Testing Hypothesis 3 using individual response questions

**Figure A.6** Male Respondents

**Figure A.7** Female Respondents

**Figure A.8** Respondents with Higher Education

**Figure A.9** Respondents with Lower Education

**Figure A.10** Older Respondents

**Figure A.11** Younger Respondents

**Figure A.12** Respondents with Higher Income

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**Figure A.14** Respondents with Stronger Interest in Politics

**Figure A.15** Respondents with Weaker Interest in Politics

**Figure A.16** Respondents with Stronger Multilateralism

**Figure A.17** Respondents with Weaker Multilateralism

**Figure A.18** Respondents with Stronger Bilateralism

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**Figure A.20** Respondents Supporting LDP

**Figure A.21** Respondents Not Supporting LDP

**Figure A.22** Respondents with Stronger Support for Prime Minister Abe

**Figure A.23** Respondents with Weaker Support for Prime Minister Abe

**Figure A.24** Attentive Respondents Only

**Figure A.25** With Post-Stratified Weights

## Balance Check

Figure A.1 shows the results of testing the balance of pre-treatment variables. These consisted of respondents' sex, education, age, income, interest in politics, multilateralism, bilateralism, support for LDP, and support for Prime Minister Abe. All respondents were divided into two groups for each variable. If there are more than two answer options, we divided them at around the median category to minimize the difference in the number of respondents between the two groups. The complete question wordings and the computer scripts will be included in the replication package once the paper is accepted for publication.

For each pair of respondent subsets (e.g., male respondents vs. female respondents), we calculated the proportions of respondents in each of the eight randomized treatment groups. Then, for each treatment group, we tested whether the difference between the two proportions

is statistically significant. The figure shows that all of the 95% confidence intervals contain zero. Thus, we conclude that the randomization was properly administered.

## Hypothesis 3

We pre-registered our third hypothesis, which is about the ranking of all eight conditions in terms of unfavorability. Specifically, we had the following expectation with regard to a combination of message attributes that produces the most unfavorable Japanese public opinion toward the U.S.:

**Hypothesis 3:** Among the eight possible combinations of the treatment variables, the outcome variable (measuring unfavorability) is the largest when respondents are exposed to the message condition that contains the Trump attribution, security issue, and uncooperative policy.

This hypothesis holds when all the three attributes move public opinion in the expected directions, as explained in Hypothesis 1, and when interaction effects are small. Testing Hypothesis 3 is effectively equivalent to running a regression model with triple interactions and making predictions. But since we are not interested in the estimates of additional interactions not included in the model for Hypothesis 2, we only present the predicted value of each of the  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  combinations and its 95% confidence interval.

Figure A.2 shows the results of testing Hypothesis 3, which addresses which of the eight possible combinations of the three treatments causes the most unfavorable views of the U.S. The average unfavorability scores are shown with bars, as done in Figure 2, and ordered by the scores. The combination of the three treatments hypothesized to have the largest effects (*Trump*  $\times$  *Uncooperative*  $\times$  *Security*) turned out to be the second most powerful combination. Instead, the combination of Trump attribution, an exchange program issue, and an uncooperative policy content produces the most unfavorable perception of the U.S. among Japanese respondents. Japanese citizens may value the past success of U.S.-Japan exchange

problems more than one might expect. This issue itself is not so prominent in national debate, but ending any success program one-sidedly—however small it may seemingly look—could invite strong backlash against the U.S. It is worth investigating this in future research.

The most important finding in Figure A.2 is that when separated into eight conditions, the greatest gulf between the average unfavorability scores exists by policy content—highlighted in black frames of the bars. Every combination that includes an uncooperative policy statement is higher on the graph—representing more unfavorable opinion toward the U.S.—than every combination that includes a cooperative message. This result thus reinforces the strong policy content treatment effects observed in the analyses addressing Hypotheses 1 and 2.

## **Treatment Effect Heterogeneity**

The main text presents results using all respondents. We also undertook a series of exploratory analyses by dividing the respondents into groups based on the nine pretreatment variables used above for the balance check. These further examinations are based on our preregistered research questions. The results are presented from Figure A.6 to Figure A.23. Overall, we did not find substantial treatment effect heterogeneity conditional on participants' attributes. In particular, it is worth noting the lack of heterogeneity with regard to the following political attitudes of participants.

First, Figures A.12 and A.13 help us understand whether political awareness, which we proxy with a question about interest in U.S.-Japan relations, moderates treatments effects—especially those for the (Trump) source cue. Past literature motivates this inquiry, which has found political awareness to be a moderator of source cue effects in a transnational opinion context (Dragojlovic 2011, 2013). The lack of significant differences in the treatment effects between participants with stronger interest in politics and those with weaker interest suggests political awareness is unlikely to moderate source cue effects—breaking with findings in related past literature.



Second, Figures A.16, A.17, A.18, A.19 show the heterogeneity in treatment effects along different levels of internationalist attitudes. We separate this concept of internationalism into two forms it can plausibly take among the Japanese public: the level of willingness to cooperate with foreign countries broadly, such as through the United Nations (multilateralism), and the level of willingness to cooperate with Japan’s most important ally, which is the U.S. (bilateralism). By and large, these figures also suggest that neither multilateralist nor bilateralist attitudes moderate any of the three treatment effects.

## Attentive Respondents Only

Before the treatment was administered, we asked a screener question, which we modeled after the one used by Berinsky, Margolis and Sances (2014). The question aimed to assess respondents’ attentiveness during the survey-taking process, which we could then use to check whether similar treatment effects appear when looking only at the most attentive sample. Specifically, in the survey page preceding the treatments, we presented respondents with a paragraph of text about Japanese newspapers, after which we asked which of the newspapers they read most often. The last few sentences of the paragraph text stated, however, that the following question was an attention test and instructed respondents to select two specific newspapers, Asahi and Yomiuri, while ignoring the question prompt itself.<sup>30</sup> We consider those that selected the correct newspapers as attentive, and those that did not as not attentive.

Figure A.24 plots the results of testing our three hypotheses for 55% of participants who passed the attention check. The results are substantially similar to the results including all respondents (Table 1, Figure 2, Figure A.2).

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<sup>30</sup>Choosing two newspapers would be logically inconsistent if the question were aimed to measure which newspaper they read most often.

## With Post-Stratified Weights

Finally, as another test of the robustness of our findings, we reproduced the results of our tests with the inclusion of sampling weights estimated through entropy balancing (Hainmueller 2012). Specifically, we used five demographic variables—age, gender, region, income, and education—to create the weights. See Figure A.25.

Compared to the unweighted results, the source cue treatment effect is even smaller and becomes insignificant. In contrast, the issue salience treatment becomes stronger, moving composite U.S. unfavorability 0.05 points in the positive direction (i.e., unfavorable), although the effect is barely significant at the 0.05 level. Importantly, the effect of policy content remains the strongest treatment even after weights are introduced. The results of testing Hypothesis 3 also show that the combinations of treatment conditions that include uncooperative policy tend to have higher unfavorability scores.

Given the centrality of the Trump source cue effect to the current study and how it loses significance in the weighted analysis, it is worth discussing why this occurs. As Table A.1 shows, our sample is more educated and younger compared to the national population, and thus lower educated and older individuals have their responses weighted up (with their counterparts' responses weighted down) upon applying weights. Notably, in the unweighted analysis, no significant negative Trump source cue effect exists among low education (see Figure A.9) and older (see Figure A.10) individuals. Correcting for the education and age biases in our sample therefore results in the Trump effect in the additive model turning insignificant.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>One reason for this result could be that lower education and older Japanese individuals have a more favorable view of Trump and thus do not react as negatively to policy statements that carry his name. Japanese opinion data on Trump does not corroborate this account, however. For example, in the 2016 Spring Pew Global Attitudes Survey that asked Japanese people about confidence in various political leaders, the lowest education group expressed “no confidence” in Donald Trump at the highest rate. Similarly, older age groups expressed less confidence in Trump. This leaves us without a clear explanation as to why weighted

The middle panel in Figure A.25 shows mixed results. As in the results presented in Figure 2, the source cue effect is substantially large and highly significant if a policy content is uncooperative. The interaction of *Source Cue* and *Issue Salience* is very small and insignificant, which is consistent with the results without using the weights. But the effect of the Trump attribution vis-à-vis that of a Congressman is *negative* and statistically significant—moving opinion in the more favorable direction—when a cooperative policy message is presented. This marks a puzzling result in light of the unweighed analysis findings, though consistent with an account of policy direction having an overwhelming influence on opinion.

We choose to emphasize unweighted treatment effects over weighted ones. Firstly, this decision is justifiable in light of research arguing that unweighted samples from platforms such as CrowdWorks—from which this study’s respondents were drawn—are valid for behavioral and cognitive research (Majima et al. 2017; Majima 2017). Furthermore, the rough U.S. equivalent of this study’s sample source can be found in the Amazon Mechanical Turk marketplace, and experimental results using this crowdsourcing service have been shown to be similar to results using more representative population-based samples (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012; Mullinix et al. 2015). Most importantly, there still exists general uncertainty over the benefits of using weights in survey experiments, and no standard operating procedure exists for how to use weights in this context (Franco et al. 2017). In particular, Franco et al. (2017) argue that researchers should always report the sample average treatment effects, as the use of post-stratified weights does not necessarily allow for better generalization of survey experimental results and instead could introduce bias.

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results change the source cue effect in testing Hypothesis 1.

Table A.1: Sample vs. Population Comparison

Variable	Value	Sample %	Population %
Age	18-25	17.1	9.0
	26-35	34.6	13.2
	36-45	27.7	17.3
	Over 45	20.5	60.5
Sex	Male	40.8	48.7
	Female	59.2	51.3
Region	Hokkaido/Tohoku	12.6	11.3
	Kanto (except Tokyo)	23.6	23.2
	Kanto (Tokyo)	13.5	10.6
	Chubu	15.3	16.9
	Kinki	17.6	17.7
	Chugoku/Shikoku/Kyushu/Okinawa	17.4	20.2
Education	Elementary/junior-high/high school	24.9	61.9
	Vocational school	15.3	6.3
	Institute of technology or two-year college	9.9	8.5
	Four-year college or university or graduate school	49.9	23.3
Income	0 – 1.99 million yen	10.3	22.4
	2 – 3.99 million yen	29.6	29.0
	4 – 5.99 million yen	29.0	19.9
	6 – 7.99 million yen	15.9	12.3
	More than 7.99 million yen	15.2	16.4

Sources: *Shūgyō Kōzō Kihon Chōsa* (Employment Status Survey), 2012; *Kokusei Chōsa* (National Census), 2015.

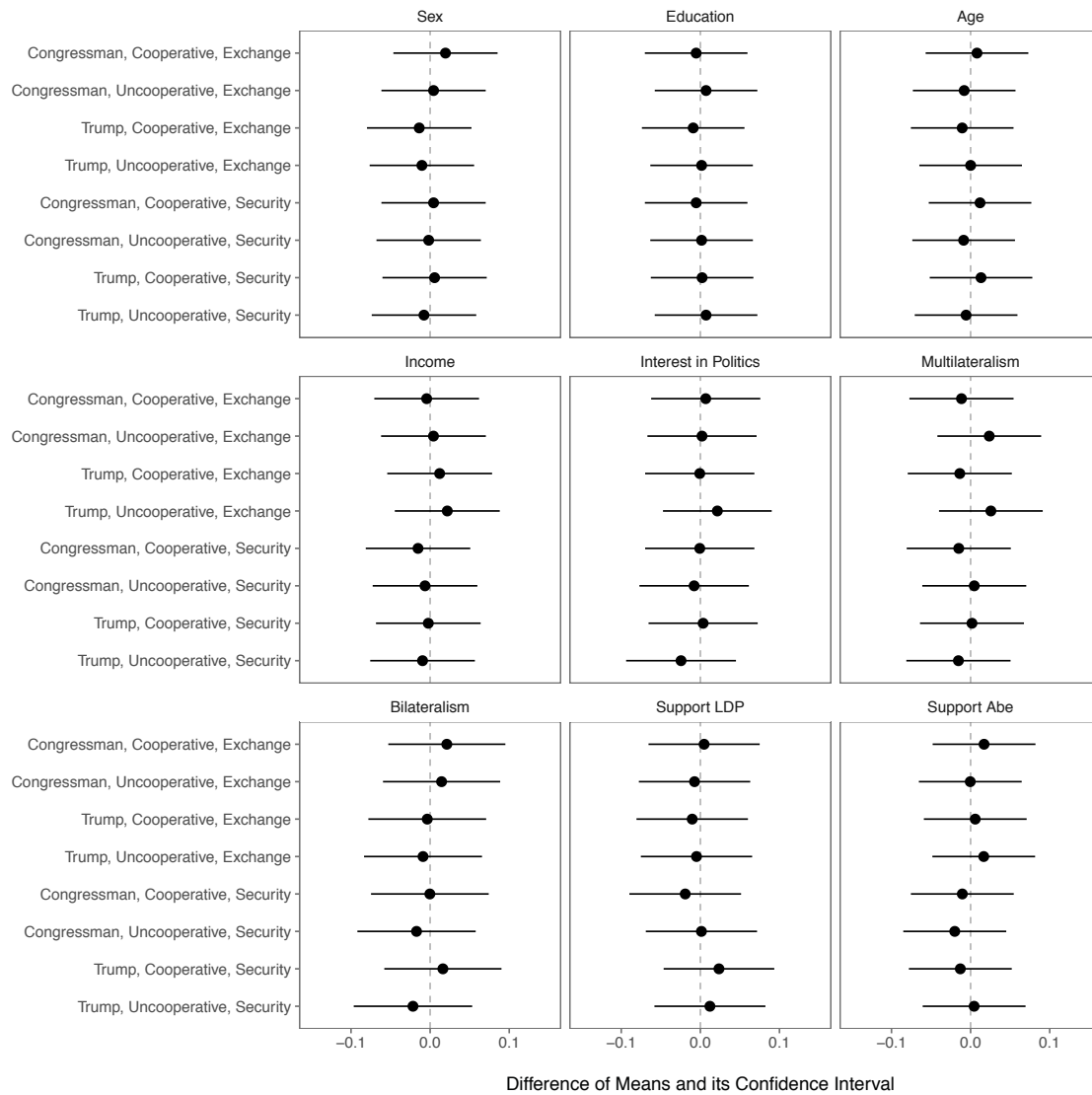


Figure A.1: Testing the Balance of Pretreatment Variables. Note: The horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

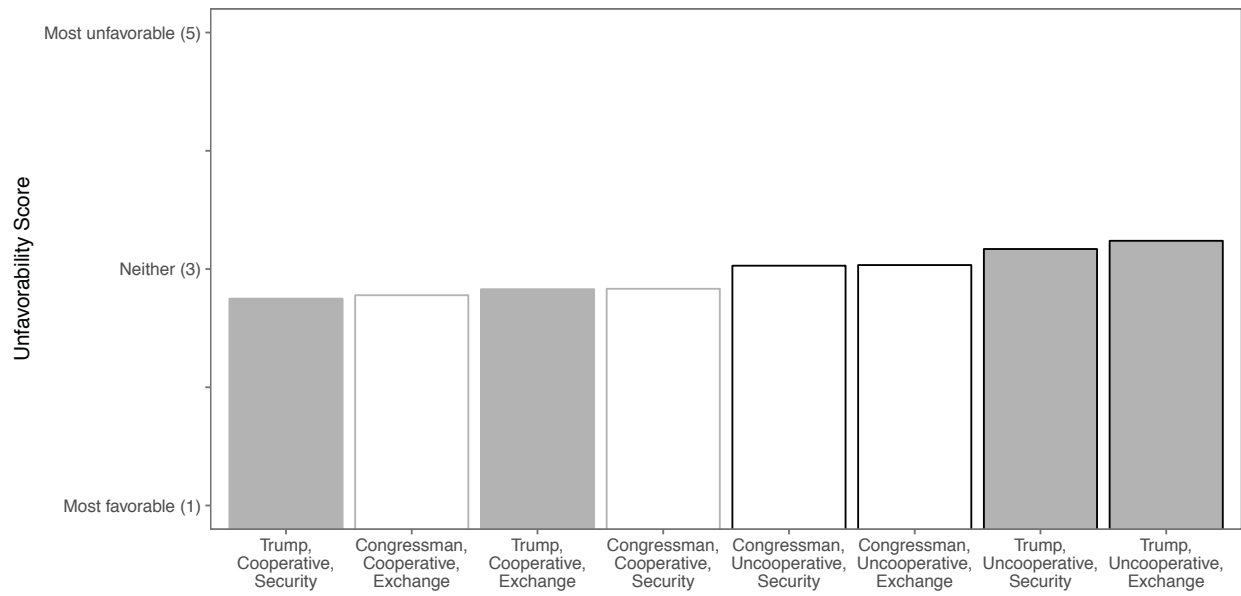


Figure A.2: Testing Hypothesis 3

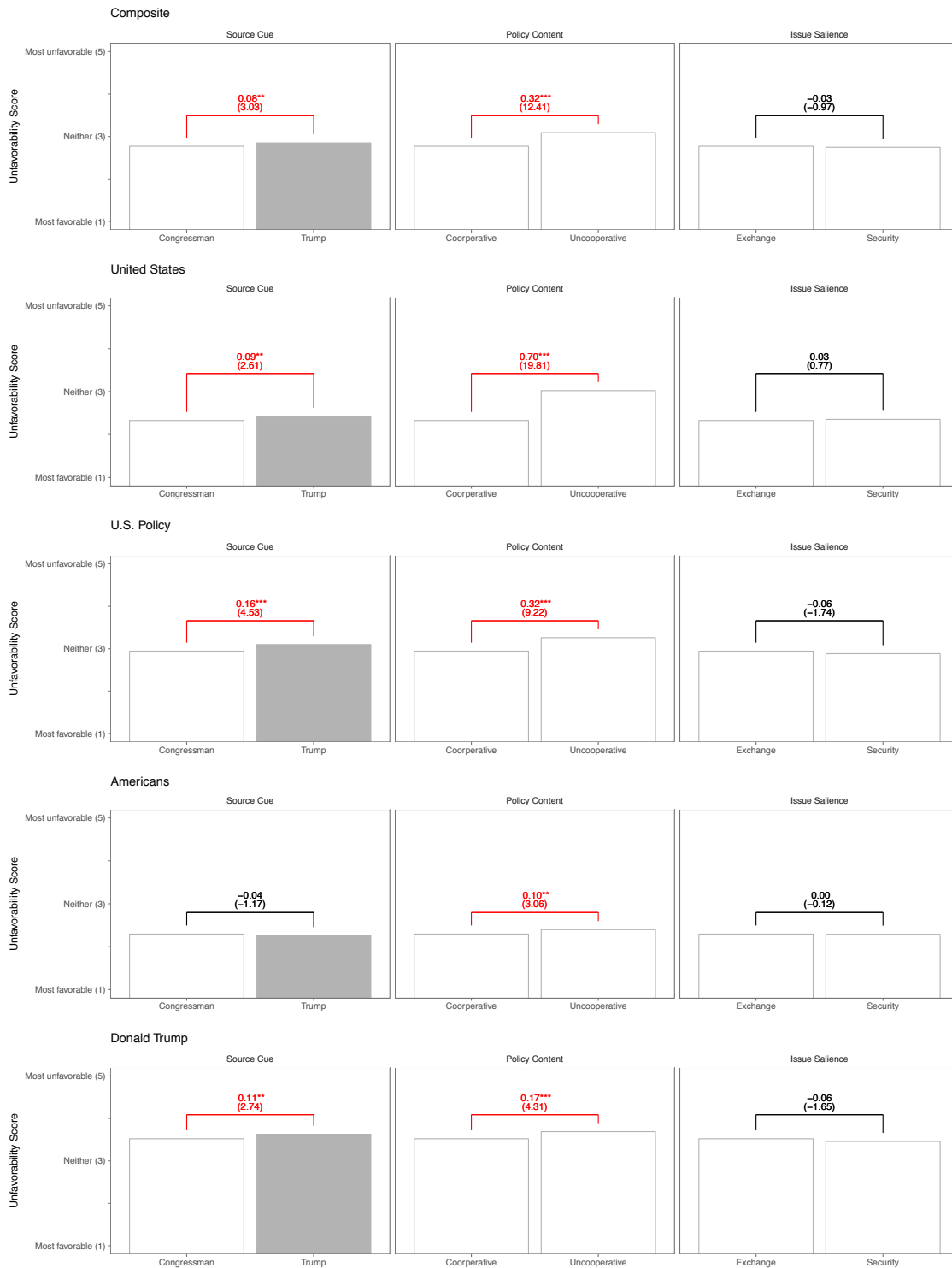


Figure A.3: Testing Hypothesis 1 using individual response questions. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

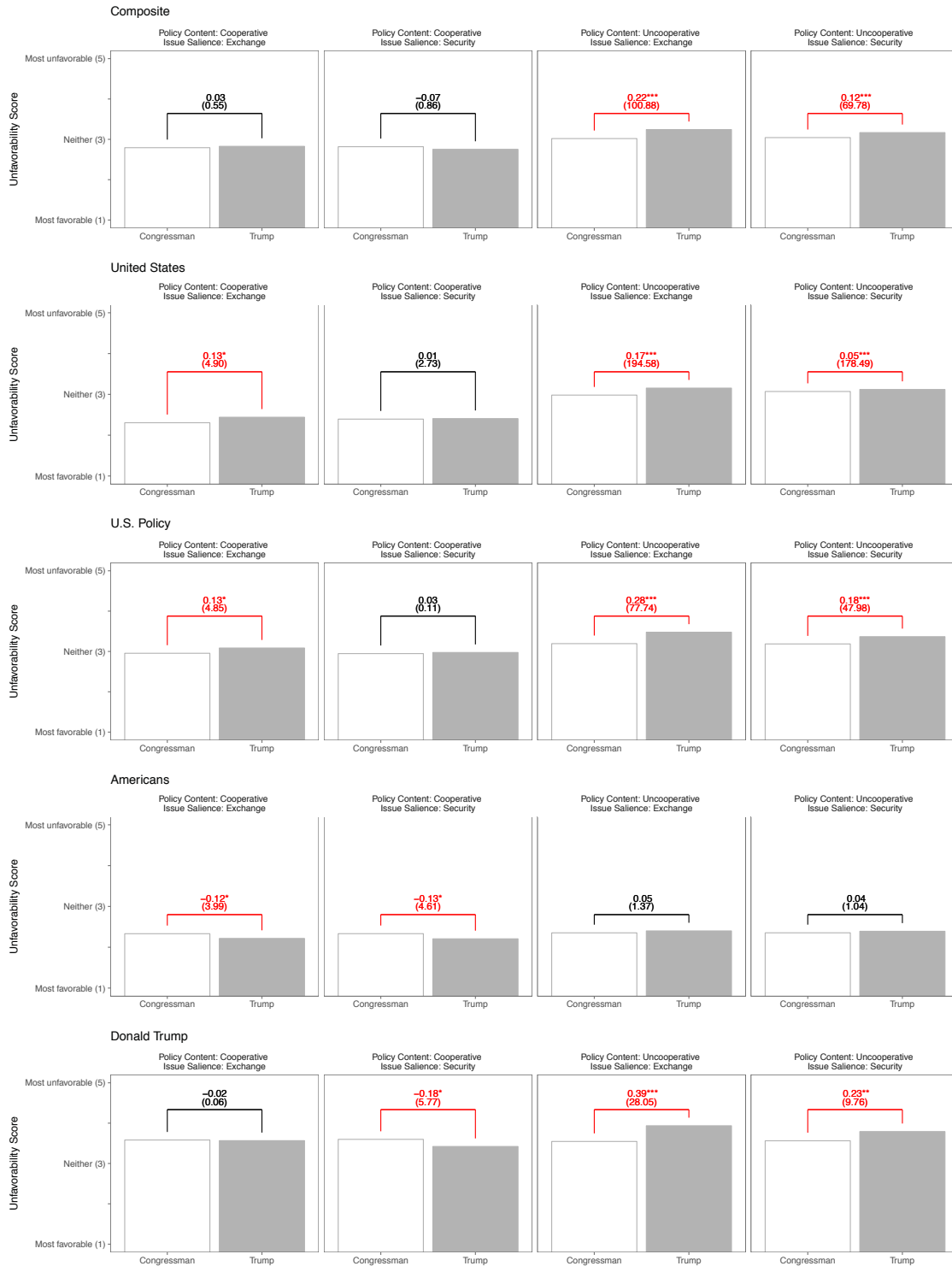


Figure A.4: Testing Hypothesis 2 using individual response questions. Note: The numbers in parentheses are F statistics. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).



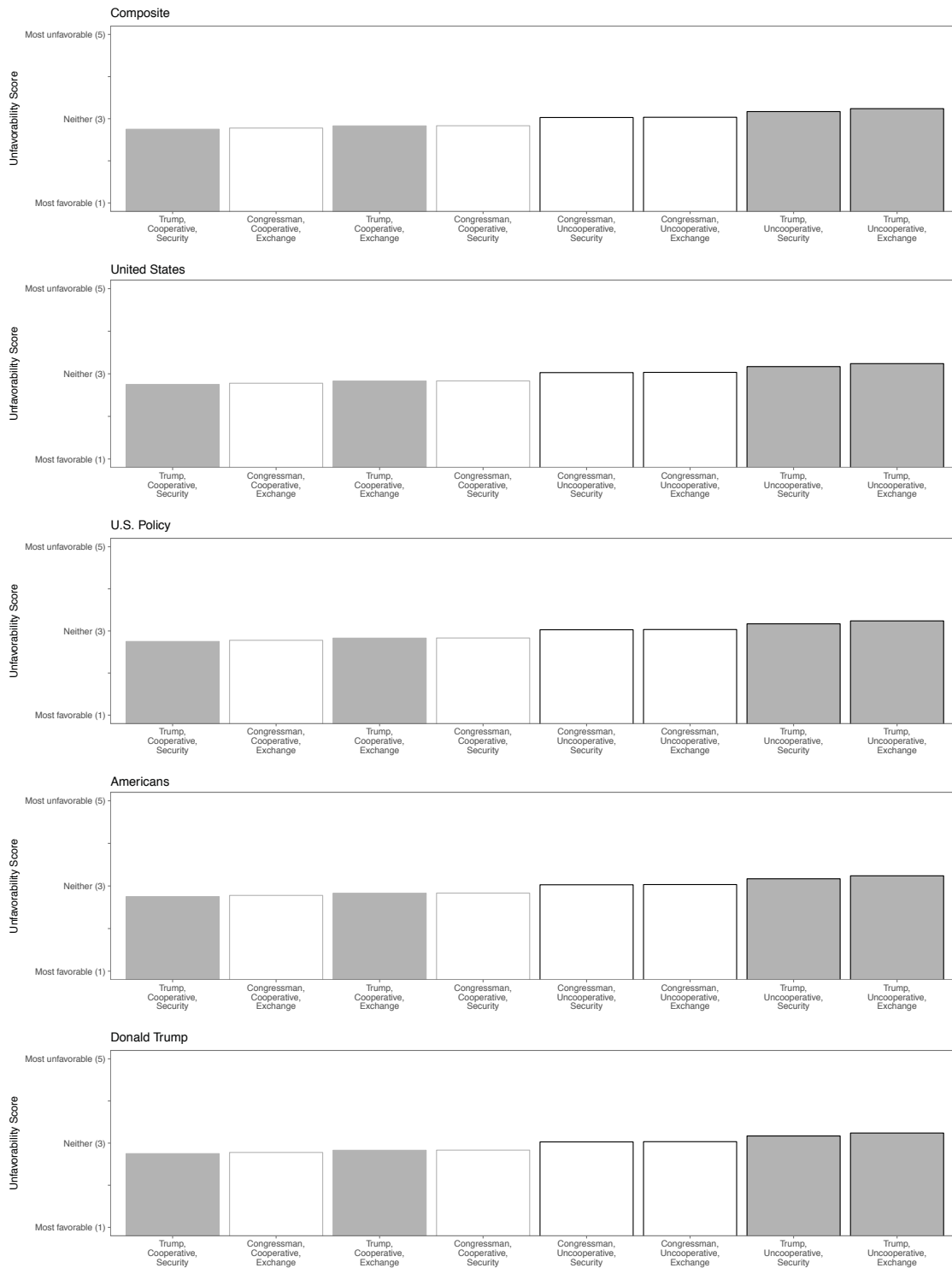


Figure A.5: Testing Hypothesis 3 using individual response questions.

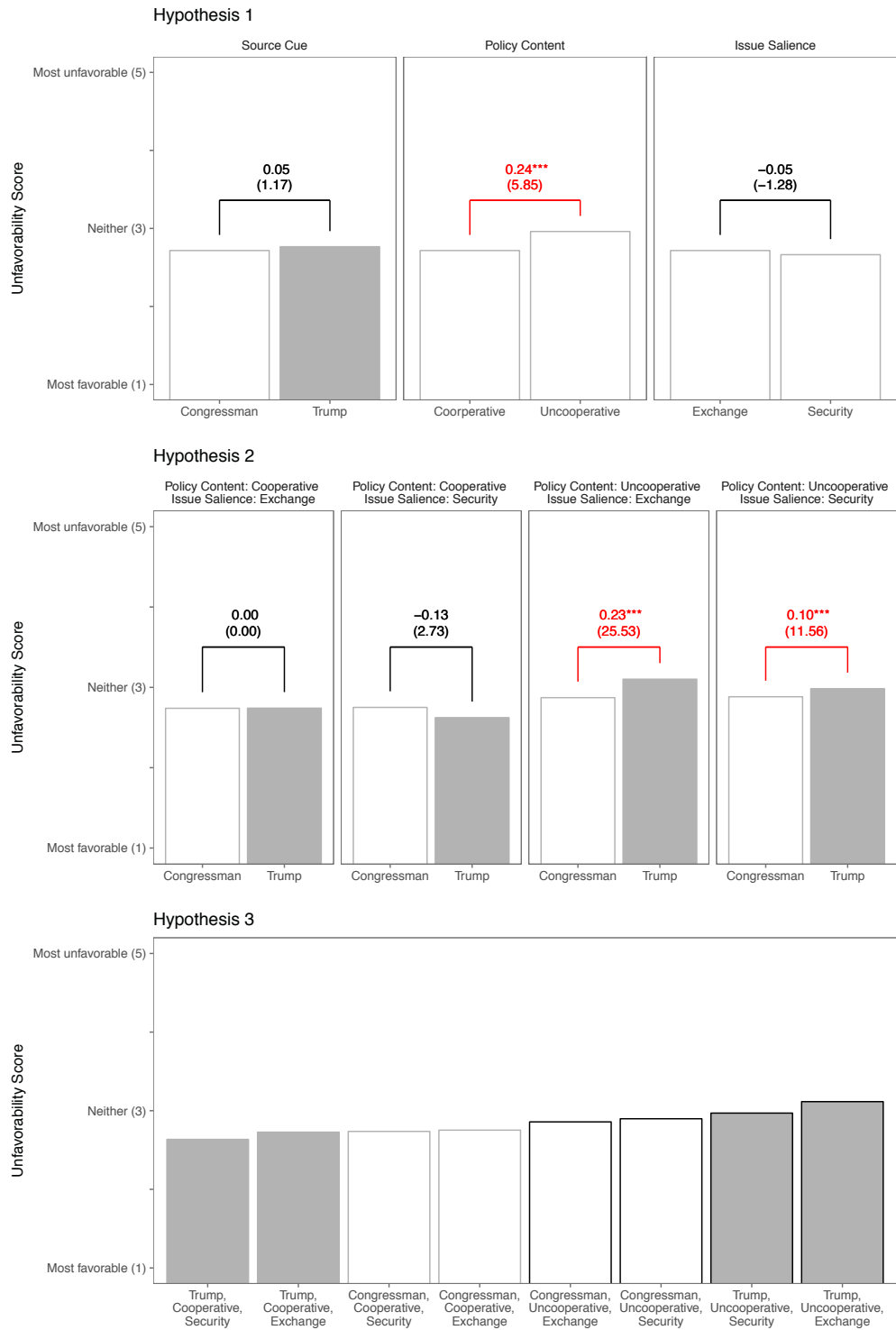


Figure A.6: Male Respondents. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

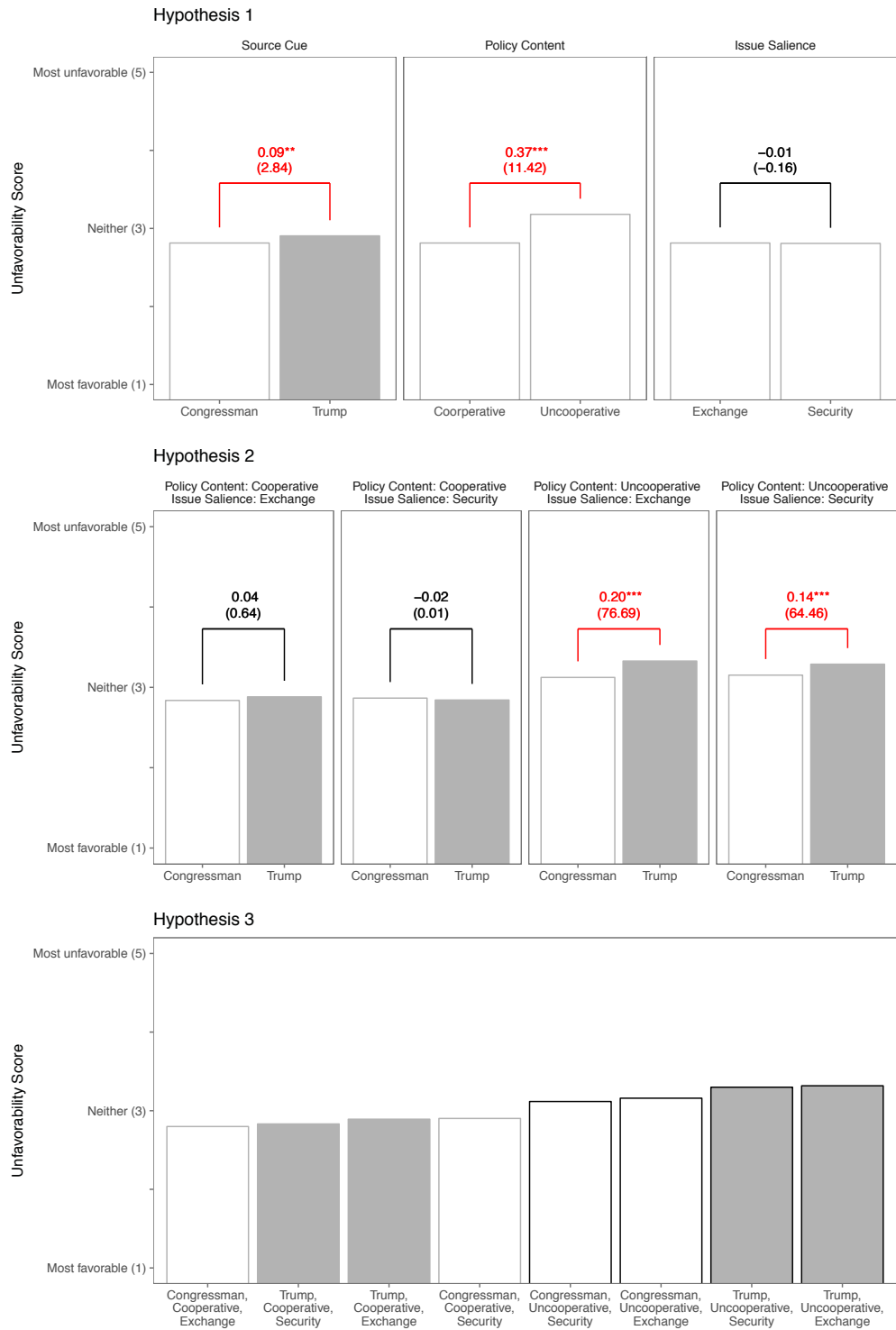


Figure A.7: Female Respondents. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

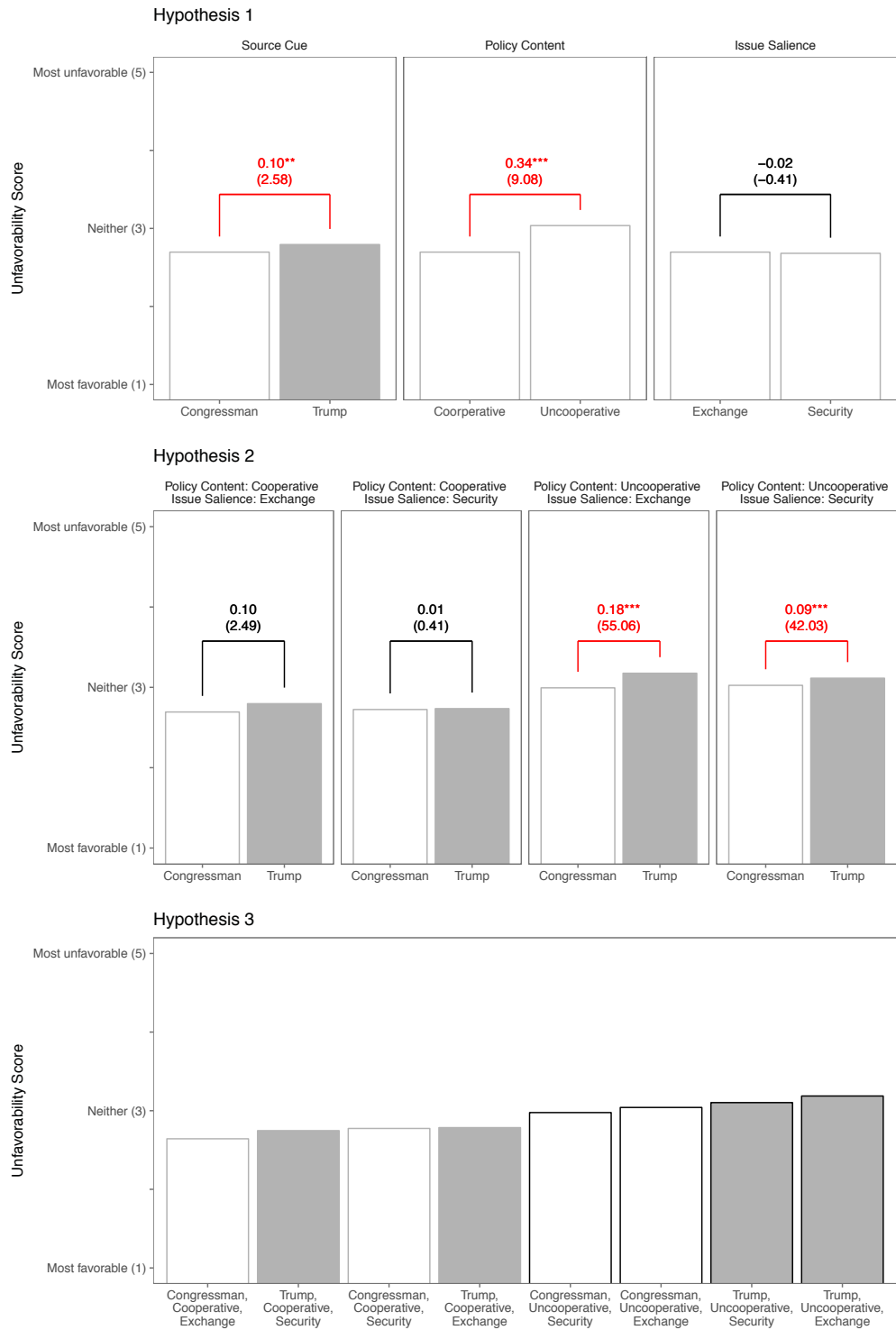


Figure A.8: Respondents with Higher Education. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

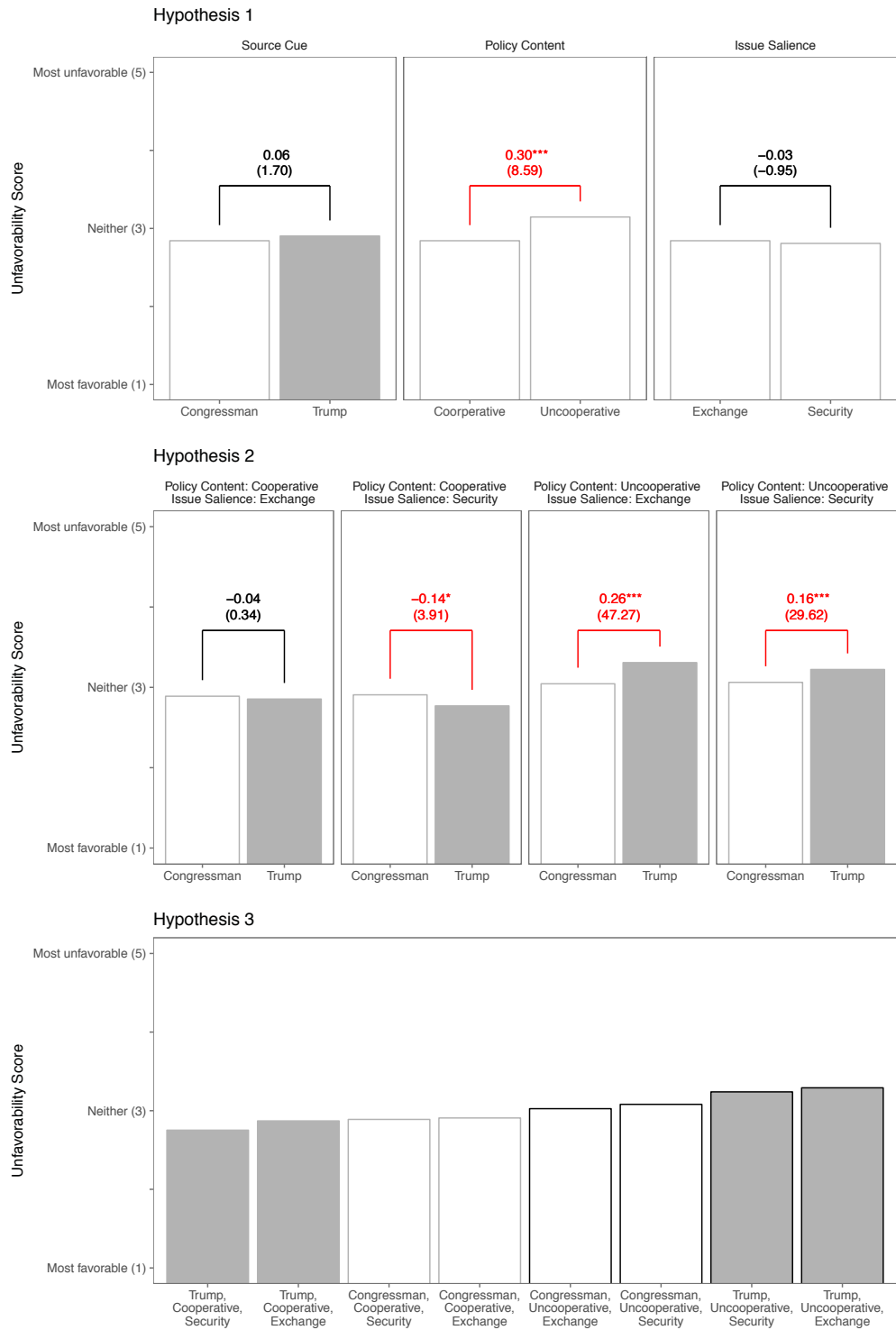


Figure A.9: Respondents with Lower Education. Note: The numbers in parentheses are  $t$  statistics for Hypothesis 1 and  $F$  statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

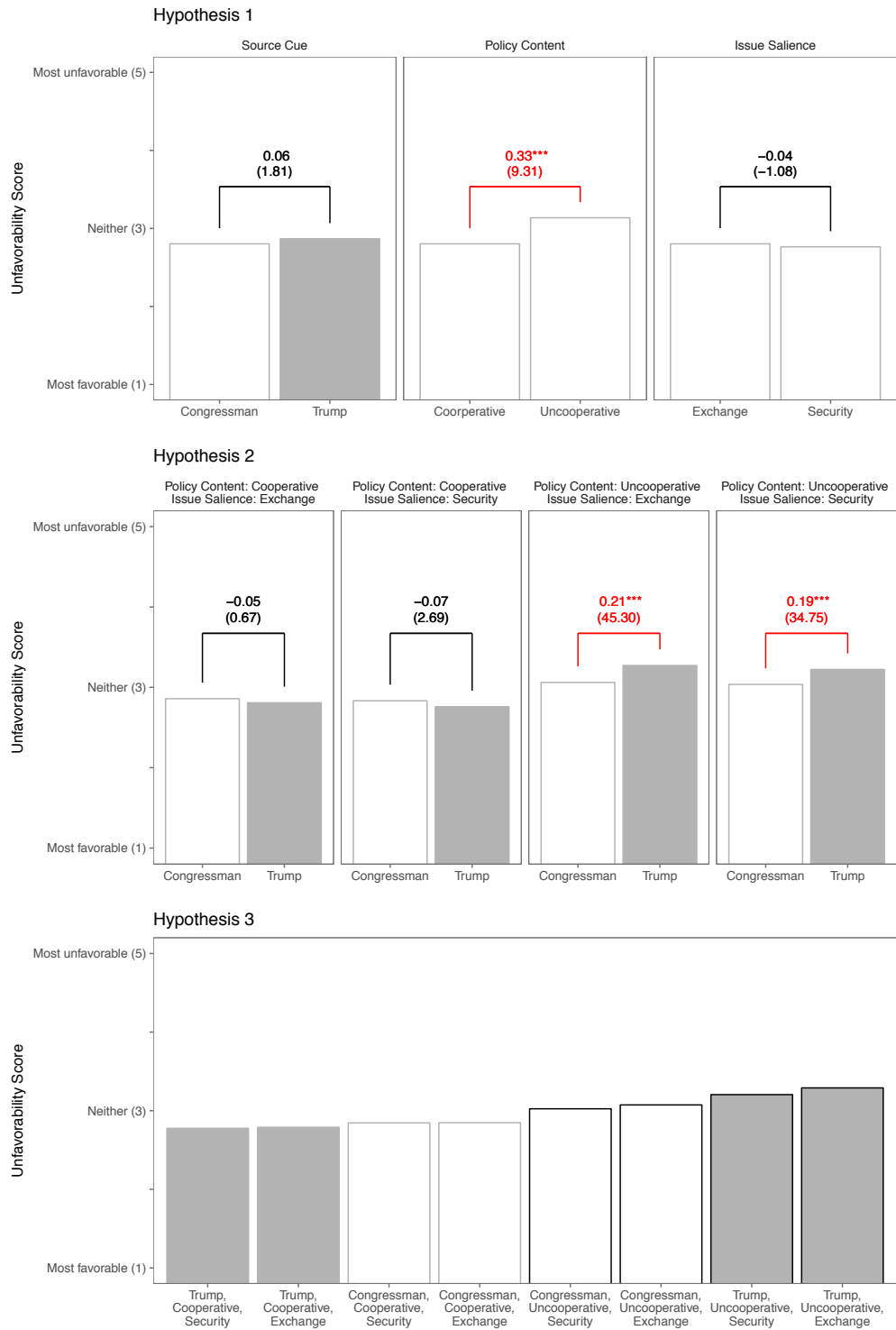


Figure A.10: Older Respondents. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

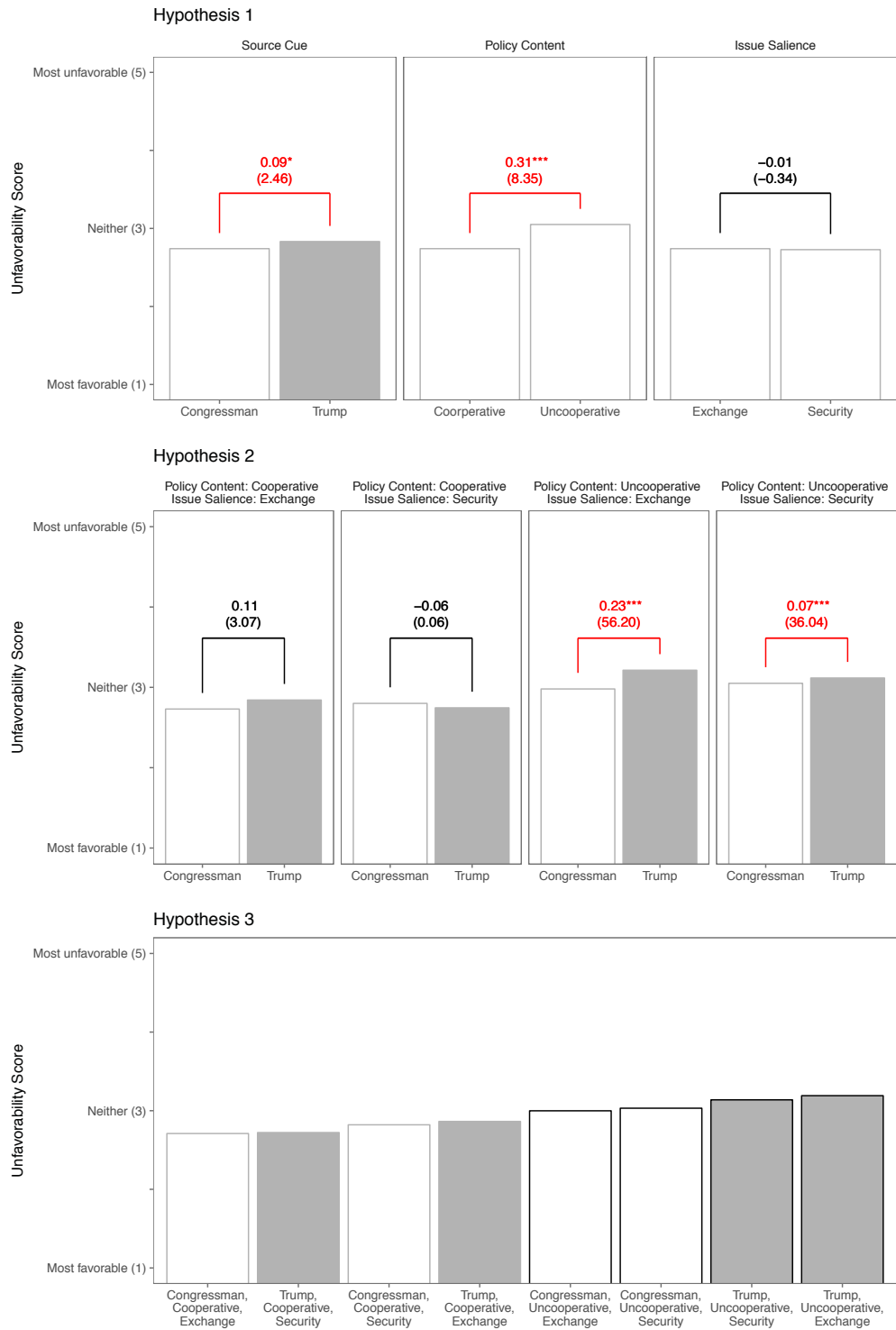


Figure A.11: Younger Respondents. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

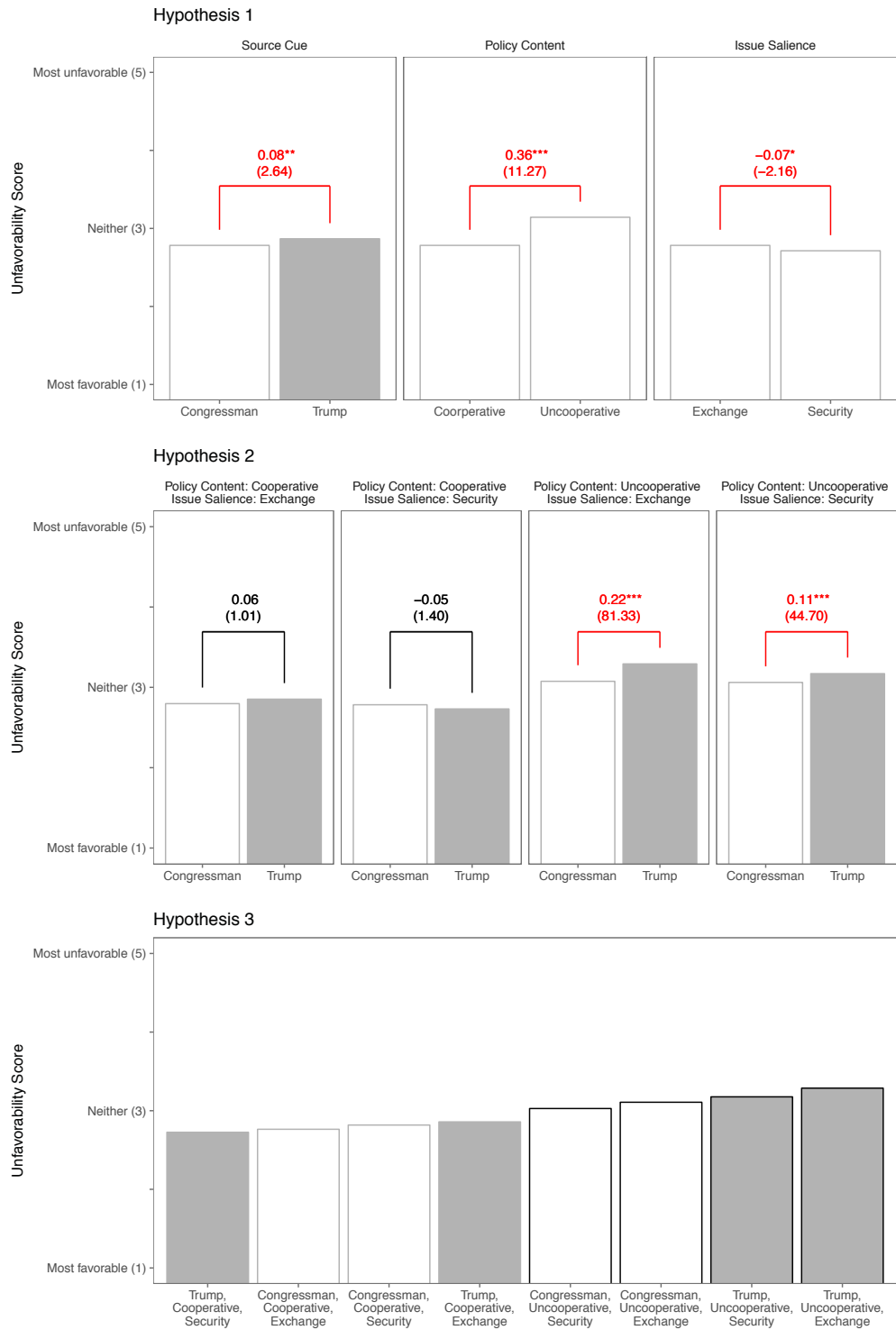


Figure A.12: Respondents with Higher Income. Note: The numbers in parentheses are  $t$  statistics for Hypothesis 1 and  $F$  statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).



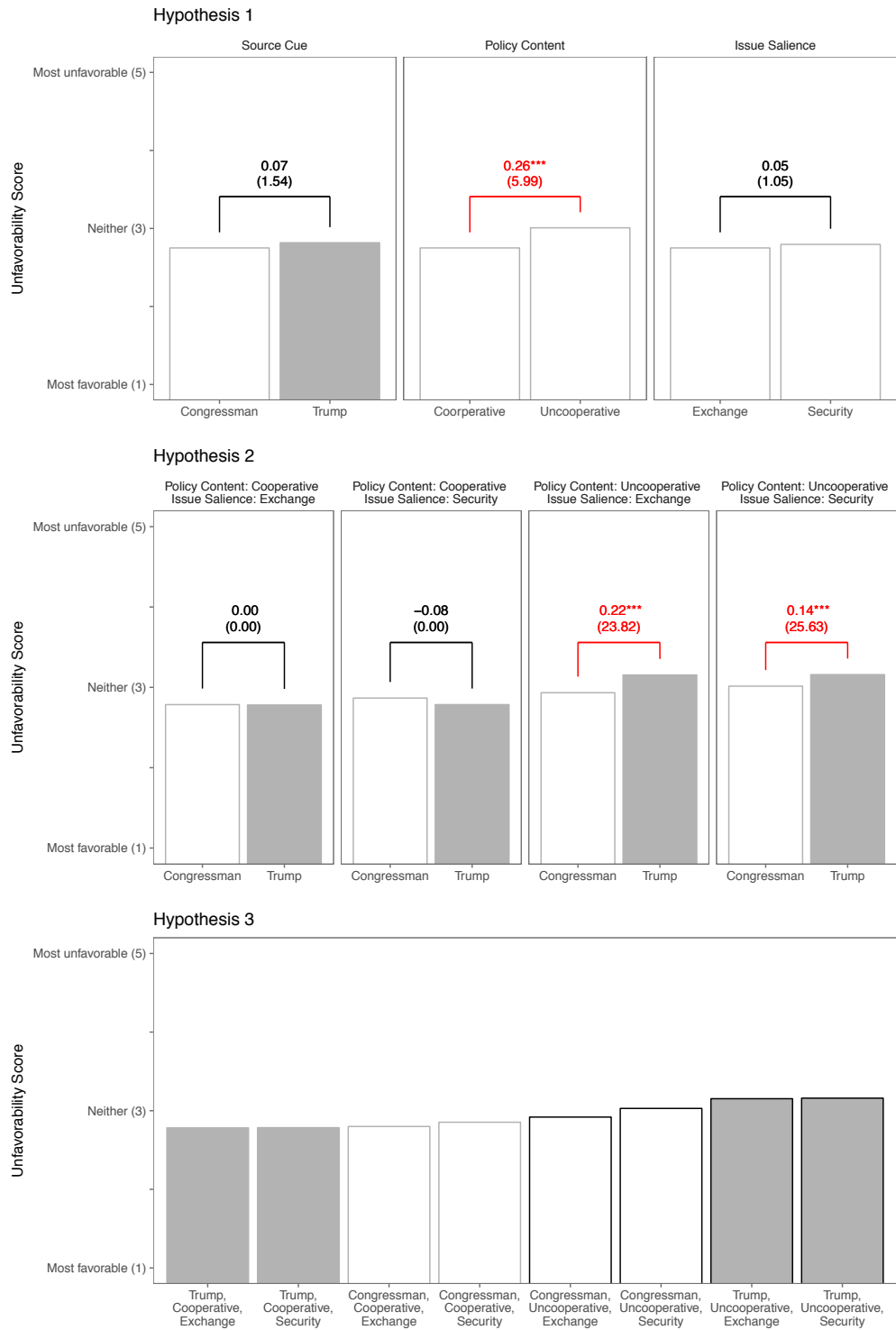


Figure A.13: Respondents with Lower Income. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

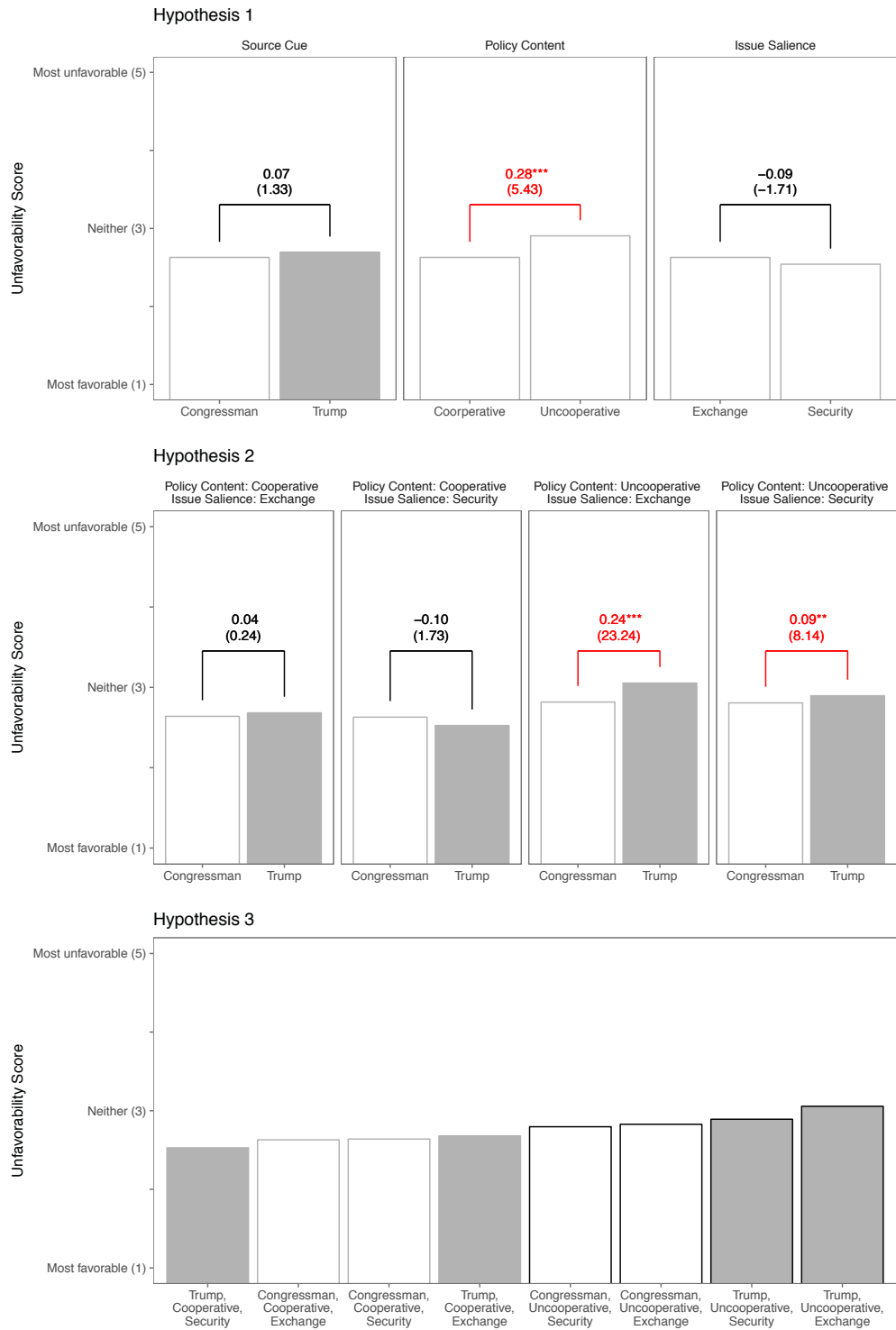


Figure A.14: Respondents with Stronger Interest in Politics. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

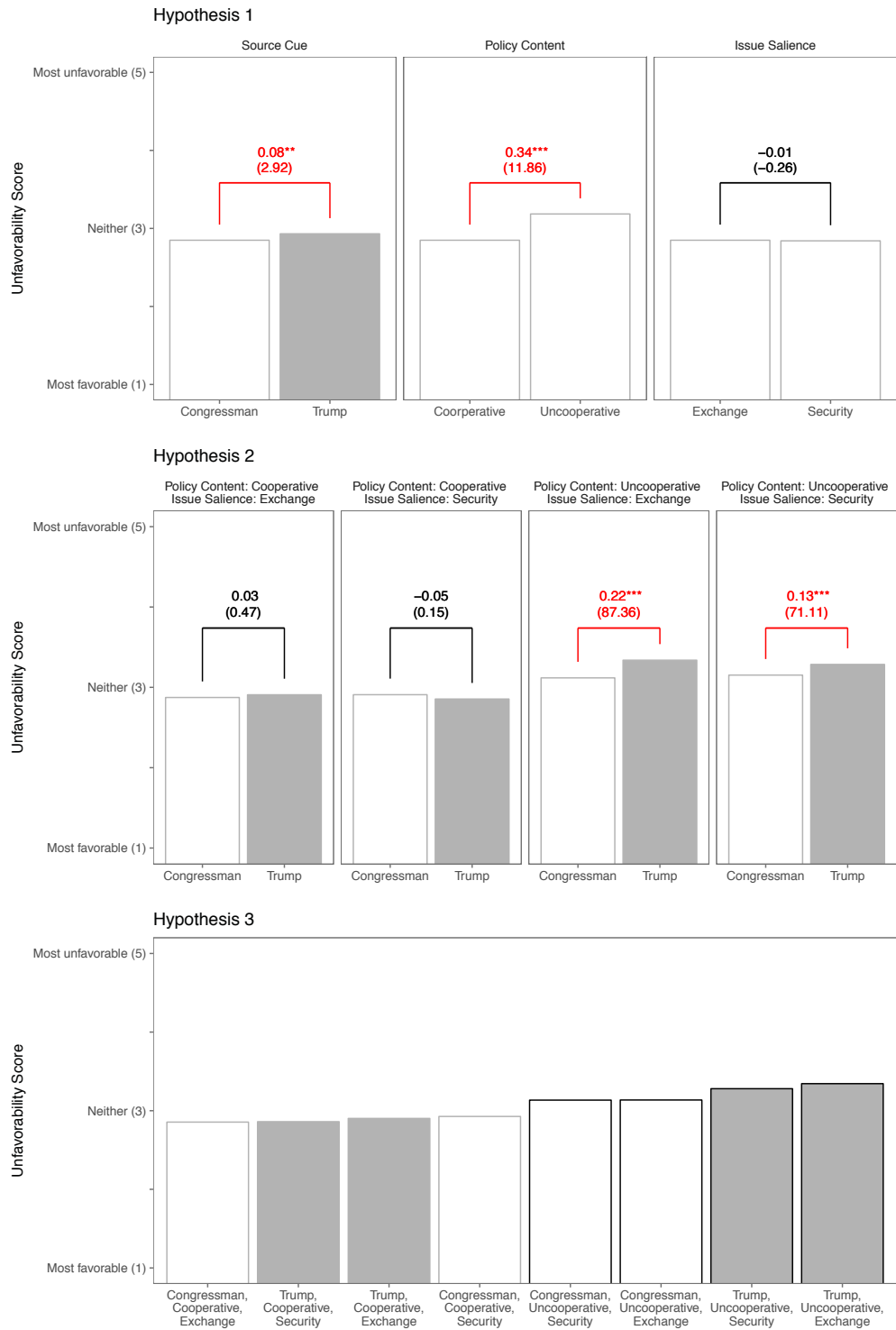


Figure A.15: Respondents with Weaker Interest in Politics. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

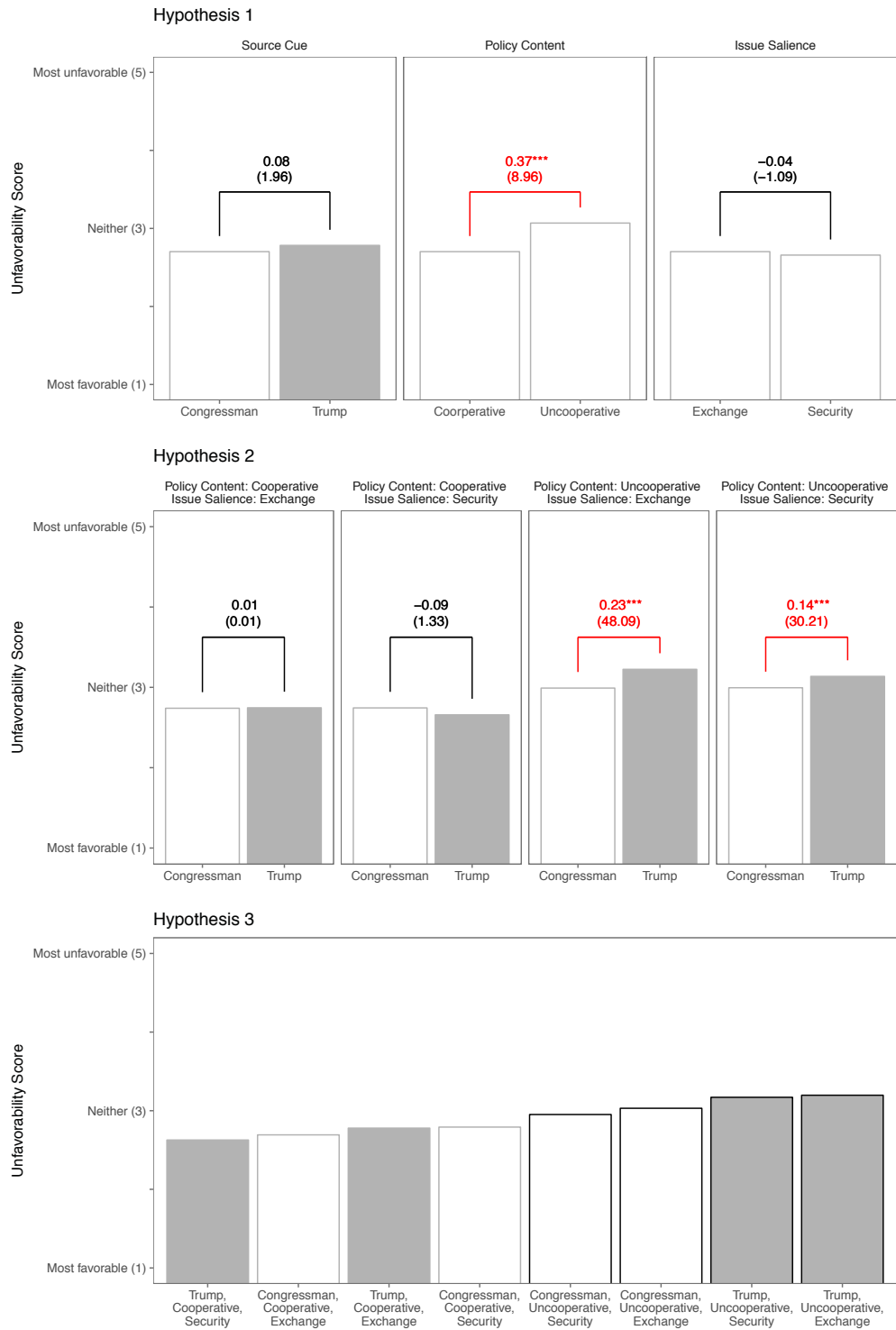


Figure A.16: Respondents with Stronger Multilateralism. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

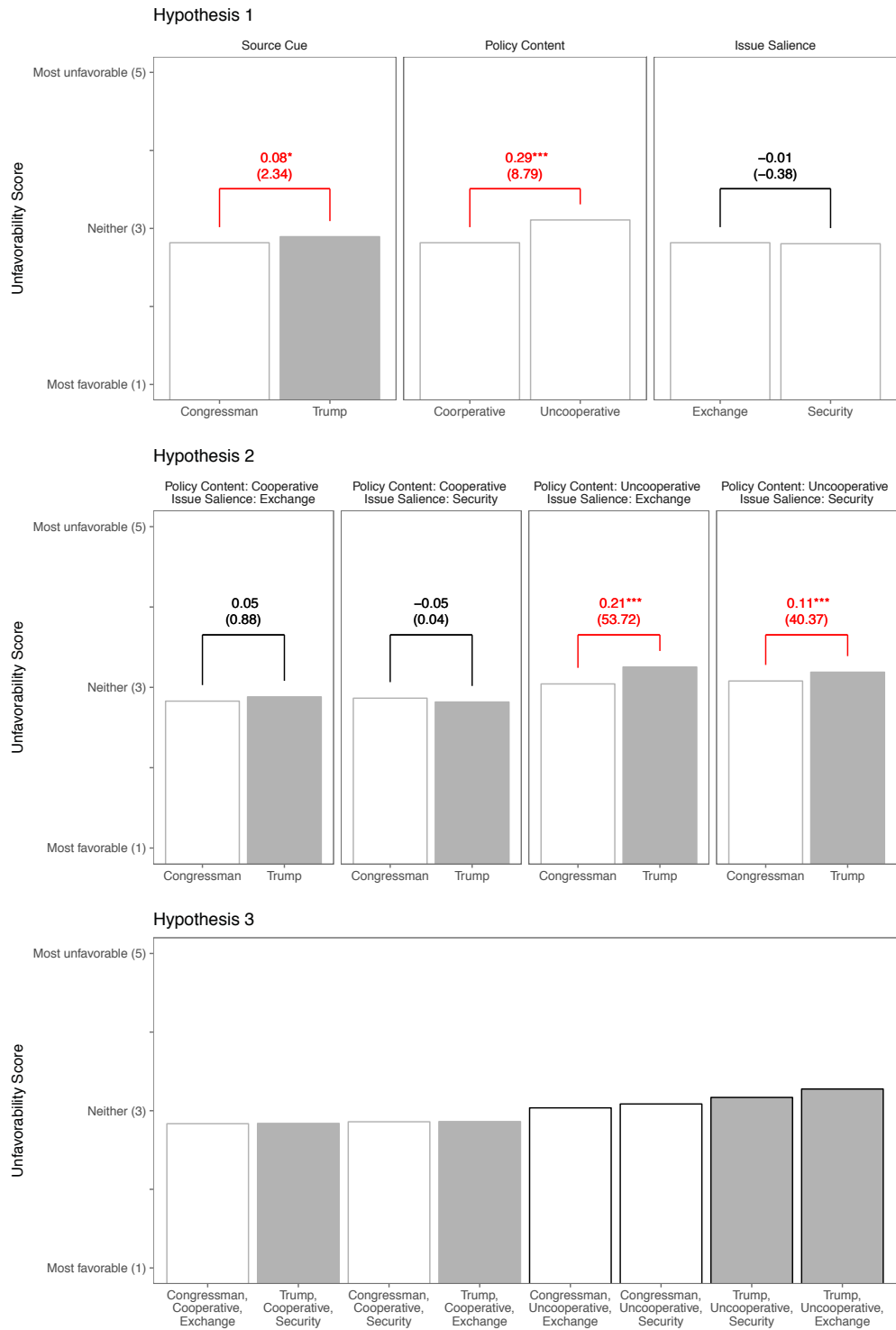


Figure A.17: Respondents with Weaker Multilateralism. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

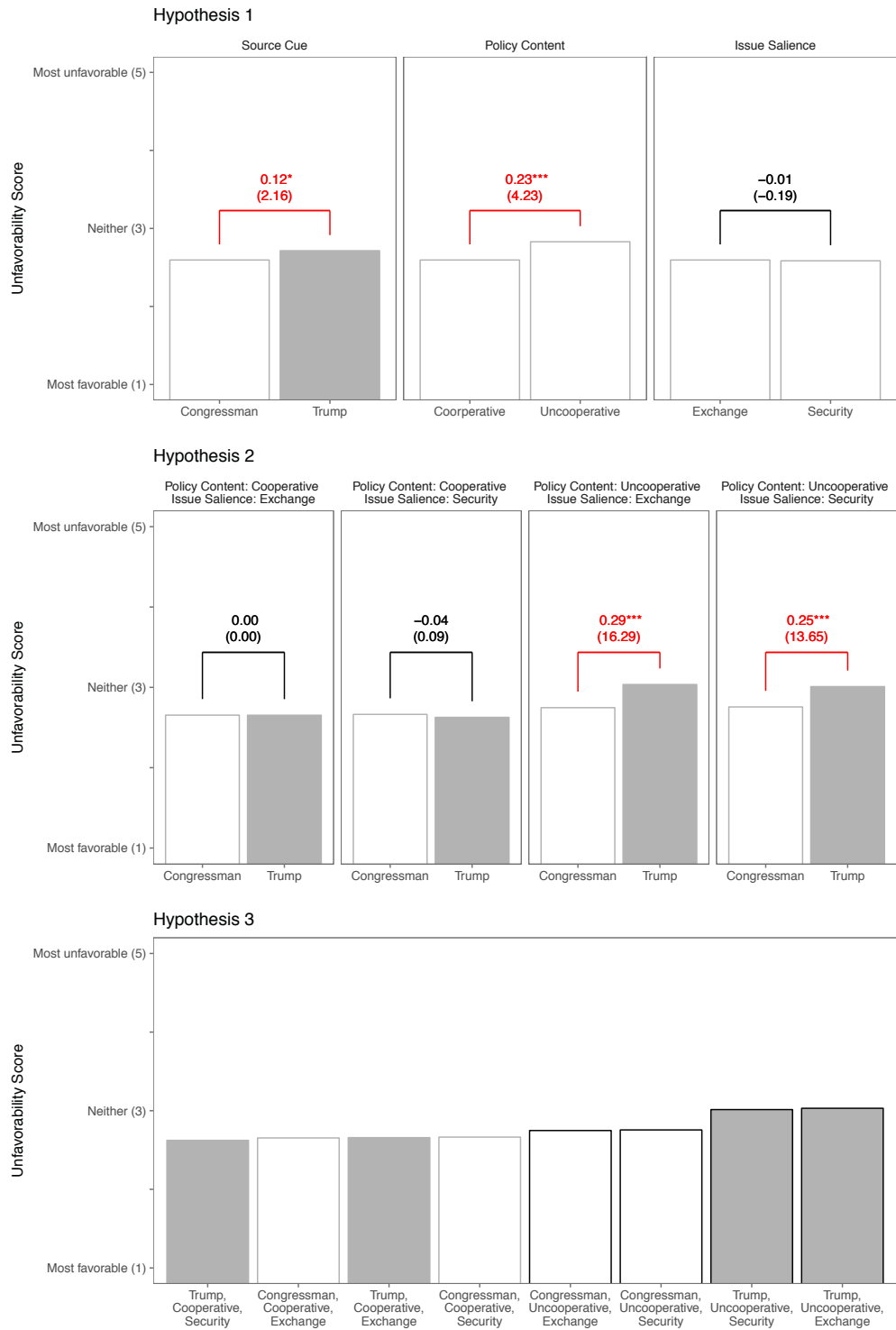


Figure A.18: Respondents with Stronger Bilateralism. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

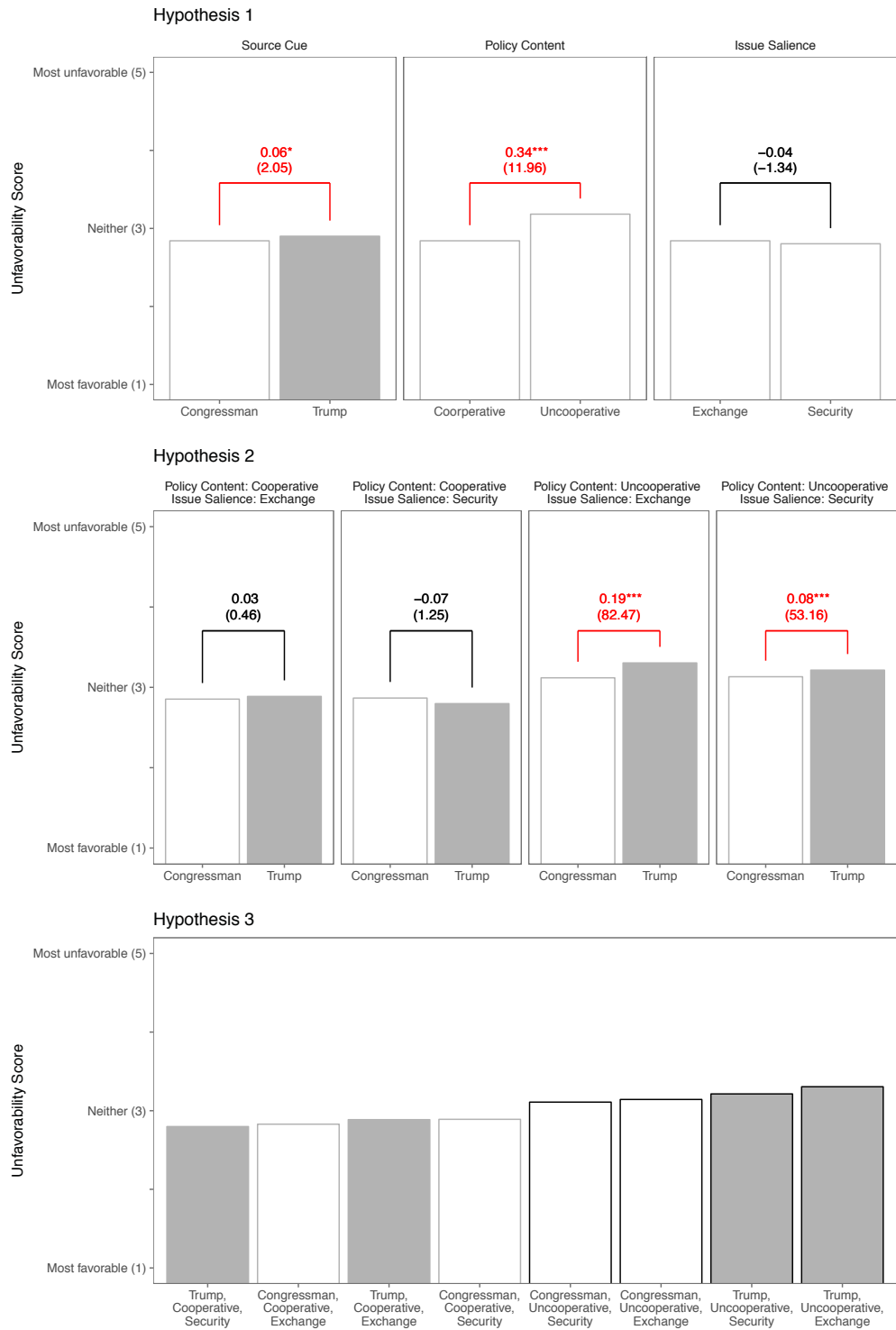


Figure A.19: Respondents with Weaker Bilateralism. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

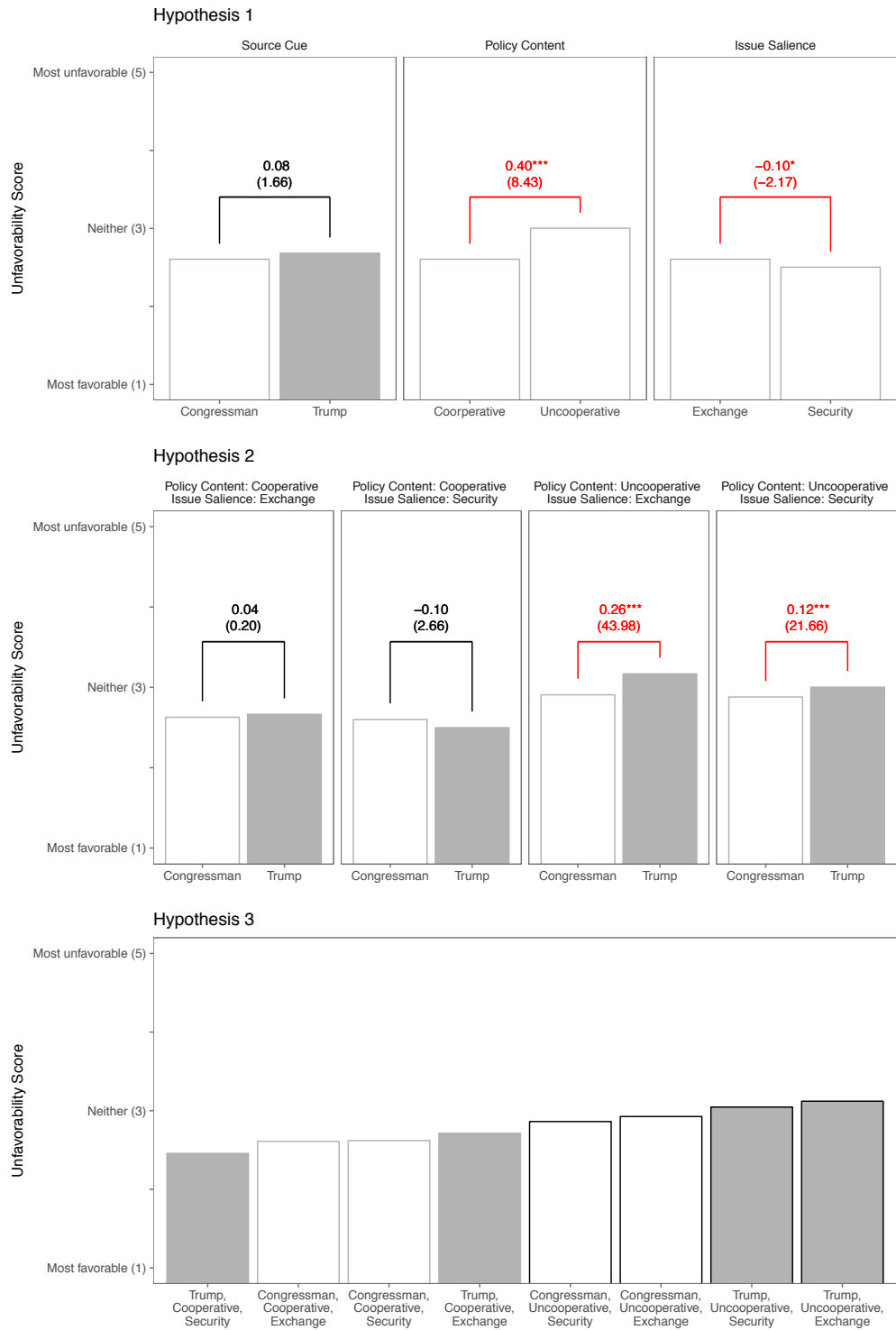


Figure A.20: Respondents Supporting LDP. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).



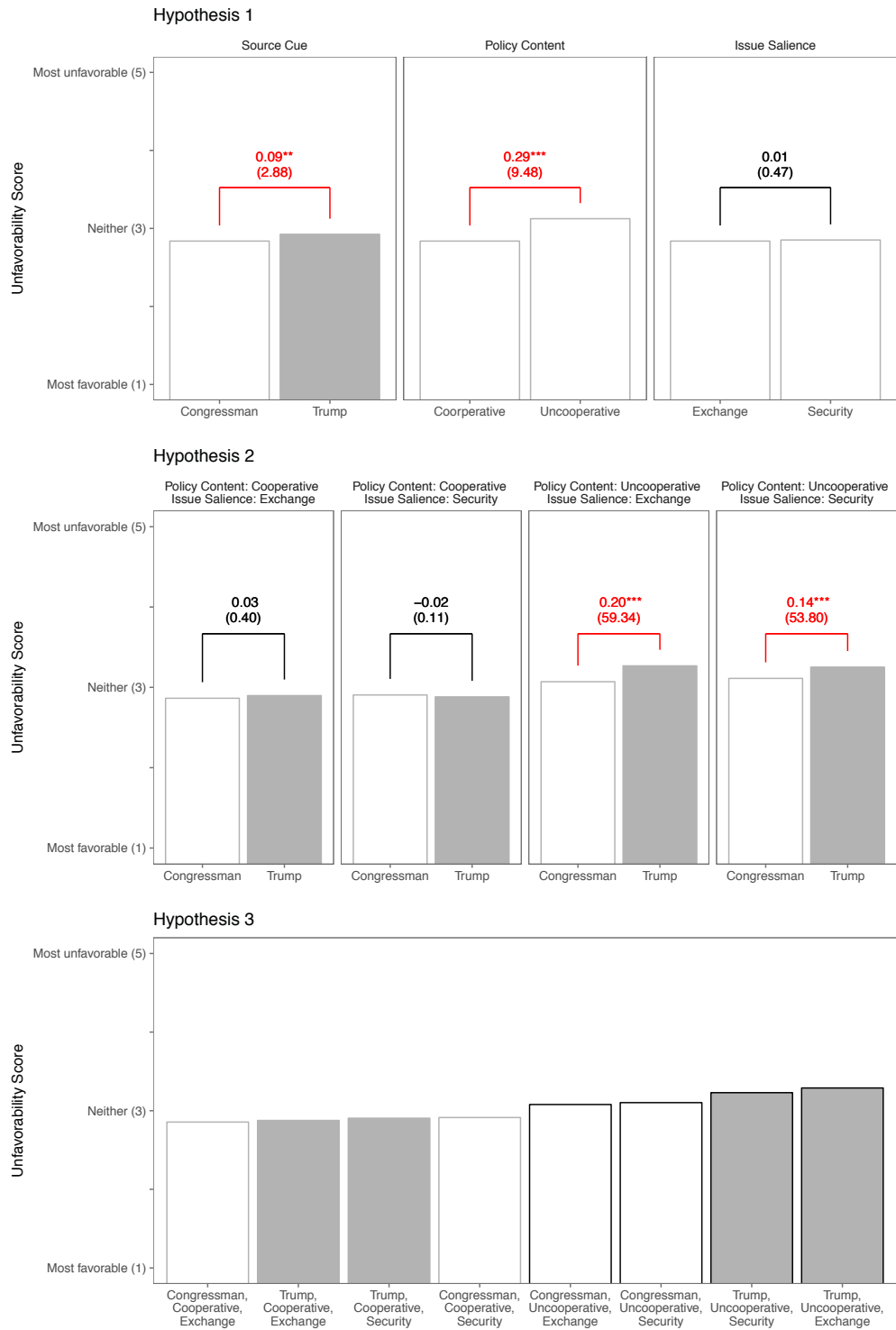


Figure A.21: Respondents Not Supporting LDP. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

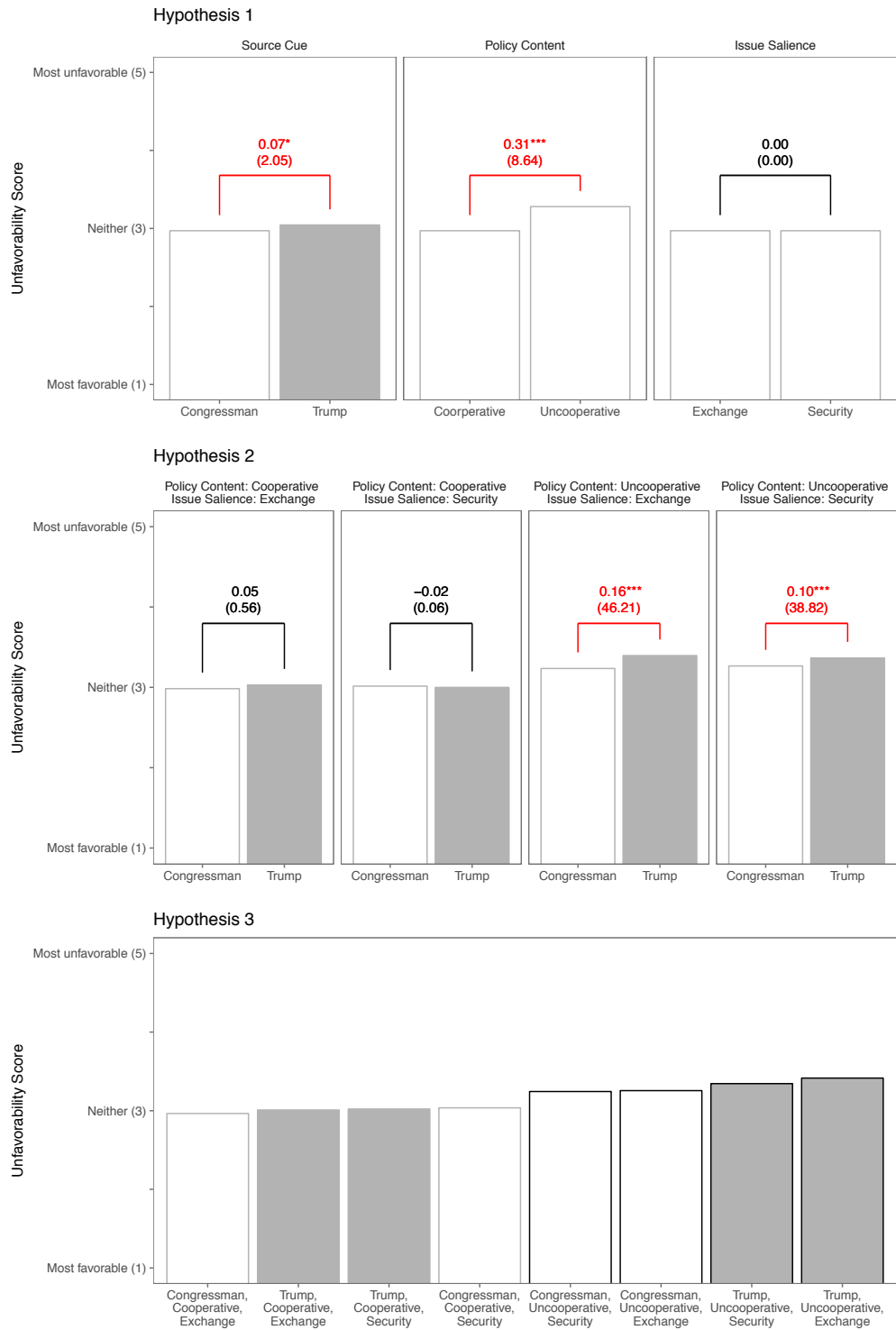


Figure A.22: Respondents with Stronger Support for Prime Minister Abe. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

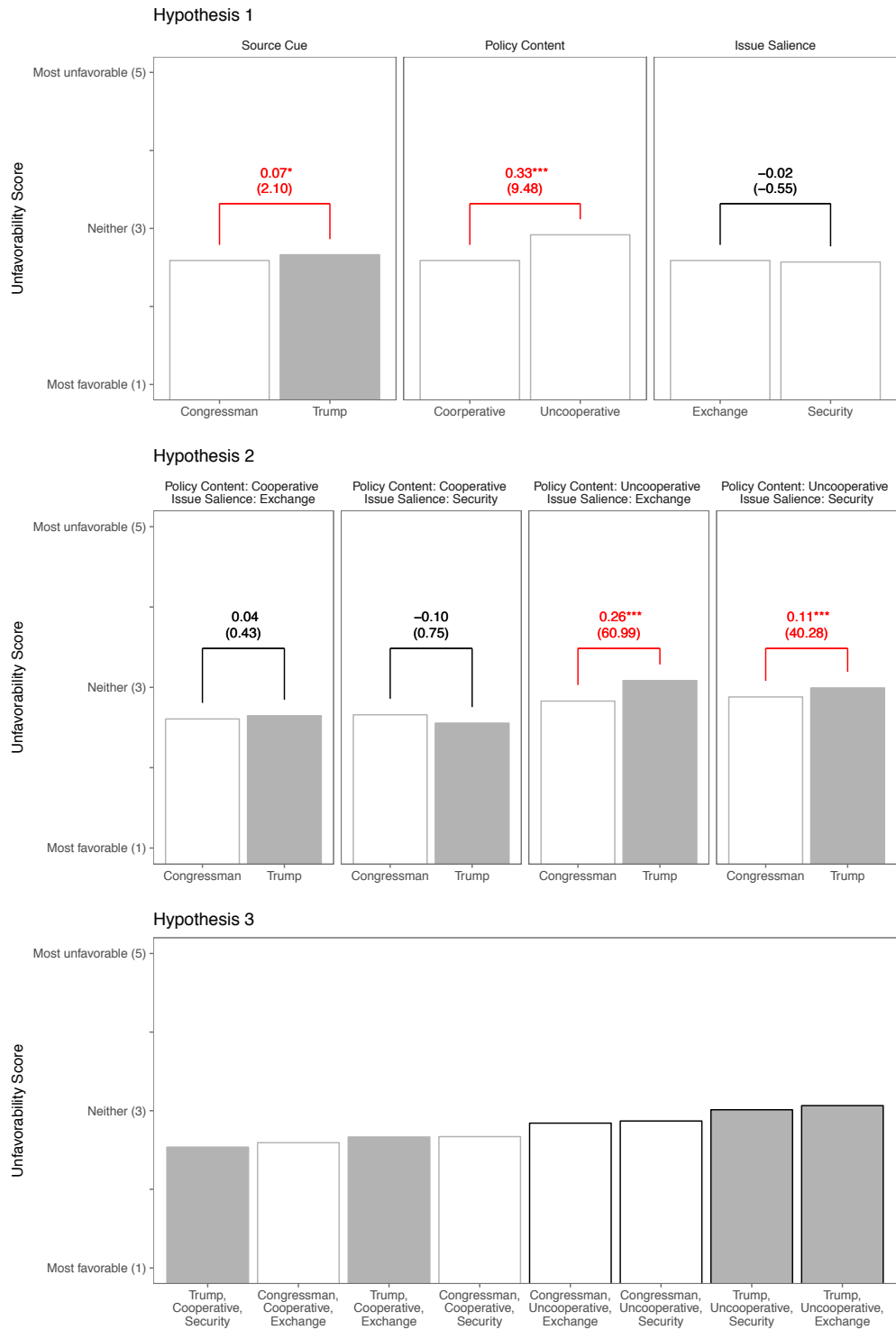


Figure A.23: Respondents with Weaker Support for Prime Minister Abe. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

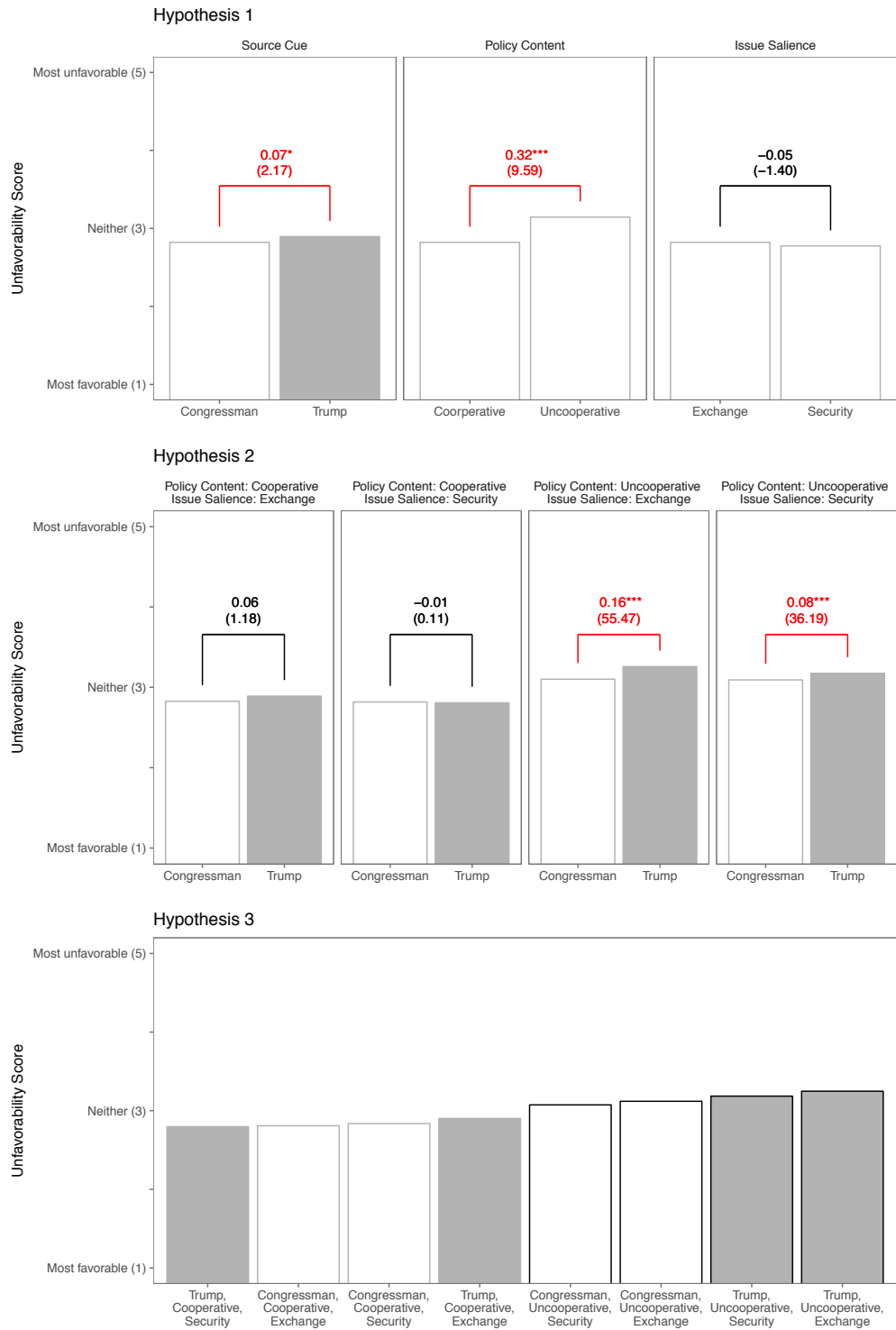


Figure A.24: Attentive Respondents Only. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).

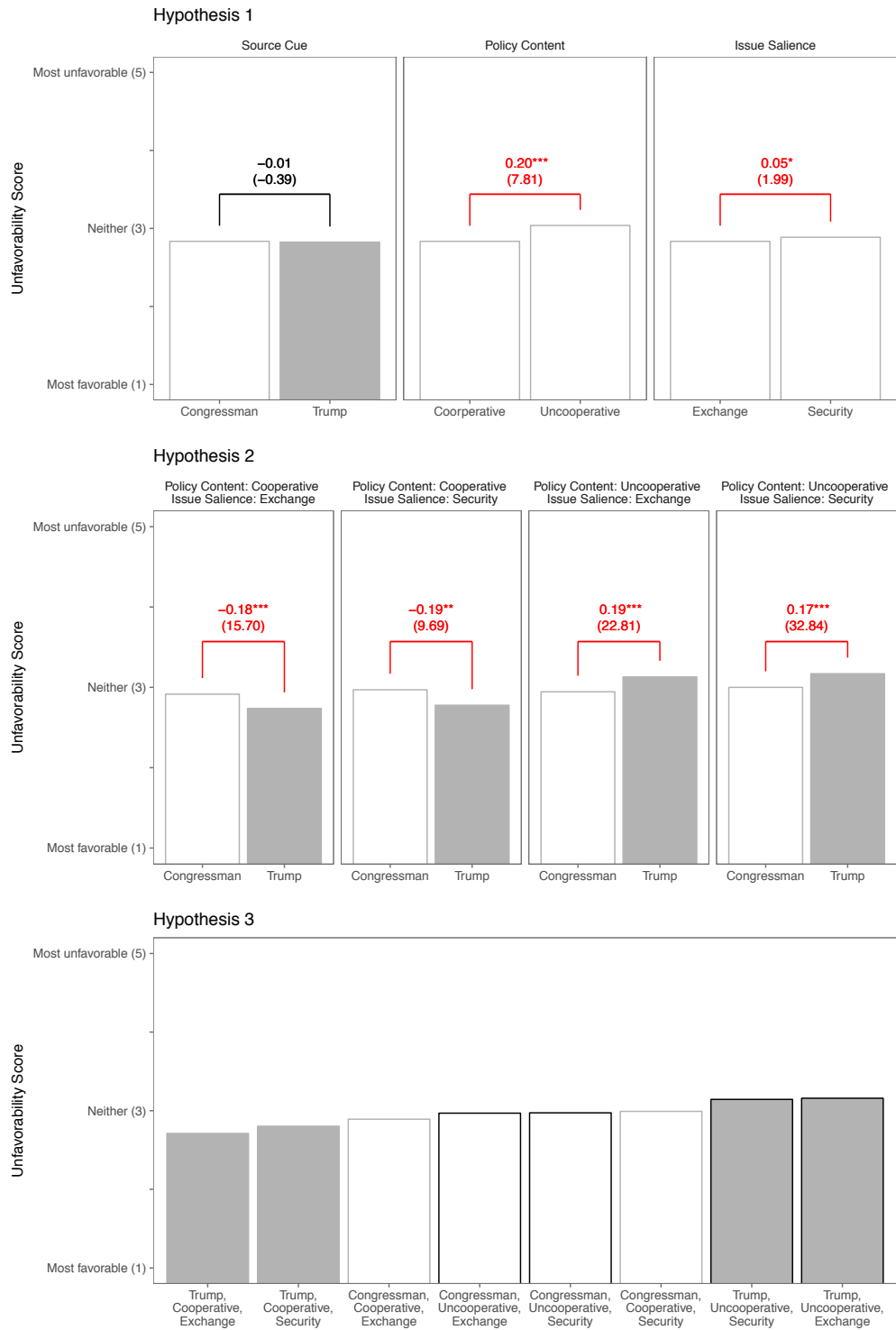


Figure A.25: With Post-Stratified Weights. Note: The numbers in parentheses are t statistics for Hypothesis 1 and F statistics for Hypothesis 2. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two sided).