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Attitudes Towards Universal Basic Income in Korea Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This study empirically analyzed how attitudes toward the introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) in South Korean society evolved before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it examined how attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI changed under the assumption of tax increases, using data from. The results of the analysis indicate a tendency for attitudes towards UBI to become more cautious, despite the experience of a system with UBI characteristics. Factors that significantly influence attitudes towards the introduction of UBI based on the 2021 data include income, gender, marital status, age group and political ideology. In addition, the “Not Out Of My Pocket” (Noomp) phenomenon is evident in the context of the introduction of a UBI with the presumption of a tax burden. It is therefore clear that social consensus on tax increases is of paramount importance in the development of welfare systems, including UBI.

Keywords: social policy; universal basic income; policy preference; COVID-19; quantitative research; Korean society

1 Introduction

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been growing interest in universal basic income(UBI) in Korean society. To combat the unprecedented infectious disease, people’s face-to-face contact was restricted, which resulted in significant losses for workers who require face-to-face interactions, ranging from small retail businesses to the education sector. Furthermore, the crisis of job displacement due to the proliferation of automation and artificial intelligence (AI), which has been ongoing for several years, has exacerbated the sense of urgency that face-to-face jobs could soon be replaced by robots or AI in the near future. In these circumstances, one of the measures that has been actively discussed to ensure the

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livelihood of workers who have lost their jobs is UBI. In addition, interest in UBI was rekindled when emergency disaster relief funds in the form of cash payments were made available to the entire population in May 2020. Providing relief to citizens who have suffered from unexpected disasters is one of the roles of government.

Typically, such relief is provided to those who have suffered in proportion to the extent of their losses. However, in the case of COVID-19, it was provided indiscriminately to the entire population because it was difficult to select victims and accurately calculate the extent of damage. Although it may be difficult to call it a UBI because it was a one-time payment, the fact that cash payments were made available to the entire population is significant, and it was a valuable opportunity for the entire population to experience the benefits of a UBI. According to an online survey conducted by LAB2050, a private policy research institute, shortly after the disaster relief funds were provided, 61.5 % of all respondents said that if the second round of disaster relief funds were provided, it should be provided to everyone as in the first round, and 57.8 % responded that they supported UBI.¹

One interpretation of the active discussions on UBI in Korea can be attributed to the failure of the government to fulfill its role as a manager of social risks. While pursuing export-oriented economic development centered on the heavy chemical industry, Korea sought to suppress the growth of labor income and minimize the expansion of public welfare to maintain price competitiveness. Instead, it encouraged individuals or families to accumulate private wealth by investing in real estate or stocks on the basis of a low tax burden, which would then serve as a basis for responding to social risks. In particular, the proportion of precarious workers in institutional blind spots is relatively high, as social welfare systems have been developed with a focus on social insurance for regular workers. In this context, it has been argued that a UBI provided universally to all citizens could be an alternative to effectively address social problems such as inequality and poverty, which are difficult to solve through existing welfare systems (Yoon 2017).²

Prior to the nationwide distribution of emergency disaster relief funds, discussions regarding UBI were primarily held among academia and politicians. The major points of contention included conceptual debates on whether the current discourse on UBI can be defined as commonly accepted UBI, debates on whether social security

1 <https://medium.com/lab2050/notice2050-29cdca04a37a>.

2 As of 2021, South Korea's poverty rate, based on 50 % of the national median disposable income, was 14.8 %, ranking 7th highest among 31 OECD countries. In the same year, the Gini coefficient for disposable income was 0.329, placing South Korea 10th highest in income inequality among OECD nations (Source: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>). Furthermore, as of 2024, 38.2 % of workers in South Korea are classified as non-regular workers, including temporary, part-time, and non-typical workers. This significant proportion of the workforce often faces greater job insecurity and fewer benefits compared to regular workers (Source: <https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4214>).

principles should be based on needs or focused on the realization of basic human rights, debates on the income security effectiveness of UBI and whether it can truly guarantee citizens' income, and debates on funding related to the provision of UBI. These debates are politically significant in terms of exploring viable alternatives for implementing UBI in practice. However, it is also necessary to understand the attitudes of citizens who actually benefit from UBI and bear the financial burden of funding it.

In particular, Korea is one of the few countries that provided universal cash transfers to all citizens after COVID-19, creating a collective memory of UBI experience, albeit a one-time experience.³ In other words, a natural experimental situation has been created to measure changes in attitudes towards UBI before and after receiving the emergency disaster relief fund. Therefore, this study aims to analyze data from the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) in 2018 and 2021 to investigate how attitudes toward UBI have changed before and after receiving the emergency disaster support fund, and what factors have influenced attitudes toward UBI. Certainly, the factors influencing attitudes toward the introduction of a universal basic income (UBI) are not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other factors, such as the spread of automation in South Korea and the evolving discourse on UBI in the political, academic, and social spheres, may also influence attitudes toward UBI. For a rigorous analysis, it would be ideal to control for all factors that could potentially influence attitudes toward UBI. However, operationalizing and including all these factors in the analysis is practically challenging. Given these limitations, our study focused on analyzing changes in response patterns to identical surveys conducted before and after the distribution of disaster relief funds as a proxy for changes in attitudes toward UBI. Consequently, this research should be understood as an exploratory study of changes in attitudes toward UBI. While it may not account for all potential influencing factors, it provides valuable insights into how a large-scale cash transfer program may have affected public perceptions of UBI in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This type of analysis provides an opportunity to understand how experience with a particular policy or system affects preferences for that policy or system, not limited to UBI. This insight can provide clues as to how Korea, which has one of the lowest levels of welfare spending and financing among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, can secure legitimacy from citizens as it increases welfare spending and tax burdens in the future (Chung, Taylor-Gooby, and Leruth 2018). Therefore, this analysis has policy implications by providing

3 As of June 2020, countries such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore implemented universal or quasi-universal cash benefits as part of their COVID-19 response measures. The United States, in contrast, provided targeted cash assistance based on income criteria.

insights into how Korea can secure legitimacy from citizens as it expands welfare spending and tax burden.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, we examine the discussion of UBI within the context of South Korean society. Section 3 examines the history of previous research on attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI, distinguishing between European welfare states and South Korea. In Section 4, we review the data and methodology used in this study, while Section 5 presents specific analytical findings. Finally, in Section 6, we describe the conclusions and implications of this research.

2 The Discussion of UBI in the Context of South Korean Society

The definition of UBI may vary depending on political ideologies or policy perspectives, but the definition provided by the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), which is leading the global discussion on UBI, is generally accepted. They define UBI as “a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement.”⁴ The five characteristics of a UBI are generally accepted as follows: it is provided periodically rather than as a one-time benefit; it is provided in the form of a cash payment; it is provided on an individual basis rather than to households; it is provided universally without means-testing; and it is provided unconditionally without requiring recipients to meet any eligibility criteria.

Interest in UBI has been steadily growing in South Korean society. As a result, there has been an intense debate in the academic and political spheres. Since 2016, academic discourse in the field of social policy has focused on specific and substantive issues related to UBI, such as its financial feasibility, its relationship with the existing welfare system, and its policy priorities (Baek 2020; Yang 2018). The context of the UBI debate in South Korea is different from that in Western welfare states. In Western welfare states, factors such as increasing labor market instability due to deindustrialization and caregiving challenges due to low birth rates and an aging population have led to active discussions about whether UBI could serve as a policy alternative, as their welfare systems had already matured significantly since World War II (Busemeyer and Sahm 2022; Roosma and van Oorschot 2020; Vlandas 2021).

In contrast, South Korea, with a less mature welfare system than its Western counterparts, initiated debates on the nature of a UBI as local governments began to implement pilot programs with features similar to a UBI. The implementation of

4 <https://basicincome.org/about-basic-income/>.

initiatives such as the Youth Dividend in Seongnam City in 2016, the Youth Allowance in Seoul in 2017, and the Youth Basic Income in Gyeonggi Province in 2019 sparked significant societal interest in UBI. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led the government to distribute emergency disaster relief funds to all citizens and encourage local governments to implement income support policies with UBI-like features, which further expanded discussions on the feasibility and effectiveness of UBI. During the presidential election in the '20s, prominent presidential candidates also expressed their strong commitment to implementing a UBI as a policy measure.

In the context of South Korean society, the remarkable emergence of UBI can be mainly attributed to the Gyeonggi Province Youth Basic Income and the first-round Emergency Disaster Relief Funds (Huh et al. 2021). The former is a program targeted at Gyeonggi Province residents who are young adults aged 24 or older and have resided in Gyeonggi Province for three years or more, or have had their residency registration in Gyeonggi Province for a cumulative total of 10 years or more. Under this program, eligible individuals receive an annual payment of KRW 1 million per person in local currency. The latter initiative, the Emergency Disaster Relief Fund, was initially proposed to selectively benefit low-income households, mainly the bottom 70 % of income earners, in response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, difficulties in identifying eligible recipients and concerns about fairness led to the decision to distribute these funds to all citizens on a household basis. The emergency disaster relief funds were distributed differentially based on the number of household members, with the maximum payment amount being KRW 1 million.⁵ It is important to note that neither of these programs can be characterized as adhering to the idealized form of UBI discussed earlier. The Gyeonggi Province Youth Basic Income Program violates the principles of regularity, universality, and unconditionality, while the first-round Emergency Disaster Relief Funds violates the principles of regularity and individuality.

Nevertheless, the first round of disaster relief funds met the criteria of both unconditionality and universality and was well received by the public. As a result, it served as a catalyst for more vigorous discussions on UBI in the political arena and academia. Apart from these socio-political debates, it is important to assess how Korean citizens perceive UBI after receiving the first round of disaster relief funds.

In this context, this study aims to investigate the impact of individuals' experiences with UBI on their attitudes towards UBI by comparing attitudes before and

⁵ To provide context for the KRW 1 million (approximately USD 850 as of January 2025), it's important to consider it in relation to key economic indicators in South Korea. As of 2025, this amount represents approximately 47.7 % of the monthly minimum wage for a full-time worker, which is set at KRW 2,096,270 based on a 40-h work week. Additionally, it equates to about 16.4 % of the 2025 median income for a four-person household, which stands at KRW 6,097,773 per month and serves as a reference point for various welfare benefits.

after receiving the first emergency disaster relief funds in 2018 and 2021. It also aims to explore how attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI might change if tax increases are a prerequisite for its implementation. Before delving into a detailed analysis, it is important to first examine the existing literature on attitudes toward the introduction of UBI in Western welfare states and in the context of South Korea.

3 Previous Research on Attitudes towards UBI

3.1 Previous Research on Attitudes towards UBI in European Welfare States

The UBI differs from existing welfare policies in two key aspects. Firstly, it is not contingent on means-testing for social assistance or contributions to social insurance, which are fundamental principles of existing welfare systems. Second, unlike conventional welfare policies, it is not currently implemented in practice (Vlandas 2021). Consequently, understanding the factors that influence attitudes towards UBI in a context where it represents a different institutional logic and does not have a tangible presence is a significant challenge. In this context, previous research on attitudes towards UBI has mainly focused on analyzing variables that are considered significant in existing studies on attitudes towards welfare. Research on attitudes toward conventional welfare has emphasized the influence of individual self-interest and ideological factors (Chung, Taylor-Gooby, and Leruth 2018). Regarding the former, it is argued that individual economic status and material self-interest, such as income and exposure to labor market risks, significantly influence attitudes toward welfare spending expansion or tax increases. With respect to the latter, ideological predispositions, including beliefs in reciprocity, fairness, and equality of opportunity, are thought to significantly influence attitudes toward welfare spending or tax increases (Wiedemann 2021).

Among the most representative studies are those analyzing attitudes towards UBI using data from the European Social Survey round 8 (2016/2017) (Busemeyer and Sahm 2022; Dermont and Weisstanner 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot 2020; Vlandas 2021). According to Roosma and van Oorschot (2020), people with a lower subjective income level and those who are unemployed tend to have a higher preference for a UBI. This suggests that people perceive a UBI as a means of guaranteeing a certain level of income in an uncertain labor market. However, people with a higher level of education, those living with children, and older people tend to have a lower preference for a UBI. This can be interpreted as a result of the design of traditional welfare systems in Western welfare states, where the system is structured to provide more benefits to individuals as they age. In other words, young people are more

likely to support a UBI than middle-aged and older people, as it may be difficult for them to consistently pay social insurance contributions based on employment stability, making them more likely to support a UBI that does not require any eligibility or contribution conditions. Furthermore, those with a liberal ideological orientation are more likely to prefer a UBI. According to Vlandas's (2021) analysis of the same data, men are more supportive of UBI than women, but this prediction contradicts the fact that women face greater care burdens and greater instability in the labor market, leading them to support UBI.

Meanwhile, research by Busemeyer and Sahm (2022) found that the level of welfare state provision affects attitudes towards the expansion of social policy in response to automation, as individuals living in countries with more comprehensive welfare states expressed lower levels of support for additional policy expansion than those living in countries with less extensive welfare provision. Furthermore, their research discovered that the degree of welfare state provision affects attitudes towards the expansion of social policy in response to automation, as individuals residing in countries with more comprehensive welfare states expressed lower levels of support for additional policy expansion than those residing in countries with less extensive welfare provisions.

The research on attitudes toward UBI after the COVID-19 pandemic focuses on the aspect of policy alternatives to respond to unexpected external shocks. According to a YouGov survey conducted in six European countries in late 2020, approximately 66 % of participants expressed a desire for the government to implement a UBI (WeMove Europe 2020). Weisstanner (2022) pointed out that, based on an analysis of comparative research conducted by Nettle et al. (2021) on UBI preferences during the pandemic and pre-COVID-19 data from the European Social Survey (ESS), preferences for UBI increased in the United Kingdom across several demographic factors, including age, gender, material status, and political ideology. Nevertheless, he maintains that the fairly consistent rise in support implies that the basic political coalition supporting UBI has not undergone significant change during the pandemic. UBI has remained primarily a theoretical policy domain in Europe, with limited concrete deliberations and only a few attempts to implement it at a larger scale. It is not unexpected, as a result, that a significant portion of the population still exhibits indecisive views towards UBI (Dermont and Weisstanner 2020).

3.2 Previous Research on Attitudes towards UBI in South Korea

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, studies were conducted to analyze attitudes toward UBI in Korean society. First, Kim (2020) used 2018 data from the KGSS to analyze the factors influencing preference for UBI by generation. The analysis showed that

younger generations tend to support UBI with lower education levels and more support for tax increases, while older generations tend to support UBI with lower education levels and higher employment rates. For middle-aged generations, the study showed that they are more likely to support UBI with a progressive ideology and more support for tax increases.

Studies on attitudes toward UBI in Korea after COVID-19 have focused on analyzing citizens' attitudes toward UBI after the emergency disaster relief fund was provided. Nam (2021) first pointed out that those who evaluated the disaster relief fund positively also had positive attitudes toward the expansion of welfare spending and the introduction of UBI, as well as tax increases for welfare and UBI. In addition, he claims that the positive effects of the disaster relief fund are consistently observed regardless of income level, political ideology, or support for political parties. Therefore, he argues that the disaster relief fund, distributed to all citizens, could create a significant base of support for the development of a welfare state and the introduction of a UBI in Korean society in the future. Huh et al. (2021) analyzed who supports UBI and what type of UBI they support. According to their analysis, those who have a positive attitude towards the welfare system also tend to have a positive attitude towards UBI. They suggested that this could be due to the fact that the UBI system has similar characteristics to the welfare system, and it could be interpreted as a result of supporting UBI as a new alternative to compensate for the current inadequacies of the welfare system. Furthermore, a significant portion of UBI supporters do not support an unconditional UBI, which can be interpreted as people understanding UBI as an extension of the existing welfare system, rather than simply supporting UBI due to the crisis of job displacement caused by structural changes in the labor market. In other words, it is difficult to attribute attitudes towards UBI to a clear conceptual understanding of UBI (Huh et al. 2021).

Finally, Yang, Yun, and Jang (2021) conducted a survey experiment to measure attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI and the willingness to increase taxes to pay for it. Overall, a high percentage of respondents were in favor of expanding welfare and introducing a UBI, along with the necessary tax increases. However, when taxes were explicitly mentioned, opposition to these policies increased. The authors also pointed to the Noomp (Not out of my pocket) phenomenon, where respondents prefer to raise taxes on the rich and corporations rather than on themselves. In addition, the authors claimed that factors such as trust in government, perception of tax burden, political ideology, and economic variables such as real estate assets significantly influence attitudes toward tax increases related to UBI.

In summary, research conducted in Western welfare states and South Korea analyzing attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI is important for understanding how citizens perceive the potential of a UBI as a viable alternative in the context of new societal risks, such as changes in the labor market and social disasters such as

COVID-19. In addition, these studies have focused on identifying the factors that influence these attitudes, with a particular emphasis on self-interest and ideological factors. However, according to research from Europe and Korea, there does not seem to be a clear fundamental shift in attitudes towards UBI. However, existing research has not directly measured changes in attitudes towards UBI before and after COVID-19, and has analyzed data from countries that have not experienced institutional arrangements similar to UBI, such as emergency disaster relief funds.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how attitudes toward UBI have changed and what factors have influenced attitudes toward UBI by analyzing KGSS data that measures attitudes toward UBI before the COVID-19 pandemic and immediately after the experience of emergency disaster relief funds that are similar in nature to UBI, using the same questions on attitudes toward UBI.

4 Research Method and Variables

4.1 Data and Methodology

To investigate how attitudes toward UBI have changed before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and to identify factors that statistically significantly influence attitudes toward UBI, we analyzed KGSS data from 2018 to 2021. The data used in this study come from the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS), which is collected by the Survey Research Center at Sungkyunkwan University. The KGSS is a well-established, nationally representative survey that has been conducted annually since 2003 to measure changes in the structure of Korean society and to provide data that can be widely used for international comparative research. It's worth noting that since 2014, the survey has been conducted every two years. Specifically, in 2018, a new attitude item was added on the introduction of a UBI, and the same item was measured in 2021. Therefore, KGSS data are suitable for measuring changes in attitudes towards UBI before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, in 2021, there is significance in measuring citizens' attitudes toward tax increases for funding UBI through an assessment of how attitudes toward UBI change, as a means of securing funding for its introduction. KGSS provides weight variables to enhance the representativeness of the data. The FINALWT variable was created by considering the probability of extracting eligible adult household members from a household and gender/age/region/city (rural) and applied weighting. As the dependent variable used in this study was measured on a 5-category Likert scale, ordinal logistic regression models were employed in relation to the analysis method.

4.2 Variables

4.2.1 Dependent Variables

The dependent variable of this study is the attitude variable towards the introduction of UBI. The specific question is “UBI is a system in which the government continuously provides a certain amount of money to all citizens regardless of their age, income level, and employment status to ensure that everyone can maintain a minimum standard of living. What do you think about introducing UBI in our country?” The response options are composed of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree (1)” to “strongly agree (5).” In order to measure attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI with the assumption of a tax burden, the following question was asked “If the government finances the UBI system through taxes, what is your opinion about introducing a UBI system in our country?” Respondents were asked to give their answers on a 5-point scale ranging from “Strongly oppose (1)” to “Strongly support (5)”. However, since the 2018 survey did not include questions on the introduction of UBI with the assumption of an increased tax burden, only the 2021 data were used for this analysis.

4.2.2 Independent Variables

In order to investigate the factors that influence attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI, we included variables in the model that have been particularly addressed in previous research. The measurement of income involved taking the natural logarithm of equalized household income, which was calculated by dividing the average monthly household income by the square root of the number of people in the household. Subjective class status was measured by asking respondents to rate their position on a 10-point Likert scale in response to the question, “If we consider the lowest rung of South Korean society to be 1 and the highest rung to be 10, where do you think you belong?” Home ownership was coded as 0 for “own house” and 1 for “monthly rent with deposit”, “monthly rent with deposit guarantee”, “monthly rent without deposit guarantee” or “no cost”. Housing is a crucial resource in Korea’s asset-based welfare system. In other words, homeownership can be used as a resource for social adaptation in situations where public welfare benefits are limited (Yang and Kim 2022), which can influence attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI. As a means of controlling for the impact of housing prices, we introduced residency in the Seoul metropolitan region as a variable. This was done because the cost of housing in the Seoul metropolitan region is higher than in other areas, and there has been a notable increase in housing prices there in recent times. Labor market status was coded as 1 for regular employment, 2 for self-employment, 3 for temporary/day

labor, and 4 for non-employment. Age groups were categorized as follows: 19 to 34 as youth, 35 to 49 as middle-aged, 50 to 64 as senior, and 65 and older as elderly. Gender was coded as 0 for male and 1 for female and used in the form of a dummy variable. Marital status was measured as 0 for widowed, divorced, never married and cohabiting, and 1 for married. Married households may be more inclined to oppose the introduction of UBI due to a combination of factors. The potential for higher household income through dual earners often provides greater financial stability, potentially reducing the perceived need for UBI. Additionally, married individuals typically have a larger family support network to rely on during times of social or economic risk. There may also be concerns about increased tax burdens to fund UBI, which could disproportionately affect dual-income households. Furthermore, worries about potential reductions in existing family-oriented welfare benefits might contribute to their opposition. Education level was coded as 0 for less than middle school graduation, 1 for high school graduate, and 2 for vocational college or higher. With regard to ideological factors, political orientation was assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from ‘very progressive (1)’ to ‘very conservative (5)’. The details and measurement methods of these variables are presented in Table 1.⁶

Table 1: Variables.

	Variables	Measurement
Dependent variable	Attitudes toward UBI	Strongly disagree = 1, slightly disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, slightly agree = 4, strongly agree = 5
	Attitude towards UBI with increased taxation premise	Strongly disagree = 1, slightly disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, slightly agree = 4, strongly agree = 5
Independent variable	Income(logged)	Equalized household income(logged)
	Subjective class status	Lowest(1) ~ Highest(10)
	Homeownership	Non-owner = 0, homeowner = 1
	Seoul metropolitan area	Non-Seoul metropolitan Area = 0, Seoul metropolitan Area = 1
	Labor market status	Regular employee = 0, Self-employed = 1, Temporary/ day laborer = 2, Non-employee = 3
	Age group	Youth(19–34) = 0, middle-aged(35–49) = 1, Senior(50–64) = 2, Elderly(65 or older) = 3
	Sex	Male = 0, Female = 1
	Marriage	Not married = 0, married = 1
	Education	Less than middle school graduation = 0, high school graduate = 1, vocational college or higher = 2
	Political ideology	Very liberal(1) – very conservative(5)

6 Note that the labor market status, age group, and education variables are nominal variables.

5 Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the variables used in the regression analysis are presented in Table 2. First, attitudes towards UBI became slightly more negative in 2021 compared to 2018. The attitude towards UBI with the assumption of increased taxation was 2.78, and as neutrality is represented by 3 points, we can see a strong tendency towards negativity regarding UBI that requires increased taxation. With respect to homeownership, in 2018, 65 % of all respondents reported owning a home, while in 2021, this figure increased to 69 %. In terms of labor market status, in both 2018 and 2021, non-employed status was predominant, while temporary/day laborers remained the lowest proportion. Regarding age groups, a relatively even distribution across age groups was observed in 2018, while the older age group had a relatively higher representation in 2021. In terms of marital status, in 2018, 56 % of respondents were married, while in 2021, this percentage increased to 69 %. In terms of education, the category “Vocational college or higher” had the highest representation.

Figure 1 shows how attitudes towards UBI have changed before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, by variable used in the regression analysis. Note that the responses were recoded by combining “Strongly Disagree” and “Slightly Disagree” into “Disagree” and “Slightly Agree” and “Strongly Agree” into “Agree” to derive the results. First, with respect to gender, it can be observed that among men, there was an approximately 8.5 % point increase in negative perceptions of UBI after experiencing the first disaster relief payment. Among women, on the other hand, the most notable change was an increase in neutral opinions. In terms of age groups, the middle-aged demographic experienced a significant decrease of about 14 % points in positive perceptions, while neutral opinions increased significantly. Thus, a significant portion of the middle-aged group that had positive attitudes toward UBI in 2018 shifted to a neutral stance in 2021. Conversely, the older group did not show any significant changes. In terms of marital status, the unmarried group showed an increase in positive attitudes towards UBI, while the married group showed a decrease in positive attitudes and an increase in negative and neutral attitudes. In terms of educational attainment, the group with a college degree or higher showed notable changes, with positive attitudes decreasing by almost 10 % points and neutral attitudes increasing significantly.

Regarding the relationship between equalized household income and UBI, as with subjective social status, there was no clear trend in 2018. However, in 2021, it can be seen that the higher the household income, the more negative the attitude toward

Table 2: Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Number of observations		Mean(ratio)		Std. dev.		Min		Max	
Year	2018	2021	2018	2021	2018	2021	2018	2021	2018	2021
Attitudes toward UBI	839	1,087	3.06	2.93	1.20	1.11	1	1	5	5
Attitude towards UBI with increased taxation premise		1,090		2.78		1.12		1		5
Income(logged)	849	1,101	5.25	5.47	1.04	0.73	0	0	9.35	7.66
Subjective class status	849	1,101	5.00	5.23	1.70	1.51	1	1	10	10
Homeownership(1 = Homeowner)	849	1,101	0.65	0.69	0.48	0.46	0	0	1	1
Seoul metropolitan area(1 = yes)	849	1,101	0.39	0.50	0.49	0.50	0	0	1	1
Labor market status	849	1,101					1	1	4	4
Regular employee	268	349	31.57	31.7						
Self-employed	146	262	17.2	23.8						
Temporary/day laborer	76	96	8.95	8.72						
Non-employee	359	394	42.29	35.79						
Age group	849	1,101					1	1	4	4
Youth	185	160	21.79	14.53						
Middle-aged	211	262	24.85	23.8						
Senior	221	426	26.03	38.69						
Elderly	232	253	27.33	22.98						
Sex(1 = Female)	849	1,101	0.54	0.58	0.50	0.49	0	0	1	1
Marriage(1 = Married)	849	1,101	0.56	0.69	0.50	0.46	0	0	1	1
Education	849	1,101					1	1	3	3
Less than middle school graduation	224	280	26.38	25.43						
High school graduate	218	383	25.68	34.79						
Vocational college or higher	407	438	47.94	39.78						
Political ideology	849	1,101	2.76	2.95	0.99	0.96	1	1	5	5

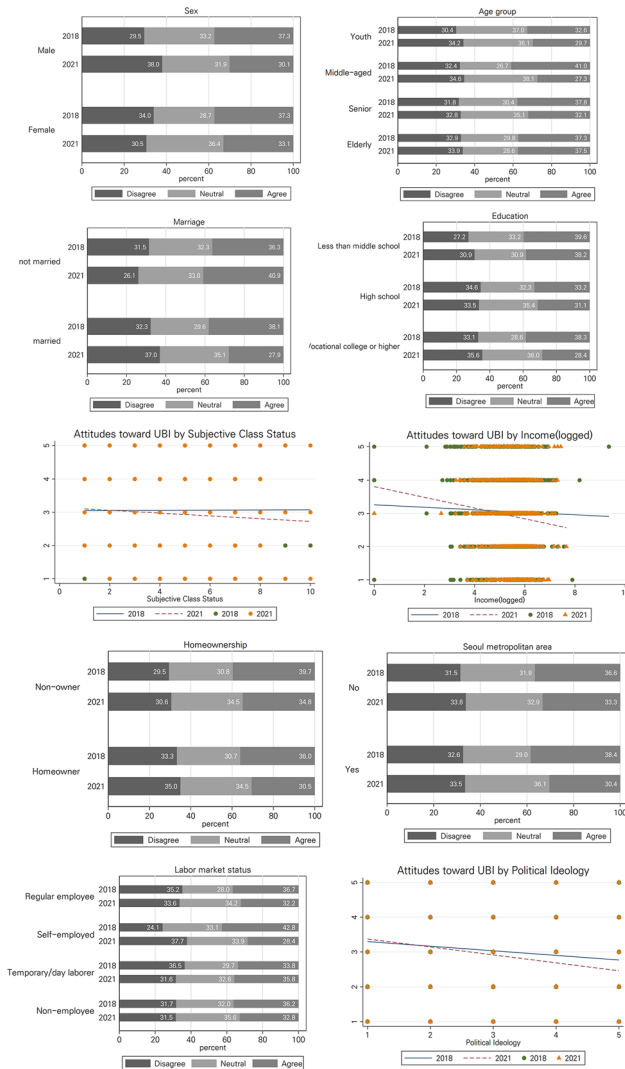


Figure 1: Attitude changes toward UBI before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

the introduction of UBI. Regarding home ownership status, there was an increase in neutral attitudes regardless of home ownership status. Regarding residence in the Seoul metropolitan area, there was a significant decrease in positive attitudes and an increase in neutral attitudes among the Seoul metropolitan area group. Regarding

labor market status, there was an approximately 15 % point decrease in positive attitudes among the self-employed group, accompanied by a significant increase in negative attitudes. Finally, in terms of political ideology, both in 2018 and 2021, the more conservative the ideology, the more negative the attitude toward the introduction of UBI, and this trend is stronger in 2021.

5.2 Ordinal Logistic Regression Results

The results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis on attitudes towards UBI before and after the COVID-19 pandemic are presented in Figure 2. Specific figures from the regression analysis can be found in Appendix 1. Each figure shows the regression coefficients and 95 % confidence intervals for attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI for each variable. First, with respect to income, there was no significant effect in 2018; however, by 2021, higher income levels were associated with more negative attitudes toward the introduction of UBI. This interpretation suggests that as income levels increase, the perceived utility of the UBI decreases, leading to negative attitudes towards its introduction. On the other hand, homeownership status showed that in 2018, homeowners had more negative attitudes toward UBI than those who did not own a home, but this effect disappeared by 2021. Meanwhile, factors such as residence in the Seoul metropolitan area, subjective class attitudes, and labor market status were all statistically insignificant before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding age groups, it can be observed that in 2021, the senior group had a more positive attitude toward the introduction of a UBI compared to the youth group.

In terms of gender, in 2018, women had more negative attitudes toward the introduction of UBI than men; however, by 2021, the opposite trend emerged, indicating a more positive disposition among women. This potentially confusing shift can be understood by referring to Figure 1, which shows that in 2018, men expressed less negative opinions than women. By 2021, however, both negative and neutral attitudes increased among both men and women, ultimately resulting in women being relatively more supportive of UBI than men. Specifically, negative attitudes decreased among women while neutral attitudes increased. Notably, this contradicts the findings of Vlandas (2021), who analyzed European data on UBI and found that men were more supportive of UBI than women. In the case of South Korea, the results suggest a contrasting pattern, possibly indicating that women, given their higher burden of care responsibilities and greater labor market instability, have more

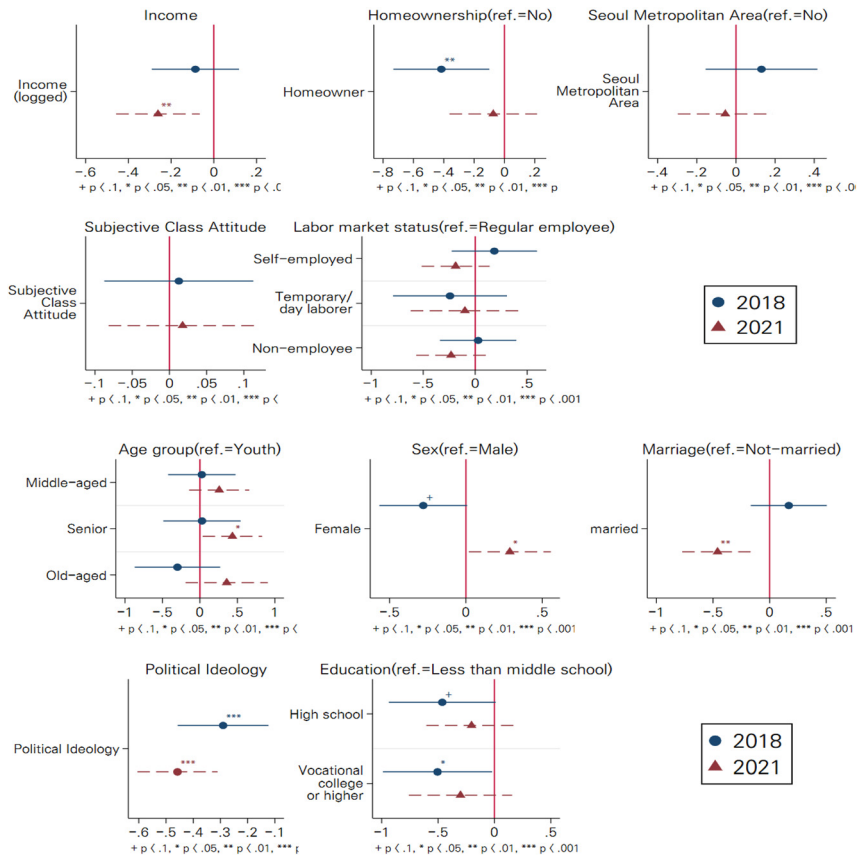


Figure 2: Results of ordinal logistic regression analysis on attitudes toward UBI before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Note: Please refer to Appendix 1 for detailed regression analysis results.

positive attitudes toward UBI compared to men. However, this interpretation should be treated with caution.

In terms of marriage, the married group in 2021 showed a more negative attitude towards the introduction of a UBI compared to the unmarried group. It can be interpreted that the married group may be more likely to oppose the introduction of a UBI due to the possibility of higher household income through dual income households and a relatively higher likelihood of having access to social safety nets to mitigate social risks compared to the unmarried group. Regarding educational attainment, in 2018, the higher-educated group was more opposed to the introduction of a UBI than the group with less than middle school education. In particular, the group with a vocational college or higher education showed stronger opposition. By

2021, however, there were no significant differences in attitudes toward UBI based on educational attainment. Finally, in relation to political ideology, those who are politically conservative are more likely to be negative about the introduction of UBI, which is consistent with the results of previous studies (Kim 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot 2020; Vlandas 2021).

In fact, the factors that significantly influence attitudes toward basic income after COVID-19 are closely related to attitudes toward the government's response to COVID-19. The results of an additional binary logistic regression analysis on attitudes towards the government's response to COVID-19 are presented in Appendix 2. This analysis was conducted by coding responses to the question "Do you think the current government is handling the 'response to the novel coronavirus infection' well or poorly?" as 1 for 'handling well' and 0 for 'handling poorly' and 'neither'. The same independent variables used in the previous analysis were used in this binary logistic regression. As can be seen from the results of the analysis, the likelihood of rating the government's response to COVID-19 positively decreases as income increases. Compared to the youth group, both the middle-aged and senior groups are more likely to have a positive attitude towards the government's response. In addition, compared to men, women are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the government's response, while those who are politically conservative are more likely to have a negative attitude toward the government's response. These analytical results are similar to those found in the analysis of attitudes toward basic income. They indicate that individuals who have a positive attitude towards the government's response to COVID-19 are more likely to have a positive attitude towards the basic income provided by the government.

These analytical findings are consistent with the research of Yang, Yun, and Jang (2021), which showed that higher levels of trust in the government are correlated with more positive attitudes toward basic income. In other words, individuals who positively evaluate the government's policy responses to the national crisis of COVID-19 are more likely to have positive attitudes towards basic income initiatives, such as the disaster relief funds implemented by the government. Interestingly, the study shows that attitudes toward the government's response to COVID-19 do not have a statistically significant relationship with attitudes toward expanding existing welfare policies. Although not presented in this study, our analysis of the impact of attitudes toward the government's response to COVID-19 on willingness to increase spending on health care, pensions for the elderly, and unemployment benefits yielded no statistically significant results. Conversely, these attitudes had a statistically significant positive impact on views regarding the expansion of the basic income. This finding is consistent with the analysis by Khaltar Odkhuu and Kim (2022), who found that the perceived effectiveness of the government's COVID-19 prevention policy did not have a statistically significant effect on attitudes toward welfare policies.

In conclusion, attitudes toward basic income in the post-COVID-19 era are significantly influenced by individuals' evaluations of the government's response to the pandemic. This suggests that positive evaluations of the disaster relief funds provided by the government at the time may have translated into favorable attitudes toward basic income in general. It is important to note, however, that attitudes towards the government's policy response did not significantly affect views on expanding existing welfare spending. Furthermore, this shift in attitudes towards basic income warrants deeper analysis. It remains unclear whether this change is based on a thorough understanding of the principles and content of a basic income, or whether it represents a short-term shift based primarily on trust in the government. This distinction is crucial for understanding the sustainability and depth of public support for basic income initiatives.

Next, we conducted post-hoc tests to determine whether the changes in attitudes toward the introduction of a basic income between 2018 and 2021 were statistically significant. The results of these tests are shown in Table 3. In this study, we used the Wald test for our post-hoc analysis. The Wald test is particularly useful in this context because it evaluates the significance of individual coefficients within a regression model. By applying this test, I can determine whether the observed changes in the independent variables between the two time points are statistically significant, ensuring that the differences are not due to random variation or sampling error. This increases the rigor of the analysis and provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to changes in public attitudes toward UBI. Thus, incorporating the Wald test strengthens the robustness of the findings by confirming that the differences observed between 2018 and 2021 are indeed meaningful, rather than merely descriptive.

The analysis results show statistically significant differences in attitudes towards basic income based on gender and marital status. In terms of gender, in 2018 men were more positive towards the introduction of basic income compared to women, while in 2021 this trend was reversed. As can be seen from the descriptive statistics presented earlier, women's attitudes towards basic income remained relatively stable, while men's attitudes became significantly more negative after COVID-19. This finding contrasts with previous research suggesting that men were either more positive than women towards a basic income or that there were no gender differences (Roosma and van Oorschot 2020; Vlandas 2021; Yang, Yun, and Jang 2021). In terms of marital status, married individuals became more negative towards the introduction of a basic income compared to unmarried individuals. This shift is particularly interesting given that the COVID-19 disaster relief payments were proportional to household size. The fact that married individuals developed more negative attitudes toward the introduction of a basic income compared to unmarried individuals, despite potentially receiving larger payments, warrants further in-depth analysis.

Finally, the results of the comparison between the attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI and the attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI under the assumption of

Table 3: Wald test results for changes in independent variables between 2018 and 2021.

Variables	Coefficient (standard error)	Wald chi-square	p-value
Income(logged)	−0.155 (0.146)	1.11	0.291
Subjective class status	0.003 (0.073)	0	0.966
Homeownership(ref. = Non-owner)	0.370+ (0.223)	2.75	0.097
Seoul metropolitan area (ref. = No)	−0.189 (0.195)	0.94	0.333
Labor market status(ref. = Regular employee)			
Self-employed	−0.378 (0.275)	1.89	0.169
Temporary/day laborer	0.164 (0.390)	0.18	0.674
Non-employee	−0.254 (0.258)	0.97	0.325
Age group(ref. = Youth)			
Middle-aged	0.222 (0.314)	0.50	0.480
Senior	0.387 (0.341)	1.29	0.256
Elderly	0.660 (0.409)	2.61	0.106
Sex(ref. = male)	0.570** (0.204)	7.83	0.005
Marriage(ref. = Not married)	−0.616** (0.237)	6.75	0.009
Education(ref. = less than middle school graduation)			
High school graduate	0.298 (0.323)	0.85	0.357
Vocational college or higher	0.247 (0.345)	0.51	0.475
Political ideology	−0.126 (0.115)	1.21	0.272

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, + p < 0.1.

a tax burden are presented in Figure 3. First, regarding income levels, there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards the introduction of a UBI across income levels when tax burden is assumed. However, when no tax burden is assumed, people with higher income levels tend to be against the introduction of a UBI. Conversely, when tax burden is assumed, individuals regardless of income level are more likely to have a negative attitude towards the introduction of a UBI. This can be interpreted as

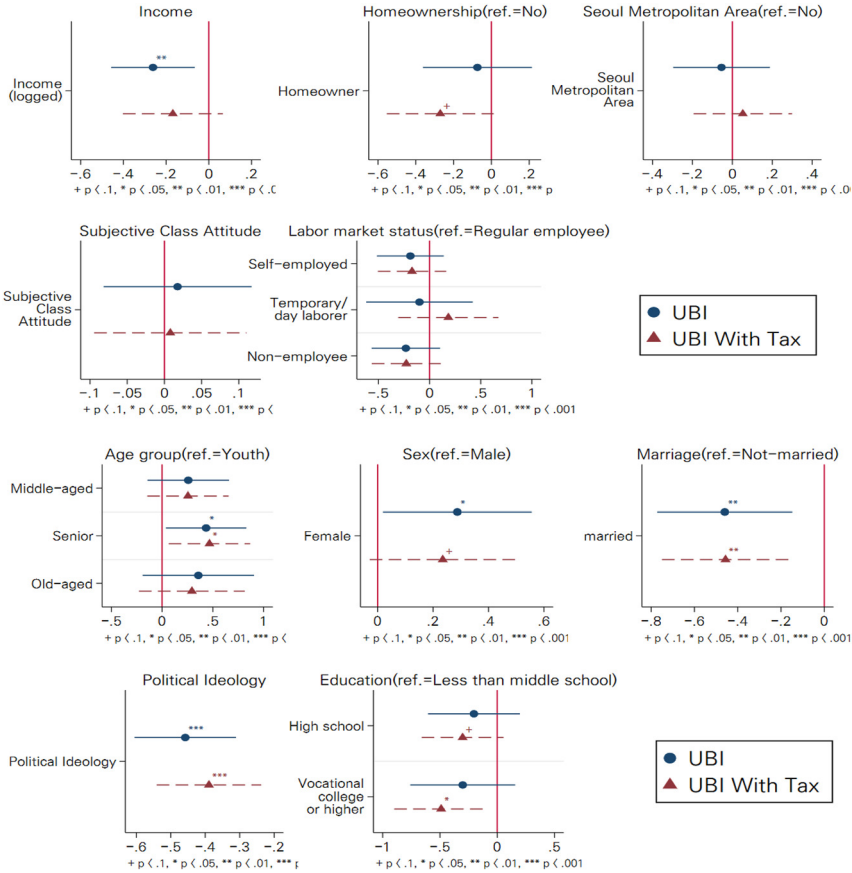


Figure 3: Results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis on the introduction of UBI and the introduction of UBI under the assumption of tax burden. Note: Please refer to Appendix 1 for detailed regression analysis results.

individuals being in favor of a UBI because it benefits them personally, but a “not out of my pocket” phenomenon is observed regarding the tax burden (Yang, Yun, and Jang 2021). Subjective class status did not yield statistically significant differences.

Regarding homeownership status, similar to the situation in 2018 where homeowners had more negative attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI than non-homeowners, in the scenario where taxes are assumed to increase, homeowners continue to have more negative attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI than those who do not own a home. However, when tax increases were assumed, the homeownership group had a more negative attitude toward the introduction of a UBI than the non-homeownership group. In Korean society, housing serves as an important

resource for individuals and families to mitigate social risks (Kim 2018). Therefore, most citizens have had to invest a considerable amount of time and money to purchase homes. In this context, additional taxation for the introduction of a UBI may significantly predispose homeowners to have a negative attitude towards such an introduction. Indeed, prior research suggests that homeowners are more likely to oppose policies that involve taxation to expand or redistribute welfare spending (Ansell 2014; Ansell and Cansunar 2021). Residence in the Seoul metropolitan area and labor market status did not yield statistically significant differences.

Regarding the age groups, the senior group shows a more positive attitude towards the introduction of a UBI compared to the youth group, regardless of the presence or absence of tax burdens. Consequently, it can be concluded that the senior group has the most positive attitude towards the introduction of a UBI compared to the youth group. Regarding gender, women express a more positive attitude towards the introduction of a UBI compared to men, regardless of the tax burden. However, when the tax burden is taken into account, there is a statistically significant difference at the 0.1 level of significance, which indicates a lower propensity to support. This can be interpreted as the 'Noomp' phenomenon mentioned earlier being observed among females. In terms of marital status, the married group shows a negative attitude towards the introduction of a UBI compared to the unmarried group, regardless of the tax burden. This could be explained by the fact that dual-income households may have higher household incomes and more family members who can benefit from social protection, leading to opposition to a UBI. Consistent with the 2018 findings, educational attainment continues to be associated with more negative attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI under the assumption of tax increases, with higher levels of education correlating with greater opposition. Regarding ideological factors, a conservative stance is associated with a negative attitude towards the introduction of a UBI, regardless of the tax burden.

6 Conclusions

This study empirically analyzed how attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI in South Korean society evolved before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it examined how attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI changed under the assumption of tax increases, using data from 2021. South Korea's experience with nationwide cash transfers under the guise of "Emergency Disaster Relief Funds" during the COVID-19 period provided a unique opportunity to assess how attitudes toward the introduction of a UBI changed before and after the experience of UBI-like cash payments to the entire population.

Our analysis reveals a notable shift in attitudes towards Universal Basic Income (UBI) between 2018 and 2021, with an overall trend towards more neutral or negative views. Contrary to prior research suggesting increased support for UBI following the COVID-19 pandemic, our findings indicate a more cautious stance, particularly among men, middle-aged individuals, and the self-employed. This suggests that rather than fostering greater acceptance, direct experiences with cash transfers and policy discussions may have contributed to a more reserved perspective on UBI. Future research employing qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews, could provide deeper insights into these attitudinal shifts.

A key finding is the changing role of gender in UBI attitudes. While women were more skeptical of UBI in 2018, their stance remained stable in 2021, whereas men's attitudes shifted towards greater opposition. This divergence may reflect differing economic vulnerabilities, with women experiencing greater labor market instability and caregiving burdens. Marital status also plays a significant role, as married individuals became more negative towards UBI, possibly due to higher household incomes and existing social safety nets. Additionally, educational disparities in attitudes observed in 2018 disappeared by 2021, while political conservatism remained a consistent predictor of opposition to UBI.

Lastly, our results highlight the influence of trust in government on UBI support. Individuals who viewed the government's COVID-19 response positively were more likely to favor UBI but did not necessarily support broader welfare expansion. Furthermore, tax assumptions significantly shape attitudes, with opposition to UBI increasing when tax burdens are explicitly considered, regardless of income level. This suggests a "Noomp" effect, where individuals support benefits when personal costs are unclear but withdraw support when financial trade-offs are evident. These findings underscore the complexity of UBI attitudes and point to key areas for further exploration. In summary, while the COVID-19 pandemic period provided the entire population with firsthand experience of cash benefits similar to UBI under the label of "emergency disaster relief funds," attitudes toward UBI have generally shifted toward caution. This suggests that the social legitimacy for the introduction of UBI in South Korean society has not been convincingly established (Chung, Taylor-Gooby, and Leruth 2018). Interestingly, the increase in cautious attitudes toward UBI in 2021 compared to 2018, when specific experience with UBI was lacking but understanding was relatively low, suggests that experience with a particular policy may paradoxically reduce preference for that policy. Furthermore, the emergence of a "Noomp" effect when tax burdens are assumed in the context of UBI implementation suggests the need for extensive deliberation on how to build societal consensus on the inevitable tax increases as part of the process of advancing welfare systems in the future.

This can be interpreted as being somewhat related to the characteristics of Korea's social security system. Korea's social security system is institutionalized to

target only those with relatively high incomes and stable employment in the labor market, centered around social insurance (Yoon 2019). It is also characterized by asset-based welfare, where individuals or families respond to social risks by accumulating private assets (Kim 2018). In this context, welfare in Korean society tends to be perceived as a private good that individuals must acquire through competition in the market, rather than as a public good realized through collective responsibility and solidarity of social members. Therefore, even though there was an indirect experience of basic income through emergency disaster relief funds, negative perceptions of basic income may intensify due to the aversion to the tax burden necessary to provide a certain level of basic income to all citizens.

The limitations of this study are as follows. First, it is necessary to investigate how the satisfaction with existing welfare programs affects attitudes toward the introduction of UBI. In the current situation where welfare spending and budget are relatively small compared to other western welfare states, it is important to analyze whether those who have a negative view of existing welfare programs are in favor of the introduction of UBI or whether those who have a positive view of the welfare system also support the introduction of UBI. Although the 2018 KGSS data included items to measure satisfaction with existing welfare programs, unfortunately, they were not included in the 2021 survey, and therefore could not be used as a variable in this study. If future KGSS surveys include these items again, this limitation can be addressed. Second, a comparative study is needed to examine attitudes toward the introduction of UBI in countries that have provided universal cash benefits. Through this, it is necessary to analyze whether the changes in attitudes toward the introduction of UBI are unique to Korea or whether they are a universal characteristic observed in countries that have experienced universal cash benefits.

Appendix 1: Results of ordinal logistic regression analysis on attitudes toward UBI before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and under the assumption of tax burden

Variables	2018	2021	UBI With Tax
Income(logged)	−0.086 (0.104)	−0.261** (0.100)	−0.168 (0.119)
Subjective class status	0.013 (0.051)	0.018 (0.051)	0.008 (0.052)
Homeownership(ref. = Non-owner)	−0.416** (0.161)	−0.074 (0.147)	−0.271+ (0.144)

(continued)

Variables	2018	2021	UBI With Tax
Seoul metropolitan area (ref. = No)	0.131 (0.146)	−0.054 (0.124)	0.052 (0.126)
Labor market status(ref. = Regular employee)			
Self-employed	0.184 (0.209)	−0.188 (0.167)	−0.172 (0.170)
Temporary/day laborer	−0.242 (0.280)	−0.099 (0.266)	0.183 (0.250)
Non-employee	0.028 (0.187)	−0.232 (0.171)	−0.228 (0.172)
Age group(ref. = Youth)			
Middle-aged	0.025 (0.230)	0.258 (0.205)	0.255 (0.205)
Senior	0.028 (0.263)	0.434* (0.202)	0.466* (0.205)
Elderly	−0.300 (0.291)	0.357 (0.280)	0.294 (0.266)
Sex(ref. = male)	−0.279+ (0.147)	0.288* (0.137)	0.235+ (0.134)
Marriage(ref. = Not married)	0.169 (0.171)	−0.460** (0.159)	−0.456** (0.150)
Education(ref. = less than middle school graduation)			
High school graduate	−0.463+ (0.242)	−0.203 (0.205)	−0.302+ (0.182)
Vocational college or higher	−0.505* (0.247)	−0.301 (0.234)	−0.489* (0.209)
Political ideology	−0.290*** (0.085)	−0.458*** (0.075)	−0.389*** (0.077)
/cut1	−3.941*** (0.667)	−4.989*** (0.663)	−4.308*** (0.736)
/cut2	−2.672*** (0.654)	−3.614*** (0.659)	−2.854*** (0.735)
/cut3	−1.338* (0.648)	−2.097** (0.654)	−1.416+ (0.731)
/cut4	0.220 (0.655)	−0.238 (0.661)	0.353 (0.741)
Observations	839	1,087	1,090
Model chi-square	29.11*	73.21***	67.20***
Pseudo R2	0.0160	0.0290	0.0264

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, + p < 0.1.

Appendix 2: Results of logistic regression analysis on the attitude towards the government's response to COVID-19

	Attitude towards the government's response to COVID-19
Income(logged)	−0.352* (0.166)
Subjective class status	0.082 (0.055)
Homeownership(ref. = Non-owner)	0.234 (0.173)
Seoul metropolitan area (ref. = No)	−0.212 (0.147)
Labor market status(ref. = Regular employee)	
Self-employed	−0.394* (0.201)
Temporary/day laborer	−0.297 (0.291)
Non-employee	−0.454* (0.202)
Age group(ref. = Youth)	
Middle-aged	0.487* (0.244)
Senior	0.696** (0.249)
Elderly	0.422 (0.325)
Sex(ref. = male)	0.300+ (0.155)
Marriage(ref. = Not married)	−0.187 (0.185)
Education(ref. = less than middle school graduation)	
High school graduate	−0.358 (0.240)
Vocational college or higher	−0.795** (0.259)
Political ideology	−0.418*** (0.082)
Constant	3.440*** (0.977)
Observations	1,086
Model chi-square	62.27***
Pseudo R2	0.0659

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, + p < 0.1.

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