

What Forms of Redistribution Do People Want in South Korea?: Flat Rate, Positive Discrimination, or Earnings-related*

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This article investigated the preferences of citizens in Korean society regarding three types of resource allocation methods: flat rate, positive discrimination, and earnings-related. In addition, the study sought to identify significant factors influencing these preferences. Finally, by empirically analyzing how attitudes toward public welfare vary based on the preferred type of universal allocation, the paper aimed to empirically understand the terrain of welfare politics and related support coalitions. The analysis results reveal the following: Firstly, the preference for flat-rate benefits, which provide benefits to all individuals in South Korean society, is the highest. Second, in contrast to the group favoring flat-rate benefits, the group favoring positive discrimination has a more positive attitude toward the expansion of public welfare. Conversely, there is little significant difference in attitudes towards the expansion of public welfare between the groups favoring flat-rate benefits and those favoring income-related benefits. Therefore, there is a need for welfare policies that can encompass both of these groups and address their shared concerns about welfare expansion.

Keywords: *preferences for redistributive policies, flat-rate benefits, earnings-related benefits, positive discrimination, welfare preference, Korean society*

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Introduction

Redistribution policies can be defined as government initiatives aimed at correcting market-generated primary distributions by compensating for market disadvantages. In essence, redistribution is a widely acknowledged means of alleviating the hardships of the impoverished and vulnerable segments of society through sacrifices made by the better-off strata (Mau 2004).¹ This framework allows the welfare state to establish a secondary income distribution system that differs from market-based distribution in terms of distributional principles and objectives. In other words, welfare state policies correct market outcomes by redistributing income through taxation and social insurance contributions (Koos and Sachweh 2017). The procurement and allocation of welfare resources is at the core of the operation of the welfare system. Consequently, ensuring the legitimacy of the “who gives, who gains” principle becomes crucial (Beramendi and Rehm 2016). For example, if welfare benefits are provided in a regressive manner relative to tax burdens, with benefits concentrated in low-income strata, there is a risk of strong resistance from higher-income segments that contribute more in taxes, potentially leading to political conflict.

Therefore, to ensure the legitimacy of redistributive policies, it is essential to extend benefits to the entire spectrum of society, thereby equalizing the burden and benefits of welfare resources to some extent. The legitimacy of the welfare state depends to a large extent not on benefits directed primarily at the impoverished, but rather on the benefits provided to the upper strata, which include ordinary workers and employees, making the inclusion of non-poor strata crucial for securing political support for the welfare state (Leisering and Leibfried 1999). As a result, the need for an

¹ The welfare state has two fundamental objectives: insurance and redistribution. The former involves the provision of a social safety net to ensure a stable livelihood for citizens facing social risks such as unemployment, sickness, retirement and childbirth throughout the life course (Barr 2001). The latter involves direct redistribution of resources by the state to address problems of poverty and inequality that arise in the market. Redistribution can take various forms and need not rely solely on sacrifices by the better-off. For example, while social insurance systems provide a form of horizontal redistribution by redistributing income across the life course, vertical redistribution, such as through progressive tax systems and social expenditures such as public assistance, ensures greater societal benefits for the lower income strata. Finally, there is also implicit redistribution between groups, such as in health care, where services are implicitly redistributed from healthy individuals to those in need (Esping-Andersen and Myles 2018).

inclusive welfare state that can strengthen the loyalty of the middle class through insurance schemes and income-related benefits has been consistently emphasized (Korpi and Palme 1998; Brady and Boistic 2015). The application of means testing in the allocation of welfare resources to certain low-income or socially vulnerable groups leads to a decrease in public support for income redistribution policies, which subsequently reduces the effectiveness of redistribution. Therefore, an approach that encompasses the entire population and provides income-linked benefits, while recognizing the different desires of different income groups, may have greater redistributive effects (Korpi and Palme 1998).

In the context of defining universalism, discussions to date have focused primarily on the aspect of universal inclusion. In the realm of resource allocation, the dimension of universality refers to the equal treatment of individuals in similar circumstances. Anttonen et al. (2012) identified three main types within this framework. These three types, which will be elaborated on subsequently, are flat-rate benefits, positive discrimination, and earnings-related benefits. Flat-rate benefits involve providing a uniform monetary payment to all individuals. Within the framework of universalism, this approach is referred to as positive discrimination because it provides additional benefits to the more needy impoverished strata (Skocpol 1991). Lastly, earnings-related benefits refer to a mechanism compensating all individuals at an equal proportion for the income loss suffered. A prominent example of this is income-related social insurance.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the preferences of citizens in Korean society for three allocation methods under the aspect of universal allocation, and to identify the factors that influence these preferences. In addition, the study seeks to explore the possible relationships between preferences for the three allocation methods and attitudes toward public welfare. Unlike Western welfare states, South Korea, from its vigorous pursuit of economic development in the 1960s until the early 1990s, relied on the role of public welfare as performed by a developing country. Economic growth in developing countries created jobs, which in turn alleviated poverty and inequality in lieu of significant public welfare efforts. However, the significant increase in public welfare spending since 1997 has not proven to be as effective in addressing issues of poverty and inequality because it has not fully replaced the functions of economic growth. Despite having established a system that is institutionally similar to that of advanced welfare countries, South Korea still ranked 10th among the 35 countries that make up the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in terms of

disposable income-based Gini coefficient as of 2020 (OECD 2023) and has the highest elderly poverty rate among OECD countries. While an adequate redistribution of resources has not been effectively realized through welfare systems, citizens have sought to respond to societal risks at the individual or family level by investing in private assets such as real estate, stocks, and cryptocurrencies. Therefore, considering how to effectively redistribute economic resources is relevant to South Korean society at this time.

In order to alleviate the problems of poverty and inequality through redistributive policies and to ensure their legitimacy, it is crucial to first examine how preferences for the three types of universal allocation mentioned above manifest themselves in the context of South Korean society. Furthermore, it is imperative to identify factors that statistically significantly influence these preferences. Lastly, through an empirical analysis of how attitudes toward public welfare vary depending on preferences for these universal allocation types, this study aims to empirically elucidate the landscape of support alliances related to welfare politics.

Literature Review on Redistribution Mechanisms

Previous studies of redistribution have focused on the debate between universalism and selectivism in the context of universal inclusion. Simply put, the former involves selecting the entire societal population as recipients, while the latter involves selecting specific groups as recipients based on certain criteria. In the case of selectivism, only the most vulnerable individuals in society may be selected as recipients, or it may involve the selection of specific groups more generally, not necessarily limited to vulnerable strata. The former is commonly referred to as residualism, and the latter can be referred to as selectivism in a broader sense. Universalism and selectivism are two concepts that can be understood as having different value orientations, with universalism reflecting social effectiveness and selectivism reflecting the value of efficiency (Gilbert and Terrell 2013).

The advantages and disadvantages of universalism and selectivism are vividly demonstrated (Laenen and Gugushvili 2021). First, universalism, unlike selectivism, is considered more practically justifiable because it treats all citizens equally, even though it burdens the wealthy and a small portion of the population who benefit from the provisions with higher taxes and distributes benefits to the majority who receive less. However, residualism has been criticized for reinforcing stigmatization of groups receiving social

benefits. Research by O'Grady (2022) on welfare reform processes in the UK suggests that as welfare benefits are increasingly provided in the form of means-tested residualism, a reduced sense of social solidarity emerges between welfare recipients and other citizens, exacerbating the stigma associated with being part of the welfare recipient group. Second, due to the significant administrative costs involved in selecting beneficiaries, selectivism tends to involve higher administrative costs than universalism, making the latter a potentially more efficient option. Finally, from a cost-benefit perspective, universalism stands out as a fair distribution of burdens, as benefits are extended to all citizens.

Conversely, selectivism has certain advantages over universalism. First, in the case of middle- and high-income groups, if the potential losses from taxation outweigh the potential benefits such as services, they are more likely to prefer selectivism with lower tax burdens than universalism (Pierson 1994). Indeed, when private alternatives for mitigating social risks exist, these groups tend to react negatively to the expansion of public welfare spending and are more inclined to favor residual welfare options that minimize their own burdens (Busemeyer and Iversen 2020). Second, from a procedural justice perspective, selectivism may be perceived as more efficient in providing assistance to those who truly need limited resources, especially when eligibility criteria are more stringent (Laenen and Gugushvili 2021).

However, to establish the legitimacy of redistributive policies, it is necessary to equalize the burden and benefits of welfare resources to some extent by extending benefits to the entire stratum. In this regard, it is essential to consider how resources should be allocated universally. Universal allocation involves treating individuals in similar circumstances equally, and it can be broadly categorized into three types (Anttonen et al. 2012).

Firstly, flat-rate benefits refer to providing everyone with an equal fixed amount of remuneration. This practice can be considered universalistic in nature due to its non-discriminatory treatment of all individuals through granting equal sums of remuneration. An illustrative case of this concept is the ongoing global discourse on universal basic income (UBI). Typically, UBI involves the regular provision of cash to all individuals, regardless of their labor market status or income level, without any requirements related to past contributions or behavior (Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017). However, as providing the same amount of remuneration to all makes it difficult to provide benefits at a sufficient level, there is criticism of the limited effectiveness of alleviating poverty and inequality solely through lower flat-rate benefits.

Second, positive discrimination refers to a method by which individuals with greater needs receive additional benefits within the framework of universalism by offering the same remuneration to those with similar desires (Skocpol 1991).² Titmuss (1974) also discussed the issue of whether compensation should be distributed equally or whether individuals with greater needs should receive greater benefits, arguing that positive discrimination is necessary to provide greater benefits to those with greater needs. In current times, this type of needs-based remuneration has been used as a means to increase the effectiveness of universal social policies in countries that implement universalism, and is essentially seen as a fine-tuning of universalist policies (Anttonen et al. 2012).

Third, earnings-related benefits refer to a method of compensating individuals for a proportional loss of income. Notably, income-related social insurance falls under this category. In the case of income-related social insurance, all participants contribute a proportional share of their income as premiums and then receive benefits in proportion to their lost income. As such, income-related social insurance can be considered universalistic in nature, as it compensates for an equal proportional loss of income for all those who experience income loss due to risk events. Goodin (1990, p.532), emphasizing the importance of income-related benefits in the political economy of welfare states, argues that in order to ensure the legitimacy of public welfare systems, it is necessary to provide benefits that are proportional to income, especially for those above the poverty line. In reality, self-interested high-income (skilled) workers are more likely to support the expansion of state insurance functions during economic downturns or periods of increased social risk because they experience greater income losses due to unemployment compared to low-income (low-skilled) workers, thus aligning with the expansion of the state's insurance function (Moene and Wallerstein 2001).

To date, studies of citizens' preferences for redistributive policies have focused primarily on the aspect of universal inclusion, specifically

² At first glance, selectivism and positive discrimination may appear to be similar concepts. However, unlike universalism, which selects the entire societal constituency as beneficiaries, selectivism operates on the principle of selecting only certain groups based on specific criteria. On the other hand, positive discrimination can be seen as a subset of universalism, where the entire societal constituency is selected as beneficiaries, and it strictly implies treating individuals in identical circumstances equally. Positive discrimination involves providing equal compensation to individuals with similar needs and providing additional benefits to the impoverished classes with higher needs within the framework of universalism. Therefore, it can be distinguished as a concept different from selectivism.

universalism versus selectivism (for a comprehensive review, see Laenen and Gugushvili 2021). However, as mentioned earlier, in the case of South Korea, effective redistribution of resources through welfare systems has not been adequately realized. Therefore, in order to meaningfully address issues of poverty and inequality, it is imperative to consider how to effectively redistribute economic resources. To do so, it is essential to first understand the preferences of citizens regarding the allocation of economic resources. In this context, this paper aims to identify the patterns of preferences within Korean society regarding the allocation of economic resources. Before proceeding with the specific analysis, a more detailed examination of redistributive policies within South Korean society is undertaken.

A Study of the Context of Redistributive Policies in South Korea and Attitudes toward Redistribution

As mentioned earlier, South Korea considered the role of public welfare from the 1960s, when economic development was actively pursued, until the early 1990s. During this period, as a developing country, economic growth created employment opportunities, which in turn helped alleviate poverty and inequality in lieu of significant public welfare provision. In other words, sustained economic development could be interpreted as having a redistributive function. After 1997, however, the substantial increase in public welfare spending could not substitute for the role of a developing country. In other words, the expansion of welfare spending was not sufficiently effective in addressing issues of poverty and inequality and could not replace the function of economic growth.

During the state-led industrialization process, South Korea adopted a social security system centered on social insurance, primarily for skilled workers in the petrochemical industry. In order to minimize the financial burden on the state, this system was designed to be financed solely by contributions from users and workers, thus avoiding direct financial obligations on the part of the state. Given the importance of skill formation in the industrialization process, South Korea followed an approach to vocational training similar to that of Japan, where skill formation was largely carried out within the firm, rather than a socially integrated system like that of Western European countries such as Germany, where skill formation is institutionalized regionally or occupationally (Yang 2017). In Korea's case, substantial funding for the chemical industry's industrialization was directed

through tax privileges and policy financing, leaving minimal resources available for public welfare provisions. As a result, the social security system, which is financed solely by user and worker contributions, was established to ensure a skilled workforce without imposing a significant fiscal burden on the government. As a result, the social security system exhibited characteristics of “regressive selectivism,” providing public social security to groups with relatively stable employment and income rather than to those most in need of benefits (Yoon 2019).

In fact, as shown in Figure 1, social insurance expenditures increased dramatically, rising from about 3.9 trillion KRW in 1990 to about 96 trillion KRW in 2015. While it is true that social service expenditures have also increased, from 550.5 billion KRW in 1990 to about 34.6 trillion KRW in 2015, and public assistance expenditures have similarly increased from 490 billion KRW in 1990 to 24.7 trillion KRW in 2015, as of 2015, social insurance accounts for about 61% of total social welfare expenditures of about 157.7 trillion KRW. In addition, there is a significant disparity between the enrollment rates of full-time and part-time employees in social insurance. As shown in Figure 1, in 2004, 72.5 percent of full-time employees were enrolled in the national pension, while only 37.7 percent of part-time employees were enrolled; even in 2022, this figure remained at 38.3 percent. In the case of health insurance, 73.8% of full-time employees were enrolled in 2004, compared to only 40.2% of part-time employees; by 2022, 94.5% of full-time employees were enrolled, compared to only 51.7% of part-time employees. For employment insurance, 61.5% of full-time employees were enrolled in 2004, and currently 92.2% are enrolled. In contrast, only 36.2% of part-time employees were enrolled in 2004, and the current enrolment rate is 54%.

For this reason, the public social security system was designed with an emphasis on social insurance. However, even within this framework, benefits have been concentrated mainly on full-time employees, who can be considered insiders in the labor market. As a result, the effective implementation of redistributive policies has faced challenges. In this context, it is imperative to identify the preferences of citizens in contemporary Korean society regarding the allocation of economic resources and to use this insight to promote more effective redistributive policies. In other words, in a Korean society where the social security system centered on social insurance has evolved to provide benefits proportional to insurance premiums, it is necessary to investigate whether preferences for earnings-related benefits are most pronounced. Conversely, in a situation where social benefits are

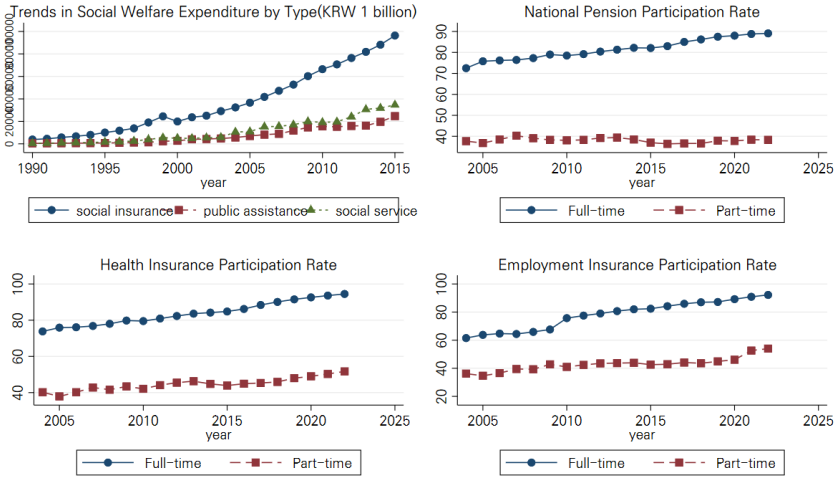


FIG. 1.—TRENDS IN SOCIAL WELFARE EXPENDITURE BY TYPE AND SOCIAL INSURANCE ENROLLMENT RATES

Sources: Ko et al. (2016) for trends in social welfare expenditure by type; Statistics Korea (2023) for social insurance participation rate.

concentrated among full-time employees, it is necessary to examine whether preferences for positive discrimination are relatively weaker.

On the other hand, when examining previous research on preferences for income redistribution policies in Korean society, a prevailing trend emerges in which higher income levels are associated with a tendency to oppose redistribution (Joo and Baek 2007; Huh and Kim 2016; Lee and Kim 2019). In addition, studies have also shown that support for redistribution tends to decrease with older age (Lee and Kim 2019) and higher levels of education (Joo and Baek, 2007; Lee and Kim 2019). Regarding gender, research findings on support for redistribution vary between women and men (Huh and Kim 2016; Lee and Kim 2019). In terms of political ideology, research suggests that conservative individuals have lower levels of support for redistribution (Joo and Baek 2007; Huh and Kim 2016).

Examining studies on preferences for universal inclusion between universalism and selectivism, Kim et al. (2014) argued that individuals with lower incomes tend to favor selective welfare, while individuals with higher incomes tend to favor universal welfare. In addition, individuals who are not engaged in economic activities tend to prefer universal welfare. Therefore,

they pointed out that the political basis for universal welfare support in Korea is more related to self-perception regarding welfare receipt than class identity. Huh and Kim (2016) emphasized that younger individuals and welfare recipients are more likely to support universalism. In addition, in terms of educational attainment, individuals with higher levels of education, especially beyond a bachelor's degree, are more likely to support universalism than those with less than a high school education. Finally, Lee et al. (2018) drew attention to the interaction effects of income and wealth. They suggested that even individuals with higher income levels may have a stronger preference for universal welfare and redistribution if their level of asset accumulation is low. However, those who accumulate assets based on income are more likely to prefer selective welfare, which carries a lower tax burden compared to universal welfare. In essence, they emphasized that if the trend of intensifying asset accumulation through real estate or financial investment is not curbed, the middle class and above may gradually withdraw from the alliance for universal welfare, making the establishment of such a system more difficult.

The importance of these previous studies lies in their empirical analysis of preferences for redistributive policies and the dichotomy between universalism and selectivism. However, there has been little empirical research on citizens' preferences for methods of allocating economic resources. Therefore, this study aims to elucidate the preference structure of Korean society for three types of universal allocation and to identify the factors that influence such preference structures. Moreover, by examining how attitudes toward public welfare are shaped based on these preferred types of resource allocation, this study seeks to understand the formation of coalition structures during the reform process of public welfare systems for the expansion of redistributive policies.

4. Research Method and Variables

Data and methodology

The data used in this study comes from the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS). Launched in 2003, the KGSS conducts annual surveys to measure structural changes in Korean society and generate data that can be widely and extensively used for international comparative research.³ The survey

³ Notably, the survey has been conducted every two years since 2014.

questionnaire includes not only recurring core questions for annual research, but also thematic modules for international comparative surveys such as the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) or the East Asian Social Survey (EASS). In particular, the 2021 edition includes items related to the allocation of economic resources, making it suitable for empirical validation of the core research questions of this study. The KGSS provides weighted variables (FINALWT) that account for sampling probabilities of household members, gender, age, region, and urbanity. These weights were applied using the `pweight` command in Stata/SE 17.0. The analytical approach used a multinomial logistic regression model to assess the probability of belonging to the three types of resource allocation in terms of economic resources. In addition, an ordinal logistic regression model was used to examine how attitudes toward public welfare differ based on preferences for these allocation methods.

Variables

(1) Dependent variables

The dependent variables of this study are preferences for methods of allocating economic resources and attitudes toward public welfare. First, with regard to the methods of allocating economic resources, the question “In your opinion, what should be the most important consideration when allocating economic resources in our society?” was used. Response options included: “People who have achieved or contributed the most should receive more,” “Everyone should receive about the same amount,” and “People in difficult circumstances should receive enough”. These response categories were used.⁴ Connecting each response category to previous studies, they can be matched to flat-rate benefits (“Everyone should receive roughly the same amount”), positive discrimination (“People in difficult circumstances should receive enough”), and earnings-related benefits (“People who have achieved or contributed the most should receive more”).

Regarding attitudes toward public welfare, the study used items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” for the question “The government should ensure a certain standard

⁴ The option “I don’t know” can also be selected, but in this study it was excluded from the analysis in order to focus on the analysis of clear attitudes towards the methods of allocation of economic resources.

of living for unemployed people.” Similarly, responses to the question “The government should reduce benefits for poor people” were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” However, reverse coding was used to ensure that higher scores reflected positive attitudes toward helping the impoverished. Finally, the question “It is the responsibility of the government to reduce income inequality between high-income and low-income individuals” was measured on a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”⁵ In summary, each of these items measured preferences for helping the unemployed, helping the impoverished, and redistributing income, respectively.

(2) Independent variables

To empirically validate factors that might influence preferences for the allocation of economic resources, the following variables were included in the analytical model. First, with respect to self-interest, which could influence attitudes toward redistributive policies, subjective and objective social class status were included. Regarding the influence of individual position within the income distribution on preferences for redistributive policies, Meltzer and Richard (1981) argued that as the gap between median and average incomes widens, individuals positioned around the median income are more likely to favor redistributive policies because they receive greater benefits from income redistribution consistent with the goal of income maximization. Similarly, Lupu and Pontusson (2011) found that when income inequality increases between the middle class and high-income groups, the middle class is more likely to support redistribution; however, when inequality increases between the middle class and low-income groups, the middle class is less likely to support redistribution. In terms of subjective social class status, Condon and Wichowsky (2020) found that individuals are more likely to support increased welfare spending when they compare themselves to higher social classes, but less likely to support redistributive policies when they compare themselves to lower classes, as evidenced by thought experiments. Thus, it can be argued that social class status is likely to have a statistically significant impact on preferences for the allocation of economic resources.

Objective social class status was measured using the concept of household equalized income, where the average monthly household income

⁵ For each of the three public welfare attitude measures, the response category “cannot decide” was excluded from the analysis.

was divided by the square root of the number of household members. Following the precedent of previous research on income decile categorization (Condon and Wichowsky 2020), household equalized income was divided into deciles. The lowest three deciles (1-3) were categorized as lower class, the middle four deciles (4-7) as middle class, and the highest three deciles (8-10) as upper class. Subjective social class status was assessed by asking, “If we consider the lowest stratum of Korean society to be 1 and the highest stratum to be 10, where do you think you belong?” This was measured on a 10-point Likert scale. Since the responses were concentrated around the middle class categories of 5 and 6, the divisions were made as follows: 1-4 points for lower class, 5-6 points for middle class, and 7-10 points for upper class.⁶

Homeownership was coded as 1 for homeowners and 0 for non-homeowners. However, given that welfare attitudes may vary according to housing prices and that the KGSS data lack specific variables for housing prices, dummy variables were introduced instead to represent metropolitan (Seoul/Gyeonggi-Do) and non-metropolitan areas. Previous studies have shown statistically significant effects of homeownership and housing asset prices on redistributive policies (Ansell 2014; Ansell and Cansunar 2021). 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. Sex was coded as 0 for men and 1 for women. Employment status was classified into regular employment, self-employment, temporary/day labor, and non-employment groups. Education level was coded as follows: Less than middle school (0), high school (1), vocational college (2), and college or higher (3). Finally, political ideology was measured using a Likert scale ranging from very progressive (1) to very conservative (5). These variables have been important factors in previous studies investigating preferences for redistributive policies. Therefore, they were also included in the analytical model of this study.

5. Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the regression analysis are

⁶ Previous studies of subjective social class status have found this concentration of responses in the middle class categories (Evans and Kelley 2004; Weisstanner and Armingeon 2022). It is worth noting that even if the analysis were conducted using divisions of 1-3 points, 4-7 points, and 8-10 points, there would be minimal difference in the analytical results of this study.

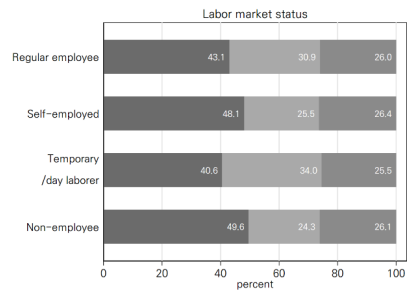
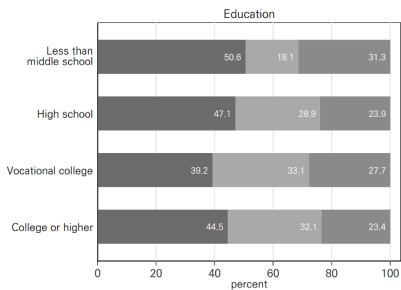
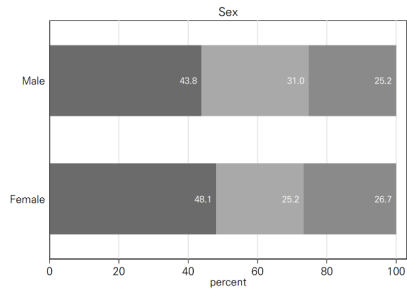
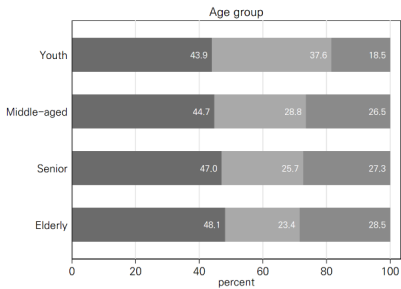
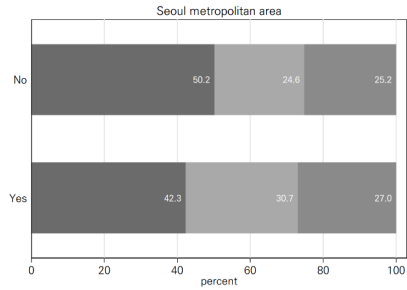
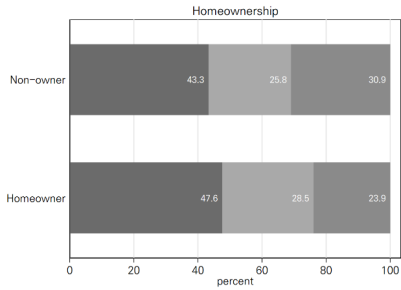
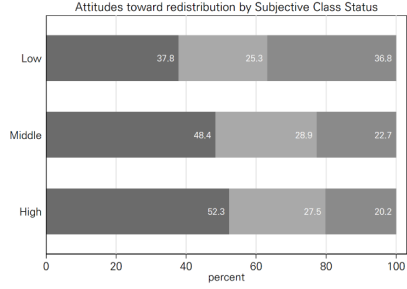
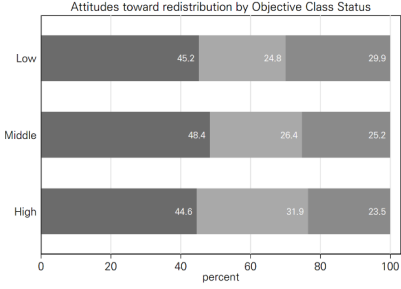
presented in Table 1. To begin with, examining the distribution of preferences for redistribution methods, it is observed that 46.3% of the total respondents prefer flat-rate benefits, while 27.7% favor earnings-related benefits and 26.1% opt for positive discrimination. Consequently, the preference for flat-rate benefits stands out as the highest in Korean society. For unemployment benefits, the mean of 3.18 is slightly higher than the median of 3, and the mean for poverty benefits is also slightly higher than 3. For preference for redistributive policies, the mean of 3.51 indicates a relatively higher level of preference compared to the previous two variables. Objective class status is distributed in a ratio of 3:4:3 for the lower, middle and upper classes, respectively, while subjective class status follows a ratio of 2.8:5.2:2. In terms of home ownership, 70% of the total respondents own a home, and about half of them live in the metropolitan area. In terms of age groups, the senior category has the highest proportion, and 58% of respondents are female. In terms of educational level, the highest proportion is in the high school category, and in terms of labor market status, the proportions are notable for regular employees and non-employees. The average political ideology score is 2.96, indicating a slightly progressive leaning.

The results of preferences for redistribution methods by variable are then presented in Figure 1. First, in relation to objective class status, regardless of the strata, a preference for flat-rate benefits is observed to be above 40%, while the preference for earnings-related benefits is relatively higher among the upper class. In contrast to objective class status, in terms of subjective class status, the lower class shows a higher preference for positive discrimination than other strata. In other words, the tendency to favor an allocation method that prioritizes economic resources for the socially disadvantaged becomes more pronounced among those who perceive themselves as belonging to the lower income group. Interestingly, it is noteworthy that the upper class demonstrates a higher preference for flat-rate benefits. As such, contrary to the anticipated expectation that preferences for earnings-related benefits would increase with higher income levels, the findings indicate a higher preference for flat-rate benefits.

Regarding homeownership status, homeowners have a slightly higher preference for earnings-related benefits compared to non-homeowners, but overall, preferences for redistribution methods do not differ significantly based on homeownership status. Regarding the Seoul metropolitan area, it can be observed that individuals who live in the Seoul metropolitan area have a relatively lower preference for earnings-related benefits compared to those who do not live in the area. In terms of age groups, the youth demographic

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	# of Samples	Mean (percent)	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Attitudes toward redistribution	1,074			1	3
Flat-rate benefits	497	46.3			
Earnings-related benefits	297	27.7			
Positive discrimination	280	26.1			
Supporting the unemployment	1,073	3.18	0.87	1	5
Supporting the poor	1,072	3.08	0.91	1	5
Preference for redistribution	1,071	3.51	0.91	1	5
Objective class status	1,093			1	3
Low	323	29.6			
Middle	437	39.9			
High	333	30.5			
Subjective class status	1,093			1	3
Low	303	27.7			
Middle	570	52.2			
High	220	20.1			
Homeownership (1=yes)	1,093	0.70	0.46	0	1
Seoul metropolitan area (1=yes)	1,093	0.49	0.50	0	1
Age group	1,093			1	4
Youth	159	14.6			
Middle-aged	259	23.7			
Senior	425	38.9			
Elderly	250	22.9			
Sex (1=female)	1,093	0.58	0.49	0	1
Education	1,093			1	4
Less than middle school	279	25.5			
High school	381	34.9			
Vocational college	132	12.1			
College or higher	301	27.5			
Labor market status	1,093			1	4
Regular employee	349	31.9			
Self-employed	244	22.3			
Temporary/day laborer	106	9.7			
Non-employee	394	36.1			
Political ideology	1,093	2.96	0.96	1	5



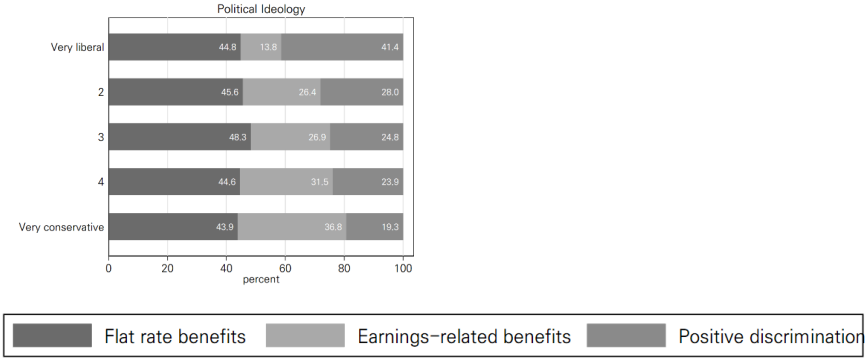


FIG. 1.—ATTITUDES TOWARD REDISTRIBUTION BY VARIABLES

group shows a higher preference for earnings-related benefits compared to other groups. This could be interpreted as a stronger preference among the youth demographic due to their greater expectation of future income growth relative to other groups. Conversely, as age increases, the preference for flat-rate benefits is observed to rise.

In terms of gender, men have a stronger preference for earnings-related benefits, while women tend to have a stronger preference for lump-sum benefits. This difference could be explained by the fact that men are more likely to achieve higher positions in the labor market in Korean society, which leads to their stronger preference for earnings-related benefits. Regarding educational attainment, a higher level of education is associated with a greater preference for earnings-related benefits. In relation to labor market status, the group of temporary/day laborers displays a higher preference for earnings-related benefits compared to other groups, whereas the non-employee group exhibits the highest preference for flat-rate benefits. Finally, with regard to political ideology, a more progressive stance is associated with a higher preference for positive discrimination, while a more conservative stance is associated with a higher preference for earnings-related benefits.

Logistic regression analysis results

Next, the results of the multinomial logistic regression conducted to examine the factors influencing preferences for redistribution methods are presented in Table 2. The reference group is the one preferring flat-rate benefits. The

reason for this is that in multinomial logistic regression analysis, the category with the largest number of cases must be designated as the reference category to minimize the standard error of the parameter estimates, since the analysis involves comparing the reference category to the remaining categories. In addition, separate analyses were conducted for both objective class status and subjective class status to mitigate the risk of overcontrol that may arise from including both variables in a single model.

Initially, the variables that have statistically significant effects on the probability of belonging to the group preferring earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits are age group, sex, education, labor market status, and political ideology. In the context of age groups, based on Model 2, middle-aged individuals show an odds reduction of about 40% compared to youth in being in the group that prefers earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits. In addition, seniors have an odds reduction of about 49% compared to youth for being in the earnings-related benefit group. As shown in Figure 1, the youth group has the highest propensity to prefer earnings-related benefits. Consequently, irrespective of statistical significance, all other age groups are less likely to prefer earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits. In particular, controlling for other variables, the senior group is less likely than the youth group to prefer earnings-related benefits to flat-rate benefits. This finding could be interpreted as a consequence of individuals nearing retirement age needing to prepare for income loss upon retirement, thus leading to a higher preference for flat-rate benefits that distribute benefits to all citizens rather than being based on individual contributions.

In relation to education levels, all higher education groups, in comparison to the “less than middle school” group, are more likely to prefer earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits. Compared to Figure 1, the observed trend is consistent even when controlling for other variables. This can be seen as an intriguing finding that can be attributed to the close link between meritocracy and educational emphasis in Korean society (Park 2021). Meritocracy, which literally means “dominance based on ability,” is commonly understood in practice as a system that rewards individuals in proportion to their abilities and efforts. From a meritocratic point of view, it is natural to give more rewards to those with higher abilities and greater efforts, while giving a smaller share to those with lower abilities and efforts. Although many people in Korean society outwardly claim that academic achievement or educational credentials do not equate to “true ability,” in reality, education is clearly recognized as a measure of ability. Over time, education in Korea has been viewed as a product of an individual’s abilities

and the most certain means of achieving social status (Chung et al. 2020). In this context, educational attainment can be interpreted as a significant factor in increasing preferences for earnings-related benefits.

Additionally, in relation to gender, there is a lower probability for females, as compared to males, to belong to the group favoring earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits. Compared to Figure 1, the observed trend is also consistent when controlling for other variables. This can be interpreted in the context of Korean society, where women may prefer earnings-related benefits less than men due to their lower labor market status and higher risk of career discontinuity. Concerning labor market status, based on Model 1, individuals in the Temporary/day laborer group exhibit higher odds of preferring earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits compared to those in the regular employee group. This effect is statistically significant at the 0.1 level, highlighting the importance of cautious interpretation. Lastly, in relation to political ideology, the odds of preferring earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits increase among individuals who hold more conservative views. Compared to Figure 1, the observed trend is also consistent when controlling for other variables.

Next, the variables that statistically significantly influence the likelihood of preferring positive discrimination over flat-rate benefits are subjective class status and political ideology. Firstly, regarding subjective class status, middle-class individuals have approximately 40% lower odds of preferring positive discrimination over flat-rate benefits compared to those in the low class. Similarly, high-class individuals have approximately 51% lower odds of preferring positive discrimination over flat-rate benefits compared to the low class. Thus, subjective class status appears to have a more decisive influence on preferences for redistributive methods than objective class status. With respect to Figure 1, the pattern remains even when additional variables are taken into account. Of particular note is the observation that higher subjective class status is associated with more negative attitudes toward a method of distributing economic resources that prioritizes benefits for low-income individuals. On the other hand, in relation to political ideology, based on Model 3, individuals with more conservative views have lower odds of preferring positive discrimination over flat-rate benefits. This effect is statistically significant at the 0.1 level, underscoring the need for careful interpretation.

The results of an analysis of how attitudes toward expanding public welfare vary across groups with different preferences for redistribution methods, while controlling for the variables used in the multinomial logistic

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF MULTINOMIAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ON ATTITUDES TOWARD
REDISTRIBUTION (REF.= FLAT-RATE BENEFITS)

	Earnings-related benefits				Positive discrimination			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	coef	odds ratio	coef	odds ratio	coef	odds ratio	coef	odds ratio
Objective class status (ref.=low)								
Middle	-0.237 (0.238)	0.789 (0.188)			-0.109 (0.233)	0.897 (0.209)		
High	-0.101 (0.264)	0.904 (0.239)			-0.115 (0.272)	0.891 (0.243)		
Subjective class status (ref.=low)								
Middle			-0.156 (0.209)	0.855 (0.179)			-0.505** (0.193)	0.603** (0.116)
High			-0.367 (0.259)	0.693 (0.179)			-0.712** (0.254)	0.490** (0.125)
Homeownership (ref.=non-owner)	0.101 (0.196)	1.106 (0.217)	0.179 (0.196)	1.196 (0.235)	-0.367+ (0.188)	0.693+ (0.131)	-0.269 (0.188)	0.764 (0.143)
Seoul metropolitan area (ref.=no)	0.257 (0.170)	1.293 (0.219)	0.232 (0.167)	1.261 (0.210)	0.142 (0.171)	1.153 (0.197)	0.086 (0.168)	1.090 (0.183)
Age group (ref.=youth)								
Middle-aged	-0.413 (0.254)	0.662 (0.168)	-0.514* (0.247)	0.598* (0.148)	0.404 (0.300)	1.498 (0.450)	0.294 (0.288)	1.342 (0.386)
Senior	-0.604* (0.261)	0.546* (0.143)	-0.665** (0.253)	0.514** (0.130)	0.452 (0.292)	1.572 (0.459)	0.321 (0.280)	1.379 (0.386)
Elderly	-0.505 (0.348)	0.604 (0.210)	-0.608+ (0.331)	0.544+ (0.180)	0.510 (0.360)	1.666 (0.600)	0.244 (0.350)	1.277 (0.446)
Sex (ref.=male)	-0.404* (0.177)	0.667* (0.118)	-0.417* (0.173)	0.659* (0.114)	-0.062 (0.183)	0.940 (0.172)	0.004 (0.179)	1.004 (0.180)
Education (ref.=less than middle school)								
High school	0.785** (0.257)	2.193** (0.565)	0.773** (0.252)	2.166** (0.546)	-0.091 (0.241)	0.913 (0.220)	-0.007 (0.242)	0.993 (0.240)
Vocational college	1.033** (0.337)	2.810** (0.948)	1.053** (0.328)	2.866** (0.942)	0.265 (0.327)	1.304 (0.426)	0.423 (0.322)	1.527 (0.492)
College or higher	0.802** (0.293)	2.229** (0.653)	0.843** (0.287)	2.322** (0.666)	0.010 (0.283)	1.010 (0.286)	0.095 (0.283)	1.100 (0.311)

	Earnings-related benefits				Positive discrimination			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	coef	odds ratio	coef	odds ratio	coef	odds ratio	coef	odds ratio
Labor market status (ref.=regular employee)								
Self-employed	-0.083 (0.235)	0.921 (0.216)	-0.038 (0.231)	0.963 (0.223)	-0.182 (0.232)	0.833 (0.193)	-0.083 (0.230)	0.920 (0.211)
Temporary/day laborer	0.522+ (0.305)	1.685+ (0.514)	0.464 (0.293)	1.591 (0.466)	-0.043 (0.328)	0.958 (0.314)	-0.083 (0.318)	0.920 (0.293)
Non-employee	-0.019 (0.239)	0.981 (0.234)	0.001 (0.221)	1.001 (0.221)	-0.143 (0.246)	0.867 (0.213)	-0.066 (0.226)	0.936 (0.211)
Political ideology	0.242** (0.090)	1.274** (0.114)	0.236** (0.087)	1.266** (0.110)	-0.167+ (0.089)	0.846+ (0.076)	-0.116 (0.089)	0.890 (0.079)
Constant	-1.313** (0.459)	0.269** (0.124)	-1.253** (0.453)	0.286** (0.129)	-0.117 (0.472)	0.889 (0.420)	0.018 (0.453)	1.018 (0.462)
Observations	1,075		1,124		1,075		1,124	
Model chi-square	71.72***		78.73***		71.72***		78.73***	
Pseudo R2	0.0390		0.0428		0.0390		0.0428	

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

regression, are presented in Figure 2. Initially, compared to the group favoring flat-rate benefits, the group favoring positive discrimination exhibits a positive stance towards unemployment support, whereas the group favoring earnings-related benefits demonstrates a negative inclination. However, it is noteworthy that the group favoring earnings-related benefits shows statistical significance at the 0.1 significance level, necessitating careful consideration in the interpretation. Regarding attitudes towards support for the impoverished and preferences for income redistribution, it is evident that the group favoring positive discrimination holds a more positive outlook compared to the group favoring flat-rate benefits. Given that the positive discrimination group prioritizes redistribution for vulnerable strata, the intuitive inference is that this group is more likely to exhibit a positive stance toward the expansion of public welfare compared to the group favoring flat-rate benefits.

One interesting observation is the relatively small difference in attitudes toward the expansion of public welfare between the group favoring flat-rate benefits and the group favoring earnings-related benefits. While there is a more negative attitude in the group favoring earnings-related benefits, particularly in the context of unemployment assistance, compared to the

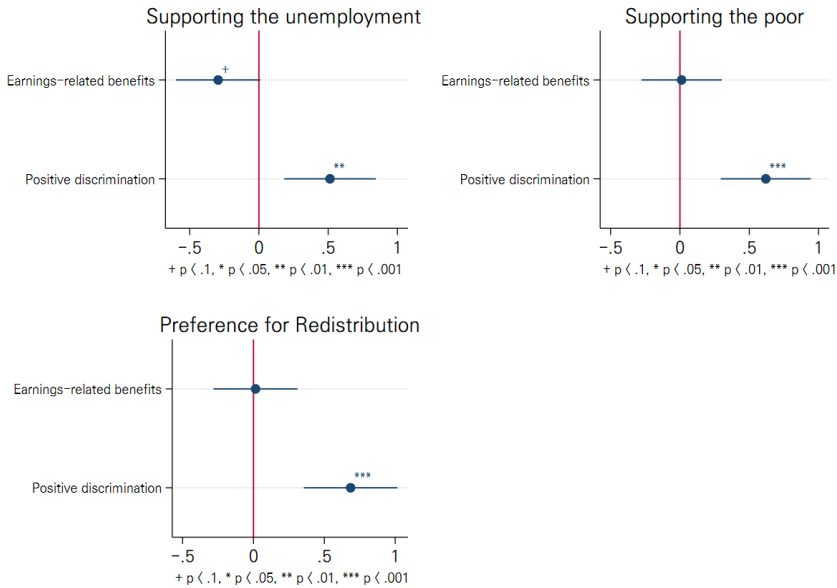


FIG. 2.—RESULTS OF ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ON WELFARE ATTITUDE (REF.= FLAT-RATE BENEFITS)⁷

group favoring flat-rate benefits, there are no statistically significant differences in attitudes toward assistance to the impoverished and preferences for income redistribution. It might be expected that the group that prefers income-related benefits would have a more negative attitude towards the expansion of welfare policies that provide more benefits to vulnerable groups than the group that prefers flat-rate benefits. However, the analytical results did not reveal any significant differences in attitudes between the flat-rate and income-related benefit groups. Therefore, it can be expected that in the process of promoting the expansion of welfare spending to address poverty and inequality issues in Korean society, it may be more feasible to achieve social consensus if the attitudes of these three groups do not diverge sharply. However, since, as noted earlier, the groups favoring flat-rate benefits and earnings-related benefits together account for 74% of the total respondents, a policy approach that can encompass citizens with preferences for both types is imperative.

⁷ Please refer to Appendix 1 for detailed regression analysis results.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the preferences of citizens in Korean society regarding three types of resource allocation methods: flat rate, positive discrimination, and earnings-related. In addition, the study sought to identify significant factors influencing these preferences. Finally, by empirically analyzing how attitudes toward public welfare vary based on the preferred type of universal allocation, the paper aimed to empirically understand the terrain of welfare politics and related support coalitions.

Summarizing the results of the analysis, the following points can be highlighted. First, examining the distribution of preferences for redistribution methods, it is observed that 46.3% of the total respondents favor flat-rate benefits, while 27.7% prefer earnings-related benefits and 26.1% opt for positive discrimination. Therefore, it can be inferred that flat-rate benefits have the highest preference in Korean society. Next, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted to examine the factors that influence preferences for redistribution methods. The variables that statistically significantly influence the probability of belonging to a group favoring earnings-related benefits over flat-rate benefits include age group, sex, education, labor market status, and political ideology. Of particular note is the fact that higher levels of education are associated with a higher likelihood of preferring earnings-related benefits to flat-rate benefits. This observation can be attributed to the close relationship between meritocracy and the emphasis on education in Korean society. Over time, education has been viewed as a manifestation of an individual's ability and as the surest means of upward mobility (Chung et al. 2020). From the perspective of meritocracy, where greater ability and effort are rewarded with greater rewards, educational attainment can be interpreted as an important factor in increasing the preference for merit-based benefits.

The variables that statistically significantly influence the probability of belonging to a group favoring positive discrimination over flat-rate benefits are subjective class status and political ideology. Compared to objective class status, subjective class status exerts a more decisive influence on preferences for redistributive methods. Specifically, we find that higher subjective class status correlates with negative attitudes toward the economically prioritized system of resource distribution in favor of low-income groups. In other words, individuals' preferences for redistributive policies are influenced by their perceived position on the social ladder, in line with the findings of previous research (Meltzer and Richard 1981; Lupu and Pontusson 2011;

Condon and Wichowsky 2020).

Finally, examining attitudes toward public welfare to address poverty and inequality issues across groups with different preferences for redistribution methods reveals that the group favoring positive discrimination has a more positive attitude toward the expansion of public welfare compared to the group favoring flat-rate benefits. Conversely, the group favoring earnings-related benefits and the group favoring flat-rate benefits do not show significant differences in their attitudes toward the expansion of public welfare. Therefore, it can be expected that in the process of advocating the expansion of welfare spending to address poverty and inequality issues in Korean society, it may be more feasible to achieve social consensus if the attitudes of these three groups do not diverge significantly.

The implications of this paper are as follows. First, in the context of South Korea, where poverty and inequality have not been effectively addressed by redistributive policies, the importance lies in understanding citizens' preferences regarding the allocation of economic resources. Throughout its economic development, Korea has developed a social insurance-based welfare system that has mainly benefited workers in the heavy and chemical industries, and currently, the share of social insurance-related expenditures benefiting regular employees remains the highest. As a result, it was expected that the preference would lean toward earnings-related benefits, where greater benefits are provided to those who contribute more to economic resources. However, the results indicate a preference for flat-rate benefits, which offer benefits to all individuals, regardless of contribution. This implies that in the process of welfare reform, a foundation based on universalism rather than selectivism is necessary.

Second, since there are few significant differences in attitudes towards the expansion of public welfare between those who favor flat benefits and those who favor earnings-related benefits, pursuing welfare policies that can encompass both groups may offer a more effective approach to addressing issues of poverty and inequality. One possible strategy is to secure the legitimacy of redistributive policies by providing a continuous benefit structure (sticky progressivity) that reflects the current social hierarchy for all citizens, rather than visibly highlighting the challenges of resource allocation within limited resources (Garcia-Fuente 2021).

Finally, there are several limitations to this study. First, due to the analysis of cross-sectional data, it is unclear whether attitudes toward the allocation of economic resources are generalizable or specific to the year of the survey. Therefore, the construction of longitudinal data to track such

attitudes over time is warranted for future research. In addition, comparative cross-national studies are needed to examine whether attitudes toward the allocation of economic resources differ across welfare regimes. In doing so, it will be crucial to determine whether the findings of this study are unique to South Korean society or whether they share similarities with other nations characterized by different welfare regimes.

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APPENDIX 1
RESULTS OF ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ON WELFARE ATTITUDE

	Supporting the unemployment	Supporting the poor	Preference for Redistribution
Attitudes toward redistribution (ref.= flat-rate benefits)			
Earnings-related benefits	-0.294+ (0.156)	0.012 (0.148)	0.015 (0.151)
Positive discrimination	0.513** (0.169)	0.619*** (0.166)	0.685*** (0.169)
Objective class status (ref.=low)			
Middle	-0.613** (0.191)	0.107 (0.176)	-0.081 (0.172)
High	-0.397+ (0.217)	-0.117 (0.199)	-0.180 (0.201)
Subjective Class Status (ref.=low)			
Middle	0.186 (0.169)	0.046 (0.159)	-0.011 (0.155)
High	0.109 (0.206)	0.042 (0.211)	-0.242 (0.197)
Homeownership (ref.=non-owner)			
	0.070 (0.161)	-0.081 (0.156)	0.134 (0.148)
Seoul metropolitan area (ref.=no)			
	0.148 (0.139)	-0.469*** (0.134)	0.416** (0.133)
Age group(ref.=youth)			
Middle-aged	-0.395+ (0.212)	-0.029 (0.214)	0.176 (0.209)
Senior	-0.506* (0.209)	-0.004 (0.208)	0.210 (0.204)
Elderly	-0.332 (0.302)	-0.055 (0.277)	0.440 (0.271)
Sex (ref.=male)			
	0.039 (0.138)	0.072 (0.134)	0.071 (0.136)
Education (ref.=less than middle school)			
High school	0.178 (0.190)	-0.107 (0.171)	0.133 (0.189)

	Supporting the unemployment	Supporting the poor	Preference for Redistribution
Vocational college	0.334 (0.282)	0.117 (0.240)	0.216 (0.262)
College or higher	-0.031 (0.233)	0.065 (0.215)	0.227 (0.227)
Labor market status (ref.=regular employee)			
Self-employed	-0.134 (0.180)	-0.048 (0.176)	0.043 (0.170)
Temporary/day laborer	0.297 (0.259)	-0.265 (0.271)	-0.081 (0.211)
Non-employee	-0.089 (0.178)	0.116 (0.171)	-0.067 (0.184)
Political ideology	-0.214** (0.073)	-0.022 (0.069)	-0.025 (0.068)
/cut1	-5.360*** (0.428)	-4.638*** (0.431)	-4.097*** (0.427)
/cut2	-2.800*** (0.392)	-1.745*** (0.389)	-1.898*** (0.364)
/cut3	-1.062** (0.378)	0.062 (0.383)	-0.213 (0.354)
/cut4	1.932*** (0.426)	2.028*** (0.412)	2.030*** (0.356)
Observations	1,073	1,072	1,071
Model chi-square	59.63***	38.07**	41.05**
Pseudo R ²	0.0272	0.0174	0.0166

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

