





Support for unconditional basic income in Spain: A materialist or post-materialist issue?

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Abstract

Unconditional basic income (UBI) is a redistributive policy proposal that is receiving increasing attention in the Spanish political sphere. Welfare attitudes literature has shown that support for UBI is higher among left-wing citizens and those of lower socioeconomic status. However, previous studies have not addressed the mediating role of ideological values such as egalitarianism or meritocracy in supporting UBI. Furthermore, studies have not considered the interactive relationship between ideological and self-interest motives when studying attitudes toward UBI. Drawing on modernization theory, we propose that individuals' socioeconomic status conditions the role of ideological motivations in shaping support for UBI. To test this hypothesis, we study data from two different surveys conducted in Spain in 2017 ($N = 1958$) and 2021 ($N = 2004$). Our findings suggest that ideology is a less relevant motivation for supporting UBI among the Spanish citizens of lower socioeconomic status, but it becomes increasingly salient among higher-status citizens. Among the latter, egalitarian values lead leftists to support UBI, whereas anti-egalitarian and meritocratic values lead rightists to anti-UBI positions. We discuss these findings within the framework of modernization theory, addressing support for UBI by different social groups and the ability of this policy proposal to elicit broad-based support.

KEYWORDS

egalitarianism, meritocracy, modernization theory, political orientation, socioeconomic status, unconditional basic income

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The idea of guaranteeing a regular income for all people, once considered utopian, is now gaining increasing popularity among the public. Particularly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, unconditional basic income (UBI) has received more attention than ever before (Johnson & Roberto, 2020). Although there is no shared definition, it is widely understood that UBI is regular income (1) covering a minimum standard of living, (2) given to all persons residing within the same territory, (3) without any requirements or work obligations (Raventós et al., 2017; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). Beyond this, specific details—such as income amount, how it is combined with existing social benefits, or how the scheme is financed—are a source of debate among academics, social activists, and policymakers.

As the debate on UBI spreads in the public sphere, there is also an emerging interest in political science literature in studying social attitudes toward this policy proposal. Recent studies have found that support for UBI is based on self-interest and ideological motives (e.g., Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020; Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont, 2020; Vlandas, 2021). In particular, people of lower socioeconomic status are more supportive of UBI, as well as those with a left-wing political orientation. In relation to the latter, however, previous research has not addressed the role played by ideological values (e.g., egalitarianism or meritocratism) in explaining *why* the left supports UBI (and *why* the right rejects it).

Moreover, previous studies have considered ideology and self-interest as separate motives, without taking into account the interactive relationship between the two. Drawing on modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, 2010), we propose a theoretical model in which socioeconomic status conditions the role of ideology in shaping individual attitudes toward UBI. In particular, we expect that the material lack of economic resources is what drives UBI support among people of lower socioeconomic status, regardless of what might be expected from their political orientation. On the contrary, we expect that once the concern for material survival is overcome and people live rather comfortably, political orientation will shape support for UBI through egalitarian versus meritocratic ideological values. To test this hypothesis, we focus specifically on the Spanish context, in which the UBI proposal has only been defended from the political left and the continuing economic crises have led many to demand a public guarantee of solid ground for all.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. First, we present an overview of the Spanish context and why it is relevant for studying attitudes toward UBI. Then we provide a brief literature review on the ideology and self-interest hypotheses, along with what studies on popular support for UBI have found in this regard. Subsequently, we discuss the interplay between ideology and self-interest motives, including the rationale for the theoretical approach we have adopted in this research. We then present the data obtained from two survey studies carried out in the Spanish context in 2017 and 2021 (the latter conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). Finally, we discuss our findings and conclude with some relevant remarks.

Unconditional basic income in Spain: An overview of the political context

The welfare state has traditionally enjoyed widespread support among the Spanish population: surveys indicate that 60%–70% of citizens were in favor of a statist-universalist model during the period 1989–2006 (Del Pino, 2007). However, this popular support has always clashed with the reality of an underdeveloped welfare state. Similar to other Mediterranean countries, Spain has a mixed welfare model that combines familistic (a large part of welfare still falls on the traditional family) and contributory values (the public social security system depends on previous contributions from the labor market); however, it also includes other universal services (e.g., education) that are financed through general taxation, as well as a decentralized system of means-tested benefits for low-income families that is managed by each autonomous community (Moreno & Mari-Klose, 2016).

The debate on UBI was introduced into the political sphere by the left-wing political party Podemos when it first ran in the 2014 European elections. However, as the party began to gather votes, the media quickly identified UBI as one of the main targets of attack in Podemos's agenda (criticizing it as utopian, populist, and unaffordable nonsense), which soon led the party to abandon UBI as a policy proposal in the following national elections (Noguera, 2019). From that moment on, Podemos (Unidas Podemos, after its coalition with the left-wing party Izquierda Unida in 2016) has advocated for a cash transfer network targeted at poor households, although the idea of a UBI remains attached to this party in the public imagination.

In any case, the demand for a UBI has been sustained over the years by other organizations and social movements beyond institutional politics, such as *Red Renta Básica* (*Basic Income Network*) and *Marea Básica* (*Basic Tide*). Pro-UBI arguments in Spain have usually revolved around (1) reducing poverty and ensuring decent living conditions for everyone, (2) providing alternatives to employment and acknowledging other socially essential activities outside the labor market (e.g., care work), and (3) protecting people from the danger of labor automation, and its consequent spread of unemployment and precariousness (Perkiö et al., 2019; Raventós et al., 2017). In contrast, typical arguments against UBI have focused on the negative effects of this policy proposal, particularly on (1) reducing the incentive to work and promoting laziness and social *parasitism*, and (2) causing a “call effect” for immigration (Perkiö et al., 2019).

It was not until the COVID-19 pandemic that interest in UBI was widely revived in Spain. During this time, poverty increased dramatically, and job destruction put 2.6 million working people (13% of employment) at high risk (Oxfam Intermón, 2020). In this context, in May 2020, the Spanish government (formed by the Spanish Socialist Party [PSOE] and Unidas Podemos) decided to implement the first statewide means-tested benefit scheme, known as the *ingreso mínimo vital* (minimum living income). Pro-UBI groups criticized the minimum living income not only as a missed opportunity to introduce an unconditional basic income, but also because of its major access and implementation barriers (Borda et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the far-right party Vox has scorned this scheme under the name of *paguita* (derogatory term for “paycheck”), referring to it as a “poisoned aid” that encourages passivity and state dependency among its beneficiaries (López de Miguel & Sánchez, 2020).

The self-interest hypothesis: Does support for UBI emerge from lower socioeconomic positions?

The welfare attitudes literature has traditionally worked with two hypotheses to explain popular support for different types of redistribution policies: self-interest and ideology (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989). The self-interest hypothesis has posited that those who are worse positioned in the social structure are more supportive of welfare policies, as they are more likely to benefit from them (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). Conversely, upper-class people would be more motivated to view the current resource distribution as fair and to hold negative views on redistributive policies that seek to tackle economic inequality (Brandt et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Bailon et al., 2017; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018).

The self-interest hypothesis has also been supported when studying attitudes toward UBI. Abundant research has found that people with a lower income and educational attainment, and those in a higher risk position in the labor market (e.g., temporary workers or the unemployed) show more positive attitudes toward UBI (Bay & Pedersen, 2006; Lim & Tanaka, 2019; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020; Shin et al., 2021; Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont, 2020; Vlandas, 2021). Similarly, perceived income uncertainty (Lee, 2018) and the perception that a UBI would improve one's current economic situation (Linnanvirta et al., 2019) are related to greater UBI support. Importantly, these findings corroborate previous literature that states

the importance of considering both objective and subjective indicators of self-interest when studying welfare attitudes (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; Kevins et al., 2019).

The ideology hypothesis: Is the left more supportive of UBI?

Alternatively, the ideology hypothesis has posited that welfare attitudes are based on left versus right ideological positions and values of egalitarianism versus economic individualism (Jæger, 2006). In particular, the welfare attitudes literature has argued that the right tends to hold values of economic individualism, which postulates that economic success is a function of hard work and thrift (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989). This belief in meritocracy would lead the right to assert that each individual is responsible for his or her own welfare and, therefore, to reject the implementation of redistributive policies. In contrast, the left generally upholds values of egalitarianism and collective responsibility, implying that the government has an obligation to ensure that every citizen enjoys a minimally acceptable standard of living (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989). This ideology would lead the left to be more supportive of egalitarian social policies.

The ideology hypothesis has also been supported regarding attitudes toward UBI. Previous evidence has shown that UBI is primarily an idea supported by left-wing positions and rejected by right-wing positions (Lim & Tanaka, 2019; Parolin & Siöland, 2020; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020; Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont, 2020; Vlandas, 2021). Moreover, studies have indicated that egalitarian values and support for state interventionism are related to greater support for UBI (Bay & Pedersen, 2006; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020). By contrast, negative attitudes toward UBI seem to be specifically related to meritocratic beliefs (i.e., “differences in income levels are due to differences in talents and efforts”) and discourses of economic individualism (i.e., individualistic attributions of poverty; Bay & Pedersen, 2006; Lim & Tanaka, 2019; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020). However, although previous research has found that values of egalitarianism versus meritocracy are related to pro- versus anti-UBI positions, no study to date has specifically analyzed the mediating role these ideological values play in explaining *why* the left supports UBI and *why* the right rejects it. Therefore, we propose studying egalitarian versus meritocratic values as explanatory mechanisms of UBI support.

The interplay between ideology and self-interest: Competing or cooperating motives?

Although self-interest and ideology have been two widely studied hypotheses, the interplay between both motives has been a rather neglected topic in political psychology research. However, it seems to be a highly relevant issue, as ideology and self-interest can sometimes be competing motives that are difficult to reconcile (see Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017).

Among the first to focus on the relationship between self-interest and ideology were Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989), who argued that ideological values were formed—at least in part—as a result of socioeconomic position. Specifically, they found evidence that socioeconomically vulnerable groups identify more strongly with egalitarian values, which would lead them to be more supportive of the welfare state. As Rossetti et al. (2021) posit, this would follow the logic of “first the grub, then the morals,” in the sense that sociostructural characteristics would precede and shape individuals’ worldviews, which in turn would drive their political attitudes. Thus, we could expect lower-status groups to be more supportive of UBI because they have more leftist values.

However, this relationship may not be so straightforward, since self-interest often cannot explain the ideological values held by individuals. Armingeon and Weisstanner (2021) argue

that there are some “cross-pressured” groups (i.e., “rich left” citizens and “poor right” citizens) for whom their ideology does not match what one would expect from their socioeconomic position. Rich leftists would have a self-interest opposed to redistribution that would conflict with their own pro-redistribution leftist ideology. Similarly, poor right-wingers would be cross-pressured in the conflict between self-interest (pro-redistribution) and ideology (anti-redistribution). Armingeon and Weisstanner (2021) suggest that in these cases, it is ideology that becomes salient and shapes the demand for redistribution. Rich left-wing citizens would tend to sacrifice their self-interest for their ideological concern to reduce inequality. Yet, the way in which poor right-wing citizens deal with this motivational conflict may be more ambiguous, particularly in the case of support for UBI.

Some theories in the social psychology literature, such as system justification theory (SJT), have addressed psychological motivations to justify the status quo even against one's own self-interest (Jost et al., 2003). SJT postulates that low-status groups sometimes maintain hierarchy-enhancing ideologies (e.g., meritocracy, economic individualism) in an attempt to differentiate themselves from other, less well-positioned groups and to protect their own group identity. An unconditional policy such as UBI may then be a highly controversial proposal for lower-status people who place great value on a meritocratic distribution of resources. As Roosma and van Oorschot (2020) suggest, working-class people who support the new right-wing parties might argue that UBI is a typical egalitarian instrument to benefit undeserving people. According to deservingness theory (see van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot et al., 2017), people are less in favor of social benefit schemes that target people deemed as undeserving (i.e., people who do not reciprocate to society or those who are held responsible for their situation of neediness).

Although lower-status people may legitimize the system at times, recent studies have also shown that upper-class citizens are generally the most vocal advocates of hierarchy-reinforcing ideologies (Brandt et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Bailon et al., 2017; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018). Moreover, previous evidence has proven that ideological considerations usually diminish when people face major economic concerns or are exposed to high social risk, in which case self-interest motives gain prominence and may lead to attitudinal change (causing some to support welfare policies they previously rejected; e.g., Bonoli et al., 2022; Häusermann et al., 2015; Margalit, 2013). This has been shown to apply not only to people living in poor socioeconomic conditions and continuously exposed to risk, but also to better-off people who are suddenly confronted with a risky situation (e.g., job loss, a crisis affecting their business). Therefore, we propose a theoretical model of an interactive relationship between ideology and self-interest, in which self-interest conditions the role of political orientation and/or ideological values in shaping attitudes toward redistributive policies.

We draw on the assumptions of modernization theory to support this hypothesis (see Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, 2010). Modernization theory argues that individuals living in poorer and more economically insecure countries value materialistic values more highly, whereas those living in more prosperous contexts tend to prioritize self-expression values over issues of material survival, as these are already guaranteed. Thus, ideological values would have a greater role on forming political attitudes in more affluent contexts, whereas in poorer countries, citizens' political attitudes would be guided by their own self-interest and need for survival, which is corroborated when studying popular support for UBI in European countries (Parolin & Siöland, 2020). Political orientation was a stronger predictor of UBI support in countries where social spending was higher; however, in countries with a smaller welfare state, ideological concerns about UBI were superseded by the appeal of an expansive welfare reform.

Importantly, modernization theory applies not only at the country level but also at the individual level. Within the same society, one's position in the socioeconomic structure will vary the extent to which one's basic survival is at stake and thus the level at which one endorses materialistic or post-materialistic values, as illustrated by Nový et al. (2017). We therefore

hypothesize that self-interest will condition individual attitudes toward UBI among Spanish citizens, particularly in the context of increasing poverty and inequality experienced in recent years. We expect lower-status people to be more materialistic in their support of UBI, giving ideology less weight when deciding for or against this proposal. Conversely, we expect political orientation to play a more important role in predicting UBI support among people of higher socioeconomic status. Following the ideology hypothesis (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Jæger, 2006), egalitarian values would lead people on the left to support UBI out of solidarity, as a way of reducing social inequality (even beyond their own self-interest). In contrast, right-wingers would reject UBI in order to prevent redistribution and maintain their privileged status, presumably through anti-egalitarian and meritocratic values (Brandt et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Bailon et al., 2017; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018).

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we sought to investigate whether support for UBI in Spain arises primarily from an ideological motive (i.e., political orientation) or whether ideology is actually superseded by a self-interest motive (i.e., position on the income ladder). Specifically, we hypothesized that the individuals' socioeconomic position would moderate the role of political orientation in predicting support for UBI, so that the predictive effect of ideology becomes stronger as one moves up the income ladder (Hypothesis 1)

H1: Left-wing political orientation will be related to greater support for UBI and, vice versa, right-wing orientation will be related to anti-UBI positions. However, this relationship will be stronger among people with higher incomes than among people with lower incomes.

Method

Data

We relied on data from a nationwide online panel survey conducted as part of a project on antecedents of preventive behavior and support for policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The panel survey aimed at studying citizens' opinions on certain practices and policies related to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain, including an item on support for the implementation of a UBI. The study was conducted with a sample of the Spanish population ($N=2004$) in February 2021. Participants aged 18–65 were recruited online through the data recruitment agency Netquest, following quotas for gender, age, geographic area, and socioeconomic position. Participants completed a self-administered, anonymous questionnaire and received compensation for their participation in the study. An overview of the descriptive statistics of the sample's main sociodemographic variables can be found in [Table S2](#) (Online Appendix).

Measures

Support for UBI

An item was used to measure participants' level of agreement with the implementation of a UBI in Spain (in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale

ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. UBI was defined as “an unconditional monthly payment that all citizens of a state would receive to guarantee a minimum of decent living conditions.”

Political orientation

Political orientation was measured through self-placement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Extreme left* to 7 = *Extreme right*, with 4 referring to a centrist political position.

Objective income level

We used objective income level as a measure of individuals' socioeconomic status. Specifically, following the recommendation of Kevins et al. (2019), we used a measure of monthly household income (10-point scale, ranging from 1 = *750€ or less* to 10 = *More than 4600€*).

The exact question wording for each of the study variables can be found in [Table S1](#) (Online [Appendix](#)). We also controlled for several other sociodemographic variables, including respondents' gender (dichotomous variable; 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), age (continuous variable), educational level (6-point scale ranging from 1 = *Elementary* to 6 = *PhD*), and employment status (we created the following dummy variable: *in education, unemployed, temporarily unemployed COVID-19, disabled, retired, housework; paid work* was a reference category). These variables have been related to UBI support in previous studies (e.g., Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020). As Nettle et al. (2021) found that UBI support increased after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, we also controlled for individual perceived economic impact of the pandemic (“The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the economic situation of my loved ones or myself,” rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*).

Data analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 statistical package. Descriptive analyses, Pearson correlation analyses, and multiple regression analyses were carried out, as well as moderation analyses, using the PROCESS macro 3.5 tool (Hayes, 2013). Specifically, we tested the following statistical model: *political orientation* was introduced as a predictor, *objective income level* as a moderator, *sociodemographic control variables* as covariates, and *UBI support* as the outcome variable. Pearson correlations between study variables can be found in [Table S3](#) (Online [Appendix](#)).

Results

[Table 1](#) shows the moderation analysis on *Political Orientation* × *Objective Income Level* in predicting support for UBI. The control variables that predicted higher support for UBI were being unemployed, a higher perception that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them financially, and a lower educational level (coefficients for control variables can be found in [Table S4](#), Online [Appendix](#)). Left-wing political orientation also predicted higher support for UBI, and this effect was moderated by income level (as the interaction coefficient between ideology and income was statistically significant). The interaction coefficient was negative, meaning that political orientation had a smaller explanatory effect on support for UBI among people with lower incomes. Conversely, the effect of being left-leaning on predicting support for UBI was stronger as income level increased. This was further supported by Johnson-Neyman analysis, which showed that the effect of political orientation was significant at all income levels, but stronger the higher the income level, as shown in [Figure 1](#) (see also [Figure S1](#), Online [Appendix](#)). We thereby found substantial confirmation for Hypothesis 1.

TABLE 1 Moderation analysis (Study 1): The predictive role of political orientation in support for UBI, moderated by objective income level.

Predictive variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Constant	4.56***	.35	[3.88, 5.25]
Political orientation	-.20***	.05	[-.29, -.11]
Objective income level	.10**	.04	[.03, .17]
Political orientation × Objective income	-.04***	.01	[-.06, -.02]
<i>Conditional effects of the IV at values of the moderator</i>			
-1 SD	-.28**	.03	[-.35, -.22]
Mean	-.38**	.02	[-.43, -.34]
+1 SD	-.48**	.03	[-.55, -.42]
<i>R</i> ²	.22		

Note: Bootstrap resamples = 5000. Analyses were conducted controlling for gender, age, educational level, employment status, and perceived economic impact of COVID-19. The full table with coefficients for control variables can be found in the Online Appendix.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$;

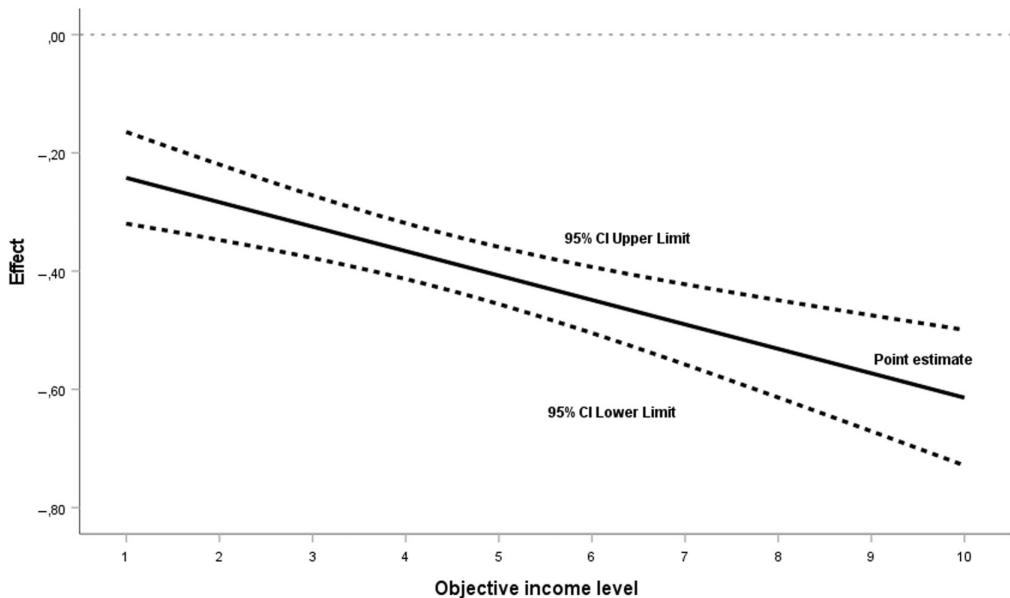


FIGURE 1 Johnson-Neyman graph: The effect of political orientation on support for UBI, moderated by objective income level (Study 1). No statistical significance transition points were found within the observed range of the moderator.

Discussion

Our findings support the hypothesis that the socioeconomic position of individuals conditions the role of political orientation in predicting support for UBI in the Spanish context. Left-wing ideology leads to supporting UBI (and vice versa, right-wing ideology leads to its rejection), but this ideological motive is less relevant for those who are at the bottom of the income scale (presumably because their self-interest motive carries more weight). By contrast, left-wing ideology gains relevance in predicting positive attitudes toward UBI as one moves up the income ladder and has greater material security.

These results are in line with our expectations according to modernization theory, but we must also discuss some study limitations. First, the definition of UBI used in this study was rather narrow, which may have led to confusion in some participants' responses. The survey was conducted at a time when the minimum living income had only recently been introduced in Spain and was quite present in the media, often referred to as "basic income" (see the section "An overview of the political context" for background on the minimum living income). Even more, the item did not include any information on the socioeconomic consequences of implementing a UBI (e.g., tax increases); therefore, it is possible that participants confused different policy proposals or misunderstood what a UBI entails.

In addition, we have only used an objective measure of socioeconomic status. Although recommended by authors such as Kevins et al. (2019), this may raise questions about participants' subjective perception of their socioeconomic position and how this relates to their self-interest motive. It could be argued that being *objectively* low-income does not necessarily imply that one behaves accordingly to what would be expected of a low-income person, especially if one does not perceive difficulties in making ends meet (and vice versa). In fact, some studies have shown that simply manipulating subjective perceptions of one's socioeconomic status can motivate support for redistributive policies, regardless of objective socioeconomic position (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015).

Furthermore, we were unable to explore the ideological values that people on the left and right use to justify their different views on UBI (as we did not have any such variable in the data). Following previous welfare literature (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Jæger, 2006), we expect egalitarian values to lead leftists to support UBI, whereas anti-egalitarian and meritocratic values would explain UBI's rejection among the right. Moreover, we would expect the role played by these values as pro- or anti-UBI ideological motivations to be greater among higher-income people, as lower-income people would already be more likely to support UBI out of self-interest.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we aimed to further analyze the interaction between ideology and self-interest in predicting support for UBI in the Spanish context. To overcome the limitations of Study 1, we proposed to study both objective and subjective perceptions of income as a proxy for self-interest, as well as to consider the role of ideological values such as egalitarianism or meritocracy as ideological motivations for supporting or rejecting UBI. Thus, we summarized our main theoretical arguments in the following hypotheses. We hypothesized that both the objective (Hypothesis 1a) and subjective (Hypothesis 1b) socioeconomic position of individuals would condition the predictive effect of political orientation on support for UBI, so that the effect of ideology would be stronger the better positioned individuals are on the economic ladder. Moreover, we expected this relationship to be further explained by the mediating effect of ideological values. We hypothesized that left-wing political orientation would predict support for UBI through egalitarian values and right-wing ideology would predict anti-UBI attitudes through meritocratic values, with this also being moderated by objective (Hypothesis 2a) and subjective income levels (Hypothesis 2b). Specifically, we expected the mediating effect of ideological values to be stronger among those who are better positioned on the social ladder.

H1a: The relationship between political orientation and support for UBI will be stronger among people with higher incomes than among people with lower incomes.

H1b: The relationship between political orientation and support for UBI will be stronger among people who subjectively perceive greater economic comfort than among those who perceive greater difficulty in making ends meet.

H2a: The effect of political orientation on support for UBI will be mediated by egalitarian *versus* meritocratic ideological values. This mediating effect will be stronger among people with higher incomes than among people with lower incomes.

H2b: The effect of political orientation on support for UBI will be mediated by egalitarian *versus* meritocratic ideological values. This mediating effect will be stronger among people who subjectively perceive greater economic comfort than among those who perceive greater difficulty in making ends meet.

Method

Data

We used data from the Spanish sample ($N=1958$) of the 2017 version of the European Social Survey (ESS; 8th edition), as it includes items on both objective and subjective perceptions of income, items measuring egalitarianism and meritocracy, and an item on support for UBI (with a more detailed explanation of this policy proposal). Descriptive statistics of the sample's main sociodemographic variables are shown in [Table S2](#) (Online [Appendix](#)).

Measures

Support for UBI

We used an item measuring participants' level of support for the implementation of a UBI in their country, rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly against* to 4 = *Strongly in favor*. The ESS framed the question in the following way:

A basic income scheme includes all of the following: The government pays everyone a monthly income to cover essential living costs. It replaces many other social benefits. The purpose is to guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living. Everyone receives the same amount regardless of whether or not they are working. People also keep the money they earn from work or other sources. This scheme is paid for by taxes. Overall, would you be against or in favour of having this scheme in Spain?

Egalitarianism versus meritocracy

A three-item index was used to assess the extent to which respondents support economic egalitarianism (understood as endorsing egalitarian values for the fair distribution of income in a society), versus support for anti-egalitarian and meritocratic values (defined by the desirability of income inequality as a reward for individual effort). Drawing on previous studies (e.g., Baute & Meuleman, 2020), we constructed an index averaging respondents' scores on the following items: (1) "Government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels"; (2) "Large differences in incomes are acceptable to reward differences in talents and efforts" (reversed); (3) "For a fair society, differences in people's standard of living should be small." The response format was a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Disagree strongly* to 5 = *Agree strongly* (higher scores

indicate greater support for egalitarianism, and lower scores indicate greater support for meritocratism). The index showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$), and the unidimensionality of the construct was confirmed by factor analysis (see [Table S4](#), [Online Appendix](#)).

Political orientation

Political orientation was measured through self-placement on a 10-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 = *Left* to 10 = *Right*.

Objective income level

We used monthly household income as a measure of objective socioeconomic position (10-point scale ranging from 1 = *Less than 780€* to 10 = *3700€ or more*).

Subjective income level

As a measure of subjective socioeconomic position, we used subjective perception about present income rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = *Very difficult on present income* to 4 = *Living comfortably on present income*.

The exact question wording for each of the study variables is provided in [Table S1](#) ([Online Appendix](#)). As in Study 1, we also controlled for several other sociodemographic variables, including respondents' gender (dichotomous variable; 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), age (continuous variable), educational level (6-point scale ranging from 1 = *Elementary* to 6 = *PhD*), and employment status (we created the following dummy variable: *in education, unemployed looking for job, unemployed not looking for job, disabled, retired, housework; paid work* was a reference category).

Data analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 statistical package. Descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation analyses, and multiple regression analyses were carried out, as well as moderation and mediation analyses, using the PROCESS macro 3.5 tool (Hayes, 2013). Specifically, we tested the following statistical model: *political orientation* was introduced as a predictor, *objective* and *subjective income level* as moderators, *sociodemographic control variables* as covariates, and *UBI support* as the outcome variable. For moderated mediation analysis, we additionally included *egalitarian* versus *meritocratic values* as the mediating variable.¹ Pearson correlations between study variables can be found in [Table S6](#) ([Online Appendix](#)).

Results

[Table 2](#) shows the moderation analysis on *Political Orientation* × *Income* (both objective and subjective measures) in predicting support for UBI (coefficients for sociodemographic variables can be found in [Table S7](#), [Online Appendix](#)). Regarding objective income level (Model 1, [Table 2](#)), we found a negative interaction effect between *political orientation* and *objective income level* that was marginally significant at $p < .06$. Nevertheless, we found sufficient evidence supporting Hypothesis 1a and pointing to a moderating effect of objective income, similar to that found in Study 1. The effect of political orientation on support for UBI was not statistically significant at low income levels, but it was significant at middle and high income levels. Our hypothesis was further supported by analyses using the Johnson-Neyman technique, which showed that the effect of political orientation was not significant in predicting support for UBI up to the third income decile (value 3.15 of *Objective income level*; see [Figure 2](#)). Once this income level is reached, the effect of ideology becomes stronger the higher the income level (see also [Figure S2](#), [Online Appendix](#)).

¹During the review process, we decided to modify the analytical procedure of Study 2 while keeping our original hypotheses unchanged. This implied the inclusion of the moderated mediation analyses using the Spanish ESS data (which we had not carried out initially) and the removal of a third study with another Spanish sample (which included these moderated mediation analyses), due to the low sample size ($n = 271$) and consequent methodological problems.

TABLE 2 Moderation analysis (Study 2): The predictive role of political orientation in support for UBI, moderated by objective and subjective income levels.

Predictive variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Constant	2.89***	.17	[2.56, 3.21]	2.82***	.20	[2.42, 3.21]
Political orientation	-.001	.02	[-.04, .04]	.03	.03	[-.03, .09]
Objective income level	.004	.02	[-.03, .04]			
Political orientation × Objective income	-.01 ^a	.004	[-.01, .00]			
Subjective income level				.02	.05	[-.08, .12]
Political orientation × Subjective income				-.02**	.01	[-.04, -.01]
<i>Conditional effects of the IV at values of the moderator</i>						
-1 SD	-.02	.01	[-.04, .01]	-.02	.01	[-.04, .01]
Mean	-.04***	.01	[-.06, -.02]	-.04***	.01	[-.06, -.02]
+1 SD	-.05***	.01	[-.08, -.03]	-.06***	.01	[-.09, -.04]
<i>R</i> ²	.05			.05		

Note: Bootstrap resamples = 5000. Analyses were conducted controlling for gender, age, educational level, and employment status. The full table with coefficients for control variables can be found in the Online Appendix.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$;

^a $p < .06$.

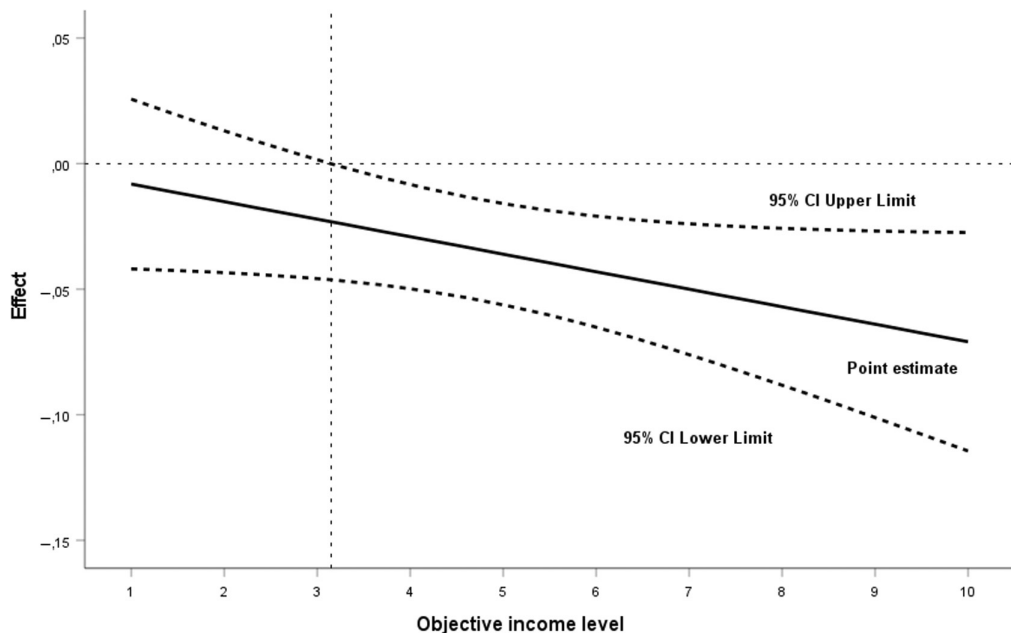


FIGURE 2 Johnson-Neyman graph: The effect of political orientation on support for UBI, moderated by objective income level (Study 2). Moderator value defining Johnson-Neyman significance region: 3.15 (36.96% below; 63.04% above).

Regarding subjective income level (Model 2, Table 2), we found a statistically significant interaction effect between *political orientation* and *subjective income level*, even when controlling for other sociodemographic variables (see Table S7, Online Appendix). As expected by

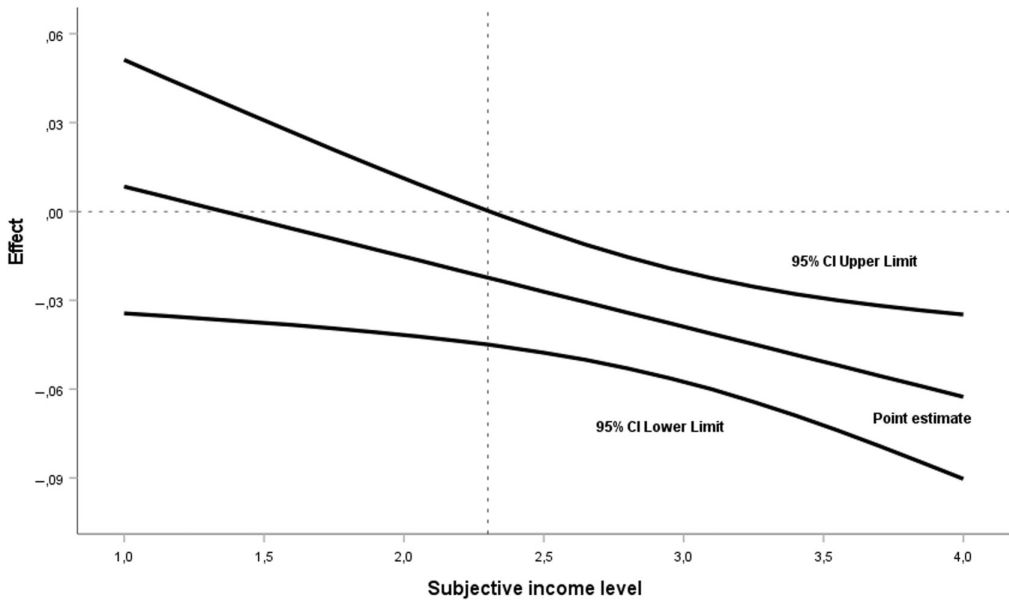


FIGURE 3 Johnson-Neyman graph: The effect of political orientation on support for UBI, moderated by subjective income level (Study 2). Moderator value defining Johnson-Neyman significance region: 2.31 (25.03% below; 75.97% above).

Hypothesis 1b, conditional effects analysis revealed that the effect of political orientation was not significant on support for UBI for those people who perceive greater difficulty in making ends meet on their present income. The effect of political orientation is only statistically significant once this difficulty is not perceived as high (value 2.31 of *Subjective income level*) and increases as respondents perceive greater comfort in making ends meet (see Figure 3; see also Figure S3, Online Appendix).

Table 3 shows the moderated mediation analyses carried out to explain the interaction effect between *political orientation* and both *objective* and *subjective income levels* on support for UBI (coefficients for sociodemographic variables can be found in Tables S8 and S9, Online Appendix). Model 1 results showed that the interaction between *political orientation* and *objective income level* was statistically significant in predicting egalitarian versus meritocratic values among the Spanish population. Conditional effects analysis indicated that left-wing political orientation has a stronger predictive effect on egalitarianism as one's income increases (and vice versa, right-wing political orientation has a stronger predictive effect on less egalitarian and more meritocratic values). Political orientation predicted support for UBI through the indirect effect of ideological values, but not through a direct effect. Thus, we found support that political orientation explains support for UBI indirectly through egalitarian versus meritocratic values. Even more, this mediating effect of egalitarianism versus meritocracy increased along with income level, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2a. The moderate mediation index was also statistically significant.

Similarly, Model 2 (Table 3) found a significant interaction effect between *political orientation* and *subjective income level* on ideological values. Conditional effects analysis showed that the predictive effect of political orientation on ideological values increases as one perceives greater comfort in making ends meet (with the left supporting more egalitarian values, and the right supporting more meritocratic values). Support for UBI was explained both by the direct effect of political orientation and by the indirect effect of egalitarian versus meritocratic values. Moreover, the mediating effect of ideological values was found to be greater among those

TABLE 3 Mediated moderation analysis (Study 2): The predictive role of political orientation in support for UBI through ideological values, moderated by objective and subjective income levels.

Predictive variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
<i>DV = Egalitarianism versus meritocratism</i>						
Constant	3.89***	.15	[3.60, 4.18]	3.92***	.18	[3.57, 4.26]
Political orientation	-.05*	.02	[-.30, -.01]	-.001	.03	[-.05, .06]
Objective income level	.04*	.02	[.01, .07]			
Political orientation × Objective income	-.01***	.003	[-.02, -.01]			
Subjective income level				.06	.05	[-.03, .15]
Political orientation × Subjective income				-.04***	.01	[-.06, -.02]
<i>R</i> ²	.14			.16		
<i>Conditional effects of the IV at values of the moderator</i>						
-1 SD	-.07***	.01	[-.10, -.05]	-.08***	.01	[-.11, -.06]
Mean	-.11***	.01	[-.13, -.09]	-.12***	.01	[-.14, -.10]
+1 SD	-.14***	.01	[-.17, -.12]	-.15***	.01	[-.18, -.13]
<i>DV = Support for UBI</i>						
Constant	2.31***	.19	[1.93, 2.69]	2.34***	.17	[2.00, 2.69]
Political orientation	-.02	.01	[-.04, .002]	-.02*	.01	[-.04, .004]
Egalitarianism versus meritocratism	.15***	.03	[.09, .21]	.14***	.03	[.08, .19]
<i>R</i> ²	.06			.06		
<i>Conditional indirect effects of the IV at values of the moderator</i>						
-1 SD	-.01	.003	[-.02, -.01]	-.01	.003	[-.02, -.01]
Mean	-.02	.004	[-.02, -.01]	-.02	.004	[-.02, -.01]
+1 SD	-.02	.005	[-.03, -.01]	-.02	.005	[-.03, -.01]
Index of moderated mediation	-.002	.001	[-.004, -.001]	-.005	.002	[-.01, -.002]

Note: Bootstrap resamples = 5000. Analyses were conducted controlling for gender, age, educational level, and employment status. The full table with coefficients for control variables can be found in the Online [Appendix](#).

****p* < .001; **p* < .05;

who live more comfortably. The moderate mediation index was also statistically significant. Thus, we found substantial evidence confirming Hypothesis 2b.

Discussion

Our findings supported the proposed theoretical model and went beyond the limitations of Study 1. Focusing on the Spanish context, we found evidence that the socioeconomic position of individuals conditions the role played by political orientation in generating attitudes toward UBI. This was observed not only with regard to the objective position of individuals in the socioeconomic structure, but also with regard to their own subjective perception of this position in comparison to others (supporting previous findings by Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). In particular, our findings showed that ideological motivations are less relevant in supporting UBI for those who are less well-positioned on the social ladder. Among those who are worse

off, political orientation is not decisive in generating attitudes toward UBI (as it is probably outweighed by a self-interest motive). Conversely, for those who are better positioned, ideology becomes more and more relevant in deciding for or against UBI. Our study indicated that egalitarian values explain the greater support for UBI among the left, whereas anti-egalitarian and meritocratic values explain anti-UBI positions among the right.

Regarding study limitations, we must acknowledge that the *egalitarianism* versus *meritocracy* indicator may pose problems in terms of construct validity, since some of the ESS items used to construct this index may also confusingly allude to support for income redistribution. Nevertheless, we constructed this index based on previous studies using these items as a measure of economic egalitarianism, finding adequate construct validity along with consistent results (e.g., Baute & Meuleman, 2020). We should also refer to the possible confounding relationship between left–right political orientation and support for egalitarian versus meritocratic values, as left–right political stance is partly defined in terms of economic (anti) egalitarianism. However, previous studies have found evidence that left–right positioning is a distinct prior step in attitude formation (Jæger, 2008), supporting the idea that these two constructs function as separate variables.

Furthermore, we must again refer to the definition of UBI used in the questionnaire. The ESS includes a rather extensive explanation of UBI, which could allow participants to get a clearer idea of what a UBI is and what socioeconomic consequences it might entail. However, this definition remains ambiguous on important issues concerning a UBI scheme, as it does not specify through which taxes the proposal would be financed or which other social benefits it would replace. The latter can be particularly problematic, since it may be reminiscent of some neoliberal proposals to introduce a basic income at the cost of reducing existing public services, thus reducing some participants' support. As Roosma and van Oorschot (2020) argue, measuring support for UBI with a single item raises questions about the extent to which participants have a clear understanding of this policy, and which particular elements of the proposal they support and reject. Thus, future studies should explore attitudes toward UBI in a more comprehensive way.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

UBI is a complex policy proposal that is gaining popularity in the public sphere for its aim of guaranteeing decent living conditions for all citizens without any requirements or work obligations (Johnson & Roberto, 2020). Therefore, there is a growing interest in the literature on the feasibility of UBI in eliciting positive attitudes among the public, as well as on which social groups would be supportive of this redistributive policy.

Recent studies have found that left-wingers and people from lower socioeconomic positions are more supportive of UBI (e.g., Parolin & Siöland, 2020; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020; Vlandas, 2021), but they have not considered the mediating role that ideological values (e.g., egalitarianism, meritocracy) may play in explaining *why* this occurs. Furthermore, previous research has not analyzed the interactive relationship between individuals' ideology and self-interest motives when generating attitudes toward UBI, even though these motives often compete against one another. Drawing on previous literature on risk exposure (Bonoli et al., 2022; Häusermann et al., 2015; Margalit, 2013) and on modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, 2010; Nový et al., 2017), we proposed a theoretical model in which the socioeconomic status of individuals conditions the role played by ideological motivations in shaping support for UBI.

Drawing on data from two distinct survey studies conducted in Spain (2017, 2021), including one study conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found evidence that support for UBI among people of lower socioeconomic status is mainly based on a self-interest

motive due to material lack of economic resources. Ideology seems to be a less relevant motivation for supporting UBI among the poor, although it gains increasing relevance as people move up the social ladder and live quite comfortably. From a post-materialistic perspective, political orientation would then drive attitudes toward UBI among the better-off through ideological values. Egalitarian values lead people on the left to support UBI out of solidarity, even if it goes against their own self-interest (e.g., the implementation of a UBI could actually mean more taxes for them; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Jæger, 2006). Conversely, right-wingers' rejection of UBI is sustained by their anti-egalitarian and meritocratic values, which lead them to oppose income redistribution and help them to justify (and maintain) their privileged status (as suggested by system justification literature: Brandt et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Bailon et al., 2017; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018).

Taking both surveys together, it is also worth noting the differences in main effect sizes and interaction effects between the two studies. We believe that the larger effect size found in Study 1 (compared to Study 2) may be due to the timing of the survey. Study 1 was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, a context in which the Spanish population faced high economic risk and the proposal for a UBI received a great deal of media attention (hence attitudes toward UBI being more salient among citizens). By contrast, in 2017, UBI was not much discussed in the public sphere since the political party Podemos had abandoned it as a policy proposal in 2014. In this regard, how different economic and political contexts alter attitudes toward UBI might be a question for future studies.

By focusing only on Spanish data, one of the problems facing our research is the generalizability of results. Thus, having access to cross-national data from the ESS (8th edition), we decided to preliminarily test whether our theoretical model could be generalized beyond the specific Spanish context. As can be seen in [Table S10](#) (Online [Appendix](#)), we ran a linear mixed effects model on all European data (controlling for country variance) and found evidence that the reported interaction between ideology and self-interest (with both objective and subjective income levels) is replicated across Europe. Future research should further investigate the specificities of this relationship within European countries, as well as extend this analysis to countries outside Europe. Moreover, as the observational nature of our research does not allow us to establish causal relationships, future studies could test the proposed theoretical model using longitudinal data.

Ultimately, our results have important theoretical and practical implications. The interplay between ideological and self-interest motives has been a rather neglected topic in the study of welfare attitudes. Some authors have posited theoretical models in which socioeconomic position precedes ideological values (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Rossetti et al., 2021) or in which ideology moderates the impact of the self-interest motive on redistributive preferences (Armingeon & Weisstanner, 2021). However, here we proposed a model in which self-interest conditions the role of ideology in positioning for or against a redistributive policy. Future research could delve deeper into the psychosocial processes by which different social groups prioritize their self-interest over their ideological values (and vice versa) in the construction of welfare attitudes; this would address some relevant psychological motivations currently being studied in political psychology literature, such as status anxiety (see Melita et al., 2021) or relative deprivation versus relative gratification (see Gatto et al., 2018).

From an applied perspective, our findings may be particularly relevant for political actors and social movements when devising strategies to mobilize the social majority in support for UBI (or any other redistributive policy proposal). Mobilizing the social bases that may support UBI out of self-interest, even if it is a proposal that in theory does not fit with their ideological values, may be the key to the implementation of this policy. Moreover, political strategies based on promoting an egalitarian ideology might bring the right-wing upper classes closer to supporting UBI; nonetheless, the effectiveness of this approach should be tested in future

studies, as it may also be counterproductive. At a time when UBI seems less and less utopian, achieving its institutional implementation will depend on the ability of its advocates to build broad social support around this policy proposal.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of Study 1 are openly available in OSF at <https://osf.io/vprgu/>. In addition, the complete study questionnaire (in both English and Spanish) is available at <https://osf.io/vprgu/>. The data that support the findings of Study 2 are openly available in the ESS data portal at <https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/study/f8e11f55-0c14-4ab3-abde-96d3f14d3c76>. Additional materials regarding the conduct of this research (e.g., analytical files) are available on request from the corresponding author.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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

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