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Mismatch between Self-reported Ideology and Economic Policy Preferences in South Korea*

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Abstract

This study applies the theoretical framework of Ellis & Stimson (2012) to examine the relationship between self-reported ideology (symbolic ideology) and economic policy-based ideology (operational ideology) among South Koreans, utilizing data from Seoul National University's Unification Perception Survey. The principal findings are as follows. First, the correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology was weak (r=0.134***), demonstrating that ideological labels have limited explanatory power for economic policy attitudes. While "conflicted conservatives" constitute a dominant proportion in the United States, in South Korea, "conflicted liberals" were observed more frequently (6.7%) than "conflicted conservatives" (5.0%). Furthermore, 48.6% of respondents fell into the "mixed" category, suggesting a lack of ideological constraint among South Koreans. Second, the determinants of ideology exhibited a dual pattern. Symbolic ideology was primarily influenced by age (generation), whereas operational ideology was more responsive to income (class). This suggests that the phenomena of "poor conservatives" and "affluent liberals" in South Korea stem from a structural separation between identity and material interests. Third, during the 2022 presidential election, the correlation between the two dimensions of ideology lost statistical significance, implying that under heightened polarization, ideology may serve as a marker for partisan identity rather than a summary of policy preferences. The principal contribution of this study lies in overcoming the reliance on cross-sectional data characteristic of prior research. By analyzing pooled repeated cross-sectional data spanning six years (N=7,200), this study empirically demonstrates that

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ideological mismatch is not a transient event but a structurally entrenched pattern in South Korea.

Keywords
Symbolic Ideology, Operational Ideology, Economic Policy Preferences, Conflicted Liberals, Ideological Mismatch

Ⅰ. Introduction

The deepening political and economic polarization in South Korean society has been accompanied by recurring and sharp confrontations between liberal and conservative camps on major social issues.[1] Concerns have mounted that this ideological conflict extends beyond mere policy disagreement to threaten social integration itself, spurring scholarly interest in the influence of South Koreans' ideological orientation on actual political behavior (Lee, 2009; Jang, 2020; Han, 2016).

However, distinct from the growing public interest in ideology, the methodological challenge of measuring ideological orientation remains unresolved. Prior research on ideology in Korea has predominantly relied on responses to a single survey item asking, "Do you consider yourself liberal or conservative?"—a measure commonly referred to as self-reported ideology (Han, 2016). While this measurement approach offers simplicity and intuitive appeal, its validity has been questioned because respondents may interpret the concepts of "liberal" and "conservative" differently or conflate ideological identity with affective polarization toward specific political actors (Lee & Lee, 2008; Yoon & Lee, 2011).

Furthermore, while prior studies have attempted to verify the congruence between self-reported ideology—where respondents define themselves—and actual policy preferences (Hwang et al., 2012; Choi & Choi, 2018; Ryu, 2019; Jang, 2020), most have been limited to cross-sectional analyses at a single point in time. This limitation constrains the ability to demonstrate the structural persistence of the observed phenomena. In particular, analyses examining the temporal stability of the ideological incongruence that South Koreans exhibit in the domain of economic policy—a core axis of traditional ideology concerning growth versus redistribution—remain insufficient.

To address this gap, this study draws on the theoretical framework of Ellis & Stimson (2012) to empirically analyze the disconnect between "symbolic ideology"

1) In this study, 'liberal' and 'conservative' refer to the Korean progressive-conservative self-placement used in public opinion surveys, rather than classical liberalism.

(self-reported identity) and "operational ideology" (economic policy preferences) among South Koreans. This study distinguishes itself from existing research by utilizing repeated cross-sectional data spanning six years (2019-2024) to identify the structural characteristics of ideological incongruence and its temporal variation during electoral periods. Through this analysis, this study aims to highlight the limitations of inferring individual or group ideological orientations solely based on symbolic ideology and to provide implications regarding whether South Koreans' self-reported labels are grounded in specific economic policy preferences.

This study is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the existing literature on the concepts and measurement of self-reported and policy-based ideology, examining the theoretical background of the symbolic-operational ideology analytical framework. Section 3 describes the data, operationalization of variables, and analytical methods employed. Section 4 presents the empirical results, including the correlation between the two ideologies, the distribution of ideological incongruence types, the moderating effect of political sophistication, and a comparison of the determinants of the two ideological measures. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the findings and presents the conclusions and limitations of the study.

Ⅱ. Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses

Ellis & Stimson (2009) draw a distinction between two dimensions of ideology: symbolic ideology and operational ideology. Symbolic ideology refers to respondents' self-identification as "liberal" or "conservative." This reflects what Conover & Feldman (1981) termed the "psychological attachment" to ideological labels, which does not necessarily correspond to specific policy positions. Symbolic ideology can be shaped not only by political contexts but also by non-political factors such as traditional values, religious beliefs, patriotism, and group identity.

Operational ideology, in contrast, represents an aggregation of preferences on specific policy issues. It measures the extent to which respondents actually support

liberal or conservative policies by synthesizing their attitudes toward individual policies such as welfare spending, tax policy, government regulation, and social issues. It is "operational" in the sense that it is grounded in concrete policy preferences rather than abstract ideological labels.

This study adopts the conceptual framework and typology developed by Ellis & Stimson (2012)—specifically, the distinction between symbolic and operational ideology and the classification of ideological mismatch types—as analytical tools. However, it is important to note the scope and limits of this theoretical application. Ellis & Stimson (2012)'s substantive findings in the United States—particularly that "conflicted conservatives" vastly outnumber "conflicted liberals"—may not directly transfer to the Korean context. The symbolic resonance of the labels "conservative" and "liberal" differs markedly between the two countries due to Korea's distinct historical trajectory involving anti-communism, the democratization movement, and inter-Korean relations. Nevertheless, the Ellis-Stimson framework remains analytically valuable for Korean research for two reasons. First, it provides a systematic method for decomposing ideology into two distinct measures—self-identification versus aggregated policy preferences—thereby enabling rigorous analysis of the gap between them. Prior Korean studies have noted this gap (Hwang et al., 2012; Jang, 2020) but lacked a unified analytical framework for systematic examination. Second, while the direction of mismatch (which type predominates) is an empirical question specific to each national context, the existence of such mismatch and its sociodemographic determinants can be meaningfully examined and compared cross-nationally.

As Kim (2009) points out, in South Korea, the concepts of liberal/conservative and left/right have been formed in a historical context different from that of the West, and their meanings have been used inconsistently. Yoon & Lee (2011), highlighting the problems of ideology measurement in Korean society, reported that differences in actual policy preferences between liberal and conservative groups distinguished by self-reported ideology are not pronounced. According to Han (2016), South Korean voters' ideological self-identification may carry different content compared to the West. In particular, the unique Korean context of inter-Korean division closely links the

meanings of "liberal" and "conservative" to North Korea policy and U.S.-Korea relations. Thus, for some voters, "conservative" may signify anti-North Korean and pro-American orientations rather than economic market liberalism, and "liberal" may connote a conciliatory policy toward North Korea rather than welfare expansion. Choi & Choi (2018) note that the relationship between ideology and policy is relatively weak in South Korea compared to Western countries. There exists a gap between administrations' ideological orientations and actual policies, and economic policy choices often occur independently of ideology in response to changes in the external environment. This suggests that ideology in South Korea has not yet fully performed the function of systematically organizing policy preferences, and that this tendency may be intensified during political upheavals such as elections. This line of thinking leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: The correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology among South Koreans will be weak.

Hypothesis 1b: During periods of heightened political polarization, such as elections, the linkage between symbolic ideology and policy preferences will weaken.

Ellis & Stimson (2012) found that in the United States, symbolic conservatives outnumber symbolic liberals, while at the operational level, a majority of Americans support liberal policies. This incongruence is particularly pronounced among "conflicted conservatives." These individuals identify symbolically as conservative while operationally preferring liberal policies—welfare expansion, stronger government regulation, environmental protection, and so forth. Conversely, "conflicted liberals" identify themselves as liberal while taking conservative positions on policy matters.[2)]

2) This ideology classification framework was later extended by Claassen et al. (2015) into a 14-issue level measurement of "label-position" incongruence (ideological incongruence), and it was reported that "conflicted conservatives" are particularly frequently observed on education and welfare spending issues.

As in the United States, the symbolic appeal of the “conservative” label in South Korea may be disconnected from actual economic policy preferences. In South Korea, “conservative” is associated with values such as anti-communism, economic growth, and social stability (Kang, 2005), and individuals who subscribe to these values may nonetheless support welfare expansion and redistribution in their actual economic policy preferences. These individuals may hold a “conservative” identity due to generational and cultural factors while preferring liberal policies according to their economic interests.

Lee (2011) analyzed how voter groups classified as liberal, moderate, and conservative differed in their attitudes toward major policies. The results showed clear differences among ideological groups on issues such as U.S.-Korea relations, aid to North Korea, comprehensive real estate tax, assembly and demonstration rights, and the death penalty. However, there was no statistically significant difference among ideological groups regarding tax increases for welfare budget expansion. This suggests that self-reported ideology is weakly linked to economic policy preferences in South Korea.

Hwang et al. (2012) analyzed the effect of Koreans’ conservative-liberal self-identification on actual policy preferences. Interestingly, self-reported political ideology (conservative-liberal) failed to predict preferences for economic growth policy, small business support policy, and half-price tuition policy. Instead, specific values (hierarchical values, economic growth values, social order values, respect for the vulnerable, etc.) explained policy preferences. This study demonstrates that there is a substantial gap between self-reported ideology and policy preferences in South Korea. Jang (2020) confirmed the existence of “conservatives who are not conservative” and “liberals who are not liberal” in South Korea. According to this analysis, a considerable number of voters exhibit incongruence between their self-reported ideology and policy preferences, and these voters’ value orientations differ from those of the congruent group. Particularly, given that “liberal” identity in South Korea is grounded in moral and political values, the possibility of incongruence patterns different from those in the West cannot be ruled out. This line of thinking

leads to our second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: In South Korea, there will be a significant proportion of "ideological mismatch types" in which symbolic ideology and operational ideology are incongruent.

According to Converse's (2006) political sophistication hypothesis, higher levels of education are associated with greater ideological coherence. Education serves as a proxy for political knowledge, and more highly educated individuals are more likely to have the capacity to form logical connections between their ideological self-identification and economic policy preferences. In an analysis of the 1980 U.S. president election, Knight (1985) found that the effect of ideology on vote choice was significant only among "ideologues" and had virtually no effect among other groups. He concluded that "the ideology glass overflows among ideologues, but is nearly empty among other citizens" (Knight, 1985). Jacoby (1991) also demonstrated that the degree to which ideological self-identification is connected to specific policy attitudes varies according to political sophistication, and that the strength of this connection also differs across issue domains. This suggests that ideological thinking is a phenomenon confined to a politically sophisticated minority.

Regarding whether these findings hold in the Korean context, Ryu (2012) analyzed the role of political knowledge in the influence of political ideology on policy preference formation. According to the study, differences in policy preferences according to ideology were statistically significant only among voters with high levels of political knowledge. For voters with low levels of political knowledge, ideology's power to predict policy preferences was weak (Ryu, 2012). This indicates that Knight's (1985) findings may be replicated in South Korea. Therefore, our third hypothesis can be expressed as follows:

Hypothesis 3: The correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology will be stronger among those with higher

levels of education.

Kang (2005) analyzes that the ideological structure in South Korea, unlike the West, exhibits multidimensional characteristics where two axes—"rejection–acceptance of anti-communist ideology" and "liberalism–authoritarianism"—intersect. Kang & Lee (2003) also analyze that Korean conservatism has been combined with anti-communism, the developmental state, and authoritarianism, acquiring meanings different from Western conservatism (tradition, free market). In this structure, "conservative" encompasses anti-communism and authoritarian values, while "liberal" encompasses criticism of anti-communist ideology and liberal values.

However, the liberal–conservative distinction in the economic dimension (welfare state versus market) is relatively underdeveloped. If the "liberal" and "conservative" labels in South Korea are more strongly connected to dimensions other than economic policy (North Korea policy, attitudes toward the democratization movement), the correlation with economic policy–based ideology may be even weaker. Specifically, symbolic ideology, being an affective attachment formed primarily through socialization processes, will be strongly influenced by life-cycle and generational effects (age). In contrast, operational ideology, being a response to the costs and benefits of specific policies, will be sensitive to economic status (income). This differential pattern of influence would confirm that the two ideology measures capture distinct psychological dimensions. Hence, the last hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis 4a: Self-reported ideology will be more strongly influenced by sociocultural factors such as age.

Hypothesis 4b: Economic policy–based ideology will be more strongly influenced by economic factors such as income and class.

Ⅲ. Data and Analytical Methods

3.1. Data

This study utilizes data from the Unification Perception Survey conducted annually by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University, spanning the years 2019 to 2024. The Unification Perception Survey employs a proportional quota sampling method based on region, sex, and age, targeting adults aged 19 and older across 16 administrative districts nationwide, with data collected through face-to-face interviews. The annual sample size is 1,200 respondents, and the present study analyzes a pooled dataset of 7,200 respondents across six years. Although the Unification Perception Survey was originally designed for research on unification and attitudes toward North Korea, items measuring respondents' economic policy preferences were newly incorporated beginning with the 2019 survey. This addition enables systematic comparative analysis of the relationship between respondents' self-reported ideology and their specific economic policy preferences. In particular, items measuring attitudes toward welfare policy, tax policy, and chaebol regulation are well-suited for capturing ideological preferences in the economic dimension.

The pooled cross-sectional design of this study offers several methodological advantages over single time-point analyses. First, aggregating six years of data (N=7,200) enhances statistical power and reduces the risk of findings being driven by idiosyncratic fluctuations in any single survey wave. Second, applying identical measurement instruments across multiple waves enables assessment of whether observed patterns of ideological incongruence are transient artifacts of a particular political moment or persistent structural features of Korean political attitudes. However, this design also carries inherent limitations. Unlike panel (longitudinal) data that track the same individuals over time, repeated cross-sectional data comprise independent samples in each wave. Consequently, this study cannot trace individual-level ideological trajectories or establish causal claims about within-person change.

Year-to-year comparisons should therefore be interpreted as aggregate-level patterns rather than individual-level dynamics.

3.2. Dependent Variables

Symbolic ideology was measured using the political ideology self-assessment item from the Unification Perception Survey. This item asks respondents, 'To what extent do you consider yourself conservative or liberal?' with responses on a 5-point scale. The original survey coded responses as 1 = very liberal to 5 = very conservative. For this study, the scale was retained as is, with higher values indicating more liberal orientation. Table 1 presents the scale as used in the analysis.

Operational ideology was constructed as the mean of three items measuring attitudes toward economic policies. The three items measure agreement or disagreement on a 4-point scale regarding welfare expansion, tax increases on the wealthy, and strengthening chaebol regulation. This variable was also reverse-coded so that higher values indicate liberal policy preferences.

Ideological mismatch types were classified by applying the framework of Ellis & Stimson (2012). For self-reported ideology, scores of 1–2 on the 5-point scale were classified as "conservative," 3 as "moderate," and 4–5 as "liberal." For the categorization of operational ideology, both the semantic structure of the original scale and the actual response distribution were considered. Each policy item, after reverse-coding, is measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with 2.5 representing the theoretical midpoint between "disagree" and "agree."

In this study, respondents with a mean score of 2.5 or below across the three items were classified as "policy conservative," those with scores above 2.5 and up to 3.0 as "policy moderate," and those with scores above 3.0 as "policy liberal." The moderate category was set at a narrow 0.5-point interval because the response distribution is concentrated in this range; applying a wider interval would result in a majority of respondents being classified as moderate, thereby obscuring ideological variation. Furthermore, the liberal category (above 3.0 to 4.0) is narrower than the

conservative category (1.0–2.5) because South Koreans generally tend to favor redistributive policies such as welfare expansion, tax increases on the wealthy, and chaebol regulation. Given this distributional characteristic, merely responding at the "agree" level (3 points) does not constitute a distinctly liberal position; it was judged conceptually appropriate to classify respondents as "policy liberal" only when they express active support exceeding mere agreement (above 3.0). Reflecting the compositional characteristics of the two ideology variables, the following types were derived:

Consistent conservative: Self-reported conservative + Policy conservative
Consistent moderate: Self-reported moderate + Policy moderate
Consistent liberal: Self-reported liberal + Policy liberal
Conflicted conservative: Self-reported conservative + Policy liberal
Conflicted liberal: Self-reported liberal + Policy conservative

3.3. Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study include household income, subjective class identification, sex (female dummy), age group, education level, and region of residence. Household income is measured across 12 categories ranging from less than 490,000 won to 7,000,000 won or more per month. Subjective class identification uses respondents' self-assessment of their social class. The original item comprises six categories (1 = upper-upper, 2 = upper-lower, 3 = middle-upper, 4 = middle-lower, 5 = lower-upper, 6 = lower-lower), which were reverse-coded for ease of interpretation in the analysis.

According to Converse (2006), the constraint within political belief systems—that is, the degree to which individual political attitudes form a coherent ideological structure—varies markedly according to political sophistication. More politically sophisticated voters are more likely to understand the logical connections between abstract ideological principles and specific economic policy preferences and to hold

consistent positions (Jacoby, 1991; Luskin, 1987). In this study, education level is employed as a proxy for political sophistication. Education level was categorized into three groups: middle school or below (reference category), high school graduate, and college attendance or above. Table 1 in Section 4 presents the list of variables used in this study along with their descriptive statistics.

3.4. Analysis Strategy

This study proceeds with the following sequential analyses. First, this study analyzes the correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology to examine the convergent validity of the two measures. As in Ellis & Stimson's (2012) U.S. study, where the correlation between the two ideology measures was found to be relatively weak, this study examines whether a similar pattern is observed in South Korea. If the correlation between the two measures is low, this would suggest that a disconnect between symbolic ideology and operational ideology exists among South Korean respondents as well. Next, this study examines the distribution of ideological mismatch types using cross-tabulation analysis, with particular attention to the size of the "conflicted conservative" and "conflicted liberal" categories. It then analyzes year-by-year trends to assess whether ideological incongruence intensifies or diminishes during specific periods.

Building on Converse (2006) and Knight (1985), this study tests whether the correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology varies by education level, used here as a proxy for political sophistication. It is predicted that higher levels of political sophistication will be associated with greater constraint between abstract ideology and specific economic policy preferences.

This study then employs OLS regression to compare the determinants of self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology. Using an identical set of independent variables for both models and comparing their estimated effects across the two dependent variables, it assesses whether the two ideology measures are shaped by different factors. If the determinants differ, this would suggest that symbolic

ideology and operational ideology are formed through distinct psychological and social mechanisms.

The determinants of the "conflicted conservative" and "conflicted liberal" types are tested using binary logistic regression analysis. The dependent variable is whether the respondent is a conflicted conservative (liberal) (1 = conflicted conservative [liberal], 0 = otherwise), and the independent variables are demographic and socioeconomic variables. Particular attention is given to the effects of education level and age. The analytical models used for OLS and logistic regression analyses are as follows:

OLS Regression Model:

Determinants of Self-Reported Ideology and Economic Policy-Based Ideology

$$SYMB_i;\ OPER_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FEML_i + \beta_2 HIGH_i + \beta_3 COLL_i + \beta_4 AG30_i + \beta_5 AG40_i + \beta_6 AG50_i + \beta_7 AG60_i + \beta_8 CHUNG_i + \beta_9 HNAM_i + \beta_{10} YNAM_i + \beta_{11} KANG_i + \beta_{12} JEJU_i + \beta_{13} INCM_i + \beta_{14} CLAS_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Logistic Regression Model:

Determinants of Ideological Mismatch Types

$$\ln\left(\frac{P_i}{1 - P_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FEML_i + \beta_2 HIGH_i + \beta_3 COLL_i + \beta_4 AG30_i + \beta_5 AG40_i + \beta_6 AG50_i + \beta_7 AG60_i + \beta_8 CHUNG_i + \beta_9 HNAM_i + \beta_{10} YNAM_i + \beta_{11} KANG_i + \beta_{12} JEJU_i + \beta_{13} INCM_i + \beta_{14} CLAS_i + \varepsilon_i$$

IV. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the analysis are presented in Table 1.[3)]

3) All analyses employ listwise deletion for missing values. Sample sizes vary slightly across analyses due to item-level nonresponse and are reported in each table.

<Table 1> Descriptive Statistics

Variable Category	Variable	Measurement	N	M / %	SD	Min	Max
Dependent Variables							
Self-reported ideology	SYMB	1=Very conservative ~ 5=Very liberal	7,197	3.1	0.84	1	5
Policy-based ideology	OPER	1=Very conservative ~ 4=Very liberal	7,186	2.8	0.58	1	4
Conflicted conservative	CCON	Dummy	7,186	5.0%	–	0	1
Conflicted liberal	CLIB	Dummy	7,186	6.7%	–	0	1
Policy Preference Items							
Welfare expansion	WELF	1=Strongly disagree ~ 4=Strongly agree	7,190	2.5	0.77	1	4
Tax increase on wealthy	TAX	1=Strongly disagree ~ 4=Strongly agree	7,199	3.1	0.78	1	4
Chaebol regulation	CHAB	1=Strongly disagree ~ 4=Strongly agree	7,196	2.8	0.77	1	4
Independent Variables (Continuous)							
Household income	INCM	1~12 (12 categories)	7,196	8.46	2.28	1	12
Subjective class identification	CLAS	1=Lower-lower ~ 6=Upper-upper	7,199	3.04	0.80	1	6
Independent Variables (Categorical)							
Male (reference)	MALE	Sex (N=7,200)		51.0 %	–	0	1
Female	FEML			49.0 %	–	0	1
20s (reference)	AG20	Age group (N=7,200)		17.8 %	–	0	1
30s	AG30			17.4 %	–	0	1
40s	AG40			20.3 %	–	0	1
50s	AG50			21.7 %	–	0	1
60 and above	AG60			22.9 %	–	0	1
Middle school or below (reference)	MIDD	Education (N=7,187)		8.0%	–	0	1
High school graduate	HIGH			42.0 %	–	0	1
College or above	COLL			49.9 %	–	0	1
Greater Seoul (reference)	SUDO	Region (N=7,200)		42.6 %	–	0	1

Central region	CHUNG	12.8%	–	0	1
Honam region	HNAM	11.9%	–	0	1
Yeongnam region	YNAM	26.4%	–	0	1
Gangwon	KANG	3.7%	–	0	1
Jeju	JEJU	2.6%	–	0	1

Note: 1. Total sample N=7,200. Policy-based ideology was calculated only for respondents who answered all three items (listwise deletion, N=7,186).
2. Conflicted conservative/liberal were calculated only when both self-reported ideology and policy-based ideology were valid.
3. Self-reported ideology is presented after reverse-coding. Original scale: 1=very liberal to 5=very conservative.

The mean of self-reported ideology was 3.1 (SD=0.84), nearly identical to the theoretical midpoint (3) of the 5-point scale, indicating that respondents are positioned at the ideological center on average. In contrast, the mean of the economic policy-based ideology index was 2.8 (SD=0.58), somewhat higher than the theoretical midpoint (2.5) of the 4-point scale. This suggests that South Koreans exhibit relatively liberal tendencies in the economic policy dimension. Examining the individual economic policy items, support for tax increases on the wealthy was highest (M=3.1), while support for welfare expansion was lowest (M=2.5). Support for chaebol regulation (M=2.8) fell between the two.[4] An interesting finding is that while South Koreans are positioned close to the center on average in self-reported ideology, they lean somewhat toward the liberal direction in economic policy-based ideology. This suggests that a pattern of citizens who are symbolically conservative but operationally liberal may also emerge in South Korea.

4) Reliability analysis of the three items comprising the economic policy-based ideology index yielded a Cronbach's α of 0.597. While this falls short of the commonly cited threshold (0.70), as Schmitt (1996) noted, there is no absolute standard for an acceptable level of alpha, and measures with low alpha values according to conventional standards can still be usefully employed depending on research purposes such as in exploratory research. Furthermore, Taber (2018) emphasizes that when the number of items is small and the content domain being measured is diverse, low alpha values are to be expected and should not be interpreted as a flaw of the instrument.

The results of the cross-tabulation analysis between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology are presented in Table 2.

<Table 2> Cross-tabulation of Self-reported Ideology × Economic Policy-based Ideology

	Policy: Conservative	Policy: Moderate	Policy: Liberal	Total
Self-reported: Conservative	604 (37.4%)	650 (40.2%)	362 (22.4%)	1,616
Self-reported: Moderate	1,022 (29.2%)	1,627 (46.4%)	855 (24.4%)	3,504
Self-reported: Liberal	480 (23.2%)	966 (46.8%)	620 (30.0%)	2,066
Total	2,106 (29.3%)	3,243 (45.1%)	1,837 (25.6%)	7,186

$\chi^2(4) = 97.24,\ p < 0.001$

The relationship between the two variables is statistically significant ($\chi^2(4)=97.24$, $p<0.001$), but the association is very weak with Cramér's V = 0.08, and only 39.7% of total respondents showed consistency between self-reported ideology and policy-based ideology. Within the self-reported conservative group (N=1,616), only 37.4% were also conservative in economic policy, while 40.2% were moderate and 22.4% actually exhibited liberal tendencies. This means that more than one-fifth of self-reported conservatives hold liberal positions on economic policy, and these individuals were classified in this study as "conflicted conservatives."

Similarly, among the self-reported liberal group (N=2,066), only 30.0% were also liberal in economic policy, while 46.8% were moderate and 23.2% held conservative positions. Approximately one-quarter of self-reported liberals actually exhibit conservative tendencies in economic policy. These individuals were classified as "conflicted liberals." Even within the self-reported moderate group (N=3,504), economic policy preferences were distributed with 29.2% conservative, 46.5% moderate, and 24.4% liberal. This demonstrates that economic policy preferences are diversely distributed even among respondents who identify themselves as ideologically moderate.

The results of applying Ellis and Stimson's (2012) classification framework are presented in Table 3.

<Table 3> Distribution of Ideological Mismatch Types

Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Consistent	2,851	39.7%
Consistent conservative	604	8.4%
Consistent moderate	1,627	22.6%
Consistent liberal	620	8.6%
Conflicted	842	11.7%
Conflicted conservative	362	5.0%
Conflicted liberal	480	6.7%
Mixed	3,493	48.6%
Total	7,186	100%

Only 39.7% of total respondents fell into the consistent type, where self-reported ideology and economic policy preferences align. Consistent conservatives comprised 8.4%, consistent moderates 22.6%, and consistent liberals 8.6%. Conflicted conservatives (5.0%) are those who identify as conservative while supporting liberal economic policies, and conflicted liberals (6.7%) are those who identify as liberal while preferring conservative economic policies. Together, these two types account for 11.7% of the total, a result that supports Hypothesis 2 (that in South Korea, there will be a significant proportion of "ideological mismatch types" in which symbolic ideology and operational ideology are incongruent). A notable finding is that 48.6% of respondents belong to the mixed type. This suggests that a substantial portion of South Koreans exhibit post-ideological (de-ideological) tendencies, taking different positions depending on the issue rather than maintaining ideological consistency. This empirically demonstrates that a considerable number of South Koreans experience incongruence between their symbolic ideological identity and operational economic policy preferences.

The correlation coefficients among self-reported ideology, economic policy-based ideology, and the individual variables comprising economic policy-based ideology are presented in Table 4.

<Table 4> Correlation Coefficients among Key Variables

Variable	Self-reported ideology	Policy-based ideology	Welfare expansion	Tax on wealthy	Chaebol regulation
Self-reported ideology	1				
Policy-based ideology	0.134***	1			
Welfare expansion	0.078***	0.690***	1		
Tax on wealthy	0.099***	0.766***	0.255***	1	
Chaebol regulation	0.121***	0.777***	0.285***	0.453***	1

Note 1: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Note 2: Only cases with valid values for all five variables included. N = 7,183

The correlation coefficient between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology was r=0.134 ($p<0.001$), which is statistically significant but very small in magnitude. According to the effect size guidelines of Gignac and Szodorai (2016), r=0.134 corresponds to a relatively small effect, and this result supports Hypothesis 1a (that the correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology among South Koreans will be weak). To understand the meaning of this correlation coefficient, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is calculated as 0.018, meaning that self-reported ideology explains only approximately 1.8% of the variance in economic policy-based ideology. In other words, even if someone responds "I am liberal" or "I am conservative," this information alone makes it very difficult to predict that respondent's preferences for economic policies such as welfare, taxation, and chaebol regulation. This suggests the possibility that the labels of liberal and conservative in South Korea are more strongly connected to dimensions other than economic policy—such as North Korea policy, historical perception, and generational identity.

The results of analysis by education level are presented in Table 5.

<Table 5> Correlation Coefficients between Self-reported Ideology and EconomicPolicy-basedIdeologybyEducationLevel

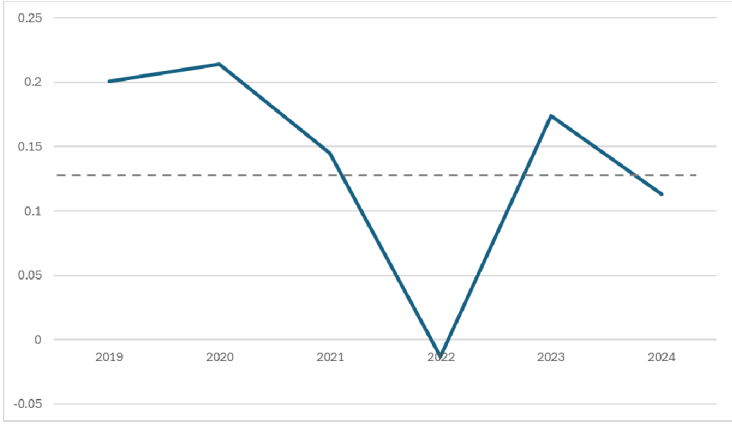
Education Level	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Middle school or below	577	0.105*
High school graduate	3,017	0.111***
College or above	3,576	0.168***
Total	7,170	0.134***

Note 1: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Note 2: N=7,170 for respondents with no missing values on self-reported ideology, economic policy-based ideology, and education level items.

While the difference in correlation coefficients between the middle school or below (r=0.105*) and high school graduate (r=0.111***) groups was minimal, the correlation was notably higher in the college or above group (r=0.168***). This result can be interpreted as indicating that college education serves as an important turning point in the linkage between self-reported ideology and economic policy, playing a role in enhancing cognitive capacity to understand abstract political concepts and connect them to specific economic policies. This result supports Hypothesis 3 and is consistent with Converse (2006)'s political sophistication hypothesis. However, even in the college or above group, the correlation coefficient was only 0.168, confirming that the connection between the two dimensions of ideology is not strong even among highly educated groups.

The results of analyzing changes in the correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology across the six years from 2019 to 2024, the data analysis period of this study, are presented in Figure 1. This analysis was conducted to determine whether the relationship between the two ideology measures is stable over time or fluctuates according to political context.

<Figure 1> Trend of Correlation Coefficients between Self-reported Ideology and Economic Policy-based Ideology, 2019-2024



Note: The horizontal dashed line represents the mean correlation coefficient of 0.134 for the 2019-2024 period.

The magnitude of the correlation between the two variables showed considerable variation across years. In 2019 (r=0.201***) and 2020 (r=0.214***), the correlation was somewhat higher compared to other years, but began to decline from 2021 (r=0.145***), falling to a level that was not statistically significant in 2022 (r=-0.013, p=0.647). It recovered to 0.174*** in 2023, but decreased again to 0.113*** in 2024. This result supports Hypothesis 1b (that during periods of heightened political polarization, such as elections, the linkage between symbolic ideology and policy preferences will weaken).

South Korea's 20th presidential election was held in March 2022, and this year can be characterized as a period of extreme political polarization. In the context of an extremely close race between two leading candidates representing the conservative and liberal camps, political attitudes among South Koreans may have been shaped around candidate personalities and party identity rather than economic policy issues. In this context, ideological self-identification may have become detached from economic policy preferences and defined instead by partisan logic. This year-to-year variation suggests that symbolic ideology may exhibit volatility depending on political

context, and that the relationship between the two ideology measures is sensitive to the political environment.

4.2. Modeling Results

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test whether self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology are determined by different factors. An identical set of independent variables was entered into both models to compare the magnitude and significance of coefficients, and the OLS analysis results are presented in Table 6.

<Table 6> Comparison of Determinants of Self-reported Ideology and EconomicPolicy-basedIdeology(OLS)>

Variable	Model 1: Self-reported Ideology B (SE)	Model 2: Policy-based Ideology B (SE)
FEML	−0.014 (0.019)	0.027* (0.013)
HIGH	0.018 (0.043)	0.006 (0.028)
COLL	0.056 (0.047)	0.001 (0.031)
AG30	−0.044 (0.029)	−0.010 (0.022)
AG40	−0.090** (0.028)	0.010 (0.022)
AG50	−0.244*** (0.030)	−0.012 (0.023)
AG60	−0.505*** (0.034)	−0.060* (0.024)
CHUNG	0.016 (0.030)	0.077*** (0.021)
HNAM	0.347*** (0.032)	0.142* (0.022)
YNAM	−0.208*** (0.023)	−0.068*** (0.017)
KANG	−0.038 (0.053)	0.118** (0.037)
JEJU	0.100 (0.064)	0.029 (0.047)
INCM	0.003 (0.005)	−0.013*** (0.004)
CLAS	0.041** (0.013)	−0.026** (0.009)
CONS	3.097*** (0.064)	2.960*** (0.044)
R^2	0.10	0.02
N	7,193	7,182

*Note 1: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

Note 2: Reference categories are male, middle school or below, 20s, and capital region, respectively.

The coefficient of determination for the self-reported ideology model (0.100) was approximately five times higher than that for the economic policy-based ideology model (0.020). This indicates that predictive power by demographic variables is higher in the self-reported ideology model. In contrast, the economic policy-based ideology model has very low explanatory power with the variables used in this study, suggesting the possibility that it may be determined by factors other than demographic characteristics, such as economic interests, information environment, and personal experiences.

Age had a strong and consistent effect on self-reported ideology. Compared to those in their 20s, those aged 60 and above were 0.505 points lower (more conservative) in self-reported ideology ($\beta = -0.505^{***}$), showing the largest difference. Those in their 40s (-0.090^{**}) and 50s (-0.244^{***}) were also significantly more conservative compared to those in their 20s. In contrast, the age effect on economic policy-based ideology was only weakly significant for those aged 60 and above (-0.060^{*}), with no significant effects observed for other age groups. This result strongly supports Hypothesis 4a (that self-reported ideology will be more strongly influenced by sociocultural factors such as age), demonstrating that differences in ideological identity by age are much larger than differences in actual economic policy preferences.

Region of residence has been reported to operate with ideological and regional factors overlapping in South Korea's regionally divided voting (Moon, 2009), and research has shown that region of origin has a significant effect on ideological orientation (Kim & Lee, 2005). In the regression results, regional variables had significant effects on both ideology measures, but with different patterns. The Honam region was 0.347^{***} points higher (more liberal) than the capital region in self-reported ideology, and also 0.142^{*} points higher in economic policy-based ideology. However, the effect on self-reported ideology was approximately 2.4 times larger than the effect on policy. Similarly, the effect of the Yeongnam region on self-reported ideology (-0.208^{***}) was approximately three times larger than its effect on economic policy-based ideology (-0.068^{***}). These results demonstrate that region has a

stronger influence on ideological self-identification than on economic policy preferences.

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that the effects of income and subjective class differed between the two ideology measures. Household income had a significant negative (-0.013***) effect only on economic policy-based ideology. Higher income was associated with more conservative policy positions (preference for welfare reduction, tax cuts, and deregulation). In contrast, no income effect was observed on self-reported ideology. This result supports Hypothesis 4b (that economic policy-based ideology will be more strongly influenced by economic factors such as income and class).

Even more noteworthy is the contrasting effect of subjective class identification. Higher subjective class identification was associated with more liberal self-reported ideology (0.041**), but more conservative economic policy-based ideology (-0.026**). That is, individuals who perceive themselves as lower class tend to respond "I am conservative" while supporting welfare expansion and chaebol regulation in terms of policy. This aligns with the phenomenon of "class-deviant voting" analyzed by Kang (2013). Low-income individuals or those who perceive themselves as lower class hold a conservative identity due to generational and cultural factors, yet support liberal policies according to their actual economic interests.

Logistic regression analysis was conducted to analyze the determinants of ideological mismatch types. Table 7 shows the determinants of conflicted conservatives (self-reported conservative + policy liberal) and conflicted liberals (self-reported liberal + policy conservative).

In Table 7, conflicted conservative status is strongly associated with age. Compared to those in their 20s, those aged 60 and above (4.474***), those in their 50s (2.733***), 40s (1.864*), and 30s (1.798*) all had significantly higher odds of being conflicted conservatives. This indicates that older individuals tend to hold a symbolic identity as conservative while taking liberal positions on actual economic policy. This generational difference suggests that the meaning of the political label "conservative" in South Korean society is constructed differently across generations.

<Table 7> Determinants of Conflicted Conservatives and Conflicted Liberals (LogisticRegression)

Variable	Conflicted Conservative OR (SE)	Conflicted Liberal OR (SE)
FEML	0.963 (0.106)	0.936 (0.089)
HIGH	0.830 (0.148)	0.967 (0.228)
COLL	0.776 (0.160)	0.846 (0.214)
AG30	1.798* (0.457)	0.999 (0.146)
AG40	1.864* (0.458)	0.922 (0.131)
AG50	2.733*** (0.641)	0.659** (0.102)
AG60	4.474*** (1.041)	0.532*** (0.095)
CHUNG	1.217 (0.207)	0.853 (0.134)
HNAM	0.815 (0.160)	1.143 (0.169)
YNAM	1.208 (0.162)	0.980 (0.115)
KANG	1.493 (0.381)	0.390* (0.151)
JEJU	1.038 (0.391)	0.983 (0.304)
INCM	1.020 (0.028)	1.077** (0.030)
CLAS	0.754*** (0.054)	1.057 (0.072)
CONS	0.048*** (0.017)	0.046*** (0.016)
Pseudo R^2	0.043	0.015
N	7,182	7,182

Note 1: Odds Ratios reported. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Note 2: Reference categories are male, middle school or below, 20s, and Greater Seoul, respectively.

Subjective class identification (CLAS) was also a significant predictor of conflicted conservative status (0.754***). For each one-unit increase in class identification (perceiving oneself as upper class), the odds of being a conflicted conservative decreased by approximately 25%. This means that individuals who perceive themselves as lower class tend to adopt a political identity as conservative while taking liberal

positions on policy.

Meanwhile, the determinants of conflicted liberals showed a contrasting pattern to those of conflicted conservatives. Age had a negative effect, with those aged 60 and above (0.53***) and those in their 50s (0.66**) having lower odds of being conflicted liberals compared to those in their 20s. This implies that when older individuals identify as "liberal," they actually tend to support liberal policies.

Among regional variables, the effect of the Gangwon region(KANG) was notable. Residents of the Gangwon region had significantly lower odds of being conflicted liberals compared to the reference group of capital region residents (OR=0.390), suggesting that respondents who profess liberal orientation in this region show relatively higher ideology-policy consistency compared to other regions.

Household income had a significant positive (+) effect on conflicted liberal status (1.08**). Higher income was associated with a tendency to identify as "liberal" while taking conservative positions on policy. This is interpreted as reflecting a pattern in which high-income individuals associate their "liberal" identity with sociocultural values while opposing redistributive policies due to their economic interests.

V. Summary and Conclusion

The analyses conducted in Section IVprovided statistical support for all hypotheses established in this study, from Hypothesis 1a through 4b. The correlation coefficient between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology was at the level of 0.134*** (Hypothesis 1a), and during the South Korean presidential election period, the linkage between the two variables dissipated (Hypothesis 1b). The existence of ideological mismatch types (Hypothesis 2) and the higher ideology-policy consistency among the highly educated (Hypothesis 3) were also confirmed. Furthermore, the differential determinant structure whereby symbolic ideology responds to age while operational ideology responds to income (Hypotheses 4a and 4b) was demonstrated.

Although ideological polarization and inter-camp confrontation have become

commonplace in South Korean society, discussions regarding the extent to which the ideological identities that individuals and groups self-report correspond with actual policy preferences remain limited. This study applied the analytical framework of Ellis and Stimson (2012) to analyze the relationship between South Koreans' ideological self-identification and their economic policy preferences. The analysis uncovered evidence for the following effects that reflect the particularities of South Korean society.

First, the correlation between self-reported ideology and economic policy-based ideology among South Koreans was found to be weak (r=0.134***), demonstrating that ideological labels have limited explanatory power for economic attitudes. While in the United States, "conflicted conservatives" were found to outnumber "conflicted liberals" by approximately six to one (Ellis & Stimson, 2012), in South Korea, "conflicted liberals" (6.7%) were observed more frequently than "conflicted conservatives" (5.0%).

Furthermore, the fact that 48.6% of total respondents belong to the "mixed" category, not classifiable into either ideological camp, suggests that a substantial portion of South Koreans exhibit post-ideological (de-ideological) tendencies, taking different positions depending on the issue rather than maintaining ideological consistency. This supports the interpretation that "liberal" identity in South Korea is grounded in non-economic values such as the history of democratization and morality rather than economic egalitarianism. However, the ideological space in South Korea can be explained as a "complex structure" in which the Cold War-authoritarian axis concerning North Korea policy and national security coexists with axes of neoliberalism, egalitarianism, and post-materialist values (Lee, 2005), and considering that the alignment of economic and cultural attitudes is not universal across comparative studies (Malka et al., 2019), the "mixed" category may also be interpreted as a "multidimensional combination" rather than simply "post-ideological."

Second, the determinants of respondents' ideology exhibited a dual pattern. Symbolic ideology was primarily influenced by age (generation), whereas operational ideology was found to be more sensitive to income (class). This demonstrates that the phenomena of "poor conservatives" (the elderly) and "affluent liberals" (high-income earners) in South Korea are not merely paradoxical but stem from a

structural separation between identity and material interests.

Third, a notable finding is that during the 2022 presidential election period, the correlation between the two dimensions of ideology lost statistical significance. This implies that during periods of heightened political polarization, ideology may cease to function as a summary of policy preferences and instead devolve into a "marker" for partisan differentiation. These results empirically demonstrate that the liberal-conservative debate in South Korea is captured by partisan logic rather than being grounded in policy substance.

The most significant scholarly contribution of this study lies in its departure from the reliance on single time-point cross-sectional data that has characterized prior research in identifying the incongruence between self-reported ideology and policy-based ideology among South Koreans, thereby enhancing the temporal stability and reproducibility of the findings. Major prior studies, including Choi & Choi (2018) and Jang (2020), were limited to analyses of cross-sectional data from specific years, posing inherent limitations in distinguishing whether observed phenomena represented temporary political events (period effects) of that time or structural patterns in South Korean society.

In contrast, this study overcame such methodological constraints by analyzing large-scale pooled cross-sectional data spanning six years (2019-2024; N=7,200). This holds significant importance in that it empirically demonstrates that the existence of "ideological mismatch types" may not be an exceptional phenomenon appearing only in specific political contexts, but rather a structurally embedded phenomenon in South Korean society.

Finally, the limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, there exists a methodological constraint in that only three items were used to measure economic policy preferences, resulting in somewhat low internal consistency of the scale. The failure to encompass a wider range of economic issues, such as real estate and minimum wage, represents a task to be addressed in future research. Second, because this study focused on the economic dimension, it did not address patterns of incongruence in other ideological dimensions such as North Korea policy, national

security, or gender issues. Future research should expand the scope of analysis to investigate how the belief systems of South Koreans operate within a multidimensional ideological space.

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