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Article

Strong support for a universal basic income, in particular among those who would benefit

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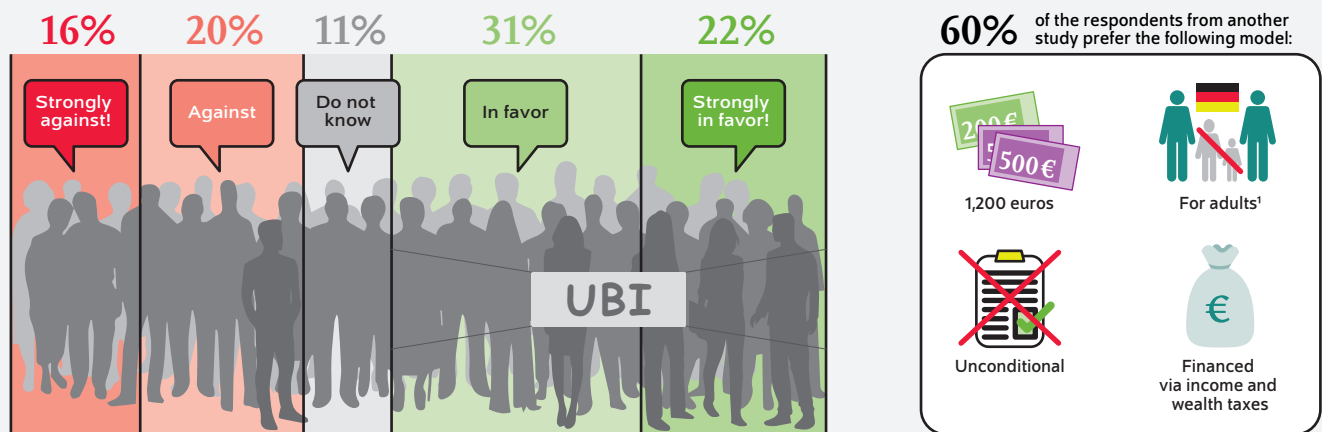
AT A GLANCE

Strong support for a universal basic income, in particular among those who would benefit

By Marius R. Busemeyer, Adrian Rinscheid, and Jürgen Schupp

- Study analyses two representative surveys on opinions on the amount and design of a universal basic income in Germany
- Results from summer 2022 show a high level of support for universal basic income, confirming earlier studies
- The higher the basic income, the greater the support: most respondents support a basic income of 1,200 euros/month
- Financing via higher income and wealth taxes for the rich has the highest level of support; increasing value-added tax, on the other hand, is unpopular
- As there is high public support for a basic income, it should be included in debates on welfare system change

Two surveys show the majority of Germans support a universal basic income financed via higher income and wealth taxes



Sources: Online surveys – Compass (eligible German voters with Internet access; left side). University of Konstanz Comparative Political Economy Working Group (German resident population; right side).

¹ German citizens and residents who have lived in Germany for over five years.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“A guaranteed basic income could make it possible for people to face future challenges, such as climate change and technological upheaval in the workplace, from a more stable economic position.”

— Jürgen Schupp —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with Jürgen Schupp (in German)
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Strong support for a universal basic income, in particular among those who would benefit

By Marius R. Busemeyer, Adrian Rinscheid, and Jürgen Schupp

ABSTRACT

A representative survey from August 2022 confirms public support for a universal basic income (UBI): Between 45 and 55 percent of respondents are in favor of a universal basic income and the unconditional financial security it promises. Two representative surveys from August 2022 investigate who exactly UBI supporters are and which UBI model they prefer. The surveys show that younger people in particular as well as low-income earners and people with serious concerns about their own economic situation support a UBI. One of the surveys analyzed in this Weekly Report shows that most respondents support an unconditional UBI of 1,200 euros that is financed via higher income and wealth taxes on the rich.

The policy debate about a universal basic income (UBI) has increased in intensity over the past years. A UBI would guarantee all citizens a set, unconditional monthly income. While this was initially viewed as a radical, utopian idea, the concept of a UBI has increasingly become included in mainstream policy and academic debates.¹ In 2020, for example, the German political party Alliance 90/The Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) advocated for a UBI in its party platform;² in the future, the “central idea of a universal basic income” should serve as an orientation point. In its election program for the 2021 Bundestag elections,³ the party supported model projects on the effects of a UBI. Included among these is the Freiburg Institute for Basic Income Studies (FRIBIS), which was founded in the fall of 2019 at the University of Freiburg as an interdisciplinary expert network dedicated to academic research on the UBI. Its aim is to provide a scientific basis for the UBI discourse in the public and political spheres.⁴

In addition, there is currently a German-wide pilot project run by the *Mein Grundeinkommen Verein* together with multiple scientific institutes such as DIW Berlin on the individual effects of a monthly 1,200-euro basic income for a period of three years.⁵ A UBI experiment in Finland generated international interest, in which 2,000 unemployed people were paid a UBI in 2017 and 2018. The results, however, had no impact on social reforms.⁶

¹ Cf. for example Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017) as well as Rutger Bregman, *Utopia for Realists: And How We Can Get There* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

² See Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, *Grundsatzprogramm 2020* (Berlin: 2020) (in German; available online. Accessed on March 21, 2023. This applies to all online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

³ Cf. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, *Deutschland. Alles ist drin, Wahlprogramm* (2021): 112 (in German; available online).

⁴ See <https://www.fribis.uni-freiburg.de/about/>

⁵ Following completion of the final of six surveys of participants in spring 2024, the key results of the study will be published; project details are available online; for more on the methodological details as well as the composition of the field study, cf. Rolf G. Heinze and Jürgen Schupp, *Basic Income – from Vision to Creeping Transformation of the Welfare State*. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2023): 46ff. (available online).

⁶ Olli Kangas et al. (eds.), *Experimenting with Unconditional Basic Income: Lessons from the Finnish BI Experiment 2017–18* (2021: Edward Elgar).

The UBI is garnering more attention in social policy research as well. Social security systems must be redesigned in Germany and other industrialized countries and hidden poverty in welfare states must be reduced. Thus, more attention is being paid to less bureaucratic reforms, such as guaranteed transfer payments.⁷ A majority of the research on the UBI is concerned with its financing,⁸ the design of different UBI models, or the philosophical/normative justification for a UBI.⁹ Debates on reforming the welfare state also often focus on how the public feels about introducing a basic income. The results of representative surveys presented in spring 2019 show that around half of the population in Germany would support a UBI.¹⁰ The coronavirus pandemic and the inflation-related increase in energy and transportation costs in 2022 led to serious financial burdens for private households in conjunction with significant uncertainty and the fear of loss of status among some of the middle class. After so much has happened, is general public support for a UBI still as high as it was in the period before the pandemic, or has it risen even further?

A major drawback of previous studies, especially the data of the European Social Survey (ESS),¹¹ is that they can only survey the support for one UBI model due to the technical feasibility restrictions of an international comparative survey study. However, very different implementation methods are discussed in both the national and international UBI discussions. Some of these methods differ considerably, such as in the UBI amount, who is entitled to it, its financing, and if it is fully unconditional or not. Since there are a multitude of diverse models, UBI can have supporters from across the political spectrum who all support different models. However, there have been few studies that use experimental survey methods to capture the complexity of the various models. Using Spanish survey data, it was shown that support for a UBI generally increases when only Spanish citizens, not residents, are entitled to a UBI.¹² Support also increases when the UBI is to be financed via progressive

⁷ For example Hillary Hoynes and Jesse Rothstein, "Universal Basic Income in the United States and Advanced Countries," *Annual Review of Economics* 11 (2019): 929–958.

⁸ The Scientific Advisory Council of the Federal Ministry of Finance presented a report in which four UBI variants are presented via microsimulation studies (in German; available online).

⁹ Cf. Van Parijs and Vanderborght, *Basic Income* for a good introduction and overview, and see Heinze and Schupp, *Basic Income* for a German perspective.

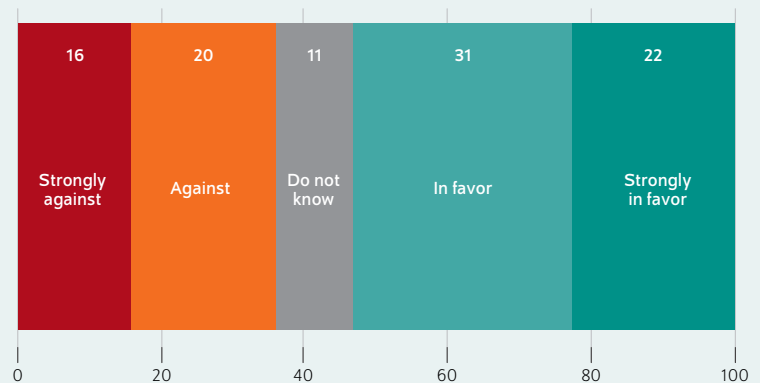
¹⁰ Cf. Jule Adriaans, Stefan Liebig, and Jürgen Schupp, "In Germany, younger, better educated persons, and lower income groups are more likely to be in favor of unconditional basic income," *DIW Weekly Report* no. 15 (2019): 263–270 (available online). The analyses are based on the eighth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2016–2017, which was the first instance of an international comparative survey including a question on UBI. In addition to confirming a high level of support, in some cases more than 50 percent in many European countries, the evaluations show that UBI support is particularly high among younger people, supporters of left-wing parties, and poorer classes. Cf. Femke Roosma and Wim van Oorschot, "Public opinion on basic income: Mapping European support for a radical alternative for welfare provision," *Journal of European Social Policy* 30, no. 2 (2020): 190–205 as well as Hanna Schwander and Tim Vlandas, "The Left and universal basic income: the role of ideology in individual support," *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 36, no. 3 (2020): 237–268.

¹¹ The European Social Survey (ESS) is a cross-country survey conducted biennially since 2001. The ESS collects data on attitudes and behavior patterns of the population in more than 30 European countries (available online).

¹² Cf. Liere Rincon, "A Robin Hood for All: A Conjoint Experiment on Support for Basic Income," *Journal of European Public Policy* 30, no. 2 (2021): 375–99.

Figure 1

Opinions on a universal basic income in Germany, 2022 Shares in percent



Source: Compass – online survey; after weighting, representative of eligible German voters with Internet access; N = 2,117; field time from August 8 to 17, 2022.

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A clear majority of respondents supports a universal basic income, as they have for years.

taxes. In a comparative study using Finnish and Swiss data, it was shown that a higher UBI increases public support and that respondents in these countries also favor UBI models that primarily benefit citizens.¹³

Despite war and crisis, over half of Germans support a UBI

Previous results from German surveys show that the UBI approval rate remained largely stable and trended upwards slightly between the end of 2016 and autumn 2018 reaching rates between 45 and 55 percent.¹⁴ In an autumn 2019 survey as a part of the SOEP Innovation Panel,¹⁵ the UBI approval rate was 48 percent, a few percentage points below the 2018 rate.¹⁶

The two studies conducted by Compass and the University of Konstanz presented in this Weekly Report build off of these findings. In August 2022, the representative Compass survey surveyed randomly selected German citizens on their opinions on a universal basic income (Box). The second study, conducted by the University of Konstanz, was based

¹³ Cf. Isabelle Stadelmann-Steffen and Clau Dermont, "Citizens' Opinions About Basic Income Proposals Compared – a Conjoint Analysis of Finland and Switzerland," *Journal of Social Policy* 49, no. 2 (2020): 383–403.

¹⁴ Cf. Jürgen Schupp, "Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen: sowohl viel Zustimmung als auch große Ablehnung," *Wirtschaftsdienst* 100, no. 2 (2020): 112–116 (in German).

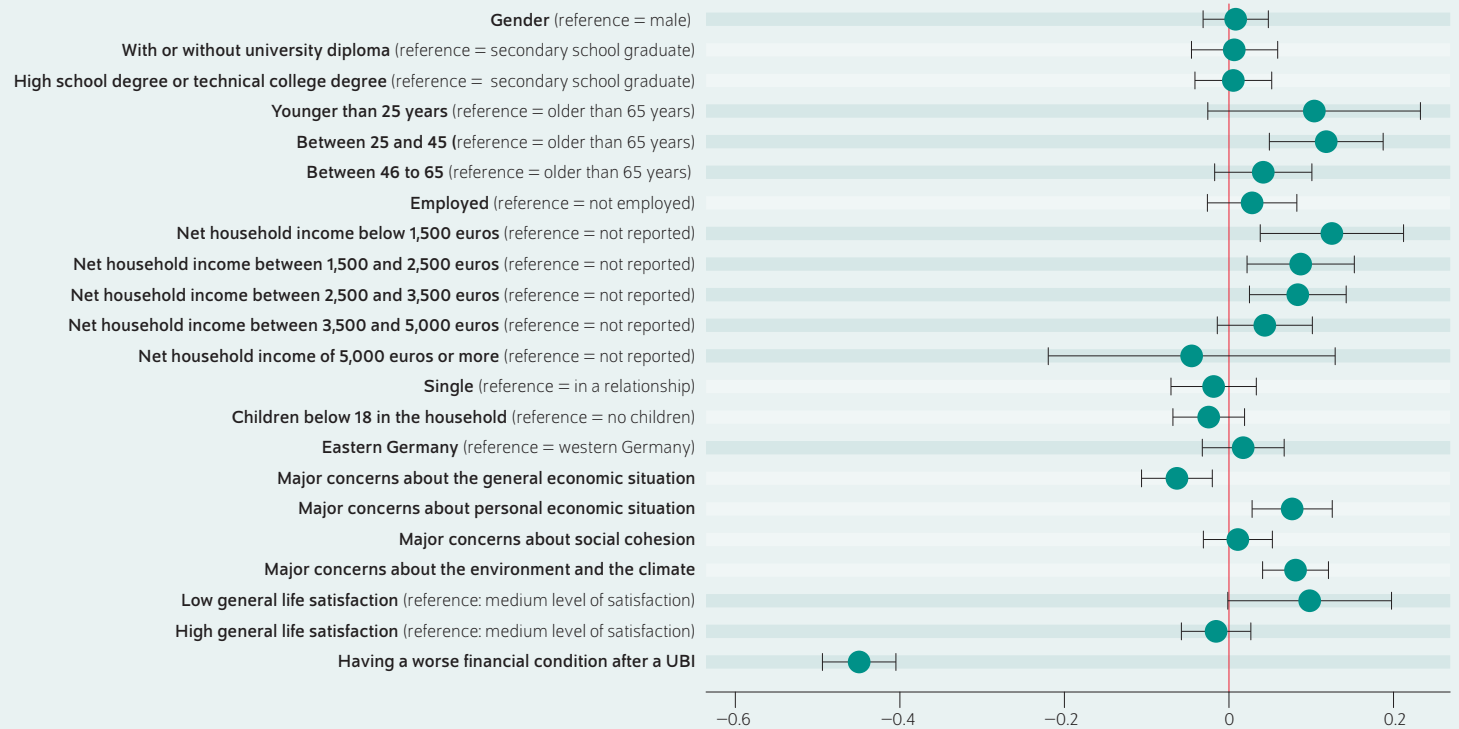
¹⁵ Random sample of the German-speaking population aged 14 and older conducted as part of the SOEP-IS BUS module on the UBI. The SOEP is a research data infrastructure for social and economic sciences based at DIW Berlin. For more on the results, see Jürgen Schupp, "Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen." For more on the methodological design and content of the SOEP Innovation panel, cf. David Richter and Jürgen Schupp, "SOEP-Innovation Panel (SOEP-IS)," *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 135, no. 3 (2015): 389–399.

¹⁶ Adriaans, Liebig, and Schupp, "In Germany, younger, better educated persons, and lower income groups are more likely to be in favor of unconditional basic income."

Figure 2

Influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the support of a universal basic income

Multivariate estimation procedure, average effect in percentage points



Note: The 95 percent confidence interval means that in 95 percent of the cases, the unknown actual value lies within this interval. Correspondingly, the probability of error is five percent. The narrower the interval, the more accurate the estimated effect. If the lower limit of the confidence interval is below zero and the upper limit is above zero, the estimated effect is not significant.

Source: Compass – online survey; after weighting, representative of eligible German voters with Internet access; N = 2,117; field time from August 8 to 17, 2022.

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Primarily younger people, low-income earners, or people with low life satisfaction support a universal basic income. Noticeable support is also from people who are concerned about the environment and climate change.

Table 1

Presumed improvement or worsening of financial situation by support/disapproval of a UBI

Do you assume that after the introduction of a UBI, that your personal financial situation will ...	Total (percent)	Of which:		
		High or low support for a UBI (percentage points)	High or low disapproval of a UBI (percentage points)	Do not know (percentage points)
... significantly improve?	14	12	2	0
... somewhat improve?	22	17	4	1
... remain about the same?	30	18	9	3
... somewhat worsen?	12	2	8	1
... significantly worsen?	11	1	9	1
Don't know	12	3	4	4
Total	100	53	36	11

Note: Cramer's V = 0.3640.

Source: Compass – online survey; after weighting, representative of eligible German voters with Internet access; N = 2,117; field time from August 8 to 17, 2022.

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on an August 2022 survey of 4,500 people who represented the resident population aged 18 to 84 in Germany in terms of age, gender, and level of education (Box).

Compass survey results show high levels of UBI support even following the coronavirus pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and higher energy and food prices.

According to the survey, 53 percent of the German population with Internet access supported the introduction of a UBI¹⁷ in August 2022, 36 percent were against, and 11 percent cannot/did not answer the question, which is a higher share than in previous surveys (Figure 1).

The more the respondents would benefit from a UBI, the higher the rate of support: Thirty-six percent of the respondents expect a UBI will somewhat or significantly improve their financial situation, while 23 percent assume it will

¹⁷ This generalization of the study results to the German population with Internet access is due to the random sampling of the Compass survey (Box).

somewhat or significantly worsen their financial situation. Around 30 percent assume that their financial position will remain roughly the same following the introduction of a UBI (Table 1).

Low income and concerns increase UBI support

In the next step, the respondents who support a UBI are analyzed in a more differentiated manner. Multivariate estimation procedures were used to determine the socio-demographic characteristics that distinguish the supporters from the non-supporters (Figure 2). The analyses reconfirm the significance of many socio-demographic effects that were shown to be significant in the 2016–2017 pre-coronavirus study.¹⁸ Thus, younger respondents tend to support a UBI more than older respondents. The trend for household net income is clear as well: People with a household income of less than 1,500 euros per month tend to support a UBI more than people who do not provide information on their income.

Some preferences and concerns of the respondents that relate to UBI support are also interesting. For example, mainly respondents who are either very concerned about their own economic situation or about the environment and climate change support a UBI. Concerns about their own economic situation may correlate with the income effect; the concerns about the environment and the climate are more likely to be related to specific values.

Respondents who are unsatisfied with their lives tend to support a UBI. By far the largest effect is attributed to a presumed decline in one's financial situation after the introduction of a UBI (Table 1). This result makes it directly clear that the amount of a UBI as well as its possible financing play important roles in support.

Support depends on UBI amount

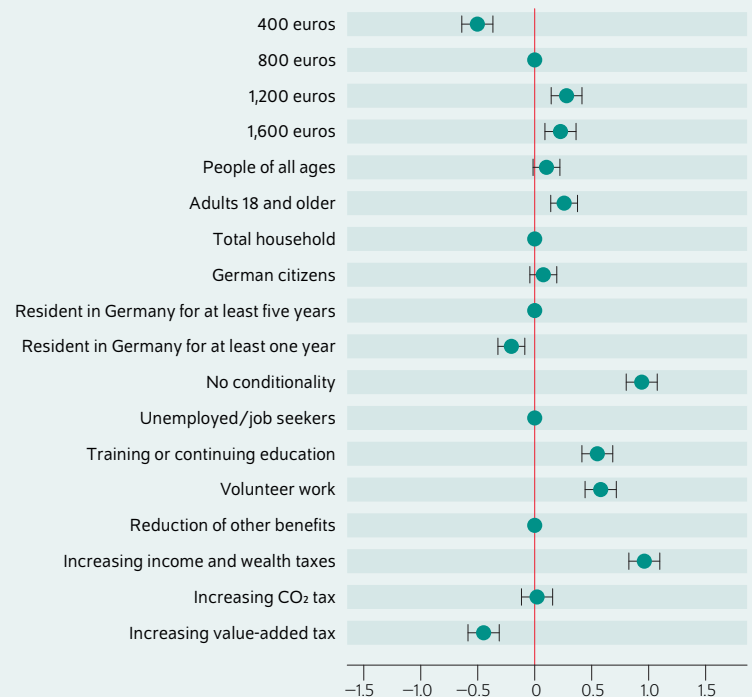
There are various UBI models that differ in terms of amount, eligible recipients, financing, and conditionality.

Until now, systematic information on the German population's preferences regarding UBI financing and conditions for eligibility has not been available. To gather this information, the Comparative Political Economy Working Group at the University of Konstanz conducted a survey with 4,500 respondents in August 2022 (Box). The respondents were presented with several possible UBI models in the form of vignettes and then asked about their level of support or opposition (Table 2). The statistical analysis of the answer patterns makes it possible to estimate the impact of a model's individual design elements on overall support. Moreover, it can be determined how a UBI should be designed so as to increase its acceptance among the respondents.

Figure 3

Influence of different UBI design characteristics on UBI support

Regression coefficients from a multi-level analysis



Note: The dependent variable (degree of support for each UBI model) was measured on an eleven-point scale.

Source: Online survey of the Comparative Political Economy Working Group at the University of Konstanz, representative of the German resident population (18 to 64 years old); N = 4,500; field time from August 9 to 17, 2022.

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A majority of the respondents support financing a UBI via higher income and wealth taxes.

Table 2

Design of various UBI models

	Dimensions	Characteristics
1	UBI amount	400 euros per month 800 euros (reference) 1,200 euros 1,600 euros
2	Eligible recipients	People of all ages (from infants to pensioners) Adults 18 years and older Total household (reference)
3	Citizenship	German citizenship Independent of citizenship, at least five years of residency in Germany (reference) Independent of citizenship, at least one year of residency in Germany
4	Conditionality	No further restrictions Paid only to the unemployed and job seekers (reference) Paid only to people who will then participate in training or continuing education Paid only to people who will then commit to volunteer work
5	Financing	Reduction of other social benefits (reference) Increasing income and wealth taxes on the rich Higher taxes on CO ₂ emissions Increasing value-added and sales taxes

Source: Authors' depiction.

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¹⁸ Adriaans, Liebig, and Schupp, "In Germany, younger, better educated persons, and lower income groups are more likely to be in favor of unconditional basic income," 131.

Box

Data and methodology**Compass survey data**

The Compass survey was conducted from August 8 to 17, 2022. The data comes from a random selection among the approximately 25 million members of the customer loyalty program Payback, which the research institute Infratest dimap used for the first time in March 2020 as the Corona Online Opinion Panel Survey Special to map short-term opinion trends. Infratest dimap weighs the data in a way that it is representative of eligible voters living in Germany (Germans aged 18 and over) with Internet access. The weighting of the random sample uses data from the official microcensus (age, gender, education, household size, federal state, and size class of municipality).

In the Compass survey, the results presented on UBI support are based on questions that follow those asked in the European Social Survey (ESS) 2016/17. Respondents were first given details on the design of the UBI.

- The state pays everyone a monthly income that covers all basic living expenses.
- This replaces many existing social benefits.
- The goal is to guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living.
- Everyone receives the same amount, regardless of whether or not they work.
- Recipients are allowed to keep other income from employment or other sources.
- The UBI will be financed via taxes.

They are then asked if they would be for or against such a UBI. Respondents could rank their level of support using a four-point scale: "very much against," "against," "in favor," "very much in favor." As a follow-up question, the respondents were asked whether they thought they would be better or worse off financially as a result of a UBI.

Konstanz survey data

The Konstanz survey is a Germany-wide survey of the Comparative Political Economy Working Group at the University of Konstanz. The survey institute Bilendi surveyed a total of 4,500 respondents

from August 9 to 17, 2022, via an online platform. The survey represents the resident population aged 18 to 84 in Germany in terms of age, gender, and level of education.

Among other things, the respondents are asked about their opinions on different UBI models via a vignette design. In a vignette design, respondents are presented different models (in this survey, three UBI models) successively, which differ in terms of characteristics or design elements (Table 2). The specifics of these characteristic dimensions are varied randomly. Following each UBI model, the respondents' relative support is surveyed. It is also asked if the respondents would personally benefit from the introduction of each UBI model (analog to the Compass survey).

Statistical analysis methods

The coefficients were calculated using logistic regression models (Figure 2). The dependent variable was support for the UBI (yes/no), excluding "do not know/no answer." The average marginal effects (to be interpreted in percentage points) are shown. Due to the comparatively small samples, only wide confidence bands can be estimated for several characteristics. The income groups are calculated for each person based on the net disposable household income (including social transfers).

The other coefficients shown are based on multi-level models (random intercept models) with the listed characteristics as independent variables (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The dependent variable (degree of support of each UBI model) was measured on a scale of 0 to 10. The results from three separate analyses show how the differing expectations about the impact of a UBI on the respondents' personal financial situations influences their preferences (Figure 4).

Predicted values make it possible to obtain the percentage approval rate for each combination of characteristics (Figure 5). For the presentation, only a small selection of particularly relevant combinations was considered, in particular the combinations of the most and least popular characteristics in addition to other selected combinations. This approach shows the range of possible support for different UBI models.

An initial finding from the Konstanz survey is that support for a UBI depends on its amount (Figure 3). For example, support increases until a UBI of 1,200 euros; a UBI of 1,600 euros has slightly less support. It is possible that respondents start to have concerns about the UBI's financing or decreased incentives to work for recipients beginning at this amount. It is also clear that respondents prefer models in which only adults, not children, receive a UBI and in which it is paid to individuals rather than to households. The citizenship criterion seems to be less important for Germans than in the studies conducted in Spain, Finland,

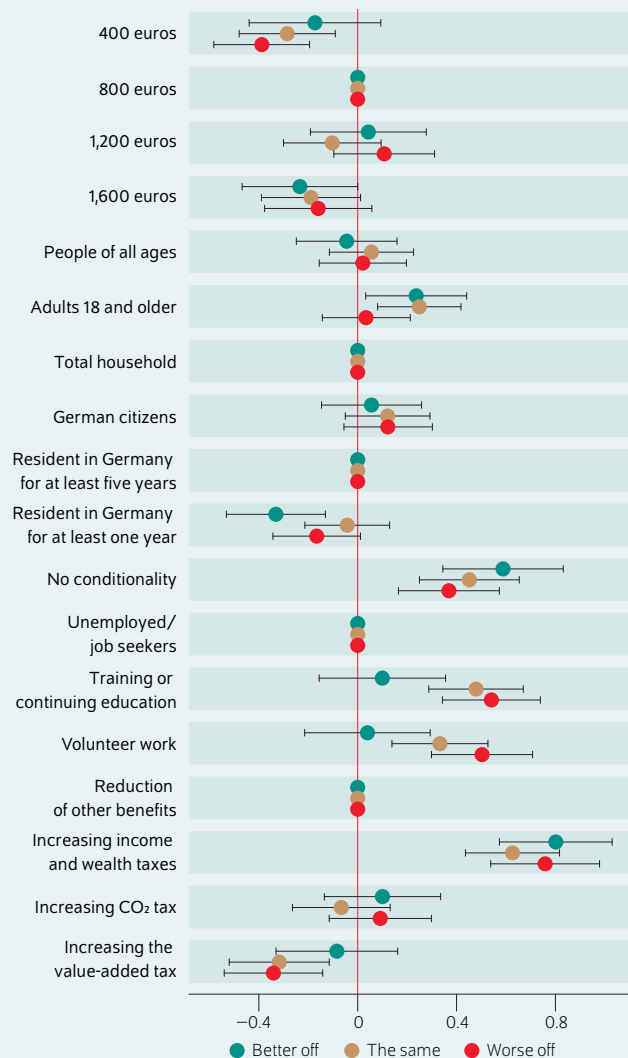
and Sweden: The respondents do not clearly differentiate between eligible recipients who have German citizenship and those who have lived in Germany for more than five years. However, approval decreases if the eligible recipients have only lived in Germany for one year.

A particularly interesting finding is that support is highest when the UBI is granted to eligible recipients unconditionally. Models with the least support are those in which the UBI is only granted to those who are unemployed or looking for work; they are relatively close to the current system of

Figure 4

Support for UBI design elements depending on the expected effect of a UBI

Regression coefficients from a multi-level analysis



Note: The dependent variable (degree of support for each UBI model) was measured on an eleven-point scale.

Source: Online survey of the Comparative Political Economy Working Group at the University of Konstanz, representative of the German resident population (18 to 64 years old); N = 4,500; field time from August 9 to 17, 2022.

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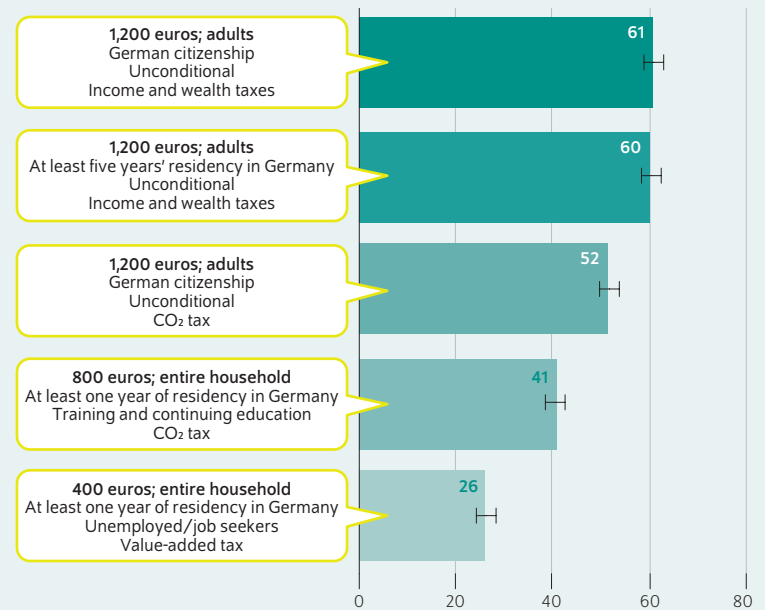
Respondents who presumably would not benefit from a UBI have significantly more support for models that require participation in training, continuing education, or volunteer work.

guaranteed minimum resources (*Mindestsicherung*). Support for a UBI increases significantly, however, if the recipients are required to participate in either a training or continuing education program or volunteer work. Nevertheless, support for a truly unconditional UBI is still the highest overall. There is also a clear pattern when it comes to financing: Support is greatest for financing via higher income and wealth taxes on the wealthy; the least popular is financing via a higher value-added tax.

Figure 5

Estimated support of different UBI models in Germany, 2022

Shares in percent



Source: Online survey of the Comparative Political Economy Working Group at the University of Konstanz, representative of the German resident population (18 to 64 years old); N = 4,500; field time from August 9 to 17, 2022.

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The majority opinion is clear: An unconditional 1,200-euro UBI to be paid to German citizens and people who have lived in Germany for at least five years, financed by taxes.

The study also determined if respondents expect to be financially better off, the same, or worse off following the introduction of a hypothetical UBI model. When differentiating by these different expectations, interesting patterns regarding UBI conditionality emerge (Figure 4). Respondents who believe they will be the same or worse off financially as the result of a UBI support models that require participation in training, continuing education, or volunteer work much more than models in which a UBI is paid only to the unemployed and job seekers. There is no difference in support for these two models among respondents who assume they will be better off financially.

Two quite generous models have the most support of just over 60 percent: 1,200 euros per month would be paid out unconditionally to German citizens or people who have lived in Germany for a long time and would be financed by higher income and wealth taxes for the rich. These models are very similar to the UBI models favored by the left and liberals. The model with the least support, at only around 26 percent, is a UBI of only 400 euros that is financed by a higher value-added tax, is paid to households instead of individuals, and has a very narrow base of eligible recipients.

Conclusion: UBI models must be concretized

Introducing a UBI is a highly controversial policy move. Survey data from the Compass and Konstanz studies suggest that preference surveys can be used to infer political support for various UBI models. Nevertheless, the limits of public support also became clear in autumn 2022 when a referendum for a pilot project in Berlin did not receive the minimum number of signatures.¹⁹

As social problems fester due to the current economic crisis, high inflation, and the green transition, a universal basic income remains politically relevant. Social media will also continue to keep it in the spotlight, while simultaneously contributing to the polarization of the debate. Differentiated and multidisciplinary scientific expert reports on the advantages and disadvantages of a UBI are the best way to overcome the sometimes heated debates. Such a multidisciplinary view could also expand on the expert opinion by the Advisory Board to the Federal Ministry of Finance,²⁰ taking

into account preferences and associated socioeconomic security and resilience. This is because a guaranteed UBI could make it possible for people to face future challenges—such as those caused by the effects of climate change or technological upheavals in the workplace—from a more economically safe position with greater reliability.²¹

Moreover, the results confirm that support for a UBI depends strongly on its design specifics. Unconditional models with a comparatively high income receive the most support, but to what extent such a model can be financed is another, but important, question. In any case, the political support is there. Presumably, however, a UBI will not be implemented in the short or medium term. Nevertheless, the social system is gradually transforming, as the debate on a basic child allowance (*Kindergrundsicherung*) shows. The future of the welfare system in times of crisis should be the focus of a broad, empirically substantive, and open-ended societal debate, which should also consider the UBI as a reform option.

¹⁹ The *Expedition Grundeinkommen* initiative did not call for the introduction of a UBI, but merely promoted a scientific three-year model experiment with 3,500 participants that would have cost around 70 million euros. However, the referendum failed due to a low voter turnout and a quarter invalid votes (in German; available online).

²⁰ Cf. Wissenschaftlicher Beirat beim Bundesministerium der Finanzen, *Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen* (2021) (in German; available online).

²¹ For such a differentiated classification of advantages and disadvantages of a basic income in the context of current societal challenges, see Philippe van Parijs, "Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic: crucial pushes or deadly blows for basic income?" in *Sozial Sicherungssysteme im Umbruch*, D. Rodenhäuser et al. (eds.) (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 2021): 193–211 (available online).

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