



# Do Koreans Like Being Nudged?

## A Survey of Behaviorally Informed Policy Preferences

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### ABSTRACT

The spread of “nudge” initiatives around the world invites testing the effects of behaviorally informed policy approaches in different socio-cultural contexts. The Western developed countries have embraced such approaches in varying degrees, but nudging has been sparingly utilized in Eastern countries. This research built upon recent survey research conducted by Western scholars with adaptations to the context of South Korea, employing a more nuanced view to the lived experience of Koreans and the significant influence of Confucianism in their society.

Preliminary findings suggest that Koreans prefer System 2 nudges, especially nudges that address unhealthy behaviors and traffic safety concerns. The nudge policy preferences of Koreans were then juxtaposed with two well-known studies for comparison to the other countries in the previous surveys: Hofstede’s “Dimensions of National Culture” and the World Values Survey Cultural Map. These studies have measures that correspond to some of the major biases of behavior and add additional insight to how and why Koreans have a distinct nudge profile. The quantitative analysis of the survey results and the other indices is situated in a qualitative analysis of the Korean context.

This research can contribute to the consideration of behaviors being unique to socio-cultural (or country) contexts. Building on that idea, behavioral research can proceed to test different outcomes of nudge concepts according to different context. The outcome of this research is a potential profile of Korea for behavioral policy approaches. This may lead to the development of some qualifying aspects for an Eastern nudge theory that better suits such populations.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS + HYPOTHESES

- 1) Do Koreans prefer System 1 or System 2 type nudges?
- 2) Which Korean policy target or public issues are most receptive to nudges?
- 3) How do Koreans differ from other countries in their nudge receptions?

**H1: Koreans have a distinct approval profile for nudge policies.**  
**H2: Koreans are more favorable to System 2 type nudges.**

*Korea is a unique socio-cultural context due to five important aspects: deep-rooted Confucian traditions, collectivist outlook in a capitalist market, population density, extremely rapid economic development, and newfound influence on the global stage. For this reason, it is worth investigating how nudges may play out for Koreans in contrast the rest of the world.*

### METHOD

A survey was disseminated through the researcher’s networks to build a snowball sample with 462 responses over the course of 6 weeks in Spring 2018. The survey replicated and expanded the questions of Sunstein (2015;2016), Resisch and Sunstein (2016), and Sunstein et al. (2017) with a carefully verified translation into Korean language. The results were analyzed and compared to the results of the earlier studies using sample-weighted t-tests, paying particular attention to whether the nudges were focused toward System 1 or System 2 decision processes, as well as the policy issue topics.

### FINDINGS

Both hypotheses were supported.

The differences between my survey results and that of the previous researches may be partly explained by sample quality and context-adjusted translations. Nonetheless, there is evidence that Korea has significantly different feelings about nudge policies from not only Western countries, but also differences from its cultural and geographical neighbors. This suggests that nudge policies must be sensitive to context on many dimensions to fit the population’s unique behavioral profile.

### INTERESTING STUFF

- Koreans do not seem to like government policies that suggest how they should donate their money or their organs (recent scandals have tainted public opinion on these issues).
- Nudge policies aimed at improving public safety and general welfare are preferred to nudges aimed at individual behaviors; there is a noted discomfort with policies that are too personal in nature.
- Global issues – environment, terrorism, human rights – do not hold much interest as nudge policy topics.
- Do not try to regulate Koreans’ food choices!



Hypothetical Policy Topic	RoK Approval	t-score (95% significance at t = +/- 1.96)					RoK
		USA	UK	Japan	China	Denmark	
require calorie labels at chain restaurants	0.89	1.883	2.220	2.067	-1.869	10.216	-4.136
require graphic warnings on cigarette packages	0.87	5.164					
implement "traffic lights" system for food.	0.49	-4.830	-17.671	-2.139	-18.550	-1.068	-12.790
current office holder must always be listed first on ballot.	0.23	-9.777					
require people to say (age 19) whether they want to be organ donors.	0.4	-9.639	-12.632	-2.504	-7.135	-7.868	-5.978
require public cafeterias to have one meat-free day per week.	0.31		-8.155	1.177	-17.318	0.387	-8.451
require companies to disclose food they sell containing GMOs.	0.95	4.791					
assume people want to donate \$50 to UNICEF on tax returns, unless they specifically state otherwise.	0.09	-7.326	-7.489	-9.803	-26.805	-2.697	-18.100
require large grocery stores place most healthy foods in a prominent, visible location.	0.35	-6.707	-16.065	-4.310	-21.340	-4.660	-13.259
a campaign of vivid and graphic images, designed to discourage cell phone use while driving.	0.79	-2.504	-5.084	-4.505	-8.602	-0.896	-5.018
a public education campaign that parents can use to make healthier choices for their children (anti-obesity).	0.93	5.203	3.091	5.150	-0.731	5.554	0.660
airlines charge people \$10 on tickets to offset carbon emissions (opt out if they explicitly say that they do not want it).	0.58	7.033	4.660	5.343	-7.444	8.283	-4.063
movie theaters to provide subliminal advertisements designed to discourage people from smoking and overeating.	0.53	3.833	1.552	3.209	-15.939	10.527	-8.269
require labels on products that have unusually high levels of salt.	0.82	3.410	-3.449	4.854	-7.170	5.216	-7.037
public education campaign designed to encourage people not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.	0.76	0.370					
public education campaign designed to encourage mothers of young children to stay home to take care of their kids.	0.31	-0.682					
assume people want to donate \$50 to Salvation Army charity on their tax returns, unless they state otherwise.	0.07	-7.977					
a public education campaign informing people that it is possible for people to change their gender.	0.37	-1.305					
require labels on products that come from companies that have repeatedly violated the nation's labor laws.	0.76	5.429					
require movie theaters to run public education messages designed to discourage people from smoking and overeating.	0.57	1.280	-4.072	-0.360	-15.817	7.931	-16.150
a public education campaign designed to combat obesity.	0.26	-9.974					
To halt rising obesity problem, require large supermarket chains to keep cashier areas free of sweets.	0.33		-21.396	-0.749	-14.540	-8.540	-9.493
requires labels on products that come from countries that have recently harbored terrorists.	0.4	-4.465					