# A Bayesian approach to examine the feasibility of integrating a data based households’ eligibility tool in a basic income system

# Abstract

Appeals to governments for implementing basic income systems are contemporary and wide spreading. The most existing theoretical background of the basic income concept prescribes transferring equal amounts to individuals irrespective of their socioeconomic attributes. However, the most recent and ongoing basic income initiatives all around the world are attached to certain socioeconomic attributes of the households to be the eligible receivers. Since 2010, Iran has implemented a broad basic income system for all its citizens irrespective of their socioeconomic attributes. Since the recent years and in the face of budget constraints, the Iranian government has been attempting to consider the welfare attributes of the receiver households to be eligible or not. This has been facing significant challenges with regard to appropriate distinguishing of the relative vulnerable from the relative wealthier groups. Are designing basic income systems with integrating a data based households’ eligibility tool feasible? In this paper, we analyze this question by utilizing the official welfare data of one and a half million Iranian citizens and a Bayesian network approach.

# Introduction

The idea of basic income, a minimum income transferred by state to each member of a society,is wide spreading. Appeals to governments for implementing basic income programs are all contemporary including the United Kingdom (Jordan , 2012; Mori, 2017), Germany (Scientific Advisory Board at the Federal Ministry, 2021; Coalition agreement SPD, The Greens and FDP, 2021) and Spain (Perkiö, 2013; De Durana & Rodrigu, 2021). In addition to the major programs and plans, there are a large number of small scale pilot projects, which are mostly revolving around several experiments in the United States (Yang et al., 2021) and serve as scientific controlled trials to capture the potential up and downs of performing the this idea (Moffitt, 2003). A complete list of the major implemented or ongoing basic income programs can be found in the World bank (Gentilini et al., 2020). Basic income systems per definition do not attach any social-demographic attributes such as age, marital status, gender, health status, social class and etc. to any individual as eligibility criteria (Bill, 1988; Van Parijs, 1991; Van der Veen, 1998; Pateman, 2004; Raventós , 2007; Widerquist, 2001). In addition, basic income shall be paid uniformly to each person of the society (Bill, 1988; Van Parijs, 1991; Van der Veen, 1998; Standing, 2012; Von Gliszczynski, 2017; Lovett, 2009; Raventós, 2007).

The idea of paying uniformly distributed basic income to all members of a society might improve the quality of life and reduce poverty, however, there are yet theoretical debates (Hoynes & Rothstein, 2019; Yang et al., 2021; Jackson, 2017; OECD, 2017; Zheng et al., 2020) regarding the financing a broad basic income program. Basically, if the equally transferred cash to all individuals be set too low, it becomes insufficient in reducing poverty. On the other hand, setting too high cash transfers payed to each individual can become extremely costly and infeasible in the face of the governments’ budget constraint (Fitzpatrick, 1999). The evidences of expansiveness’s of basic income come not only from theoretical perspective but also from empirical experiences. Hoynes & Rothstein (2019) estimate a broad basic income program not attached to social-demographic variables to be costly about twice the cost of all existing transfers in the United States. A universal *no question asked* public transfer to everyone would necessitate significant tax rises as well as reductions in essential existing benefits in (OECD, 2017). Jackson (2017) predicts that implementing a broad basic income program would increase tax rates for below median income workers up to 70 percent or 80 percent if the basic income level is set at one-half of Canada’s median income. Zheng et al., (2020) prognoses that if in China, in 2014, the government would have decided to pay every adult a monthly income of 336 yuan (if living in urban areas) or 231 yuan (if living in rural areas), this would have required a yearly government expenditure of 3.472 trillion yuan, equivalent to approximately 5.46% of overall Chinese GDP and almost half of the overall Chinese government expenditure.

Iran is known as the first country in the world to provide a de facto based on the definition of World bank (Gentilini et al., 2020) basic income system to all its citizens. In December 2010, Iran launched a cash transfer program that payed every Iranian residing in the country the equivalent of $40–45 a month, unconditionally. The program, while still continuing after thirteen years, has lost much of its desired effect as the purchasing power of the transfers has been largely receding through inflation. It is now witnessed as insufficient for the vulnerable households and simultaneously as of little value for the relatively wealthier households, while worsening the government’s budget considering of its large aggregate size.

Subsequently, it has become inevitable for the administration to pursue the idea of a basic income, which incorporates a households’ eligibility tool in its system. Apart from Iran’s experience, the most recent or currently ongoing basic income initiatives all around the world, are attached to certain socioeconomic conditions to select the eligible receivers (Yang et al., 2021).

Are designing basic income systems with integrating a data based households’ eligibility tool feasible? This paper investigates this question as a research gap within the existing literature of basic income. We analyze this question by utilizing the official welfare data of one and a half million Iranian citizens and a Bayesian belief network BBN approach. Thereby, we investigate whether one administration can obtain reliable probabilistic inferences regarding the average amount of cash, households have access in their bank accounts based on the reliable welfare households’ data.

The remainder of the paper is as follows. Section 2 explains the main welfare attributes of the individuals within the source data of the research and how the individual data is converted into the households’ data table. How the Bayesian model is constructed and evaluated, are explained in section 3. The results of the analysis are presented and deliberated in section 4. Concluding remarks are highlighted in section 5.

# Data preparation

The anonymized welfare data of 1.5 million randomly chosen individual Iranian citizens provided by Iran’s [ministry of cooperatives, labor, and social welfare](https://irangov.ir/cat/502) are utilized in this study. The 30 distinct registered information for each individual are depicted in table 1. The source data table’s each row belongs exactly to one person containing welfare information of that person in 30 distinct columns. We did not utilize this data table directly, as we believe in a more meaningful parameter to evaluate the individuals’ welfare i.e. the aggregation of entire individuals’ welfare attributes within their corresponded household. Over the key identification *Parent ID*, we ascribed each of the 1.5 million individual persons to their corresponded unique household and came out with exactly five hundred thousand households in the total. We generated out of individual available data a new table named *Household\_welfare\_data*. In the aggregation process, we added the welfare values of individual persons (e.g. car numbers and car values) within a family together and averaged the sum over the number of family members. The aggregation carried out with the exception of person ID, parent ID, age, gender and the living place. These variables are not to be summed and hence are represented by the parent’s information in the *Household\_welfare\_data*. Finally, due to the existing of 8280 NaN values in a column related to the question of *living in the city or not*, we dropped the corresponded rows to come up with a data table consisting of 491720 rows × 30 columns.

Table 1: The types of 30 distinct registered information from each individual

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Person’s family profile and gender | 1. Person ID |
| 1. Parent ID |
| 1. Age |
| 1. Gender |
| Person’s living place | 1. live in the city or not? |
| Person’s income | 1. Total annual salary |
| 1. Has a trade union license? |
| 1. Is an employed taxable person? |
| Person’s insurance and retirement status | 1. Has health insurance? |
| 1. Is a pension fund insurer? |
| 1. Is a pension fund retiree? |
| Person’s transport and trips | 1. Number of foreign air trips |
| 1. Number of foreign land trips |
| 1. Total number of cars |
| 1. Total value of cars |
| Person’s special health issues | 1. Is a special patient? |
| 1. Is a disabled person? |
| Person’s bank account records of the recent years | 1. Total income from bank interest within 20.03.2016-20.03.2017 |
| 1. Total creditor turnover within 20.03.2016-20.03.2017 |
| 1. Total debt within 20.032016-20.03.2017 |
| 1. Average accounts balance within 20.03.2016-20.03.2017 |
| 1. Total income from bank interest in within 20.03.2017-20.03.2018 |
| 1. Total creditor turnover within 20.03.2017-20.03.2018 |
| 1. Total debt within 20.03.2017-20.03.2018 |
| 1. Average accounts balance within 20.03.2017-20.03.2018 |
| 1. Total income from bank interest within 20.03.2018-20.03.2019 |
| 1. Total creditor turnover within 20.03.2018-20.03.2019 |
| 1. Total debt within 20.03.2018-20.03.2019 |
| 1. Average accounts balance within 20.03.2018-20.03.2019 |
| 1. Average accounts balance within 20.03.2019-20.03.2020 |

# Bayesian Network model

A Bayesian belief network BBN model (Pearl, 1988) is a graphical network that represents probabilistic relationships among a bundle of variables. It comprises a directed acyclic graph DAG with nodes representing the variables and arcs representing conditional dependencies between the connected nodes. Bayes theorem defines the relationships between variables (Puga et. al., 2015). The main objective of BBNs is to infer the posterior probability distribution of a set of presumably not completely observable variables after observing a set of observable variables. A clear explanation of what Bayesian Belief Networks are and how they are utilized is explained in Barbrook-Johnson and Penn (2022).

In our investigation, the total of the 30 variables in the table 1 are selected to be the main components of the Bayesian network. The corresponded variable to the thirty’s row of the table 1 i.e. the *average balance of the entire family members’ accounts* within the period of 20.032019-20.03.2020, is the key *dependent* variable of our study. In a certain year, this variable represents the averaged *remaining* total amount of the money, which is accessible in the bank accounts of the entire members of a family through that year, after all the debits and credits have been considered. It is describing the level of accessibility of a household to *cash* through the year, and hence is presumed to be the possible criterion of the eligibility or not eligibility of a household to receive further cash in the form of a basic income. Hereafter, if the administration decides e.g. on 20.03.2019 upon the eligibility of a household to be the receiver of the basic income within the time period 20.032019-20.03.2020, it can look at the aggregated values of the welfare attributes of the entire members of that family by means of their banking records from 20.03.2016 until 20.03.2019 (rows 18-29 at table 1) as well as their non-banking welfare attributes of that household at the day of decision making (rows 3-17 at table 1) to assess the probabilistic posterior access of that household within the upcoming time. As the individual banking records can be interpreted as sensitive information and might not be applicable, we design experiments in this paper, once with the existence of the banking records and once without the banking records.

To construct the Bayesian network, we must go through three steps. As Bayesian networks conventionally use labeled variables, whose domain are a finite set of labels, we should discretize the space of the data for the entire variables at the first step. We do this step by splitting the data for each of 30 variables into 2 subsections, if applicable. If a variable is greater or equal than a certain threshold , it becomes labeled as *negative* (by assumption) and if it is smaller than it becomes labeled as *positive* by (assumption). To experiment the impact of setting different values of , we incorporate *deciles*. A decile is the result of splitting up the ranked data of each variable into 10 equally large subsections, so that each subsection represents 1/10 of the data of a variable. We set the splitting threshold in each experiment of our study to the 9 in-between threshold value of 10 identified deciles. Thus, the *n’*th decile splits the entire data related to a certain variable of the table 1 to the *negatives*, which represent the data part with values greater or equal than the *n/10* of the ranked data of that variable and the *positives*, which represent the data part with values smaller than the *(10-n)/10* of the ranked data of that variable. For example, the corresponded to the *n=5* splits the data of a variable into the values less than the *median (positives)* and the values greater than the *median (negatives)*. Note that, each time we set the threshold in line with a certain decile, we apply the same decile number *n* to split the data of all 30 variables. The splitting of variables is done with the exception of the *gender* and the *living place*, which are binary variables on their own.

In the second step, we estimate a DAG that captures the dependencies between the variables given the labeled data (Neapolitan, 2003). In our study we are using the Hill Climbing Search algorithm (Tsamardinos et al., 2006). This algorithm undertakes a greedy local search that starts from a disconnected DAG consisting of the entire 30 variables and proceeds by iteratively performing single-edge manipulations that maximally increase the value of a *score* function. The score function maps DAGs to a numerical score, which measures how well DAGs fit to the given data table. We apply the *pyAgrum* 1.9.0 on Jupyter framework to compute the DAG as well as the subsequent Bayesian learning computations through our study.

In the third step, we compute the conditional probability distributions CPTs of the individual variables, given the DAG and the labeled data.

By completion of the third step, the BNN is completed and can be used to make inferences regarding the posterior probabilities of the variables of concern. In this paper we are pursuing the feasibility of obtaining reliable inferences regarding the average amount of cash, each household is going to have access on average in an upcoming year of interest, after the BNN is consulted by a set of the household’s welfare attributes. Thereby, we design experiments to split the variable *average balance of the entire family members’ accounts* within the period of 20.032019-20.03.2020 (, which is the key variable of our study) according to the 9 in-between threshold values of 10 deciles, each time to the corresponded *negative* and *positive* subsection and see how well the BBN can distinguish the households, who are positioned on the area larger or equal than the threshold (negatives), from the households, who are positioned on the area smaller than the threshold (positives). As the BBN model outputs probabilities values linked to being *negatives* or *positives*, we must decide upon a probability threshold upon which we decide to classify a household as a *positives* type, if the predicted posterior probability of *positives* exceeds and classify a household as a *negatives*, if the predicted posterior probability of *positives* for that household through the BBN model does not exceed the . The default for interpreting probabilities to class labels is 0.5. However, tuning of to increase the preciseness of predictions, necessitates observing the changes in the accuracy of the BBN model to predict each *negative* and *positive* value of the target variable while moving e.g. from 0.0 to 0.9 in small (e.g. 0.1) incremental step sizes. Thereby we apply the *receiver operating characteristic* (ROC) curve (Fawcett, 2006) and the *precision and recall* (PR) curve (Powers, 2011) as well.

Before presenting the results in section 4, we explain the applied metrics to assess the feasibility of correct eligible households’ classification by a special case in the experiment design of our investigation.

## Classification of households according to above and under median cash availability

In this subsection we examine the distinguishing of the population with under *median* average cash access from the population with above *median* average cash access. The threshold (n=5) is set to be the cash level larger than available for the lower *n=5* deciles (*positives*) and less than available for the upper *n=5* deciles (*negatives*). We split the data of the rest of the variables to the *negatives* and *positives* based on their median levels, accordingly, as described in the previous section. The BBN model is trained using the labeled data of 30 variables in line with (n=5) and the Hill Climbing Search algorithm over the 80% of the 491720 rows × 30 columns of data. The BBN’s DAG is presented in figure 1.

We use the rest of 20% of the entire data table as the test set. Left and right hand panels of the Figure 2 illustrate the ROC and PR metrics of the test set, respectively. To interpret these accuracy measures we should first note the definitions a-d, as well as the equations 1-8.

1. True negative: if the target value is negative and the predicted value is negative.
2. True positive: if the target value is positive and the predicted value is positive.
3. False negative: if the target value is positive and the predicted value is negative.
4. False positive: if the target value is negative and the predicted value is positive.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

(7)

(8)

The ROC Curve depicts the contrast between the *true positive rate* and *false positive rate* by changing the probability thresholds . The PR curve depicts the possible trade-off between the *recall* and the *precision* by changing the probability thresholds . Note that the *precision* describes, how precise the model is, if it predicts a class to be e.g. *positive*, whereas the *recall* describes, how much the model has succeeded to cover the *positives* to be correctly predicted. The *PR* becomes more meaningful, when there are moderate to large *imbalances* between the number of data within the negatives and positives classes e.g. when we are seeking to distinguish the population with the lowest *n=1* decile (*positives*) from the rest 9 deciles (*negatives*).

The AUC represents the integral of the area under ROC and PR curves and is a metrics for evaluating the accuracy of the model by considering the entire possible ranges of the . The *f1\_score* represents the *harmonic* mean of the *precision* and *recall* metrics. The *accuracy\_total* represents the overall accurateness of the model without being detailed in the *negatives* and *positives* subsections.

The blue point in figure 2 is the *optimal PR threshold* that results in the best balance between the *precision* and *recall* metrics expressed in the term *f1\_score*. The red point in the figure 2 is the *optimal ROC threshold* that result in the best balance between the true and the false *positive* rates. The ROC and PR curves in Figure 2 show a around 0.425-0.492 as the optimum threshold, which delivers a balanced accuracy and preciseness to predict the *positive* classes. In that , we will be able to cover between 80-90 percent precisely predicted *positive* i.e. below median level cash accessible households. Through, by setting *non-optimal* threshold values deviating from the optimal value, we can increase the recognition of the true *positive* households up to levels higher than e.g. 90%, however, then we should take extra added *false positives* (in ROC), as well as a reduced precision (in PR) into the account.

Depending on their budget constraints, the political administrations might be interested (beside the optimal thresholds) in the range of non-optimal threshold values as well, as they can choose threshold values encompassing e.g. higher than 90% recognition of True positives (, which promises a higher recognition rate of lower income groups compared to the level corresponded to optimal threshold) at the cost of accepting to allocate extra budget to be distributed to *False positives*. The trade-off between recognition of negatives and positives in the test set of the Iranian *Household\_welfare\_data* through altering the threshold from 0.0 to 0.9 in small (0.1) incremental step sizes and its relationship with the *accuracy\_total* is represented in figure 3.

As the individual banking records can be interpreted as sensitive information and might not be applicable, we replicate the classification of households in the test set according to above and under median cash availability *without* their recent years banking records (with the exception of the *average balance of the entire family members’ accounts*, which is incorporated only in the training step). Note that, banking records of the recent years play a crucial role to predict the households’ cash access. This is illustrated in figure 4. Each panel of figure 4 describes the change in the posterior probability of *negatives* and *positives* groups’ cash access (in the vertical axis) by providing evidences from a single explanatory variable in form of probability *x* for being that variable *negative* and *1-x* for being that variable *positive* and incrementing *x* along the horizontal axis from 0.0 to 1.0 in small (0.01) incremental step sizes. The absolute difference of the maximum and the minimum of the posterior probability of *negatives* cash access by changing the value of the explanatory variable in the horizontal axis is depicted in the parenthesis above each explanatory variable’s panel and is a criterion for assessing how *important* that variable is in the shaping of a prediction for the dependent variable. The panels are sorted from the left to the right and above to below based on increasing in the *importance values*. As it is evident from the figure 4, the entire banking records (rows 18-29 at table 1 and in the lower 4 rows in figure 4) play the greater role to predict the posteriors in comparison with the non-banking welfare attributes of that household (rows 3-17 at table 1 and the first 4 rows in figure 4). Hence, it can be rationally expected that erasing banking records will reduce the model accuracy metrics.

The reduced BBN (BBN\_2) model through subtraction of banking records of the recent years is trained using the labeled data of 14 variables in line with (n=5) and the Hill Climbing Search algorithm over the 80% of the 491720 rows × 14 columns of data. The BBN\_2’s DAG is presented in figure 5. The PR and ROC curves together with *AUC* and *f\_score* values in figure 5 indicate the feasibility of obtaining relatively precise predictions by setting the to optimal values. The indicators, of figure 5, however imply lower preciseness compared to the figure 2. This approve our expectation regarding the reduced accuracy metrics’ level through erasing the banking records by (n=5). The trade-off between recognition of negatives and positives (in the case of cutting the banking records from the households’ eligibility question in the test set of the Iranian *Household\_welfare\_data*) through altering the threshold from 0.0 to 0.9 in small (0.1) incremental step sizes and its relationship with the *accuracy\_total* is represented in figure 7. One can see, that, in this case, the administration will have less play room in the range of non-optimal threshold values, if they e.g. decide to choose threshold values to achieve higher than 90% recognition of True positives. In this case (, which promises a higher recognition rate of lower income groups), the administration must be accepting to allocate extra budget to be distributed to more than 60% *False positives*, who might not be deserved to be receivers of the basic income, indeed.

# Results

# Conclusion

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