BASIC INCOME TRIALS
Assuring (continued) political commitment
22nd BIEN Congress, Seoul, 23-26 August 2023

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A POLITICAL PUZZLE

• UBI trials are inherently political projects: most come into being following an explicitly political initiative

• UBI trials regularly fail for political reasons
  1. Lack of continued political support
  2. Active political interference

• Question: why and how to protect UBI trials from politics?
FOUR CASES …

‘THE GOOD’
Finland, 2019

‘THE UGLY’
Ontario, 2019

‘THE BAD’
Catalunya, 2023

‘THE SNEAKY’
Ireland, 2023
Different cases seem to have very idiosyncratic pathways, leading to very different outcomes

1. Trial **completed** (Finland)
2. Trial **reduced in scope** (Ireland)
3. Trial **temporarily halted** (Catalunya)
4. Trial **permanently cancelled** (Ontario)
... A COMMON PROBLEM?

- Each case faces the **common problem of political interference**
- Political interference takes different forms

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<th>“Blocking”</th>
<th>“Reversing”</th>
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<td><strong>Weak(ish)</strong></td>
<td>Finland</td>
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• What drives political interference in UBI pilots?
  • Internal: **pre-existing political tensions** play out over time
  • External: political actors respond to **new political events/shocks** (e.g. elections)

• **Trust politics??? ... yes, to be political!**
  • Political processes don’t roll out automatically or unencumbered: **trust political context to change over time**
    • Changes in political priorities
    • Changes in political actors/coalitions
  • Political actors and their motivations are not fixed: **trust politicians to respond “politically” to political events**
• Long-term political commitment is both the most important and the most fragile resource!
  • Political commitment requires willingness and ability to commit, which are both fragile features
  • Trust political priorities to change and trust politics to affect commitments to trial basic income over time!

• Political commitment is about protecting UBI trials from politics itself
In response to political interference, the most common response is to look for political solutions

1. **Trust and moral/rational persuasion**: naive view of how political calculus works
2. **Mobilizing public pressure**: UBI engages a lot of public support in polling but in general that does not easily translate into broad political manifestations
3. **Bargaining**: UBI does not have much to offer in itself and even proponents may not be willing to sacrifice a broader political agenda — e.g. little impact on political reputation
• Political solutions are reactive (ex post), better to find a proactive solution (ex ante)

• Institutional solution: use rules, regulations, processes to effectively separate the pilot from the politics
  1. Minimize political influence over time: e.g. key appointments at start, not during trial
  2. Effective barriers to political control: reduce points where ac “veto points”
  3. Guaranteed access to resources for the whole duration of the pilot (planning, implementation, evaluation)
1. **Form of initial commitment**: pilots are initiated through some form of political statement, but this can take many different forms allowing different levels of future discretion

2. **Budget**: a secure budget for the whole duration is critical but this can be organised with single control by one agency or a complex budget with multiple “veto points” (e.g. parliamentary approval)

3. **Trial administration**: who runs the actual trial can be organised internally (gov’t agency) or externally (independent office)

4. **External interaction/collaboration**: trials are complex projects that require collaboration and even negotiation with third parties for implementation or evaluation (access to data)
1. UBI trials are political events, involving political actors and processes — no escape from politics!

2. UBI trials are vulnerable to various forms of unavoidable political interference (ex ante influence and ex post control)

3. Key challenge is securing long-term (not merely initial) political commitment to UBI trials from start to finish

4. Political solutions to secure political commitment ex post don’t work (well), better to focus on ex ante institutional solutions
THANK YOU!

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