



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?**

'THE GOOD'
Finland, 2019



'THE BAD'
Catalunya, 2023



'THE UGLY'
Ontario, 2019



'THE SNEAKY'
Ireland, 2023



DIFFERENT CASES? ...

- 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

	“Blocking”	“Reversing”
Weak(ish)	Finland	Catalunya
Strong(ish)	Ireland	Ontario

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

- 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

- 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**

THE LIMITS OF POLITICAL SOLUTIONS

- 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

THE PROMISE OF INSTITUTIONAL SOLUTIONS

- 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)

FOUR AREAS OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

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)

CONCLUSION: PROTECTING TRIALS FROM POLITICS

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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