Kevin Zapata Celestino*

The Inability to Form a Coalition: The Case of the Basic Income Proposal in Mexico

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Abstract: The proposal for Basic Income (BI) pushed by renowned figures in Mexico sparked a vigorous debate over social policy between 2015 and 2018. This debate was particularly notable, as it challenged the long-standing dominance of conditional cash transfers, which had remained largely unquestioned as the country's main antipoverty policy since their introduction in the 1990s. Despite the BI proposal getting wide coverage from the media, it not only failed to gain traction on the government's agenda but also quickly became irrelevant right after the general elections of 2018. This was due to the unsuccessful coalition-building efforts of the BI proponents, who were unable to reconcile their political disagreements, overcome partisan competition, establish communication, and bridge their policy beliefs on various levels. By conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders, I conclude that the inability of the BI supporters to form a unified advocacy coalition made it impossible to promote social policy change.

Keywords: basic income; social policy; advocacy coalitions; policy change; Mexico

1 Introduction

Mexico has a long history of social policies and programmes aimed at addressing poverty, ranging from general subsidies to targeted interventions. While these initiatives have varied in their degrees of success, they predominantly share a residual perspective that only the poor should benefit from them (Kurtz 2002; Levy 2006; Molyneux 2008; Ward 2023). As suggested by Gough et al. (2004) and Barrientos et al. 2008, social policy in many Latin American countries, including Mexico, is characterised by liberal-informal welfare arrangements, wherein social protection is primarily provided through market-based mechanisms in a strictly segmented manner. Consequently, social policy is envisioned only for vulnerable individuals, namely those who are unable to participate in the labour market and generate their own income.

***Corresponding author: Kevin Zapata Celestino**, Department of Social Policy, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK, E-mail: kevinzapata2012@gmail.com

Given the above, the proposal for Basic Income (BI) – the idea that the government grants a regular income to all members of society without discrimination in the form of a cash transfer with the goal of creating a financial safety net (Raventós 2007; Van Parijs 2004; Widerquist et al. 2013) – as an alternative to tackle poverty and inequality in Mexico sparked an unusual debate prior to the general election in 2018. This proposal meant a radical shift from the pre-existing policy based on conditional and targeted transfers by ensuring that all citizens would receive payment without strings attached (Gentilini et al. 2020). However, despite the endorsement of prominent political figures from across the ideological spectrum, the heated public debate did not result in significant policy action. Moreover, shortly after the general election, the BI proposal rapidly lost relevance. Therefore, it is fair to question how such a provocative i.e. which garnered considerable support from various political groups, was abandoned so abruptly.

In this line, the question that guides the research is as follows: why did the BI proposal in Mexico fail to attract the government's attention? By conducting interviews with key advocates between 2015 and 2018 – years in which the debate took off – I examine the political dynamics behind the BI debate and proposal aiming to identify the institutional factors that hindered its acceptance among relevant authorities. The analysis is guided by the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), a theoretical approach that explains how competing groups form coalitions around shared beliefs and values, and strategically mobilise resources to influence governmental decision-making (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014). This framework provides a valuable lens to understand the motivations and interactions of the interviewees within a context of policy competition. By applying the ACF, the study explores how these dynamics and conflicting coalitions contributed to the stagnation of the BI proposal, ultimately preventing significant social policy change.

The author's personal interest in understanding the defeat of BI advocates in Mexico is not only due to the absence of literature on the topic but also because it is helpful to better understand the causes that prevent or boost policy change, in particular in a context in which stability and change are often portrayed as contradictory (Levy and Székely 1987; Vásquez 2010). Therefore, the exploratory approach of the research is focused on delving into the political and institutional factors that might have played a role in preventing social policy change. Furthermore, this article aims to expand the literature on the politics of BI beyond high-income countries. By examining the Mexican case, I seek to emphasise how flawed coalition-building politics can become the primary obstacle in the pursuit of BI, as concluded in previous studies (De Wispelaere 2016; De Wispelaere and Noguera 2012).

The objective of the article is to illustrate tangibly how difficult it is to build a common platform to promote policy change, despite many parties agreeing on core elements. Regarding the structure of the article, I will first explain the method used

for the research. Subsequently, I will explain the foundations of the ACF and present the specific context in which this policy development occurred. Finally I will analyse the struggle between the involved actors to form a coalition that impeded broader influence of BI advocates, before ending with final reflections on the value of the Mexican case for future coalition-building efforts.

2 Methods

As mentioned earlier, there is a concerning absence of literature regarding the unsuccessful efforts to promote the BI in Mexico. Thus, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to explore the topic and identify the major causes that prevented the BI proposal from obtaining relevant traction within the government's agenda. Accordingly, the research focused on the institutional factors that might have influenced the development of the proposal. Hence, semi-structured interviews with key actors that advocated in favour of the BI proposal were deemed valuable to shed light on the barriers that prevented success in promoting policy change. Semi-structured interviews are useful "to understand the reasons why people act in particular ways, by exploring participants' perceptions, experiences and attitudes" (Harvey-Jordan and Long 2001: 219). Therefore, this method was considered optimal for uncovering the underlying reasoning behind the political actions taken and for gathering as much insight as possible from people directly involved in the events that shaped the debate.

First, to identify potential interviewees, I conducted an extensive review of Mexican media outlets that included newspapers such as "Reforma", "El Financiero", "El Universal", "La Jornada", "El Economista", and "Excelsior".[1] By looking for articles that explicitly contained the keywords "Basic Income" or any of its variants such as "Universal Basic Income", "Citizen Basic Income", "Universal Citizen Income", "Universal Subsidy", "Universal Grant" or "Guaranteed Minimum Income", I could identify the leading figures who advocated in favour of the BI proposal and contextualise the political environment in which the debate occurred. Subsequently, a list of potential interviewees was created; however, considering that many of these were public figures, obtaining access to them was limited.

As a result, the final list of interviewees was narrowed down to six prominent figures who played key roles in shaping the public discourse and were available for an interview. This is a case of quality over quantity since the mentioned individuals were not only notable advocates but also had a relevant degree of influence in Mexico's political landscape. The list is presented as follows (see Table 1):

1 The mentioned newspapers are the most relevant outlets in terms of political influence and coverage.

Table 1: Interviewed actors.

Julio Boltvinik Kalinka	Renowned scholar at *Colegio de México*, and former congressional representative for the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD). Member of the BI network in Mexico.
Araceli Damián González	Renowned scholar at *Colegio de México*, and former congressional representative for the National Regeneration Movement (Morena). Member of the BI network in Mexico.
Jorge Álvarez Maynez	Former congressional representative and general secretary of Citizen's Movement party (MC)
John Scott Andretta	Renowned scholar at *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas* (CIDE), and current board member of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval).
Jorge Castañeda Gutman	Main advisor of Ricardo Anaya, presidential candidate for the National Action Party (PAN), MC and PRD coalition during the 2018 general election.
Pablo Yanes Rizo	Chief of research at Mexico City's headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Founder of the BI network in Mexico.

Jorge Álvarez Maynez was also the presidential candidate for MC in the 2024 general election.

The mentioned actors were able to provide a strong picture of the dynamics that revolved around the BI proposal during the mentioned years. The interviews were designed to understand each actor's views regarding the political factors that influenced the proposal and undermined the possibility of reaching a common agreement among the involved parties. The interviews were carried out in person during 2018 and 2019. In addition, I also conducted reviews from various documentary and media sources, which helped to obtain detailed information about the policy process and to contrast the statements of the interviewees.

For the information analysis, I adopted a narrative approach, which seeks to make sense of how individuals or groups interpret specific events or phenomena based on their own experiences (Riessman 2011). This approach provides insights into how people construct stories, following particular narratives that reveal the historical, sociocultural, and contextual elements shaping their realities (Sandelowski 1991). The analysis focused on specific elements, including: Who are the key actors? What are their roles? What is the central message of their narrative? How is their narrative structured? How do their narratives align with or conflict with those of other actors? By examining these narratives, I was able to identify the main 'characters' within the policy development, their belief systems and policy values, and the specific strategies or lines of action they pursued. This way, valuable insights can be obtained from the various perspectives on how the policy process occurred and the various underlying factors that shaped it.

3 Advocacy Coalition Building

Within the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), Sabatier (1988; 1993) argues that it is possible to understand how policy coalitions, populated by interest groups, lobbyists, activists, elected officials, scholars, researchers, think tanks, and others, form by focusing on the shared beliefs of policy actors. ACF states that specific beliefs and assumptions about the world act as the key component that binds actors together. In this perspective, there are three main types of beliefs: deep core beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary beliefs. Deep core beliefs refer to normative views of the world in broad terms. Policy core beliefs are fundamental policy perspectives on how to achieve specific goals, and secondary beliefs refer to instrumental and negotiable aspects of implementing policy (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993; Sabatier 1993).

The mentioned beliefs follow a hierarchy in which the first (deep core beliefs) are almost immovable because they are part of people's identities, the second (policy beliefs) are restricted to specific policy areas and might be more susceptible to change but this takes a long time, and the third (secondary beliefs) can be easily modifiable according to the needs of the actors (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993). When actors agree on the first two levels of beliefs, it is likely that they will come together to advocate for specific policy goals. Yet, it is important to mention that belief similarity is the minimum condition to group individuals in a coalition, but making them work and coordinate requires trust (Ingold et al. 2017). Trust ultimately increases the interaction and collaboration of actors, which allows them to create specific institutional arrangements (Sabatier and Weible 2007; Weible et al. 2020; Zafonte and Sabatier 2004).

Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014) point out that coalitions compete against other coalitions to translate their beliefs into policies. Hence, public policy could be considered the projection of winning coalitions (Pierce et al. 2017). Consequently, coalitions must develop action strategies to influence governmental authorities. On their own, coalitions will not achieve much, so they must employ various resources in pursuit of their policy goals, including financial resources, legal authority, public opinion, information, social mobilisation, and skilful leadership (Sabatier and Weible 2007). In this perspective, attracting other groups in order to build a broader platform that enhances policy reform requires the effective use of ideas and discourses by key policy entrepreneurs to attract actors who initially would not be interested in the policy issue (Béland and Cox 2016; Rychlik et al. 2021). Thus, coalitions seek to gain influence over the policy process to enhance their position or block competing coalitions.

In accordance with the above, for an advocacy coalition to be successful in competing against other coalitions it should share deep core and policy beliefs, which

are the "binding substance" of the group (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993; Sabatier 1993). It should maintain unity by enhancing socialisation and interaction of its members. In this sense, the interactions among participants should reinforce the institutional agreement, this is the rules and norms that define not only belonging but mutual trust (Ingold et al. 2017; March and Olsen 2006; Marsh and Rhodes 1992; McPherson and Raab 1988; Sabatier and Weible 2007; Zafonte and Sabatier 2004). Likewise, it should be able to use its various resources in a coordinated manner to attract audiences and engage with relevant stakeholders (Sabatier and Weible 2007). This way, the coalition would have better chances to frame policy, meaning the possibility to define a policy problem and propose a solution to relevant authorities (True et al. 2007). Also, it would be able to use specific major events as catalysts for change in a more effective way (Cairney 2016). In contrast, a loose or fragmented coalition without a defined institutional agreement will not be able to effectively compete since it will lack the elements to capitalise emerging opportunities to advance its agenda (Ingold et al. 2017; March and Olsen 2006; Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Sabatier and Weible 2007).

The ACF is particularly relevant for analysing the Mexican case regarding the BI proposal because it emphasises the importance of shared beliefs, coordinated action, and resource mobilisation for achieving policy outcomes. When a coalition lacks cohesion – as I will demonstrate in subsequent sections – its capacity to frame policy and mobilise resources is significantly weakened. The absence of shared goals and coordinated strategies leads to fragmented efforts, making it challenging to counter opposing coalitions or gain the attention of key policymakers. By identifying the main advocates of the BI and their contradictory attitudes and actions, I will show how a lack of consensus and agreement on key issues resulted in irreconcilable fractures, ultimately sinking efforts in favour of the BI initiative. Thus, as the ACF suggests, the inability to form a unified coalition was a critical factor preventing policy change in Mexico.

4 The Mexican Momentum

The idea of implementing a BI in Mexico is far from new; it was first proposed in the 1970s as an alternative to distributing the country's oil wealth among citizens (Zaid 2016). Since then, the proposal has been sporadically revived and promoted by various social and political actors. In 2003, Elsa Conde promoted it for the party *México Posible* in the Chamber of Deputies. Similarly, during the 2006 general election, the presidential candidate for the Social Democratic Party (PSD), Patricia Mercado, advocated for it. Additionally, Senator Manlio Fabio Beltrones of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) suggested the need to implement a fiscal

reform to support the creation of a BI programme (Yanes 2016). Nevertheless, these proposals went largely unnoticed by the public and received little attention from relevant policymakers.

It was not until very recently that a serious debate emerged in Mexico about the BI, with a significant number of prominent figures from across the political spectrum expressing their support for the proposal. This shift was caused by two main trigger events: the tax reform passed during Enrique Peña Nieto's government (2012–2018) in 2014 and the concerning results from the 2015 Coneval report on poverty in the country. [2] When President Peña Nieto presented the tax reform, he announced at the same time the implementation of a universal pension programme aimed at older people over 65 years old, which in essence was a Basic Income (Animal Político 2021). While the programme was not fully universal, it set an important precedent in favour of extending non-conditional cash transfers to broader populations (Willmore 2014). Likewise, it boosted the idea that pre-existing social programmes could serve as stepping-stones for a future BI programme (De Wispelaere 2016b).

Similarly, the disappointing numbers about poverty highlighted by Coneval prompted an intense discussion nationwide about the limitations of conditional cash transfers in tackling poverty (Aristegui Noticias 2014). According to Peña Nieto's government, the conditional cash transfers programme – known as *Oportunidades* – required a major transformation. [3] In this context, various key actors presented initiatives promoting BI in different political forums. For instance, PRD Senator Luis Sánchez Jiménez introduced a legislative initiative in Congress to create a BI. Similarly, Gonzalo Hernández Licona, then executive secretary of Coneval, expanded the BI debate beyond academia and political circles by publicly endorsing the idea of implementing a BI, suggesting it could replace many inefficient welfare programmes (Romo 2015). In 2016 and 2017, during the debates on Mexico City's new constitution, Morena's parliamentary group advocated for introducing a BI as a fundamental right within the draft of the new constitution. Although this was ultimately rejected, the discussion received extensive media attention beyond Mexico City, further advancing the debate (Fariza 2017).

Subsequently, in 2017, Araceli Damián González, a congressional representative for Morena, proposed a constitutional reform to introduce a BI, though it was later discarded (Cámara de Diputados 2017). Similarly, early that year, ECLAC conducted a seminar on BI at the Senate of the Republic, inviting renowned experts and advocates

2 The Coneval is the autonomous public body responsible for evaluating social policy and measuring poverty in Mexico. According to the report of the Coneval, poverty increased from 53.3 million people in 2012 to 55.3 million in 2014 during the first two years of Enrique Peña Nieto's administration.

3 Eventually, *Oportunidades* was transformed into *Prospera*, which arguably was a continuation of the previous programme but with new added elements.

to discuss international experiences (ECLAC 2017). Finally, in 2018, Ricardo Anaya, the presidential candidate for the PAN, PRD, and MC coalition, presented a BI as his main social policy proposal during the general election. The proposal aimed to eradicate extreme poverty, boost economic growth, and provide financial security for individuals without access to welfare benefits (Alcántara 2018).

It must be acknowledged that contemporary international experiences in which BI pilot projects were tested also fuelled the debate in Mexico, including cases in Finland, Germany, Brazil, Namibia, Kenya, and China (Gentilini et al. 2020; IBIW 2017; Kangas 2019; Riutort et al. 2021). The discussion about the results obtained in these and other international experiences helped to push the debate beyond academic spaces and create some level of awareness about the proposal in general society (Ruiz 2017). In this line, international organisations such as the ECLAC and Oxfam played a relevant role in its diffusion by sharing research findings, conducting advocacy campaigns, and fostering dialogue among policymakers and civil society (Oxfam México 2018; Senado de la República 2016). These efforts not only highlighted the potential benefits and challenges of implementing a basic income but also contributed to framing it as a viable policy tool for addressing poverty and inequality.

In the following section, I will illustrate how, despite many actors garnering attention around the BI proposal, important institutional and contextual elements played against its adoption within the government agenda, mainly: the failure to build a coherent platform that advocated in its favour.

5 The Struggle for a Coalition

Despite multiple and relevant actors promoting the BI during the last three years of Enrique Peña Nieto's administration, they failed to form a coalition that could compete against the dominant group and their pre-existing framing of social development policy based on conditional cash transfers. Conditional and targeted cash transfers – under the name *Progresa* (1997–2002), *Oportunidades* (2002–2014), and *Prospera* (2014–2019)[4] – were implemented as a human capital building intervention in the late 1990s and eventually became the main antipoverty policy in the country (Yaschine 2019).

This policy was supported by a powerful group of renowned social policy experts and economists with strong connections to the domestic policy elite and relevant multilateral organisations, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, known as the "Human Capital Coalition" (Salas-Porras 2017; Tomazini

4 The programme was abruptly terminated in 2019 by the populist government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador accusing corruption in its operation.

2017; Valencia et al. 2016). Due to their shared characteristics, common understanding of social policy, and well-coordinated defence of conditional cash transfers, they formed a strong policy community (Behrman 2008; Levy 2006; Levy and Rodríguez 2005; Lustig 2014; Valencia et al. 2016).

This is particularly relevant because it shows how the realm of social policy in Mexico was dominated by a group, which was not only well-established in terms of cohesion but also with enough resources and connections to fight back any attempt to change the direction of the preexisting social policy based on conditional cash transfers. The above coalition exercised influence over the policymaking process, thus creating a policy monopoly, which is the capacity to control how policy is framed, who can participate in shaping the policy agenda, and create institutional barriers to prevent change (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). In contrast, BI supporters formed a "loose coalition" in which actors shared some similar beliefs regarding tackling poverty but lacked more complex or organised activity (Sabatier and Weible 2007). BI advocates in Mexico represented a large "issue network," with many actors involved but with low stability and consensus (Marshall 1995). Pablo Yanez Rizo stated: "There are a lot of BI supporters, and everybody is more than welcome to become one. There are no restrictions; we are an open network and there are many activities through which anybody can contribute to the diffusion of the proposal" (Interview).

However, a loosely affiliated issue network is more challenging to mobilise collectively because actors are less likely to find common ground (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Marsh and Smith 2000). Given the large number of actors involved, many of whom had their own political agendas, the network struggled to achieve stability. As represented in Table 2 (see Appendix), BI supporters were heterogeneous actors with little incentive to cooperate since many of them were political adversaries. The fact that most of the mentioned actors were left-wing supporters did not mean they sympathised with each other.

For instance, Morena accused the PRD of betraying its left-wing principles due to its decision to form a *de facto* alliance with PAN and PRI to approve liberal reforms during Enrique Peña Nieto's presidency (2013–2018) (Batres 2017; Loaeza 2020). In particular, relevant voices of Morena – namely, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)[5] – criticised PRD's decision to endorse Peña Nieto's tax reform, accusing that its sole purpose was to 'sink' the country (García 2014). Similarly, MC, traditionally an ally of the left, decided to support the conservative PAN in 2018 (Suárez 2017a). Thus, despite policy actors agreeing on the need to shift social policy towards universality, an overwhelming lack of trust prevented them from forming a broader platform in favour of the BI proposal. This became particularly problematic during the 2018

5 AMLO was then leader of Morena and became president of Mexico between 2018 and 2024.

general election. As suggested by Cook (2001), trust is the cornerstone for collaboration; hence, when individuals distrust each other, it is very difficult to develop a functional network that enables them to pursue collective goals.

Against this background, it was clear that advocates of the BI proposal had a clear disadvantage against the supporters of conditional cash transfers. A cohesive coalition is able to present and defend their policy proposal in a coherent manner by aligning resources and coordinating actions, but a loose network will have more problems due to internal disagreements and uncooperative behaviour will derail any coordinated response (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Marsh and Smith 2000; Weible et al. 2020). In this sense, when comparing both groups, the BI advocates were not only loosely connected but fragmented with a lot of friction among the participants. In a crowded policy making environment, a government's attention is limited (Kingdon 1984). Thereby, a well-organised group is more likely to capture and hold that attention, while a disjointed group risks being ignored. It could be said that the competition between both coalitions was asymmetrical not only in terms of resources and access to key policy actors but also in terms of their binding substance.

Following the above, PAN and Morena also competed to be recognised as the primary proponents of the BI. For example, when Morena proposed including the BI as a fundamental right in Mexico City's new constitution, PAN blocked the proposal (Suárez 2017b). Similarly, when Ricardo Anaya presented the BI as his main social policy proposal during the 2018 general election, Morena withdrew its support. As stated by Julio Boltvinik Kalinka: "Once Ricardo Anaya proposed the basic income, it became completely unattractive for [Andrés Manuel] López Obrador and Morena (…) Anaya basically poisoned the proposal" (Interview).

It is important to note that Anaya's proposal was virtually identical to the one presented by Morena's parliamentary group a year before in the Chamber of Deputies. Thus, the struggle was not about a disagreement on the policy proposal's terms but a matter of politics. Araceli Damián González stated that Ricardo Anaya adopted the BI proposal to influence potential left-wing voters during the general election: "Ricardo Anaya plagiarised the proposal that I presented in Congress. He did it to justify his alliance with the 'left' (…) His proposal copied almost word for word my proposal, but PAN was never interested in universal basic income" (Interview). In this sense, it could be said that both Morena and PAN were part of a "governance trap", implying that the involved parties were more interested in thwarting their opponents or blocking them from potential political victories than cooperating to deliver better results for citizens (Widner et al. 2022).

Equally, the above shows a form of "cheap support", meaning that the actors are more interested in political gains around the proposal than the proposal itself, therefore, they only showed interest in the BI as long as it served their political interests (De Wispelaere 2016). In this sense, persistent political division is often the

main problem in building an effective coalition in favour of BI: "Where political division is rife and persistent, building a grand coalition that combines the support of opposing ideological factions is a risky strategy with considerable political costs attached" (De Wispelaere 2016: 137). Consequently, the actors might have shared some sympathy for the BI proposal, but it was not sufficient to overcome the strong political rivalry. In this view, Jorge Castañeda Gutman expressed: "Elections are the worst moment to try to support a common cause because electoral campaigns are designed to highlight differences between political alternatives (…) it is necessary to call all the interested parties and stakeholders to promote consensus but not now (during the election)" (Interview).

Electoral competitiveness plays a significant role in shaping how political parties approach policymaking, particularly in determining their strategic priorities (Fairfield and Garay 2017; Jacques 2022). Parties facing high levels of competition are more likely to focus on 'priority investments' in policy areas that they believe will grant immediate electoral benefits. Time inconsistencies arise because parties may prioritise short-term gains – such as focusing on popular, high-visibility issues that resonate with the electorate at the moment – over long-term, potentially more impactful policies that require sustained commitment but may not offer immediate voter appeal. Therefore, the inconsistencies and 'cheap support' of PAN and Morena regarding the BI proposal seemed to be strongly influenced by the electoral environment that pushed the mentioned actors to pursue agendas based on their electoral strategic priorities.

Furthermore, the actors did not attempt to bridge their differences; there was a complete lack of communication between the political groups supporting the BI. According to Béland and Cox (2016), a good flow of ideas can help individuals with similar ideas to mobilise to form groups and broader alliances. However, BI supporters were completely fragmented, and communication was non-existent. Jorge Álvarez Máynez pointed out:

> The actors are not willing to talk to each other, and many people involved have proved to be politically immature (…) It is a shame that instead of forming a platform that could help promote the basic income, the involved actors devoted themselves to criticising each other. It is a dishonest debate where private and political interests are mixed (Interview).

Because the policy actors were incapable of establishing basic communication, coordination was impossible with detrimental effects. A weak coordination level implies that actors cannot pursue a coherent path of action and are less clear about their common policy goal (Weible and Ingold 2018; Weible et al. 2020). Consequently, the actors lost the opportunity to exchange valuable resources (i.e. financial resources, expertise, legal authority, or legitimacy) that could have had a deeper impact on attracting and convincing wider audiences (Sabatier 1993). Subsequently,

it was impossible to establish a robust constituency demanding a BI, a basic element to push the proposal onto the governmental agenda (Chrisp and De Wispelaere 2023; Standing 2017).

Also, the absence of communication likely undermined the policy learning process of the coalition. As noted by Heikkila and Gerlak (2013), policy learning occurs within a context of collective deliberation that helps individuals gain information and knowledge. The facilitation of the discussion would have helped involved parties to adjust their preferences according to the new information, which eventually would have allowed them to develop consensus (Nowlin 2024). Thus, building consensus is a cornerstone of effective collective action. Unfortunately, without a platform for open discussion and the opportunity to reconcile differing viewpoints, the BI supporters remained fragmented and limited in its knowledge. With each participant pursuing divergent lines of action to attract audiences, they lost the opportunity to learn, adapt, and coalesce around a coherent strategy (Béland and Cox 2016; Rychlik et al. 2021).

Another very interesting aspect that might have impeded the construction of a coalition in favour of BI was a sensitive concern about how the proposal would impact other policy subsystems, particularly the fiscal regime. According to the ACF, when a group of policy actors share deep core beliefs (ontological understandings of the world) and policy beliefs, which reflect fundamental perspectives on policy issues, these shared convictions provide a foundation for collective action (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014; Sabatier 1993). However, as suggested by Weible et al. (2019): "some belief categories belong to one level in one policy subsystem, and to another level in another subsystem" (p. 1058). This means that beliefs may vary in their level of importance or salience depending on the specific policy area they pertain to. In the case of the BI supporters, arguably the actors were driven by the idea of social transformation (deep core belief). Likewise, they believed that poverty was harmful for society so a universal programme in the form of a BI would be the best alternative to tackle the problem (policy core belief). Yet, this perspective was limited to the poverty issue.

The actors were in strong disagreement about how the BI proposal, in order to be financially sustainable (i.e. allocating enough budget), would impact the tax regime. Hence, what for the social policy subsystem might be a secondary instrumental belief (which taxes to raise to fund the BI), for economic policy it likely represented an upper belief. For some of the interviewees – Julio Boltvinik Kalinka, Araceli Damián González, Pablo Yanez Rizo, and Jorge Álvarez Máynez – BI should be funded through progressive tax reform, meaning that people who earn more contribute more to taxes (Simon and Nobes 1998). In contrast, other advocates such as Jorge Castañeda Gutmann and John Scott Andretta did not discard the idea of funding BI with an increase and expansion of the value-added tax, which is, by nature, a regressive tax

because people with lower resources pay a larger proportion of their income (Sommerfeld et al. 1992). In John Scott Andretta's perspective:

> If we extend VAT [to food and medicines] and eliminate certain subsidies that only benefit the highest income deciles, we could use those financial resources to fund basic income that could help to reduce inequality and extreme poverty (…) by doing this we might obtain enough resources to close the difference between the average income of the extreme poor and the minimum welfare threshold (Interview).

The aforementioned reveals a much more profound economic ontological position than one might think initially. Those in favour of extending VAT to fund the BI proposal likely reflect a more liberal position about the role of the state in the economy, which would clash against the view of those who advocate for a more active role of the state. Thus, while in the social policy subsystem, the actors might find common ground, in the economic policy subsystem there is a strong dissonance. This was a direct source of conflict since the actors' cognitive barriers clashed with each other (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014b). In other words, their fundamental views were exposed to a dramatically opposed viewpoint that was not acceptable from a normative perspective (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993).

The lack of trust due to perceived political strategising and the profound ideological differences prevented socialisation and policy-learning, which ultimately blocked any institutional agreement, thus condemning any potential coalition-building effort (Ingold et al. 2017; Sabatier and Weible 2007; Zafonte and Sabatier 2004). Without trust, actors were unable to engage in the deliberation necessary to reconcile their divergent perspectives, exchange critical information, or align their priorities. This breakdown in communication further deepened the divisions between the social and economic policy subsystems, creating silos where actors prioritised their specific agendas over collaborative problem-solving. Actors operate in various policy subsystems at the same time but they can become entrenched in conflicting positions. Consequently, even shared goals, such as the desire to improve social welfare through a BI, become unachievable when ideological dissonance dominates the coalition's dynamics.

Relatedly, it cannot be ignored how sensitive and polarised the topic of taxes is in Mexico (Zapata 2023). Thus, it is probable that the above discussion about the "right" tax reforms caused irreconcilable differences that condemned any attempt to form a common platform. As Subirats (2001) argues, any major reform – regardless of its nature – must be sufficiently appealing to garner public support; otherwise, it is likely to face significant resistance that jeopardises its enactment or implementation. In Mexico, raising taxes is deeply unpopular and carries a high political cost, so much so that no politician has proposed a substantial tax reform in decades (Ríos 2020; Zapata 2023). Considering how "demonised" taxes are in the country, political actors

would need to expend considerable political capital to advocate for a tax reform that could serve as the foundation for the BI proposal. The political actors were in complete disagreement on the design of the tax reform and given the political cost that promoting a tax reform would carry for them, it is understandable they were hesitant in supporting any further coalition-building in favour of the BI proposal.

Finally, it is important to mention that some BI supporters such as John Scott Andretta or Gonzalo Hernandez Licona were at the same time important members of the policy community that endorsed conditional cash transfers. Although this may seem contradictory since both were groups competing to frame social policy, the above occurs when actors are motivated to be brokers that mediate conflict to facilitate the adoption of a policy (Ingold and Varone 2012; Mintrom and Vergari 1996). Their motivation to act as brokers was grounded in the idea that despite their positive views on conditional cash transfers, they also had some serious criticisms of this social policy and considered it necessary to build a broader protection scheme (Romo 2015; Scott 2017). Hence, the proposal for a BI aligned with their idea of building a new protection scheme with universal coverage. However, their effort to promote a dialogue between both groups failed given the complete opposition from prominent conditional cash transfer advocates to consider a universal approach in social policy (Fariza 2018; 2019).[6]

6 Final Considerations

The research aimed to offer an explanation of why a popular BI proposal could not flourish beyond the debate in the three years before Mexico's general elections in 2018. The interviews conducted with prominent figures in social policy-making in Mexico suggest various major impediments explaining why the BI proposal could not gain traction in the government's agenda. Political differences among various actors within the BI coalition, partisan competition, null meaningful communication, and disagreement on fundamental beliefs on related sensitive topics (i.e. taxes), hampered any potential cooperation and coordination among BI advocates, thus reducing the effectiveness of their strategies to promote policy change. Despite the individual efforts of each of the BI promoters, their inability to build a coherent platform not only made them uncompetitive in the policy subsystem but also made them lose the initial interest of the public.

6 Among the most prominent opponents were Santiago Levy, former vice president of the Inter-American Development Bank and considered the creator of conditional cash transfers, and Nora Lustig, a renowned scholar and consultant on international development.

Moreover, distrust among the involved parties likely hampered the proposal in subsequent years. Despite Morena being the winner of the general elections in 2018, the BI proposal was completely discarded from its policy agenda, no matter how many of its partisans openly endorsed it. What is more, when other parties have tried to push the topic into the public debate, prominent leaders of Morena have shut down the discussion by shifting the conversation to other topics (Martínez 2020). Although the scope of the research does not allow me to state the specific reasons why this was the case, I speculate that the BI proposal became a victim of "politicisation", which means that a specific political tone had been given to the proposal causing polarisation (Wiesner 2021).

Since the BI proposal was pushed by the PAN, PRD, and MC coalition during the general election of 2018, it is probable that the proposal in people's minds is still linked to those parties, making it politically unappealing for Morena's government. This would potentially illustrate how parties in Mexico operate under a logic of electoral prioritisation and opportunistic political support, in which policy agendas adjust to electoral objectives rather than long-term committed perspectives. As suggested by Vivero and Díaz (2014), political parties in Mexico many times show little ideological coherence, thus they operate based on pragmatic competition. Yet, more research would be necessary to prove this in the case of Morena's opposition to the BI proposal.

So, is this the end of the BI proposal in Mexico? De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012) state that the political difficulties of creating an effective coalition in favour of the BI can be overcome if their supporters are able to seriously take the proposal beyond cheap political interests. Therefore, it will depend on how much BI advocates are convinced about the proposal and how much they are willing to sacrifice for the cause. This would require an enormous effort given that a discussion about the BI will undoubtedly promote deeper discussion on related issues, including taxation and other economic dimensions of policy, which historically have caused major disagreement among policy actors.

I believe the recent failure will give BI advocates in Mexico plenty of valuable lessons for regrouping and building a cohesive platform for the future. Learning from past mistakes can help policy actors change their attitudes and develop a clear image of their common goals and a potential path of action. In this perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic promoted important changes in people's perception of universal programmes (Nettle et al. 2021), thus providing BI supporters better prospects to advocate for this policy. Indeed, crises themselves might not be enough to overcome the political barriers that impede the materialisation of the BI (Chrisp and De Wispelaere 2023). Hence, stakeholders interested in the BI proposal need to coordinate and work based on long-term strategies to build acceptance in wider audiences beyond temporary settings and crises.

Appendix

Table 2: Prominent Basic Income supporters in Mexico.

Actor	Background	Political position
Pablo Yanes Rizo	Chief of research at Mexico City's headquarters of the ECLAC.	Left-wing
Julio Boltvinik Kalinka	Former congressional representative for PRD, and later member of Morena. Scholar at *El Colegio de México.*	Left-wing
Araceli Damián González	Former congressional representative for Morena (2015–2018). Scholar at *El Colegio de México.*	Left-wing.
Alejandro Luevano Pérez	Founder member of Morena.	Left-wing.
Jorge Castañeda Gutman	Former member of Vicente Fox's (PAN) cabinet (2000–2003)	Conservative.
Ricardo Anaya Cortés	Presidential candidate for the coalition PAN, PRD, and MC in 2018.	Conservative.
Rogelio Huerta Quintanilla	Scholar at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM).	Left-wing.
John Scott Andretta	Scholar at the CIDE, and counsellor of the Coneval.	Not clear.
Patricia Mercado Castro	Former president of *Mexico Posible* and of the Social Democratic Party, and later member of MC.	Left-wing
Jorge Álvarez Maynez	Congressional representative and general secretary of MC.	Centre.
Martí Batres Guadarrama	Senator and former president of Morena.	Left-wing.
José Luis Sánchez Jiménez	Senator for PRD.	Left-wing.
Porfirio Muñoz Ledo	Former president of PRD and later congressional representative for Morena.	Left-wing.
Gonzalo Hernández Licona	Executive secretary of the Coneval (2006–2019).	Not clear.
Salomón Chertorivski Woldenberg	Former member of Felipe Calderon's (PAN) cabinet (2011–2012), and later member of MC.	Centre.
Gerardo Esquivel Hernández	Scholar at *El Colegio de México* and deputy governor of Mexico's central bank (2019–2022).	Left-wing.
Cecilia Soto González	Former congressional representative for PRD, later supporter of PAN.	Left-wing.

Elaborated by the author with information from media and Pablo Yanes (Interview).

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