Journal of Social Policy (2026), **55**, 62–99
doi:10.1017/S0047279424000084

ARTICLE

Who's in for no strings: revisiting the determinants of universal basic income support

Leire Rincón García[1,2]

[1]Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain and [2]Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Email: leire.rincon@uab.cat

(Received 15 February 2023; revised 3 April 2024; accepted 2 May 2024; first published online 13 November 2024)

Abstract

Universal basic income (UBI) is becoming a prominent alternative to reform the welfare state, yet public support for this policy remains a puzzle. Existing scholarship empirically shows that certain groups like the low-income and left-wing show support, but it remains unclear if this translates to a preference for UBI over alternatives. This paper argues against this assumption: UBI challenges welfare norms and deservingness principles, suggesting people would typically prefer means-tested options. Drawing on a conjoint experiment, this paper empirically shows supportive evidence of the idea that support for a UBI does not translate into an inherent preference for UBI. These findings have widespread implications for both the UBI literature and the politics of welfare reform.

Keywords: universal basic income; conjoint experiment; preferences; material self-interest; other-regardingness

Introduction

Universal basic income (UBI) is becoming an increasingly salient policy proposal to reform the welfare state, given the current challenges such institutions are facing. The prospects of labour automatisation, potential structural unemployment derived thereof, and socio-demographic changes like the ageing of the population and lowering birth-rates are some of these (Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006; Colombino, 2015; Frey and Osborne, 2017). The recent Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated such challenges in the long-run, a development which has clearly evidenced the need for a social buffer (Johnson and Roberto, 2020; Prabhakar, 2020; Ståhl and MacEachen, 2020). Although the imperative for reforming the welfare state is pressing, the feasibility of such reform hinges upon public support. Against this backdrop, the underpinnings of public backing for a UBI are receiving growing attention in recent scholarship (see Laenen et al., 2023 or Rincón, 2023 for reviews).

Current scholarship has mostly focused on the individual-level determinants of UBI support. A consistent finding in this work is that being low-income, unemployed, young, and left-wing predicts support for this policy proposal (e.g., Vlandas, 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020). Yet, existing research does not provide evidence that this support translates into a genuine preference for a UBI

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

over other competing policy alternatives. Hence, a critical puzzle remains unaddressed: is this support reflective of an underlying preference for UBI over other alternatives, or is it merely showcasing a demand for more government intervention and redistribution?

In this paper, I argue and show that, even if particular population sub-groups support a UBI, these should not prefer this policy over other means-tested alternatives. This is underpinned by three key factors: firstly, UBI challenges traditional welfare principles, questioning its legitimacy; its potential benefits, like redistribution and efficiency, aren't immediately obvious; finally, UBI clashes with deeply ingrained deservingness criteria in welfare decisions. In this paper, I test whether support for a UBI translates in an actual preference for this policy alternative through a conjoint experiment fielded in Spain in March 2019.

The findings in this paper show that support for a UBI does not translate into an actual preference for this policy alternative. This paper conveys, in line with previous work, that individual characteristics such as being left-wing, do indeed predict support for the key features of a UBI, but also uncovers that in spite of such support, these individuals actually prefer means-tested alternatives over a UBI. These findings have important implications to the study of preferences and politics of welfare state reform. They suggest that previous research on UBI may have overestimated the political backing of this proposal, urging further investigation into the factors shaping preferences for UBI over other policies.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The following section presents the theoretical framework where the policy features of a UBI are outlined, and where I argue that it is precisely UBI's universality and unconditionality that generate opposition to this proposal. The third section details the methods and the relevance of the case selection. Thereafter, the results are presented, and the paper closes with the concluding remarks.

Determinants of universal basic income support

Universal basic income is a cash transfer proposal, given to everyone (universal), on an individual and regular basis, and with no strings attached (unconditional). Like many other welfare cash transfers, a UBI is a multidimensional policy proposal, composed of several features, in this case: universality, unconditionality, individuality, a determined level of generosity (or quantity), and a specified set of legal requirements (De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2004). Its distinctiveness in relation to other cash transfer alternatives lies on the combination of universality and unconditionality. These two features define the absence of any target group, that is, all the population is eligible (universality), and the absence of any form of behavioural conditionality or strings-attached to receive this policy (unconditionality) (De Wispelaere & Stirton, 2004; Torry, 2019; more on universality: Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988; Anttonen & Sipilä, 2014 specifically about unconditionality: Immervoll & Knotz, 2018). These two core characteristics have been shown to compromise its political viability, albeit with differences across contexts (Rincon, 2023; Rincón et al., 2022). Yet, in spite of such findings research has also consistently shown that particular groups of individuals tend to show more support for this policy than others (a non-exhaustive list includes Vlandas, 2019; Schwander and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Vlandas, 2020; Fernández-Albertos & Manzano, 2016a; Lee, 2021; Laenen & Gugushvili, 2023; Rincón, 2023). Although this remains a solid finding, this scholarship does not clearly convey that such support translates into a preference for this policy proposal. This paper claims that this should not be the case for three main reasons.

First, a UBI represents a significant departure from existing welfare systems that typically involve selective cash transfers, often subject to means-testing or behavioural conditions. Even if some welfare states may rate higher in the principle universality than others (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kangas & Kvist, 2018), there is yet not one welfare state that counts with a universal and unconditional cash transfer. Cash transfer implementations generally rely on selectivity, introducing conditions or means-testing. A UBI hence, departs radically from any pre-existing cash transfer. While this doesn't necessarily imply that it should be automatically unsupported, prior research has shown that established institutional frameworks play a significant role in shaping the norms of legitimacy and acceptability for public opinion through different mechanisms (Jordan, 2013; Larsen, 2006; Kumlin & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014). Consequently, some resistance to the adoption of a UBI is reasonable, considering the influence of established institutional norms.

Aside from this macro-level explanation of resistance to UBI, opposition also emanates from individual-level variables. In this sense, status quo bias refers to the human tendency to prefer the current state of affairs or the existing set of policies over potential new alternatives (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988), with compelling evidence of how this phenomena influences preferences for public policy (Arceneaux & Nicholson, 2023).

Opposition to UBI may also arise from its divergence from the principles of deservingness ingrained in current welfare policies. Deservingness literature shows that individuals support welfare policies that are targeted to those recipients deemed more worthy in terms of need, lack of control, reciprocity, identity, and attitudes (Oorschot, 2000). Research suggests that these considerations tend to take precedence when individuals make decisions about which policies to endorse. In fact, research shows that deservingness heuristics are rooted in vital survival mechanisms from hunter-gatherer societies, evolved to facilitate resource distribution, prioritising those in need or making significant contributions to the group. Over time, these have become unconscious and automatic processes shaping present-day decision-making (Petersen, 2012, 2015).

However, it is precisely the universal and unconditional that fosters opposition that also renders this policy an appealing alternative to the existing configuration of cash transfers. However, the central argument of this paper posits that the potential benefits of UBI are not entirely intuitive and may not be fully understood by public opinion. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to review these potential merits of a UBI, they are outlined briefly to explain how these may not be entirely clear to the broader population.

A UBI is often considered as a more efficient alternative to the current welfare provision of cash transfers, given the reduction of administrative costs, its bureaucratic simplicity, and the ability to overcome the problems of non-take-up and unemployment and poverty traps, and overall having a higher redistributive impact than existing schemes. First, the existing patchwork of cash transfer

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

programs relies heavily on a complex bureaucratic machinery responsible for the administration of these transfers. Such infrastructure consumes a significant portion of the welfare budget. Transitioning to a single, straightforward cash transfer system would reduce such administrative costs substantially (Simanainen & Kangas, 2021; Immervoll & Knotz, 2018). Secondly, research shows that means-tested and conditional schemes often fail to reach the entire eligible population, a phenomenon referred to as the non-take-up problem (Van Oorschot, 1991). Poverty and unemployment traps generated by current cash transfer programs could be prevented with a UBI that remains intact even when recipients receive additional sources of income (Gilroy et al., 2013; Calnitsky, 2016). These mechanisms partly underpin the advantages of a UBI, an account for a heightened redistributive potential compared to existing alternatives (for other additional advantages see Groot, 1997; Standing, 2008; Davutoğlu, 2013; Calnitsky, 2016). Nonetheless, this paper argues that such advantages are not immediately apparent to the public, and there is a degree of debate amongst experts too. Consequently, despite the potential benefits a UBI may offer, it appears more plausible to anticipate that it will attract more public opposition than backing.

With the previous considerations in mind, I now turn to revisit the political economy literature on preferences and empirical work on UBI support, to argue that even if the low-income, left-wing, and outsiders may show higher support for a UBI than their more secure and right-wing counterparts, these will still prefer means-tested and conditional alternatives.

Material self-interest

The material self-interest account of preferences posits that individuals, as rational beings and utility-maximisers will support policies that benefit them the most (Campbell, 1960; Lipset, 1960; Curtin & Cowan, 1975; Meltzer & Richard, 1981; AuClaire, 1984; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Cook & Barret, 1992; Gilens, 1995; Van Kersbergen, 2002). In this context, income is a prominent predictor of preferences. Given that those with lower incomes tend to benefit more from redistribution, the literature posits and empirically shows that lower incomes are more favourable to UBI (Vlandas, 2020; Lee, 2021; for a review of these findings see Laenen et al., 2023). However, paradoxically, lower-incomes also prefer policies that differ substantially from a UBI, like those targeted to the poor (e.g., Fernández-Albertos & Manzano, 2016b). The fact that low-income support both a UBI and targeted schemes may be reflective of an underlying demand for more government intervention. The key question remains, which of these policy alternatives do these individuals prefer, and why? Following the argument of material self-interest, people with low incomes are more likely to favor targeted schemes because they perceive them as directly redistributive. Targeted schemes are clearer in terms of who benefits and who loses, while the broader social benefits of a UBI may not be as obvious. Hence the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1. Low-incomes will prefer means-tested (targeted and conditional policies) over universal and unconditional ones.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, income is not the only predictor of preferences from a material self-interested rationale. Given the changing nature of labour markets, one's employment status and risk – be it subjective, occupational, or industrial – have been increasingly identified as prominent predictors of preferences (Moene & Wallerstein, 2003; Jæger, 2006; Emmeneggeret al., 2012; Hausermann & Schwander, 2012). Labour market transformations are challenging the fixed, stable, and long-term and full-time employment patterns characteristic of the past century, diversifying the experiences and attachment that individuals have to the labour market (Häusermann, 2010; Hausermann & Schwander, 2012; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013; Busemeyer & Kemmerling, 2020). While some population groups still enjoy secure employment forms and protection, others are experiencing more intermittent or discontinuous employment patterns – alternating with unemployment periods – and some encounter atypical forms of employment like part-time or temporary jobs. Dualisation literature distinguishes between this core workforce of protected workers – insiders – and a periphery of vulnerable and unprotected individuals – outsiders – and has shown that these individuals ultimately have different preferences, with insiders favouring insurance-based policies and outsiders favouring more investment or redistribution (Häusermann, 2010; Häusermann et al., 2015; Marx, 2014; Schwander, 2019).

While UBI may serve both as an insurance or redistributive policy, the literature on UBI preferences has picked up on the theoretical underpinnings of dualisation research and argued that outsiders should be more favourable to a UBI, a prediction which has received empirical backing (e.g., Vlandas, 2019, 2020; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020). The prediction that outsiders should support a UBI more than insiders based on material self-interest is coherent and convincing, but should outsiders prefer this policy over targeted and means-tested schemes? This paper argues even if the benefits of a cash transfer safety net for outsiders may be somewhat more evident than for the low-income, outsiders should not prefer this form of cash transfer given potential free-rider concerns and deservingness considerations that have been outlined in the previous paragraphs. Outsiders may strongly benefit from a UBI for various reasons: it provides a safety net that could enable them to reject low-standard working conditions, provide permanent security in their discontinuous working patterns, represent an extra material buffer for low-wages, and given that this quantity is not associated to previous contributions it could be more appealing than other forms of welfare. However, their potential concerns for free riding of other individuals who do not participate in the labour market, and deservingness heuristics, alongside the reasons aforementioned at the beginning of this section, may chip in to prevent a higher support from outsiders towards this policy alternative. Hence, the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2. Outsiders will prefer means-tested policies and conditional ones over universal and unconditional ones.

Other regardingness

Building on the literature of welfare preferences, research on UBI support has also drawn on other-regarding accounts of preferences to explain support for this new

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

policy alternative. In this vein, ideology has been said to be a key driver of support for UBI (Roosma & van Oorschot, 2019; Vlandas, 2019, 2020; Chrisp et al., 2020). More particularly, existing research theorises and empirically shows that being left-wing is a prominent predictor of UBI support. From a theoretical standpoint, this makes sense given that those of the left tend to show more egalitarian attitudes or favour more government intervention. Despite this, the literature documents a left-wing division of UBI support (Van Parijs, 2018; Schwander & Vlandas, 2020). Schwader and Vlandas (2020) develop a micro-level explanation of why this is the case pointing at the different left-wing concerns for capitalism as the mechanism of discrepancy in support for UBI. They show that, concerns of exploitation and inefficiencies of free markets derived from capitalism are positively associated to UBI support, but those on the left concerned with the repression – or individual dependency on labour market for material survival – do not support a UBI (Schwander & Vlandas, 2020). This is particularly surprising given that it is UBI's potential in de-commodifying labour, providing an exit strategy from the labour market, which has been much debated and appraised by the literature (Busemeyer & Kemmerling, 2020). The fact that those most concerned with the repressive impact of the labour market do not support a UBI illustrates how the emancipatory and non-economic redistributive effects of UBI are not so evident, and that other considerations, like deservingness heuristics, may contribute to hinder support for UBI. Hence, the core expectation is that left-wing individuals still prefer means-tested alternatives.

H3a. Left-wing individuals will show higher support for means-tested and conditional policies, rather than universal and unconditional ones.

However, we know that the effect of ideology is far more complex in the case of a UBI. This is because the UBI has been advocated for as a tool to bolster the welfare state in some instances, while in others, it has been positioned as a means to scale back the welfare state – a stance that has garnered support from right-wing factions (Murray, 2016). In this scenario, it is reasonable to expect that the effect of ideology is dependent on the UBI model presented. When it comes to UBI models, the literature broadly distinguished between two overarching UBI rationales: welfare enhancing, and welfare retrenching. The former defines a UBI that enhances welfare provision by providing a safety net to the whole population, avoiding the traps and cracks of existing welfare provision. This may imply that some cash transfers are replaced by this UBI, which simplifies the administration of welfare, but does not leave anyone worse off: it has an enhancing effect over welfare and does not threaten material subsistence. The purpose is to strengthen welfare provision, while also making it more cost-effective by reducing administration costs, but not to replace it. In this sense, the funding mechanisms may range from introducing or increasing a broad range of taxes but will exclude reducing expenditure of the core pillars of welfare provision. On the other hand, from a welfare retrenching perspective, UBI is conceived as a means to replace all of the existing welfare provision, not only cash transfers but universal services and core pillars such as health and education (Murray, 2016).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hence, I argue that the effect of ideology on support for UBI's most characteristic feature – universality – is *conditional on* the UBI model presented, and more particularly, whether UBI is presented in a welfare retrenching or a welfare enhancing perspective. Key to this are the funding mechanisms employed. While I have theorised about the preferences of both left- and right-leaning individuals without accounting for funding mechanisms, the unanswered question is whether left-wing individuals would prefer a UBI over means-tested or targeted schemes if funded through progressive mechanisms, and similarly, if right-wing individuals would prefer it if funded through welfare retrenching methods. Following from the core argument of this paper, funding a UBI through progressive financing methods should not guarantee a left-wing preference for UBI given that the challenges outlined in the previous section remain in place. Hence, the final hypothesis is:

> H3b. Left-wing individuals will show higher support for means-tested policies, rather than universal and unconditional ones, even when funded through progressive funding mechanisms.

Empirical strategy

Case Selection and data

I study support for UBI in Spain. This is a particularly relevant context given the saliency of welfare reform debate and UBI more precisely. Between 2017 and 2018 a field experiment was carried out to test the potential effects of a UBI in Barcelona, known as B-Mincome, and at the time of the survey, there was no clear ideological champion of the policy in the country.[1]

Spain's welfare model has been classified as the Mediterranean or Southern welfare state (Ferrera, 1996), given that it was not included in the initial categorisation of Esping-Andersen (1990) (but note that it was incorporated in the 1999 version). Spain's welfare system is marked by a middle-level de-commodification, with high insurance components. This is particularly due to the unemployment benefits, which are generous but dependent on previous contribution, bearing resemblance to the continental type of welfare states and are also characterised by institutional fragmentation (i.e., private vs public employees, agricultural vs. other self-employed). Despite this, health provision in Spain however parallels Nordic or social democrat typology in its universal character, (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Overall however, Spain's welfare model is highly dualised with a generous protection of insiders, and weak subsidies to those in irregular sectors or with more discontinuous employment patterns – i.e., outsiders (Ferrera, 1996).

This leaves a group of 'hyper-protected' beneficiaries with generous protection schemes for sickness, maternity, or unemployment, and a second under-protected and vulnerable group, exacerbating labour market dualisation cleavages (Hausermann & Schwander, 2012). Specifically in Spain, it has been said that there are four, rather than two, different spaces depending on the different job/income and welfare opportunities combination: (1) a protected core of the labour market, (2) temporary and irregular unemployment, (3) underground sector, and (4) ex-employed or unemployed (Ferrera, 1996; Carlos & Rodríguez, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Crucial to this contribution however, in Spain's cash transfer support network. At the time of the survey Spain did not count with a centralised, state-wide cash transfer system or minimum income scheme – in fact, it was not until June 2020, as a response to the coronavirus pandemic, that Spain accelerated the introduction of its first state-wide minimum income scheme. Until then, this form of assistance depended on the autonomous regions, which highlights another important characteristic of this welfare state: its decentralised nature.

Methods

This paper relies on data of a conjoint experiment that was embedded in a survey launched in Spain and fielded by a commercial polling agency (Netquest) in the month of March 2019. The sample ($n = 1000$) consists of a convenience sample[2] from a pool of respondents chosen by Netquest, with quotas based on gender, age, and geographical region, and are representative of the Spanish population (see Appendix A1). The survey's duration was of 15 minutes and was fielded using Qualtrics software.

This paper draws on a conjoint experiment given its relevance and adequacy to the research question. Conjoint experiments are specifically suited to unpack the trade-offs associated to multidimensional preferences (Hainmueller et al., 2014; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015; Bansak et al., 2019; Häusermann et al., 2015). To do so, conjoint experiments break down every decision profile into its component parts: dimensions and attributes. In this case, dimensions represent the core characteristics shared by most welfare cash transfer – i.e., unit of recipient or benefit generosity – and attributes, which represent the varying characteristic within each dimension – i.e., in the case of recipients this could be households or individuals. Respondents then choose and rate each pair of profiles, with varying attributes, which then allows for analysing the relative impact of each of these features.

Given the relevance of conjoint experiments to assess the multidimensionality of preferences, research is increasingly employing this methodology to understand public opinion towards welfare policies (Gallego & Marx, 2016; Häusermann et al., 2019; Hankinson, 2018), including basic income (Dermont & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2019; Rincon, 2023; Rincón et al., 2022). In this contribution, I follow previous work in employing a cross-policy design, looking at how support towards a series of different policy alternatives rather than looking at how varying characteristics *within* one specific policy alter support for the proposal in question.

Conjoint design

To understand how support for universal basic income compares to other policy alternatives I employ a fully randomised conjoint experiment, which varies in the attributes presented along six dimensions shared by income cash transfers, as described in Table 1, enabling the assessment of the causal impact of different cash transfer design characteristics on support for specific policy proposals. Table A2 in the appendix displays the full conjoint design with further justification. For the benefit generosity dimension, I use the quantity in euros (for more details, see Table A3 in appendix). The number of dimensions and attributes is similar to the ones

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. Conjoint design: dimensions and attributes as employed in the main analysis. The full conjoint design can be found in Appendix A2

	Dimension	Attributes
Benefit design	Target population sub-groups	Targeting need (dependency/under poverty threshold)
		Targeting minors
		Universality (giving to everyone, non-targeting)
	Conditionality	Unconditional (no conditions, or being unemployed and not having to look for employment)
		Participatory conditions (i.e., training, education; community work)
		Reciprocity/inability (looking for employment, or being unable to work)
		Employment (having some form of employment, like self-employed, part-time, or full-time)
	Legal Requirements	Citizenship
		Residence (combine 6 months, 1 year and 5 years residence)
	Recipients	Households
		Individuals
	Generosity	Covers living costs
		Beyond living costs
		Low quantity (200€)[3]
Funding mechanisms	Funding mechanisms	Capital/technology taxation
		Reducing targeted welfare spending
		Reducing universal welfare spending
		Environmental taxation
		Increase inheritance tax
		Cut spending on defense
		Increase personal income tax to everyone
		Increase personal income tax to highest incomes

used in most studies. This is the same design employed by previous work (references anonymised). However, this paper focuses on the two key dimensions which make a UBI distinctive of competing policy proposal: universality (that is, the absence of targeting) and unconditionality (that is, the lack of imposed conditions). These are two dimensions that make UBI distinctive of any other alternative. It is also the combination of these two features that come to represent the construct of a UBI Hence, support for UBI is operationalised as support given to each of these two characteristics (universality and unconditionality), compared to other alternative designs. Additionally, it is also understood as the support given to the interaction or combination of these two characteristics.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Respondents are shown two proposals, and they are required to select one of them and rate the two. This task is performed four times. A screenshot of the task is shown in Figure A4 in the appendix. Table A5 in the appendix details the wording of the questions included and describes the operationalisation of the two dependent variables: a forced choice (between the two policies shown to respondents in each round), and a support rate (given to each of the two policies per round). To ensure that task complexity was not an issue, the survey was pre-tested. Respondents were able to perform the conjoint tasks easily and the considerations in the experimental design resonated with respondents' understandings of welfare.

To ensure data quality, all respondents who completed the questionnaire in less than 10 minutes were excluded from the analysis (note that the survey lasts for about 15 minutes). Observations which do not include the whole four conjoint rounds or provide inconsistent answers – i.e., that the forced choice and support rate dependent variable are incongruent – were also deleted.[4] This leaves a total of 748 observations. As robustness checks the same analysis I performed using only the two first conjoint rounds, where respondent satisficing should not be an issue (Bansak et al., 2018; Bansak et al., 2017). These results are available in the appendix and are consistent with the main results.

The analysis in this paper is based on the support rate dependent variable, given its relevance to the question under study. Appendix A5 shows the question wording and A6 a justification of this dependent variable. The analysis in this paper relies mainly on two quantities of interest. First, the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE), which is defined as the marginal effect of one attribute averaged over the joint distribution of other attributes (Hainmueller et al., 2014; Häusermann et al., 2015). Its interpretation is the probability of selecting one policy proposal when a particular attribute is present, in reference to a counterfactual level, which is set as the baseline category (Teele et al., 2018).

Marginal means, however, are increasingly seen as more appropriate for the analysis of sub-group preferences. The marginal mean, in contrast to the AMCE, does not count with a baseline or arbitrary reference category, so it is essentially representative of an attribute's mean without taking into consideration the remaining factors (for a detailed overview of the methodological issues involved see Leeper et al., 2018). Hence, I employ marginal means as the main quantity of interest in this paper – the AMCE is reported in the appendix. Section A7 of the appendix also details how the dataset is restructured for analysis.

Respondent characteristics

This paper is concerned with the preferences of particular sub-groups, where income, outsider/insiders status (operationalised through employment status), and ideology are key defining variables. Table A8 in the appendix summarises the survey questions where this information has been extracted from and the operationalisation of each variable.

Results

Does support for a UBI translate into an actual preference for this policy alternative? Results suggest that this is not the case overall. In line with our first hypothesis, the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

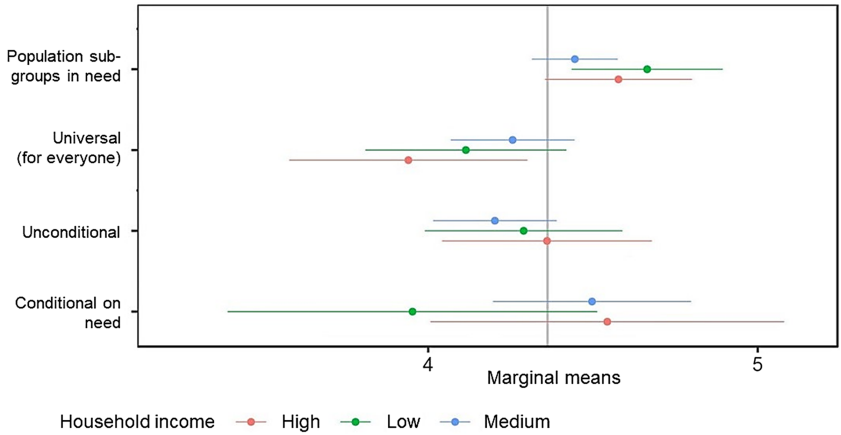


Figure 1. Marginal mean analysis of the support rate dependent variable across different income groups. The vertical line indicates the average support rate. The dots are the marginal means, and the confidence level is set at .95. The two first attributes belong to the universality dimension (which population sub-groups are targeted) and includes universality or needs-based targeting. The second two attributes belong to the conditionality dimension and include no conditions and conditioning on need – inability to work or unemployed.

low-income do prefer means-tested policies over universal ones, but they do not prefer attaching behavioural conditions over unconditionality (see Figure 1). From a material self-interested perspective this seems coherent. The targeting/universality dichotomy refers to the means available to recipients. From a self-interested rationale, low-income should prioritise the targeting dimension, as it guarantees economic support for the low-income. We now turn to explore the joint effect of universality and unconditionality by interacting the dimension of target groups and conditionality (see A10 in appendix), the findings are in line with this previously detected preference for means-testing over universality. Results show that, while the universality and unconditionality combination do not seem more unpopular than several targeting and conditioning alternatives, the attribute of means-testing to low incomes and being employed attains a significantly higher rate of support than the combination of universality and unconditionality in line with a UBI. That is, means-testing and conditioning is preferred over a UBI.

Contrary to what is suggested by previous research however, there are no significant differences in preferences across income groups in the support given to the attribute of universality and unconditionality, which contrasts with the prevailing finding in the research on UBI that shows that being low-income predicts support for this policy proposal (e.g., Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020; Vlandas, 2020). This finding is consistent and congruent with the interaction of target groups and conditionality dimensions (see Figure A10 in the appendix).

Nonetheless, an essential observation concerning preferences for conditionality worth highlighting is the divergence in preferences that arises between individuals with low and medium incomes in relation to other conditionality attributes. As it can be seen from Figure A9 in the appendix, low incomes do show significantly more support than medium incomes to other forms of conditionality, like those that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

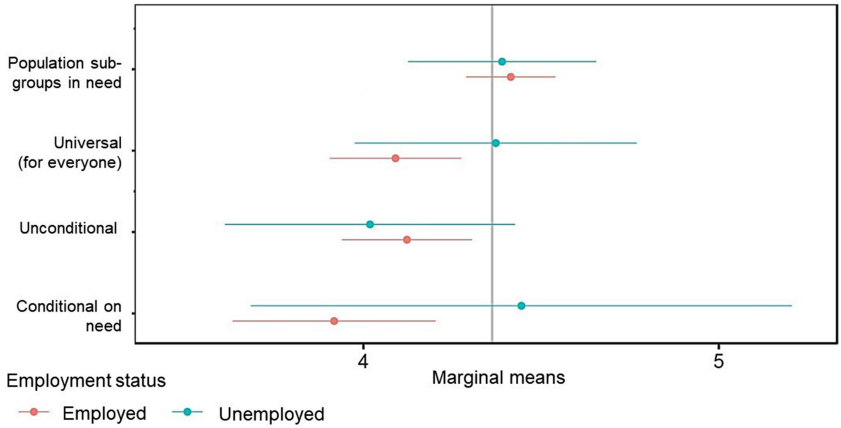


Figure 2. Marginal means of the support rate dependent variable across groups with different employment status. The vertical line indicates the average support rate. The dots are the marginal means, and the confidence level is set at .95. The two first attributes belong to the universality dimension (which population sub-groups are targeted) and includes universality or needs-based targeting. The second two attributes belong to the conditionality dimension and include no conditions and conditioning on need – inability to work or unemployed.

require recipients to be employed in some way; while medium incomes show significantly more support to policies, which promote training, education, or volunteering. This resonates with potential demands of different income groups, like the working poor, which is a group that has been increasing in size recently (Bonoli, 2005; OECD, 2009; Stier, 2011; Levanon, 2018). In this sense, low incomes may be demanding a sort of salary complement to improve their living standards.

Moving to the hypothesis on outsider preferences, contrary to the expectations, I find mixed evidence that outsiders prefer targeted and conditional policies over universal and unconditional ones. Figure 2 shows that outsiders – the unemployed – do not give higher support to targeted and conditional policies; in fact, there are no significant differences in support rate across attributes (see Figure 2). In contrast, insiders – or the employed – do show significantly higher support to making policies selective based on need, over universal ones. In other words, the unemployed do not have a strong preference for the conventional design of welfare cash transfers. The interaction analysis of target groups and condition dimension shows no significant differences in support for the UBI model characterised by universality and unconditionality, relative to other configurations involving various conditions and means-testing (see Figure A13 in the appendix). This observation holds true not only for the unemployed but also for the employed population, where there are no statistically significant disparities in their policy preferences.

In line with the hypothesis, high-risk individuals show significantly higher levels of support for means-tested alternatives, over universal ones (see Figure 3 below). However, contrary to expectations, they show a preference for unconditional policies rather than conditional ones. Results reveal that high risk oppose making cash transfers conditional on being unemployed and looking for employment or being unable to work, which is indeed very striking as they should be the key

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

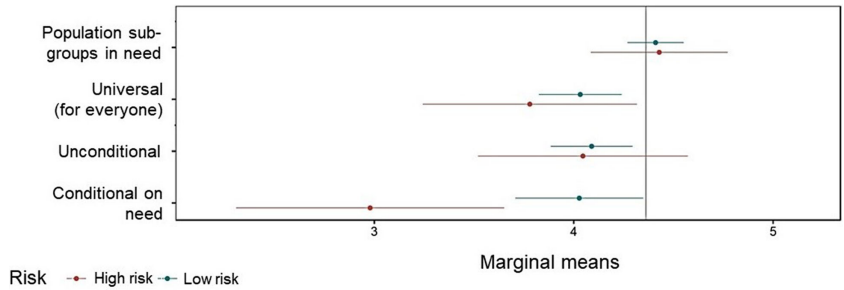


Figure 3. Marginal means of the support rate dependent variable across individuals with different levels of risk. The vertical line indicates the average support rate. The dots are the marginal means, and the confidence level is set at .95. The two first attributes belong to the universality dimension (which population sub-groups are targeted) and includes universality or needs-based targeting. The second two attributes belong to the conditionality dimension and include no conditions and conditioning on need – inability to work or unemployed.

winners of this type of policy. However, once we turn to the combined analysis of universality and unconditionality, we find that no combination of means-testing and conditionality is more popular than the UBI model of universality and unconditionality (see Figure A16 in the appendix). One reason for this is that it may be the case that the effect of the attributes within each dimension cancel out: that is, while means-testing is preferred, the (un)conditionality dimension matters less, hence, finding no effect.

A result that is particularly striking is the lack of significant differences in preferences between the employed-unemployed, and the high vs. low risk individuals,[5] especially in a highly dualised context like Spain, where welfare institutions exacerbate the inequalities derived from the labour market segmentation (Hauserman & Schwander 2012, in Emmenegger et al., 2012). However, these findings resonate with previous work on dualisation, which shows that in fact, the lack of preference gaps across these two groups (Emmenegger, 2009) may be explained by three potential mechanisms. First, individuals may be driven by their household material prospects rather than their individual status within the labour market (Becker, 1981; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Pierson, 2001; Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006, 2012; Emmenegger, 2010; Hausermann & Schwander, 2012). In Spain, the household income narrative aligns with the welfare system's nature and heavy reliance on family support for income, making it theoretically plausible. However, the lack of significant differences across the preferences of different income groups suggests this may not be the most convincing explanation in this case.

Another possible explanation for the lack of preference divisions between insiders and outsiders is the poor working conditions experienced by insiders (Hausermann & Schwander, 2012), implying that while outsiders may face greater relative disadvantages in welfare institutions, insiders still lack security, aligning their preferences with outsiders. Additionally, the diverse profiles among outsiders may lead to heterogeneous preferences, further complicating the divide (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2005; Häuserman, 2010).

Finally, I turn to explore how ideology shapes preferences towards UBI. Results show that left-wing individuals prefer policies that are means-tested, even if they

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

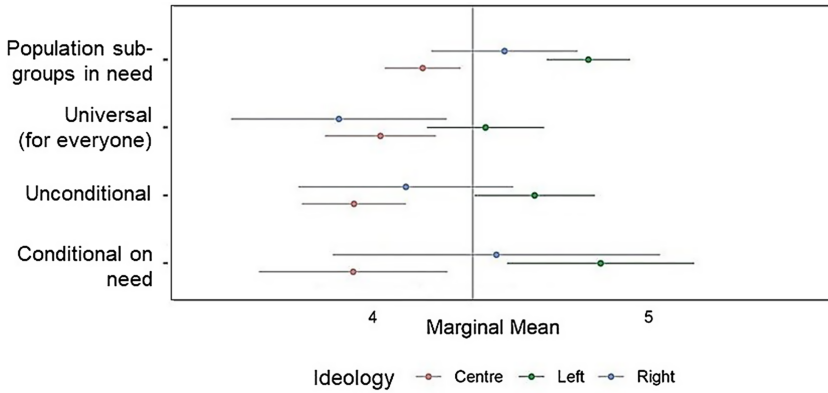


Figure 4. Marginal mean analysis of the support rate dependent variable across ideology groups. The vertical line indicates the average support rate. The dots are the marginal means, and the confidence level is set at .95. The two first attributes belong to the universality dimension (which population sub-groups are targeted) and includes universality or needs-based targeting. The second two attributes belong to the conditionality dimension and include no conditions and conditioning on need – inability to work or unemployed.

show higher levels of support to universality and unconditionality than the centre-right individuals (see Figure 4). Unlike the targeting/universality dimension, those on the left do not prefer conditional alternatives more than unconditional ones, but they simply do not exhibit significant differences in their preferences within this dimension, also in line with the findings of different income groups. Taken together, this suggests that the conditionality dimension seems less contentious in terms of preferences, with the sole exception of the high-risk individuals – who prefer unconditionality over attaching conditions.

A similar trend appears in the combined analysis of universality and unconditionality (Figure A19 in the appendix), where a similar trend is found: the marginal mean of the making policies means-tested and conditional on the basis of need is larger than that of universality-unconditionality for those on the left, even if, this difference is not statistically significant. Interestingly, this is not the case amongst those on the centre or right-wing, who show lower rates of support for a UBI's universality and unconditionality combination. However, the results do not convey hardly any cleavages in preferences – or statistically significant differences in support – across ideological groups, with the exception of those on the right higher support for conditioning on need and means-testing over a UBI, more so, than those on the left (see Table 2).

Does securing a UBI welfare-enhancing (retrenching) model ensure a preference for this type of cash transfer amongst the left-wing (right-wing)? There is no evidence that universal or unconditional policies are preferred over means-tested or conditional ones by those on the left (see Figures 5 and 6), even if funded through progressive funding mechanisms (e.g., increasing taxes to those with higher incomes or taxing corporations). Results do show however, that there are no significant differences in support for universality or means-testing once progressive funding mechanisms are secured, which is not the case for instance, when a cash transfer is

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 2. Average support levels of policies across ideology. The first column shows the average support level given to all cash transfers designs across ideology. The second column shows the main effects marginal mean for the attribute of universality. The third and fourth columns show the marginal mean of the attribute of universality interacted with two different forms of welfare retrenchment. The numbers in brackets indicate the standard errors

Ideology	Average support	Support for universality	Funded through universal welfare retrenching	Funded through targeted welfare retrenching
Centre	4.13	4.03 (0.10)	3.68 (0.20)	4.16 (0.28)
Left	4.58	4.41 (0.11)	3.64 (0.24)	4.80 (0.24)
Right	4.39	3.88 (0.20)	5 (0.21)	3.18 (0.37)

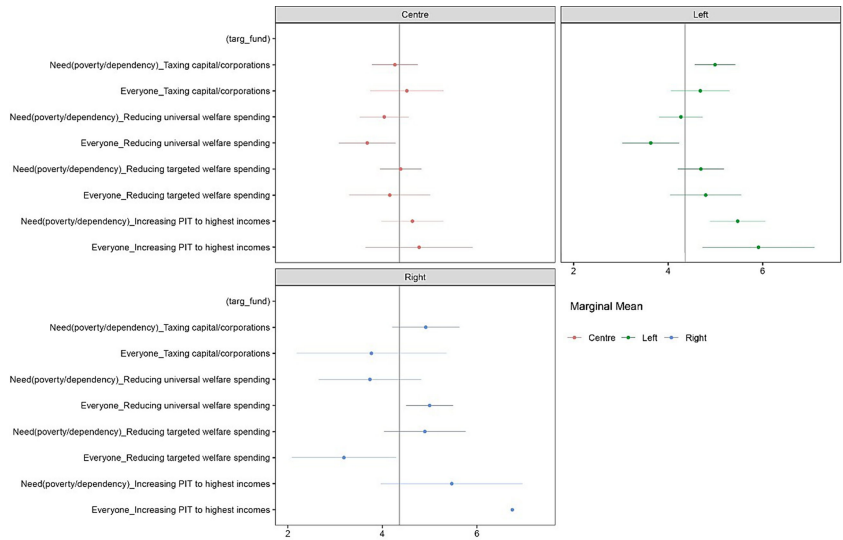


Figure 5. Interaction between the target groups and funding mechanisms dimensions. The figure only shows the attribute levels of targeting and universality (for the targeting dimension) and two funding mechanisms for welfare retrenching – reducing targeted and universal welfare expenditure – as well as two progressive mechanisms -increasing personal income tax to highest income and increasing capital tax.

funded through the retrenching of universal welfare expenditure (see Figure 5). This implies that once a cash transfer's progressivity is ensured through funding mechanisms, its design isn't controversial. Resistance from the left may stem more from its redistributive nature than its specific design.

Do those on the right show a preference for a universal or unconditional cash transfer once it is funded through retrenching welfare state? Results suggest that this is the case. The marginal mean of universality is significantly higher than that of means-testing once the reduction of universal welfare spending is established as the funding mechanism.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

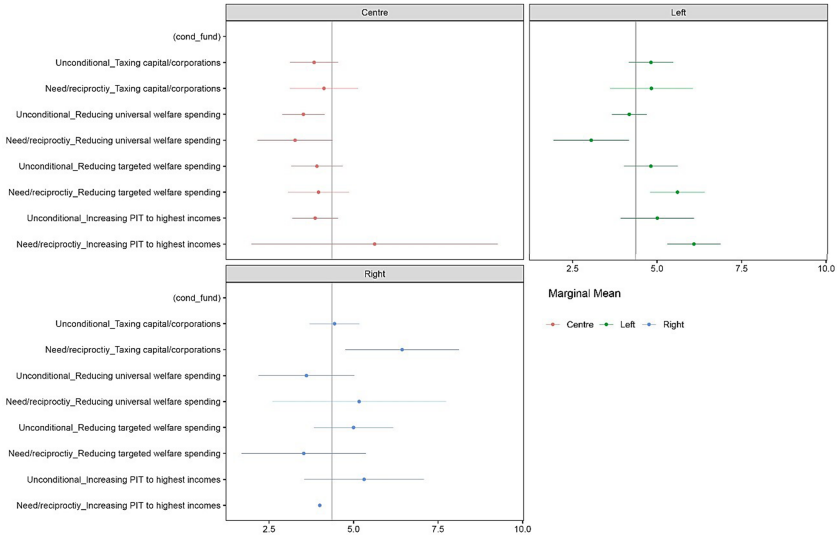


Figure 6. Interaction between the conditionality and funding mechanisms dimensions. The figure only shows the attribute levels of targeting and universality (for the targeting dimension) and two funding mechanisms for welfare retrenching – reducing targeted and universal welfare expenditure – as well as two progressive mechanisms – increasing personal income tax to highest income and increasing capital tax.

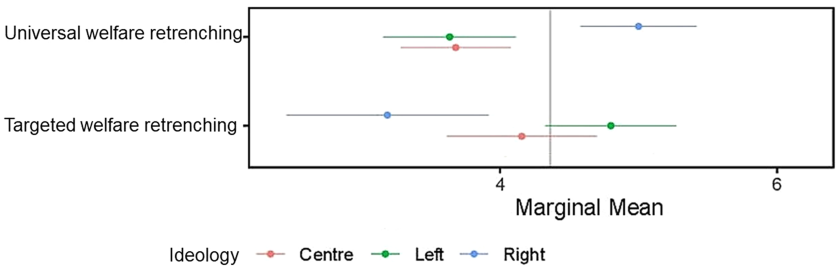


Figure 7. Support for universality conditional on the funding mechanisms. The figure shows the marginal means across ideology groups for the interaction between target groups and funding mechanisms. The graph only includes the attributes which are theoretically relevant universality and welfare retrenching mechanisms. Robustness checks can be found in Figure A20.

An interesting finding emerges with regards to support for universality funded through the reduction of targeted welfare – i.e., pensions, housing, low-income support – those on the left show significantly higher support rates for this alternative than those on the right (see Figure 7). Although this finding may seem conspicuous it could be reflecting support for the concept of UBI as a welfare simplification tool – not retrenching – to the existing patchwork of social assistance benefits which is filled with administrative hurdles, employment and poverty traps, and stigma of conditional benefits, and the advocacy of one universal cash transfer that guarantees

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

material existence as a universal right (McKay, 2001; Van Parijs, 2018; Martinelli, 2020). Nevertheless, an important remark here is that the statistical significance of this effect disappears in the robustness checks (see Appendix A11), so one cannot conclude that those on the left give more support than those on the right to universality funded through this mechanism.

Conclusion

Universal basic income has become a key alternative to reform the welfare state, which is facing an increasing number of challenges. Yet, who, and whether there is a key coalition of support remains an open question. Research indicates that individual traits such as low-income status, outsider identity, or left-wing ideology predict backing for this policy. However, it fails to establish whether this support reflects a true preference for the proposal over other options, which is crucial for understanding its political backing. This paper contends that despite certain groups showing greater support for UBI, it doesn't necessarily signify a genuine preference for it. Three main reasons support this claim: firstly, UBI diverges significantly from conventional welfare norms, challenging established biases and deservingness judgements, further complicated by its non-intuitive advantages.

This paper reveals for the first time that while certain traits may forecast backing for UBI – e.g., being low-income or left-wing – individuals with these characteristics don't necessarily favour UBI over other policies. For instance, low-income, high-risk, and left-leaning individuals still prefer means-tested schemes over universal ones.

These results have broad implications for both the research of preferences and the politics of welfare reform. The findings indicate no unified support for UBI, as even those with high backing for its key aspects prefer other policies. This highlights an overestimation of UBI's political backing and emphasises the need to distinguish between support and preference. The support detected by previous work amongst the low-incomes, outsiders, and left-wing, seems to be rooted in a demand for government intervention rather than a true preference for UBI over other alternatives. Future work should examine why this is the case and explore other mechanisms that may explain an actual preference for a UBI.

Some conspicuous findings are worth discussing. It is particularly striking that income turns out not to be a predictor of universal and unconditional policies which contrast with previous research (Delsen & Schilpzand, 2019; Roosma & van Oorschot, 2019; Vlandas, 2019, 2020; Chrisp et al., 2020). This suggests that UBI support identified by previous research might reflect a broader desire for government intervention rather than polarisation over UBI's core traits. It aligns with studies showing distinct motivations for redistribution. In line with this research, I show that the giving to the poor side of social policy and redistribution do not prime the income-maximising motivations of individuals (Cavaillé & Trump, 2015).

A striking finding is the lack of preference cleavages across insiders and outsiders, which has been discussed in the paper. Future work could explore why this is the case, and how far this is related to perceptions about whether UBI is more effective

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for redistributive or insurance purposes, but also, to what extent a welfare institutional context which relies on families as key providers of welfare mitigates the effect of individual labour market indicators even in highly dualised societies.

Other important results have been reported, which unveil key dynamics of support. One of such findings is the conditional effect of ideology on support for UBI's features and the UBI model presented. Ideology appears as a very polarising variable, albeit conditional on the policy attributes and interactions. First, important preference cleavages appear across ideology, which are not prevalent across material variables. Those on the left tend to give more support to all policy options, although their preferences follow a structure similar to the rest of their ideological counterparts: they prefer means-tested over universal alternatives. In line with previous work results here also convey the absence of an ideological cleavage in support for welfare (Fernández-Albertos & Manzano, 2016b), given that that reducing universal welfare is a funding mechanism that does not polarise the preferences of different ideological groups. Like this work, I do find ideological cleavages emerge in giving to the poor. However, a novel finding is that this logic changes when it comes to the restructuring of the welfare state. When a universal cash transfer is presented to replace existing welfare, right-wing individuals boost their support for universal welfare state retrenchment, which is penalised by those on the left. The implication of this finding is that welfare consensus in Spain is not as robust as otherwise thought, and it may likely crumble in the event of a welfare-restructuring proposition.

Another implication and key insight from this finding are that indeed, the ideological cleavages found in UBI support are not so much related to the policy design itself, as both those on the left and right hold the same preferences in terms of cash transfer design. However, accounting for the UBI model or the funding mechanisms, such preferences diverge quite more substantially: those on the left show no preference for means-testing over universality, while those on the right still demonstrate the preference for targeting.

This contribution does not come without its limitations. This paper relies on data from one country, but future research could explore in which ways these findings are transferrable to other contexts. Comparative welfare state research suggests that different welfare systems influence what aspects of welfare are important in public discourse (Larsen, 2008) and how individual traits impact preferences across contexts (Gingrich & Ansell, 2012). Further exploration in other settings may reveal differing roles of individual characteristics in shaping policy support or varying importance of UBI dimensions across countries. For instance, recent studies suggest that universality may not be a contentious issue in more universalistic welfare states (Rincón et al., 2022).

Finally, this paper examines individual characteristics' effects independently, overlooking their complex interactions in shaping preference schemes. Despite limitations, this study unveils for the first time whether support translates into a preference for UBI, identifying causal policy design effects, and detecting support dynamics among competing policy alternatives, essential to understand UBI politics and welfare reform.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Acknowledgements. I want to thank Heikki Hilamo for funding the data collection process. I also want to thank the attendees of the Political Behaviour workshop, held in Humboldt University May 2022, for their feedback and comments regarding this manuscript and its presentation. I also thank the EPSA 2022 attendees for their feedback during the presentation of this work.

Funding. Academy of Helsinki.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

Notes

1 It must be acknowledged, however, that this has not always been the case in Spain. Izquierda Unida (United Left), a left-wing party in Spain that merged with Podemos (We Can) in 2016 to form Unidas Podemos (United, we can), did include this proposal in their political manifesto during the 1990s, but the debate on the topic never reached a high saliency level. Later, in 2014, Podemos incorporated this policy proposal in its political manifesto for the 2014 European Parliament Elections. By the following elections, however, in 2015, Podemos eliminated this proposal from their political program and electoral manifesto, and since then no other party has included the idea as such.

2 The sample is labelled as a convenience sample because the respondents are part of a pre-registered respondent pool gathered by the commercial survey agency Netquest. These are not randomly drawn out of the population hence why these are not referred to as a random sample – but they are respondents who previously registered with Netquest. This is not to say that the sample is biased in some way given that quotas were employed to maintain proportionality with the population's characteristics. This sampling is used in most survey research.

3 This quantity represents a very low, symbolic quantity, not enough to cover living costs. Its inclusion is inspired from the concept of the eurodividend developed by Van Parijs (2013) and proposed as a pan-European income scheme to every individual with the specified level of generosity of 200€, as a starting symbolic quantity. Because the concept of euro-dividend is part of the UBI debate, and having a very minimal, symbolic quantity is also considered by some as a potential steppingstone to the introduction of a full basic income scheme, this quantity is also included in the design.

4 Consistent responses are those which reflect the same preference in both dependent variables, i.e., that the policy selected in the forced choice is never rated lower than the other alternative, in the support rate dependent variable.

5 The only exception is the that high-risk individuals give lower support to making policies conditional on need, in comparison to low-risk individuals.

6 As it can be seen from the target percentage and actual proportion of respondents per quota category, the proportion of respondents aimed at and finally obtained are very similar, suggesting that although the number of respondents drops after the cleaning process, the sample is still representative.

References

Anttonen, A., & Sipilä, J. (2014). Varieties of universalism. In Draft paper prepared for the UNRISD Conference, New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South, Geneva (pp. 7–8).

Arceneaux, K. & Nicholson, S.P. (2023). Anchoring political preferences: The psychological foundations of status quo bias and the boundaries of elite manipulation. *Political Behavior*, 1–25.

Armingeon, K., & Bonoli, G. (2006). *The politics of post-industrial welfare states: Adapting post-war social policies to new social risks*. Routledge.

AuClaire, P. A. (1984). Public attitudes toward social welfare expenditures. *Social Work*, **29**(2), 139–144.

Bansak, K., Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. J. (2019). Conjoint survey experiments. In J. N. Druckman, & D. P. Green (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of advances in experimental political science*. Cambridge University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bansak, K., Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D.J., & Yamamoto, T. (2018). The number of choice tasks and survey satisficing in conjoint experiments. *Political Analysis*, **26**(1), 112–119. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2017.40

Bansak, K., Hainmueller, J., & Yamamoto, T. (2017). Beyond the breaking point? Survey satisficing in conjoint experiments. *Stanford University Graduate School of Business Research Paper No. 17-33, MIT Political Science Department Research Paper No. 2017-16*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2959146

Becker, G. (1981). *Treatise on the family*. Cambridge University Press.

Bonoli, G. (2005). The politics of the new social policies: providing coverage against new social risks in mature welfare states. *Policy & Politics,* **33**(3), 431–449.

Busemeyer, M., & Kemmerling, A. (2020). Dualization, stratification, liberalization, or what? An attempt to clarify the conceptual underpinnings of the dualization debate. *Political Science Research and Methods*, **8**(2), 375–379.

Calnitsky, D. (2016). More normal than welfare: The mincome experiment, stigma, and community experience. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, **53**(1), 26–71. https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12091

Campbell, A. (1960). *The American voter*. University of Chicago Press.

Carlos, P. D. J., & Rodríguez, V. (2020). *Las desigualdades económicas en españa: realidades y percepciones estudi os estudi os economí a y soci edad.*

Cavaillé, C., & Trump, K. S. (2015). The two facets of social policy preferences. *The Journal of Politics*, **77**(1), 1–34. https://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/cavaille

Chrisp, J., Pulkka, V.-V., & Rincón García, L. (2020). Snowballing or wilting? What affects public support for varying models of basic income? *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, **36**(3), 223–236.

Colombino, U. (2015). Is unconditional basic income a viable alternative to other social welfare measures? *IZA World of Labor*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.128

Cook, F. L., & Barret, E. J. (1992). *Support for the American welfare state the views of congress and the public*. Columbia University Press.

Curtin, R. T., & Cowan, C. D. (1975). Public attitudes toward fiscal programs.. In B. Strumpel (Ed.), *In 1972–1973 surveys of consumers*. University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research.

Davutoğlu, A. (2013). Two different poverty reduction approaches: neoliberal market based microfinance versus social rights defender basic income. *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, **6**(1), 39–47. https://antioch.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=94899349&site=ehost-live&scope=site%5Cnhttp://content.ebscohost.com.antioch.idm.oclc.org/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=94899349&S=R&D=a9h&EbscoContent=dGJyMN

De Wispelaere, J. & Stirton, L. (2004). The many faces of universal basic income. *The Political Quarterly*, **75**(3), 266–274.

Delsen, L., & Schilpzand, R. (2019). Individual preferences for the unconditional basic income in the European Union. In *Contributions to economics* (pp. 29–60). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30044-9_2

Dermont, C., & Stadelmann-steffen, I. (2019). Beyond complex welfare systems: Citizens opinion towards basic income proposals compared. *Journal of Social Policy*, **49**(2), 1–21. https://boris.unibe.ch/113309/

Emmenegger, P. (2009). Barriers to entry: Insider/outsider politics and the political determinants of job security regulations. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **19**(2), 131–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928708101866

Emmenegger, P. (2010). The long road to flexicurity: The development of job security regulations in Denmark and Sweden. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, **33**(3), 271–294.

Emmenegger, P., Häusermann, S., et al. (2012). *The age of dualization: The changing face of inequality in deindustrializing societies*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199797899.001.0001

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Polity Press. Princeton University Press.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1999). *Social foundations of postindustrial economies*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0198742002.001.0001

Fernández-Albertos, J., & Manzano, D. (2016a). Dualism and support for the welfare state. *Comparative European Politics*, **14**, 349–375.

Fernández-Albertos, J., & Manzano, D. (2016b). The lack of partisan conflictover the welfare state in Spain. In *Voters and Parties in the Spanish Political Space* (pp. 63–83). Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ferrera, M. (1996). The "Southern Model" of welfare in Social Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **6**(1), 17–37.

Frey, C. B., & Osborne, M. A. (2017). Technological forecasting and social change. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, **114**, 254–280.

Gallego, A., & Marx, P. (2016). Multi-dimensional preferences for labour market reforms: a conjoint experiment. *Journal of European Public Policy*, **1763**(June), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1170191

Gallego, A., & Marx, P. (2017). Multi-dimensional preferences for labour market reforms: A conjoint experiment. *Journal of European Public Policy*, **24**(7), 1027–1047. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1170191

Gilens, M. (1995). Racial attitudes and opposition to welfare. *The Journal of Politics*, **57**(4).

Gilroy, B. M., Heimann, A., & Schopf, M. (2013). Basic income and labour supply: The German case. *Basic Income Studies*, **8**(1), 43–70. https://doi.org/10.1515/bis-2012-0009

Gingrich, J., & Ansell, B. (2012). Preferences in context: Micro preferences, macro contexts, and the demand for social policy. *Comparative Political Studies*, **45**(12), 1624–1654. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463904

Groot, L. F. M. (1997). An alternative route to a basic income: The transition from conditional to unconditional social security. *Economist*, **145**(2), 203–227. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1002942221250

Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. J. (2015). The hidden American immigration consensus: A conjoint analysis of attitudes toward immigrants. American Journal of Political Science, 59(3), 529–548. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12138

Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D. J., & Yamamoto, T. (2014). Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments. *Political Analysis*, **22**(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpt024

Hankinson, M. (2018). When do renters behave like homeowners? High rent, price anxiety, and nimbyism. *American Political Science Review*, **112**(3), 473–493. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000035

Hasenfeld, Y., & Rafferty, J. A. (1989). The determinants of public attitudes toward the welfare state. https://sf.oxfordjournals.org/

Häuserman, S. (2010). *The politics of welfare state reform in continental Europe: Modernization in hard times*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Häusermann, S., Kemmerling, A., & Rueda, D. (2020). How labor market inequality transforms mass politics. *Political Science Research and Methods*, **8**(2), 344–355. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2018.64

Häusermann, S., Kurer, T. and Schwander, H. (2015). High-Skilled outsiders? Labor market vulnerability, education and welfare state preferences. *Socio-Economic Review*, **13**(2), 235–258.

Häusermann, S., Kurer, T., & Traber, D. (2019). The politics of trade-offs: Studying the dynamics of welfare state reform with conjoint experiments. *Comparative Political Studies*, **52**(7), 1059–1095. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018797943

Hausermann, S., & Schwander, H. (2012). Varieties of dualization? Labor market segmentation and insider-outsider divides across regimes. In P. Emmenger et al. (Eds.), *The age of dualization: The changing face of inequality in deindustrializing societies*. Oxford University Press.

Immervoll, H., & Knotz, C. (2018). How demanding are activation requirements for jobseekers? IZA Discussion Paper No. 11704. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3234227

Iversen, T., & Rosenbluth, F. (2006). The political economy of gender: Explaining cross-national variation in the gender division of labor and the gender voting gap. *American Journal of Political Science*, **50**(1), 1–19.

Iversen, T., & Rosenbluth, F. (2012). *Women, work, and politics: The political economy of gender inequality*. Yale University Press.

Jæger, M. M. (2006). What makes people support public responsibility for welfare provision: Self-Interest or political ideology? A longitudinal approach. *Acta sociologica*, **49**(3), 321–338.

Johnson, A. F., & Roberto, K. J. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic: Time for a universal basic income?. In *Public administration and development* (pp. 232–235). John Wiley and Sons Ltd. https://doi.org/:10.1002/pad.1891

Jordan, J. (2013). Policy feedback and support for the welfare state. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **23**(2), 134–148.

Kangas, O., & Kvist, J. (2018). Nordic welfare states. In Routledge handbook of the welfare state (pp. 124–136). London: Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kitschelt, H., & Rehm, P. (2005). Work, family and politics. Foundations of electoral partisan alignments in postindustrial democracies. In *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Washington, DC.

Kumlin, S., & Stadelmann-Steffen, I. eds. (2014). How welfare states shape the democratic public: Policy feedback, participation, voting, and attitudes. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Laenen, T., & Gugushvili, D. (2023). Welfare state dissatisfaction and support for major welfare reform: Towards means-tested welfare or a universal basic income? *International Journal of Social Welfare*, **32**(2), 178–185.

Laenen, T., Van Hootegem, A., & Rossetti, F. (2023). The multidimensionality of public support for basic income: A vignette experiment in Belgium. *Journal of European Public Policy*, **30**(5), 849–872.

Larsen, C. A. (2008). The institutional logic of welfare attitudes: How welfare regimes influence public support. *Comparative Political Studies*, **41**(2), 145–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006295234

Larsen, C.A. (2006). How welfare regimes influence judgement of deservingness and public support for welfare policy. Aalborg, Denmark: Department of Economics, Politics and Public Administration, Aalborg University.

Lee, S. (2021). Politics of universal and unconditional cash transfer: Examining attitudes toward universal basic income. *Basic income studies*, **16**(2), 191–208.

Leeper, T. J., Hobolt, S. B., & Tilley, J. (2018). Measuring Subgroup Preferences in Conjoint Experiments. *Political Analysis,* **28**(2), 207–221.

Levanon, A. (2018). Labor market insiders or outsiders? A cross-national examination of redistributive preferences of the working poor. *Societies*, **8**(3), 72. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030072

Lipset, S. (1960). *Political man: The social bases of politics*. Doubleday.

Martinelli, L. (2020). A basic income Trilemma: Affordability, adequacy, and the advantages of radically simplified welfare. *Journal of Social Policy*, **49**(3), 461–482. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279419000424

Marx, P. (2014). Labour market risks and political preferences: The case of temporary employment. *European Journal of Political Research*, **53**(1), 136–159.

McKay, A. (2001). Rethinking work and income maintenance policy: Promoting gender equality through a citizens' basic income. *Feminist Economics*, **7**(1), 97–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700010022721

Meltzer, A. H., & Richard, S. F. (1981). *A Rational Theory of the Size of Government*. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/t-and-c

Moene, K. O., & Wallerstein, M. (2003). Earnings inequality and welfare spending: A disaggregated analysis. *World Politics*, **55**(4), 485–516.

Murray, C. (2016). In our hands: A plan to replace the welfare state. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2009). Is Work the Best Antidote to Poverty? In OECD Employment Outlook: Tackling the Jobs Crisis. Paris, France.

Oorschot, W. V. (2000). Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. *Policy & Politics*, **28**(1), 33–48.

Petersen, M. B. (2012). Social welfare as small-scale help: evolutionary psychology and the deservingness heuristic. *American Journal of Political Science*, **56**(1), 1–16.

Petersen, M. B. (2015). Evolutionary political psychology. The handbook of evolutionary psychology, 2.

Pierson, P. (2001). *The new politics of the welfare state*. Oxford University Press.

Prabhakar, R. (2020). Universal basic income and Covid-19. *IPPR Progressive Review*, **27**(1), 105–113. https://doi.org/10.1111/newe.12198

Rincon, L. (2023). A Robin Hood for all: A conjoint experiment on support for basic income. *Journal of European Public Policy*, **30**(2), 375–399.

Rincón, L. (2023). Public opinion on basic income: What have we learnt so far? In M. Torry (Ed.), The Palgrave International Handbook of Basic Income (pp. 285–306). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Rincón, L., Vlandas, T., & Hiilamo, H. (2022). What's not to like? Benefit design, funding structure and support for universal basic income. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **32**(4), 467–483.

Roosma, F., & van Oorschot, W. (2019). Public opinion on basic income: Mapping European support for a radical alternative for welfare provision. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **30**(2), 190–225. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928719882827

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Roosma, F., & van Oorschot, W. (2020). Public opinion on basic income: Mapping European support for a radical alternative for welfare provision. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **30**(2), 190–205. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928719882827

Samuelson, W., & Zeckhauser, R. (1988). Status quo bias in decision making. *Journal of risk and uncertainty*, **1**, 7–59.

Schwander, H. (2019). Labor market dualization and insider–outsider divides: why this new conflict matters. *Political Studies Review*, **17**(1), 14–29.

Schwander, H., & Häusermann, S. (2013). Who is in and who is out? A risk-based conceptualization of insiders and outsiders. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **23**(3), 248–269.

Schwander, H. and Vlandas, T. (2020). The left and universal basic income: The role of ideology in individual support. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, **36**(3), 237–268.

Simanainen, M., & Kangas, O. (2021). What explains the popular support for basic income? In O. Kangas., S. Jauhiainen, M. Simanainen, and M. Ylikanno (Eds.), Experimenting with Unconditional Basic Income (pp. 134–148). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Ståhl, C., & MacEachen, E. (2020). Universal basic income as a policy response to COVID-19 and precarious employment: Potential impacts on rehabilitation and return-to-work. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-020-09923-w

Standing, G. (2008). How cash transfers promote the case for basic income. *Basic Income Studies*, **3**(1), 30. https://doi.org/10.2202/1932-0183.1106

Stier, H. (2011). Working and poor. In D. Ben-David (Ed.), *In the state of the nation: Society, economy and policy* (pp. 135–180). Israel, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies.

Teele, D., Lagan, J., & Frances, R. (2018). Teele, Dawn Langan, Joshua Kalla, and Frances Rosenbluth. 2018. The ties that double bind: Social roles and women's underrepresentation in politics. *American Political Science Review*, **112**(3), 525–541.

Torry, M. ed. (2019). The Palgrave international handbook of basic income. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Van Kersbergen, K. (2002). The politics of welfare state reform. *Swiss Political Science Review*, **8**(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1662-6370.2002.tb00392.x

Van Oorschot, W. (1991). Non take-up of social security benefits in Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy*, **1**(1), 15–30.

Van Parijs, P. (2013). The euro-dividend. *Social Europe Journal*.

Van Parijs, P. (2018). *Basic income and the left*. Social Europe Edition.

Vlandas, T. (2019). The politics of the basic income guarantee. *Basic Income Studies*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1515/bis-2018-0021

Vlandas, T. (2020). The political economy of individual-level support for basic income in Europe'. *Journal of European Social Policy*. https://www.bk.admin.ch/ch/f/pore/va/20160605/det601.html

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Appendix A: General

A1. Respondent quotas. The table includes the final number and proportion of respondents per quota category, and the target or objective number and proportion.[6]

	Categories	Number of respondents	Target number	Respondent percentage	Target percentage
Gender	Male	374	500	50%	50%
	Female	374	500	50%	50%
Age	18-24	79	119	10,6%	12%
	25-34	106	152	14,2%	15%
	35-44	151	223	20,2%	22%
	45-54	154	204	20,6%	20%
	55-64	145	172	19,4%	17%*
	65-74	113	130	15,1%	13%
Region	Andalucía	134	182	18%	18%
	Aragón	21	28	2,8%	3%
	Principado de Asturias	17	22	2,3%	2%
	Illes Balears	20	24	2,5%	2%
	Canarias	36	45	4,8%	5%
	Cantabria	9	13	1,2%	1%
	Castilla y León	43	52	5,7%	5%
	Castilla-La Mancha	37	44	4,9%	4%
	Catalunya	119	163	15,9%	16%
	Comunitat Valenciana	79	106	10,6%	11%
	Extremadura	18	23	2,4%	2%
	Galicia	40	58	5,3%	6%
	Madrid	100	140	13,3%	14%
	Murcia	24	32	3,2%	3%
	Navarra	11	14	1,5%	1%
	País Vasco	34	47	4,5%	5%
	La Rioja	6	7	0,8%	1%

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A2. Full conjoint design, as respondents saw the options. Column 3 shows how the different categories were collapsed.

Dimension	Attributes	Collapsed categories
Target population sub-groups	To those under the poverty threshold	Targeting need
	To those with dependent family members	
	To those with minors	Minors
	Everyone	Universalisation
Legal requirements	Residency permit 6 months ago	Residency
	Residency permit 1 year ago	
	Residency permit 5 years ago	
	Citizenship	Citizenship
Conditionality	Full-time employed	Conditional on employment
	Self-employed	
	Part-time employed	
	Involved in volunteering or community work	Conditional on participating in society in different ways
	Training or education	
	Unable to work	Targeting need/ reciprocity
	Unemployed but looking for employment	
	Unemployed and not looking for employment	Universalisation
	Unconditional	
Generosity	Eurodividend	Does not cover living costs
	Covers living costs without housing	Covers part or all of living costs
	Minus 25% of poverty threshold	
	Poverty threshold	
	Plus 25% of poverty threshold	Above minimum need
Recipients	Households	
	Individuals	
Funding mechanisms	Increase taxes to corporations	Capital/technology taxation
	Increase capital income tax	
	Introduce a tax on technology	
	Introduce a tax on inter-bank financial transactions	

(*Continued*)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(*Continued*)

Dimension	Attributes	Collapsed categories
	Cutting unemployment benefits	Reducing targeted welfare spending
	Cutting social assistance for low-income families	
	Cutting housing benefits	
	Cutting pension spending	Reducing universal welfare spending
	Cutting spending on health	
	Cutting spending on education	
	Introduce a new environmental tax	Environmental taxation
	Increase environmental taxes (Finland: excise liquid fuels; Spain: hydrocarbons)	
	Increase inheritance tax	
	Cut spending on defence	
	Increase personal income tax to everyone	
	Increase personal income tax to highest incomes	

Each dimension presented in this table corresponds to distinct design characteristics of cash transfer programs. Every cash transfer program includes predefined elements such as a specified target population, a set of conditions (or lack thereof), a designated unit of recipients, and established legal requirements, as well as funding mechanisms. In the case of a UBI, the dimensions that align with its design are highlighted in bold. Conversely, dimensions lacking bold attribute levels signify that, according to the UBI definition, these specific attributes remain unspecified.

A3. Construction of the quantity dimension

Measure	Quantity (in euros)	Calculation and data source
Eurodividend proposal	€200	Quantity proposed by Van Parijs (2013), in his proposal of the euro-dividend
Covers living costs without housing	€450	Calculation of living costs without housing from INE statistics
−25% poverty threshold	€550	Calculated from poverty threshold
Poverty threshold	€680	Calculated from the Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida (Life Conditions Survey)
+25% poverty threshold	€850	Calculated from poverty threshold

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A4. Screenshot of the one conjoint experiment task. Respondents saw the table in Spanish language.

First round

In the following table you will see two policy proposals. The first column indicates the main characteristics and the following two specify the features of the two proposals. Please read carefully both alternatives and select the proposal you prefer.

Policy characteristics	Proposal 1	Proposal 2
To whom the benefit is directed	Everyone	Individuals with minors under their charge
Conditions to recieve the benefit	Having full-time employment	Being involved in studying or training
Benefit recipients	Families/households	Families/households
Quantity	550€	550€
Legal requirements	Having a residence permit (since at least 6 months ago)	Having a residence permit (since at least 6 months ago)
How it will be funded	Reducing housing expenditure	Reducing education expenditure

The primary emphasis here lies in evaluating the impact of policy design and its attributes on public support for cash transfers. Consequently, we intentionally refrain from explicitly employing the term 'universal basic income' in our survey questions. This choice is rooted in our question set, which is tailored to explore diverse cash transfer alternatives within the framework of the welfare state. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the label 'universal basic income' may suffer from a lack of clarity in public comprehension due to its varied usage in different contexts, often leading to confusion with alternative cash-transfer models. For instance, the introduction of a minimum income scheme in Spain was misconstrued by many in Europe, including parliamentarians and the media, as an implementation of a UBI.

A5. Wording of the two questions and operationalisation of the dependent variables

Dependent variable	Question wording	Operationalisation
Forced choice	Read the two income proposals carefully, and choose from the following options your preferred proposal.	0, 1, where 1 is the selected policy
Support rate	Rate each policy according to how likely you are of voting in favour of it. Note that 0 is not at all, and 10 means definitely voting in favour of it.	Ordinal scale 0–10, where 0 is no support and 10 is full support

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A6. Jusitification of the dependent variable

The forced choice dependent variable has several caveats. First, it is an indication of the preferred option, but cannot grasp preference intensity. The forced choice may indicate the 'least worst' or 'best of best' option to respondents, but this quantity cannot account for the degree of support, or how much/less this alternative is liked/disliked than the competing alternative. The support rate, on the contrary, gives us both an indication of which policy is preferred and the degree of support towards it. Hence, it is a much more accurate and comprehensive measure than the forced choice. For this reason, the main analysis relies on the support rate dependent variable, although the forced choice is included in the appendix.

A7. Data reshaping process, dependent variables, and analysis

To perform the relevant analysis, I reshape current data so that each observation (data row) is a policy proposal k of a task j, presented to a respondent i. This means that for the total 748 respondents, leaving a total of 4,948 observations, where each observation is a policy package or profile, shown to one respondent, in one specific round, which was either selected or not. Each respondent observes two profiles at one time, completes four of each of these rounds, meaning that he/she observes a total of eight policy profiles. Each respondent is required to select one policy proposal from each pair and rate the two of them, which leaves us with two dependent variables – forced choice, and support rate. I code the first dependent variable Y1 – forced choice – as 1 if the policy proposal is selected, and 0 if it is the unselected policy proposal. The second dependent variable Y2, the support rate, is a number ranging from 0 to 10, depending on the support given to the policy proposal – both to the unselected and selected one. Each observation includes a vector of the attributes presented in that observation. Dependent variables Y1 and Y2 are modelled as a function of X, which a vector is containing the attributes that the respondents were exposed to. This can be analysed with a simple Ordinary Least Squares linear regression (Hainmueller et al., 2014).

A8. Survey questions of key respondent characteristics and their operationalisation

Variable	Question wording	Question options	Re-coding
Household income	Indicate your net disposable household income on a monthly basis.	<300€	Low
		301–600€	
		601–900€	
		901–1.200€	
		1.201–1.800€	Medium
		1.801–2.400€	
		2.401–3.000€	High
		3.001–4.500€	
		4.501–6.000€	

(*Continued*)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

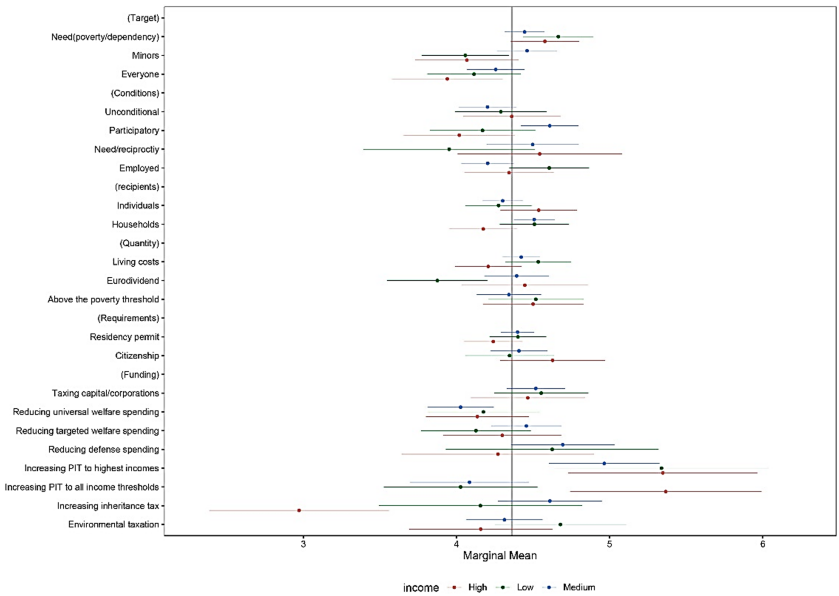
(*Continued*)

Variable	Question wording	Question options	Re-coding
		More than 6.000€	
Employment status	Indicate in which of the following situations you are now.	Employed	Employed (Insiders)
		Pensioner (and have worked before)	Pensioner
		Pensioner (have not worked before)	
		Unemployed (have worked before)	Unemployed (Outsiders)
		Unemployed (Have not worked before)	
		Domestic worker (non-remunerated)	
		Student	Student
		Other situation, which?	Other
Subjective risk of unemployment	How probable do you think it is that in the following 12 months, you will lose your job?	Very probable	High risk
		Quite probable	
		Not very probable	Low risk
		Not probable at all	
Ideology	Indicate whether you feel more on the right or left, ideologically speaking, where 0 is left, and 10 is right.	0–10 including	0–3 : Left; 4–6: Centre; 7–10: Right

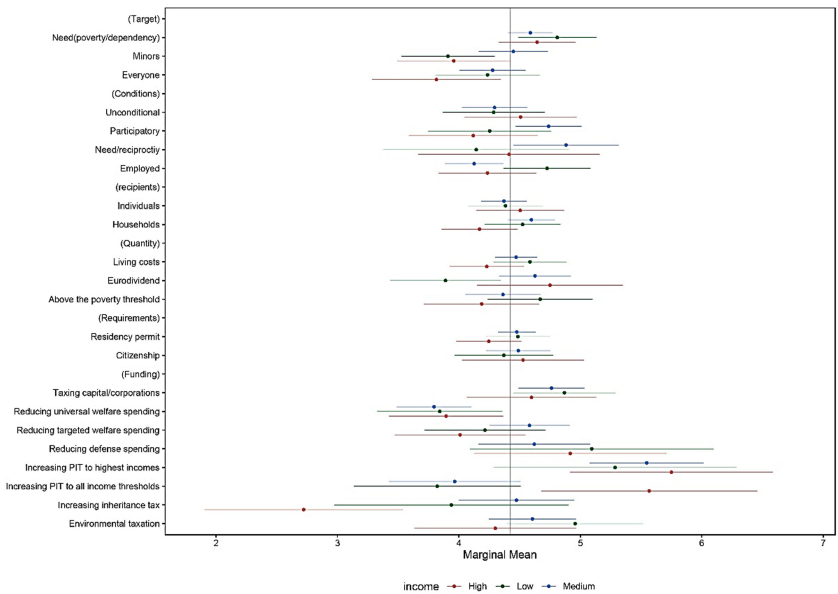
https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Appendix B: Heterogeneous effects

B1. Income: Marginal means of the support rate dependent variable across income groups (full conjoint design)

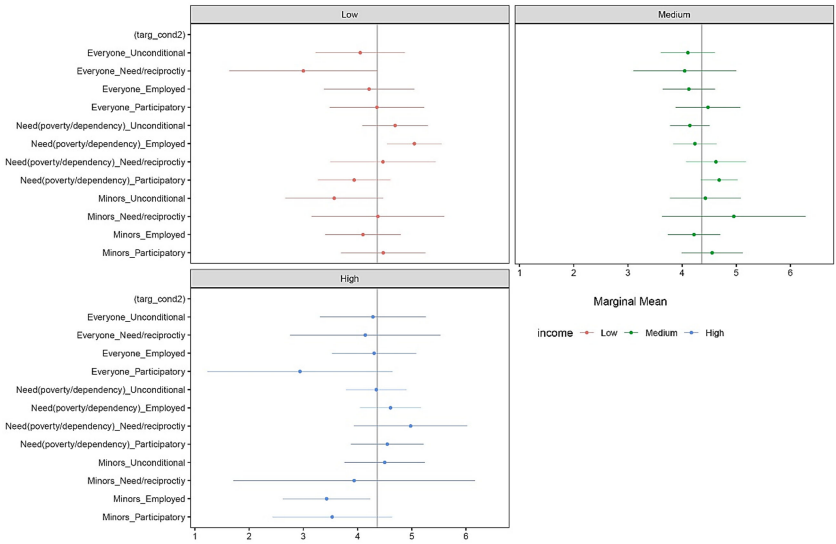


B2. Robustness: Marginal means of the support rate dependent variable across income groups (full conjoint design) – including only the two first rounds

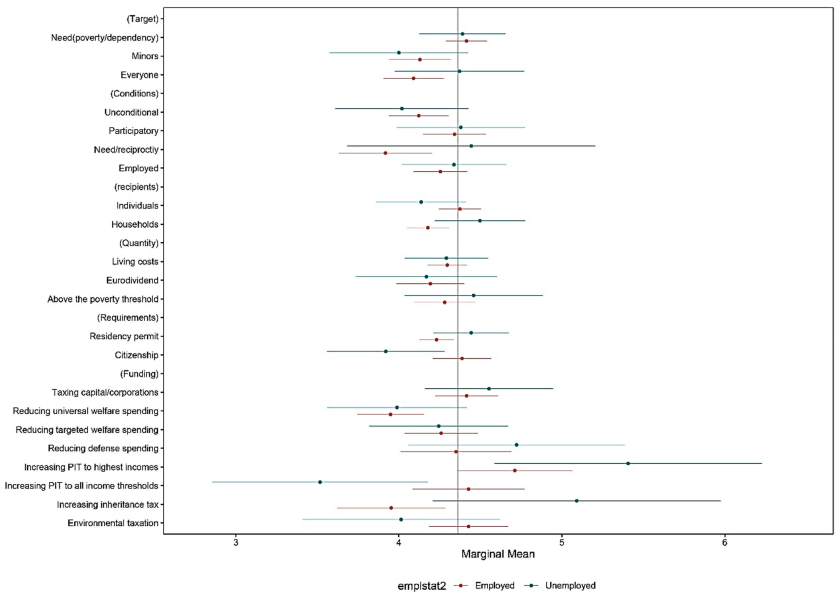


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B3. Interaction between target groups and conditions, across income

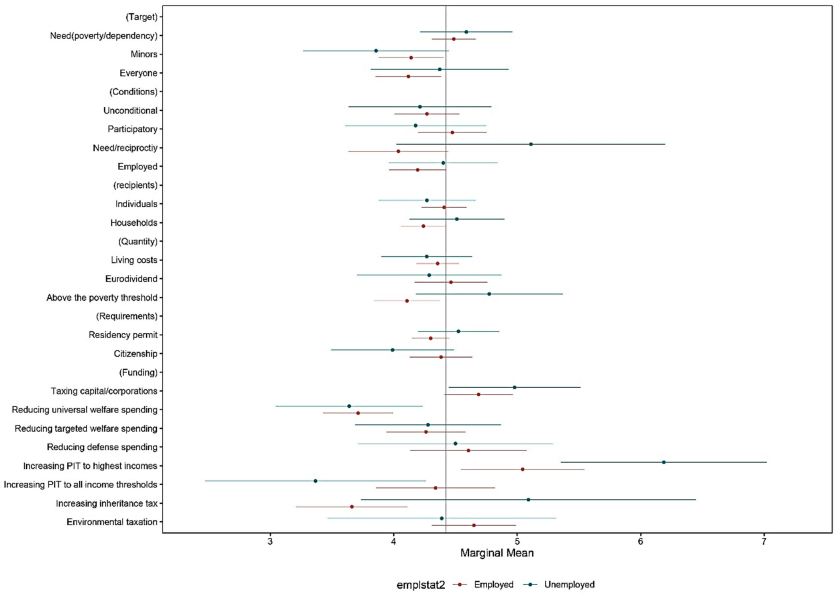


B4. Dualisation: Marginal means of support rate across insiders and outsiders (employment status)



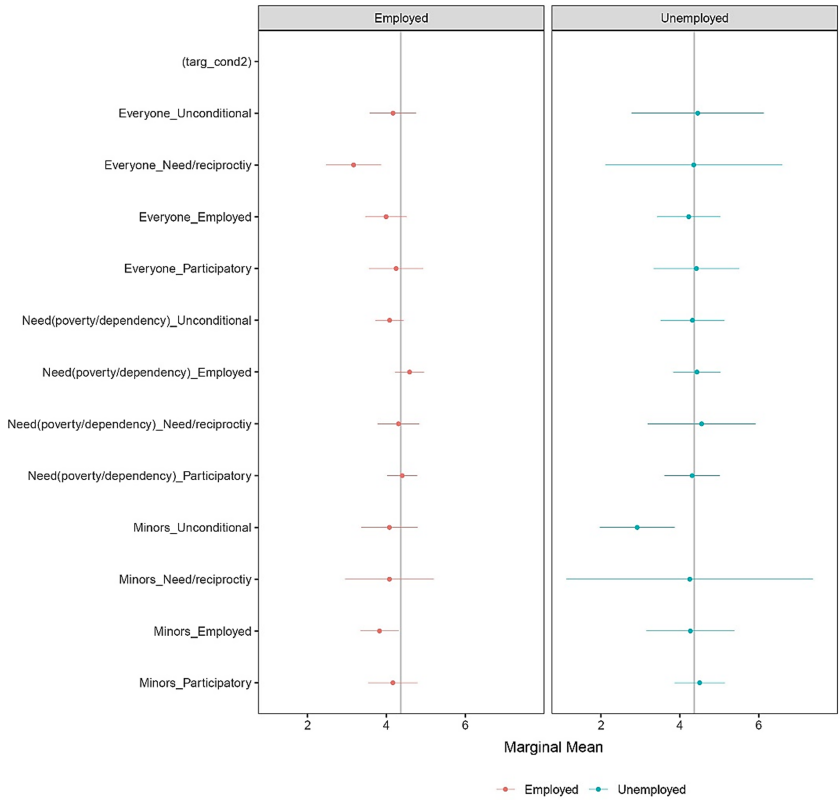
https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B5. Robustness checks. Dualisation: Marginal means of support rate across insiders and outsiders (employment status)



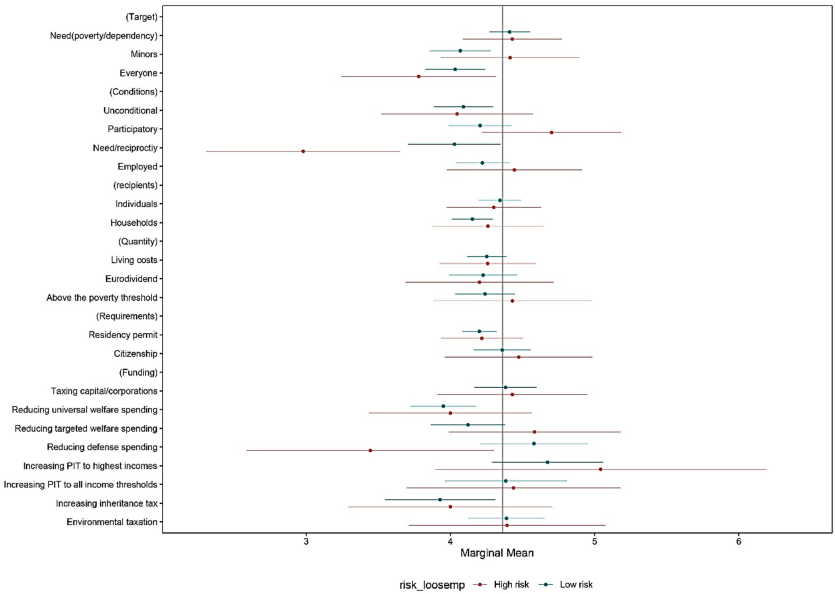
https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B6. Interaction between target groups and conditions, across employment status

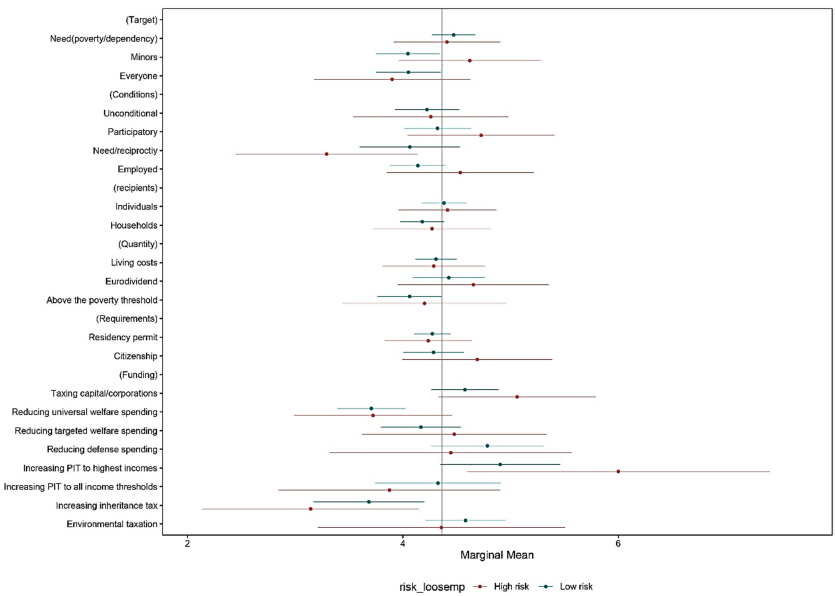


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B7. Dualisation: Marginal means of support rate across insiders and outsiders (Risk)

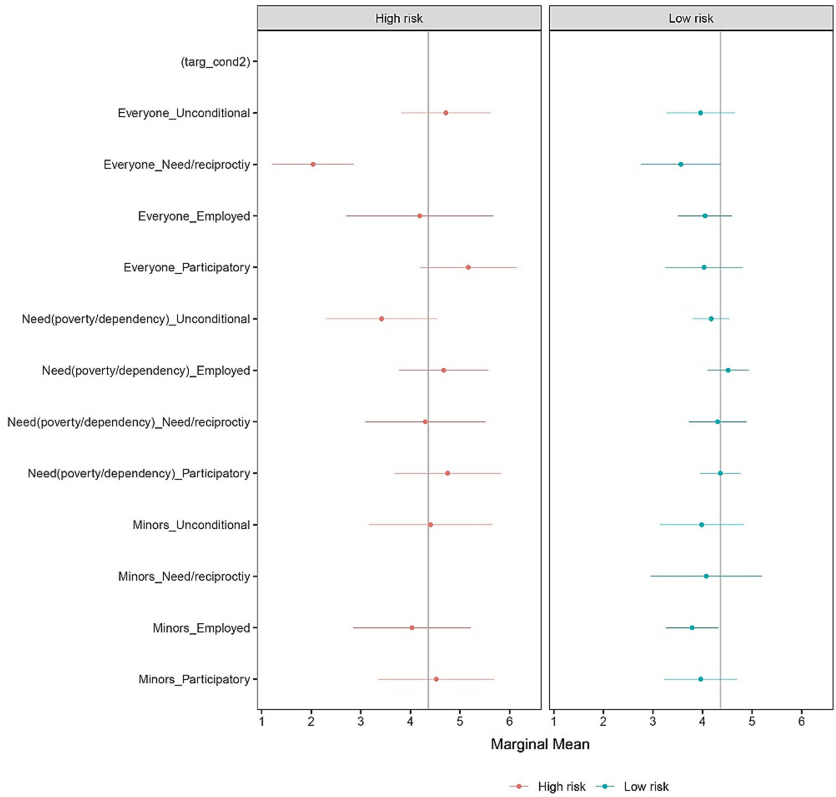


B8. Robustness. Dualisation: Marginal means of support rate across insiders and outsiders (Risk)



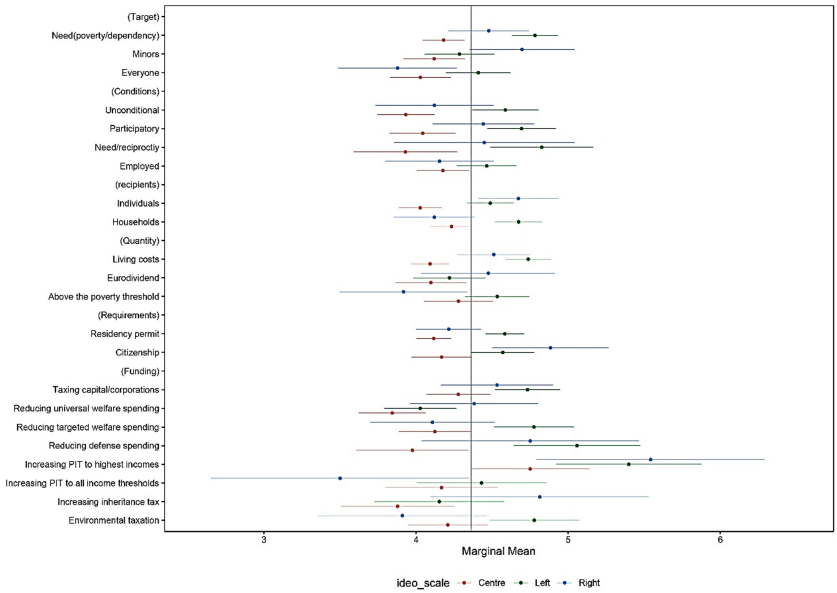
https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B9. Interaction between target groups and conditions, across risk

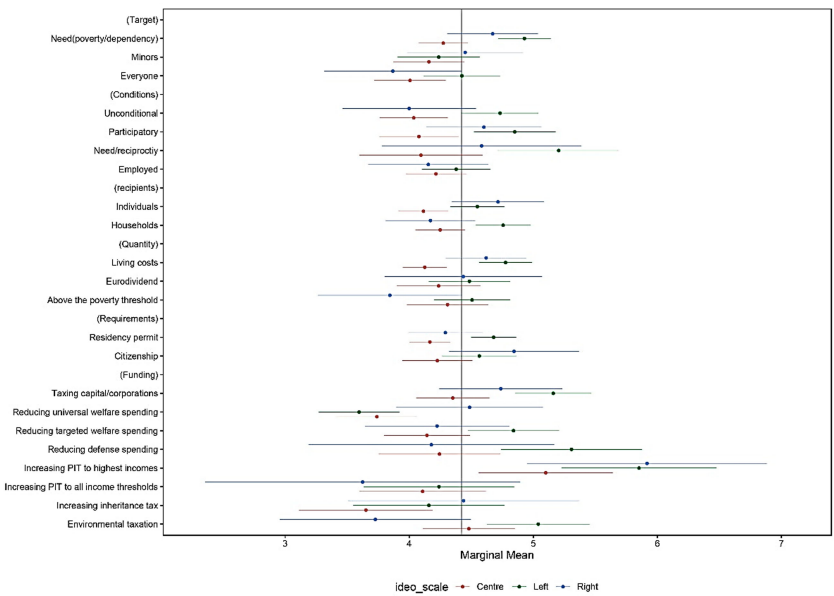


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B10. Ideology: Marginal means of the support rate dependent variable across ideology groups (full conjoint design)

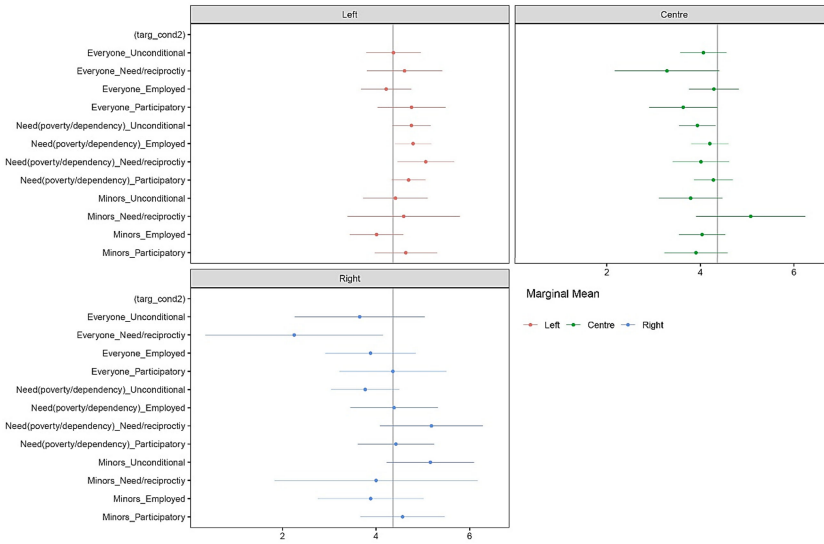


B11. Robustness: Marginal means of the support rate dependent variable across ideology groups (full conjoint design) – including only the two first conjoint rounds

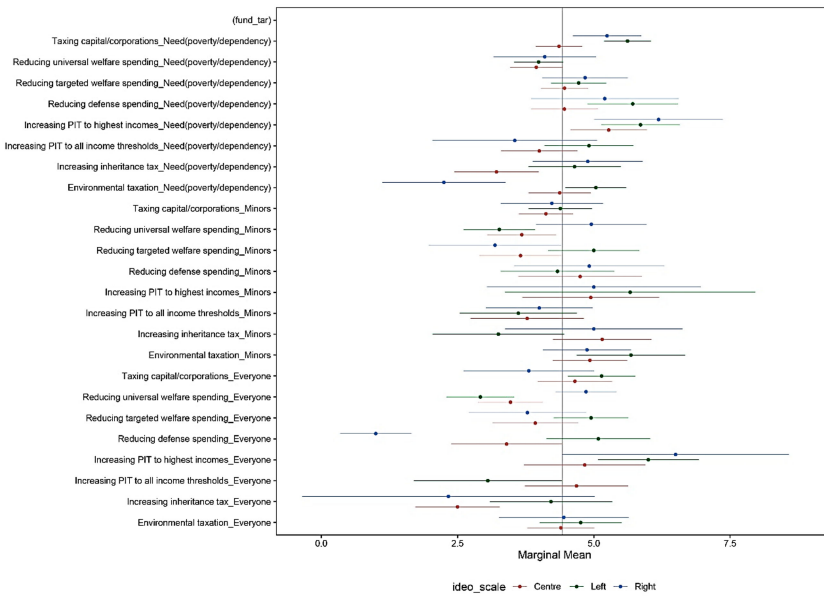


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B12. Interaction between target groups and conditions, across ideology



B13. Robustness checks: Marginal means across ideology groups within the interaction between target population sub-groups and funding mechanisms (full results), only including the two first conjoint round



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

B14. Scope conditions

In this section I discuss the validity and reliability of the findings. A first concern for the validity of the findings has to do with the complexity of conjoint choices and relevance of the task to respondents. To ensure that the conjoint tasks were not overwhelming to respondents, several survey pre-testing rounds were carried out. Individuals engaged with the task in a straightforward manner and the attributes resonated well with respondents' notions and understandings of cash transfers.

Another related concern to the conjoint design could be whether these combinations are unlikely to appear in the real world, and to what extent this could compromise the validity of the findings. For instance, a respondent could observe a cash transfer proposal given to everyone, unconditional, of very generous quantity (above the poverty threshold level), financed by a reform of personal income tax by everyone; a combination which might not be feasible and therefore affects support levels. In all the pre-testing sessions, this concern did not arise among respondents. The economic feasibility of a UBI through different funding mechanism remains untested so there is no conclusive evidence of which combinations should be more or less realistic. Moreover, the specific quantities of taxation and the exclusivity of reliance on one funding mechanisms are not mentioned, increasing the potential feasibility of all combinations. Finally, it is key to allow room for testing the broad range of options that are currently discussed as funding mechanisms for welfare state reform, even if there is variance on how feasible these are. Enabling this broader set of combinations to be shown to respondents is relevant in research terms to be able to test how these combinations work.

A third concern related to the conjoint tasks is respondent satisficing. The pre-testing indicated that four rounds are an optimal number for respondent engagement. The number of tasks and dimensions is also very similar to the number found in previous work. Nevertheless, to eliminate concerns of respondent satisficing, I perform robustness checks, only with the two first rounds of responses, in order to ensure that findings are consistent throughout rounds. As outlined in the appendix, findings are generally robust and strengthen the case of the results here presented.

Cite this article: Rincón García, L. (2026) Who's in for no strings: revisiting the determinants of universal basic income support. *Journal of Social Policy* **55**, 62–99. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000084 Published online by Cambridge University Press