

Coca-Cola's political and policy influence in Mexico: understanding the role of institutions, interests and divided society

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Abstract

In response to Mexico's burgeoning industrial epidemics of obesity and type-2 diabetes, triggered in part by sugar-sweetened carbonated beverages' ability to readily market their products and influence consumption, the government has responded through a variety of non-communicable disease (NCD) policies. Nevertheless, major industries, such as Coca-Cola, have been able to continuously obstruct the prioritization of those policies targeting the consumption, marketing and sale of their products. To better understand why this has occurred, this article introduces a political science agenda-setting framework and applies it to the case of Coca-Cola in Mexico. Devised from political science theory and subsequently applied to the case of Coca-Cola in Mexico, my framework, titled Institutions, Interests, and Industry Civic Influence (IPIIC), emphasizes Coca-Cola's access to institutions, supportive presidents and industry efforts to hamper civic mobilization and pressures for greater regulation of the soda industry. Methodologically, I employ qualitative single case study analysis, combining an analysis of 26 case study documents and seven in-depth stake-holder interviews. My proposed analytical framework helps to underscore the fact that Coca-Cola's influence is not solely shaped by the corporation's increased economic importance, but more importantly, its access to politicians, institutions and strategies to divide civil society. Additionally, my proposed framework provides several real-world policy recommendations for how governments and civil society can re-structure their relationship with the soda industry, such as the government's creation of laws prohibiting the industry's ability to influence NCD policy and fund scientific research.

Keywords: Mexico, soda industry, policy, institutions, civil society

Key Messages

- Political science theory can go far in helping to unravel and understand how major soda industries in Mexico, such as Coca-Cola, can continue to influence regulatory policy and scientific research.
- In order to fully understand Coca-Cola's policy and research influence in Mexico, we need to better understand the company's historical institutional connections and capacity to divide civic mobilization.
- The author's proposed analytical political science framework can be applied to other emerging economies and help to explain why big soda industries continue to interfere in policy and research despite increased government support for obesity and type-2 diabetes prevention policies.

Introduction

The product of global economic integration, foreign trade and economic growth, in recent years Mexico has seen one of the highest levels of per-capita consumption of sugary-beverage and fast foods in the Americas (Luxton, 2015). While this situation has been underpinned by the emergence of a thriving middle-income class, it has also contributed to the growth of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In Mexico, the top three NCD contributors to Disability-Adjusted Life Years are diabetes mellitus, ischaemic heart and chronic kidney disease (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019). As Figure 1 illustrates, the number of deaths attributed to NCDs in Mexico increased between 2000 and 2010. Figure 2 shows that the population percentage of obese individuals has increased from 23.3% in 2005 to 28.3% in 2015, while the percentage of type-2 diabetes rose from 10.1% in 2005 to 11.2% in 2014.

This study is motivated by two primary research questions. First, since the beginning of the president Vicente Fox administration (2000–2006) to the present day, why has the government been repeatedly incapable of limiting the ability of Mexico's largest soda industry, Coca-Cola, to obstruct government efforts to prioritize NCD prevention policies to discourage the consumption, marketing and sale of their products? This conundrum has contributed to the emergence of Mexico's 'industrial epidemics' (Hastings, 2012): e.g. obesity and type-2 diabetes, facilitated by Coca-Cola's ability to easily market and sell its products. Second, to what extent can political

science theory be used to develop an analytical framework addressing this first empirical question while providing a useful tool for policy-makers and civil society?

In answering these questions, this article submits an analytical framework titled Institutions, Political Interests, and Industry Civic Influence (IPIC). The IPIC framework was devised from several political science theories and subsequently applied and tested with the case of Coca-Cola in Mexico. IPIC provides an in-depth analysis of the actors and incentives shaping Mexico's policy agenda-setting in the area of NCD prevention, such as policies seeking to reduce soda consumption (e.g. soda taxes), marketing and sales regulation. Through the application of this framework, it is argued that constraints in limiting Coca-Cola's agenda-setting influence are attributed to three primary factors: first, the ability of industry lobbyists to meet with legislative members, taking advantage of pre-existing historic institutions and ties with policy-makers within government; second, the presidents' pre-existing personal ties with Coca-Cola and interests in benefiting from this company's ongoing success; and finally, the presence of what this article refers to as a 'conflictual civil societal response,' with Coca-Cola-supported researchers/activists vs public health advocates divided over the relationship between these products and NCDs and what prevention policies should look like, in turn hampering civil society's ability to mobilize and limit Coca-Cola's agenda-setting influence.

Soda industry development and political context

Mexico's soda industry quickly emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, when the economy began to liberalize. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 facilitated foreign direct investment from the USA and the expansion of Mexico's soda industry (Lopez and Jacobs, 2018). As Figures 3 and 4 illustrate, this industry continues to see an increase in sales and production. Today, the production and sales of soda are dominated by two companies that have approximately 85% of the market share: Coca-Cola (70%) and Pepsi-Co (15%) (Lutzenkirchen, 2018), followed by Ajemex, Sociedad Cooperativa Trabajadores de Pascual, Jarocito and Mister Q (Cortes, 2009). Coca-Cola FEMSA is the largest producer of sodas (Lutzenkirchen, 2018). Sales continue to be dominated by Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Co, followed by Grupo Peñatfiel, Ajemex, and Sociedad Cooperativa Trabajadores de Pascual (Cortes, 2009). Coca-Cola essentially dominates the market and presents a formidable political and economic force.

Mexico's political and policy-making context also facilitates Coca-Cola's influence. Historically, the president wields considerable policy-making powers through legislative veto authority and informally as head of the governing political party (historically the PRI, Partido Revolucionario Institucional), enjoying, until recently,

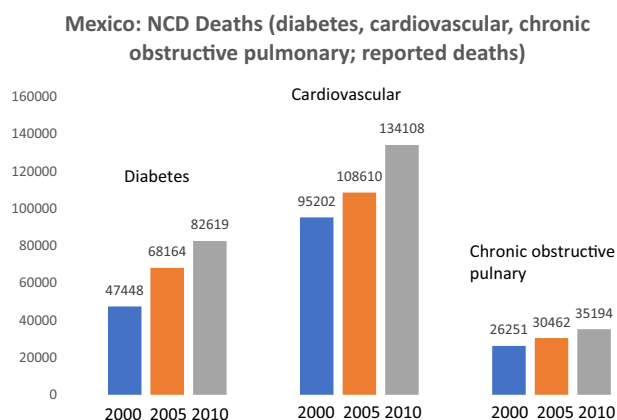


Figure 1 Mexico: NCD Deaths (diabetes, cardiovascular, chronic obstructive pulmonary; reported deaths). Source: WHO and Global Health Observatory (2019).

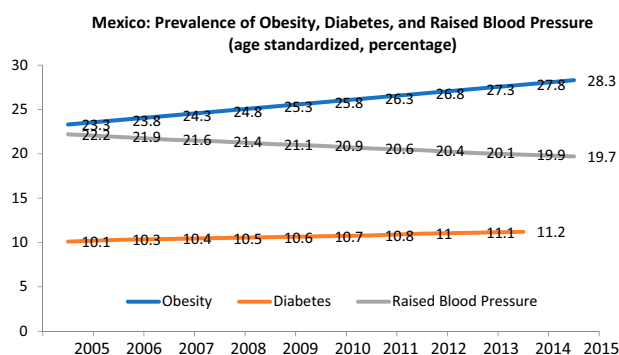


Figure 2 Mexico: Prevalence of Obesity, Diabetes, and Raised Blood Pressure (age standardized, percentage). Source: WHO and Global Health Observatory, 2019.



Figure 3 Mexico: Soft Drink Sales (US\$ million). Source: Statista (2019).

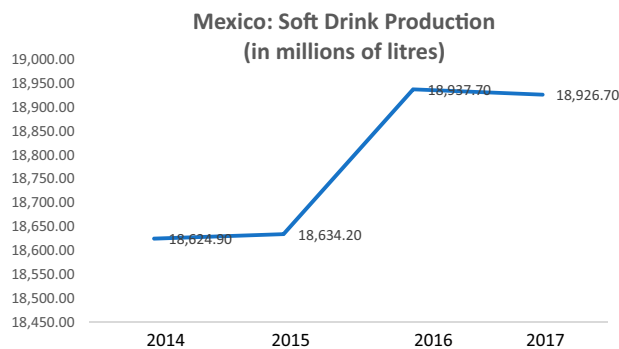


Figure 4 Mexico: Soft Drink Production (in millions of litres). Source: Statista (2019).

majority representation in the congress, while leading the corporatist political agreement between the governing party, business and labour sectors (Peschard and Rioff, 2005). The president's ability to appoint and dismiss federal agency directors has also sustained the president's influence over policy agenda-setting (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk, 2016). In this context, Coca-Cola has had a considerable amount of policy influence when supported by the president and political parties.

Methodology

This study commenced in June 2018 and concluded in April 2019. When conducting research, this study employed a qualitative case study methodological approach. This approach entails several benefits, ranging from hypothesis-building, establishing causal mechanisms, internal validation of theories and providing rich contextual analysis (Gerring, 2011). Following Gerring's (2011) discussion of the benefits that case studies provide in establishing causal insight, the case of Mexico was selected in order to illustrate the potential effectiveness of the IPIC framework by engaging in a form of 'pattern matching', i.e. illustrating the presence of IPIC's causal mechanisms in Mexico. The unit of analysis was restricted to the national government level and those actors involved in agenda-setting processes. The case of Mexico was chosen because of the author's experience living and conducting research there, the vast amount of published literature on Coca-Cola's policy influence in Mexico, and because within the Americas, Mexico has one of the highest prevalence rates of obesity and diabetes—see Figures 5 and 6. Coca-Cola was also chosen because it is the most popular soda consumed in the country (Tyler, 2018).

With respect to data, this study used qualitative and quantitative sources. Qualitative documents, such as journal articles, books, policy reports and news articles were obtained via Google's online search engine with keyword search terms. Online library search engines, such as ArticleFirst, Web of Science and PubMed (considered the most thorough databases for finding social science and medicine articles), were also used. Book chapters and policy reports were obtained from colleagues in Mexico. When reviewing documents, a narrative review process was used: selecting materials based on several key search terms, without a specific selection criteria, followed by a summary and analysis of the literature (Ferrari, 2015). A summary and analysis of the theoretical literature discussing industry's NCD policy influence was done in order to understand alternative theoretical approaches to this topic and assess limitations of the existing literature, providing information which was then used to explain the IPIC framework's significance. With regards to

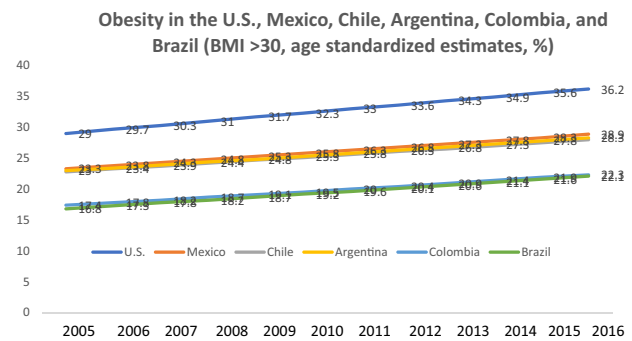


Figure 5 Obesity in the U.S., Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil (BMI >30, age-standardized estimates, %). Source: WHO and Global Health Observatory (2019).

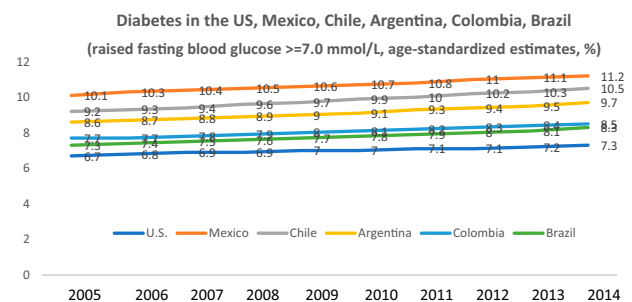


Figure 6 Diabetes in the US, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil (raised fasting blood glucose ≥ 7.0 mmol/L, age-standardized estimates, %). Source: WHO and Global Health Observatory (2019).

documents discussing the Mexican case study, the author looked for and used relevant empirical analytical statements about the politics and policy process both to inform the article's descriptive analysis and to provide evidence of IPIC's effectiveness. In order to avoid selection bias, documents were randomly obtained from different academic and non-academic sources. Finally, quantitative statistical data of epidemiological NCD trends and quality of life were obtained from the World Health Organization (WHO) and used to provide a description of Mexico's burden of disease.

Qualitative data were also obtained from stakeholder interviews in Mexico, with ethical review. Seven interviewees were selected due to their presence in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), academia and government, chosen for their empirical knowledge and policy experience, not their personal views (see Table 1). Snowballing procedures were used to find additional interviewees. Interviews were conducted for 30 min each, via Skype and WhatsApp communication, from mid- to late-April 2019. Formal verbal consent was obtained prior to the interviews. With the exception of two government officials, all gave consent to use their names, title and institutional affiliation. A total of eight interview questions were used, focusing on the president's relationship with Coca-Cola, the latter's partnership with government and civil society, and the importance of congressional/bureaucratic institutions for Coca-Cola's lobbying activities. Interview data were analysed in a thematic fashion, without particular software usage, and referenced as supportive empirical evidence. Finally, these interview data were combined with the aforementioned qualitative documents in order to 'triangulate' the data, i.e. ensure that different types of data sources were in agreement over particular issues, thus avoiding selection bias in the usage of data.

Table 1 Interviews

Interviewee	Affiliation
Academic	
Dr Simon Barquera, Professor	National Institute of Public Health
Dr Sergio Juárez, Associate Professor	Monterrey Technological Institute
Activist NGO	
Ana Larrañaga	ContraPESO
Yarishdy Mora	ContraPESO
Luis Cruz	NCD Alliance, Mexico City
Government	
Anonymous interview source	Secretariat of Health
Anonymous interview source	Secretariat of Health

Theoretical contribution

This article introduces a political science analytical framework titled IPIC. Following an ‘analytical narratives’ (Bates *et al.*, 1998) perspective, which applies political science theories to empirical case studies and uses the latter to reveal the effectiveness and limitations of theory, IPIC is an analytical framework that is used to better understand and explain the political and social factors shaping the policy agenda-setting process. This proposed framework is not intended to introduce a generalizable theory about the policy-making process, i.e. applicable to, and validated by, many case studies, but rather to use political science theories in order to better explain, not predict, agenda-setting processes.

The IPIC framework combines historical institutional (HI) theories emphasizing the importance of formal institutional design and historic interest group access to congressional and bureaucratic institutions (Institutions) (Thelen, 1999), rational choice institutionalism in political elite decision-making (Political Interests) (Ostrom, 2007), and industry’s effects on civic mobilization (Industry Civic Influence) (Walker, 2009). As Figure 7 illustrates, these three pathways of the IPIC framework operate simultaneously, are isolated from each other, though eventually contributing to the same outcome—i.e. industry policy agenda-setting influence. Moreover, all three pathways are important and the presence of each is necessary to fully explain agenda-setting outcomes. Considering the political elite-driven agenda-setting process found in many developing nations, however, the Institutions and Political Interests pathways may be more causally significant than Industry Civic Influence—although the latter is needed to explain why agenda-setting continues to be elite-driven.

With respect to applying HI theories when addressing IPICs Institutions pathway, and building on the works of Immergut (1992) and Weir (1989), the application of the IPIC framework to Mexico reveals how Coca-Cola lobbyists’ historic access to legislators and policy-makers through congressional and bureaucratic institutions facilitated their subsequent ability to influence the NCD policy agenda. In Mexico, the congress periodically holds sub-committee meetings covering 52 policy issues, one of them being healthcare. When these sub-committee meetings on healthcare convene, soda and junk food industry representatives consistently go to these meetings and confront committee members prior to and after these meetings to discuss their company’s particular issues of concern. Moreover, these sub-committees routinely invite public testimony and are there to help oversee, conduct research and assist the congress in the fulfilment of its duties (Mexican Congress, 1999).

Next, with respect to the IPIC’s Political Interests pathway, IPIC’s application to Mexico reveals how presidents with previous

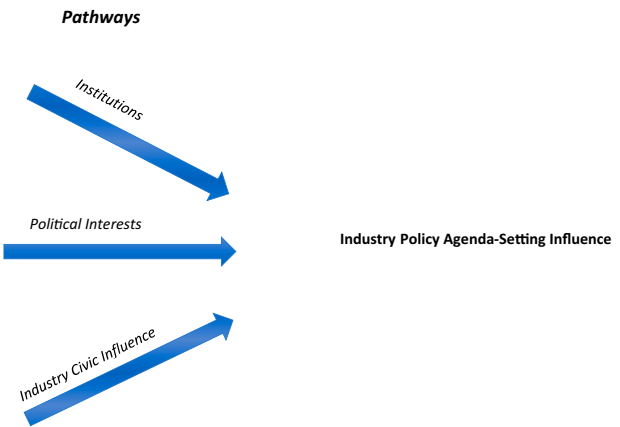


Figure 7 IPIC framework: institutions, political interests, and industry civic influence.

career histories in the soda industry and long-standing corporate allies facilitated the latter’s influence over NCD policy. Here, rational choice theory refers to politician’s strategies when maximizing their personal preferences in a context of institutional, organizational and social constraints (Ostrom, 2007). In this article, this approach focuses on presidents and their effort to maximize their preferences in supporting the industry in exchange for their political support and assistance in achieving other policy objectives.

Finally, IPIC’s Industry Civic Influence pathway builds on the theoretical importance of industries’ impact on civic mobilization and pressures on the government for policy reform. Building on Walker (2009), Lee and Romano (2013) and De Bakker *et al.* (2013) depiction of corporate efforts to mobilize citizens around causes that are aligned with the former’s interests, IPIC’s application to Mexico shows how industries can create a ‘conflictual civil society’ by supporting academic researchers and activists that could be working with other public health activists safeguarding the public’s health interests, in turn limiting the latter’s full potential to unify, mobilize and thwart industry’s ongoing agenda-setting influence.

Results

Since the early-1990s, the sugary-beverage and fast food industries in Mexico exhibited a great deal of influence over NCD prevention policy. Despite civil societal actors working with the Secretariat of Health (SoH) to propose marketing regulations, a soda tax in 2008 and 2012, along with improved nutritional food diagrams (Cecil, 2018), these policies were never adopted (Rosenberg, 2015; Taylor and Jacobson, 2015; Proceso, 2017). To help further reduce the consumption of sugary drinks, in 2008 the SoH introduced the *Recomendaciones de Bebidas para una Vida Saludable* (Recommendation of Drinks for a Healthy Life), which also failed to materialize (Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria, 2013). Inter-ministerial efforts between the Secretariat of Education and Health in 2010 were also introduced in order to prevent the sale of soft drinks and other sweetened beverages in schools; and yet, after vehement opposition from the soda industry, mainly by vocalizing its opposition through votes in government-organized hearings, such as the Ministry of the Economy’s Federal Commission for Regulatory Improvement (COFEMER), this effort was eventually avoided (Barquera *et al.*, 2013; Taylor and Jacobson, 2015).

Nevertheless, in 2013 the Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI, 2012–18) presidential administration succeeded in adopting a soda and

beverage (SSB) tax, which entailed a tax of one peso per litre of soda. To facilitate its passage, this tax was introduced as part of a larger fiscal policy package focused on rejuvenating the economy, with proponents in civil society framing the endeavour on economic rather than healthcare grounds (Bonilla-Chacín *et al.*, 2016; Baker *et al.*, 2017). This fiscal package was introduced to diversify government revenue (reducing its dependence on oil revenue) and entailed increasing taxes for high-income earners, limiting corporate deductions, creating a 10% tax on dividends, increasing taxes for the mining sector, and a soda and snack tax (Valenzuela, 2016). In 2016, further efforts were made to increase the SSB tax; nevertheless, this proposal ultimately proved unsuccessful due to the Nieto administration's decision not to modify government taxes for the remainder of his presidential term (Bonilla-Chacín *et al.*, 2016).

Yet another successful soda industry strategy for undermining policy development has been its ongoing funding of supportive scientific research. For instance, Coca-Cola has worked with researchers, foundations, think-tanks and sponsored conferences to downplay the harm that increased sugar consumption has on health, questioning the scientific evidence behind these claims, and the effectiveness of prevention policies (Taylor and Jacobson, 2015; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with Ana Larrañaga, April 15, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019; interview with Simon Barquera, April 16, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 29, 2019). A good example was a study by ITAM university economists, indirectly supported by Coca-Cola and other industries through the ConMéxico foundation, titled Taxing Calories in Mexico (Aguilar *et al.*, 2015; Cecile, 2018). This study provided statistical evidence questioning the soda tax's reduction in soda consumption. FunSalud (Mexican Health Foundation), arguably the most influential NGO when it comes to setting the SoH's public health agenda, has for years also criticized efforts to limit the consumption of soda and processed foods. FunSalud has consistently taken this position because its directors and board have worked closely with Coca-Cola and other food industries, such as Nestlé (Rosenberg, 2015); one excellent example was Dr Mercedes Juan López, who chaired FunSalud's board prior to becoming Secretary of Health under President Peña Nieto (Rosenberg, 2015). During her time at FunSalud, Dr López criticized the soda tax's effectiveness, instead emphasizing the importance of exercise and moderation in soda consumption (Rosenberg, 2015); this message comported with Coca-Cola's position on the soda tax. FunSalud has also worked closely with Coca-Cola on childhood obesity projects (Cecil, 2018). Finally, in 2006 Coca-Cola also partnered with the SoH to create the 'Ponte 100' programme, which promoted the habit of individual exercise rather than dietary changes (Rosenberg, 2015; Ochoa, 2016; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 25 and 29, 2019).

Institutions

But what have been the institutional conditions facilitating Coca-Cola's policy agenda-setting influence? Consistent with the IPIC framework, first, Institutions mattered: Mexico's congressional committees, coupled with industries' pre-existing ties with congressional legislators, facilitated Coca-Cola's influence (Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria, 2017; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019; interview with Ana Larrañaga, April 15, 2019; interview with Simon Barquera, April 16, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 25 and 29, 2019). Indeed, prior to the 2011 constitutional reforms

regulating corporate access to congressional bodies, Coca-Cola lobbyists and supportive labour unions, such as the *Cámara Nacional de la Industria de Azúcar* (CNIA), had repeated access to congressional members and committee meetings focused on NCD prevention policies. For instance, the CNIA initially lobbied against the soda tax because it would entail a substantial reduction in soda industry demand for sugar cane, with industries opting for the use of cheaper high-fructose corn syrup, potentially lowering sugar cane profits and employment (Lutzenkirchen, 2018).

Within these congressional venues, lobbyists pressured legislative representatives into refraining from passing the aforementioned legislation on a sugar tax (in 2008, 2012), marketing and sales (Calvillo and Peteranderl, 2018), made possible for several reasons. First was the provision of largesse and campaign contributions (Rosenberg, 2015), with extensive private contributions deemed illegal according to the 2011 constitutional reforms (O'Neil, 2013).

Coca-Cola representatives also had access to SoH committees focused on proposing NCD policies, such as the *Observatorio Mexicano de Enfermedades No Transmisibles* (OMENT, Mexican Observatory for NCDs). Since its inception through the 2013 National Strategy, OMENT has consistently ensured Coca-Cola's (and other industry's) representation, far exceeding civil society's, and, in the process, heavily influenced policy proposals (Lutzenkirchen, 2018; UK Health Forum, 2018; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with Ana Larrañaga, April 15, 2019). Coca-Cola corporate executives also had long-held personal ties and thus direct access to senior health officials, such as former SoH Secretary Mercedes Juan López, who often advocated on their behalf (Cecil, 2018; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019). Other corporate strategies included using the media to question the relationship between the consumption of sodas and NCDs and opposing policies on the grounds of threats to individual liberty and happiness. One good example in Mexico has been the soda industry's usage of large billboards promoting their message that exercise is joyful and that having a little sugar every day is natural and good for individuals (Calvillo, 2017). Finally, some blamed the apathy and incompetence of congressional members for industries' ability to repeatedly influence policy (Lira, 2017).

Political interests

Following IPIC's Political Interests pathway, which applies rational choice theories emphasizing the importance of presidents' personal and political preferences in health policy-making, the Mexican presidency's historic ties and vested interests in advancing Coca-Cola's continued prosperity played an important role. For example, former President Vicente Fox had previously been a Coca-Cola executive and benefited from receiving campaign donations and advice from trusted corporate friends (Cruz and Durán, 2017). In fact, before becoming president, as head of Coca-Cola's Latin America operations, Fox was committed to expanding its sales and becoming a market leader (Taylor, 2018). Consequently, Coca-Cola executives were highly influential throughout Fox's administration (Kilpatrick, 2015; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 25 and 29, 2019). Reporters and think tank experts claim that because of Fox's pre-existing ties and reliance on Coca-Cola, this company had tremendous influence over health policy (Rosenberg, 2015; interview with Yarishdy Mora, July 9, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019). In 2003, for example, under industry pressures, Fox ignored the idea of imposing a tax on

sodas using sugar cane ingredients (Juárez and Río, 2017; interview with Luis Cruz, July 29, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019). Furthermore, the political connections that Fox created for Coca-Cola helped to deepen the company's partnership with government officials after he left office (interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019; interview with Ana Larrañaga, April 15, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 25 and 29, 2019).

Subsequent presidents, such as Felip Calderón (PAN, 2006–2012), were also supportive of Coca-Cola's activities, while Enrique Peña Nieto also supported Coca-Cola and Nestlé's distribution of its products, mainly biscuits and fortified puddings, to support his anti-hunger programme (Ochoa, 2014; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019). These industries have continued to have considerable influence within presidential administrations, while highlighting the fact that there is no sense of conflict of interest within government (Rundall and Arana, 2013; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019).

Industry civic influence

Finally, IPIC's Industry Civic Influence pathway, which applies theories underscoring industry's manipulation of civic mobilization in the former's favour (Walker, 2009; Lee and Romano, 2013), also sheds light into the challenges of civic mobilization and resistance to Coca-Cola's policy influence. Indeed, Mexico has exhibited what the author described as a 'conflictual civil societal response,' where influential segments of society, such as university academics and think-tanks, which have been approached by and work closely with Coca-Cola-funded foundations, such as ConMéxico, have repeatedly neglected to unify with NGOs, activists, and other academics representing the general public's healthcare needs. Seeking funding, academics in the former camp, such as professors at the ITAM, El Colegio de México, and the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon, have often supported Coca-Cola and other soda industries and the ConMéxico foundation, due to the latter's willingness to finance research and facilitate publication (Gertner and Rifkin, 2017; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019; interview with Ana Larrañaga, April 15, 2019; interview with Simon Barquera, April 16, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 25 and 29, 2019). Other NGOs, such as the Mexican Diabetes Federation, have also received funding from Coca-Cola and no longer engage in public advocacy campaigns, while often sponsoring conferences that emphasize scientific information supportive of Coca-Cola's message emphasizing the importance of individual responsibility and exercise (*Asociación Mexicana de Diabetes*, 2019; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019). Alternatively, NGOs, such as El Poder del Consumidor, and those advocating for the health and safety of Mexico's citizens, such as Fundación Midete, ContraPESO, and researchers from the National Institute of Public Health, have created their own *Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria*. However, the Alianza has insufficient government and/or private sector support, with limited contributions from the Bloomberg Foundation (Bonilla-Chacín *et al.*, 2016).

When compared with each other, however, academics and think-tanks working with food and beverage industries have had greater access to resources, funding for social media, and thus more political influence vs their rival public health proponents (Barquera *et al.*, 2013). This has led to a lack of unity in civil society's ability to exert ongoing pressure on the president and congress to limit Coca-Cola's policy interference (Bonilla-Chacín *et al.*, 2016; interview with Ana

Larrañaga, April 15, 2019; interview with Sergio Juárez, April 12, 2019; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019; interview with anonymous health official, April 25 and 29, 2019). Furthermore, the SoH maintained its tradition of not proactively seeking the advice of advocates in favour of defending the public's healthcare interests, reflecting a pre-existing tradition of policy elites viewing civil society as unworthy of participating in concrete policy discussions (Rosenberg, 2015; interview with Luis Cruz, April 29, 2019; interview with Yarishdy Mora, April 9, 2019).

Discussion

This article has shown that one of the reasons why the industrial epidemics of obesity and type-2 diabetes burgeoned in Mexico has to do with Coca-Cola's ongoing ability to negatively influence politicians' decisions not to prioritize NCD policies, taking on several political strategies to prohibit 'policy windows' (Kingdon, 1984) from opening and leading to more aggressive NCD policies. With unfettered access to markets, facilitating the marketing, sale and consumption of Coca-Cola's unhealthy products, this industry has behaved in what Moodie *et al.* (2013) refer to as a dangerous 'disease vector' (Gilmore *et al.*, 2011).

In attempting to explain why this is the case, this article has introduced the IPIC framework. In light of the recent literature discussing the various political tactics that tobacco, alcohol and food industries use to manipulate NCD policies, why is another analytical framework needed? A brief review of the literature helps to address this question.

Hillman and Hitt (1999) were the first to underscore how tobacco companies have engaged in what they and others refer to as Corporate Political Activities (CPA). Industries engage in CPA in order to influence health policy decisions in their favour through a variety of political tactics. Hillman and Hitt (1999) introduced us to the tobacco industry's CPA strategies of 'information/messaging' (such as engaging in lobbying activities, funding supportive research, framing the debate on diet), 'financing' (e.g. providing gifts to politicians), and 'constituency-building' (e.g. partnering with communities and industry). After the discovery of more documents highlighting the tobacco industry's alternative political strategies, Savell *et al.* (2014) adopted Hillman and Hitt's (1999) three strategies and added three additional strategies, now totalling six; these three additional strategies included: 'legal' (threat of legal action); 'policy substitution' (e.g. industry self-regulation); and *opposition* 'fragmentation/destabilization' (criticizing opponents)—see *Supplementary Appendix Table SA2*. Savell *et al.* (2014) also addressed the discourse frames used by industry to influence policy discussions and agenda-setting, such as the unintended consequences of policy, regulatory redundancy, and insufficient credible evidence. Mialon *et al.* (2015) subsequently discovered that Savell *et al.*'s (2014) six political strategies used by the tobacco and alcohol industries were also used by the food industry in several nations (Gilmore *et al.*, 2011; Mialon *et al.*, 2016, 2017).

Similarly, Moodie *et al.* (2013) emphasized tactics employed by the food, tobacco and alcohol industries, such as: co-opting policy-makers and health professionals by helping them design national policy [falling into Savell *et al.*'s (2014) 'information/messaging' tactic]; lobbying politicians ('information/messaging'); encouraging voters to oppose industry regulations based on principles of individual liberty; biasing research findings by funding research institutions providing supportive evidence ('information/messaging'); and providing community programmes in order to deflect public criticism

(‘constituency-building’). More recently, Lima and Galea (2018) have introduced a 3D view of power in the food industry’s ability to interfere with NCD policy agenda-setting, with a specific influence over defining what constitutes an important health issue and avoiding conflict between public–private groups; these power strategies are operationalized through what they refer to as ‘practices of power’, such as lobbying activities (Savell *et al.*’s [2014] ‘information/messaging’), campaign donations (‘financial incentives’), partnerships with government (‘information/messaging’) and civil societal capture, i.e. funding research organizations, co-opting them into releasing supportive data in the hopes of influencing public opinion (‘information/messaging’) (Savell *et al.*, 2014).

While the IPIC framework also addresses issues of ‘information/messaging’ (e.g. lobbying, funding research, Coca-Cola partnering with government to create policies), it goes beyond the above literature in four primary ways—see Supplementary Appendix Table SA2. First, with respect to Institutions, IPIC underscores the fact that lobbyists have access to multiple institutions, ranging from congressional meetings and bureaucratic committees, while targeting specific individuals within these institutions. The aforementioned literature often fails to address these multiple institutional access points, and thus falls short of providing a deeper understanding of what lobbyists do and why they are consistently influential. Second, IPIC’s emphasis of multiple institutional access points also provides more insight into the HI reasons for Lima and Galea’s (2018) emphasis on the food industry’s ‘practices of power’, i.e. by specifying how multiple institutional access contributes to this power. Third, with respect to Political Interests, IPIC delves more into political elite decision-making processes—an issue that the aforementioned literature fails to adequately address (Mialon *et al.*, 2016)—by emphasizing why and how pre-existing relationships between the soda industry and presidents negatively influence the latter’s policy decisions (e.g. Fox and Coca-Cola), as well as presidential support for industries in order to secure their assistance in achieving other social welfare policy objectives (e.g. Peña Nieto’s anti-hunger work with Coca-Cola). Finally, IPIC’s Industry Civic Influence goes beyond Savell *et al.*’s (2014) ‘constituency-building’ approach to show that in the process of working with select allies in society (e.g. academics), industries hamper civil society’s ability to create a unified voice, engendering a ‘conflictual civil society’, and thus limiting its ability to mobilize in response to Coca-Cola’s political tactics.

Empirically, the application of IPIC to Mexico revealed several key lessons. First, Coca-Cola’s political importance to Mexico’s market is insufficient for explaining its ability to consistently influence NCD policy agenda-setting. Equally if not more important is understanding the extent to which lobbyists have access to congressional and bureaucratic institutions. Second, Coca-Cola’s policy influence is further magnified when presidents have pre-existing personal ties to these industries. Future research will need to examine if Mexican presidents without these historic ties are still committed to supporting these industries and what industry leaders are doing to court other politicians with these pre-existing ties.

The case of Mexico also highlighted how a ‘conflictual civil society’ hampers efforts to unify and potentially thwart industry’s policy agenda-setting influence. IPIC’s Industry Civic Influence pathway revealed how Coca-Cola’s partnership with researchers hampered the influence of those NGOs striving to oppose Coca-Cola’s activities. More work will need to be done examining how Coca-Cola and other industries investing in other emerging markets, such as Brazil and India, are dividing civil society, leading to similar mobilization problems, or if strong state-civil societal partnerships pre-date this industry civic interference.

Future research will also need to examine to what extent IPIC applies to other countries. In India, similar to Mexico, soda industries have had historic access to federal institutions, while prime ministers have had a career interest in ensuring that these industries and fast food companies prosper—especially as they have been linked to the government’s efforts to develop the agricultural sector; moreover, industries such as Pepsi-Co and Nestlé, have hampered civil society’s ability to mobilize (Gómez, 2018). Similar dynamics have been seen in Brazil, where soda industries have colluded with federal regulatory bodies and congressional committees, where presidents have depended on sugary-beverage and fast food companies to help eradicate hunger, and where industrial collusion with nutrition scientists has challenged civic mobilization and support (Gómez, 2018). These findings suggest that the IPIC framework has the potential to help explain the soda industry’s ongoing influence over NCD agenda-setting policy and research in other countries.

IPIC also provides several real-world policy recommendations. First, bureaucrats and politicians can use IPIC’s Institutions and Political Interests pathways to discover which political actors are continuously colluding with industry; in response, IPIC can recommend legislation that tightly regulates government’s partnerships with the soda industry when considering NCD policy. Furthermore, with respect to Institutions, after analysing the historic track record of soda industries having access to congressional members and bureaucratic committees, IPIC can recommend that congressional representatives propose laws increasing transparency, via monitoring and reporting, of lobbying activities between the soda industry and government officials; this endeavour could ultimately lead to transparency laws targeting Mexico’s soda industry. And by focussing on IPIC’s Industry Civic Influence (ICI) pathway, congressional representatives and bureaucrats can locate and propose legislation increasing transparency processes between the soda industry and academic researchers. Indeed, applying IPIC could advocate for prohibiting the soda industry’s provision of research grants. Finally, in civil society, NGOs can also use the ICI pathway to evaluate the extent of their supportive political and social networks, in the process recommending that NGOs expand their support base within government and academia in order to offset those civic actors supported by industry.

Nevertheless, there were several methodological limitations with the IPIC approach. First, this study only examined the role of Coca-Cola and no other soda industries in Mexico, thus limiting the number of observable implications of IPIC’s explanatory effectiveness. Second, a more extensive cross-national comparative analysis of Mexico to several other emerging economies could have helped to further validate the IPIC framework. Finally, with respect to interview data, the evidence could have been strengthened by obtaining the views of Coca-Cola and other soda industry representatives.

Finally, this article did not consider the deep cultural importance of Coca-Cola to the Mexican diet and impact on social perceptions. Since its emergence in Mexico’s market in the 1970s, Coca-Cola has quickly become the most popular soda beverage in the nation, while in some instances being perceived as a form of medical treatment (Tyler, 2018). What’s more, this beverage has gradually been adopted into religious beliefs and customs (often used, e.g. during burial ceremonies in southern Mexico) (Tyler, 2018). Coca-Cola has also done wonders to promote sporting events and, in the process, become an integral part of Mexican sports culture and history (Rosenberg, 2015). All of this is to say that Coca-Cola’s deep cultural penetration and influence may be creating a sense of cultural acceptance and support of its products, which, in turn, could be generating incentives not to mobilize in opposition to its policy and

political influence. Future research will therefore need to consider combining this article's IPIC framework with an anthropological approach to Coca-Cola's cultural and political influence.

Conclusion

Despite the recent introduction of NCD prevention programmes in Mexico, Coca-Cola continues to succeed in negatively influencing NCD policies, as well as scientific research linking their foods to NCDs. In Mexico, and as the IPIC framework has helped to illustrate, Coca-Cola remains successful because of the ease with which industry leaders have access to congressional and bureaucratic institutions, supportive presidents, while hampering civic mobilization. Adopting a political science perspective highlighting the historical institutions, roles and interests of political and industrial actors through the IPIC framework may help to magnify the realization that Coca-Cola's ongoing policy influence in Mexico is shaped more by the company's political and social strategies rather than its importance to the Mexican economy.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained for this research project.

Supplementary data

Supplementary data are available at *Health Policy and Planning* online.

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