Conceptualising backlash politics: Introduction to a special issue on backlash politics in comparison

Karen J Alter[1] iD and Michael Zürn[2,3] iD

Abstract

Despite the widespread sense that backlash is an important feature of contemporary national and world politics, there is remarkably little scholarly work on the politics of backlash. This special issue conceptualises backlash politics as a distinct form of contentious politics. Backlash politics includes the following three necessary elements: (1) a retrograde objective of returning to a prior social condition, (2) extraordinary goals and tactics that challenge dominant scripts, and (3) a threshold condition of entering mainstream public discourse. When backlash politics combines with frequent companion accelerants – nostalgia, emotional appeals, taboo breaking and institutional reshaping – the results can be unpredictable, contagious, transformative and enduring. Contributions to this special issue engage this definition to advance our understanding of backlash politics. The special issue's conclusion draws insights about the causes and dynamics of backlash politics that lead to the following three potential outcomes: a petering out of the politics, the construction of new cleavages, or a retrograde transformation. Creating a distinct category of backlash politics brings debates in American politics, comparative politics, and international relations together with studies of specific topics, facilitating comparisons across time, space, and issue areas and generating new questions that can hopefully promote lesson drawing.

Keywords

backlash politics, contestation, emotional politics, taboo breaking, nostalgia, public discourse, retrograde

Despite the widespread sense that backlash against globalisation and immigration are important dynamics in contemporary national and world politics, there is remarkably little scholarly work on the politics of backlash. Political pundits invoke the concept of backlash, taking at face value that a protest or a rapidly mobilised counter-movement is an important and direct negative response to a specific policy, decision or action that is portrayed as having gone too far. For social scientists, this pundit's version lacks validity

[1]Department of Political Science, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA
[2]Research Unit Global Governance, WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin, Germany
[3]Department of Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Corresponding author:
Michael Zürn, WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Reichpietschufer 50, Berlin 10785, Germany.
Email: michael.zuern@wzb.eu

since nearly identical changes may not lead to a mobilised backlash, in which case it is hard to see the change as triggering a backlash. If mobilising in opposition to actions or events is par for the course, then there is nothing particularly new, exceptional, or even interesting about the causes and consequences of backlash politics. These critiques may be correct, yet it is also true that the penchant for generalised patterns, specific terminology, and careful causal reasoning has basically eliminated backlash as a phenomenon of social science inquiry.

This symposium aims to correct the sublimation of backlash politics. While backlash politics is surely a variant of contested politics, we argue that backlash politics is a particular and extraordinary variant worthy of special study not only because of its contemporary relevance, but also because it can instigate substantial change in societies and political systems. Why do fights about a contained set of policies or issues – Obamacare, the Euro, gay marriage – escalate into existential disagreements about what the larger country or society represents or values? Why do some political disagreements – about assault rifles, immigration rules, religious exemptions from military service – mutate, escalate, and jump to locations that lack a triggering catalyst? The combination that is backlash politics – retrograde objectives, extraordinary goals and tactics, and the threshold of entering mainstream public discourse – explains these phenomena. When backlash politics components combine with frequent companion accelerants – nostalgia, emotional appeals, taboo breaking, and institutional reshaping – the results can be unpredictable and transformative.

This special issue names, describes, and theorises about backlash politics to generate a new agenda for scholarly inquiry, one that spans traditional political science subfields and levels of analysis (policy, issue area, locality, state or international level). Our primary concern in this article is to define the dynamics of backlash politics in a way that is conceptually distinct and that allows for comparisons across time, space, and political arenas. To be a concept with its own value added, backlash politics needs to be more than a counter-reaction to a specific set of circumstances; it must be a politics with its own specific dynamics that work in similar ways, following its own logics, across different contexts.

Part 1 defines the following three necessary elements of our backlash politics definition: a (1) retrograde objective as well as (2) extraordinary goals and tactics that have (3) reached the threshold level of entering mainstream public discourse. Backlash movements are the actors mobilised around achieving retrograde goals. We then identify frequent companions that often arise because of the necessary features in our definition, and that when present, add dynamics to backlash politics. The retrograde objectives often generate emotional appeals, including nostalgia and negative sentiments such as anger and resentment. Extraordinary objectives often inspire taboo breaking to underscore the extraordinary nature of the claims. Reaching the threshold level of entering mainstream public discourse often leads to the reshaping of institutions through formal means (e.g. rewriting policies and processes to alter future trajectories of politics) or informally (repurposing and reinterpreting existing rules and processes). The intensifying presence of these frequent companions may contribute to more significant, enduring, and far-reaching effects and outcomes.

Part 2 starts to develop an analytical framework to help understand the outbreak of backlash politics and divergent outcomes. We review existing arguments about causes and triggers, and identify three ways backlash politics eventually ends: (1) *no change*: backlash politics can be repressed and it can peter out; (2) *fundamental change* in the form of new cleavages, factions, or dominant scripts that incorporate backlash movements and objectives into ordinary politics, or (3) *social reversion*: backlash politics can

contribute to fundamental social and political changes. Rather than being conclusive, Part 2 raises important questions about conventional wisdom regarding the causes and consequences of political backlashes.

This special issue is based on two workshops of scholars who have studied phenomena that are often associated with backlash politics at national, comparative, and international levels. The conclusion to this special issue will return to the issue of what is distinct about this backlash concept, and begin to theorise about backlash politics dynamics.

Backlash politics: A definition

The study of backlash is not new. Yet, perhaps, because political scientists are so sceptical about pundit backlash claims, existing scholarship on the causes, nature, or consequences of political backlashes is surprisingly sparse and vague. Two important exceptions are frequently cited when backlash politics is discussed. In 1970, Lipset and Raab published a book about a 100 years of right-wing extremism in America. A by-product of their investigation is the identification of common features of movements that:

> have a greater symbolic investment in the past than in the present [. . .] The most activist and vocal adherents of these backwards-looking groups tended to be white, often male, and people who lose power and status when discrimination is removed. (Lipset and Raab, 1970: 504)

A second example is Jane Mansbridge who builds on her understanding of the tribal and often irrational (in terms of the claims made) mobilisation and counter-mobilisation for and against the Equal Rights Amendment. Mansbridge (1986) counterposed inward-looking movements with movements that try to build broad coalitions, suggesting that progressive movements require broad coalitions, and that inward-looking movements were therefore not progressive.

Lipset, Raab, and Mansbridge are often cited because they do not simply use the word backlash, they also theorise how backlash politics plays out. Most scholarship, by contrast, mostly uses the word backlash, associating backlash politics with specific topics such as right-wing politics, race politics, populism, or reactionary responses to feminism, sexuality politics, and legal rulings. As Ebetürk and Cupać (2020) explain, in feminist discourse, opposition to the feminist agenda is generally described as backlash. Law literature is also rife with discussions of backlashes against court rulings (Greenhouse and Siegel, 2011; Klarman, 2004; Siegel, 2017). The gist one gets from these usages is that backlash is contestation of, and oppositional responses to 'progress'. The loose use of the word backlash, and its association with right-wing, antifeminist, and homophobic groups, suggests a link between backlash and social backwardness.

We reject both the pundit and these standard scholarly versions, creating a definition that avoids reducing backlash politics to the features of right-wing politics, and that does not presume that backlash is a reactionary counter-movement contesting progressive change because it disempowers certain groups. This section develops a composite definition wherein a specific constellation of features jointly distinguish backlash politics from more ordinary forms of contestation and power-seeking.

Necessary elements of backlash politics

Movements with retrograde objectives probably always exist. Three jointly necessary elements capture whether such movements trigger backlash politics. Backlash politics

combines a retrograde objective, extraordinary claims, demands and tactics, and a threshold of influencing public discourse so that the movement's objectives and/or tactics become normalised features of politics.

A retrograde objective of recovering the past.   We begin by taking literally the word 'backlash', defined by different dictionaries as 'a sudden violent backward movement or reaction'[1] and 'a quick strong backward movement' akin to the recoil of a gunshot.[2] We convert this idea into the notion that backlash politics is retrograde, aiming to revert to a prior social condition. The prior condition may be an actual earlier situation, or a condition that is mostly an imagined or white-washed nostalgia. For example, if socialism never existed as a real or imagined social reality in the United States, then a politics oriented towards achieving socialism is not backlash politics. If, however, socialism existed as an earlier condition, then a politics oriented towards returning to the memory of socialism, as for instance in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic, may generate backlash politics.

The concept of 'retrograde' – returning to a prior condition – is essential to our definition. This term also connotes that the goal is a larger social condition, and not merely the reversal of a specific policy or action. While the retrograde goals may start out limited, they often gain an extensive dynamic and get more encompassing in the course of backlash politics. 'Retrograde' is easily confused with 'regressive', but they are not the same thing. Regressive by definition means returning to a less-developed condition (see, for example, Geiselberger, 2017: 7). Conceptualising something as regressive requires either a normative theory or a teleological theory of social development. In contrast, our use of the term backlash is normatively neutral since retrograde is not seen as necessarily bad. For example, the temperance movement sought to return to a social world where the many vices associated with drunkenness were rare to non-existent. Ostensibly, the movement was about a policy goal – ending alcohol consumption – yet, Joseph Gusfield argues that for most American Evangelical male participants, banning alcohol consumption reflected a larger retrograde objective of reestablishing a less indulgent and immoderate cultural order (Gusfield, 1986: 4). Meanwhile, for many women, the goal of temperance was a means to address the social problems associated with alcohol, including spousal abuse and family neglect. The temperance crusade of 1873–1874 was arguably progressive in that it generated 'the first large-scale temperance movement specifically by and for women' and it led to the creation of organisations specifically focused on the needs of women (Blocker, 1985: 460–461).

The temperance example underscores that harkening back to a prior condition is not coterminous with a regressive politics aimed at reversing civilisational achievements. Since the movement is about reclaiming, participants can believe that human agency can produce the desired result. In this respect, the movement is not utopian, and it is future-oriented, focusing on what participants expect will improve their world.

Extraordinary: Challenging dominant scripts.   A second necessary element is that backlash politics must involve extraordinary goals, claims or tactics that challenge dominant scripts in two respects. First, backlash movements often challenge not only policies but also shared principles, goals, procedures, and practices within which political processes and the exercise of political authority occurs.[3] Second, since backlash movements conceive of the earlier condition as preferable, they consider the status quo – ipso facto – as deficient in some fundamental and important way. Backlash movements are, therefore,

inherently challenging broadly shared notions of what constitutes a better world and how this better world is achieved and sustained.

Often these movements tackle only a part of a dominant script, if only to avoid potential divisions among supporters. In this respect, backlash politics may not aim for a reactionary revolution. Yet, since backlash movements aspire change of the norms, processes, and outcomes that are part of ordinary contested politics, they must unsettle existing political scripts. The frequent companions we discuss next are the tools through which dominant scripts are unsettled. Challenging these scripts may also unsettle current power structures. Yet, even where backlash movements do not aspire the unseating of current power structures (perhaps, because such a goal might lead political powers to quash the movement), backlash politics is nonetheless extraordinary both in their larger social aims, and because the means to these goals involve a reconstitution of politics.

Different backlash agendas will reject different aspects of dominant scripts. In Europe, today's authoritarian populist backlash movements seek to roll-back immigration and globalisation, and scale back or eliminate the delegation of political authority to European institutions. More fundamentally, they also challenge the notion of equal access to common resources like welfare state support, and the idea of cultural pluralism as an expression of individual liberty and social tolerance. Poland's Law and Justice party shows that backlash movements are not averse to using normal political strategies to gain and wield power and achieve these transformative goals. In other locales and times, backlash politics targets other dominant scripts with regular or extraordinary strategies. For example, a different retrograde objective might be to reinstate a purer Islamic way of life; or to value a biblical Judaism that exempts Haredi Jews from equality and citizenship obligations in the service of a Jewish devotion to Torah study; or an idealised return to pastoral roots as imagined during China's Cultural Revolution. In this respect, debates about whether Israel should pass legislation declaring Israel a Jewish state,[4] whether China or Russia should recover Maoist[5] and Stalinist[6] figures and ideologies may arguably indicate retrograde objectives. The ends differ, but these movements are similar in that the retrograde narratives reject parts of the currently dominant scripts of the local, national, regional, and/or international society, and thus, they go beyond specific policies.

Once in power, backlash movements may become invested in maintaining the power structures they now dominate. Indeed, once in office, the tactics and objectives more than the means may be extraordinary as some recent European examples suggest. Thus, to say that backlash movements employ and embody extraordinary claims, methods, or tactics is not to say that they are themselves revolutionary. Also, in trying to re-empower elements of the old social order, backlash movements may well end up empowering the very actors these movements seem to be rejecting. What makes the politics nonetheless extraordinary, and thus part of backlash politics, is that people are rejecting broadly shared understandings of what is considered politically legitimate, understandings that are inscribed into dominant social and political scripts.

A popular threshold with an uncertain outcome. Backlash movements with retrograde objectives and extraordinary agendas may be an omnipresent feature of politics. A backlash mobilisation strategy converts into backlash politics once a movement constructs a retrograde imaginary, challenges dominant scripts, *and* when these efforts become common elements of public discourse and public life. In other words, the third jointly necessary condition of backlash politics is that the articulated backlash objectives must play a role in mainstream public discourse and politics. This requirement also means that at a minimum, a semi-independent public sphere must exist.

Changing public discourse is itself an important political goal of many backlash movements. In gaining validation for the movement's social objectives, and in successfully imparting the retrograde imaginary into the larger public debate, backlash movements launch a political dynamic that by design is potentially transformative. This transformative potential is when we begin to talk about backlash politics. Backlash politics, therefore, is at least temporarily destabilising. Whether the backlash politics achieves its goals is a separate question which we discuss in part 2, and theorise about in the special issue's Conclusion (Alter and Zürn, 2002).

Frequent companions to backlash politics

Backlash movements do not exist in isolation. Because backlash movements are challenging elements of dominant scripts, they are likely to generate a counter-reaction, at least when they reach the threshold of entering public discourse. Since counter-reactions will shape the ultimate destination, our definition of backlash politics is about an interactive political process, not a particular outcome. Resistance produces a dynamic which in turn inspires resistance by counter-movements.[7]

The three necessary elements of backlash politics often bring with them what we are calling frequent companions, constellations of companion tactics and strategies that stem from both the retrograde and extraordinary goals of backlash movements, and the counter-reactions of those who defend the dominant script. Important companions of backlash politics include (1) emotive elements, which for backlashers are often suffused with the haze of nostalgia; (2) taboo breaking and new political strategies; (3) challenges to procedures and institutions associated with the dominant script. When present, these companion features infuse additional instability into the political process. We call these companion features because they are likely to take place as part of backlash politics, but are not required for one to say that a polity has entered the throes of backlash politics. The special issue's conclusion will theorise about how the presence or absence of these frequent companions influences backlash politics outcomes.

An emotive element that may include a dose of nostalgia. Emotional elements are a frequent companion for two reasons. First, the political goal of recovering a prior social condition only makes sense if the past can be constructed as somehow better than the present. Backlash-infused nostalgia is therefore likely to occur, and with it a whitewashing of history. Since history often involved suppressing the very actors who are seeking a greater say in politics and society – minorities, women, environmentalists, and so on – this whitewashing can be regressive and it can generate a counter-movement.[8]

Nostalgia is not, however, a necessary part of our definition because the past prior condition may have actually existed in the very form that proponents suggest. Also, since every past contains multiple simultaneous realities, recovering and emphasising one aspect of the past may not require a white-washed nostalgic embellishment. Indeed, Andrew Murphy (2009: 131) notes that contemporary scholars such as Robert Bellah, Amatai Ezioni, and Robert Putnam harken back to a time where people communed together and looked out for each other, creating a picture of the past that many would see as both accurate and positive.

Second, the extraordinary character of a backlash struggle can lead backlash entrepreneurs to tap into the psychology of individuals through emotive appeals.[9] As Roger Petersen's (2020) contribution to this special issue explains, emotions can act as a switch

that generates intense sentiments, that heighten the saliency of a particular concern, creates a sense of urgency, and interferes with information processing, reflection, and decision-making. Because emotional appeals mobilise people, they are a useful way to entice disaffected bystanders to identify with the social aspirations of a backlash group and thus to reach the threshold objective of entering public discourse.

Perhaps, because negative emotions are potent political mobilisers and disrupters, the emotions most likely to be frequent companions to backlash politics tend to have a negative bent (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2017). If the past was superior to the present, the question then arises as to how society arrived at the new but lesser reality? This question in itself can generate a politics of blame, which is often a politics of anger and resentment against those who allegedly caused the current social reality. Scholars have associated the emotion of anger with a belief 'that another has committed a bad action against oneself' (Petersen and Liaras, 2006: 322), and a 'belief that punishment is possible' (Petersen and Liaras, 2006: 322). Anger can fuel violence, but it can also mobilise an optimistic social movement with a dignity and restorative orientation (Pearlman, 2013). Meanwhile, resentment is pretty much wholly negative. Scholars suggest that resentment couples a perception of injury and of unearned dominance with bitterness and a desire for revenge. In the extreme, the resentment 'emotion becomes an obsessive, smoldering, simmering and festering sense of wounded self-esteem and a desire for revenge' (Meltzer and Musolf, 2002: 245). Both anger and resentment can be measurable, and successful mobilisation of anger and resentment can have a multiplying effect. For example, Nguyen (2019) shows that anger and anxiety are only weakly associated with the choice of authoritarian populists parties in Germany and Austria, yet, the choice for a populist party leads to a strong increase in measurements of anger and anxiety, suggesting that cause can also become an effect. We thus see that the forces propelling backlash may, by engaging emotion and attracting new adherents, intensify thereby adding a dynamic element to backlash politics.

Taboo breaking and new political strategies. Our definition includes that backlash politics is extraordinary politics that involve a rejection of parts of the dominant social script. To wake people from a tacit or complacent support of dominant beliefs and practices may require a clear break, and thus, a flagrant rejection of the institutions, people, or norms associated with the objectionable dominant script. We, thus, expect taboo breaking – crossing socially prohibited lines – to be a frequent companion of backlash politics.

Taboo breaking can contribute to questioning prevalent norms and their justification, and thus, to changing public discourse. It can also involve challenges of prevalent practices and appropriate behaviour. Taboo breaking by a backlash movement, therefore, often plays out as permanently testing the limits of what is still considered as appropriate discursive and behavioural standards, all features of deviance which, for some group members, is an end itself (see Terman, 2020).

Taboo breaking is intentionally disruptive, yet, we do not rule out that backlash movements might pursue retrograde objectives with ordinary political tactics, and thus, that dominant scripts might be challenged through ordinary contested politics. We are also not saying that wherever there is taboo breaking, one also finds backlash politics. For instance, it is quite easy to find taboo breaking among revolutionary groups that are not backwards oriented (and, of course, in politics instigated by and for young people), and thus, taboo breaking may be prevalent wherever actors seek to change elements of the status quo.

Institutional reshaping. Because backlash politics affects public discourse, it has the potential of institutional reshaping. Extraordinary demands often involve the targeting of procedures and institutions of decision-making that are blocking the achievement of desired goals. Also, the more fundamentally transformative the retrograde vision, the larger the aspired social change, and the more a backlash movement is likely to target fundamental core principles and institutions of the dominant script. When a backlash movement starts to attack fundamental procedures (e.g. the election and selection processes of political representatives or judges) or fundamental principles of the existing system (e.g. judicial independence, a free press, a legal presumption of innocence before proven guilty), the movement becomes inherently more extraordinary in its nature and objectives, and backlash politics becomes more disruptive and unpredictable. In this special issue, Claudia Landwehr (2020) considers the current demands for institutional reshaping, arguing that these demands did not arise from dissatisfaction with democractic principles, yet, they fundamentally disrupt dominant scripts about how democratic consensus is built.

The more disruptive and successful a backlash movement becomes, the more likely the defenders of the status quo are to adopt their own form of unusual counter-measures. Once the political gloves have been removed, counter-movements may also employ new strategies as a response to the disruptors. They may find ways to exclude backlash leaders from the political process, such as changing voting rules, appointment processes, retirement protocols, or parliamentary rules in order to deny the backlash movements' full access to the political system. Backlash politics may, therefore, lead to a change of the institutional status quo as function of two polarised sides (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). In short, backlash politics often leads to a change of discourse, procedures, and institutions in a given political system (Madsen, 2017; and more generally the contributions in Sandholtz and Whytock, 2017).

Neither strong emotions, nor a dose of nostalgia, nor taboo breaking, nor even institutional reshaping are necessary or sufficient conditions for backlash politics to exist or to be transformative. If the aspired retrograde social condition involves a significant redirection of current politics, if extraordinary strategies and tactics are effectively deployed, and should the public discourse threshold be surpassed, it is however very likely that emotions and taboo breaking will be part of backlash politics and that institutional reshaping will therefore be present as well. Moreover, the potent combination of backlash politics and the frequent companions increases the chance that fundamental changes will result.

Backlash politics as a composite concept that transcends time and space

Whereas pundits often focus on events or actions that serve as catalysts, scholars mostly become interested in backlash politics because the intensity, strength, and endurance of mass movements signal a deeper dissatisfaction with the social conditions of mainstream society. The retrograde orientation and extraordinary challenges to dominant scripts differentiate backlash politics from the general category of contested politics and social movements, and the threshold criteria of entering public discourse ensure that the politics are significant. The presence of the 'frequent companions' further intensifies the nature and impact of backlash politics.

These three features – retrograde, extraordinary, and part of public discourse – are collectively necessary; one or two elements on their own do not constitute backlash politics. As such, the definition separates the topic of backlash movements (who they are and what motivates them), and backlash outcomes (whether and how backlash movements succeed in

Table 1. Typology of movements using backlash criteria.

Direction	Modes, objectives, and tactics	
	Extraordinary/challenge dominant scripts and seek to reconstitute politics or polity	Ordinary/accept or do not challenge dominant scripts, procedures, or institutions
Retrograde objective	ISIL: Establish a Caliphate White Supremacy movements Radical-Right-Wing parties in Europe American temperance movement (1860s–1930s) China's Boxer uprising	Amish/Quakers Indigenous Rights movements Luddites
Oriented towards future imaginaries	Communism Feminism LGTBQ movements Zionism	Socialism/Social democracy Libertarianism European Federalists
Both retrograde and future-oriented	National Socialism in Germany (1930s) China's cultural revolution	Rural grassroots movements such as Brazil's land equity movement of the 1970s Environmentalism and early Green Parties End of time (eschatology) movements Localist movements

ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Grey = backlash politics (when threshold condition met)

their goals) from the study of backlash politics. When the three backlash features are coupled with the frequent companions, the concept includes interactive processes, dynamism, and modes of action. While it is still an empirical question whether these features come together in one ideal type, we do not talk about directed causal relationships in this respect, but rather about the notion of co-constitutiveness of the features of backlash politics.

This conceptualisation seems to be promising for at least two reasons. First, the tendency of scholars to build theories that focus mostly on more recent or very specific national politics may obscure commonalities that may pertain in the category of backlash politics. Our definition of backlash politics does not identify the location or issue where actors are struggling. We do not presume grassroots origins. We do not presume that status loss drives backlash, or that backlash is associated with the political right or left. Second, we also imagine that a focus on backlash could lead to a reclassification of movements and politics that have been seen as distinct, allowing for new insights into common sources, precipitating factors, or dynamics that cut across countries, regions, historical moments, and levels of analysis (e.g. local, national, regional, and global).

Table 1 illustrates these points and is a first cut effort to imagine political movements that may or may not be reclassified as backlash movements. Our requirement of a retrograde objective means that a backlash movement needs to strive for a prior social condition. The question then becomes when, how, and why these movements achieve the threshold of backlash politics by inserting their objectives and imaginaries into public discourse. Table 1 demonstrates that retrograde movements can be distinguished from

movements that imagine new and different futures, and that both types of movements may, but do not necessarily, employ extraordinary strategies or seek to upend existing political orders. It also demonstrates how some movements are hard to classify because they combine sentiments about the past with a vision of a new future. The back-to-the-future nature of the politics might be its own particular variant of backlash politics.

The shaded boxes incorporate movements that lead to backlash only when they achieve the threshold of entering public discourse. We can see from the many unshaded boxes that backlash politics is rarer than backlash movements. These examples suggest that backlash politics is nothing particularly new, nor is it isolated to a particular type of political system (e.g. democracies) or imagined community (nation). In defining a general category that crosses subfield silos in political science, we are implicitly asking whether the backlash concept may travel across political issues and levels. Can Russian foreign policy under Putin be described as backlash politics? Is it helpful to conceive of a local revolt to China's purchase of a factory as a material concern (e.g. job losses) or as backlash politics simply because the purchase becomes a much larger controversy? Many scholars will suggest that challenges to policies is backlash politics; our criteria help one scrutinise these claims. The underlying question therefore is whether backlash politics as described shows the expected regularities that can help us to better understand specific instances where a reaction seems outsized and/or suggests the need for a fundamental reconstitution of politics.

Important questions: Towards a framework for studying backlash politics

Backlash politics comes with a lot of variation. We are not suggesting that our higher level category of backlash politics substitutes for a comparative investigation of similar types of backlash politics, such as gender-based, right-wing, antisemitic, or racist backlashes. We are, however, suggesting that these variants be identified as discrete types of backlash or social mobilisation so that we do not presume that elements pertaining to a specific variant are necessarily part of a broader theory of backlash politics.

This section identifies questions and issues that should be addressed as part of a framework for studying backlash politics. For now, we draw on existing literatures that speak to the causes and consequences of backlash politics. Since it is far from clear that these observations also apply to backlash politics, the discussion mainly identifies important questions a fuller theory of backlash politics should address. Contributions to this special issue draw on these ideas, and the conclusion identifies questions that arise from comparing across cases of backlash politics.

Causes of backlash: Under which conditions are backlash politics likely?

Do triggers matter? If so, how? Pundit accounts of backlash generally start by locating a trigger as the beginning of a causal story that then seeks to explain why a group is mobilised in opposition. For example, Susan Faludi (1991) focuses on the media's portrayal of the women's equality movement to explain backlash against feminism. Similarly, the study of right-wing radical movements often involves investigating whether backlash processes are triggered by real social or structural forces or events, such as whether immigration explains a rising support for right-wing movements (Hochschild, 2016; Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

Donatella Della Porta (2020) explains how social movement literature has identified numerous proximate triggers of grass roots mobilisation, including changes in perceived social conditions, in resources, or political opportunities. Our contributors, including Hanspieter Kriesi, Omar Encarnacíon, Justin Gest, Canes-Wrone et al., Nicole Deitelhoff (2020), Mikael Rask Madsen, and Cupać and Ebetürk investigate how the success of contemporary backlash politics derives at least in part from increased resources, crises-induced opportunities, and a policy change that is disliked. These contributions find that proximate triggers can at best only partly explain the timing and presence of backlash politics. These findings correspond with the general social science scepticism regarding pundit claims that triggers cause backlash.

Given our focus on retrograde objectives and extraordinary goals and tactics, one can also consider how more fundamental social changes serve as triggers of backlash politics. One might also investigate, as Freedman (2020) does, whether illusory triggers are a more likely frequent companion of emotion and nostalgia, since reason-based arguments may be harder to construct where posited triggers are illusory. We might think that localised triggers are more likely reversible, while external triggers might be more likely to lead to the construction of scapegoat targets and so on. One might also study when triggers do and do not bloom into backlash politics, as Gest and Canes-Wrone do. For example, crises, because they are revealing moments during which power constellations and problematic social developments become more visible, might create political opportunities (Allison and Zelikow, 1971; Kreuder-Sonnen, 2019) or generate extraordinary responses, including the attempt to move back to a pre-crisis situation. Yet, since such events do not always trigger backlash politics, one could investigate whether additional factors determine when crises pull societies together, or tear them apart.

Another feature of triggers may be the types of emotion that become associated with an event. For example, Jonathan Mercer (1996) studied the misplaced role that reputation-recovery has played in the waging of war. Baumeister et al. (2001) find that bad emotions have more impact than good emotions, and bad sentiments and stereotypes are harder to dislodge than are good ones. A general insight is the idea that negative emotions can be a particularly potent political force (Petersen, 2002), and for this reason triggers that evoke negative emotions may be more likely to instigate backlash politics.

Does the speed of social change contribute to backlash politics? Many backlash essayists invoke a notion of progress that moved too fast or reached too far. A similar idea is that backlash occurs because policy-makers failed to help people adjust to change, leading to a tipping point where a small event triggers a rapid outsized response (Gladwell, 2000). Yet, it seems to us that not all rapid social changes generate political backlashes (think about the social democratic reforms in the 1970s), and sometimes, backlash movements are responding to a change that has not been very rapid (e.g. 1930s fascists who mobilised against forces unleashed by an industrial revolution that occurred long before their rise). While it is hard to know if a sense of 'too much, too fast' is predictive, merely associated, or only sometimes an additional contributor to backlash politics, this common perception generates a hypothesis that a high speed of social change is more likely to produce backlash politics.

Even if this hypothesis is confirmed, important questions remain: Is rapid social change a necessary or permissive condition that increases the likelihood of backlash politics? And we would still want to ascertain why structural dissatisfactions only

sometimes crystalise into backlash politics. As is done in the study of genocide (Kuper, 1989), one could look for indicators that might suggest the crystallisation of a simmering frustration.

Does the type of the precipitating social change matter? Three types of fundamental changes are frequently associated with backlash politics. First are changes in the *socio-economic realm* that produce losers who mourn the old economic constellation. Second, changes in the *socio-cultural realm* (e.g. changes in the ethics and life-styles of a society). The terms postmaterialism, feminism, and multiculturalism speak to social changes that may give rise to grievances because old cultural patterns and ways of life are challenged by these new cultural standards. Third, changes in the *political realm*, in the constellation and working of political institutions, may cause backlash politics. For example, demographic changes can undermine the influence of certain groups over political outcomes, a possibility that Gest (2020) explores in this special issue. Or, even when there is no triggering change, an institution that in the past was seen as effective and fair may no longer be considered legitimate, an idea that Landwehr (2020) explores in this special issue. The differing impact of these different types of change are being debated by scholars studying the rise of right-wing populism, a movement that fits our criteria of backlash politics.

Yet, is the root cause of change important in understanding the causes or the consequences of backlash politics? The attraction of identifying a root cause is that we might perhaps understand why only some social changes generate backlash politics, and we might learn how to avoid either the change or the adverse effects that inevitable change generates. Meanwhile, if we learn that social, cultural, or political change does not necessarily precipitate backlash, then we might instead focus on how certain groups politicise change, playing upon human fears and concerns.

Consequences: The likely outcomes of backlash politics

Our backlash politics definition does not include the success of the backlash movement in the sense of achieving its policy or polity goals. We discussed causes and triggers since this is of great interest in the literature, yet, since counter-mobilisations and counter-strategies can defuse backlash movements, there is no reason per se to presume that the causes and triggers will be directly related to the consequences. Indeed, we expect the 'frequent companions' of backlash politics to be a more likely explanation for variation in the outcomes of backlash.[10]

We envision three possible outcomes of backlash politics. Effective counteractions may lead to no larger systemic change. The other two scenarios suggest that backlash politics can be associated with a more fundamental reorientation of politics, including backlashes that jump borders. It is this potentiality of fundamental change and contagion that makes backlash politics worthy of greater study.

No change. Backlash politics may peter out for many reasons. Political stone-walling may lead actors involved in backlash politics to lose internal energy. Existing political actors may syphon key parts of the backlash constituency away by sufficiently addressing issues of import to a large swath of the mobilised backlash movement. Governments may suppress a backlash movement, sending key leaders to exile or jail. Black swan events – like the 2020 pandemic – can overtake backlash politics. Also possible is that backlash movement leaders may reveal their true power-seeking nature, disowning their priorities

and their constituency once they are allowed to join the power elite. Whatever leads to the dissipation of the backlash politics, the first outcome will lead to no meaningful change in existing national or international politics.

Fundamental change. Backlash politics can generate a new social cleavage or faction that becomes a permanent feature of future democratic or authoritarian politics. In this outcome, backlash politics reconstitutes national-level society and politics with significant effects on policy and politics, but without fundamentally reshaping the national political system or the polity. This reconstitution of national politics may or may not then reshape international level politics. Where new cleavages capture national politics, and should new cleavages emerge in multiple national systems, it is possible that new political priorities will get projected into the international arena, and in this way, backlash politics may jump borders or levels of analysis.

Social reversion. Backlash politics may succeed in their extraordinary objectives, reconstituting the polity to fit the vision of the movement. This reconstitution could take the form of a fundamentally different social order, with new taboos, new heroes, and a significantly different script that re-orders politics and society. The return of an Islamic state, or a return to socialist parties and principles in China or Russia might be an example of such a reordering. This type of a reconstitution could involve fundamental system change, like the imposition of Sharia law or a heightened political role for the theocracy, or it could merely involve a change in leadership or priorities, where new or pre-existing political elite redeploy institutions and tools of government towards different ends.

For all three of these potentialities, it will be the counter-mobilisations and the counter-strategies that determine if backlash politics generates a critical juncture that fundamentally reshapes societies and politics. Meanwhile, even when critical junctures occur, the result of the juncture may or may not be a fundamental and long-standing social and political change. After all, there is always the risk that the more things change, the more they stay the same. That said, critical junctures create openings where new options become possible. And critical junctures can jump across borders, having a transnational and international impact. The contagion possibility is another reason why backlash politics can be so transformative.

It is also important to underscore that success does not necessarily involve a displacement of the power elite. The temperance movement was only partly successful, but one can imagine a successful temperance movement where a prior drinking culture became taboo, where spousal abuse was no longer tolerated, and where drunkards either returned to their role of constructive parts of a family or they were ostracised and blamed for the forced separation of the family. These types of fundamental social change could be accomplished without any change in the power elite or the political structure. In this case, backlash would cause fundamental social, but not revolutionary political change.

Bringing the pieces together: A framework for investigating backlash politics and their spread

Bringing backlash politics and its frequent companions together with our discussion of conceivable causes and consequences of backlash politics, we sum up this section with our working framework for studying backlash politics. Figure 1 below summarises our discussion. We presume that backlash movements, meaning movements desiring a return
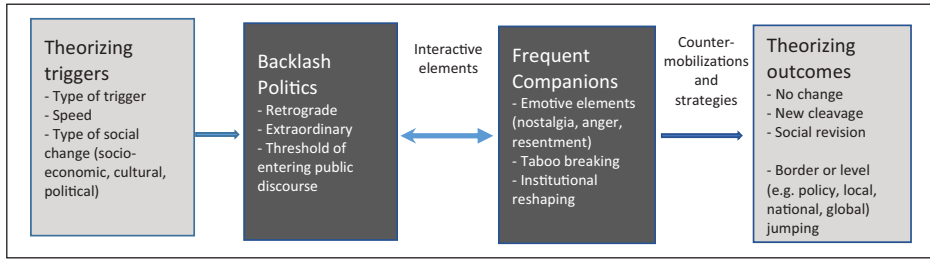
Figure 1. Backlash politics – A framework.

to a prior social condition, are omnipresent features of politics. The study of triggers investigates the conditions that transform the demands of backlash movements into backlash politics. The necessary elements and possible frequent companions are fundamental to shaping the process through which backlash politics plays out. We identify three conceivable outcomes, but the outcomes will be shaped by the counter-mobilisation that backlash politics generates. A theory of backlash politics should include triggers, and build on the presence or absence of frequent companions. The study of backlash might want to expand to focus on how interactive elements generate frequent companions, and when and how counter-mobilisation shapes outcomes.

So far we have mostly focused on a single level, meaning whether local, national, or international backlashes reshape politics or achieve their objectives. An additional dimension to consider is when and how backlash movements jump borders. One can imagine additional outcomes that might include (1) no border jumping, (2) regional effects or diffusion to similar types of systems (e.g. democracies, regional integration systems, etc.), and (3) global effects, especially if internationalised scripts are reshaped. We will return to this idea in the special issue's conclusion.

Our backlash politics definition raises questions about many features frequently mentioned when pundits and scholars invoke the word 'backlash'. In particular, our questioning of claims about triggers, and our definition of backlash movements as seeking to return to a prior social condition challenges the notion that a specific action or social change triggered the response. In this respect, counterfactual musings that 'if only Obamacare did not exist', 'if only NATO had not expanded to former Iron-Curtain countries', 'if the European Union had not done x, y or z' may be a hopeless fool's exercise. Thus, it could be that once the threshold of backlash politics is reached, and the movement becomes self-sustaining, the process of backlash politics produces outcomes that may be quite independent of the triggers, or even the intent of the backlash movement. Or, there could be a moment of contingency when events could unfold in multiple directions. Especially because the rise of backlash movements and the response to these movements often produces critical junctures and moments of consequential political agency and border jumping contagion, understanding the dynamics unleashed by backlash politics becomes especially important. In the conclusion of this special issue, we will push towards a proto-theory of backlash politics, based on insights developed by our contributors.

Conclusion: A roadmap to the special issue

In this article, we defined backlash politics as a particular form of political contestation with a retrograde objective as well as extraordinary goals and tactics, which has reached

the threshold level of entering public discourse. We also discussed frequent companions: emotional appeals, nostalgia, taboo breaking practices, and institutional reshaping that may intensify the dynamics and consequences of backlash politics. The question remains whether this conceptualisation can build new insights.

To study backlash politics is to query how visions of the past come to structure contemporary and future-oriented politics, and how adding certain extraordinary tactics and strategies interject dynamics that can generate transformative change. If only because the potential for reversionary change is real, and because backlash politics can mutate and jump levels and borders, the category of backlash politics deserves this type of conceptualisation and theorisation.

We believe that new questions of general significance emerge when we focus on the category of backlash politics, and thus, by putting the study of discrete movements and events together. Questions include, for example, how do the frequent companions of emotional elements, taboo breaking, and institutional reshaping intensify and extend backlash politics? Backlash movements often complain about the process through which a decision occurred (e.g. a legal ruling, a questionable policy, a problematic political procedural). Is a response focused on process an effective counter-strategy? What is the role of counter-mobilisation and counter-strategies in tempering or exacerbating backlash politics or shaping outcomes? Are backlash dynamics and outcomes different depending on whether grassroots or elite actors instigate backlash politics? How are dynamics and outcomes different depending on whether backlash politics occur at more than one level, including local, sub-national, national, or international levels? Do backlash dynamics and outcomes vary depending on whether the retrograde objectives promote majority or minority objectives? What happens when new technologies enter into the backlash politics, such as television or social media? Do backlash dynamics vary depending on whether the retrograde objective is primarily material or primarily ideational? Are back-to-the-future backlashes, where backlash-proponents insert futuristic imaginaries into the politics, fundamentally different than backlashes oriented solely towards revision to a prior condition?

The special issue contributions draw on scholarship and bodies of research examining a range of issues and subjects where backlash politics are often invoked. The contributions are deliberately short, and in most cases, they draw from extensive research undertaken by the author(s). As we are all just embarking on the study of backlash politics, our collective goal is to be suggestive and provocative rather than conclusive. Below is a guide to the articles.

Part 1: Definitional elements of backlash politics

A first set of contributions, which includes this article, probes and explores the conceptual discussion in the 'Introduction' section.

Donatella Della Porta's (2020) article 'Conceptualizing backlash movements as a form of contentious politics: A perspective from social movement studies' explores synergies between our definition of backlash politics and the literature on social movements. Scholars of social movements have studied many elements associated with backlash politics. Studies of the radical-right identify how retrograde objectives, invocation of memories, and particular types of framings shape right-wing politics. Social movements literature has examined how mobilising resources and political opportunities, influence social mobilisation and the mobilisation of counter-movements. This contribution provides a guide to these literatures that can save time for scholars who want to learn about these elements of backlash politics.

Engaging ideas from political theory, Claudia Landwehr's (2020) article 'Backlash Against the Procedural Consensus' examines how current right-wing populist backlash movements are retrograde in a more fundamental and even regressive way. By challenging the procedural principles of liberal democracy, these movements undermine democratic society's capacity to build political consensus. Even if attacks on procedures are primarily instrumental to substantive objectives, their distinctive anti-pluralist understanding of democracy depreciates core principles of representation, mediation, and negotiation. Landwehr, thus, suggests that the 'institutional reshaping' of this movement aims for a reconstitution of democratic politics. The critique suggests that resisting right-wing populism is not enough. The larger question is how can democracies maintain a procedural consensus that enables them to deal with deep substantive conflicts peacefully and effectively?

Frequent companions to backlash politics: Are they separate from or constituting of backlash politics?

The second set of papers examines why the frequent companions to backlash politics that we identify are embraced, and how these dynamics effect backlash politics. Frequent companion features, we argue, stem from the necessary conditions of backlash politics. The four contributions in this section probe the co-constitutive nature of these frequent companions and backlash politics.

Roger Petersen's article 'Emotions and Backlash in US Society and Politics' examines the different types of dynamics that the emotions of anger, resentment, indignation, and contempt play in constituting and accelerating backlash politics. Indignation, which the author defines as anger at a third party wherein attacks on this third party become a way to demonstrate an in-group identity, widens the circle of actors that are brought into a backlash narrative. The third-party target may be a bystander that is then helpless to respond. Against this background, Petersen examines how cultural changes in the United States have shaped perceptions of group and group status. The indignation narrative, Petersen argues, is a narrative wherein the trigger of structural change may not be a necessary ingredient of backlash politics.

Rochelle Terman's article 'The Positive Side of Negative Identity: Stigma and Deviance in Backlash Movements' looks at extraordinary acts of deviance and taboo breaking that challenge mainstream norms. Building off insights from the sociology of stigma and deviance, Terman shows how taboo breaking is commonly embraced in groups experiencing status deprivation, where it serves the following three basic functions: as an expression of group identity and distinction, as a strategy to accumulate prestige within the group, and as a way to bolster in-group solidarity and order. Terman suggests that for backlash movements trying to recapture lost status, deviance is not only an instrumental tool of political mobilisation, but it is also a constitutive element of the movement and thus the movement's key participants will not shed a strategy of deviance.

Joshua Freedman's (2020) article 'Back of the Queue: Brexit, Status Loss, and the Politics of Backlash' focuses on a category that we did not include in our backlash definition per se, namely status anxiety and status seeking. Freedman challenges the notion that there is some a priori status loss that triggers backlash politics. Instead, he argues that backlash mobilisers stoke status anxiety, so that backlash politics and status seeking are co-constitutive phenomena. Freedman illustrates the cause–effect relationship by

focusing on appeals to status as they repeatedly surfaced during Britain's 2016 referendum on the European Union (EU). His larger claim is that subjective narratives of status loss are 'constructed, promoted, retrieved, and contested, in order to either advance, or oppose, the cause of backlash entrepreneurs'.

Jack Snyder's article 'Backlash against Naming and Shaming: The Politics of Status and Emotion' takes as its starting point the common international human rights strategy of shaming human rights violators. Drawing on theoretical literatures in psychology, social psychology, and sociology, Snyder explains why shaming that challenges the status of locally held traditional values actually plays into the hands of elites in a traditional power structure, motivating widespread popular backlash against the human rights shamers. Snyder notes that cultural revivalist movements thrive on the counter-narrative that the Western shaming strategy facilitates. Meanwhile, Snyder challenges the idea that cultural revivalism is a retrograde objective, suggesting that there is a modernist dimension to the goal of cultural revivalism, and that human rights discourse plays into this modernist agenda.

Backlash politics in comparison

The special issue also includes articles that analyse backlash politics in comparison to understand better the triggers and consequences. A third set of papers applies the backlash category to questions that animate comparative politics scholars. A fourth set will focus on backlash in the context of international relations.

Comparative politics investigations of backlash politics. Omar Encarnación's (2020) article 'The Gay Rights Backlash: Contrasting Views from the United States and Latin America' demonstrates how and why not all gay rights progress generates a backlash. Encarnación shows the scale of gay rights backlash in the United States, which he calls the broadest and deepest backlash of any liberal democracy. He contrasts the United States' experience with Latin America, where similar advances in protecting homosexual rights did not generate backlash politics, even though the conservative Christians mimicked many of the American talking points. Encarnación's cross-national analysis of gay rights developments in the United States and Latin America demonstrates that a gay rights backlash hinges on the existence of resource-rich 'backlashers' and a receptive societal environment. He also credits Latin American gay activists for the successful framing of their struggles in human rights terms, a strategy that implanted gay rights into the larger pro-democracy and human rights culture, while blunting the impact of the Catholic Church's backlash efforts.

Backlash today is often characterised as a reaction by the dominant ethnic group to a challenge to their dominant status. Justin Gest's article *Demographic Change and Backlash: Social Cleavage and Coexistence in Majority Minority Societies* draws from a larger comparative historical analysis of six majorities – minority societies where the one-time majority lost their numerical supremacy. The comparison reveals that there is nothing inevitable about a backlash arising from a dominant (e.g. majority) group becoming out-numbered by minority groups. The larger study investigates how antecedent conditions in the form of an inclusive political strategy that integrates minority groups can lead to a smooth demographic transition, one that does not raise fundamental questions of national identity. Gest considers how political strategies create identity binaries that either grow into or diffuse backlash politics.

Whereas the previous contributions consider a similar shock that generates divergent responses, Hanspieter Kriesi's (2020) article *A Backlash against European Integration?* explains that it can be problematic to see a similar domestic reaction – Euro-scepticism – as a form of backlash against European integration. Kriesi explains that European integration scepticism is long-standing and it may even be a predictable reaction of political parties to the strains put on national systems. Kriesi recognises that certain triggers (e.g. the Euro crisis, the refugee crisis, and Brexit) have added political momentum to long-standing critiques, but he suggests the rightist Euro-scepticism has a retrograde objective, while leftist Euro-scepticism is mostly reform oriented, and thus, not seeking a return to national control. Kriesi thus suggests that one must understand the source of the political disaffection – whether its origins are a cultural backlash or an economic dissatisfaction – arguing for the need to differentiate the politicisation of European integration from a backlash politics targeted (in part) on European integration. Both exist in the EU context today, yet the counter-strategies needed will differ depending on the source of disaffection.

Brandice Canes-Wrone, Lauren Mattioli and Sophie Meunier's (2020) article *Foreign Direct Investment Screening and Congressional Backlash Politics in the United States* examines a particular instance that they consider to be part of a backlash against economic globalisation – the screening of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States. Although most FDI is welcome, some proposed deals have incited suspicion and triggered a backlash in Congress against the very procedures that let economic openness happen. Examining the varied responses to foreign FDI, and especially Chinese FDI, the authors argue that what are often presumed to be triggers of resistance are not the only factors driving opposition. Expected triggers include security concerns and massive change in global chains of production, but other triggers involve purely domestic political motives. In particular, Canes-Wrone et al. find that the backlash generally originates outside the district where the investment is located and that economic distress is not a significant cause of counter-mobilisation. The authors suggest that resistance to Chinese FDI reflects and indicates a larger retrograde political mobilisation rooted in appeals to a more dominant and self-reliant United States.

International relations investigation of backlash politics. Jelena Cupać and Irem Ebetürk's (2020) article *The Personal is Global Political: Antifeminist Backlash in the United Nations* first reviews what we know about gender-related backlash politics. The authors then consider anti-feminism at the international level, examining the rhetorical shift away from promoting gender equity and towards retrograde understandings of family relationships to see if antifeminist backlash may be spreading to the international level. Ebetürk and Cupać suggest that backlash politics has indeed migrated from national levels to the United Nations (UN). The UN counter-mobilisations are designed to reverse feminist advances in the UN, but they are also extensions of national resistance to the advancement of women's rights through human rights discourse and international institutional policies. In other words, this example of backlash represents and internationalisation of the types of nationalist counter-reactions that Snyder discusses.

Nicole Deitelhoff's article *What's in a Name? Contestation and Backlash against international norms and institutions* starts by explaining why for many norm- theorists, contestation is not necessarily indicative of backlash. Deitelhoff then studies the recurring and radicalising contestation over the International Criminal Court (ICC), describing some of the push-back against the ICC as contestation and only sometimes as

backlash. The goal is to identify how contestation turns into backlash. It turns out that specific triggers intensify contestation discourses, transforming contestation into a backlash politics. This contribution aims to retain contestation, including contestation about dominant scripts, as a part of normal ordinary politics.

Mikael Rask Madsen's (2020) article *Two Level Politics and Backlash against International Institutions: Evidence form the Politicization of European Human Rights* explores the recent criticism of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Madsen's larger question is whether international institutions are more susceptible to backlash politics compared to domestic institutions. The empirical focus is the reform of the ECtHR in the 2018 Copenhagen Declaration. Madsen suggests that pre-existing commitments to international institutions were quickly given up when significant domestic interests collided with the European court and its practices. Madsen posits that backlash politics against international institutions is transformed when seeking international institutional reform. Entering a collective bargaining process, backlash objectives are changed by the logic of diplomatic negotiation, academic scrutiny, and the interests of the other member states and civil society.

What have we learned about backlash politics in comparison?

The special issue's conclusion, *Theorizing Backlash Politics*, draws together the findings across contributions to discuss their implications for the question of whether there is such a thing as backlash politics. We first consider whether backlash politics is more than simply a regressive form of contested politics, and whether normative issues should be given more attention in the backlash concept. We then consider whether theorising backlash as a common category can generate new insights. Although studying causes of backlash can generate important insights about backlash politics, we suggest that the larger pay-off may come from studying dynamics and consequences of backlash politics. Overall, evidence from this special is no more than suggestive, but we put forth a proto-theory of causes, dynamics, and outcomes of backlash politics that raises important questions for further study.

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ORCID iDs

Karen J Alter https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9508-8938
Michael Zürn https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2243-8380

Notes

1. See the Merriam Webster on-line dictionary definition available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/backlash last visited 4 December 2018.
2. See https://www.dictionary.com/browse/backlash last visited 4 December 2018.
3. Scripts are ideas and institutional prescriptions about the organisation of society. Scripts manifest themselves in political theories, constitutions, party manifestos, and justifications of policies. They consist of actors and notions of authority, a plot, a scenery and notions of temporality and need to speak to central questions about the organisation of society. See Börzel and Zürn (2020).

4. See Mitnick (2017).
5. See Jamil Anderlini (2016).
6. See Shaun Walker (2008).
7. The conclusion to this special issue explains why we eschew Mansbridge and Shames' (2008) general definition of backlash as 'the use of coercive power to regain lost power as capacity', yet, we agree that backlash is 'a process of dynamic resistance' (Mansbridge and Shames, 2008: 626).
8. Scholars have associated nostalgia with group identities including ethnic nationalism (Bonikowski, 2017), imperial nostalgia (Müller, 2004; Kushner, 2007; Nikolayenko, 2008) and masculine nostalgia (MacKenzie and Foster, 2017). This negative connotation finds resonance in historical invocations where nostalgia was seen as 'bad politics' (Natali, 2004). Yet, nostalgia is not per se a bad politics.
9. Scholars who discuss backlash movements sometimes invoke social identity theory. Turner and Oaks (1986) argue that social identity works as 'a mechanism whereby society forms the psychology of its members to pursue its goals and conflicts'. This psychology requires creating:

    a shared psychological field, shared cognitive representations of themselves, their own identity, and the objective world in the form of shared social norms of fact and value . . . [which] makes meaningful the simplest communications and emotions of a public intersubjective life. (Turner and Oaks, 1986)

    Elevating the saliency of 'in-group' categories and forms is a key part of creating this social identity, a point that Mansbridge (1986) also emphasised.
10. Our concept of backlash politics thus builds on the historical-institutionalist notion of reactive sequences (Thelen, 2004; Pierson, 2004). Reactive sequences may be self-reinforcing, but they may also be self-undermining 'mechanisms that contain a change in the opportunities, beliefs, or desires, eroding support for the institution' to the point that the institution itself can be undermined Zürn (2018). For example, Karen Alter (2000) explains that the growing influence of the European Court of Justice generated both positive feedback (the mobilisation of new actors raising new cases) and a backlash of negative feedback (the resistance of national judges who saw their power and influence being undermined by the growing influence of European law). It might, therefore, be the case that backlash dynamics, in the form of reactive sequences, are inherent to certain types of status or power eroding developments.

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