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Year: 2021

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## **The backlash against globalization**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102405>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-207165>

Journal Article

Published Version



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Originally published at:

Walter, Stefanie (2021). The backlash against globalization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1):421-442.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102405>

*Annual Review of Political Science*  
The Backlash Against  
Globalization

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Annu. Rev. Political Sci. 2021. 24:421–42

First published as a Review in Advance on  
February 12, 2021

The *Annual Review of Political Science* is online at  
[polisci.annualreviews.org](http://polisci.annualreviews.org)

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102405>

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### Keywords

globalization, international organizations, public opinion, protectionism, backlash, international cooperation

### Abstract

In recent years, the world has seen a rising backlash against globalization. This article reviews the nature, causes, and consequences of the globalization backlash. It shows that, contrary to a popular narrative, the backlash is not associated with a large swing in public opinion against globalization but is rather a result of its politicization. The increasing influence of globalization-skeptic actors has resulted in more protectionist, isolationist, and nationalist policies, some of which fundamentally threaten pillars of the contemporary international order. Both material and nonmaterial causes drive the globalization backlash, and these causes interact and mediate each other. The consequences are shaped by the responses of societal actors, national governments, and international policy makers. These responses can either yield to and reinforce the global backlash or push back against it. Understanding these dynamics will be an important task for future research.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world has seen a rising backlash against globalization. Growing protectionism, the dismantling of the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) dispute settlement system, and protests against international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are expressions of a backlash against economic globalization. Political globalization is also experiencing pushback as voters and politicians are criticizing the constraints that international institutions place on national sovereignty. International organizations as diverse as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the International Criminal Court, and the European Union have lost important member states, and initiatives for new international agreements have been hard to conclude. Finally, there is also growing backlash against social and cultural globalization, expressed as anti-immigrant rhetoric, antitourism protests, and a general concern about the loss of local cultures in a globalized world.

Not surprisingly, research on the backlash against globalization is booming. This article reviews existing work on the globalization backlash, broadly defined as a significant decrease in support for globalization. It starts by discussing the nature of the phenomenon: What exactly is the globalization backlash, what forms does it take, and what is new about it? This discussion shows that, contrary to the popular narrative, the globalization backlash is not associated with a large swing in public opinion against globalization. Rather, existing preferences have been politicized, and globalization-skeptic actors have become more influential politically in recent years. This has resulted in more protectionist, isolationist, and nationalist policies, some of which fundamentally threaten pillars of the contemporary international order.

The article next explores the causes of the globalization backlash. Rather than debate whether material or nonmaterial causes drive the backlash, it is more productive to explore how these types of factors coevolve, interact, and mediate each other. This can be achieved by studying the relationship and the interplay between these causes, delving deeper into the role of hopes and expectations about what a less globalized counterfactual world would look like, and examining how political actors can strategically mobilize voters with globalization-skeptic attitudes into political action.

The final section turns to the consequences of the globalization backlash. It examines the societal, policy, and international-level responses to the backlash and the dynamics they bring about. I distinguish between responses that yield to and reinforce the backlash and those that push back against the backlash and try to mitigate its causes. The dynamics that unfold are complex, and assessing how these dynamics matter for the long-term consequences of the globalization backlash is a promising avenue for future research.

## EXPLORING THE GLOBALIZATION BACKLASH

What exactly is the nature of the globalization backlash? Surprisingly, the burgeoning literature on the phenomenon spends rather little time defining it. Although most studies agree that Brexit, Trumpism, and the success of populist nationalist parties are all manifestations of the backlash, the usage of this term varies widely. It is used to refer to phenomena ranging from individual support for protectionism to the electoral success of nationalist political parties to antiglobalization protests to unilateral withdrawals from international institutions.

I use the term globalization backlash broadly to denote a significant decrease in public, partisan, or policy support for globalization. This rather general conceptualization allows us to explore the backlash both with regard to the different dimensions of globalization (economic, political, and social/cultural) and with regard to different relevant groups of actors (voters, political intermediaries, and governments). There is significant variation in the extent to which we can observe globalization backlash within and across these categories.

Considering the different dimensions of globalization is important because they cannot always be clearly separated from each other. The dismantling of the WTO dispute settlement system, for example, pushes back against both economic and political globalization, just as the backlash against the European Court of Human Rights combines opposition to political and sociocultural globalization. At the same time, however, backlashes against one dimension of globalization can go hand in hand with support for more globalization in other areas. The climate youth movement, for example, is often skeptical about economic globalization and the environmental costs associated with international trade, but it is also pushing for more political globalization to facilitate a more effective and coordinated global fight against climate change. Others, such as market-liberal Brexiters, oppose the constraints that political globalization places on national sovereignty but whole-heartedly embrace free trade and hence economic globalization.

### A Popular Backlash Against Globalization?

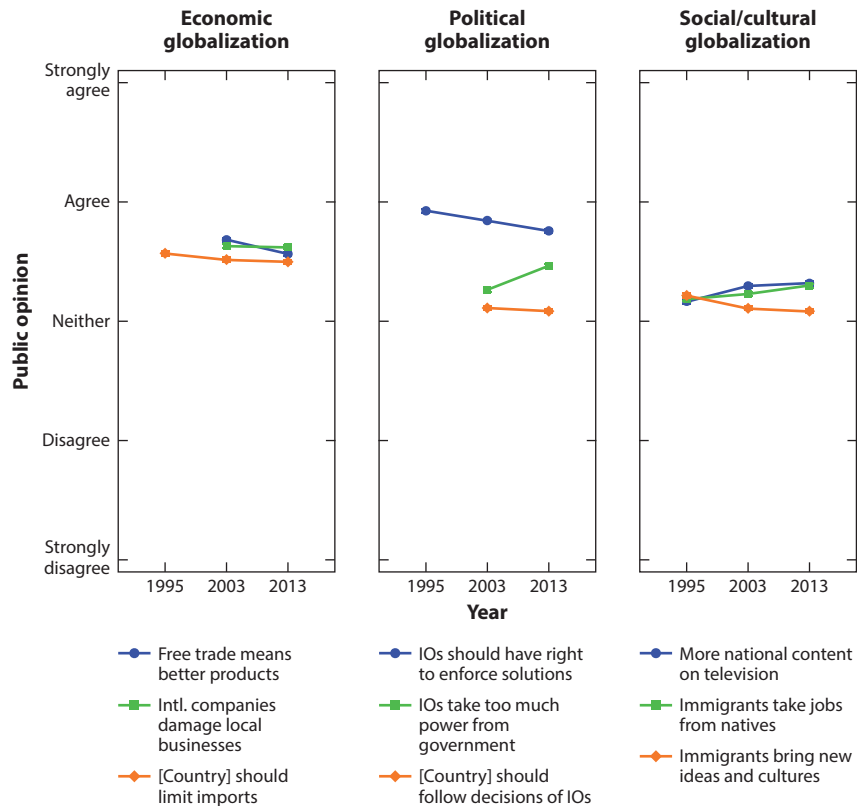
An influential narrative holds that the globalization backlash is rooted in the mass public, where a growing share of losers of globalization increasingly lashes out against globalization in its different guises (e.g., Colantone & Stanig 2019, Hobolt 2016, Norris & Inglehart 2019, Rodrik 2018). The most prominent and consequential examples of this popular backlash are the election successes of nationalist candidates, such as Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and the Brexit referendum vote.

This narrative invokes the image of major shifts in public opinion directed against trade, international cooperation, and immigration. Up close, however, the picture of a large shift of public preferences is less clear than this narrative suggests. Studies that examine broad shifts in globalization-related public opinion over time are relatively rare and provide inconclusive evidence: Whereas some studies find a shift in public opinion against globalization, such as increasingly negative attitudes about international and supranational organizations (Bearce & Jolliff Scott 2019, Bølstad 2014), others show that attitudes toward globalization are surprisingly stable and sometimes even become more positive over time (Kiratli 2020, Mader et al. 2019, Nguyen & Spilker 2019). **Figure 1** illustrates this inconclusive picture using average survey responses from 15 countries<sup>1</sup> at different levels of development across the world on globalization-related topics collected by the International Social Survey Project (ISSP) in 1995, 2003, and 2013. These data are useful because the survey asks the same questions repeatedly to representative population samples over a long period of time and therefore allows us to track change over time.

Despite considerable movement over time, **Figure 1** shows no clear trend in the direction of a backlash. On most dimensions, we see rising skepticism to some aspects of globalization but not others. For example, although respondents have become more skeptical about the benefits of free trade, they have become less positive about limiting imports. Likewise, although support for the right of international organizations to enforce solutions has decreased, it remains at high levels, and although concerns about immigration and support for more national content on television have grown, these trends are not particularly pronounced. There is also some interesting variation between more and less developed countries and between European and non-European countries, but no evidence that the globalization backlash—to the extent that it exists—is a developed-country or European phenomenon. Rather, the public in developed countries has grown more skeptical especially with regard to sociocultural globalization and (to a lesser extent)

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<sup>1</sup>The 15 countries are the Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.



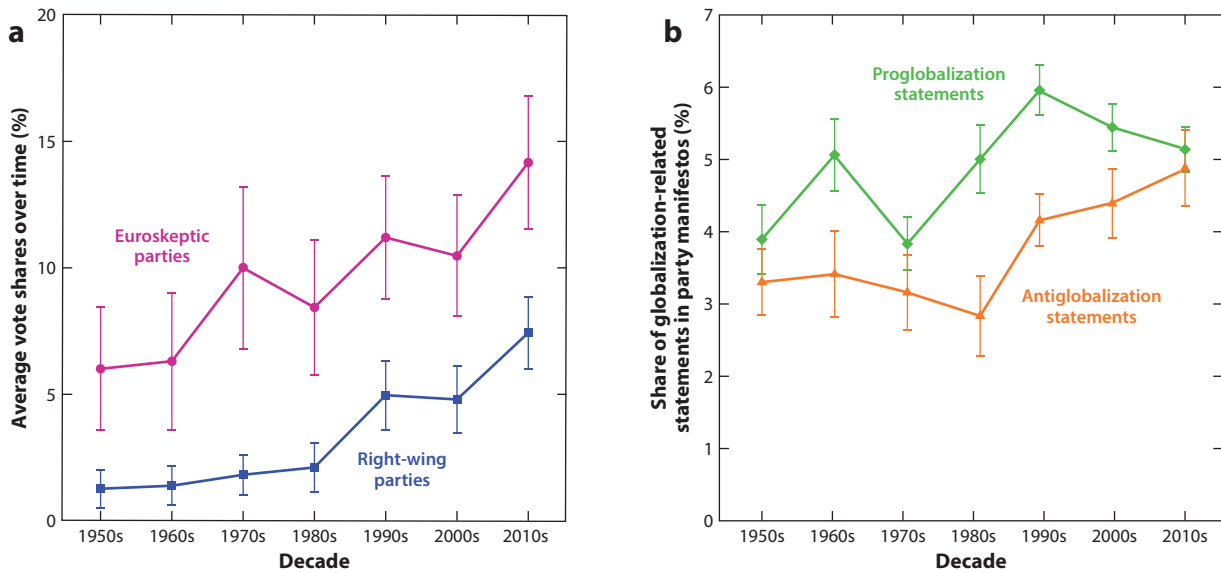
**Figure 1**

Public opinion on globalization-related issues in 15 countries, 1995–2013. Mean responses to the different statements are shown. Data are from the International Social Survey Project. Abbreviation: IOs, international organizations.

economic globalization, whereas in less developed and European countries, skepticism has significantly grown in particular with regard to political globalization. There is no clear backlash against economic globalization in any of these country groups.

Overall, and despite this variation, these data provide little evidence for a large swing in public opinion against globalization. Although a considerable share of the mass public is skeptical of globalization, these assessments have been quite stable over the past two decades. Contrary to the prominent narrative, the so-called popular globalization backlash thus does not seem to be caused by a major shift in public opinion.

What we can observe, however, is a clear backlash in political behavior. There has been significant civil society mobilization against globalization since the 1990s (e.g., Della Porta et al. 2015). This includes movements such as ATTAC (the Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financière et l’Aide aux Citoyens/Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens) but also finds its expression in violent events such as the 2001 protests at the G20 summit in Genoa. More recently, and using new tools such as online petitions, civil society has successfully mobilized against major new international trade agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Canada–Europe Trade Agreement (Meunier & Czesana 2019). Although targets have evolved over time—among the more recent developments



**Figure 2**

Political parties and the globalization backlash. (a) Average vote shares over time. (b) Partisan globalization discourse. Data come from the ParlGov database (Döring & Manow 2019) for vote shares and from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2019) for party discourse. Anti (pro)-globalization statements are calculated as the combined share of negative (positive) statements/quasi-sentences about internationalism, the European Union, and multiculturalism plus positive (negative) statements regarding protectionism and the national way of life as a percentage of the overall number of allocated codes per document.

are protests against overtourism—they underscore that dissatisfaction with different forms of globalization has existed for a while and can be mobilized.

The most consequential form of behavioral popular globalization backlash, however, has been occurring in the voting booth. Votes for economic nationalist and isolationist parties in Western European countries increased substantially between 1985 and 2015 (Colantone & Stanig 2018a, 2019), whereas voters’ support for political parties promoting liberal internationalist policies in the West has almost halved since the 1990s (Trubowitz & Burgoon 2020). Moreover, the share of referendums decided against international cooperation has increased substantially since the 2000s, with every second referendum ending in favor of noncooperation in the 2010s (De Vries et al. 2021). **Figure 2a** illustrates this trend. It shows the average vote share of radical right parties and Euroskeptical parties in national parliaments of 37 mostly Western countries. The figure demonstrates that since the 1990s, these parties with their antiglobalization platforms (Zaslave 2008) have continually increased their vote share, reaching an all-time high in the 2010s.<sup>2</sup> The election of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum are thus but the most prominent examples of a wider trend of globalization backlash in voting behavior.

Although voters’ attitudes about globalization have not changed much, they increasingly vote for candidates, parties, or proposals that oppose globalization. What explains this apparent paradox? An important part of the answer is the increasing politicization of issues related to

<sup>2</sup>Note that I am deliberately not looking at populist parties, which often take center stage in research on the globalization backlash, because populism comes in different flavors, not all of which are opposed to globalization (Verbeek & Zaslave 2017).

globalization. A growing body of research shows that the mass public has become increasingly aware of and polarized on these issues, and that these issues have become much more salient and contested in recent years (De Vries 2018, De Wilde 2011, Hutter et al. 2016, Zürn et al. 2012). While the underlying causes for this change are complex (as I discuss below), once activated, antiglobalization attitudes can turn into powerful heuristics and identities (Grynberg et al. 2019, Hobolt et al. 2020), so that some authors even speak of a new cleavage between globalization winners and losers (Bornschieer 2018, Kriesi et al. 2008). While public preferences have not changed much over the past decades, opposition to globalization has been increasingly mobilized. The globalization backlash in voting behavior thus reflects that globalization skeptics have become more visible and politically consequential (De Vries et al. 2021).

### **Political Parties: Politicizing the Globalization Backlash**

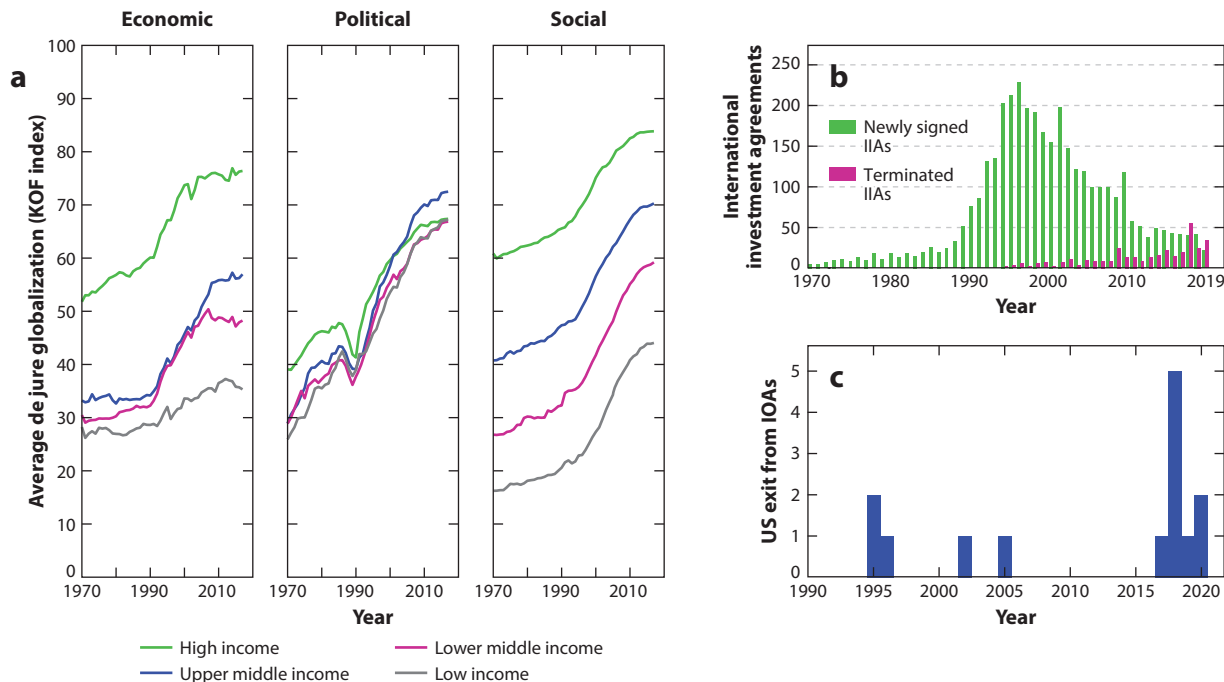
To understand this increasing contestation and politicization of globalization-related issues, we need to look at the supply side of politics. In recent years, parties offering policy programs for those dissatisfied with globalization have flourished (Bornschieer 2018). European integration and globalization more generally have become more salient issues in political discourse (Hooghe & Marks 2009). At the same time, the tone of the debate has become more negative (Burgoon et al. 2017, Trubowitz & Burgoon 2020) as electoral pressure by globalization-skeptic parties has weakened support for proglobalization policies among mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018, Meijers 2017).

**Figure 2b** illustrates the growing importance of globalization-related issues for party politics by looking at partisan discourse since the 1950s. Using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project, it shows the evolution of how the election manifestos of political parties in 56 countries across the world speak about globalization-related issues including protectionism, internationalism, the European Union, multiculturalism, and the national way of life. The increasing average shares of positive and negative party statements about globalization demonstrate the growing salience of globalization-related issues. Moreover, whereas positive statements clearly outweighed negative statements about globalization from the 1980s onward, negative statements have increased markedly since the 1990s, an increase that has been most pronounced among EU countries. By the 2010s, parties in both developed and less developed countries made as many negative statements about globalization as they made positive statements. This decrease in the share of proglobalization statements reflects not only the growing opposition to globalization in partisan rhetoric but also the fact that political parties positively inclined toward globalization have increasingly obscured their positions on these issues (Lacewell 2017).

The emergence of a second axis of party competition has profoundly reshaped party politics in recent decades (Hooghe & Marks 2018; Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008). In particular, it has created new opportunities for political parties to (re)position themselves in this transformed space (De Vries & Hobolt 2020). By emphasizing issues such as immigration, national sovereignty, or European integration as core components of their party programs, they have given voters who have always been opposed to globalization the opportunity to actually express this opposition at the ballot box. This has allowed these parties to successfully challenge established parties and has been a core factor in their success. In recent years, globalization-skeptic parties and politicians also increasingly participate in government (Mudde 2013).

### **Implementing the Globalization Backlash: Policies**

The globalization backlash has also been pronounced with regard to policy. All three dimensions of globalization have faced policy backlash: Protectionist policies have increased sharply



**Figure 3**

Globalization-related policies: developments over time. (a) Average de jure globalization by level of development, 1970–2017, KOF Globalization Index (Gygli et al. 2019). (b) International investment agreements (IIAs), 1970–2019 (UNCTAD 2020). (c) US exit from international organizations and agreements (IOAs), 1991–June 2020 (Cooley & Nexon 2020).

over the past years (WTO 2020, pp. 108–9), the number of international governmental organizations has stagnated across all major world regions after decades of rapid growth (Pevehouse et al. 2019), and international institutions such as international courts face a backlash in both developing and developed countries (Alter et al. 2016, Madsen et al. 2018, Voeten 2019). Some countries also no longer meet core membership criteria, such as democracy or the rule of law (Kelemen 2017).

**Figure 3** illustrates these broad trends. Using data on de jure (policy) globalization from the KOF Globalization Index (Gygli et al. 2019), **Figure 3a** shows that the rapid, decade-long growth in globalization levels started to slow down in the 2000s for economic and political globalization and in the 2010s for social globalization. The slowdown is most pronounced for economic globalization; was accelerated by the global financial crisis, especially with regard to de facto globalization; and can be observed across all three dimensions and across all levels of development. **Figure 3b** shows that in some areas, such as the international investment regime, the backlash is particularly pronounced. The number of newly signed international investment agreements (IIAs) has decreased since the mid-1990s, whereas the number of IIA terminations has strongly increased in recent years (UNCTAD 2020; see also Peinhardt & Wellhausen 2016). In 2017 and 2019, the number of terminated agreements exceeded the number of newly signed agreements.

Rather than an across-the-board globalization backlash in policies, however, **Figure 3** suggests that overall and for some time, de jure globalization has been stagnating at high levels or growing at a lower rate. So far, we have thus largely seen a slowdown, rather than a backlash, in terms of globalization policies that came after a period of accelerated globalization in the 1990s. Notably,



the policy slowdown started long before the more recent electoral successes of populist parties and politicians and likely represents a response to more structural developments, such as geopolitical change, changes in global production regimes, the increasing transfer of authority from nation-states to international institutions, and more generally diminishing returns from further globalization (e.g., Constantinescu et al. 2020, Stephen & Zürn 2019). These developments seem to have dampened enthusiasm for more liberalization across the world.

Two trends are new, however, and suggest that the road ahead may be bumpier than this analysis suggests. First, although unilateral withdrawals from or even the decay and dissolution of international organizations are nothing new (e.g., Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020, Gray 2018, von Borzyskowski & Vabulas 2019), in recent years there has been a growing backlash against major international organizations such as the WTO, the European Union, the International Criminal Court, and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The backlash thus increasingly targets the core institutions that underpin the architecture of the contemporary world order that allowed globalization to emerge in the first place. Second, whereas challenges to international institutions originate in countries across the world, recently some of the principal drivers of the globalization backlash have come from the erstwhile pillars of that order, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. **Figure 3c** shows, for example, that the United States has withdrawn from international agreements at a very high rate during the Trump presidency (Cooley & Nexon 2020). As central nodes in global economic networks, these countries have the potential to weaponize interdependence, which in turn creates incentives for other countries to retreat from these networks (Farrell & Newman 2019). These developments suggest that the current backlash may well have systemic repercussions for the contemporary world order at large (Lake et al. 2021, Pepinsky & Walter 2019).

## CAUSES OF THE GLOBALIZATION BACKLASH

Why is the world witnessing a popular backlash against globalization? There is broad agreement in the literature that the major structural transformations of the last three decades have facilitated its emergence. These transformations include the acceleration of globalization, deindustrialization, technological change, and inequality (Mansfield & Rudra 2021, Milner 2021, Rodrik 2018), as well as noneconomic transformations such as the end of the Cold War, rising immigration levels, cultural value change, and the increasing reach of international organizations into domestic politics (Hooghe & Marks 2009, Norris & Inglehart 2019). This account echoes research in economic history, which finds that the first major globalization backlash in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was also driven by structural transformations such as the integration of commodity markets and mass migration (Obstfeld 2020, O'Rourke 2019).

The importance of these structural transformations is most clearly demonstrated by the host of studies that present compelling evidence that the globalization backlash is stronger in the communities that have been most negatively affected by these structural changes. In regions that face higher trade competition with China and other low-wage countries, radical right-wing parties are more successful (Colantone & Stanig 2018a, Dippel et al. 2015). In such regions in the United States, ideological polarization has increased (Dorn et al. 2020), support for protectionism and restrictive immigration policies is higher (Bisbee et al. 2020), and legislators support more protectionist trade policy proposals (Feigenbaum & Hall 2015, Owen 2017). Likewise, in the United Kingdom's 2016 Brexit referendum, the Leave vote was significantly higher in communities with greater exposure to the "China shock" (Colantone & Stanig 2018b) and rising immigration levels (Goodwin & Milazzo 2017). Financial globalization also matters: Radical right parties tend to thrive in the aftermath of international financial crises (Funke et al. 2016), communities hit harder

by international financial shocks and crises exhibit stronger support for nationalist populist parties (Broz et al. 2021, Gyongyosi & Verner 2018), and the effects of trade shocks on voting behavior have been reinforced by the global financial crisis and the euro crisis (Hutter & Kriesi 2019, Milner 2021). Trade has strong distributive consequences (Rogowski 1989), facilitates inequality (Ha 2012, Lang & Tavares 2018, Menendez et al. 2018), and produces grievances (Palmtag et al. 2018, Rudra 2008) in both developed and developing countries, and these studies suggest that increasingly, this is met with a backlash reaction.

Despite this strong evidence that globalization-related regional developments are associated with backlashes against globalization, it remains contested whether globalization itself is the main driver of the globalization backlash. Other socioeconomic transformations are equally—or perhaps even more—consequential in fostering backlash. For example, several studies find that support for radical right parties and nationalist projects such as Brexit is driven by exposure to automation and the digital revolution (Colantone & Stanig 2019, Frey et al. 2018, Im et al. 2019). In fact, the IMF (2019) concludes in a recent study that the effects of technology on local labor markets are much more pervasive and long-lasting than trade shocks.

These major economic transformations have together increased regional disparities and socioeconomic inequality. Moreover, they have been augmented by a decline in corporate, income, and wealth taxes fostered by financial globalization, which has not only contributed to a rise in inequality but also restricted the state's ability to compensate the losers of these transformations (Rodrik 2018). These developments have provided a breeding ground for backlash (Ansell & Adler 2019, Broz et al. 2021, Burgoon 2013, Engler & Weisstanner 2020, Fetzer 2019).

### **Material or Nonmaterial Causes?**

A second major debate is more fundamental and revolves around the question whether the globalization backlash is predominantly driven by material or nonmaterial concerns (for reviews of this debate, see Golder 2016, Hainmueller & Hopkins 2014, Hobolt & De Vries 2016, Naoi 2020). The background to this debate is the fact that individual-level research is far less conclusive about the importance of economic transformations in driving the globalization backlash than the regional-level analyses suggest.

One group of scholars argues that the globalization backlash is driven by material concerns of globalization losers. Several studies document that individuals who are more exposed to objective globalization risks are more supportive of protectionist and anti-immigrant policies (e.g., Dancygier & Donnelly 2013, Owen & Johnston 2017). Another robust finding is that low-skilled individuals, who face the highest globalization-related labor market risks, exhibit more globalization skepticism (Bearce & Jolliff Scott 2019, Margalit 2012). However, the evidence that those directly hurt by globalization are more likely to vote for antiglobalization parties or proposals is mixed. For example, voters most exposed to negative offshoring risks are not more likely to vote for populist-right parties than low-skilled voters more generally (Rommel & Walter 2018). And in regions exposed to import competition, the unemployed and manual workers are not more likely to vote for nationalist and isolationist parties or projects such as Brexit than people who are more sheltered from globalization pressures (Colantone & Stanig 2018a,b).

In light of this mixed evidence about the role of material self-interest, other authors argue that noneconomic factors such as cultural concerns, identity, ideology, or concerns about sovereignty are much more important drivers of the globalization backlash than material concerns. For example, opposition to economic globalization is stronger among individuals holding right-wing authoritarian, nationalist, and isolationist values and attitudes (Jedinger & Burger 2020, Mansfield & Mutz 2013) and among those concerned about the negative sociotropic effects of trade (Mansfield

& Mutz 2009). Opposition to political and sociocultural globalization is related to concerns about restrictions on national sovereignty (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2014) and a cultural backlash against mainstream culture and neoliberalism (Hopkin & Blyth 2019, Norris & Inglehart 2019). But opposition to globalization can also originate in progressive values. For example, protectionism is stronger among those with other-regarding preferences (Lü et al. 2012) and those concerned about the environment, consumer health, and labor conditions abroad (Duina 2019, Ehrlich 2018).

### Going Beyond the Silos

Taken together, there is evidence for both material and nonmaterial causes of the globalization backlash. Trying to adjudicate between these approaches is not the most fruitful endeavor, however, for two reasons. First, there are methodological issues: Whereas identity, values, beliefs, and subjective concerns are measured rather precisely on the individual level, identifying individuals' objective, respondent-specific material interest is much more difficult (Malhotra et al. 2013, Naoi 2020, Owen & Walter 2017). This coarse measurement of self-interest makes it hard to adjudicate between the different approaches in a balanced manner. Second, it is more promising to study how material and nonmaterial causes relate, how they interact, and under which circumstances and for whom certain causes matter more than others. Researchers have begun to address these questions from three angles.

A first strand of research focuses on the question of how material and nonmaterial causes of the globalization backlash relate. Several studies show that adverse economic developments affect nonmaterial values and attitudes, such as authoritarian values (Ballard-Rosa et al. 2021), xenophobic beliefs (Hays et al. 2019), and cultural grievances (Carreras et al. 2019), as well as trust in governments (Foster & Frieden 2017) and support for democracy (Armingeon & Guthmann 2014). Economic, social, and cultural transformations can also create anxieties that fuel anti-immigrant, antiestablishment, or protectionist attitudes among those who see their subjective social status threatened (Gidron & Hall 2017, Kurer 2020, Mutz 2018). These changes in nonmaterial attitudes in turn then serve as proximate causes for voting behavior. At the same time, cultural values can provide a prism through which economic developments are interpreted. Other studies show that material and nonmaterial causes for the globalization backlash can coexist: Whereas some voters choose nationalist parties or policies based on material self-interest, other voters vote for them for cultural reasons (Ahlquist et al. 2020, Margalit 2012). Moreover, opposition to different dimensions of globalization can be motivated differently, and opposition to one dimension of globalization can reinforce or weaken opposition to other dimensions. For example, Leave voters in the 2016 Brexit referendum saw Brexit as an opportunity not only to limit political and socio-cultural globalization (especially immigration) but also to achieve greater economic globalization, especially more trade openness (Hobolt 2016, Owen & Walter 2017).

A second approach delves deeper into the role of expectations about what the counterfactual less globalized world would look like and what the consequences of protectionist, isolationist, or nationalist policies would be (De Vries 2018). Research has shown, for example, that individuals supporting referendum proposals that aim at retrenching political globalization often are overly optimistic about the consequences of such actions (Grynberg et al. 2019, Sciarini et al. 2015, Walter et al. 2018). Individuals' support for globalization-enabling or -restricting policies also depends on their evaluation of the risks and rewards associated with these policies and their risk orientation (Ehrlich & Maestas 2010, Jurado et al. 2020, Steenbergen & Siczek 2017). A better understanding of where these expectations originate, how they are related to material and non-material factors, and what happens when they are not fulfilled will expand our understanding of the dynamics that underlie the globalization backlash.

A third approach examines when and how previously low-salience issues related to globalization turn into a noticeable globalization backlash (De Vries et al. 2021, Rodrik 2020). It shows that political elites can strategically mobilize voters with globalization-skeptic attitudes by using antiglobalization messages (De Vries & Edwards 2009, Naoi & Urata 2013). The impact of elite cues on public opinion about international issues varies across issues (Guisinger & Saunders 2017) and message tones (Dellmuth & Tallberg 2020). Media coverage that overemphasizes the costs of globalization can induce backlash (Brutger & Strezhnev 2018), but politicization is also driven by external factors such as crises (Hutter & Kriesi 2019) or a changing decision-making context (Hooghe & Marks 2009, Zürn et al. 2012). Yet, politicization can also create support for globalization (De Vries et al. 2021, Risse 2010), so it is important to understand its overall effect.

Finally, for a better understanding of the causes of the globalization backlash, it is also useful to recognize their endogenous nature. The backlash may trigger responses that reinforce or mitigate these causes, and our understanding of how this in turn affects the dynamics of the globalization backlash over time is still limited. The next section sketches out some ideas in this regard.

## RESPONSES AND DYNAMICS

Turning to the consequences of the globalization backlash, this section examines responses to the backlash at the societal, governmental, and international levels, and the dynamics these responses produce. The aim of this section is to suggest a framework for thinking about these responses and dynamics, rather than to review all the possible ways in which they can play out. It classifies responses based on two dimensions: the locus of action and the type of response (see **Table 1**). The first dimension classifies responses based on whether they are predominantly located on the societal level (responses by voters, civil society organizations, or political parties), on the national policy level, or on the international level (government behavior in international negotiations and responses by international organizations). The second dimension distinguishes between responses that yield to and reinforce the backlash and responses that mitigate and push back against the globalization backlash.

This classification is of course a simplification. Responses can straddle and have feedback effects across these categories, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between responses and the backlash itself. But this framework provides a useful heuristic for analyzing the vast and varied responses to the globalization backlash. This section illustrates how it helps us systematically think about some of these responses and the dynamics and feedback effects they produce.

### An Ever-Growing Globalization Backlash? Reinforcing Dynamics

There is some concern that the backlash against globalization may turn into a fundamental challenge for the contemporary international order. This becomes more likely when societal, policy,

**Table 1** The globalization backlash: responses and dynamics

Type of response	Reinforcement	Pushback and mitigation
Societal	Encouraging globalization-skeptic attitudes Pandering to the right	Proglobalization mobilization Deterrence effects
Domestic policy	Antiglobalization policies	Policies aimed at mitigating causes of backlash
International	Government responsiveness in international negotiations International organization responsiveness	Nonaccommodation in international negotiations Enhancing legitimacy of international institutions

and international responses reinforce the backlash and its underlying grievances, creating self-perpetuating dynamics. Such dynamics may come about in various ways.

There are several possible reinforcement dynamics on the societal level. With regard to voters, a number of studies document that successful globalization backlash—such as widespread antiglobalization mobilization, electoral successes of globalization-skeptic parties, or successful policy backlash—can intensify voters' antiglobalization attitudes and preferences. For example, informing individuals about the increasing use of capital controls by other countries makes them more supportive of restrictions on international financial flows (Steinberg et al. 2020). Regarding backlash against political globalization, several studies document that voters who think that Brexit is going well for the United Kingdom are significantly more likely to support an EU exit for their own country (De Vries 2017; Walter 2020, 2021). Electoral successes of radical parties and candidates such as Donald Trump legitimize their views and thus encourage those sharing these views to support them more openly (Bischof & Wagner 2019, Bursztyn et al. 2017). As a result of these reinforcing dynamics, antiglobalization attitudes can become stronger and more vocal over time. Mainstream parties also have a role to play. There is growing evidence that electoral successes of radical right parties induce mainstream parties to shift their policy positions in a more globalization-skeptic, anti-immigrant, and protectionist direction (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018, Meijers 2017). As these shifts give antiglobalization positions more moral and political weight, they intensify the globalization backlash and further politicize the cultural axis of party competition.

Responsiveness on the national policy level implies the implementation of protectionist, isolationist, and anti-immigrant policies, which in turn deepen the policy-based globalization backlash. Such policies can be motivated by policy makers' genuine preferences for rolling back globalization or by the hope that such policies may calm the waters and reduce backlash over time. This is by no means assured, however. For one, policies such as restrictive immigration reforms or Brexit increase the salience of these issues and politicize them further (Abou-Chadi & Helbling 2018, Hobolt et al. 2020). Moreover, such policies often also reverberate internationally. One consequence is that other countries are likely to retaliate against protectionist policies (Irwin 2017), but protectionist policies in one state can also reduce support for proglobalization policies, such as openness to foreign investment abroad (Chilton et al. 2017), and negative rhetoric about trade can erode confidence in the trade regime overall and entice other states to violate trade rules (Carnegie & Carson 2019). Efforts by one state to renegotiate more advantageous terms of international cooperation can spark similar demands from other governments (Walter 2020). Finally, globalization-skeptic governments, such as successive British pro-Brexit governments and the Trump administration, have been successful in undermining and dismantling existing institutions and structures that underpin the contemporary global order, but they have largely failed to replace these institutions with functioning alternatives (Drezner 2019). The question is who will move in to fill the void and what the reactions to the newly emerging structures will be. For example, one possibility is that big businesses will use the opportunity to tailor new rules in their favor (Johns et al. 2019). Another is a more powerful role for China (Weiss & Wallace 2021). Such dynamics can reinforce grievances that have been associated with the emergence of the globalization backlash, feeding the very dynamics that underlie the politicization of globalization on the societal level.

Finally, there are also international-level responses to the globalization backlash. Confronted with globalization-skeptic publics at home, governments often tread more carefully in international negotiations and show higher levels of responsiveness to their constituents' interests (Hagemann et al. 2017; Schneider 2019, 2020). While such a response may help address globalization-skeptic publics at home, it makes decision making on the international level more

difficult (Hooghe & Marks 2009). The failure to successfully complete the 2019 Madrid climate summit or the difficulties of devising EU-wide responses to the euro, refugee, and COVID-19 crises are cases in point. Finally, international organizations themselves can strategically respond to the globalization backlash (Bressanelli et al. 2020). For example, the European Court of Justice has become more restrictive in its reasonings and rulings to better align with growing public opposition to free movement of people (Blauberger et al. 2018), and the European Commission withdraws legislative proposals more frequently when faced with backlash (Reh et al. 2020). These responses are double-edged swords, however, as they may invite further opposition in the long term by compromising the input and output legitimacy of these institutions.

## **Pushing Back Against the Globalization Backlash**

Although the backlash against globalization has received much attention, the descriptive analysis at the beginning of this article showed that large groups of people and political parties remain supportive of globalization. It is thus not surprising that there is considerable resistance against the globalization backlash. Some of this pushback directly counteracts globalization-skeptic positions and policies, whereas other responses try to mitigate the backlash by addressing the grievances that underlie the backlash.

On the societal level, one of the starkest developments in recent years has been the emergence of vocal civil society organizations that counter-mobilize in support of international cooperation, against xenophobia, and for progressive values more generally (Roth 2018). Examples include the pro-EU movements that sprang up in the United Kingdom and across the EU-27 states after the Brexit referendum; the Swiss group Operation Libero, which helped derail several referendums aimed at limiting immigrant rights and Switzerland's international commitments; and the climate youth movement, which is loudly demanding more international environmental cooperation worldwide. Another important development has been pushback by political actors. Increasingly, political parties (especially green and social liberal parties; see Bakker et al. 2015) and politicians (such as New Zealand's prime minister Jacinda Ardern or France's president Emmanuel Macron) vocally support cosmopolitan and international stances and emphasize their opposition to nationalist ideas and policies. This reflects the growing importance of the demarcation–integration axis of party competition (Kriesi et al. 2008). Overall, what we can observe is a strong politicization of all issues related to globalization, rather than a one-sided backlash (De Vries et al. 2021). At the same time, we sometimes also see some surprising absences of pushback. One major puzzle, for example, is why businesses, especially export-oriented businesses and those embedded in global value chains, have not been more vocally opposing disruptive backlash policies such as the increase in US protectionism or the risk of a no-deal Brexit in the United Kingdom.

On the domestic policy level, the most prominent debate about how to push back against the globalization backlash revolves around compensation for the losers of globalization and other economic transformations. The goal is to “re-embed” liberalism (Ruggie 1982) into society and to thus regain losers' support for sustained globalization by redistributing its welfare gains (Mansfield & Rudra 2021). This could occur through a general expansion of welfare policies, more or better regulation, or place-based policies, which might be better suited to mitigating globalization-related grievances associated with regional economic decline (Broz et al. 2021, Rodríguez-Pose 2018). Several studies suggest that social welfare or public employment programs that cushion the risks of globalization and reduce the inequality it produces can increase public support for economic openness (Hays et al. 2005, Nooruddin & Rudra 2014), and reduce nativist sentiment and voting for radical right parties (Crepaz & Damron 2009, Swank & Betz 2003). Moreover, globalization losers strongly support redistributive policies (Walter 2010, 2017). Nonetheless, the

compensation strategy faces two challenges. First, globalization winners are often unwilling to share their gains from globalization (Linardi & Rudra 2020, Walter 2017), which is only one reason why governments' room to implement sweeping reforms is constrained (Beramendi et al. 2015). Second, and perhaps more importantly, the effectiveness of this strategy is unclear. The globalization backlash has not been limited to countries that lack a strong welfare state; European countries with mature welfare states, such as Denmark and Sweden, have also seen highly successful radical right parties. Although there is no strong backlash against economic globalization in these countries, they do experience strong backlash against political and sociocultural globalization. This suggests that it may be hard to find an easy, compensation-based remedy that addresses grievances on all globalization dimensions (Goodman & Pepinsky 2021).

Finally, at the international level, governments have pushed back against attempts by individual countries to extract better terms of cooperation. For example, the EU-27 governments have consistently refused to accommodate Britain's requests to enjoy many of the benefits of EU membership while being freed of its obligations after Brexit. Such nonaccommodation is costly, but it counters the globalization backlash by reducing support for it (Chopin & Lequesne 2020; Walter 2020, 2021; Walter et al. 2018). Countries willing to cooperate have also tried to work around policy backlash and to uphold cooperation. For example, several countries are supporting the creation of a multiparty interim appeal arrangement designed to resolve WTO disputes as long as the United States is blocking the functioning of the WTO's dispute settlement system. International organizations themselves also respond to the globalization backlash. Most notable are efforts to enhance the legitimacy of international organizations (Gronau & Schmidtke 2016, Tallberg & Zürn 2019, Zaum 2013) by changing their communication patterns (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018, Moschella et al. 2020) or establishing parliamentary bodies (Rocabert et al. 2019). By improving both their procedural standards and performance quality, international organizations can enhance their perceived legitimacy among member states and the public (Anderson et al. 2019).

In sum, we can observe pushback in a variety of forms and at different levels of analysis. To what extent these attempts to mitigate or push back against the globalization backlash will ultimately be successful, and how they interact with those responses that reinforce the backlash, are open questions and comprise an important and promising avenue for future research.

## CONCLUSION

What is the backlash against globalization, and what are its causes and consequences? This review has examined the backlash across different dimensions and has made three main arguments.

First, the globalization backlash manifests itself in electoral successes of globalization-skeptic parties; in a more negative tone in partisan discourse about globalization; and in an increase in policies designed to stop or curtail economic, political, and/or sociocultural globalization. However, contrary to the popular narrative, the globalization backlash is not driven by a large swing in public opinion against globalization. Rather, existing antiglobalization attitudes have been politicized and become more politically consequential.

Second, as this implies, it is important to understand not only why voters oppose globalization but also when and how this opposition becomes activated and when it becomes politically salient. Our understanding of the causes of the globalization backlash can be improved by moving the focus of the debate from the relative importance of material versus nonmaterial causes of the backlash to the interplay of these causes and their importance for the politicization of globalization-related issues.

Third, to understand the consequences of the globalization backlash, we should focus on the responses it generates and the feedback effects these responses produce. Such societal, domestic

policy, and international-level responses can either yield to and reinforce the backlash or push back against it and aim at mitigating its underlying causes. Understanding the dynamics this produces will be an important task for future research.

Although this review has focused on the backlash against globalization, it is vital to recognize that this backlash does not stand in isolation. It is occurring amid other major developments, such as a populist backlash against elites, growing threats against liberal democracy, and geopolitical changes like the rise of China. How these challenges are causally linked with the globalization backlash, how they interact with it, whether they fuel or quell the dynamics surrounding it, and whether these developments will turn the backlash against globalization into a serious threat for the contemporary international order are questions that future research should seek to answer.

### SUMMARY POINTS

1. In recent years, the world has seen a rising backlash against all three dimensions of globalization: economic, political, and sociocultural globalization.
2. This backlash is not associated with major shifts in public opinion against globalization but rather with a growing politicization of antiglobalization attitudes and political influence of antiglobalization actors.
3. The globalization backlash manifests itself in electoral successes of globalization-skeptic parties, in a more negative tone in partisan discourse about globalization, and in an increase in protectionist, isolationist, or nationalist policies designed to stop or curtail economic, political, and/or sociocultural globalization.
4. Both material and nonmaterial causes drive the globalization backlash, and it is important to understand how these causes coevolve, interact, and mediate each other. This can be achieved by studying the relationship and the interplay between these causes, delving deeper into the role of expectations about what a counterfactual less globalized world would look like, and examining how political actors strategically mobilize voters with globalization-skeptic attitudes into political action.
5. The consequences of the globalization backlash are shaped by the societal, policy, and international-level responses to the backlash and the dynamics they bring about. Some responses yield to and reinforce the backlash, whereas others push back against the backlash and try to mitigate its causes.
6. The globalization backlash is occurring amid other major challenges to the contemporary global order, such as the populist backlash against elites, growing threats against liberal democracy, and geopolitical changes like the rise of China.

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Ryan Brutger, Lori Crasnic, Silvia Decadri, Valentin Lang, Giorgio Malet, Marco Martini, Tabea Palmtag, and Rachel Wellhausen for helpful comments and the students in my



“Understanding the Antiglobalization Backlash” seminar for inspiring discussions. Lisa Rogensmoser and Reto Mitteregger provided excellent research assistance. This article has benefited from funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program grant agreement No. 817582 (ERC Consolidator Grant DISINTEGRATION).

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## Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Political Science* articles may be found at <http://www.annualreviews.org/errata/polisci>