

# Globalization Backlash

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## Abstract

Backlash against globalization has become a defining feature of the first decade of the twenty-first century, from the Seattle riots in fall 1999 to the recent riots and strikes within Europe to protest government austerity measures. The global financial crisis has exacerbated nascent backlash and contributed to its spread. Backlash against globalization within global power centers takes two forms: a left leaning collective public protest against global capitalism and a right leaning defense of national sovereignty. The left variation occurs outside of standard political institutions, which is often, but not exclusively, NGO (nongovernmental organization) driven and usually involves expressive public demonstrations and disruption; the right variant occurs within institutions, particularly nationalist political parties and electoral systems. The right and the left share a mutual animus toward globalization and progress narratives. The left variant receives more media attention; the right is more durable as it is embedded within national political systems. Scholars acknowledge “globalization backlash.” Yet, the phenomenon has been under-theorized as well as under-empiricized and covers a range of disparate issues. A first step in a research agenda *vis-a-vis* the concept would be to establish the parameters of the phenomenon. What forms of social action might we attribute to the cultural, social, economic, and political forces of globalization, and which actions have other causes? The second issue is to identify the differences between institutional and extra-institutional backlashes. The former is potentially more enduring, whereas the latter opens the door to iterations of public violence.

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization describes a process that began as early as the 1300s when traders left their native lands and set sail in search of tea and spices [for an overview, see Osterhammel and Petersson (2005)]. The hallmarks of a modern globalization, trans-border flow of capital, goods, persons, and at a later stage information began in the “Age of Capital (Hobsbawm, 1975)” —the period between 1848 and 1875, when improvements in transportation and communication made global exchange possible and relatively efficient. The activities that constitute globalization have deep and broad historical

antecedents. Globalization as a discursive frame for discussing global trade and commerce has gained currency relatively recently. Sociologists (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Guillen, 2001) have documented that a public “discourse” around globalization emerged in the mid-1980s and accelerated in the late 1990s, as evidenced by an increase in the number of media mentions as well as academic articles and monographs.

### FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

Scholars, particularly economists, viewed globalization as a correlate of democracy and by extension as a public good (Eichengreen & Leblang, 2008). By the 1990s, positive discussion of globalization declined and negative discussion dramatically increased (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005, p. 41). Guillen (2001) identified five recurrent themes in the academic literature on globalization. All themes were in the form of questions, such as, is globalization “really happening”; producing “convergence”; creating “global culture.” Answers were inconclusive with committed academic partisans on both sides. Among these themes (Guillen, 2001), the question as to whether globalization “undermines the authority of the nation-state” is most germane to issues of backlash. Citizens view their national states as guarantors of social, political, physical, and cultural security. Whether globalization threatens the markers of collective security—borders, labor markets, social welfare, physical safety, and identity—is subject to continual academic debate. Among ordinary citizens, the perception that globalization is a threat is wide spread and generates varieties of conflict.

Globalization’s entry into the popular vernacular coincides with the beginning of a backlash against globalization that took multiple forms. From the Seattle riots in fall 1999 that protested the World Trade Organization’s (WTO’s) annual meeting to 2011s Occupy Wall Street, to the recent riots and strikes within Europe to protest government austerity measures, backlash against globalization has become a defining feature of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The global financial crisis has exacerbated nascent backlash and contributed to its spread.

During the millennium period (from the late 1990s to the early 2000s), economists (Rodrik, 1997; Stiglitz, 2002) and legal scholars (Chua, 2003) began to identify the downside or “discontents” of globalization. Rodrik (1997) asked *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?* and warned that “social disintegration” is a potential cost of global “economic integration.” Globalization backlash in the developing world, of the sort that occupies Stiglitz and Chua, manifests itself in anti-Western sentiment and random acts of violence rather than through formal organization. James (2008) identifies religious fundamentalism as a core dimension of backlash. Huntington’s (1998) “clash

of civilization” between the West and the non-Protestant rest, even though it has global and economic components, remains more fully articulated on the local and cultural levels. The spectacular carnage of September 11, 2001 when eight transnational actors destroyed the World Trade Center, the quintessential symbol of global capitalism, focused global public attention on the collateral cultural, as well as political and economic, risks attendant on globalization (Keohane, 2002). September 11, despite its horror, remains an outlier. If we look across the contemporary Middle East, fragile political institutions, rather than economic institutions, encourage religious fundamentalism (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

In contrast to the developing world and the Middle East, backlash against globalization within global power centers takes two forms: a left leaning collective public protest against global capitalism and a right leaning defense of national sovereignty. The left variation occurs outside of standard political institutions, which is often, but not exclusively, NGO (nongovernmental organization) driven and usually involves expressive public demonstrations and disruption (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Keck & Sikkink, 1998); the right variant occurs within institutions, particularly nationalist political parties and electoral systems (Berezin, 2009, 2012, 2013). The right and the left view themselves as worlds apart ideologically, yet they have a surprising convergence in their animus toward globalization and contemporary progress narratives. The left variant is arguably more colorful and tends to receive more media attention; the right is more durable as it is embedded within national political systems.

## CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH

### MOBILIZING AGAINST CAPITALISM

The extra-institutional push against globalization began dramatically in Seattle, Washington in 1999 when a coalition of labor and social justice activists staged multi-city protests against the WTO’s annual ministerial meeting. The violence and police riots that ensued, labeled as the “Battle of Seattle,” focused international media attention on the antiglobalization movement (Tarrow, 2005, pp. 170–171). Canadian journalist, Naomi Klein’s 1999 book *NO Logo* became a seminal document for the nascent antiglobalization movement.

In June 1998, in Paris, Bernard Cassen, editor of the French *Le Monde Diplomatique* and an assortment of trade unionists, intellectuals, and human rights activists, founded ATTAC (Action pour une taxe Tobin d’aide aux citoyens) (Berezin, 2009, pp. 120–121). ATTAC was an organizational response to an appeal published in *Le Monde Diplomatique* to “disarm the markets.” The

Tobin Tax, named after James Tobin, the Noble Prize-winning American economist, proposed to tax international monetary transactions to moderate the effects of exchange speculation. ATTAC named its weekly email newsletter *Sand in the Wheels* after Tobin's metaphor that an international finance tax would, like sand in the wheels of a car, slow the advance of global capitalism. Initially, less noticed than the events of Seattle, ATTAC became active in Paris in the late 1990s and soon spread throughout Europe and beyond [see essays in Della Porta and Tarrow (2005)].

By the year 2000, ATTAC began to organize public protest events (Berezin, 2009, pp. 136–138). Its first large mobilization occurred in December 2000 in Nice at the meeting of the European Council of Ministers. ATTAC's target was the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights, an addendum to the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaty, known as the *Treaty of Nice*.

The European Council unveiled the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* at its biannual meeting in December 2000 at Nice, France. ATTAC mobilized 50,000 persons to travel to Nice to engage in 3 days of public protest against the Charter. ATTAC described the mobilization as a *euromanifestation*. The Nice mobilization consisted of 2 days of conferences, forums, and marches. It was an extra-parliamentary attack on the expanding process of Europeanization that the left *and* right populists viewed as a form of globalization.

ATTAC campaigned against the *Charter* with the slogan, "Another Europe Is Possible." It described the European Union as a "motor of liberal globalization," which de-personalized and de-socialized capital transactions. ATTAC argued that the new *Charter*, while it protected individuals against the abuses that are constitutive of unbridled market forces, was fundamentally antilabor, antisocial, and antinational. The weakening of social rights was among ATTAC's principal concerns—specifically Article 15 that ensured the right to look for work, not the right to work, which the 1961 *European Social Charter*, as well as its 1996 amended version, guaranteed.

ATTAC's impact and presence began to dissipate in the mid-2000s although it still exists as an activist social network (<http://www.attac.org/en>). The principle legacy of ATTAC is the World Social Forum (WSF), held annually at the same time as the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos. The first WSF was held in 2001 in Porto Allegro, Brazil. As a left counterpoint to the WEF, the WSF's annual meeting travels from one developing world location to another and is a relatively enduring annual moment that advocates for global social justice. "Occupy Wall Street" movement bears a kinship relation to these earlier movements. While antiglobalization movements have provided grist for the academic social movements mill, their targets, global capitalism and financial markets, are too broad for these movements to be efficacious. Their main value is expressive. Left antiglobalization movements generate

a mood of discontent that other more narrowly goal-oriented groups may capitalize on for good or bad.

#### PROTECTING NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

The electoral salience of right wing and nationalist political parties in Western and Eastern Europe has provided a more enduring and institutionally embedded instance of backlash against globalization. Up until the early 1970s, Western Europe was prosperous and democratic in spirit as well as political practice. Post-war Europe had managed to combine sustained economic growth with broad social welfare programs. Eichengreen (2007) provides the most cogent account of this much told history from the perspective of political development and economy. In the 1970s, the post-war social contract began to break down as the effects of the first oil crisis began to diffuse globally. European economic stagnation soon followed.

By the early 1980s, European leaders such as Margaret Thatcher in England and France's first socialist president Francois Mitterrand began to feel the economic effects of lack of national competitiveness in now globalizing markets. Both leaders privatized and de-nationalized former state businesses in an attempt to remain economically competitive. The beginning of what is now termed *neo-liberalism* in Europe was a response to global market pressures. The second big trans-European response was the 1992 Maastricht Treaty designed to further consolidate European economic integration in an attempt to remain competitive and prosperous. The culmination of the integration project was the introduction of the common currency, the *euro*, in 2002. The acceleration of European integration in the 1990s was Europe's attempt to confront the challenges of globalization. Despite the occasional national referenda, Europeanization was an elite-driven top-down process that became synonymous in the popular imagination with globalization. Rodrik (1997, pp. 41–45) recounts the public opposition to and strikes against the Maastricht in France, which squeaked to ratification with a popular vote of 51%.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the communist left and terrorist groups such as the *Red Brigades* in Italy and the *Baader-Meinhof (Red Army Faction)* in Germany posed political threats to national security as they battled post-war European capitalism and capitalists. The European terrorist left was gradually subdued by the end of the 1980s just as left political parties were beginning to lose electoral salience. It was at that historical moment that the European right began to emerge as a political force. The French National Front founded in 1972 had its first electoral breakthrough in the first round of the Parliamentary election in 1986 when it attained 9.8% of the vote. The French right initially targeted immigrants, not capitalism, as

a problem. The right grew sporadically within different countries across Europe and political scientists have mapped its progress.

Standard analysis of the emergent European right that focused upon the early right's initial anti-immigrant positions missed two important developments: first, during the 1990s, the right was becoming a voice of nationalism against Europeanization; and second, the right was also developing a respectable and broadly appealing platform that was increasingly anti-Europe and antiglobalization. Berezin (2009, 2013) documents this progression. The rejection of the proposed European constitution in both France and the Netherlands crystallized the anti-Europe and the antiglobal sentiments that were simmering just below the surface of European national politics. In France, the coalition against the European constitution consisted of ATTAC, the declining French Communist Party, and the National Front. While these three groups did not act in concert as they were in theory ideologically opposed to one another, they shared the same position on the European constitution that they viewed as locking in the new neo-liberal, market-driven European polity. A principal propaganda trope of the anti-constitution groups was the claim that "Polish plumbers" would migrate into France and take way high paying jobs from the French. The "Polish plumber" argument derived from the service clause in the European draft constitution. Known as the *Bolkestein directive*, the clause liberalized labor mobility for low level service employees (Grossman & Woll, 2011). The mobilization against the European constitution in France solidified the antiglobalization coalition that supported national labor forces and national production and made "protectionism" part of the European economic vocabulary.

The antipathy to Europe with its focus upon global economic competition was becoming increasingly salient as the first decade of the new century progressed. The European sovereign debt crisis that gained momentum beginning in spring 2010 with the failure of the Greek economy was the tipping point in the trans-European backlash against globalization (Berezin, 2012). In the few years that have elapsed since the spring of 2010, European national politics have exhibited volatility, and austerity riots have become the norm in Mediterranean Europe. The 2009 European Parliamentary elections revealed a center right in ascendance and a breakthrough for the anti-Europe far right (<http://www.euractiv.com/eu-elections/2009-2014-centre-right-european-linksdossier-188510>). Since the spring of 2010, there have been 12 Parliamentary elections in the former Western Europe, the core of the *eurozone*. Volatility and anti-Europe backlash as evidenced by the electoral surge of right parties characterized these Parliamentary elections (Election figures at <http://eed.nsd.uib.no/webview>). For example, in June 2010, the right wing, *Party of Freedom*, came in third



place in the Dutch parliamentary elections. Four days later, a Flemish nationalist and secessionist party captured a large portion of votes in a Belgian parliamentary election. Three months later, a Swedish right populist party, the *Swedish Democrats*, received 5.7% of the vote and became eligible for a seat in the Congress. In Finland, the populist and anti-Europe party *True Finns* received 19% of the vote, an increase of 15% from what they had received in the 2007 Parliamentary election.

The French Presidential election and the Greek Parliamentary elections in spring 2012 represent the apex of the anti-Europe and antiglobalization backlash in Europe. François Hollande, a Socialist, was elected President but France's anti-Europe right and left extremes carried the first round of the election. Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front, France's and Europe's most enduring right parties came in third place with 17.9% of the vote. She based her campaign France exiting the *eurozone*, europhobia, and protecting French industry and workers. Le Pen captured a larger portion of the vote than Jean-Luc Mélenchon's hastily assembled Left Front coalition, which was no friendlier to the *eurozone* than the extreme right. Taken together, the two candidates from the left and right extremes of the French political spectrum received the same percentage of votes as the two leading presidential candidates who were both committed to solving the European debt crisis.

During the same period as the French elections and campaign, Greece was waiting for a European bailout from its national debt crisis and struggling with its version of austerity. By the day of the May 5 election, the major question in Greece was whether the Socialist party would oust the austerity-focused/Germany-friendly center-right ruling party. The Greek elections defied all expectations. The extreme left *Syriza* party, and the avowedly neo-Nazi *Golden Dawn* party, outperformed the traditional left and center-right parties. The *Golden Dawn* party with its harsh Neo-Nazi symbols and violent anti-immigrant and anti-Europe agenda even managed to oust *Laos*—the long-standing Greek right party.

#### KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Until the sovereign debt crisis is solved, Europe remains the site of the most active backlash against globalization. The European form of backlash taints the spirit if not the practice of democracy in Europe and is insidious because it occurs at the ballot box as well as in the streets. The left mobilization against globalization tends toward the idealistic and utopian and focuses on social justice and workers' rights. Its vagueness in programmatic terms is also problematic as it leaves *lacunae* for all sorts of political idea and programs to enter.

Scholars discuss “globalization backlash” and acknowledge its existence. Yet, the phenomenon has been under-theorized as well as under-empiricized and covers a range of disparate issues (Westaway, 2012). A first step toward establishing a research agenda *vis-a-vis* the concept would be to establish the parameters of the phenomenon. What forms of social action do we wish to attribute to the cultural, social, economic, and political forces of globalization, and which actions have other causes? For example, while globalization makes international terrorism possible, do we really want to attribute religious fundamentalism and extremism to globalization? The second issue that is important is to identify the differences between institutional and extra-institutional backlashes. The former is potentially more enduring, whereas the latter opens the door to iterations of public violence.

As Guillen (2001) demonstrates measuring the effects of globalization, let alone backlash to globalization, is both difficult and ambiguous. Yet, as backlash often challenges democratic practices and sentiments, it is important to think about calibrating it. One method would be to target groups both within and outside of institutional frameworks who point to globalization as a source of grievance and to examine the specific contexts within which their claims occur. This would require a more on the ground approach to thinking about globalization instead of the reliance upon broad macroeconomic indicators that frequently make up the corpus of evidence in these discussions.

Backlash to globalization, whether inside or outside of institutions, is a constitutive feature of what I (Berezin, 2009, 2013) have described elsewhere as a “post-security” polity. This is a new political space in which the territorial bases of security—political, cultural, economic, and environmental—have eroded, if not ended. Social scientists need to take a hard look at where global actors might find new forms of security. Backlash, paradoxically, is a place to begin.

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