

# T04P02 / Sustainable Development and Backlash Politics: Which Implications for Public Policies?

**Topic :** T04 / PUBLIC PROBLEM, SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND AGENDA SETTING

**Chair :** Carla Tomazini (University of Warwick)

**Second Chair :** Catia Grisa (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul - UFRGS)

**Third Chair :** Jean-Francois LE COQ (CIRAD - CIAT)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The terms “backlash” and “backlash politics” are essential elements of the contemporary political landscape. They are often used to denote conservative mobilization against policies supporting human rights, feminism, and LGBTQ+ rights. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have not been left unscathed: they are perceived as a hegemonic global political program, constituting an increasingly questioned and even contested agenda (Munro, 2023). In various contexts, the movements against the SDGs have expressed their disagreement through a multitude of channels, ranging from citizens taking to the streets to officials at the highest level taking a stand, including presidents. Their opposition appears through the explicit rejection of certain institutional notions and recommendations that are currently considered predominant at different levels, whether locally, nationally, regionally, or internationally (Alter & Zürn, 2020). These movements question fundamental principles such as human rights, the importance of protecting the environment and ecosystems, and the necessity of vaccines for public health, as well as social advances such as gender parity and women’s rights. More important, they also challenge the policies and measures implemented under the 2030 Agenda, often arguing that these initiatives compromise national sovereignty, hinder economic development, or threaten cultural and traditional values.

This panel aims to explore the dynamics of backlash and to understand its implications and its effects on public policies in terms of sustainable development. It will contribute, both theoretically and empirically, to this emerging literature (Alter & Zürn, 2020; Patashnik, 2019; Paternotte, 2021; Patterson, 2023; Snyder, 2020), by focusing at the same time on the analysis of backlash actors, their mobilizing forces and their ideas, as well as on the policies they dismantle, circumvent, or adopt when they come to power. These analyses will consider the constraints and requirements of sustainable development, addressing issues related to family farming, agroecological practices, climate change adaptation, biodiversity preservation, and the fight against inequalities regarding gender, education, health, and the recognition of traditional communities and indigenous knowledge. Above all, this issue aims to examine the contextual specificities of the emergence of these backlash actors, movements, and policies, as well as their crystallization and diffusion.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel seek to explore backlash politics, particularly how opposition to sustainable development goals (SDGs) manifests in contemporary public policies, across different political areas and at different scales (local, national, regional, and international). We call for innovative contributions and little-explored perspectives. Proposals may include case studies of specific actors or movements link to SDD., analyses of backlash strategies, and assessments of how these actors challenge existing policies or introduce alternative agendas when in power. Papers should be theoretically grounded and empirically rich, contributing to academic discourse dissecting for instance how ideas, institutions, and interests are at stake (Hall, 1997; Palier & Surel, 2005; Patterson, 2023). Topics of interest include backlash-driven modifications in public policy areas such as family farming, agroecology, climate change adaptation, biodiversity, and social equity—particularly regarding gender, cultural preservation, indigenous rights, and public health. This panel is particularly interested in research that examines the local, national, or regional contexts in which these backlash movements arise and in understanding how their ideas spread and gain traction. Comparative studies and papers offering a global or cross-regional perspective on the backlash against SDGs are especially encouraged, as they can help illuminate patterns and variations in backlash politics across different societies.

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## Session 1

Wednesday, July 2nd 16:00 to 18:00 (A5)

### **(Virtual) Celebrating in the Battlefield: The Politics of Framing Equality on International Women's Day**

Isabelle Engeli (University of Exeter)

Rebekka Kesberg (University of Amsterdam)

Liza Mugge (University of Amsterdam)

While gender equality has gained significant traction across the globe, it has also been increasingly politicised. Anti-gender opposition has dramatically expanded. At the same time, critiques have been raised among pro-equality actors about the lack of inclusivity in the vision of equality that too often remains centred on white cis women. As a result, the definition of gender equality itself has become highly contentious in the public sphere. At the one end of the spectrum, there are actors who advocate for a fully inclusive and intersectional definition of equality. At the other end, there are actors who contend that equality has gone too far or in the wrong direction.

This paper investigates how equality is strategically defined by both pro- and anti- equality actors, at a snapshot in time; the highly symbolic moment of International Women's Day. We analyse how equality is framed, whose equality it is, and what the ways forward are that are promoted by these actors. International Women's Day is a celebration of the achievements toward equality and emphasizes challenges that remained to be tackled. This is a day when divergent perspectives about equality are strategically showcased. Pro- and anti-equality actors seize the occasion to promote their vision of equality and compete against alternative visions. We contend that to do so they strategically select and bundle policy issues from a wide range of equality issues. With limited space and resources, they make choices about the issues that they deem worth of attention across public arenas, such as the parliament and social media.

Drawing on latent class analysis of parliamentary questions and tweets posted on X on international women's days between 2019 and 2023 across 10 European countries (Austria, France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Hungary, and the United Kingdom) we map the political battlefield around gender equality. We shed light on the extent to which parliamentary and civil society agendas overlap to offer a taxonomy of issue positions and constellation of actors. We show that, beyond virtue signalling, mobilization around International Women's Day is complex and politicized.

### **Governance for Regeneration in Tourism: backlash and environmental movements fighting in a Brazilian Mining-Dependent municipality**

Armindo dos Santos de Sousa Teodósio (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais)

Amanda Ribeiro Carolino (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais)

Maria Letícia Alvarenga Corrêa (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais)

Magnus Emmendoerfer (Universidade Federal de Viçosa - UFV / UNESCO CHAIR CEPPBRASIL )

Our research discusses the challenges for the regeneration of territories in the municipality of Brumadinho, state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil after the tragedy derived from the corporate crime that happened in 2019. A mining waste dam collapsed in this city, leading to the death of 272 people and the destruction of fauna, flora, soil, and the Paraopeba River in ten more cities in the state of Minas Gerais.

Brumadinho is a city marked by the economic and political domination of the mining sector industry

(Mining-Dependent) as a way to local development. But the city houses the Inhotim Cultural Center too, one of the largest contemporary art museums in the world because it houses numerous works of art in more than ten buildings spread across an environmental reserve. The municipality is also rich in tourist experiences and tours related to the appreciation of nature and the natural landscape, extreme sports, and cultural experience in "quilombola" communities (rural traditional black groups formed by slaves who fled from slavery more than a century ago), indigenous peoples, small farmers, and rural communities.

Since the 2019 crime, numerous interventions for the regeneration of the territory have been developed by different Brazilian government agencies, civil society organizations, and consultants hired by Vale S.A., the mining corporation responsible for this tragedy. In the Brumadinho political, cultural, environmental, and economic reality we can find conservative and backlash politic-oriented people trying to determine the way that the governance for the regeneration of the territory will happen at the same time that social, and environmental movements, traditional communities and progressive local leaders trying to change the historical dependence of mining sector, and of the big tourism industry.

Our research is qualitative and based on action research, with the central objective of supporting the struggle of local communities for protagonism, autonomy, and centrality in punishing those responsible, repairing damages, and regenerating the territories of Brumadinho.

In our research, we analyze the challenges for the promotion of tourist itineraries capable of generating empathy and involvement between tourists and communities in Brumadinho, to mitigate violations of rights and strengthen struggles for justice, repair of damages, and regeneration of the territory. Three social groups are analyzed in this field of research. The "quilombola" communities, the villages of two indigenous peoples, and the urban area of ??the municipality, in which most of the families of workers victimized are concentrated. "Quilombola" and Indigenous groups experience a historical trajectory of structural racism in Brazil, suffering from rights violations amplified after the tragedy and crime in Brumadinho. As a way of resisting and re-signifying their existence in these territories, these groups have sought to develop cultural tourism activities and circuits, community-based and oriented towards the dissemination and strengthening of the struggles of black people and indigenous peoples for rights.

We also analyzed the local controversies regarding creating a Memorial in Homage to the victims of this tragedy, which has aroused conflicts within the territory involving the right to memory and the risk of making this building a spectacular representation of the disaster without connection with the mourning. The mining corporation is the main one responsible for the construction of this memorial, arousing criticism and resistance among different groups in Brumadinho who experience mourning for the loss of family members and loved ones.

This research context is fruitful for critical debates and complex analyses on governance for sustainability in the encounter and clashes between people, communities, social and environmental movements, corporations, and governments, in a local reality where we can find cultures ranging from traditional communities to contemporary ways of reproduction of the tourism industry and mineral extraction.

## **Exclusion in Agenda Setting: Stakeholder Dynamics and Nomadic Communities in Mongolia's Tourism Policy**

Oyun-Erdene Chuluunbaatar (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)

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PhD student, School of Public Policy, Chiang Mai University

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Abstract

Tourism is one of Mongolia's key economic sectors, with vast potential for sustainable development. However, the agenda-setting process for tourism policy often excludes the perceptions and contributions of Mongolia's nomadic communities, who are central to the country's cultural heritage. Existing research on tourism policy development has predominantly focused on economic and environmental outcomes, with limited attention to stakeholder dynamics and inclusivity. Furthermore, applications of Birkland's Levels of the Agenda theory rarely address the negotiation and conflict dimension between advocacy groups and blockers, particularly for marginalized communities. This study fills these gaps by examining how stakeholder dynamics influence the exclusion of nomadic communities in Mongolia's tourism policy agenda-setting.

Addressing this issue of exclusion requires the comprehensive understanding the interactions among key actors, including nomadic communities, government bodies, private sector stakeholders, and NGOs, and how these dynamics influence agenda-setting processes.

Using Birkland's Levels of the Agenda framework, this study maps Mongolia's policies to the four agenda

levels: Agenda Universe (SDGs), Systemic Agenda (Vision 2050), Institutional Agenda (State Tourism Development Policy), and Decision Agenda (10-Year Tourism Development Program). A qualitative approach is employed, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and stakeholder mapping, to examine exclusionary dynamics and power imbalances in the policy process.

Preliminary findings suggest that power imbalances, institutional mechanisms, and conflicting stakeholder priorities significantly contribute to the exclusion of nomadic voices, undermining inclusivity and sustainability in tourism policy. The proposed add-on extends Birkland's framework by introducing a unique group dynamic: advocacy groups seeking policy change alongside blockers resisting it, particularly in the transition from the Institutional Agenda to the Decision Agenda. This extension uncovers the negotiation and conflict dimensions between these groups, offering a more nuanced framework for analyzing policy processes.

By linking academic research and policymaking, this study contributes to agenda-setting theory and provides actionable recommendations for inclusive and sustainable tourism development in Mongolia.

## **From backlash to implementing the 30x30 target: Brazil's implications following the dismantling of protected area policies**

Letícia Carvalho (Universidade de Brasília)

Mauro Guilherme Cappellaro (Center for Sustainable Development / University of Brasilia)

At the end of 2022, the global biodiversity policy landscape underwent a significant impact with the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which incorporated important objectives to curb biodiversity loss. Among them is its third target, the "30x30 target", which, in short, aims to designate 30% of the planet as protected areas by 2030.

Taking into account the commitment of the signatory countries to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to internalize the GBF targets in national plans, this paper will analyse Brazil, a prominent actor in the international biodiversity regime, which has recently lived through a period permeated by protected area backlash policies.

Considering that Bauer et al [1] address the conditions under which governments engage in policy dismantling and the strategies they choose, Bauer and Becker [2] highlight how the rise of populist leaders often leads to an agenda of anti-pluralist reform of the state bureaucracy, permeated by five dimensions: centralizing administrative structures, resource allocation, politicizing staff, politicizing norms, and reducing external accountability. In Brazil, the backlash that began discreetly during the mandate of former president Michel Temer (2016-2019) became visible when former reactionary populist president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) did not hesitate to get elected and govern on the basis of signals favorable to anti-environmentalist lobbies [3].

Thus, by asking "how has the dismantling of socio-environmental policies in Brazil between 2016 and 2022 harmed the Brazilian protected areas policy, and how might this delay implementing the 30x30 target?", this paper will employ bibliographical and documentary research to understand how the dismantling of the Brazilian protected areas policy took place within Bauer and Becker's five dimensions of political change. Semi-structured interviews with public servants will further explore the 30x30 target's criteria – representativeness, connectivity and effective and equitable governance – within the Brazilian protected areas system, as well as the processes of demarcation and titling of indigenous and quilombola territories.

Apart from particular aspects as the strengthening of the legislative branch vis-à-vis the executive branch [4], it will be noted that the Brazilian protected areas policy has been undermined through actions such as reducing the Ministry of the Environment's autonomy, the allocation of environmental resources, and the transparency and dissemination of environmental information, as well as increasing politicization of positions within environmental agencies and the relaxation of environmental norms, ultimately characterizing a strategy of active dismantling [5]. This scenario will then be complemented by a current panorama that does not yet fully achieve what is outlined in the 30x30 target, potentially leading to implementation delay.

In short, the paper relates to the panel by precisely discussing the implications of backlash policies for environmental and sustainable development policies, specifically those on protected areas in Brazil. Furthermore, it also gains relevance not only by addressing the relationship between political change (dismantling) and its impact on the implementation of international environmental/biodiversity decisions, but also, in overall terms, by helping to expand the field of study on the convergence between the environmental crisis and the crisis of liberal democracy.

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