



Values, trust, and cultural backlash in conservation governance: The case of wildlife management in the United States



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ABSTRACT

The global rise of populism is having a profound effect on policies across many issues. We explore the potential effects on wildlife conservation using the western United States as a case study. Global populist trends have been explained through the phenomenon of cultural backlash, wherein those left behind in the value shift beginning post-World War II started to mobilize by the end of the century to protect their core values and traditions. Our prior work suggests that wildlife values in the western United States are shifting from traditional domination to mutualism orientations. The current study looked for indications of backlash from the American hunting culture that may be associated with that shift. Data from a 19-state survey ($n = 12,673$) revealed that, in states with a higher prevalence of mutualism, residents with domination values had lower levels of trust in the state wildlife agency. Traditional residents were also less supportive of broadly-inclusive governance models, and the potential for social conflict over wildlife issues was much higher in those states. Finally, we found evidence of actions to “fight back” against change among traditional groups in the growth of ballot initiatives from 1990 to 2016 to protect hunting rights. Backlash will likely affect different countries and jurisdictions differently, contingent on the historical and cultural context. Nonetheless, it will be a global force with important implications for conservation governance, even if only to intensify conflict. Governance innovations will be necessary to help conservation institutions adapt to dramatic changes in the socio-political environment.

1. Introduction

In the past several decades, the conservation fields have documented a steady decline of biological diversity accompanied by economic, political, and administrative challenges to conservation decision-making. A growing body of literature proposes that improved governance is key to addressing these challenges and improving conservation success (Lebel et al., 2006; Armitage et al., 2012; Rothstein and Teorell, 2012). This literature commonly emphasizes the contemporary failures of expert models of decision-making and centralized hierarchical decision structures in resource management (Agrawal and Ostrom, 2001; Riley et al., 2002). Ostrom's (2015) work on common pool resources shows that multilevel, distributed decision authority is often more effective than top-down approaches at managing resources in complex social-ecological systems. This has spurred a widespread trend in prescribing more inclusive, decentralized decision-making processes (Reed, 2008; Gavin et al., 2015; Decker et al., 2016).

However, recent populist political trends, such as the Brexit vote in England, election of Donald Trump as U.S. president, and increased

representation of populist parties in European parliaments (Inglehart and Norris, 2016), suggest a strong possibility of disruption to achieving inclusiveness in governance. Inglehart and Norris (2016) contend that these events mark an era of political change embodied by “cultural backlash”, a phenomenon wherein those left behind in a shifting culture act in opposition to change for the purpose of retaining their cultural identity and values. Given the recent populist wave, we sought to explore how that cultural backlash will affect wildlife conservation, looking specifically at the western United States as a case study. As some scholars have suggested, wildlife conservation in the United States is failing at its conservation mandate as existing governance institutions grow increasingly distant from the broad spectrum of people and interests they represent (Decker et al., 2016). Yet a cultural backlash, and the clash of values at its core, will have a profound effect on the ability of those institutions to adapt and meet the inclusiveness challenge.

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1.1. Value shift and cultural backlash

Populist movements globally and in the United States specifically have taken multiple forms and not necessarily been represented by only one ideological position (Parker and Barreto, 2014; Formisano, 2015). The current movement began taking shape at the end of the 20th century, when democracies were challenged by low voter participation, declining support for incumbents, fragmentation of the party system, and emergence of single issue and radical parties (Meny and Surel, 2002; Inglehart and Norris, 2016). The populism that emerged was marked by anti-establishment feelings, distrust of elites, nationalism, xenophobia, and positive attitudes toward authoritarian leadership (Mudde, 2007). In the early 2000s, U.S. populist rhetoric shifted between topics of economic inequality and issues of cultural erosion. But when the populist Tea Party filled state legislatures in 2009, the focus shifted to cultural issues such as women's reproductive rights and immigration (Formisano, 2015; McGirr, 2015). This shift was marked by nostalgia for an earlier time, as is apparent from Donald Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again".

Inglehart and Norris (2016) suggest that the current trend and global rise of populism is rooted in a phenomenon they describe as cultural backlash. The backlash reflected in U.S. politics today is a reaction to an abrupt shift in American culture that occurred more than 70 years ago, the effects of which are still unfolding. Inglehart (1997) argues that the rapid expansion of well-being following World War II had a profound effect on re-shaping social values. Adopting the notion of Maslow's need hierarchy, he suggests that the focus prior to the war was on subsistence needs and materialist values. Due to modernization (increased wealth, education, urbanization), people raised in the affluent years following the war were not confronted with these same needs and instead shifted focus to higher-order self-expressive needs, reflected in what Inglehart refers to as post-materialist values. Data from the World Values Survey illustrate how the latter influence positions on an array of contemporary issues, including concern for the environment, gender rights, and same-sex marriage (Norris and Inglehart, 2009). Post-materialists, for example, are more likely to embrace immigrants and multicultural diversity of lifestyles, and to support international cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and the efforts of multinational organizations such as the United Nations. They are also likely to have higher levels of wealth and education, and advocate for progressive social change.

New self-expressive needs and a perceived lack of representation in decision-making prompted many citizens to demand more engagement in political processes. This led not only to more inclusive forms of governance but also provided the basis for the recent rise in democracy worldwide (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). In the United States, activism associated with this shift led to a renaissance of environmental legislation in the 1970s that provided federal regulation over environmental practices and gave citizens across the value spectrum greater access to decision processes (Andrews, 2006). This, in turn, put stress on existing political institutions to conform to public interests. Many institutions were perceived as performing poorly given their inability to adapt to changing social values, which spawned declines in trust, loss of faith in government, and a contested decision environment (Orren, 1997; Levi and Stoker, 2000; Dalton, 2005).

Amidst this change, discontent built up among those who were not swept along in the post-materialist value shift. Encouraged by the rise of neoliberal ideologies, which championed individualism, self-sufficiency, and free-market principles in lieu of centralized government power, a new wave of cultural backlash emerged (Harvey, 2005; Bonneuil, 2015). This wave included older generations, men, ethnic majorities, and the less educated (Inglehart and Norris, 2016), who felt a sense of isolation from a society that was changing in ways that threatened the traditional values and lifestyles they cherished. Opposition grew and spread through conservative national media outlets, think tanks, social organizations, and radical political party factions

(McGirr, 2015). This new-age populism, which manifested politically in the rise of the Tea Party that advocated for a highly adversarial approach during the Obama administration, burst into prominence in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and provided a new opportunity for backlash to emerge in the national consciousness and be legitimized in governance institutions.

1.2. The case of American hunting culture's backlash

It is highly likely that the North American culture of hunting has been caught up in this broader trend of populism. One reason is that populism centers on contempt for elites, advocating for the rights of everyday people (Mudde, 2007). Many of the earliest immigrants from Europe were prevented from hunting in their home countries because wildlife was property of aristocrats and royalty. In the United States, wildlife and hunting would be for the "common man" (McCorquodale, 1997) which remains a fundamental principle of wildlife governance today and gave rise to a powerful populist culture of hunting (Robbins and Luginbuhl, 2005; Organ et al., 2012).

Hunting became more than an activity, number of participants, or means of subsistence; it became part of a deeply cherished cultural identity. Hunting was interwoven into the values and practices that were considered "prototypically American" following the 19th century westward expansion. A strong independence value emerged then as an adaptation to isolation and harsh conditions on the frontier (Kitayama et al., 2010). Adoption of this value spread to eastern states, not because it was adaptive but because it was assigned novelty and prestige. This spawned a cultural prototype of the rugged frontier American who conquered the western wilderness and was independent and self-sufficient (Slotkin, 1992). Hunting became a reification and enactment of that depiction. In contemporary society, the hunting culture remains a strong source of identity for many – one that defines gender roles, binds communities, assigns social prestige, and signals social development – and is an important force directing individual attitudes, norms, and behaviors (Stedman and Heberlein, 2001).

The post-materialist cultural change of the latter half of the 20th century could be seen as threatening to the hunting culture. We theorize that this is in large part due to the rise of post-materialist values coinciding with a shift in wildlife values, from traditional domination to mutualism value orientations. These orientations contribute to oppositional positions on how wildlife should be treated. Mutualist values, for example, are associated with beliefs that human activity should be limited for the sake of wildlife protection, while domination values are tied to a belief that wildlife exists for human use. Elsewhere, we have proposed that mutualist values arose due to a modernized lifestyle wherein people were removed from direct contact with wildlife and, given the human tendency to anthropomorphize, began to view wildlife in egalitarian ways (Manfredi et al., 2009). The modernization that Inglehart contends produces post-materialist values therefore may also have given rise to these new wildlife values. While further longitudinal analysis is warranted, this contention is supported by our prior research showing a positive correlation between mutualism and post-materialist values (Manfredi et al., 2009).

We expect that this shift in wildlife values would give rise to backlash. The growing changes in the way people think about wildlife would be threatening to the hunting culture, particularly in how those changes contribute to the periodic and recurring discussion about the acceptability of hunting (Boglioli, 2009). The presence of this threat would fuel the perceived need to "fight back" against change, and to protect a cultural heritage.

1.3. The enduring values of wildlife governance institutions

While societal values have increasingly diversified, wildlife governance institutions in North America have clung tightly to the hunting culture. The origins of contemporary U.S. governance structures for

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