Illiberal Reactions to the University in the 21st Century

Evan Schofer
University of California, Irvine

Julia C. Lerch*
University of California, Irvine

John W. Meyer
Stanford University

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Direct correspondence to Evan Schofer (schofer@uci.edu), 3151 Social Science Plaza, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697.
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Abstract

Following decades of rapid worldwide university expansion, there are now instances of retrenchment: increasing attacks on higher education, sometimes leading to enrollment declines and the imposition of political controls. The post-1945 growth of universities was linked to the liberal, and later neoliberal, international order in which the university is central, producing both knowledge and schooled people. The recent weakening of this order, associated with growing populism and nationalism, erodes the authority of the university. We hypothesize that attacks on the university emerge in countries less integrated into the established international order and in countries linked to international structures that support alternatives. We examine cross-national data on tertiary enrollments over the period 1960-2017. While growth continues generally, it is now lowered in countries tied to illiberal international organizations. Analyses of enrollments in various fields, constraints on academic freedom, and terrorist attacks on universities show similar patterns.
Introduction

Universities expanded dramatically across the globe in the period since World War II, viewed as engines of economic growth and human betterment (Baker 2014; Schofer and Meyer 2005; Trow 2007; also See Brint 1994 on expansion of professions). We use the case of higher education to explore the issue of opposition and backlash in world society (Symons and Hadler 2018; Velasco 2020; Bromley et al. 2020). In recent years, reactionary opposition to higher education appears to be growing. Hungary and Russia enacted legislation to close international universities (Inside Higher Ed 2017), and criticized or de-funded specific fields, such as gender studies. China has tightened political controls over universities (Scholars at Risk 2019), and (attempted) coups in Egypt, Thailand, and Turkey were followed by crackdowns on higher education (Scholars at Risk 2016, 2017). Far-right groups in India have criticized universities as anti-nationalist and launched attacks (New York Times 2020). Physical attacks are also increasing elsewhere – for instance by Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Scholars at Risk 2016, 2017). Even in the United States, critiques are on the rise. Donald Trump sharply attacked higher education on twitter, threatening to revoke the tax-exempt status of universities, and opinion surveys find that American conservatives increasingly view universities in a negative light (Parker 2019; see also Gross 2003).

We examine growing oppositions to the university as part of a broader backlash against the liberal international order that has dominated the globe since

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1 Our arguments address higher education generally, as built around conventional (originally Western) models. We emphasize the term university, as the most common form.
the end of World War II (Ruggie 1982; Guillen 2018). The general cultural framework legitimating global liberalism spurred post-1945 trends toward democratic politics, free markets, and human rights (e.g., Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2008; Elliott 2007) – but also the expansion of higher education, which came to be seen as a right and a central foundation for collective progress (Frank and Meyer 2020). Today, we see a backlash against this model (Guillen 2018), including falling levels of democracy and civil liberties (Diamond 2008; Kurlantzick 2013; Bromley et al. 2020), mounting opposition to free markets (Kotz 2015), and growing rejections of liberal norms of gender equality and LGBT rights (Altman and Symons 2016; Hadler and Symons 2018; Graff, Kapur, and Walters 2019; Velasco 2020).

We argue that contemporary oppositions to the university are rooted in a decline in the legitimated authority of liberal world society and culture, which has invigorated alternative cultural frameworks – some built around statist or nationalist models, others around conservative religious doctrines. These alternative frames propel efforts to reform or suppress the university. We examine cross-national data on tertiary enrollments over the period 1960-2017. While growth continues, higher education enrollments are lower if countries are linked to international organizations that reject dimensions of the liberal world order (e.g., Bob 2012; Hadler and Symons 2018; Motadel 2019; Bromley et al. 2020). Exploratory analyses of enrollments in various fields of study and of direct attacks on universities show similar patterns.

Our analysis contributes to a growing body of work that addresses resistance to world cultural diffusion processes: some national settings are less receptive to
global models and norms than others (see Pope and Meyer 2016 for a summary; Symons and Hadler 2018; Bromley et al. 2020), and some liberal cultural models remain contested in the international community (e.g., Boyle, Kim, and Longhofer 2015). We expand on this scholarship with an analysis of recently emerging contestations over the university, an institution that had come to enjoy enormous and worldwide legitimacy. Overall, a key contribution of our paper is to show that these oppositions themselves are increasingly linked to fragmentations in world society rather than rooted solely in domestic structures.

**Theorizing oppositions to world society and culture**

Conventional empirical research on world society observed monotonic patterns of global diffusion (Meyer et al. 1997), offering a corrective to earlier theories that stressed national differences. However, the literature increasingly attends to questions of variability in world cultural diffusion and the growing contestations of liberal models.

We make three points. First, the structure of world society provides conditions for opposition. World society is a decentralized assemblage of discourse, activity, and organization (Drori 2008). Indeed, a puzzle for earlier theory was to understand how ostensibly weak international institutions propel isomorphic change (Hironaka 2014). Liberal ideologies on women’s rights and abortion are supported by core international institutions, but alternatives remain institutionalized, for instance in religious structures such as the Catholic Church (Boyle, Kim, and Longhofer 2015; Wang and Schofer 2018). Throughout the era of
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liberal dominance, alternative statist and corporatist models of the state remained institutionalized in some countries (Jepperson 2002). Most spectacularly, Communism developed its own transnational structures (e.g., the Warsaw Pact) and internal patterns of diffusion and isomorphism. The critical point is that given a decentralized global structure, alternative frameworks coexist alongside dominant models (Adamson 2005; Beckfield 2010).

Second, the content of liberal world culture has features that contribute to oppositional mobilization (e.g., Boli 2008; Kymlicka 1995). The liberal order empowers its constructed actors with ever expanding rights (Meyer and Jepperson 2000) and propels mobilization on a global scale (e.g., Hironaka 2014; Tsutsui 2018), not always in the service of liberal goals. People and groups routinely claim liberal rights to be illiberal (e.g., practice a religion that discriminates against LGBT people) (see Bob 2019).

In short, liberalism embodies internal bases for oppositional mobilization (Kymlicka 1995). International institutions enshrine national sovereignty, but also expansive human rights that pose a challenge to state authority. They celebrate the equality of persons but also market solutions that produce inequalities. Universalized ideologies about rights and professional knowledge are thought to apply everywhere, but individual and local diversity is also empowered (Boyle 2005; Boli and Elliott 2008; see also Robertson 1992 on glocalization).

The theoretical task is to explain when and where these possibilities for heterogeneity and conflict, always present, actually produce organized opposition. Along a first dimension, existing work shows that diffusion tends to be slow or
partial when the global institutionalization of a model is weak, or when alternative models are institutionalized at the global or national level. For example, Boyle, Kim, and Longhofer (2015) focus on the case of abortion where “policy models are contested at the global level, and multiple ideational frames persist” (885). A second insight is that strong regional, national, or local institutionalized alternatives may blunt the influence of global culture (e.g., Jepperson 2002; Wang and Schofer 2018; Boyle 2004; Wotipka and Ramirez 2008). Mathias’ (2013) study of cross-national trends in the abolition of the death penalty found diffusion to be more limited where certain religious frames are prevalent. Finally, one of the most well-established findings is that non-conformity to world cultural norms is often observed in peripheries (Schofer et al. 2012).

The contemporary wave of oppositions allows us to expand on these insights. We argue that there is a decline in the legitimacy of liberal norms and models of the post-World War II and world society. Legitimacy is central in bolstering institutional orders and propelling diffusion (Strang and Meyer 1993). Hironaka (2017) sees legitimacy as shaped by historical shifts in the international status order and the perceived success of particular cultural models (also see Strang 2006). The rise of Prussia on the world stage on the late 19th century, for instance, propelled a wave of policy diffusion and isomorphism. The subsequent disasters of the World Wars and genocide utterly destroyed the legitimacy of German policies and ideologies (Weiss 1977), creating space in the international arena for alternatives. Similarly, the rising postwar standing of the United States greatly enhanced the global legitimacy of
liberalisms. However, recent perceived failures of the United States and liberal policy models are again creating space for revitalized alternatives. We unpack this general argument, as well as implications for the university, below.

**Global liberalism and university expansion in world society**

Universities emerged in Western Europe, expanding slowly at first and then more rapidly after the Enlightenment (Riddle 1990). European influence and domination carried the university across the globe. After World War II – and even more after the breakdown of Communism – universities grew explosively in numbers and enrollments everywhere (Schofer and Meyer 2005). A century ago, a fraction of one percent of a cohort pursued higher education. Today the country average of higher education enrollments is around 35 percent, and over 70 percent in wealthy countries (World Bank 2019). Figure 1 shows the global pattern of dramatically increased enrollments. Beyond expansion, more and more aspects of society came under the umbrella of academic and professional knowledge (Drori et al. 2003; Foucault 1971). Schooled professions became dominant occupational groups and knit together the elites of a rapidly globalizing world under a common frame of a global “knowledge society” (Frank and Meyer 2020).

[Figure 1 about here]

There is a tendency to naturalize educational expansion as obvious or functional. In fact, all these changes came despite significant resistance. For much of

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2 Likewise, the rapid economic ascendance of Japan in the 1980s legitimated new narratives of the “Japanese economic model,” and a spate of isomorphisms.
the 20th century scholars and policymakers were critical of higher educational expansion. Conservatives thought rising expectations would produce disorder (Huntington 1968), centrists thought it was a massively inefficient status competition (Boudon 1973; Collins 1979; Dore 1976), and leftists saw it as undercutting class solidarities. Indeed, the Communist countries limited the expansion of university education in the 1970s (Lenhardt and Stock 2000; Baker, Kohler, and Stock 2004). Overall, concerns reflected Schumpeter's (1950) judgment that the entire liberal capitalist system might be destroyed by the schooled intellectuals it produced. Both supporters and critics of educational expansion assumed that university expansion should not exceed the functional “needs” of society. And indeed, functionalist thinking (often economistic in character), though unsuccessful in explaining patterns of global expansion, remains central in both public policy and social scientific analysis (e.g., Goldin and Katz 2010). Institutionalists, by contrast, see functionalism as a central modern cultural ideology.

Despite these dour assessments, university enrollments exploded, and did so virtually everywhere throughout the whole period as Figure 1 shows (Schofer and Meyer 2005, 2007). The expected collapse resulting from expansion beyond social “needs” did not occur. Critics had failed to recognize a fundamental dynamic: rather than responding to predictable social needs, university teaching and research created new ones, yielding a “knowledge society” (Baker 2014; Gibbons et al. 1994;

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3 Credential competition ideas (Boudon 1973; Collins 1979, 2000) provide a description of overall expansion. Institutional theory provides an account of why inflationary expansion would focus on education, and why it would be so highly legitimated as a public good.
Whole new arenas of social life became central features of the putative economy, with material production overshadowed by growing sectors of university-educated personnel: psychologists, consultants, lawyers, and business managers constructing and addressing new societal problems.

This remarkable expansion of the university was the product of the global liberal era that emerged following World War II (Ruggie 1982). Aggressive nationalism was seen as having produced the horrors of World War I and II and the destruction of continental statist and corporatist societies. American success on the global stage propelled the legitimacy of liberal models of social organization, and strong international institutions, such as the UN system, were built around liberal principles. The collapse of Communism in 1989 – the primary global alternative – further bolstered the legitimacy of liberalism, leading to an even more extreme era of triumphalist neoliberalism (Ruggie 1998). Often narrowly conceived in economic terms, neoliberalism in fact involved an aggressive intensification of liberal principles in all areas, and international institutions were increasingly assertive in diffusing them. Pro-free market ideologies certainly became more dominant (Centeno and Cohen 2012), but so did human rights movements (Stacy 2009) and civil society activism (Reimann 2006); and a third wave of democratization swept the world (Huntington 1991).

The liberal international order propelled massive global changes: polities were increasingly organized around the preferences of individual voters (democracy) and economies around the choices of individual consumers, producers,
and innovators (markets) (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2008). Rights came to be seen as rooted in individuals and not just the state (as in the global human rights regime: Elliott 2007, 2014). And education came to be seen as essential for achieving development through the capacities of highly schooled individuals (Chabbott 2003).

This rise of a liberal, and later neoliberal, world order rendered education – and especially the university – a most central social institution. Education had played a limited role in statist or corporatist societies (Jepperson 2002). Under liberal models built around individualism, however, rights-based ideologies propelled demands for ever greater access (e.g., Education For All). The reform and improvement of individuals – through schooling – became a preferred solution to societal problems of order and growth. Higher education became a core concern of both left-wing and right-wing liberal international institutions, from UNESCO to the World Bank (Buckner 2017).

The massive expansion of higher education in the liberal and neoliberal era was seen as essential to creating the empowered individual “actors” (Hwang and Colyvas 2011) demanded by the liberal model, and served as the principal foundation for a society imagined as rooted in individual rights and competencies (Frank and Meyer 2020): (a) The expansion of individualism and liberal ideologies of human development (against traditional familial roles) created new areas for university ideas and personnel – for instance related to mass education, medical care, psychological wellbeing, and recreation. (b) The expansion of the sciences brought new areas of nature under technical controls. Industries arose and
expanded, with new awareness of old problems such as care for the water, the earth, the air, and the biology of a newly recognized ecosystem. (c) The expansion of the social sciences helped create vast new areas of social management in the polity, the economy, and the family and gender system. All these changes were worldwide and helped construct a global order and stratification system built around knowledge and schooled elites (Frank and Meyer 2020; Boli and Thomas 1999; Bromley and Meyer 2015; Schofer et al. 2020).

The weakening legitimacy of global liberalism, and rise of opposition

After a long period of liberal dominance, circumstances have changed. The legitimated cultural authority of liberalism is increasingly questioned (e.g., Guillen 2018). A number of indicators and causal factors have been suggested. Liberal and neo-liberal economic models were held responsible for economic disasters, including the Asian financial crisis in the 1990s and the 2008 global crisis (Campbell 2010; Stiglitz 2010; Guillen 2018). Liberalism and global integration are seen as exacerbating economic inequality (see Mills 2008 for a review). Elite-driven projects such as the European Union and World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programs expanded in the absence of global representative institutions, yielding popular resentments and the perception of “democratic deficits” (e.g., Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005). The sense of popular powerlessness is contrasted with the awareness of global centers of power linked to highly schooled elites with common university credentials (Frank and Meyer 2020).
The failures of liberalism on the world stage have material effects – generating unemployment, inequality, and crisis – as tends to be emphasized in the emergent literature on the anti-liberal backlash (e.g., Guillen 2018). But beyond direct effects, a general cultural consequence is that the myth-like status of liberal policies and institutions is undermined. Oppositions arise not only from an objective reality that liberalism has fallen short, but from a cultural process of de-legitimation whereby high-profile failures on the world stage undermine faith in the liberal model (Hironaka 2017). This is intensified by the over-reaching expectations and claims associated with neoliberalism: a triumphalistic and universalistic posture that imagines limitless human possibilities that contrasts sharply with local realities and constraints. Free markets and democracy were to empower ordinary people and transform Iraq, the former USSR, and so on; often entrenched inequalities and interests won out.

With liberalism less legitimized, alternative frameworks and organizational structures can gain influence in the international arena. Recent scholarship points to the growing influence of international organizations espousing alternatives to liberalism – some newly founded and others re-energized – that have served as nodes for mobilizations around a range of cultural frames, including conservative religious doctrines, authoritarian or nationalist ideologies, or traditional views regarding the individual and family. For example, scholars highlight the role of global alliances in the growing backlash against liberal gender and sexuality norms (Bob 2012; Hadler and Symons 2018; Velasco 2020; Cupać and Ebetürk 2020). Others document the importance of international linkages in the recent growth of
government restrictions on civil society (Bromley et al. 2020; Glasius, Schalk, and Lange 2020). And a burgeoning scholarship in political science attends to the role of regional organizations in bolstering alternatives to liberal democracy (Kneuer et al. 2019; Debre 2020; Cooley and Schaaf 2017; Obydenkova and Libman 2019). We introduce organizations relevant to our paper below, but the theoretical insight is that oppositional dynamics at the national level appear to be linked, at least in part, to international structures that support alternatives to the liberal model.

This weakening of liberal models in world society and the growing influence of alternatives has produced criticism and attacks directed toward all the institutions involved: democracy, free markets, individualist freedoms (e.g., women’s rights), and rationalized organizational machineries. There are many manifestations: declines in democracy, restrictions on civil society (Ambrosio 2008; Diamond 2008; Kurlantzick 2013; Bromley et al. 2020); attacks on assertions of the rights of women and non-conforming gender roles and sexual identities (Graff, Kapur, and Walters 2019; Hadler and Symons 2018); the resurgence of nationalist movements (Golder 2016; Bonikowski 2017); the growth of radical religious fundamentalisms (Emerson and Hartmann 2006); and opposition to major international institutions (e.g., Brexit; see Guillen 2018).

We here focus on oppositions to the authority of the university, which remain underexplored in the literature (but see, e.g., Bhaty and Sundar 2020). To illustrate the phenomenon, our online Appendix I describes short country vignettes from four contexts – Hungary, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Nigeria – where governments or non-state groups have sought to assert control over the university.
These examples suggest that contestations over the university can take multiple forms. First, efforts can seek to *suppress* the university entirely. Complete rejection seems most common in far peripheries. For instance, the Taliban rule in Afghanistan decimated a higher education sector already ravaged by civil war (Baiza 2013) and the ousted Taliban continue to launch physical attacks on universities and schools today (UNESCO 2010). Similar patterns can be observed in Nigeria, where the targeted destruction of schools and universities has been a hallmark of the Boko Haram insurgency (Human Rights Watch 2016).

A more common reaction is to *coopt* the university – redirecting it from its liberal core, or in the imagery of some conservatives, restoring its true essence. This kind of response characterizes highly modernized competitors to Western liberalism, such as the Communist countries (historically) and modernizing authoritarian regimes. Our appendix explores the contemporary example of Hungary, where the government has reduced funding and enrollments, asserted growing control over universities, and established new institutions loyal to the state (Times Higher Education 2013, 2017). We also chronicle developments in Turkey, where an attempted coup in 2016 was followed by a sweeping crackdown on academics and universities (Scholars at Risk 2017). A common pattern is to emphasize technical university training, while restricting the humanities and social sciences, seen as a source of “intellectuals” or “Western” values that undermine traditional orders. For instance, in Turkey we see efforts to bring education in line with politicized Islam.
Opposition to the university may manifest in a variety of ways: cuts in enrollment and funding, constraints on academic freedom, harassment or persecution of students and faculty, or sometimes even physical attacks. And efforts may focus on particular issue-areas. For instance, in the United States, conservative attitudes toward universities have grown increasingly critical, supporting cuts in higher education, trying to shift universities toward job training, and criticizing the arts and social sciences (e.g., Pew 2019).

**Hypotheses**

Drawing on the theoretical discussion above, our analyses test three main hypotheses. The first prediction follows conventional world society thinking. Given the university’s external legitimation by a liberal, and later neoliberal, world society, we expect that oppositions to the university should be more common in the peripheries of world society. As is conventional, we proxy countries’ embeddedness in world society via their ties to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs):

*Hypothesis 1. Oppositions to the authority of the university are more likely in the peripheries of world society, as measured by country ties to INGOs.*

A main contribution of our paper, however, is to attend to countries’ embeddedness in alternatives to the liberal international order that are organized on an international scale. We thus theorize that contestations over the university should be more likely in countries with ties to international organizations that reject, or offer alternatives to, various dimensions of the liberal model – economic,
political, or social. Moreover, we suggest that the recent weakening of the legitimacy of the global liberal order, as chronicled above, has heightened the salience of such alternative cultural programs and oppositional structures:

*Hypothesis 2. Oppositions to the authority of the university are more likely in societies linked to internationally organized illiberal alternatives.*

*Hypothesis 3. Countries linked to internationally organized illiberal alternatives are especially likely to see oppositions to the authority of the university in the most recent decade, a period of declining legitimacy of the liberal order.*

These arguments provide an alternative to existing explanations of far-right mobilization, which have emphasized economic insecurity, economic inequality, or immigration. We overlap with prior work in ascribing importance to the 2008 crisis as a turning point (e.g., Guillen 2018), but emphasize diffuse legitimation effects rather than simply direct effects of economic hardship (also see Norris and Inglehart 2018 for criticism of economic arguments). Additional explanations for university growth/decline are addressed in later tables, which include demographic and economic factors (e.g., youth population, growth of the service sector, unemployment) as well as factors associated with far-right populism (industrial decline, economic crisis, incoming migrants).

**Quantitative analyses: Undercutting the university around the globe**

We explore the issue with quantitative cross-national and longitudinal analyses of higher education enrollments and related measures. Our main analyses cover the period from 1960-2016. The unit of analysis is the country-year.
addition to enrollments, we examine other measures that may reflect opposition or cooptation: shifts in enrollment away from fields associated with liberalism (social sciences) and toward applied and technical fields (e.g., engineering); measures of academic freedom; and terrorist attacks on universities or their participants. These additional measures vary widely in quality and sample size, and thus our results are exploratory.

Dependent Variables

Higher education enrollments. We use the gross tertiary enrollment ratio, the total number of students divided by the population in the relevant age group. Enrollments have been increasing rapidly in most countries, so stagnation or decline may reflect growing opposition to higher education. The measure includes students enrolled in ISCED levels 5 and 6. Data come from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2019).

Higher education enrollments in engineering, agriculture, and business; Enrollments in the social sciences, education, and arts/humanities. Illiberal opposition may shift university enrollments toward applied and technical fields linked to national economic development and away from the historically “liberal” social sciences, arts, and humanities. To assess this, we use data on tertiary enrollments by field of study, taken from the UNESCO website (UNESCO 2017). We combine the following UNESCO enrollment categories: “Engineering, Manufacturing, and

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4 Engineering or technical fields are not inherently illiberal. Our point is that illiberal movements and regimes have often celebrated their contributions (e.g., to material production).
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Construction Programmes”, “Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary Programmes”, and “Business Administration and Law”. Our second measure combines the following categories of enrollments: “Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information Programmes”, “Education Programmes”, and programs in “Arts and Humanities Programmes”. Enrollments in each set of fields are measured as a percentage of total enrollments. The measure is widely available only from 1999 to the present.

**Terrorist attacks on universities.** We draw on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) to identify terrorist attacks that specifically target higher education institutions. The GTD includes over 170,000 terrorist incidents between 1970 and 2016: bombings, assassinations, and the like. The name of the terrorist target is generally included, which allows us to identify attacks that specifically target higher educational institutions. The data mainly report zeros and ones, so we created a dummy variable indicating the presence of any attack within a given country-year.5

**Academic Freedom.** We measure academic freedom using a 5-point measure taken from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Dataset Version 9 (Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2019). Countries scoring at the bottom of the scale are characterized by the following: “Censorship and intimidation are frequent. Academic activities and cultural expressions are severely restricted or controlled by

5 Alternative versions, such as those with raw counts, required zero-inflated negative binomial models. Results were similar. The dichotomous model simplified presentation.
the government.” By contrast, in countries that score at the top of the scale, political authorities fully respect academic freedom and cultural expression.6

Independent variables

*Population* is measured by the natural log of country population (World Bank 2019).7

*Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita* captures a country’s overall level of development and wealth. We expect that wealthy countries have greater education enrollments, and the variable is an important control for the other outcomes we examine below. We use real GDP based on purchasing power parity (PPP) in inflation-adjusted US Dollars. Data are taken from the Penn World Table Version 9.0 (Feenstra et al. 2013). The measure is logged to reduce skewness.

*Democracy.* Democracy is measured by the twenty-one point “Polity IV” scale, which distinguishes between autocratic and democratic societies (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2013). The Freedom House democracy measure yields similar results.

*Secondary school enrollment.* Secondary education is measured by the gross enrollment ratio, taken from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2019).8 We employ it as a control variable, as it is known to affect higher education

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6 We also examined violations of academic freedom from the Academic Freedom Monitor database. Results were similar, but we focus on the V-Dem measure because it is available over a much longer period of time.
7 Rescaled by 10,000 prior to logging to improve presentation; doing so does not affect the results.
8 Net enrollment ratios (which include only enrollees in the designated age group for a given level of schooling) yield similar results, but are available for fewer countries and years.
enrollments. But substantively, mass education expansion may reduce opposition to the university.

*Country links to world society (INGO memberships).* A country's linkage to the "liberal" culture of world society is measured in the conventional manner, using data on International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) memberships from the Yearbook of International Association (UIA 1971 to 2015; see Boli and Thomas 1999). The measure is the total number of different INGOs in which a country's citizens hold membership, logged to reduce skewness.

*Membership in illiberal inter-governmental organizations.* We surveyed the literature to identify major international organizations active during our period of study that espouse a range of cultural alternatives to liberalism, such as conservative religious doctrines, authoritarian or nationalist ideologies, traditional views regarding the individual and family, and so on. Our online Appendix II provides a description for each of the organizations that made it onto our list and justifies their inclusion. Our final list of illiberal international organizations expands the list used in Bromley et al. (2020) and includes the following organizations:

- Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)
- Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)
- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
- League of Arab States (LAS)
- Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

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9 We thank Michael Giesen for his suggestions of relevant literature and organizations.
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- *Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)*
- *Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO)*

We constructed a time-varying count of countries’ memberships in these organizations (including provisional membership status) in a given year. Ties to these organizations may be proxies for countries’ illiberal orientations; but these organizations may also bolster and propagate illiberal frames and discourses (e.g., Hadler and Symons 2018).

Descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in Table 1.

Methods

Higher education enrollments are analyzed using panel regression models with country fixed effects. Fixed effects models, which were preferred based on results of a Hausman test, though in practice both fixed and random effects models yielded similar findings. Fixed effects models focus on within-case variability and control for all time-invariant features of a society that might affect the outcome variable, such as region, colonial history, or geographic location (Wooldridge 2002). We use the same modeling approach for our exploratory analyses of educational enrollment by field and academic freedom. The occurrence of any terror attacks on universities in a given country-year is modeled using a panel logistic regression model.10

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10 Terrorist attacks on universities are technically a count variable (non-negative integer), but most values are zero or one. We used a logit model, which focuses on whether any attacks occur in a given year (rather than the actual number). Alternatives, such as a zero-inflated negative binomial model, tell the same story.
We conducted a number of robustness checks. We examined alternative common panel regression models, such as random effects, two-way fixed effects, panel corrected standard errors, and dynamic fixed effects panel models (see Table 6) (e.g., Baltagi 2008; Beck and Katz 2011; Wooldridge 2002). Models using random effects and panel corrected standard errors are useful as a methodological check and because some of our arguments address cross-national variability in addition to within-case variability. We also included a wide range of additional controls that might affect enrollments, including demographic factors and economic variables (Table 7). Overall, results were stable. Finally, we looked for outliers and influential cases. We found a few moderate outliers, but their removal did not alter results; we left them in the analysis.

Results

Table 2 presents results of panel regression models with country fixed effects examining tertiary enrollments. Control variables have expected effects: wealth and the expansion of secondary schooling are associated with tertiary enrollments.

[Table 2 about here]

We observe that some indicators of liberalism are positively associated with tertiary enrollments. Country embeddedness in the liberal culture of world society – operationalized by INGO memberships – is associated with higher enrollments. The coefficients are large and highly significant, emphasizing the strong connection between liberal world culture and enrollment expansion. Democracy, another measure of liberalism, has no effect once INGO memberships are controlled.
We also see that ties to international illiberal organizations are associated with lower enrollments. This is consistent with the idea that attacks on higher education are linked to alternative ideological programs that challenge the liberal international order. Further, we examine changes since 2008. Overall, the post-2008 dummy is positive, highlighting the general trend of continued enrollment growth in most countries. But Figure 2 shows that the number of countries experiencing enrollment declines has increased in recent years. Indeed, in Table 2 we see that the interaction between illiberal ties and the post-2008 period is negative. Overall, these findings suggest that enrollments are lower in countries with illiberal orientations \textit{in general} (as suggested by the negative main effect for our illiberal IGOs variable), and \textit{especially} in the period since 2008, as the liberal order has weakened. The overall world trend may be upward, but we see hints of divergence.

[Figure 2 about here]

We also note that the negative effects of illiberal orientation on enrollments (both overall and since 2008) are larger for female enrollments (not presented; available upon request). This is consistent with the illustrative examples discussed in our Appendix I – illiberal movements often celebrate traditional understandings of gender and family and/or the explicit exclusion of women (e.g., in Hungary and Afghanistan).

We now turn to exploratory analyses of a broader set of outcomes. Table 3 examines the relative size of tertiary enrollments in different fields. We draw a contrast between engineering, agriculture, and business, which are directly linked to state interests of economic development, versus the social sciences, journalism,
education, and the arts/humanities which are often associated with liberalism (e.g., free speech and democracy). Measures are only available since 1999, so samples are smaller, and few coefficients are significant. Nevertheless, key results fit our suppositions. In models of engineering/agriculture/business enrollments, the interaction between country membership in illiberal organizations and the post-2008 period is positive and significant. Conversely, in models of social science/journalism/arts and humanities enrollments, the interaction of illiberal ties and the post-2008 period is negative and statistically significant. These findings are consistent with examples of Hungary and Turkey, in which illiberal regimes favor technical fields ("practical higher education") and cut back the social sciences.

[Table 3 about here]

In Table 4, we examine a measure of "academic freedom". Countries scoring low are those in which academics and students routinely experience direct political repression and censorship. Democratic societies tend to score high on the academic freedom index, as one would expect. Again, we see that countries with ties to illiberal organizations score lower on academic freedom generally, and especially in the period after 2008. This fits with examples such as Turkey, where an illiberal regime specifically targeted scholars and students and purged large parts of the university system.

[Table 4 about here]

In Table 5, we turn to more direct assaults on the university, in the form of terrorist attacks on higher education institutions. Few variables have significant effects on terror attacks (which are fairly rare). However, we see a statistically
significant association between illiberal membership and terrorism. Moreover, the interaction between illiberal membership and the post-2008 era is also significant, suggesting an uptick of terrorist attacks against universities in countries with illiberal ties.

[Table 5 about here]

Robustness Checks

Table 6 includes alternative panel regression models as a robustness check. It is useful to show that models with random effects yield similar results. Although we present analyses with country fixed effects (because they are conservative and address unobserved heterogeneity) it is important to show that the findings are not limited to analyses of “within” country variation over time. Random effects models (while more prone to omitted variable bias) make use of cross-national variation, and thus speak to country differences (not just within-case variation).

[Table 6 about here]

Table 7 presents models with further variables that address additional factors that may affect university enrollments. We include the following measures: the fertility rate (a measure of family structure that also indirectly reflects the status of women); the age dependency ratio (a measure of the relative size of the youth population, the group available to enter higher education); a dummy for countries with very high values of (lagged) tertiary enrollments, who may be nearing the enrollment “ceiling”; the expansion of the service sector as % of GDP (sometimes viewed as an indicator of the expanding “knowledge economy” and demand for
skilled workers); and unemployment (which might affect demand for higher education). The main findings generally hold steady with the inclusion of additional controls. In one instance, when a measure of “service sector” is added, our key IGO measure is only significant at the .10 level. This lowered significance is not due to the service sector measure, itself, but rather it is due to the particular (smaller) sample of cases in the analysis. (Dropping cases that are missing on the service sector measure has the same effect.)

[Table 7 about here]

Models in Table 7 also address some common explanations for the rise of populism, which might produce opposition to higher education. We include the following measures: economic crisis (measured by economic decline of 5% or more\textsuperscript{11}), the size of the industrial sector (whose decline is sometimes linked to populism); economic inequality (gini score), and migration (incoming migrants per capita). Again, our main findings hold up.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The university is a core element of global liberalism, and has grown in numbers, enrollments, and centrality worldwide in a period of liberal dominance. Events of recent years have challenged global liberal institutions. Economic and political events have weakened the standing of America and the liberal West. We see reinvigoration of many fundamentalist and populist movements. The close links between universities and global elites invite populist reactions. In this environment,

\[\text{11 Other measures of economic crisis/decline yield similar results.}\]
movements have attacked many aspects of the liberal program, including the university.

Our statistical analyses provide systematic evidence that countries with illiberal links and orientations tend to have lower enrollments. The international arena is not tightly centralized, but allows for alternative structures and discourses that may oppose the diffusion of dominant models. More specific to the contemporary period, we find that the negative effect of illiberalism strengthens in recent years, pointing to the growing influence of alternatives in an era of active contestations over liberal models. Exploratory analyses observe similar patterns in the fields of educational enrollments, higher educational funding, and attacks on the university. And stronger assertions of “traditional” family control over women and children may occur, leaving enrollments of girls and women particularly vulnerable (see Symons and Hadler 2018).

Conventional analyses tend to see schooling as principally linked to the economy. As a result, scholars have had difficulty explaining the hyper-expansion of schooling around the world, and some have predicted an imminent collapse, as higher education runs up against economic constraints. Our paper suggests that socio-political movements attacking liberalism are a greater threat to higher education.

More broadly, our study outlines the dynamics of opposition in world society, which is not simply a monolithic regime that propels global conformity. This basic world society model helped make sense of some sweeping patterns of global diffusion. However, the world society literature has increasingly attended to the
complexities of international institutions. Alternative and potentially conflicting cultural frames are available at any given moment, both within world institutions and embedded in regional, national, or local structures. Episodes of diffusion have been propelled by the legitimation of cultural models on the global stage (with liberal ascendance after World War II) and the build-up of international structures. The post-War era and the 1990s in particular were historically unusual, with a high level of global liberal legitimacy and elaborated international structures. Today, the erosion of legitimacy and the establishment of structures rooted in alternative cultural programs create new possibilities for mobilized opposition.

Our emphasis on a general de-legitimation of liberal world culture helps explain the broad nature of contemporary pushbacks to liberalism. Much of the literature stresses economic and political failures, but contention is also emerging over liberal models in society and culture. Our study points to the usefulness of conceptualizing national reactions as linked to world-level oppositional structures. Given broad erosions in the legitimacy of the liberal model, we would expect national ties to such illiberal international alliances to predict pushback in other domains as well (e.g., women's rights). In general, we see these memberships as a proxy for more diffuse patterns of embeddedness in alternatives to liberal world society. Rather than any one organization directly transmitting alternative principles to its member countries, memberships capture linkages to what are bound to be a host of anti-liberal pressures. Nonetheless, some direct pathways of diffusion are likely also at play, for instance in the form of conferences and communication, which future research could explore.
What does the future hold? The contemporary development of the university was bound up with the current global order. Some factors that are weakening this order are likely to continue, such as the decline of American economic influence and the emergence of China. Other events are more unpredictable. Future economic crises or wars could further destabilize the international community. The trends traced by world society scholars – for instance, expansions of education, human rights, and environmentalism – hinge on a distinctive institutional order that emerged after World War II. That order is not set in stone.

In sum, the legitimacy of the university is weaker in many locales. Anti-science movements around climate change and vaccines have grown stronger. Universities are more easily criticized. Even where liberal democracy remains strong, illiberal voices can be heard. If successful, illiberal movements and regimes will likely shrink universities and re-orient them around more nationalist and instrumentalist goals, producing much more technical training and fewer sociologists.
References


Reactions to the University


Table 1: Descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary enrollment ratio</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>18.48</td>
<td>21.61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>121.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Tertiary in engineering, agriculture</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>44.21</td>
<td>9.91</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Tertiary in social science, journalism, education</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>31.37</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>85.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist attacks on universities</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic freedom</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>-3.33</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real GDP per capita (log)</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>8.73</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>12.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary enrollment</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>54.29</td>
<td>35.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>163.93</td>
</tr>
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<td>Democracy</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>7.51</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>6.01</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-2008 (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illiberal membership X post-2008</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0</td>
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Table 2: Panel regression models with fixed effects: the effects of illiberal organization membership on tertiary enrollments 1960-2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient (Standard Error)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>GDP (log, p/cap)</td>
<td>9.56*** (1.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary enrollment</td>
<td>0.36*** (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.04 (-0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO membership (log)</td>
<td>2.82*** (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO membership</td>
<td>-5.24*** (1.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-2008 period</td>
<td>10.92*** (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO x post-2008</td>
<td>-2.50* (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-98.51*** (17.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (country-years)</td>
<td>6,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10
Table 3: Panel regression models with fixed effects: the effects of illiberal organizations on university enrollments in selected fields of study (% of total enrollment), 1999-2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Engineering, agriculture and business</th>
<th>Social sciences, education, and journalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (log, p/cap)</td>
<td>-3.50 (-4.60)</td>
<td>-1.44 (-0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School enrollment</td>
<td>-0.01 (-0.01)</td>
<td>-0.06+ (-0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.00 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO membership (log)</td>
<td>1.43 (2.09)</td>
<td>-3.78 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO membership</td>
<td>3.84* (1.70)</td>
<td>-0.36 (1.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-2008 period</td>
<td>0.08 (0.08)</td>
<td>-0.83+ (0.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO x post-2008</td>
<td>2.07*** (0.57)</td>
<td>-1.58*** (0.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>66.51** (21.55)</td>
<td>77.73*** (22.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (country-years)</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.033 (0.077)</td>
<td>0.057 (0.105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10
Table 4: Panel regression models with fixed effects: the effects of illiberal organizations on academic freedom, 1960-2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Freedom</th>
<th>Academic Freedom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>GDP (log, p/cap)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Enrollment</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO membership (log)</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO membership</td>
<td>-0.30***</td>
<td>-0.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-2008 period</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO x post-2008</td>
<td>-0.17***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.26+</td>
<td>-1.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.73)</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (country-years)</td>
<td>6,885</td>
<td>6,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.599</td>
<td>0.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>148</td>
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</table>

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10
Table 5: Logistic regression models with fixed effects: the effects of illiberal organizations on terrorist attacks against universities, 1970-2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Terrorist Attacks</th>
<th>Terrorist Attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (log, p/cap)</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
<td>(0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (log)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School enrollment</td>
<td>-0.03+</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO membership (log)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.55)</td>
<td>(0.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO membership</td>
<td>1.38***</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>(0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-2008 period</td>
<td>-0.80**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO x post-2008</td>
<td>1.26**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-19.65</td>
<td>-7.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15.53)</td>
<td>(15.82)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N (country-years) 2,660 2,660
R-square 0.21 0.23
Countries 147 147

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10
Table 6: Main analysis with alternative models: Random effects, two-way fixed effects, panel corrected standard errors, and dynamic fixed effects panel model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Random Effects</th>
<th>Two-way FE</th>
<th>Panel-Corrected SE</th>
<th>Dynamic Panel FE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (log. p/cap)</td>
<td>7.25***</td>
<td>6.64**</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>3.74***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.60)</td>
<td>(2.17)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School enrollment</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.44***</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.20+</td>
<td>0.07+</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO membership (log)</td>
<td>2.95***</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>2.44***</td>
<td>1.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.70)</td>
<td>(1.17)</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td>(0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal IGO membership</td>
<td>-4.78***</td>
<td>-5.41***</td>
<td>-1.58***</td>
<td>-1.59+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
<td>(1.13)</td>
<td>(0.26)</td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged DV</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>(0.04)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-54.86**</td>
<td>-18.18***</td>
<td>-37.87***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(14.23)</td>
<td>(18.50)</td>
<td>(2.58)</td>
<td>(8.37)</td>
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<tr>
<td>N (country-years)</td>
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<td>6,637</td>
<td>6,637</td>
<td>6,492</td>
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<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.639</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>0.814</td>
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<td>Countries</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (log, p/cap)</td>
<td>9.50***</td>
<td>9.41***</td>
<td>7.92***</td>
<td>11.61***</td>
<td>9.67***</td>
<td>11.58***</td>
<td>17.56***</td>
<td>9.55***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2.02)</td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
<td>(1.53)</td>
<td>(3.31)</td>
<td>(4.14)</td>
<td>(2.00)</td>
<td>(2.53)</td>
<td>(3.25)</td>
<td>(2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary enrollment</td>
<td>0.44***</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.25***</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
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<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
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<td>Democracy</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO membership (log)</td>
<td>3.92***</td>
<td>2.84***</td>
<td>2.49***</td>
<td>1.65+</td>
<td>6.50***</td>
<td>2.96***</td>
<td>2.02**</td>
<td>6.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.86)</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
<td>(0.67)</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
<td>(1.31)</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
<td>(0.70)</td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
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<td>Illiberal IGO membership</td>
<td>-5.08***</td>
<td>-5.26***</td>
<td>-4.60***</td>
<td>-3.11+</td>
<td>-5.55*</td>
<td>-5.19***</td>
<td>-2.96*</td>
<td>-5.87**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.16)</td>
<td>(1.24)</td>
<td>(1.17)</td>
<td>(1.78)</td>
<td>(2.50)</td>
<td>(1.23)</td>
<td>(1.43)</td>
<td>(1.98)</td>
<td>(1.26)</td>
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<td>Fertility</td>
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<td>(0.76)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth population</td>
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<td>Tertiary ceiling dummy</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-96.52***</td>
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Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1
Figure 1: World tertiary enrollment ratio, 1960-2016.

Figure 2. Proportion of countries experiencing year-to-year enrollment decline, with smoothed curve.
Appendix I: Illustrative examples: Hungary, Turkey, Afghanistan, Nigeria

We here describe examples of emergent opposition to universities. Our examples do not represent in-depth case studies but illustrate the issue of interest. They highlight that university attacks tend to be linked to movements or regimes that reject (some) dimensions of global liberalism and may involve a mix of suppression and co-optation.

**Hungary**

In the 1990s, Hungary was viewed as a model of successful transition to liberal democracy (Rupnik 2012). Higher education enrollment rates grew rapidly during the 1990s and much of the 2000s, from just under 20 percent to nearly 60 percent for men and a remarkable 80 percent for women (see Figure A1 below). In a striking reversal, Hungary today has become a poster child of a wave of illiberalism. In 2010, the country elected the right-wing, Euro-skeptic Fidesz party and prime minister Viktor Orbán. The majority was enough to enact constitutional amendments (Brodsky n.d.), paving the way for Orbán to pursue his vision of Hungary as an “illiberal democracy” (Kornai 2015).

The Orbán government launched a series of educational reforms, criticizing the school system for being “too liberal” and “failing children” (Deutsche Welle 2016). In 2013, the government nationalized the school system, transferring control from local authorities to a center (Reuters 2016a). The regime also nationalized the textbook industry and required standardized textbooks that met government approval (Freedom House 2014).

Orbán is especially critical of higher education and has argued that Hungarian education has produced too many people with “useless knowledge” and not enough manual laborers (Times Higher Education 2017). He has proclaimed a desire to turn Hungary into a “work-based” economy focused on manufacturing (Times Higher Education 2013).

In 2011, the government reduced the compulsory school-leaving age from 18 to 16. Subsequently, the number of students receiving the necessary certification to enter the university is reported to have fallen by nearly a quarter (Times Higher Education 2017). Soon after, the government severely cut the number of state-funded undergraduate university places. It also published a list of study fields that would no longer receive state-funded places, including economics and business studies, legal studies, international relations, and adult education (Times Higher Education 2013).

In 2017, the Central European University in Budapest, funded by Hungarian-born and US-based philanthropist George Soros, was targeted by restrictive legislation (New York Times 2017a). Additional reforms involved growing political control over existing universities, and the establishment of parallel institutions loyal to the government (European University Association 2017).

The cumulative effect of these anti-liberal policies has been to substantially reduce higher education enrollments in Hungary. Figure A1 presents the tertiary enrollment ratio in Hungary from 1970-2015. The enrollment ratio has declined 20 percentage points for women and 10 percentage points for men.
Turkey

On July 15, 2016, Turkey witnessed its 7th military coup attempt since its transition to a multiparty system in 1950. The Erdogan government responded immediately with mass arrests and purges (Human Rights Watch 2017a). The higher education sector was the focus of a sweeping crackdown -- an “unprecedented threat to a national higher education system” (Scholars at Risk 2017, 12).

In the 1990s, Turkey appeared to be on a liberalizing trajectory, becoming more democratic and a candidate for European Union (EU) membership. Enacting educational reforms in accordance with EU standards, the expansion of higher education was part and parcel of Turkey’s path. Enrollment rates grew dramatically and the number of public universities almost doubled from 53 in 2005 to 104 in 2014. Similarly, the number of non-profit private universities almost tripled from 25 in 2005 to 72 in 2014. Research spending rose more than tenfold between 2000 and 2011 (Özoğlu, Gür, and Gümus 2016).

Even prior to the coup attempt, a government crackdown on universities was growing. In January 2016, 1,128 academics in Turkey and abroad signed a petition opposing violence in Kurdish areas (Baser, Akgönül, and Öztürk 2017). Erdogan accused the signatories of treason and nearly 30 academics were detained (Nature News 2016). Subsequently, universities across Turkey carried out disciplinary proceedings against the academic signatories -- directed by the Higher Education Council (YÖK), a state authority established to monitor universities (Times Higher Education 2016a). Scholars at Risk notes that in 2016, by “midyear, the scale of criminal and administrative actions against thousands of scholars had already reached historically unprecedented levels for modern Turkey’s civilian-led governments” (Scholars at Risk 2016, 11).

Figure A1: Tertiary enrollment rate by gender in Hungary.
Erdogan, himself, has been sharply critical of Western higher education: “Those who were sent to the West for education came back with only the West’s culture, losing their identity. Those whom the country waited for to solve its problems came back as the West’s volunteer spies [...] Those who look down on their own nation, those who despise their own values [...] even our enemies couldn’t do damage like these so-called intellectuals did” (The Telegraph 2017).

When an attempted coup took place in July 2016, Erdogan and his party set out to detain or dismiss soldiers, judges, police, civil servants, academics, and teachers (Freedom House 2017). Universities have been a key focus of the crackdown. Four days after the coup, YÖK ordered the temporary resignation of 1,577 deans at state and private universities (Reuters 2016b). Erdogan also took direct charge of appointing university presidents (Times Higher Education 2016b). Scholars at Risk reports that from January 1, 2016 to August 31, 2017 (Scholars at Risk 2017):

- 7,023 university personnel were dismissed and banned from public service
- 1,404 university personnel and students were detained, arrested, or named in warrants
- 407 university personnel and students were criminally charged
- 60,000+ students were affected by state-ordered university closings
- 294 graduate students were expelled from Turkish institutions while studying abroad

Mass education has also been affected. In 2017, the National Education Ministry introduced a new curriculum to support national values and Islamic morality. Evolution and references to Darwinian theory have been removed, and Turkey’s secular heritage has been de-emphasized (New York Times 2017b). The Erdogan government also modified the school calendar with the introduction of Islamic celebrations, allowed teachers and students to veil, and encouraged sex segregation (Kandiyoti and Emanet 2017).

Interestingly, these crackdowns are thus far not associated with any decline in higher education enrollments. However, complaints about restrictions and persecution of scholars and students have grown sharply (e.g., Scholars at Risk 2017). Thus, Turkey seems to be pursuing a path of co-optation rather than suppressing education entirely.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan illustrates the dynamics of university opposition on the distant periphery of world society. University enrollments in Afghanistan declined substantially throughout the 1990s, when other countries aggressively expanded higher education. The decline was partly the result of a civil war, but was in larger part driven by the Taliban’s ascent to power in 1996. The Taliban regime engaged in widespread suppression of schooling, and the near wholesale destruction of universities (Baiza 2013).

The late 1970s and early 1980s had seen tentative growth in enrollments under the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the Soviet-backed communist party that toppled the Afghan monarchy in 1978. The PDPA had secularized education, had tried to provide free primary and secondary schooling, and had worked to expand higher education (Burde 2014). However, efforts were undercut by a civil war between the PDPA and various insurgent groups. PDPA purges of “non- or anti-revolutionary” individuals resulted in mass arrests throughout the educational system (Baiza 2013).
The Taliban overthrew the government in 1996 and moved to impose severe restrictions on the whole educational system, especially universities. They themselves were partly the product of a parallel education system that had developed in Islamist-controlled areas of Afghanistan and along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, in opposition to the official PDPA education system (Griffin 2001). Islamist resistance factions, with the support of Pakistan, the United States, and international organizations, used religious schools in refugee camps as recruitment centers for the anti-Soviet resistance (Burge 2014). The Taliban, which translates into “the seekers” and is commonly understood as “madrasa students seeking religious knowledge,” were a product of this system (Nojumi 2002). Many of the leaders and commanders were Soviet-era resistance fighters. Their soldiers were often madrasa students (Baiza 2013).

The Taliban set out to erase all non-Islamic influences in Afghanistan (Silinsky 2014). When they took the capital Kabul, they closed Kabul University to rid it of Western influences, including interaction between men and women (Chronicle of HE 1999). When some universities were re-opened later, they were open only to men and with severe restrictions. All students had to have beards of an appropriate length and Shari’a approved dress code had to be followed (US Department of State 1998).

By 1999, the majority of academics in Afghanistan – most of whom had degrees from Western institutions – had been dismissed or fled; by then the faculty at Kabul University apparently numbered 160, down from 900 (Chronicle of HE 1999). A refugee professor from Kabul University was quoted as saying that campuses in Kabul were “technically not closed, but those who do remain are forbidden from teaching anything in science, for example” (Chronicle of HE 2001). The curriculum in all departments, including the sciences and medicine, was changed so as to comprise mainly religious subjects (Chronicle of HE 2006).

The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and removed the Taliban from power. The US-supported regime began reconstruction of the educational system and higher education enrollment grew rapidly -- especially of women. By 2013, US aid programs for higher education amounted to more than $132.6 million; that year more than 185,000 students were enrolled at over 100 universities, contrasting with only 25,500 students at 21 universities in 2003 (Chronicle of HE 2013).

Nonetheless, schools and universities continue to be a key site for cultural conflict in Afghanistan. The ousted Taliban control large swaths of territory in rural areas and maintain an armed resistance in opposition to the current order (Silinsky 2014). Human Rights Watch and UNESCO have reported rising terrorist attacks on educational institutions by Islamist groups such as the Taliban, curbing enrollments in affected areas (UNESCO 2010; Human Rights Watch 2017b).

Nigeria

Nigeria’s Boko Haram caught the world’s attention in 2014 when it abducted over 250 school girls in the northern Nigerian state of Borno. The group aims to overthrow the government and create a pure Islamic state in Northern Nigeria (Comolli 2015). It achieved infamy in large part due to its violent opposition to Western-style education, reflected in its attacks on schools and universities.

Boko Haram’s formation is traced back to the mid-1990s when a Nigerian student founded a radical Islamist student group at the University of Maiduguri (Onuoha 2015). In
2003, the group launched some attacks on public buildings and police stations and established a community in the desert in Yobe, based on Salafi principles and the societal model of the Taliban (Boko Haram has been dubbed the “Nigerian Taliban”) (Walker 2012). In recent years, the violence of the group’s attacks has escalated under a new leadership (Comolli 2015). Human Rights Watch estimates that since 2009 around 10,000 civilians have died as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency (Human Rights Watch 2016).

While the group formally operates under a different name, it is globally known by its popular name, “Boko Haram,” which can be loosely translated as “Western education is forbidden” (Newman 2013). Indeed, there have been reports that the destruction of educational certificates was at one point a rite of passage for joining the group (Comolli 2015). The opposition involves a wholesale rejection of all types of Western education -- or sometimes just some elements. The group’s former leader Yusuf has been quoted arguing that Western subjects can be taught “if they do not clash with the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed” or “contradict Islamic teachings” (Mohammed 2015: 17). At the same time, he has classified some subjects, such as geography, geology, and sociology as categorically forbidden, noting that “these branches of knowledge are not knowledge but full of unbelief” and he further remarked: “if you have studied Islam, you’ll know, whoever you are, that in sociology there is danger” (Mohammed 2015: 18). He apparently also decreed as forbidden the sciences which deal with subjects such as Darwinism and evolution (Mohammed 2015).

A hallmark of Boko Haram’s insurgency since 2009 has been the destruction of schools and universities. It is estimated that at least 611 teachers had been deliberately killed and a further 19,000 forced to flee between 2009 and 2016 (Human Rights Watch 2016). As part of its violent rejection, Boko Haram has also attacked universities. In 2014, suicide bombers affiliated with the group detonated themselves in a full lecture hall at the Federal College of Education in the northern Nigerian state of Kano, killing at least 15 and injuring an estimated 34. Similar attacks were experienced at other Nigerian universities in northern and western Nigeria. In a separate 2014 incident at a university in northern Nigeria, students and faculty received threatening letters purportedly written by Boko Haram causing many to leave -- and, upon advice by the Nigerian military, the closure of the university (all incidents from: Scholars at Risk 2015). Between January and July 2017, the University of Maiduguri in Borno received six violent attacks, resulting in at least 14 deaths and 33 injuries and prompting state authorities to build a trench around the university. Media reports suggest that many university staff and faculty left the university in the wake of the attacks, and university attendance dropped severely (Scholars at Risk 2017). Tertiary enrollments in Nigeria have declined since the mid-2000s (though the trajectory is unclear, as reporting has ceased since 2011).

Appendix II: Description of illiberal international organizations

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS is a Russia-centric organization of former Soviet Republics, formed during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and today includes 9 full members and 2 associate members. The organization emphasizes anti-liberal norms in the Eurasian region. It has legitimated dubious elections, and has been described as creating “a new space for authoritarian pushback to international human rights regimes” (Cooley and Schaaf 2017: 162).
Reactions to the University

Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). This is an older inter-governmental organization linked to the Soviet Union, founded in 1949 (and active till 1991) to promote economic cooperation based on the coordination of national planned economies. The organization was formed as a communist alternative to liberal international efforts at economic integration and included countries with economic models similar to the Soviet Union and sufficient political loyalty, with membership at its maximum spanning 11 countries and several states with observer- or associate-type status. On occasion, member compliance with COMECON directions was coerced by force, using the Warsaw Pact – another organization linked to the Soviet Union (Obydenkova and Libman 2019).

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC is a six-country regional organization in the Gulf, founded in 1981 and today consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The GCC has been described as a “monarchy club,” with Saudi Arabia as the pivotal member, and features extensively in the scholarship on authoritarian regionalism (Kneuer et al. 2019, 457). During the Arab Spring, for instance, a GCC military intervention spearheaded by Saudi Arabia helped suppress an antigovernment uprising in Bahrain that had featured calls for democratization and greater respect for human rights (Libman and Obydenkova 2018; Debre 2020a). The GCC has also been noted for its 2012 Joint Security Agreement, which endows executive and security authorities with “extraterritorial powers that bypass traditional domestic legal checks and international norms” (Cooley 2015, 57).

League of Arab States (LAS). The LAS is also one of the older regional organizations, founded in 1945 with initially six members and now 22. The organization has historically stressed principles of non-interference and sovereignty, built around an imperative of regime survival (Barnett and Solingen 2007). While the League has recently employed sanctions against Libya and Syria for violent crackdowns (Beck 2015), it is generally seen as having a poor record of promoting democracy and human rights in its member states (Debre 2020b). The organization took almost sixty years to adopt a human rights charter, which even now has been described as falling short of universal standards, with “enforcement virtually non-existent” (van Hüllen 2015), and it has a record of legitimizing flawed election outcomes in its member states (Debre and Morgenbesser 2017).

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The OIC was formed in the late 1960s and today has almost 60 member states. The organization tends to emphasize Islamic distinction from Western values. While many of these emphases are not necessarily anti-liberal, the organization has not been insulated from Islamic anti-liberal mobilization. For instance, it has historically resisted liberal human rights visions, as reflected in its creation of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam in 1990, seen by human rights scholars as undermining international human rights (Kayaoglu 2013). Today the organization continues to support anti-liberal agendas, for instance blocking action on LGBT rights at the UN (Reuters 2016c; Hadler and Symons 2018).

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO was formed in 2001 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan and today includes 8 full members and several with observer-type status. The organization emphasizes ideas of national
development, state security, and traditional values, articulated around opposition to
universalistic liberal imperatives such as human rights (see Ambrosio 2008).

Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). The WTO, or “Warsaw Pact,” is another older regional
organization linked to the Soviet Union. Like COMECON, this military and political alliance
was founded in 1955 (and dissolved in 1991) as the communist alternative to parallel
developments in the West (in this case, the North Atlantic Treaty) (Crump and Godard
2018). At its maximum, the organization had eight members and several observer states.
We include the organization as an example of an IGO with an illiberal penchant given its
history of democracy prevention in member states, such as its well-known military
intervention to prevent liberalization during the Prague Spring in 1968 (Obydenkova and
Libman 2019, 109).

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