offers a series of observational studies, moving from hypothetical treatments of experiments toward real-world events. Again, whether it is the Massachusetts high court's ruling on same-sex marriage, an announcement by President George W. Bush on the Federal Marriage Amendment, the 2004 decision by the California Supreme Court stopping gay marriages in San Francisco, or the *Obergefell* decision, there is little or no evidence of public opinion backlash. To conclude this section of the book, chapter 5 theorizes about the extent to which different sorts of institutions, be they legislatures, courts, executives, or direct democracy, might affect the prevalence of backlash. Analyzing observational data surrounding the Obama administration's actions on gay marriage, as well as experimental evidence, the authors find no evidence that the type of institution that acts on gay rights policy affects the presence of backlash: indeed, there is just no evidence of backlash in the first place!

In chapters 6 and 7, the authors turn their attention to elite-led mobilization, seeking to provide an alternative to mass opinion backlash theory. Chapter 6 delivers a historical overview of gay rights in the United States, comparing the prevalence of backlash and elite-led mobilization. From this review, the authors see no real-world evidence of backlash but find substantial signs that elites have used gay rights policies to mobilize their supporters. Chapter 7 affords specific empirical tests of the elite-led mobilization theory, with particular attention to the 2010 anti-retention campaign against three Iowa Supreme Court justices after their ruling in favor of same-sex marriage. Discussing how there was no change in public support for same-sex marriage after the decision (contra backlash theory), the authors catalog how religious conservatives campaigned against the justices and present empirical evidence demonstrating that the Iowa justices fared worse in counties with a higher percentage of evangelical citizens. Finally, relying on campaign contribution data, the authors show that much of the Iowa anti-retention campaign was funded by national anti-gay interests. Chapter 8 concludes the book.

Elite-Led Mobilization and Gay Rights is an important book, both for its clear-eyed conceptualization of backlash and the fresh elite-led mobilization theory it advances. The mix of experimental and observational evidence the authors amass convincingly dispels the notion that advances in gay rights are uniformly (or even usually) accompanied by a decline in public support against expansive rights protections for minorities. The interesting analysis the authors provide of elite action in response to the Iowa Supreme Court's 2009 *Varnum* opinion illustrates how policy entrepreneurs can co-opt minority rights campaigns for their own ends.

Every single-issue study necessarily suggests a conversation about generalizability. The authors open the book citing studies across issue areas that invoke the concept of mass opinion backlash yet smartly train their attention in this book on gay rights. No single book can do everything; still, the question many readers will be left with at the end of the book is that of the extent to which the findings apply to areas other than gay rights. Future research should endeavor to answer whether elite-led mobilization explains other issues better than mass opinion backlash or whether some of the unique aspects of gay rights—perhaps especially the extremely quick and highly unusual trend toward public acceptance of gay rights in the 2010s—made public opinion backlash less applicable to the politics of gay rights, even as it might help us understand the politics of other rights campaigns. To be clear, understanding the politics of gay rights is an important end in and of itself, and Bishin and coauthors provide a convincing account of public opinion in this policy domain. By carefully elucidating the implications of two major theories, *Elite-Led Mobilization and Gay Rights* sets the stage for other scholars to compare the presence (or absence) of backlash beyond gay rights.

Although the book's arguments and conclusions are important for undergraduate and graduate students interested in public opinion, gay rights, and law and politics, this book should command a wide readership among activists and interest groups interested in expanding rights. As the authors point out, the wide acceptance of backlash theory has suggested to these groups a dispiriting model of social change: you may already be deprived of some of your rights, but if you try to improve your position, you risk losing even some of your current supporters. So, the best action is to stay in the closet and do not fight for your rights. By contrast, the gay rights movement—as masterfully explained by the authors—suggests the opposite story: groups can (and should) mobilize to advance their interests and can do so, win, and actually gain support. The public is not necessarily the enemy of these groups. The major contribution of this book—and one that deserves wide readership and citation—is that understanding the politics of rights-enhancing campaigns also requires understanding the actions of political entrepreneurs who opportunistically seek to use stigmatized groups as means to their own ends.

Response to Michael J. Nelson and James L. Gibson's Review of *Elite-Led Mobilization and Gay Rights: Dispelling the Myth of Mass Opinion Backlash*

doi:10.1017/S1537592722000603

— Benjamin G. Bishin
— Thomas J. Hayes
— Matthew B. Incantalupo
— Charles Anthony Smith

Professors Gibson and Nelson have been generous, thorough, and insightful in their assessment of our book. In highlighting the extent to which elite–led mobilization is

generalizable, they raise a critical question for the book and an important point for understanding democracies in general. In our book, we develop and test elite-led mobilization theory (ELM) to explain the politics of opposition to gay rights both in contemporary politics and over time. Consequently, its generalizability beyond issues relating to the LGBTQ community and the extent to which it is valuable for understanding policy beyond gay rights are important and open questions. To what extent can this theory help us understand opposition to the push for equality by other stigmatized or discriminated against groups?

Although we have not yet seen much research examining ELM in other contexts, we do see significant primary and anecdotal evidence consistent with ELM on issues of immigration, women's rights, and race, as just three examples. Indeed, with respect to immigration, our own research has shown the theory to be robust (Benjamin G. Bishin, Thomas J. Hayes, Matthew B. Incantalupo, and Charles Anthony Smith. 2022. "Immigration and Public Opinion: Will Backlash Impede Immigrants' Policy Progress?" *Social Science Quarterly* 102 [6], 2022). Additionally, as just one example, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) is an organization funded by right-wing elites and corporations and exists to coordinate state-level legislation on each of these issues. To what extent is opposition to equality for these groups elite-led, rather than mass-led as ELM suggests? The example of Black civil rights may be especially instructive.

A growing body of research shows that opposition to Black civil rights is driven by elites. Perhaps the most prominent development is the rise of the Tea Party, a right-wing reactionary response to the Obama presidency (Christopher S. Parker and Matt A. Baretto, *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*, 2013). Given the reliance by so many Tea Party supporters on the very social programs against which they rail, its origin as a mass-driven movement seems unlikely; instead, evidence suggests that the movement was elite-driven (Michael A. Bailey, Jonathan Mummolo, and Hans Noel, "Tea Party Influence: A Story of Activists and Elites," *American Politics Research* 40 [5], 2012; Anthony DiMaggio, *The Rise of the Tea Party: Political Discontent and Corporate Media in the Age of Obama*, 2011) and instigated by national activists who then mobilized on the local level around traditional conservative issues, an emphasis on American decline, and opposition to the nation's first Black president (e.g., Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 2012). The ongoing support by groups like ALEC of legislation initiated and supported by the Tea Party—for instance, limiting voting rights—further reinforces the role that right-wing elites play in opposing Black civil rights.

More recently, we have seen a relatively obscure line of legal thought, critical race theory (CRT), elevated to a hot-button issue in educational policy. The emergence of CRT as a political lightning rod is a direct consequence of a strategy by conservative elites to galvanize voters (see https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-inquiry/how-a-conservative-activist-invented-the-conflict-over-critical-race-theory). Even after months of elite discourse and media coverage, many Americans who express concern about the teaching of CRT and topics influenced by the theory in elementary and high schools have a difficult time articulating arguments advanced by CRT scholars. Of course, that this issue has come to the forefront despite the absence of CRT in schools in any meaningful way can be attributed to the persistent elite drumbeat about CRT on Fox News and in other conservative outlets. Once more, we see what appears at first to be a grassroots backlash actually turns out to be the product of an organized and well-funded campaign by political elites to introduce and advance a set of talking points to aid their quest for power.

The evidence for ELM provided here is, by necessity, anecdotal and preliminary. Future research should examine the extent to which the theory of ELM helps us understand opposition to equality for a wide range of social groups.

Judging Inequality: State Supreme Courts and the Inequality Crisis. By James L. Gibson and Michael J. Nelson. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 2021. 356p. $35.00 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592722001153

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Despite the occasional foray into high-profile policy arenas like marriage equality, reproductive rights, or the *Bush v. Gore* ruling, in recent decades, the US Supreme Court has steadily and relentlessly withdrawn from the politics of policy. The Court typically decides somewhat more than 50 and far fewer than 100 cases per year, and many of those are on mundane and minute points of statutory law. Despite its shrinking policy footprint, the academy and the agents of popular political culture continue to be more concerned with courts at the federal level, and the Supreme Court in particular, than they are with state courts. A practical reality of this retrenchment from the engagement of policy by the Supreme Court is that state courts have become more frequent courts of last resort. Operating across a wide spectrum of political coalitions throughout each state and created or bounded by 50 different state