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# The temporal cleavage: the case of populist retrotopia vs. climate emergency

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## ABSTRACT

How do time perceptions politicize contestation in the case of climate politics? We argue that across Western Europe and North America, contestation in the climate case and beyond forms along an emerging temporal dividing line. The climate movement's reference to the scientific understanding of climate with its nonnegotiable timescales is at odds with populism's Great Again 'retrotopias' referring to a romanticized fossil fuel past in which climate change is nonexistent. We understand these two distinct temporal positions within society as represented by *sometimers* and *anytimers* with each having their very own social structure, collective identity, and organizational manifestation. If supported by further studies, the generalized characteristics of *sometimers* and *anytimers* will allow for the development of a substantial temporal cleavage that might be indicative for the Anthropocene.

**KEYWORDS** Temporal cleavage; populism; climate emergency; *sometimer*; *anytimer*; conflict

## 1. Introduction

Explaining mobilization and polarization in societies has always been a key objective of the social sciences. In our exploratory study, we aim to contribute to this scholarship by proposing the notion of, and calling for further research on, what we describe as a 'temporal cleavage'. The case we use to elaborate this cleavage is the contestation in climate change politics in Western democracies. It is not by chance, we argue, that the opposing alliances refer to temporal statements in their slogans: '*Fridays for Future*' and '*Make America Great Again.*' In addition, we suggest that the climate case might be indicative of a wider readjustment of political mobilization in the Anthropocene. Hence, we explore how diverging time perceptions contribute to the formation of a temporal cleavage, and study its political importance in the climate case.

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We situate our research on this cleavage within the wider research field exploring societies' interactions with earth system dynamics in the Anthropocene that are currently barely studied in traditional environmental political science research. This is why we align with a recent call for a paradigm shift suggesting renewed concepts with explanatory power for the current state of the planet and its societies (Biermann 2021, Hanusch *et al.* 2021). In line with this, current studies underscore the need for integrating planetary and human time frames ranging from nanoseconds (e.g., in the case of the resource-intensive mining of Bitcoins) to deep time (e.g., in the case of nuclear waste storage) (Galaz 2019, Hanusch and Biermann 2020). Against this background, we see the need for research explaining how temporal perspectives contribute to social contestation and the formation of politicized dividing lines.

Current explanations for conflicts in the climate case, and in particular between the groups we described above, range from overall national and right-wing ideology (Lockwood 2018, Kulin *et al.* 2021) and a technocratic ecocentric worldview (Zulianello and Ceccobelli 2020) to individual attitudes (Huber 2020, Huber *et al.* 2020). To the best of our knowledge, none of these consider theoretically or test empirically the role of time perspectives.

Taking a look at time research, in recent decades a decisive scholarship focusing on time and politics has emerged (Goetz 2019) ranging from the methodology of temporal political research (Bartolini 1993) to time and conflict studies (Reychler 2015), with the latter focusing on the role of time in violent conflicts, but not on how time perspectives lead to the formation of politicized dividing lines.

The same holds true for studies on political conflicts, including the traditional cleavage studies (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). While an ongoing debate asks whether traditional economic and religious cleavages have declined, disappeared, or endured in new forms, a separate debate puts forward a very different account of social and political change – one focused less on the traditional cleavages and more on emerging new dimensions of political conflict cutting across old divisions and restructuring the basis of political competition. Yet, studies on the emergence of new conflict lines have not incorporated a genuine time perspective. This includes research on materialism vs. postmaterialism focusing primarily on attitudes about matter (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997), research on communitarism vs. cosmopolitanism focusing on attitudes on space (Kriesi *et al.* 2008, 2012), research on conservatism vs. progressivism focusing on change, research on globalization winners vs. losers focusing on economics, research on Green-Alternative-Liberal vs. Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist focusing on integration (Hooghe and Marks 2018), and research on technocracy vs. populism focusing on representation (Caramani 2017).

We aim to contribute to this scholarship by asking how time perceptions politicize contestation in the case of climate politics. We assume that contestation in the climate case forms along an emerging politicized temporal dividing line that might be indicative for the Anthropocene. The origin of the temporal cleavage, we argue, can be found in different positions on time of social actors that have emerged from transformed planet-human relations. Competing notions of time might have become an issue organizing political contention in many states worldwide, posing specific challenges for Western representative democracies. In order to elaborate such a temporal cleavage and to explore its plausibility, we rely on the seminal distinction of two fundamentally opposite notions of time (McTaggart 1908) and demonstrate how the two corresponding social groups profoundly shape policy making in the Anthropocene. Inspired by the work of Goodhart (2017), we call these opposing groups *sometimers* and *anytimers*.

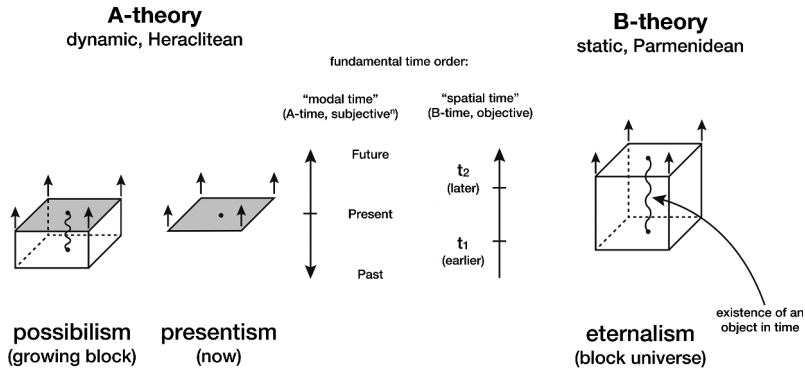
In the following, we first conceptualize the theoretical and methodological basis for our analysis of a temporal cleavage. Second, we apply this analytical scheme to the right-wing populist movement across Europe and North America on the one hand and the climate movement of Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion on the other. Third, we discuss our results, narrow down the cleavage in general patterns, and indicate avenues to further validate (or dismiss) the idea of a temporal cleavage.

## 2. Conceptualizing the temporal cleavage

### 2.1. The theory of competing time perspectives

The plausibility of a temporal cleavage rests on observations that social mobilization over a variety of conflicts can be ascribed to opposing perspectives of how people understand both the concept of time itself and effective human agency in spatio-temporal structures. We assign these oppositions to different conceptions of time, each of which gives preference to certain forms of political action. By relying on the philosophy of time and especially on John McTaggart's distinction between an *A series of time* and *B series of time*, we identify two positions on time. In his seminal 1908 paper 'The Unreality of Time,' McTaggart deals with the question of to what extent it is possible to make true statements about temporal phenomena (Adam 1995, Rohs 2020). We use his distinction of an A and B series as heuristic tools to distinguish opposing positions in political contestations since the 2010s.

The two time series differ in how they order events in a temporal structure (see Figure 1). The *A series of time* orders events regarding past, present, and future. It emphasizes the processual or dynamic character of time and appears in everyday language as passing or running time. This series privileges the present as its reference point. Thus, events have properties relative



**Figure 1.** Conceptualization of the A and B series of time. Translated and extended from Sieroka (2018, p. 19).

to the present, such as being ‘one day past,’ ‘present,’ or ‘one day in the future.’ In contrast, the *B series of time* emphasizes the ordering aspect of time and can be described by the image of the eternal or permanent order of things. In this series, events are ordered according to whether they occur before or after another event. Thus, there is no longer any privileged reference point. Accordingly, events have properties such as ‘earlier than,’ ‘simultaneously with,’ or ‘later than.’ So, for instance, 3 September 1866 is John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart’s birthday regardless of today’s date, the fact that he died on 18 January 1925 or that he published his seminal paper after his birth and before his death.

What ideas of social theory are implicated in each time series? People relying on the *A series* conception of time can either be aligned to *possibilism* or *presentism*. According to possibilism, the past is related to the present, while within presentism only the present exists. Accordingly, the possibilist image of the world is a growing block of history from the past till today, while the presentist one is flat with only the now being of importance. Because the future does not exist and is thus unconditioned, both types of actors first tend to derive present action from interpreting the past or simply live in the moment. Second, both have an affinity to ideas of human discretion and the potential of human agency (leadership). Third, they privilege a subjective perspective of the world by viewing the world from the present – from their present in contrast to the present of other actors. Thus, a greater affinity to relativistic epistemic and moral positions can be expected. Below, we describe people relying on the *A series* of time as ‘sometimes’ – in our case those aligned to populist retrotopias – because they align political action to improve their present situation. In contrast, the worldview of the *B-series* is the block universe. The totality of time, i.e., past, present, and future, is understood as equally given and real. This perspective regards time as

analogous to space, and because everything is always there and fixed, it is also called *eternalism*. Therefore, it also leans towards causal determinism and, by degree, to fatalism. In addition, eternalists can also be expected to have an affinity to universal epistemic and moral statements, such as obligations to future human beings. We describe people relying on the B series as ‘any-timers’ – in our case those aligned to the climate emergency – because they refer to political actions that relate various points in the block universe, such as past and future climate change, towards an overall environmental stewardship.

## 2.2. The methodology of cleavages

Defined as ‘politicized dividing line[s]’ (Bartolini 2009, p. 13), cleavages emerge in macro-social conflicts and resulting mobilization processes. As such, they are ‘specific political structures articulating voice within [...] nation-states’ (Bartolini 2007, p. xiii). Above, we argued that large-scale processes associated with the Anthropocene trigger such conflicts that have led to the formation of a temporal cleavage.

Cleavage configurations link individual political behavior to wide-ranging historical processes, explaining how crucial phases can create political path dependencies over decades and even centuries (Bornschieer 2009, p. 1). When Lipset and Rokkan (1967) first introduced their idea of cleavages, they focused on national politics and had three objectives: to explicate ‘*the genesis of the system of contrasts and cleavages within the national community,*’ to understand ‘*the condition for the development of a stable system of cleavage and oppositions in national political life,*’ and to explain ‘*the behaviour of the mass of rank-and-file citizens within the resultant party systems*’ (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, pp. 1–2, emphasis in original). As a result, Lipset and Rokkan found that social conflicts, which emerged before mass franchise, fundamentally structured political competition after universal suffrage was introduced, at least in Western Europe. These cleavages formed modernity’s processes of nation building, resulting in both the cultural conflicts of center vs. periphery and church vs. state as well as in socioeconomic conflicts of urban vs. rural and worker vs. owner. Depending on which cleavages prevailed within a state, the party systems formed accordingly, thus stabilizing, institutionalizing, and reproducing cleavages.

Three characteristics of cleavages have been identified (Bornschieer 2010, p. 55; see also Bartolini 2009, pp. 15–25):

- (1) *Socio-structural element*: a characteristic (like class, religious denomination, status, or education) that members of each of the opposing social groups have in common;

- (2) *Collective identity*: perceptions of distinct identities, ideological values, and interests that exist within each social group;
- (3) *Organizational manifestation*: structuring and institutionalization of conflicts between groups through parties by mobilizing identities, loyalties, and values. Thus, cleavage politics is always also identity politics, related to distinction and othering (Brons 2015, Ford and Jennings 2020).

There is a hierarchy among cleavages, with a few dominant cleavages polarizing politics, and both the hierarchy and cleavages change over time (Bornschieer 2009, p. 7, Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p. 6). Recent studies have investigated the decline of traditional cleavages as voters no longer align in stable preferences (dealignment). However, this research also sees new cleavages emerging (realignment) due to educational expansion, mass migration, aging societies, and geographical polarization, forming new hierarchies of cleavages (Ford and Jennings 2020). Having a flexible character, the cleavage concept has travelled to other regions and new democracies (Tóka 1998, Redžić and Everett 2020). Either way, in conceptual and methodological terms Bartolini (2009) calls for a demanding research agenda, distinguishing a cleavage itself from both the historical conflict it emerged from and the translation into a specific national party system.

Against this background, we see our exploration of the temporal cleavage as a potential analysis. Methodologically, it aims to develop ideal types through engagement with relevant scholarship and primary sources, informed by general knowledge of the relevant movements. More specifically, our qualitative analysis is based on the following scheme. We study the three dimensions of a cleavage, i.e., the social structure, collective identity, and organizational manifestation, with regard to the time perspectives of groups representing the A and B series, respectively. We attribute imaginaries of the A series to populist retrotopian groups, and those of the B series to climate emergency movements. Our nomenclature of the opposing positions draws on the distinction between ‘somewheres’ and ‘anywheres’ as introduced by Goodhart (2017). Thus, we refer to (collective) actors representing the A series as *sometimers* and to those of the B series as *anytimers*. Subsequently, we introduce both groups and elaborate their temporal stance. In doing so, we focus on contestation and mobilization in Western representative democracies.

### 3. Analysis of the temporal cleavage

#### 3.1. Populist retrotopia

In the context of climate change, *sometimers* are a homogenous group that is vulnerable in temporal respects because their material and ideational resources are closely related to a specific way of life. So, the reference to

a heartland is core for their identity, which forms around an envisioned retrotopia. In organizational terms, they rely on and infiltrate existing institutions, which they undermine when it suits their purpose.

### **3.1.1. Socio-structural: born, raised, and lived in the 'good ol' days'**

*Sometimers* are the temporal equivalent of the spatially connotated *somewheres*. With slight variations, *sometimers* usually support right-wing populist parties and movements (from Trump's Republican Party to the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) or the British Brexiters); they are on average of an older generation, white, male, working class, lowly educated, and live in rural areas or small towns (Goodhart 2017, p. 3, Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 21). Beyond that, they share country-specific characteristics. For instance, in the US (evangelical) religious denominations are key (Gorski 2017). As social mobility increased in recent decades, *sometimers* formed a looser alignment than the social groups identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967).

*Sometimers* have been ascribed identities at distinct places within distinct groups, such as the Polish farmer of the Kujawy region or the Irish coal worker of the Midlands. This makes most of them vulnerable to change, for example, due to the fourth industrial revolution. In other words, they neither benefit from change nor do they accept the idea that change is a natural given. In other words: they prefer time to pass without change happening. *Sometimers'* set of socio-structural characteristics makes them lose control over their lives in a world full of change, and thus they tend towards stability, they plea for a right to stop things from changing and to continue the life one is living (Goodhart 2017, p. 7).

Thus, *sometimers* are vulnerable and resistant to change, or as a proponent of the B series would put it: resistant to locations in spatio-temporal structures other than what they experience as their present or a narrated past. This is mirrored in their search for a nostalgic heartland in the form of a retrotopia. The heartland is the 'territory of imagination, that populists construct the "people" as the object of their politics' (Taggart 2004, p. 274). The heartland is an imprecise retrotopia; because it is projected from the past into the present, it is assumed to have been proven as feasible. Socio-structural factors only make sense once they are contextualized against this notion of a heartland, which *sometimers* overwhelmingly regard as the 'normal' ethnic and cultural homogeneity, traditional order, national social contracts, dutifulness, lifestyles, and jobs from decades ago. Due to their biography, *sometimers* are not in the same way concerned about scientific facts as *anytimers*; instead, what guides their actions are narratives of their retrotopia.



### 3.1.2. *Collective identity: back to the good old future*

Identity is paramount to understanding the temporal cleavage because conceptions of time are at the core of retrotopian populists, including their ideological overlaps with the alt-right (Stern 2019, pp. 33–49). Retrotopias are visions rooted in a ‘lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future’ (Bauman 2017, p. 3, Elçi 2021). They have an impact on every level of social life, from individual lifestyles to worldviews of (trans)national social groups, addressing supposed desires of stability and self-assurance, and even ‘overwriting’ the scientific consensus that industrialization has led to climate change. As a means against unwanted change, the sometimers produce retrotopias based on two features: *selectivity* and *cyclicity*.

First, *selectivity* leads to iterations rather than reiterations, thus transfiguring the past into nostalgia (Bauman 2017, p. 7). Producers of retrotopias question historical realities and the importance of climate timescales. They produce a politics of eternity that brings ‘the past as a vast misty courtyard of illegible monuments to national victimhood, all of them equally distant from the present, all of them equally accessible for manipulation’ (Snyder 2017, p. 121). Selective remembering allows romanticizing a state of society and fossil fuel past, which leaves no room for climate temporalities. This was evoked by US President Trump when claiming ‘OIL (ENERGY) IS BACK!!!!’ (Trump 2020). During his presidential campaign in 2016, he envisioned: “When we win, we are bringing steel back, we are going to bring steel back to Pennsylvania, like it used to be. We are putting our steel workers and our miners back to work. We are. We will bring back our once-great steel companies” (Donald Trump, in Danner 2016). In this selective remembering, steel was taken away and the due course of history was endangered, while sometime in the more distant past steel companies brought wealth and carried identities, feelings of pride, and narratives of heritage and destiny.

Second, *selectivity* allows the creation of *cyclicity*. The idea of *cyclicity* is made possible by ‘esoteric historical theory’ (Clark 2019, p. 17), such as in *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America’s Next Rendezvous. An American Prophecy* (Strauss and Howe 1998). This book argues that history is structured in 80–100-year cycles recurring with a fixed set of four social moods and turnings: (1) ‘high’ through a new order, (2) ‘awakening’ through a new value regime, (3) ‘unravelling’ as order decays, and (4) ‘crisis’ and replacement of the order. Stephen Bannon constantly referred to this pseudo-scientific narrative, and as former chief campaign strategist and White House chief strategist he implemented it in governmental politics. Even after he left the White House, the ‘Great Again’ retrotopian narrative remained (Howe 2017) and was for the 2020 election slightly modified in a presentist manner as ‘Keep America Great.’ According to Bannon, humanity is currently in the fourth turning described by Strauss

and Howe (1998, p. 258): ‘The Crisis climax is human history’s equivalent to nature’s raging typhoon, the kind that sucks all surrounding matter into a single swirl of ferocious energy. (...) The climax can end in triumph, or tragedy, or some combination of both.’ All this resonates with the argument that the future is unconditioned; if climate change is admitted at all, it is an issue that humans can fight as they have done before.

The consequence of a selective and cyclic understanding of world affairs is that ‘new pasts are being fabricated to replace old futures’ (Clark 2019, p. 18). Thinking in cycles of hundreds of years calls for a political system that allows grand strategies and civilizational goals, a dynastic system supposedly taking the long term into account (Stern 2019, pp. 44–45).

### **3.1.3. Organizational manifestation: ambiguous generationalism**

Strikingly, the ‘guides to the heartland’ are not sometimers themselves, but anytimers like Boris Johnson or Donald Trump – born into an elite network, flexible in their living conditions, and having enough resources to live well in times of change. In some cases, such as in France with Marion Maréchal (Maréchal-Le Pen), Marine and Jean-Marie Le Pen, or in the US with the Trump clan, they attempt to establish a dynastic leadership.

Sometimers use traditional ways of political participation – namely elections – more often than anytimers. The voter turnout of members of the interwar generations, who show the highest support for authoritarian parties, is almost twice as high as that of the millennials and generation X, who show the least support for authoritarian parties and the highest support for socially liberal views (Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 259). In line with the socio-structural explanations, authoritarian-populist parties mobilize an older and rural electorate. In sum, values of older generations and the rural population are overrepresented in party politics (Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 260). Meanwhile, sometimer movements – especially in majoritarian systems – aim to subvert and infiltrate traditional conservative parties in order to steer them towards their retrotopian visions. This development can be seen in the Tea Party movement and the US Republican Party or the right-wing Brexiteers and the British Conservatives.

When voter turnout disfavors sometimers, they also opt for non-electoral politics (Pirro and Portos 2020). The yellow vests movement in France is a prominent example of the presentist or even retrotopian vision of sometimers fighting against climate policies seen as a threat to their heartland. Another example is the German ‘Fridays for Hubraum’ (‘Fridays for engine size’) movement opposing ‘Fridays for Future.’ Organized in a Facebook group of over 500,000 members, they are against any climate policies that oppose individual mobility and fossil fuel-based combustion engines. Unsurprisingly, the AfD endorsed the movement. And again, it is the same pattern: even if not directly denying anthropogenic climate

change, they are against anything that could endanger the present or their retrotopia. In other words, social change not in line with repopulating the heartland has to stop.

### 3.2. *Climate emergency*

In the context of climate change, *anytimers* are a heterogeneous group that is temporally resilient by commanding the material and ideational resources to manage and welcome social change as just another location in the block universe. They believe that science is the prime means to understand the universe, allowing the climate emergency to be calculated. In organizational terms, they see street protests calling for climate action by politics as their prime political strategy.

#### 3.2.1. *Socio-structural: temporally resilient and open to change*

Socially, *anytimers* resemble the *anywheres* who are described as a well-educated and mobile group. In their late teens, they usually move to a university town and, after graduating, on to a career in a metropolitan area or even abroad. They tend to see the world as a global village. Because of their educational and professional background, they can easily deal with living in new places and connecting to new people. Often, they are part of the relatively affluent parts of society (Goodhart 2017).

*Anywheres* are perceived to be culturally and politically hegemonic – at least in traditional Western democracies. In this sense, they aspire to having their own worldview appear as the common sense of the whole society. On the traditional right–left spectrum, they are difficult to locate, mainly because they consist of ‘on the one hand, mainstream liberal currents of the new social movements (feminism, antiracism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, and LGBTQ rights); on the other hand, the most dynamic, high-end “symbolic” and financial sectors of the U.S. economy (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood)’ (Fraser 2017, Goodhart 2017, Sandel 2020).

Two aspects are relevant for the temporal focus on *anytimers*: social change and education. While *sometimers* feel threatened when the present becomes different to what it was and moves even farther away from their heartland, *anytimers* hold the arrival at other locations in the block universe as a constant and permanent – a natural-law-like condition that societies constantly need to adapt to and can use for progress. In their view, social change takes place in a world that is fundamentally calculable and measurable. Thus, the best way to adapt is through higher education, science, and smart innovation so as to become temporally resilient (Benessia and Funtowicz 2016, Goodhart 2017, Sandel 2020).

Two of the most visible groups of the global but regionally diversified climate emergency movement are *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion*. The international movement of (mainly) school students Fridays for Future is supported by adult-led groups such as Artists for Future, Entrepreneurs4Future, and Scientists 4 Future (S4F) – with the latter being the most prominent among them (Hagedorn *et al.* 2019). Studies on the social background of participants show that they belong to the educated classes. High school and university students are overrepresented, and at least one parent typically has a university degree. With the growing popularity of the movement, more adults have participated, most of whom have academic backgrounds as well (Wahlström *et al.* 2019, Haunss and Sommer 2020). Within the climate emergency movement, we find argumentation that corresponds to the mind-set of the anytimers. For instance, Thunberg (2019a) refers to ‘The people who have been unaware, but are now starting to wake up. And once we become aware, we change. People can change. People are ready for change.’ With this, she links the anytimers’ progressive ideals, that if people only become aware they will act correctly, with a positive evaluation of change. This focus on science, innovation, and social change is mirrored in a statement by S4F (Hagedorn *et al.* 2019): ‘Many social, technological, and nature-based solutions already exist. (...) There is no time to wait until they [young protesters] are in power.’

### 3.2.2. *Collective identity: chronopolitan reasoning based on universal equations*

Anytimers tend to hold a ‘chronopolitan’ perspective, claiming that the world should be seen ‘as an evolving system of changing temporalities. It presupposes the global present but transcends it by opening up to alternative pasts and futures, and also to the diversity of intersecting rhythms of life. [...] The chronopolitan ideal is mindful of the rights of future generations. These rights are already inscribed in the actions and thoughts of the living, in that present actions extend temporally to various times in the future’ (Cwerner 2000) (see also Adam 2020).

Compatible with the idea of time typical of the B series, anytimers believe that the past, present, and future are always already there within the block universe in which one has to maneuver. Anytimers usually hold universalist perspectives both in a moral and epistemological respect, including a ‘progressive individualism’ (Goodhart 2017). Their moral convictions center around abstractions, such as ‘humans,’ ‘humanity,’ or ‘the planet.’ Yet what is considered good thus strongly depends on the moral attitudes of different anytimer groups. For instance, sustainable development can be regarded as their guiding principle, yet nevertheless one finds conflicting interpretations, from Buen Vivir to the green economy.

Anytimers usually have homogenizing notions about how science is able to explain the world and can contribute with recommendations. In line with the assumptions of the block universe, universalizing statements, such as the Anthropocene equation or the reports of the International Panel on Climate Change, are representative of their worldview (Gaffney and Steffen 2017). They allow one to precisely calculate the reasons for a climate emergency – or as expressed in the slogans of Extinction Rebellion (2020), ‘Time is running out’, ‘This is an emergency’, and ‘Act now.’ Hence, science’s role in the climate emergency movement is crucial. They have clear chronopolitan and universalizing intuitions when they state: ‘[We] strike because we care for our planet and for each other. We have hope that humanity can change, avert the worst climate disasters and build a better future’ (Fridays for Future 2020b). Accordingly, they unite the rhetoric of progressive individualism with that of social movements: ‘We, as a movement, stand together as one. We are all people of the same planet, regardless of borders, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion, abilities and social origin and deserve to be treated as equal. Every opinion and voice should be heard and valued the same. We try to be as inclusive as possible and welcome everyone as long as they respect our values and principles’ (SmileForFuture 2020) (see also Extinction Rebellion 2020).

The intense relationship between the Fridays for Future movement and the scientific system is intriguing because both mutually generate legitimacy. For instance, in her speech to the UN, Greta Thunberg (2019b) stated: ‘[For] more than 30 years the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away (. . .)’. In turn, Thunberg’s observation is shared by the S4F: ‘The enormous grassroots mobilization of the youth climate movement – including Fridays for Future, School (or Youth) Strike 4 Climate, Youth for (or 4) Climate, and Youth Climate Strike – shows that young people understand the situation’ (Hagedorn *et al.* 2019). Their mutual support becomes regularly evident, such as in a response commissioned by Fridays for Future (Wuppertal Institut 2020): ‘That is why we show once again that science is behind us. We have turned to science ourselves and asked: What is necessary to stay below these 1.5°C?’ (Fridays for Future 2020a).

### 3.2.3. *Organizational manifestation: evidence-based projects through ‘glocal’ networking*

Anytimers’ preferred form of organization is projects they commit to for a period before moving on, which corresponds to the notion of permanent change that may require different approaches each time. This project consists of ‘putting moral pressure on policymakers, to make them listen to the scientists, and then to take forceful action to rapidly decarbonize the global economy’ (Fridays for Future 2020b). For this project, they leave school in order to demonstrate ‘[for] our future, for a better society, for our planet’

(SmileForFuture 2020). This became obvious in Greta Thunberg's speech to the UN: 'This is all wrong. I shouldn't be standing here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean' (Thunberg 2019b).

Anytimers' appreciation of higher education and science results in a plea for a new science-policy interface in accordance with the assumptions of the block universe, apparent in their slogan 'Listen to the science'. As a diverse movement, that claim is translated into forms of politics that range from evidence-based technocratically smart innovations to inclusive democratic decision-making. On the one side, the framing of the climate crisis is indeed grounded on Monism and a Manichean vision of the world, and both features have a clear polarizing tendency (Zulianello and Ceccobelli 2020). 'Listen to science' sets clear limits to policy agendas and policy outcomes because science is elevated to an absolute truth, to an absolute good. When an absolute good is identified, there is no reason to compromise, and thus there is a tendency not only to polarization but also to technocracy (Caramani 2017). On the other side, Thunberg (2019a) claims that 'democracy is every second'; meanwhile, Extinction Rebellion collaborates with Graham Smith, a leading scholar of democratic innovations (Smith 2019, University of Westminster, London 2019). Accordingly, the organization of Fridays for Future is decentralized and networked. Local groups organize themselves, and everyone is encouraged to participate. The movement is nonhierarchical and at a distance from the established political parties. A workshop that took place in Lausanne in August 2020, in which, according to the organizers, 400 activists from 38 countries participated, aimed to give the movement a certain global cohesion (SmileForFuture 2020). In Germany, tensions showed between the egalitarian and participatory aspirations of the movement (seen as an inclusive project valuing everyone) and the logic of media cultures, as many media outlets focus on individual charismatic personalities such as Greta Thunberg or, in Germany, Luisa Neubauer or Jakob Blasel. Further tensions have arisen between the purity of doctrine as advocated on the street and the need for compromise in the political arena. This became openly apparent in Germany over the question of whether activists from Fridays for Future should enter the national parliament via the lists of established parties, usually the Green Party (Schipkowski 2020, Zaremba 2020).

#### 4. Discussion

Here, we organize the discussion of our observations regarding two aspects. First, we attempt a general statement regarding a temporal cleavage, and second, we suggest further steps for research to broaden and deepen the understanding of such a cleavage.

#### 4.1. The temporal cleavage

We outlined a stabilized contestation between the sometimers and anytimers along the temporal cleavage. Table 1 displays the characteristics of the temporal cleavage in the form of Weberian ideal types.

Sometimers are particularly concerned with change over time. They feel themselves and the world dear to them (their ‘heartland’) as vulnerable and threatened by the flow of time (‘temporal vulnerability’). The only social change they accept is change leading to their heartland. In contrast, for anytimers change is a constant and permanent feature of the world because every spatio-temporal location in the block universe is different from other locations. Their focus is not directed at their communities of origin but is globally oriented. Education and science are their means to understand the block universe and to generate temporal resilience.

Sometimers define their specific present and thus are considered ‘chrono-particularists’. They explore the truths of their present in and through narratives – which are not necessarily reactionary even if sometimers tend to be associated therewith. Faced with social change perceived as a threat, they tend to take refuge in stories (‘cocooning’). In contrast, anytimers perceive space and time as a reality that can be politically managed by universal mathematical laws and universalistic moral norms and thus are considered ‘chrono-politans’. Their aim is to shape this space towards the future.

So, regarding the conceptual relationship between time and change, we assume that imaginaries of how time flows influence both group’s political responses to change. For sometimers, envisioning a growing block with only present and past existing, the future seems indeterminate, and thus change potentially threatening to their space of experience. In contrast, anytimers feel that the block universe, with all time already existing, allows them to control and bring about the change they deem needed.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the temporal cleavage.

	Representatives of the A series	Representatives of the B series
Social structure	Sometimers in their heartland with temporal vulnerability	Anytimers on the planet with temporal resilience
Collective identity	Chrono-particularists as ‘seekers after their truth’ with reactionary, presentist, or unconditioned future narrations, leading to cocooning	Chrono-politans as ‘seekers after the reality’ with universal equations including conditioned futures, leading to intertemporal acting
Organizational manifestation	‘Guides to the heartland’ use elite networking & dynastic leadership to implement the idea that everything has to stay the same or turn into their heartland	‘Progressive avant-garde’ uses global networking & demo-techno-crazy to implement the idea that inevitable change as a natural given has to be dealt with

In organizational terms, both groups work in network-like structures. They differ in that sometimers are looking for (dynastic) leaders to guide them back to their heartland. Sometimers show a strategy of infiltrating, especially conservative parties and political institutions. In contrast, anytimers keep a distance from political parties and institutions but favor street protests and time-based projects that can be adjusted in response to change. Their glocal networking is ambiguous in terms of technocratic and democratic principles and calls for novel science–policy interfaces.

#### **4.2. Temporal cleavage: from a potential analysis to a validated and verified concept**

Inspired by the cleavage literature (e.g., Bartolini 2009, Bornschier 2010), we have elaborated how different time perspectives generate oppositions that have crystallized into conflict over climate action, on how particular political entrepreneurs have emerged on both sides, and on which mobilization strategies and political arenas they have preferably chosen. With this, we argue for the emergence of a temporal cleavage as the politicized dividing line over conflicts associated with transformations in the Anthropocene. To substantiate both ideal types and the respective temporal cleavage, further research is needed.

First, Bartolini (2009, p. 19) reminds us that ‘[if] a cleavage is regarded as a conflict line or a division line translated into politics, the translation is what historically constitutes the linkage between social condition, consciousness, and action.’ In our explorative study, we focused on the specific translation in Western Europe and the United States. We expect, however, that conflicts associated with climate change, and more generally with the transformative processes in the Anthropocene, might be translated differently or repressed or depoliticized (Levine 1997). A wider geographical focus will help us gain a better understanding of the temporal cleavage. This includes, beyond our explorative research, comparative study designs that combine case-based with variable-based research. Thus, a better understanding of how the temporal cleavage is translated in different political systems can be achieved.

Second, a sectoral broadening is also needed. If we are correct in assuming that the temporal cleavage is the division line of the Anthropocene, then more nuanced empirical studies in policy fields beyond climate are needed, such as energy policy with its obvious temporal cases of final depositories of nuclear waste or biodiversity policy dealing with the results of millions of years of evolution.

Third, the understanding of the temporal cleavage might be deepened by becoming empirically grounded in, and linked to, individual time perceptions. Two lines of research seem to be particularly promising in this regard. The literature on the consideration of future consequences



provides a good starting point to reflect on how notions of time should affect behavior and attitudes (Bruderer Enzler 2015, Joireman and King 2016, Beiser-Mcgrath and Huber 2018). Studies in the field of time psychology on different time perspectives provide promising insights into, for example, how a past, present, and future orientation or a so-called balanced time perspective influence sustainable attitudes and behaviors (Wittmann and Sircova 2018, Shipp and Aeon 2019). Yet, both strands of research need to be linked to social contestation, possibly resulting in a temporal cleavage.

Fourth, the relation of the temporal cleavage to other cleavages needs to be further elaborated. This includes its relations to the cleavages identified in the seminal study by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) as well as those proposed by more recent scholarship (e.g., Ford and Jennings 2020). We have to understand whether the temporal cleavage is transversal to other cleavages, replaces an old one, or simply adds another cleavage dimension to the complex societies of the 21st century.

Finally, and again related to our conceptual frame, empirical research might enrich and sharpen the understanding of whether it is possible to separate the temporal dimension of cleavages from the spatial dimensions or whether they necessarily hang together in certain coherent constellations. So, from a counterfactual viewpoint, it would be interesting to find ‘planetary sometimers’ and ‘local anytimers’ and make sense of their visions of politics in the Anthropocene.

## 5. Conclusion

Our analysis identified temporal reasons for social conflict over climate change. We found conceptual and empirical indications of a temporal cleavage separating Western societies between (as we called them) sometimers and anytimers. The focus on a distinct temporality seems to be worthy of further investigation in order to better understand conflicts and mobilization in the Anthropocene. Subsequently, we identify two further implications of our study.

First, time has been there all along. So far, the temporality of democracies has been adjusted to some generalized features of human lifespans, including voting age and election cycles. Yet, sometimers and anytimers (as representatives of the core cleavage of the Anthropocene) demand broader recognition of temporal otherness and temporal literacy. On top of that, and beyond the scope of our indicative study, a third party requires temporal recognition in political systems, namely, the planet itself with its deep-time interdependencies.

Second, a distinct temporal perspective translated in terms of knowledge implementation and political practice could bring new formats of policy making. Contestation and mobilization are essential to tackling climate change, but their cultivation through democratic politics is key to avoiding resignation or even social division (Hanusch 2018). The question then is how to deal with conflicts over temporality in democratic politics. At the individual level, citizens need temporal literacy to become self-aware of and to reflect upon their positioning as sometimers or anytimers. This includes a pronounced temporal vocabulary of similar precision as we already have for the spatial dimension of planetary politics.

At the level of institutions, we have demonstrated how sometimers opt for the path of traditional institutions of representative democracy, while anytimers prefer a project-based approach. Herewith, new tasks arise for democracy research when it comes to finding novel platforms for both approaches to engage in argumentative contestation about redesigning human–planet relations in the Anthropocene.

After all, it appears that social sciences are just at the very beginning of understanding temporal positioning, how it is interwoven with planetary times, and the possible consequences for democratic contestation. Time matters.

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