Brexit domino?
The political contagion effects of voter-based disintegration

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Abstract

The growing popular backlash against international institutions has resulted in several national referendum votes aimed at withdrawing from or renegotiating the membership terms of international institutions. To shed light on the systemic implications of these voter-based disintegration efforts, this paper examines how such efforts reverberate abroad. Observing other countries' disintegration experiences allows voters to better assess their own countries' prospects outside of existing international institutions. Depending on the nature of the disintegration experience, this may both encourage or deter them to support a similar move for their own country. The paper empirically examines this argument for the case of Brexit. It leverages original survey data from 49 488 EU-27 Europeans collected in five survey waves since the start of the Brexit negotiations and from a two-wave survey of 2241 Swiss voters conducted around the first Brexit extension in spring 2019. The results document both encouragement and deterrence effects of Brexit.

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1.   Introduction

International institutions have become increasingly contested in the past years. Institutions as diverse as the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter et al. 2016; De Vries 2018), the WTO (Pelc 2013), or international courts (Alter et al. 2016; Chaudoin 2016; Voeten 2019) have become salient and polarizing issues in national public debates. Efforts to not only slow down, but to reverse international integration have proliferated. The most prominent example is Brexit, the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (EU). But other examples include the US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, several African states' withdrawals from the International Criminal Court (ICC), or open non-compliance with the core norms of international organizations, such as in Poland, Hungary, or Italy. Although skepticism about the merits of international cooperation, exits from international treaties, or even dissolutions of international organizations are nothing new, the frequency with which they manifest themselves has increased in recent years.

The spread of non-cooperative, or even disintegrative tendencies is widely seen as a serious threat to international institutions and international cooperation more generally. The Economist has warned that the "politics of anger" might lead to an unravelling of globalization and the prosperity it has created (The Economist 2016). This concern is shared by academics, who have argued that multilateralism has become increasingly contested (Morse and Keohane 2014) and that the contemporary global world order is facing significant challenges (Pepinsky and Walter 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019).

Against this backdrop, it is imperative to better understand how attempts to revert or undermine international institutions spread, how they can be contained, and which dynamics they produce in the international arena. In short, we need a better understanding of the politics of disintegration and their implication for international relations. Whereas there is vast research on the creation and functioning of international institutions (for overviews, see e.g. Martin and

Simmons 2013; Pevehouse and von Borzyskowski 2016; Gilligan and Johns 2012), the causes, dynamics, and consequences of international disintegration are not yet well understood (e.g., Jones 2018; Schneider 2017; Vollaard 2014). A few studies examine under what circumstances states withdraw from international institutions (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019; Helfer 2005, 2017; Shanks et al. 1996), and when international organizations seize to function or even to exist (Crasnic and Palmtag 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2018; Gray 2018). But we are still only at the beginning of understanding how these processes are related, how they interact, how they spread and how they are contained.

This paper contributes to a better understanding of these questions by examining how disintegration processes reverberate internationally. Such processes provide other countries with a lot of information about the benefits and downsides of such a decision that can influence their decision to pursue a similar path. Yet the direction of this effect is unclear. One the one hand, disintegration processes in one country may encourage other countries to equally reconsider or renegotiate their membership in international agreements. On the other hand, they may also increase support for continued membership in and compliance with international institutions.

To examine whether disintegration processes reverberate abroad, and whether this deters or encourages countries to pursue a similar path, this paper focuses on *voter-based disintegration* (Walter 2019b) as one of the most extreme expressions of the backlash against international institutions. Voter-based disintegration is a process in which a member state of an international institution attempts to unilaterally change the terms of or withdraw from an existing international institution on the basis of a strong popular mandate, such as a referendum vote or a successful candidate's key election promise. Such voter-based disintegration efforts have proliferated in recent years. Among the twenty referendums on international issues that were held worldwide between 2010 and 2019, for example, every second referendum was on

an issue that either implied the withdrawal from an international institution or non-compliance with or renegotiation of international institutions (see De Vries et al. 2019).

Such voter-based disintegration is particularly challenging for international institutions as they transcend international borders. Not only do they create negative externalities for the institution's other member states (Walter et al. 2018), but they also politicize questions of international cooperation and the costs and benefits of international disintegration in the other member states. For example, after the Brexit referendum vote, euphoric Eurosceptics across Europe, from France's Marine le Pen to the Slovak People's Party-Our Slovakia, called for similar referendums in their own countries. And across the Atlantic, then-candidate Donald Trump tweeted that British voters "took their country back, just like we will take America back."[1] Similarly, the leaders of Spain's Podemos or Italy's Five-Star-Movement celebrated Greece's 2015 referendum-based bid for a more generous bailout package, raising fears that it would spark similar demands in other Eurozone crisis countries. However, such political contagion does not always occur. Moreover, it is possible that these popular challenges to international institutions actually strengthen the commitment to the rules-based order in other countries. For example, public support for the EU has increased since the Brexit referendum (Glencross 2019), the 2016 presidential election that brought Donald Trump to power led to a marked uptick in support for European integration among Europeans (Minkus et al. 2018), and popular appetite to leave the Paris Accord has not spread to other countries. Faced with a threat to an existing international institutions, voters in the other member states may thus mobilize in support of the institutions. Rather than spread internationally, voter-based disintegration efforts by one country could thus then lead to a strengthening of the affected institution.

Irrespective of whether voter-based disintegration processes launched by voters in one country encourage or deter voters abroad to pursue a similar strategy, voter-based instances of

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[1] Tweet from June 24, 2016

disintegration tends to be much more politicized and salient in the political debate both at home and abroad than disintegration decisions taken by a small foreign policy elite.[2] As such, they provide a fertile ground for studying the political contagion effects of disintegration.

I argue that voter-based disintegration processes can create political contagion effects abroad because they inform voters about the likely economic, social, and political consequences of disintegration. This allows voters abroad to assess more accurately whether and to what extent disintegration presents a viable and better alternative to membership in the international institution. A positive disintegration experience that improves the situation of the withdrawing country is likely to encourage voters in other countries to pursue a similar path. As a result of this dynamic, disintegration pressure in one country is likely to spread across countries. In contrast, observing that a country is worse off post-disintegration is likely to decrease voters' enthusiasm for disintegration efforts by their own country. Whether a voter-based disintegration experience abroad ultimately encourages or deters voters from supporting a similar path for their own country thus depends on the "success" of the other country's voter-based disintegration efforts. This in turn creates incentives for the remaining member states and the international institution to take these political contagion effects in mind when responding to disintegration efforts by one member state.

Empirically, the paper examines the reverberations of Brexit in the other European countries using original survey data from 49488 EU-27 Europeans collected in five survey waves during the ongoing Brexit negotiations (July and December 2017, June and December 2018, and July 2019). To additionally examine how Brexit affects vote intentions for actual, upcoming disintegration referendums, I additionally analyze original survey data from Switzerland, collected in two waves surrounding the first No Deal–Brexit-cliff edge on March 29, 2019. This latter analysis allows me to gauge how observing the difficulties of

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[2] For a discussion of these latter instances, see von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2018).

implementing Brexit events affect voters who actually have to vote in upcoming referendums on their country's relations with the EU.

Overall, the analysis shows that Brexit has both an encouragement and a deterrence effect: Those who think that Brexit is going to be positive for the UK are significantly more likely to support a withdrawal of their own country from the EU or, in the Swiss case, existing bilateral treaties with the EU. In contrast, those who assess the Brexit experience as negative for the UK are less likely to support such non-cooperative votes. Moreover, the analysis shows that Swiss voters became significantly more willing to cooperate with the EU after observing Britain's failed attempt at leaving the European Union as originally scheduled.

2.   Is international disintegration politically contagious?

International cooperation and the tension between national sovereignty and international authority have been increasingly politicized in recent years (Grande and Kriesi 2015; Hutter et al. 2016; Zürn 2014; Zürn et al. 2012). Public support for international organizations has decreased over time (Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019) and the rise of populist nationalism presents a considerable challenge for international institutions (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019).

One prominent explanation for this popular turn against international cooperation has been that as inequality has grown, policies designed to shelter voters from economic risks have been scaled back in years characterized by austerity, the rise of China, and growing migration flows, the "embedded liberalism" (Ruggie 1982) that characterized the post-WWII world order has faded away, leaving those hurt by globalization more exposed to the vagaries of the global economy (e.g., Autor et al. 2016; Bastiaens and Rudra 2018; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Hobolt 2016; Vasilopoulou et al. 2014). Others highlight the growing importance of identity and cultural value divides (e.g., Kentmen-Cin and Erisen 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019) as

sources for a growing discontent with international institutions and globalization more generally.

Dissatisfaction with the functioning of an international institution does not automatically translate into a desire to leave that institution, however (Clements et al. 2014; Dinas et al. 2017; De Vries 2018). This is because it is genuinely difficult to correctly predict how one's country would fare if it left an existing international institution. After all, it is not certain that a country will be better off outside the institution and the benefit of leaving an international institution depends on how good the national alternative is. Only if voters believe that their country would overall do equally well or better outside the institution will they be willing to risk "going it alone" (de Vries 2018). Most studies to date suggest that voters imagine such a counterfactual situation by comparing their own country relative to others, such as indicators of their own country's economic performance (e.g., Gärtner 1997; Hobolt and Leblond 2009, 2013), or their satisfaction with their national own political system (e.g., Anderson 1998; Armingeon and Ceka 2013; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012; Rohrschneider 2002; Sánchez-Cuenca 2000). But such national benchmarks are imperfect proxies so that voters face a lot of uncertainty about the likely consequences of a disintegration decision.

Gauging the risks and potential benefits of disintegration is particularly difficult, because the costs and benefits of disintegration depend to a large degree on the reaction of the other member states to the disintegration request and the nature of the disintegrating state's future relations with them. This gives the international institution's other member states an important role in any disintegration process. Yet their response is not easy to predict, because they face difficult trade-offs when confronted with one member state's voter-based disintegration demands (Walter et al. 2018; Jurado et al. 2018; Walter 2019a, b). On the one hand, they can accommodate the disintegration request, for example by modifying the international agreement or maintaining wide-ranging post-withdrawal cooperation with the

withdrawing state. This allows the other member states to salvage as many of the cooperation gains as possible and allows them to respect the democratically expressed wishes of the referendum country's electorate. However, an accommodating response also carries moral hazard and political contagion risks, as other countries might be incentivized to similarly seek to improve their relative position as well. This speaks for the second response option, a hard, non-accommodating reaction, such as not granting any exceptions to existing rules or making few concessions in the withdrawal negotiations, because it allows the other member states to discourage such opportunistic behavior. However, non-accommodation is likely to be costly for everyone involved because of the foregone gains from cooperation. This *accommodation dilemma* makes it genuinely difficult for voters to correctly predict how one's country would fare if it left an existing international institution.

Voters tend to understand this strategic complication (Christin et al. 2002; Dinas et al. 2017; Finke and Beach 2017; Hobolt 2009), but for lack of a realistic counterfactual often misperceive the strategic incentives of the other member states to take a non-accommodating stance. Some voters therefore imagine their country's post-integration future in too rosy a color (Grynberg et al. 2019; Milic 2015; Owen and Walter 2017; Sciarini et al. 2015; Steenbergen and Siczek 2017; Walter et al. 2018), and such optimism tends to make voters more willing to risk breaking apart from an international organization.[3] For example, more than 90 percent of Greek voters who rejected the bailout agreement in the 2015 referendum expected their vote to result in continued negotiations and a better bailout package (Dinas et al. 2015). Similarly a majority of "Leave"-voters in the Brexit referendum believed that the UK would retain full access to the EU's single market post-Brexit without any major compromises (Grynberg et al. 2019; Owen and Walter 2017).

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[3] Similar over-optimism has been documented with regard to subnational secession, such as in independence referendums in Québec (Blais et al. 1995), Catalonia (Muñoz and Tormos 2015), and Scotland (Curtice 2014).

Watching another country's withdrawal process from an international institution or attempt to renegotiate its membership unfold, in contrast, provides voters in other countries with a lot of information about how the other member states are likely to react to disintegration efforts on their part. This in turn, allows them to better calibrate the likely economic, social, and political consequences of disintegration. Another country's disintegration experience thus provides voters with a powerful counterfactual that allows them to assess more accurately to what extent disintegration presents a viable and better alternative to membership in the international institution (de Vries 2017; Walter 2019b). More generally, it influences how voters evaluate the affected international institution and the merits of international cooperation more generally (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012; Clements, Nanou, and Verney 2014; Hobolt 2016; Walter 2019b).

Whether this encourages or deters voters abroad to support disintegration for their own country ultimately depends on the nature of the disintegrating country's experience. A disintegration experience that improves the situation of the withdrawing country not only demonstrates that an exit from an international treaty is a real possibility, but also that states can be better off on their own. Such a positive experience is thus likely to make voters in other countries more optimistic about their country's prospects outside the international institution. Moreover, a strong signal that voters abroad no longer support a specific international agreement thus may increase voters' doubts about the merits of international cooperation more generally (Malet 2019). This is likely to create an *"encouragement effect"* that makes successful disintegration of one member state "socially contagious" (Pacheco 2012) and encourages disintegrative tendencies abroad.[4] As a result of this dynamic, disintegration pressure in one country is likely to spread to other countries as well.

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[4] This effect has also been well documented in the context of secession on the national level (Coggins 2011; B Walter 2006b, 2006a).

In contrast, when the disintegrating country fails in its efforts to change or leave the international institution, voters in other countries equally update their beliefs: Observing that a country is worse-off post-disintegration (or aborts its disintegration bid for fear of negative consequences, as the Swiss and Greeks ultimately did at the end of the negotiations with the EU and the remaining member states) is likely to make them more pessimistic about their own country's post-disintegration future. At the same time, the conflictual nature of a non-accommodating negotiation stance may induce a rally effect on part of the citizens of the remaining member states in favor of the international institution whose stability they perceive as threatened (Minkus et al. 2018). The resulting *"deterrence effect"* should decrease voters' enthusiasm for an exit of their own country.

Whether a voter-based disintegration experience abroad ultimately encourages or deters voters from supporting a similar path for their own country not only depends on the "success" of the other country's voter-based disintegration efforts, however, but is likely to be mediated voters' pre-existing attitudes towards the international institution and international cooperation more generally. Because international cooperation and especially European integration have become heavily politicized in recent years (Grande and Kriesi 2015; Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2009; De Vries et al. 2019; Zürn et al. 2012), observing another country's real-life disintegration experience does not necessarily create new attitudes and opinions about the desirability of an exit of their own country and international cooperation. It is difficult to change individuals (mis-)perceptions with corrective information when people hold strong prior beliefs (Baekgaard et al. 2017; Gaines et al. 2007; Grynberg et al. 2019; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017; Taber and Lodge 2006). This suggests that the more pronounced voters' pre-existing attitudes are before the onset of the disintegration process, the less updating will occur, weakening the encouragement and deterrence effects of observing another country's disintegration experience both among hard integration-sceptics and among staunch integration-

supporters. For example, hard integration-sceptics, who advocate leaving an international institution irrespective of the costs, are less likely to be deterred by a non-accommodative negotiation stance or a negative outcome of foreign disintegration efforts. In contrast, individuals with less strongly held beliefs about the merits of international cooperation and disintegration will be much more susceptible to the new information provided by an actual disintegration process.[5]

Overall, this suggests that the systemic consequences of voter-based disintegration efforts in one country depends both on how the other member states of the affected international institution respond, and to what extent the withdrawing country's experience squares with the pre-existing attitudes and resulting priors of voters abroad.

3.   Research Design

To examine to which extent and how the disintegration experience of one country reverberates abroad I concentrate on the contagion effects of Brexit: the UK's referendum-based decision to leave the European Union. The spillover effects of Brexit on other countries, especially the remaining EU-27 member states are large. Not surprisingly, there has been considerable concern that Brexit might pose a serious, perhaps even existential, threat for the EU as a whole (Laffan 2019). After all, Brexit puts at risk the integrity of the Single Market (Jensen and Kelstrup 2019), changes the balance of power within the EU, and diminishes the EU's global standing (Bulmer and Quaglia 2018; Oliver 2016). Especially a hard, let alone a "No Deal" Brexit is also likely to create significant economic costs in the remaining member

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[5] The contagion effects are also likely to vary by subject area (Jerit and Barabas 2012). For example, individuals who care more about identity than economic issues will respond more strongly to information about how disintegration affects the withdrawing country's national sovereignty rather than the economy, and vice versa.

states (Chen et al. 2017). Perhaps the biggest concern has been, however, that Brexit may split the EU, leaving it disunited and ultimately at risk of further withdrawals.

Brexit is not just a fascinating and important case of voter-based disintegration in and of itself, however, but also a case that lends itself particularly well for studying the possible political contagion effects of voter-based disintegration. For one, Brexit is the most consequential case of voter-based disintegration so far, which is why its reverberations in other countries are so large. But it is also a case where political contagion effects should be particularly visible, and where the nature of these contagion effects is likely to vary both across time and across individuals. Policymakers, pundits, and academics have warned that Brexit might induce a domino effect and encourage voters in other countries to push for a withdrawal of their own countries from the EU as well EU (Hobolt 2016; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2016; de Vries 2017). Right after the 2016 referendum, this concern was bolstered by the jubilant reception with which the Brexit vote was received among euroskeptics across Europe, especially as it came at a time when European integration had become a heavily contested issue among European voters and elites (Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter et al. 2016). In the meantime, however, a consensus view seems to have emerged that Brexit has reduced, rather than increased support for disintegration in the remaining member states (Glencross 2019; de Vries 2017). Yet we still know very little about whether the recent uptick in support for the EU is related to Brexit at all, how and why this apparent turn from an encouragement effect to a deterrence effect came about, and how it is related to the European response to Brexit.

To shed light on these questions and on the more general question of how the voter-based disintegration experience of one country reverberates abroad, this paper therefore examines the reverberations of Brexit among the mass publics in other European countries. My focus is on two different types of countries. A first set of analyses looks at how Brexit

reverberates across the EU-27, the 27 remaining member states of the European Union, with a particular focus on whether and how Brexit affects support for an EU-exit of additional countries in the remaining EU-27 member states. However, given that currently no EU member state has an EU-exit on its political agenda, such an analysis necessarily focuses on a hypothetical scenario. This significantly lowers the stakes for respondents and therefore raises validity concerns. To address this concern, the second set of analyses focuses on the effects of Brexit in a context in which voters are tasked with voting on concrete proposals for voter-based disintegration: Switzerland.

4.   Brexit reverberations in the EU-27

How does the mass public in the EU-27 evaluate Brexit, and (how) does it affect public support for an exit of their own country from the EU? EU-27 public opinion matters for two reasons (Jurado et al. 2018; Walter 2019a): First, the reverberations of voter-based disintegration experiences will be felt most significantly in the other member states of the international institution from which the country is withdrawing. Not only are they most acutely affected in economic and political terms by any change in their relationship with the disintegrating state. But political contagion effects are also likely to be most pronounced within the EU, where euroskeptic political entrepreneurs have incentives to use any momentum that Brexit may generate. Second, the EU and its remaining member states are the more powerful negotiating partner in the Brexit negotiations (Moravcsik 2018; Schimmelfennig 2018). As a result, the Brexit process is being shaped in important ways by the EU institutions, and, ultimately, the 27 remaining EU member states.

Research Design

To examine how Brexit affects support for disintegration in the remaining EU-27 member states, I use original survey data from a large-scale data collection project in which 49,488 EU-27 Europeans have been surveyed about their EU- and Brexit-related opinions every six months since the start of the negotiations in the summer of 2017 (Walter 2019a).[6] The data were collected in five waves (July 2017, December 2017, June 2018, December 2018, and June 2019) through an EU-wide online omnibus survey (the 'EuroPulse') run by Dalia Research.[7] In each wave, the sample consists of a census representative sample of approximately 10.000 working-age respondents (ages 18-65).[8] Respondents are drawn across the remaining 27 EU Member States, with sample sizes roughly proportional to their population size. In order to obtain census representative results, the data are weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics.[9] I use this data to analyze how Brexit has affected support for an EU-withdrawal among voters in the remaining EU member states.

The analyses below first present some descriptive evidence on how the EU-27 public views Brexit. I then provide some observational analyses that examines how European's assessment of the UK's Brexit experience is related to their support for their own country's withdrawal from the EU.

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[6] This tracking survey is part of the ERC funded project "The Mass Politics of Disintegration" (DISINTEGRATION).

[7] The EuroPulse collects data from all 28 EU Member States. I omit the data from respondents in the UK for the analysis.

[8] More specifically, N=9,371 in July 2017, N=9,468 in December 2017, N=9,423 in June 2018, 10,434 in December 2018, and N=10,792 in July 2019. The goal of this data collection effort, which will continue until 2024, is to create a longitudinal dataset which will allow for a dynamic analysis of how individuals respond to disintegration negotiations and outcomes, and how this feeds back into their own support for an international institution and demands for disintegration.

[9] The target weighting variables are age, gender, level of education (as defined by ISCED (2011) levels 0-2, 3-4, and 5-8), and degree of urbanization (rural and urban).

Descriptives

To examine how the EU-27 public assesses Brexit, I examine respondents' answers to the question "*Five years from now on, do you think Brexit will make the UK much better off/somewhat better off/neither better nor worse off/somewhat worse off/much worse off?*" Table 1 shows that Europeans vary substantially in their assessment about how Brexit will affect the UK in the medium term. Overall, a good third think that Brexit will make the UK somewhat or much worse off whereas a good quarter of respondents thinks that Brexit will be a success for the UK. At the same time, a quarter of respondents thinks that Brexit will make the UK neither better nor worse off, and 13% do not give any assessment. Those respondents who pay a lot of attention to Brexit tend to be more pessimistic. Here, almost every second respondents expects that Brexit will make the UK worse off, compared with almost one third who believe that Brexit will make the UK better off in the medium term.

Table 1: Assessment of medium-term Brexit effect on UK

	All respondents	High attention to Brexit
much worse off	10%	19%
somewhat worse off	27%	29%
neither better nor worse off	25%	19%
somewhat better off	16%	15%
much better off	9%	15%
Don't know	13%	4%
N	49486	9586

Figure 1 shows that these assessments have become more pessimistic over time, with the exception of June 2018 when the EU and the UK reported considerable progress in the withdrawal negotiations. As the negotiations began to run into serious difficulties in late 2018, and especially after the UK's originally scheduled Brexit date in late March 2019 had been postponed amidst serious political difficulties, however, respondents began to view the UK's Brexit outlook significantly more negatively. Nonetheless, the variation in assessment has remained large throughout the Brexit negotiation period.

Figure1: **Development of Brexit evaluations and vote intentions in hypothetical withdrawal referendums, July 2017- June 2019**
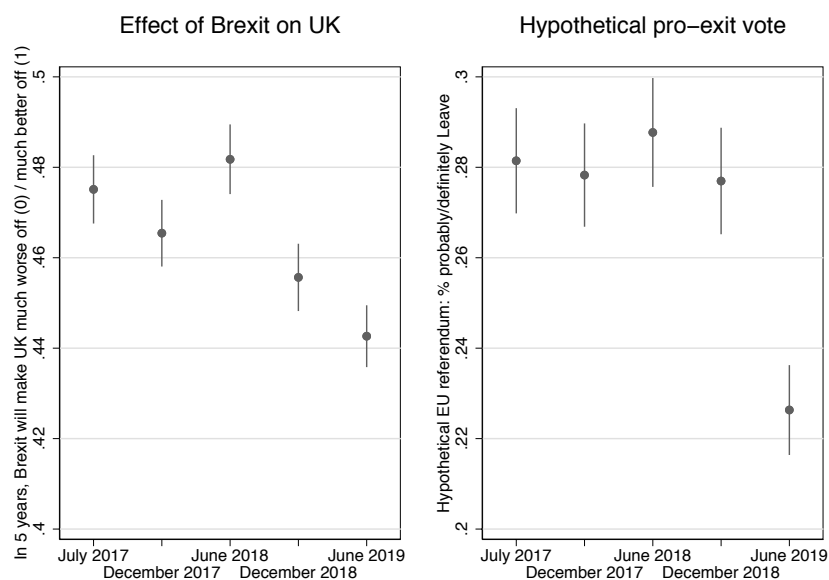
Note: Mean value of all answers. "Don't knows" are treated as missing data.

We next look at how Europeans' support for EU-withdrawal of their own country has evolved since the start of the Brexit negotiations? Support for EU-withdrawal is measured with the survey question "*If [YOUR COUNTRY] were to hold a referendum on leaving the EU today, how would you vote?*" Although a clear majority of Europeans support remaining in the EU (40% state they would definitely and 25% probably vote to remain in such an exit-referendum), about a quarter of respondents supports EU withdrawal (11% definitely and 13% probably intending to vote in favor of leaving the EU).[10] Figure 1 shows that support for exit was initially stable at approximately 28% throughout the first 1.5 years of the negotiations, but then decreased significantly to 22.6% in the aftermath of the UK's failed March 2019 Brexit-attempt. On a descriptive level, the difficulties of the UK to implement Brexit seem to have discouraged support for similar moves in the remaining member states.

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[10] 10.7% did not know or answer the question

Assessments of Brexit and support for EU-exit in the EU-27: Regression analysis

To examine this relationship more systematically, I next perform regression analyses of the correlates of vote intentions in a hypothetical referendum on respondents' own countries' EU membership. The dependent variable is a continuous variable ranging from (1) would definitely vote to remain to (4) would definitely vote to leave the EU. The main independent variable is respondents' assessment of how Brexit will affect the UK in the medium term (see table 1). Of course, both respondents' desire to leave the EU and their expectations of how Brexit will play out for the UK are related to what respondents think about the EU more generally.[11] In the analyses below, I therefore control for these attitudes. Because recent research demonstrates that Euroscepticism is a multidimensional concept (Hobolt and de Vries 2016; De Vries 2018), I use two different variables. Respondent's general opinion of the EU is gauged with a general question about their opinion of the EU. The answer categories on a five-point scale range from *"very negative"* to *"very positive."* A second variable measures respondents' preferred future course for the European Union. Respondents could choose between three answers: *"The EU should return some power to national governments", "The division of power between national governments and the EU should remain as it is today,"* and *"National governments should transfer more power to the EU"*, as well as *"don't know."* I additionally control for sociodemographic variables (age, gender, education, and whether the respondent lives in a rural or urban setting) that have been shown to affect Euroskepticism, as well as country- and wave-fixed effects.

Table 3 shows the results for several multivariate analyses of the correlates of avote intentions in a hypothetical EU-exit referendum in each respondent's own country. Model 1 uses OLS to analyze respondents vote intentions on the 4-point scale. The other three models

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[11] Pearson's correlation coefficient between respondents' general assessment of the EU and their assessment of the effects of Brexit on the UK is .27, the correlation between EU assessment and exit-vote intention is 0.69.

use dummy variables as dependent variables and explore the likelihood of probably or definitely voting leave (model 2), definitely planning to vote to leave the EU (model 3), and definitely planning to vote to remain (model 4).

All models show that respondents' assessment of the likely effects of Brexit on the UK is strongly correlated with their propensity to support a withdrawal of their own country. They also show both a deterrence and an encouragement effect at play: Controlling for respondents' views of the EU, the analyses show that those who assess the effects of Brexit on the UK more positively are more likely to support an EU-exit of their own country, whereas those who assess the EUK's Brexit experience more negatively are less likely to support such an exit.[12] These effects are significant in both statistical and substantive terms. Compared to those who do not have an opinion about the effect of Brexit on the UK, those who believe that Brexit will be a resounding success are 17.6 percentage points more likely to support an exit of their own country relative to those who think that Brexit will not have any effect on the UK, a strong encouragement effect. At the same time, Brexit deters other respondents: the predicted probability of supporting a leave vote is 9.5% lower among those who believe that Brexit will play out very badly for the UK in the medium term. These marginal effects are similar in size as the effects of a one unit increase in respondents' general opinion of the EU (here a one-unit increase on the 4-point scale reduces the predicted leave-vote probability by 14.1%). It is also notable that these effect sizes persist after controlling for two different dimensions of EU-related opinions, general EU opinion and more specific opinions about a possible EU reform.

Among the control variables, we see that more educated respondents and those living in urban areas are less likely to support an EU-exit of their own country, whereas gender and age have no significant effect. In terms of dynamic effects, the regression analyses mirror the finding from figure 2. Whereas the group of those definitely wanting to leave increased over

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[12] As is to be expected, the substantive effects are considerably larger when I do not control for euroskeptic/europhile attitudes.

Table 3: Correlates of Leave-support in the EU-27 member states

	Vote in hypothetical EU-exit referendum	Probably/ definitely Leave (dummy)	Definitely Leave (dummy)	Definitely Remain (dummy)
	OLS	Logit	Logit	Logit
UK much worse off	-0.344***	-0.963***	0.038	1.725***
	(0.01)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.05)
UK somewhat worse off	-0.300***	-0.888***	-0.507***	1.101***
	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.04)
UK neither better nor worse off	.	.	.	.
UK somewhat better off	0.242***	0.689***	0.614***	-0.467***
	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)
UK much better off	0.489***	1.329***	1.632***	-0.241***
	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
General EU opinion (higher=positive)	-0.513***	-1.423***	-1.517***	1.223***
	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
EU reform: more powers to EU	.	.	.	.
EU reform: Maintain status quo	-0.005	-0.217***	-0.208*	-0.220***
	(0.01)	(0.07)	(0.12)	(0.05)
EU reform: return EU powers	0.123***	0.281***	0.347***	-0.512***
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.05)
EU reform: don't know	0.061***	-0.233***	0.032	-0.649***
	(0.02)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.05)
Age (in years)	0.001***	0.003**	0.001	-0.001
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	-0.038***	-0.160***	-0.076**	0.149***
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Female	-0.009	-0.051	-0.158***	-0.063**
	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.03)
Rural area	0.027***	0.116***	0.164***	-0.049
	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)
July 2017 wave	.	.	.	.
December 2017 wave	-0.012	0.019	0.193**	0.164***
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.05)
July 2018 wave	0.019	0.034	0.224***	-0.004
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.05)
December 2018 wave	-0.022	-0.072	-0.044	0.070
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.05)
June 2019 wave	-0.084***	-0.380***	-0.040	0.308***
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.05)
N	39881	42480	42480	42480
R2	0.561			
F	1073.6	170.1	106.2	169.9

Notes: country fixed-effects included. Data are weighted

the first year of the Brexit negotiations, respondents have become less supportive of exit over time, and we see a significant increase in support for remaining in the EU after the first Brexit-extension in March 2019.

Overall, this analysis supports the argument that the systemic consequences of voter-based disintegration efforts in one country depends on whether the mass public abroad assesses the other country's disintegration experience as positive or negative. Moreover, the steep drop in exit support after the March 2019 Brexit extension also provides tentative evidence in favor of the argument that the response by the other member states of the affected international institution plays an important role in shaping these assessments and the nature of the contagion effect.
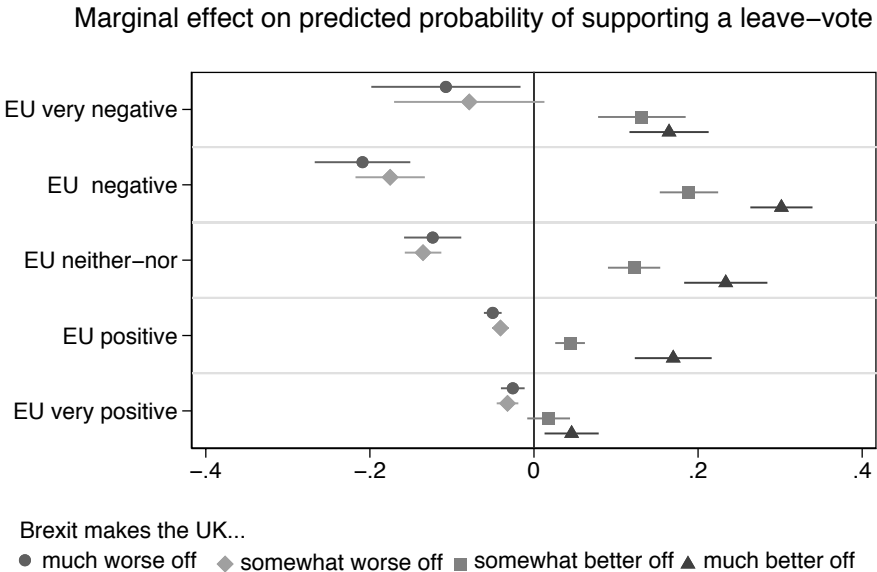
I have argued above, however, that contagion effects will be shaped in important ways by the extent to which the withdrawing country's experience squares with voters' pre-existing attitudes and resulting priors about the likely consequences of leaving an international institution. To explore this aspect in more detail, I next interact respondents' assessment of the UK's Brexit experience with their general views on the EU. Figure 2 shows the marginal effects of different evaluations of the medium-term Brexit effects on the likelihood that a respondent probably or definitely plans to vote leave in a hypothetical EU referendum on the 4-point scale, by different general assessments of the EU.[13]

The analysis once more confirms the existence of both encouragement and deterrence effects. Figure 2, based on models that interact the expected Brexit effect on the EU and respondents' EU opinion, confirms that Brexit has both deterrence and encouragement effects. Those who think Brexit is going badly for the EU are significantly less likely to consider voting leave, even if they view the EU very negatively. An assessment that Brexit will make the UK

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[13] The model interacts Brexit evaluations and EU opinion dummies. The dependent variable is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent would probably or definitely vote to leave the EU if her own country were to hold an exit referendum.

much worse off in five years decreases the likelihood of a leave-vote by up to 21 percentage points. At the same time, among those who think that Brexit will be a success for the UK the likelihood that they will support an exit of their own country increases by up to 30 percentage points. The encouragement effects are on average bigger than deterrence effects.

Figure 2: Deterrence and encouragement effects of Brexit, by EU opinion

Marginal effect on predicted probability of supporting a leave−vote

Brexit makes the UK...
● much worse off ◆ somewhat worse off ■ somewhat better off ▲ much better off

The analysis also shows that observing another country's disintegration experience does not affect all respondents equally. Rather, in line with both informational theories and work on motivated reasoning, the effect is largest amongst those respondents who do not hold very strong opinions about the EU. Observing the British withdrawal experience also has a stronger impact on those voters with a negative or even very negative opinion of the EU than on voters who view the EU more positively, that is on those voters most likely to toy with the idea of supporting an exit of their own country. Nonetheless, even among those who view the EU very positively, a very optimistic assessment of the UK's Brexit experience increases the likelihood of a leave vote by 5 percentage points.

Taken together, the analysis of the EU-27 survey data suggests that fears about political contagion risks of voter-based disintegration processes are justified: a Brexit that is seen as a success for the UK is indeed likely to encourage Euroskeptics in the remaining EU-27 member states to pursue EU-exit plans for their own countries. Observing voter-based disintegration efforts in one country can thus have significant ripple effects throughout the entire international institution. Whether these ripple effects deter or encourage further disintegration, however, depends on how the disintegration experience plays out for the withdrawing country.

5.   Brexit reverberations in Switzerland

While the voter-based withdrawal of an EU-27 member state from the EU appears only a distant possibility at the time of writing, a referendum-based rejection of new or existing international agreements with the EU is a distinct possibility in Switzerland. This case thus allows for a much more immediate analysis of the reverberations of Brexit. Rather than simply rely on respondents' subjective assessments of Brexit, this case is moreover well-placed to shed light on how the unfolding of the Brexit process affects public opinion and the willingness to cooperate with the EU abroad because it uses data collected during the most salient weeks of the Brexit negotiations to date: the month surrounding the originally planned Brexit date on 29 March 2019.

Switzerland is a country in which the country's bilateral relations with the EU have been a salient and contested issue in the public debate at least since Swiss voters rejected EEA membership in a referendum vote in 1992 (e.g., Armingeon and Lutz 2019; Emmenegger et al. 2018; Milic 2015; Sciarini et al. 2015). Given the country's strong direct democratic institutions, the struggles surrounding Swiss-EU relations involve the Swiss public to a strong degree. Several Swiss referendums have been held in the past years that were directed at terminating or at least not complying with some major existing international treaties: the 2014

"Against-mass immigration" and "ECOPOP"-initiatives (both directed against free movement of people treaty with the EU), the 2016 "Implementation-initiative" (which, if accepted, would have mandated non-compliance with the European Human Rights Charta), and the 2018 "Self-determination-initiative" (which, if accepted, would have mandated that the government renegotiate and, if unsuccessful, terminate international treaties found incompatible with domestic referendum votes). The Swiss case thus provides a context where voters' decision to support disintegration is not just a theoretical question, but one with real-world consequences.

Research Design

To examine how Brexit affects vote intentions on EU-related issues in Switzerland, I use original survey data from a second poll that conducted in March and April 2019. This time period not only covers a point in time in which several referendums on Swiss-EU relations were upcoming in Switzerland. It also covers the time surrounding the first, chaotic, Brexit extension.

Three referendums on Swiss-EU relations were on the horizon when the survey was conducted, two disintegration referendums and one referendum on deepening Swiss-EU relations. The first Swiss disintegration referendum, scheduled for May 2019, put the country's new weapons' law to a vote, which had been reformed in line with new Schengen rules. Because a non-implementation of the reform would under Schengen rules have led to an automatic termination of Switzerland's Schengen-membership, this *de facto* turned the vote into a referendum about withdrawal from the Schengen agreement. The second disintegration referendm is a popular vote on the "limitation initiative," an initiative launched by the eurosceptic Swiss People's Party (SVP) which will most likely be voted on in spring 2020. The limitation initiative requires the Swiss government to renegotiate and, if unsuccessful, to withdraw from the Swiss-EU treaty on the free movement of people. However, such a withdrawal has potentially much more far-reaching consequences. The so-called "guillotine clause" gives the EU the right to terminate all seven core bilateral treaties if Switzerland

withdraws from one of them. A voter-based withdrawal from the free-movement-of-people Treaty thus has the potential to end the existing framework for Swiss-EU relations. Finally, Switzerland and the EU have negotiated a new institutional framework agreement, that deepens the relationship between the two parties. The framework agreement is heavily contested domestically and will need to be ratified by a popular vote, which is expected to be held some time in 2020 or 2021. Given these three upcoming votes, the Swiss case allows me to examine how Brexit reverberates among voters abroad who are themselves tasked to vote on a disintegration proposal.[14]

A second advantage of the Swiss survey is that its design allows for a more direct analysis of how the Brexit negotiations affect support for disintegration abroad. The survey was designed to cover the critical phase around the UK's original withdrawal date on March 29, 2019. A first wave with 1622 respondents was carried out between March 13-28 2019 by Infratest dimap. After a two-week break during which British and UK policymakers struggled to find a viable way out of the Brexit impasse and during which a chaotic "no-deal-Brexit" had become a distinct possibility, the EU extended the Brexit deadline to 31 October 2019. Immediately after this decision, the second survey wave was conducted with 836 respondents (fieldwork April 12-18, 2019).[15]

The survey design thus also allows me to gauge how public opinion responded to a very blunt display of the difficulties and trade-offs surrounding the withdrawal from an international institution. Although the Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU-27 have been difficult from the start, these difficulties were put into glaring light in March and April 2019. As the end of British EU membership drew nearer and increasingly was likely to end with a chaotic No-Deal-Brexit on March 29, 2019, attention across Europe was focused on Brussels and London.

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[14] In the analyses below, I additionally explore how voters would vote in a hypothetical referendum on terminating the Swiss-EU bilateral treaties, which is the Swiss equivalent to the EU-exit question in the EU-27 countries.

[15] The sample was built using quota sampling of Swiss citizens. I additionally use weights in the analyses.

For weeks, European headlines, including Swiss media, had Brexit as their front-page news. The "Brexit mess" that unfolded in the weeks surrounding March 29 made it glaringly clear that Brexit was not going as well as many Brexiteers had predicted, but instead put the trade-offs and difficulties associated with it into the spotlight. If Brexit reverberates abroad, this is the moment when we should observe a deterrence effect.

Descriptives

How did Swiss vote intentions in a number of upcoming EU-related referendums evolve in the period surrounding the first Brexit extension? Figure 3 shows the share of Swiss voters who said they were planning to probably or certainly vote in favor of disintegration – that is, a vote against the weapons' reform, in favor of the limitation initiative, and in favor of terminating the bilateral treaties (a hypothetical vote), as well as a vote against a deepening of cooperation in the form of the institutional framework agreement.

Figure 3: Swiss vote intention in EU-related referendums, pre- and post-Brexit extension
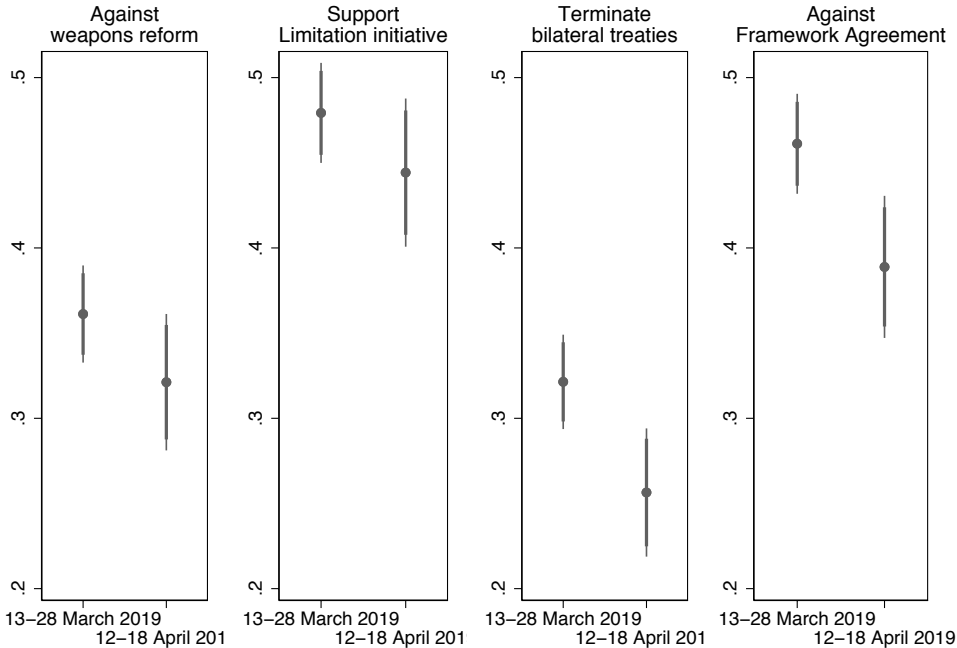
Note: Dots show share of respondents planning to vote in favor of disintegration or against compliance or a deepening of cooperation with 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

The analyses show that within only two weeks, the Swiss public became significantly more cautious about terminating existing international agreements between their own country and the EU. They also became more positive towards complying with existing rules (the reforms intended to ensure Swiss weapons law's compliance with Schengen rules) and towards deepening cooperation with the EU (the institutional framework agreement). For the institutional framework agreement, the most salient issue at the time of the survey, and for the hypothetical referendum on withdrawing from the bilateral treaties, these differences are statistically significant at the 1% level.[16] Because Brexit dominated the news during that period and no other major events occurred in Switzerland during these two weeks, we can be reasonably confident that any changes are indeed attributable to observing the UK's difficulties in implementing Brexit.[17]

This evidence suggests that voter-based disintegration negotiation processes indeed reverberate abroad. Because the time period studied covered a period in which the difficulties surrounding Brexit dominated the news, we observe a deterrence effect. Yet the results also imply that a positive Brexit experience could easily encourage disintegrative tendencies in Switzerland as well.

Encouragement and deterrence effects on Swiss vote intentions

To examine this last point in more detail, the last set of analyses replicates the analyses from the EU-27 sample above and examine Swiss vote intentions for the three upcoming EU-

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[16] At the time of the survey, the referendum campaign on the weapons law referendum had not yet fully started and the fact that a rejection of the reform would lead to an automatic termination of Switzerland's Schengen membership had not yet been widely discussed.

[17] The other EU-related topic that was salient in that period in the Swiss discourse and media were the consultations about the new Swiss-EU framework agreement. Because criticism of the agreement dominated the debate, however, this would rather push opinions of the EU in the opposite direction, however.

related referendums and the hypothetical referendum on terminating Switzerland's bilateral treaties with the EU. The dependent variables are continuous variables that measure vote intentions on a four-point scale (certainly for, probably for, probably against, certainly against), recoded in a way so that higher values always denote support for disintegration or opposition to compliance/more cooperation. Respondents who state that they plan not to vote are treated as missing.

The main independent variable is respondents' assessment of the UK's Brexit experience. I use answers to the same question as in the EU-27 survey, the question how respondents think Brexit will affect the UK in the medium term (five years), measured on a five-point scale. As in the EU-27, these assessments vary widely. With 31% expecting an overall positive effect of Brexit on the UK, Swiss respondents are slightly more optimistic about Brexit than the EU-27 Europeans. Nonetheless, as in the EU-27, the largest group (37%) thinks that the UK will be somewhat or much worse off because of Brexit.

As in the analyses before, I control for respondents' general opinion of the EU, because these views are highly correlated with how Swiss voters assess the effects of Brexit.[18] Swiss respondents evaluate the EU much more skeptically than EU-27 voters. For a majority of Swiss respondents, the EU is somewhat (39.8%) or very negative (12.5%). Only 22.1% view the EU somewhat positively, and a clear minority (1.6%) see the EU as very positive. In addition, I control for education, age and gender, respondents' main language, a dummy for the post-Brexit extension wave, as well as canton fixed effects.

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[18] Pearson's correlation coefficient=.45

Table 5: Correlates of non-cooperative referendum vote intentions in Switzerland (logit)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
				Against institutional
		Support for	Support for	framework
	Against	limitation	terminating	agreement
	weapons reform	initiative	bilateral treaties	
UK much worse off	-0.591***	-0.602***	-0.463***	-0.422***
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
UK somewhat worse off	-0.315***	-0.391***	-0.338***	-0.236***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
UK neither better nor worse	.	.	.	.
UK somewhat better off	0.066	0.156**	0.164***	0.079
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.05)
UK much better off	0.147	0.389***	0.506***	0.262***
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.07)
EU very negative	0.993***	0.780***	1.101***	1.037***
	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.07)
EU somewhat negative	0.312***	0.304***	0.246***	0.314***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
EU neither	.	.	.	.
EU somewhat positive	-0.192***	-0.223***	-0.214***	-0.361***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.05)
EU very positive	-0.447***	-0.385***	-0.292**	-0.696***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.15)
Education	-0.102***	-0.083***	-0.036	-0.057**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age in years	-0.001	0.002	0.002	-0.002
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	-0.214***	-0.087*	-0.003	-0.064*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)
French-speaking	-0.078	0.016	-0.137	-0.116
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Italian-speaking	-0.080	0.227	-0.086	0.043
	(0.21)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.14)
Post-Extension Wave	-0.050	-0.051	-0.142***	-0.093**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Constant	2.739***	2.744***	2.138***	2.873***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.13)
N	2283	2260	2250	2234
R2	0.251	0.298	0.385	0.383
F	20.108	20.455	29.177	35.563

Table 4 shows the results of OLS regressions for vote intentions on the four different referendums. As in the EU-27 analysis, we can observe both encouragement and deterrence effects: Even after controlling for respondents' general opinion of the EU, those who think that Brexit will be a boon for the UK are much more likely to vote for disintegration or against cooperation in a Swiss referendum on EU relations than those who think that Brexit will turn out badly for the UK. Particularly the deterrence effect is again both substantially and statistically significant. But we can also observe encouragement effects. Table 4 also confirms the deterrence effect of the UK's failure to leave the European Union as scheduled in March 2019. Support for disintegration or non-cooperation is lower in the post-extension wave for all four referendums, indicating that the overall support for non-cooperative votes dropped across the board over this period.[19]

In sum, the Swiss analysis further corroborates the argument that voter-based disintegration processes such as Brexit reverberate abroad. The analysis of the Swiss case also shows that these reverberations are not limited to an international institutions member states, but radiates beyond to countries in which voters can update their priors about their own country's foreign policy by observing another country's disintegration efforts.

6.   Conclusion

In the past few years, the world has witnessed an unprecedented popular backlash against international institutions. Popular demands to not only slow down, but to reverse international integration have proliferated, and have resulted in referendum and election outcomes that have reverberated across the world. While much attention has been paid to why support for international institutions has eroded, we know much less about the systemic

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[19] The coefficient is statistically significant for the bilateral treaty termination and institutional framework agreements.

implications of these effects. This paper has examined one such effect: the encouragement and deterrence effects of such voter-based disintegration efforts abroad.

Using evidence from a large-scale, five-wave cross-national survey of EU-27 public opinion on Brexit and the EU, as well as survey data from Switzerland, this paper has demonstrated that voters abroad closely watch how voter-based disintegration processes unfold and draw their own conclusions from observing this experience. When another country's disintegration efforts are perceived as successful, this encourages voters abroad to equally pursue a less cooperative strategy and makes them more likely support a withdrawal of their own country from international institutions. In contrast, another country's negative disintegration experience deters voters abroad from supporting a similar strategy for their own country. The analyses have demonstrated that the encouragement and deterrence effects are shaped both by how the negotiations unfold and by the extent to which respondents' evaluation of the other country's disintegration experience squares with their own priors.

The insight that episodes such as Brexit carry considerable political contagion potential is important. After all, nationalist-populist parties, candidates, and initiatives justify their efforts to withdraw from international institutions or to renegotiate existing agreements in their favor with the argument that more assertiveness in international relations and more emphasis on their own country's interests rather than accepting compromise will increase their country's prosperity, national sovereignty, and democratic quality. Being able to observe how such efforts actually play out helps voters evaluate these claims. The analysis reported in this paper suggests that voters pay attention to these processes and update their priors accordingly. Watching the difficulties and setbacks of Brexit, for example, have decreased the appeal of such messages to some extent (de Vries 2017). Nonetheless, they still garner considerable support.

Policymakers seem to be intuitively aware of these political contagion risks and therefore have tended to take rather unaccommodating negotiation stances in episodes as

diverse as the Greek bailout referendum, the NAFTA renegotiations and the Brexit negotiations. Yet the failure of populist promises to materialize and the non-accommodating negotiating stances bear their own risk. When governments tasked with implementing voter-based disintegration decisions have not been able to deliver in the way envisaged by populist politicians, , they have been decried as incompetent or unwilling to implement the will of the people. Resistance of foreign governments against one country's wishes for unilateral change has been condemned as a lack of respect of democracy. There is thus a risk that the failure of voter-based disintegration initiatives breeds even more resentment and feeding ground for populists, thus leading to a further erosion of support for international institutions in the long run.

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