

Shaping post-withdrawal relations with a leaving state: Brexit dilemmas and public opinion

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Abstract

How do voters want their governments to respond when another country unilaterally withdraws from an international institution? We distinguish between negotiation approaches that vary in the degree to which they accommodate the withdrawing state's demands and argue that citizens' negotiation preferences are shaped by two issues: First, their exposure to the costs and benefits of accommodation. This exposure varies across issues, and we argue that citizens will generally prefer non-accommodation on zero-sum issues, but support more accommodation on cooperation issues, where non-accommodation puts existing cooperation gains at risk. Second, citizens consider that withdrawal negotiations create precedents and should be less willing to accommodate the more they are concerned about the ripple effects of accommodation on the institution's stability. Moreover, the choice between accommodation and non-accommodation confronts different groups of citizens with two types of dilemmas. To examine our argument, we use survey evidence and a conjoint experiment conducted in Germany and Spain during the Brexit negotiations. We find that respondents overall are more willing to accommodate the UK on cooperation issues than on zero-sum issues, but also find evidence that Euroskeptics and Europhiles confront different issue-specific dilemmas. Our paper contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding the challenges to multilateralism that have proliferated in recent years.

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1. Introduction

During the past few years, there has been a growing popular backlash against international institutions. Voters have become more critical of individual international institutions such as the EU¹, the World Trade Organization², and international courts³. More generally, multilateralism has become increasingly contested⁴ and the stability and legitimacy of the existing liberal world order is being challenged⁵.

Much has been written about the reasons as to why voters in countries as diverse as Greece⁶, Switzerland⁷, the United Kingdom⁸, and the United States⁹ have turned against international institutions and international cooperation more generally. There has also been growing interest in which states withdraw from international institutions¹⁰, how states challenge international organizations through renegotiations¹¹, and what such withdrawals may mean for the respective international institutions¹².

However, much less is known about those on the receiving end of such disintegration processes: the citizens of the remaining member states. This is surprising, because the effects of a withdrawal by one country from an international institution on the other member states can be large, both in economic and political terms. The US withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal, for example, made it very difficult (or impossible) for the other parties to the agreement to

¹ Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016.

² Pelc 2013.

³ Chaudoin 2016; Voeten 2019.

⁴ Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019; Morse and Keohane 2014.

⁵ Tallberg and Zürn 2019.

⁶ Clements, Nanou, and Verney 2014.

⁷ Sciarini, Lanz, and Nai 2015.

⁸ See, for instance, Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Hobolt 2016.

⁹ Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Norris and Inglehart 2019.

¹⁰ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019; Helfer 2005; Thompson, Broude, and Haftel 2019.

¹¹ Kruck and Zangl 2020; Lipsey 2017.

¹² Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020.

uphold the arrangement. The prospect that Greece could leave the euro after its 2015 bailout referendum caused significant concern in the other EMU member states, because it was expected that such a move would have far-reaching ripple effects. Most recently, then, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (known as “*Brexit*”) has significant political and economic repercussions for the remaining EU-27 member states.

Although any state is of course free to leave an international institution, the remaining member states often have a significant say in how the future relationship between the withdrawing state and the international institution will be shaped. Even though research into how such negotiations play out in specific cases has begun to emerge¹³, more rigorous analyses of how governments deal with the dilemmas and intertemporal trade-offs in these negotiations is scarce. We know even less about the goals that the citizens in the remaining member states want their governments to pursue in such withdrawal negotiations and how public beliefs influence the negotiation dynamics at an international level. Yet understanding public opinion matters, both directly and indirectly. First, policymakers take public opinion into account when taking foreign policy decisions¹⁴, especially when international cooperation is a salient issue in the public sphere¹⁵. Second, voters’ preferences can enhance the bargaining power of governments in international negotiations¹⁶, and can thus provide a useful tool for policymakers engaged in withdrawal negotiations. For both reasons, it is important to better understand public opinion about the terms of another country’s withdrawal from an international organization, and the organization’s future engagement with that state.

Our paper fills this gap by providing insights into how citizens in the remaining states want their governments to respond to unilateral withdrawal requests and the dilemmas that they

¹³ Goodwin, Hix, and Pickup 2018; Pitsoulis and Schwuchow 2016.

¹⁴ Hagemann et al. 2017; Schneider 2018; Tomz et al. 2020.

¹⁵ Wratil 2018.

¹⁶ Caraway et al. 2012; Hug and König 2002; Schneider and Cederman 1994.

face in the process. We begin by conceptualizing two ideal type negotiation outcomes in withdrawal negotiations based on the extent of (non-)accommodation.¹⁷ The concept of accommodation captures the degree to which the withdrawing state will be allowed to continue enjoying the benefits of cooperation as well as its obligation to bear cooperation costs after withdrawal. We then explore which types of outcomes and corresponding negotiation approaches voters in the remaining states prefer. In particular, we argue that voters' choice between more or less accommodation is shaped by two main issues: their exposure to the net costs of accommodating the withdrawing state, and concern about the ripple-effects of accommodation. Exposure varies across individuals, but also across specific negotiation issues. On some issues, accommodating the withdrawing state leaves the remaining member states worse off, and vice versa. Citizens' willingness to accommodate the withdrawing country on such *zero-sum issues* is therefore likely to be small. Other issues require cooperation from both sides to generate benefits, which means that the remaining member states face losses if they refuse to accommodate the withdrawing state on such *cooperation issues*. We therefore hypothesize that citizens will support a more uncompromising stance on zero-sum issues, but a more accommodating negotiation position on cooperation issues. At the same time, however, accommodating the withdrawing state with generous terms of withdrawal may encourage further exits. This thus risks destabilizing the institution in the long run¹⁸. This suggests that voters concerned about the institution's stability should be less willing to make accommodations.

The choice between accommodation and non-accommodation can confront citizens with difficult trade-offs. Citizens with an interest in safeguarding the international institution prefer a non-accommodating stance, yet this is a costly path when it puts cooperation gains at

¹⁷ Walter 2020a, b

¹⁸ De Vries 2017; Walter 2021a.

risk.¹⁹ With regard to cooperation issues, these citizens thus face a dilemma which moderates their support for non-accommodation. At the same time, the possible encouragement effects of an accommodative negotiation approach are likely to be perceived as a boon, rather than as a problem by citizens who themselves wish to leave the institution. However, these citizens face a dilemma with regard to zero-sum issues, where accommodation is costly for the remaining member states. Critics of the international institution will therefore moderate their support for accommodation on zero-sum issues.

We examine these arguments in the context of the largest withdrawal negotiations from an international organization to date: the Brexit negotiations between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU). These negotiations presented an enormous challenge to the remaining member states of the EU, who were losing one of their biggest, geopolitically powerful, net contributing member states, with whom they were enjoying close ties. Using original data from two surveys conducted in Germany and Spain in December 2017 and March 2019, our paper analyzes individual Brexit negotiation preferences. We first use a conjoint experiment to analyze how citizens evaluate different hypothetical Brexit deals that include a variety of cooperation and zero-sum issues. We find that citizens overall are more willing to accommodate the UK on cooperation issues than on zero-sum issues, but also find evidence for the issue-specific (non-)accommodation dilemmas. Europhiles prefer non-accommodation, but have more moderate preferences with regard to cooperation issues. By contrast, Euroskeptic respondents show a clear preference for more accommodating proposals regarding cooperation issues, but are much less accommodating with regard to zero-sum issues. Of course, the Brexit negotiations cover a multitude of issues. In a second step, we therefore explore respondents' preferences regarding the general EU-27 Brexit negotiation approach and find that exposure to the costs of non-accommodation and EU attitudes condition overall negotiation preferences as

¹⁹ Walter 2020a

well. Moreover, we run simulations that suggest that the final outcome of the Brexit negotiations was supported by a majority of Spanish and German citizens.

In sum, our paper generates substantively important insights into European citizens' preferences regarding the Brexit negotiations. More generally, it contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding the unilateral challenges to multilateralism that have proliferated in recent years.

2. Bargaining over the terms of withdrawal: (Non-)Accommodation dilemmas

Membership of an international institution generates both costs and benefits for its member states. For most countries, the costs of being a member of an international institution are outweighed by the benefits such membership confers – otherwise sovereign states would not join an international institution²⁰. These costs range from financial obligations - such as yearly payments into the budget of an international organization - to compliance with the mutually agreed compromises and rules of international institutions (such as international regulations and standards). Importantly, international cooperation also imposes limitations on national sovereignty²¹. The benefits from cooperation include the aggregate gains from international cooperation, reputational benefits, or access to joint programs and initiatives, but sometimes also more tangible benefits such as funding from international programs.

A country's request to withdraw from an international institution can be interpreted as a bid to recalibrate this cost-benefit ratio. This suggests that we can conceptualize possible withdrawal outcomes in a 2x2 table that distinguishes outcomes based on whether or not the withdrawing state continues to pay the costs and enjoy the benefits of membership in the international institution (see table 1). A first possible negotiation outcome is that the leaving

²⁰ E.g., Abbott and Snidal 1998; Keohane 1984

²¹ Thompson, Broude, and Haftel 2019.

state continues to enjoy the benefits of international cooperation, but does not have to bear the costs. This is, of course, a very good negotiation outcome for the withdrawing state, as it essentially allows it to free-ride on the efforts of the other states to generate cooperation gains. We refer to such an outcome as an *accommodating* withdrawal outcome. This contrasts with an outcome in which the withdrawing state loses the benefits that international cooperation provides, but continues to bear at least some of the costs. One can conceive of this outcome as one in which the withdrawing member state is punished for leaving. Such a *non-accommodating* outcome clearly is the worst outcome for the withdrawing state.²²

Table 1: Typology of withdrawal outcomes

	Leaving state keeps benefits	Leaving state loses benefits
Leaving state does not bear costs	<i>accommodating</i>	<i>somewhat non-accommodating</i>
Leaving state bears some costs	<i>somewhat accommodating</i>	<i>non-accommodating</i>

Both the accommodating and the non-accommodating outcomes are extremes and serve more as an analytical tool rather than a realistic depiction of negotiation outcomes. In most cases, the negotiation outcome will instead be somewhere in between these two extremes. In “*somewhat accommodating*” withdrawal outcomes, the withdrawing state retains many benefits of international cooperation but also continues to bear some of the costs of cooperation. An example of such an outcome is the United States’ threat to withdraw from the NAFTA treaty during 2017-2018. The new, renegotiated “United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement” (USMCA), maintained the core of the original agreement, but also modernized it and

²² In reality, it will be difficult to force a sovereign country into sharing the costs of an agreement when it is excluded from its benefits.

incorporated new rules and provisions that mostly reflected changes desired by the United States²³. The US was thus able to keep and even slightly expand its share of the cooperation gains generated by the free trade agreement, while at the same time agreeing to follow the new agreement's rules, with all the sovereignty costs such an agreement entails.

In other cases, the withdrawing state loses access to most of the benefits of cooperation, but in return bears no or only a small share of the costs of cooperation. This is analytically similar to not entering into an agreement: the state does not cooperate and thus does not share the costs, but also not the benefits of cooperation. The important difference is, however, that this implies a reduction of existing cooperation gains for everyone involved relative to the status quo (membership). We classify such instances as “*somewhat non-accommodating*.” For example, Burundi's 2017 withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC) means that it no longer benefits from the transnational legal structure and the reputational benefits that ICC membership provides, but in turn also no longer has to allow the ICC to investigate and prosecute international crimes committed in Burundi after the withdrawal.

In which of these scenarios a country ends up after withdrawing from an international institution can vary considerably. Sometimes, the terms of withdrawal are pre-determined in an international agreement²⁴, while sometimes, withdrawal simply means a return to the status quo²⁵. Even when the international environment has evolved to such an extent that the status quo is no longer available, the consequences of withdrawal from individual treaties are sometimes small for the withdrawing state, either because the country is embedded in a wider regime of legal rights and obligations²⁶, or because other countries continue to cooperate to

²³ Flores-Macías and Sánchez-Talanquer 2019.

²⁴ Rosendorff and Milner 2001.

²⁵ Thompson, Broude, and Haftel 2019.

²⁶ Peinhardt and Wellhausen 2016.

provide a global public good from which the withdrawing state cannot easily be excluded. This also holds in cases where unilateral withdrawal reduces the overall effectiveness of the treaty²⁷.

In other cases, however, countries unilaterally (threaten to) withdraw from international institutions and in the process try to renegotiate better terms for their future relations with their former partner states. Examples of this kind of withdrawal negotiations range from lesser known examples such as transboundary freshwater agreements²⁸ or bilateral investment treaties²⁹, to better-known examples such as the US bid to terminate NAFTA and renegotiate the USMCA successor agreement³⁰ or Brexit, where the EU and the UK have been negotiating about both the terms of withdrawal and the contours of their future relationship³¹. In essence, such withdrawal negotiations are aimed at establishing a new institutional arrangement that rebalances the costs and benefits of cooperation. By taking a more- or less-accommodating approach to negotiations, the institution's other member state(s) can thus influence the withdrawal outcome and the extent to which the withdrawing state will be able to enjoy the benefits of cooperation and will have to continue to bear cooperation costs after withdrawal.³²

How do the citizens of remaining member states evaluate these negotiation approaches? We argue that the choice between more or less accommodation confronts voters (and elites) in the remaining member states with a number of difficult trade-offs.³³ These trade-offs, the dilemmas they create, and ultimately voters' support for more or less accommodation are shaped by two main issues: first, the extent to which accommodation creates net costs or

²⁷ Schmidt 2020.

²⁸ De Bruyne, Fischhendler, and Haftel 2020.

²⁹ Haftel and Thompson 2018; Huikuri 2020.

³⁰ Lester and Manak 2018.

³¹ Hix 2018.

³² In the context of withdrawal, the remaining member states will also need to think about what the withdrawal means for their own position within the international institution and possible internal reforms going forward. In this article, we do not focus on the resulting internal negotiations, but instead concentrate on relations with the challenging state.

³³ The question as to whether voters form their preferences independently or whether they are influenced by cues and actions of political elites is a contested issue (e.g., Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020; Guisinger and Saunders 2017), for a recent review see Pevehouse 2020.

benefits for the remaining member states in terms of cooperation gains, and second, the extent to which the voter is concerned about the potential ripple-effects of accommodation.

Net costs or benefits of accommodation: Zero-sum and cooperation issues

The first issue influencing voters' preferred negotiation approach concerns the potential costs or benefits for their own countries of accommodation. The extent to which accommodation and non-accommodation affects these costs and benefits varies across different types of negotiation issues. We classify these issues into two broad categories: zero-sum issues and cooperation issues.³⁴

Zero-sum issues are issues for which a more favorable outcome for the leaving state invariably makes the remaining member states worse off, and vice versa. Accommodating the withdrawing state on zero-sum issues thus means that they will be worse off than under the status quo, whereas non-accommodation means that the withdrawing state will be worse off. Zero-sum issues are therefore negotiation issues for which each negotiating party will try to push through the most favorable outcome for itself, which is also why these issues are likely to be particularly divisive. An example of such a zero-sum issue is the conflict between Bangladesh and India about how to share the water of the Ganges, which was one reason for the expiry of the Bangladesh India Ganges Farakka treaty in 1977. More generally, zero-sum issues imply that the less beneficial the outcome is for the withdrawing state, the better it will be for the remaining member states.

By contrast, *cooperation issues* are issues where cooperation from both sides is required to generate benefits. For cooperation issues, denying the withdrawing state continued access to

³⁴ This distinction assumes that states care about absolute gains, and not just relative gains. The more weight they put on relative gains, the more issues will move into the zero-sum category (see Snidal 1991). Issues can also be placed along a continuum between these two poles.

the benefits from international cooperation means that the remaining member states lose these cooperation gains as well. For example, if a withdrawal leads to the re-introduction of trade barriers, exporters and consumers in both the remaining and the leaving country will be hurt. Likewise, the expiry of other forms of cooperation and policy coordination – from terrorism prevention to environmental protection – creates transaction costs, economic distortions, and financial risks for economic actors and individuals in both the remaining and the withdrawing state alike. Cooperation issues thus imply that non-accommodation which generates a less beneficial outcome for the withdrawing state than the status quo also hurts the remaining member states. Hence, non-accommodation on cooperation issues is costly for both sides.

This discussion suggests that voters in the remaining member states should assess the desirability of an accommodating or non-accommodating withdrawal outcome differently depending on whether the issue(s) under negotiation are zero-sum or cooperation issues. We expect that voters will generally prefer non-accommodation on zero-sum issues, but will be more accommodating with regard to cooperation issues. The more exposed an individual is to the consequences of the withdrawal, the more pronounced these effects should be. Taking into account that withdrawal negotiations usually cover multiple issues, we argue that the preferred negotiation outcome will depend on the mix of zero-sum and cooperation issues. This leads to the following hypotheses: *The higher the share of zero-sum issues, the less accommodating voters will be. When cooperation issues dominate, they will be more willing to accommodate the withdrawing state's demands, especially when they are heavily exposed to the economic or social fallout from non-cooperation.*

Concern about the ripple effects of withdrawal: Precedent and political contagion

Withdrawal negotiations and treaty renegotiations often set a precedent for future withdrawals and renegotiations and provide voters and elites abroad with valuable information

about the economic, social, and political consequences of such actions³⁵. It is therefore important to consider the ripple effects of the outcome of any withdrawal negotiations. An accommodating outcome that allows countries to change the cost-benefit ratio in their favor generates a precedent that makes withdrawal attractive, for example.³⁶ This in turn can incentivize critics of the international institution in the remaining member states to push for a withdrawal of their own country.³⁷ Accommodation also reduces reciprocity, a key enforcement mechanism of international regimes³⁸. Taken together, this means that accommodation carries the risk of destabilizing the international institution in the long run. By contrast, non-accommodation avoids such problems and instead is likely to deter further exits³⁹.

The ripple-effects of accommodating and non-accommodating withdrawal outcomes also influence how voters evaluate different negotiation approaches in the first place, in ways that vary according to a citizen's own assessment of the international institution. Citizens who are supportive of the institution will be particularly concerned about potential negative domino effects of accommodation and the risks to the long-term stability this generates for the institution.⁴⁰ We therefore expect them to be more likely to endorse a non-accommodating negotiation approach. By contrast, for citizens who would like their own country to withdraw from the international institution as well, an accommodative withdrawal precedent is attractive because it facilitates future withdrawals on favorable terms. As a result, we hypothesize that *citizens that are supportive of the international institution will be more likely to prefer a non-accommodating negotiation outcome, while citizens that oppose the international institution will be more likely to prefer an accommodative negotiation outcome.*

³⁵ Hobolt 2016; De Vries 2017; Walter 2021a.

³⁶ Such ripple effects are well documented in the context of secession on the national level (e.g., Coggins 2011).

³⁷ It can also encourage the withdrawing state to repeat such behavior in the future.

³⁸ Simmons 2010: 275.

³⁹ Walter 2021a.

⁴⁰ Walter 2020a

Negotiation preferences and dilemmas

While it is straightforward to derive hypotheses about how the type of negotiation issue and concern about the ripple-effects of accommodation influence voters’ negotiation preferences, the problem confronting voters is that these dimensions do not stand in isolation. Table 2 exhibits a 2x2 matrix which shows that combining the two dimensions yields four different settings, two of which create considerable dilemmas for supporters and for the opponents of the international institution, respectively.

Table 2: Preferred negotiation strategies among supporters and opponents of the international institution (II)

	II supporter	II opponent
Zero-Sum issues	<i>Preference for Non-Accommodation</i>	<i>Non-Accommodation Dilemma: Moderation</i>
Cooperation issues	<i>Accommodation Dilemma: Moderation</i>	<i>Preference for Accommodation</i>

As discussed above, voters who value the international organization and are concerned that a positive withdrawal experience for the leaving state may undermine the long-term stability of the international organization are going to be less willing to accommodate the leaving state. This is easy when non-accommodation carries little cost, that is, when the negotiations revolve around zero-sum issues, for which accommodation is costlier for the remaining member states than non-accommodation. In this scenario, we expect that supporters of the international institution will unambiguously support non-accommodation (upper left-hand corner). However, where cooperation issues are concerned, non-accommodation is costly. For voters who value the international institution and who therefore want to avoid any further destabilization, this creates a dilemma which moderates their preference for a non-

accommodating negotiation stance (lower left-hand corner).⁴¹ The extent of this *accommodation dilemma* will be shaped by a variety of factors, such as voters' discount rate, the time profile of the costs and benefits of non-accommodation, or their closeness to elites who emphasize certain issues more than others.⁴² Overall, however, based on the “*accommodation dilemma*”, we hypothesize that *supporters of the international institution will support a more compromising line with regard to cooperation issues than with regard to zero-sum issues.*

Meanwhile, citizens who are opposed to the international institution and would like to withdraw from it themselves face a different kind of dilemma. They are not conflicted with regard to cooperation issues; after all, they want a negotiation outcome that creates an attractive precedent for future withdrawals. They are therefore likely to support accommodating the withdrawing state on cooperation issues (lower right-hand corner). However, they face a “*non-accommodation dilemma*” with regard to zero-sum issues (upper right-hand corner). This is because accommodating the withdrawing state on zero-sum issues means tangible costs to the remaining member states. Since opponents of international institutions are often nationalists, allowing another country to enjoy absolute gains at their own country's expense is a particularly bitter pill to swallow. For opponents of the international institution, zero-sum issues therefore create a dilemma between the wish to limit the costs of another country's withdrawal for their own country and the wish to establish a favorable precedent for future withdrawals from the international institution.⁴³ We therefore hypothesize that *citizens who oppose the international institution will strongly prefer an accommodative negotiation stance with regard to cooperation issues. However, the non-accommodation dilemma will moderate their preferences for accommodation with regard to zero-sum issues.*

⁴¹ Walter 2020b

⁴² For example, because the ripple effects of accommodation are likely to take more time to materialize than the net costs and benefits of accommodation, individuals with a higher discount rate are likely to give more weight to their exposure to the immediate costs of the negotiation outcome.

⁴³ Once more, the time profile of the costs and benefits of accommodation and non-accommodation and the closeness to political elites and the cues they provide may influence which voters experience this dilemma.

3. Empirical Analysis: Brexit Dilemmas in the EU-27

To empirically examine our argument, we use original survey data collected in the context of the Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU, the largest withdrawal negotiations from an international organization to date. These negotiations presented an enormous challenge to the remaining EU-27 member states because a sharp break of the dense ties between the UK and the EU-27, a so-called “No-Deal Brexit,” would have had far-reaching and devastating consequences across Europe⁴⁴. Even a Brexit outcome that significantly reduces the level of cooperation with the UK relative to the status quo, commonly referred to as “hard Brexit,” has been estimated to reduce national GDP in the EU-27 by between 0.6 and 2.6 percentage points⁴⁵. By contrast, an accommodative negotiation approach which would have allowed the UK to retain most of the benefits while getting rid of most of the costs of EU membership would have limited the economic fallout from Brexit, especially in the short run. Accommodation, thus, carried upsides not just for the UK, but for the EU as well.

At the same time, accommodation created a number of risks for the EU. It would weaken the EU’s *acquis communautaire*, which would damage the appeal and the unity of the single market in the long run.⁴⁶ Not only that, allowing the UK to share the EU’s benefits without contributing and accepting the costs carried an even larger political risk: the risk of political contagion. An accommodating Brexit outcome that left the UK better off than it was previously as an EU member state risked demonstrating to voters across the EU-27 that European integration can be reversed and that countries can unilaterally improve their position by leaving the EU. Allowing single states to opt out from the costs of EU membership while retaining the

⁴⁴ Hix 2018

⁴⁵ Chen et al. 2018; Emerson, Busse, Di Salvo, Gros, et al. 2017.

⁴⁶ Such a negotiation outcome would also open up the EU to challenges from other trade partners, who would likely demand similarly preferential treatment under the WTO’s most favored nation principle.

benefits thus risked setting a precedent with significant long-term ripple effects⁴⁷. The question of how many benefits the UK should be allowed to continue to enjoy after the transition period and how much of the costs it should be required to shoulder thus confronted the remaining EU member states and their citizens with difficult trade-offs.

Although the Brexit negotiations were conducted by the European Commission, public opinion mattered in these negotiations. Both the Withdrawal Agreement that was concluded in 2019 and the UK-EU agreement about the future relationship negotiated in 2020 had to be ratified by the national parliaments of the EU-27 member states and the European Parliament. Occurring against a backdrop of increasing contestation over the EU⁴⁸, Brexit was a highly politicized issue not just in the UK but also in the remaining member states, not least because of its impact on defining a blueprint for exiting the EU. National political parties in the remaining member states have used the Brexit negotiations to justify and explain their EU-related policies.⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ There was also significant media coverage of the Brexit negotiations and about two thirds of EU-27 Europeans have stated in surveys that they were paying at least some attention to Brexit⁵¹. All of which suggests that politicians' Brexit-related responsiveness to public opinion should be high.

Case selection and data

Our empirical analysis examines German and Spanish citizens' preferences regarding the Brexit negotiations. Germany and Spain are two of the largest EU member states, and Brexit

⁴⁷ Hobolt 2016; Della Porta et al. 2016; De Vries 2017; Walter, Dinas, Jurado, and Konstantinidis 2018.

⁴⁸ Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016.

⁴⁹ Chopin and Lequesne 2020; Martini and Walter 2020.

⁵⁰ In the Online Appendix, we show that the assessment on how well the country has handled the Brexit negotiations explains their vote for the incumbent parties in Germany and Spain, even controlling for EU positions, ideology and the usual sociodemographic suspects (Appendix 1).

⁵¹ Walter 2020a: 10.

was a prominently discussed issue in both countries throughout the negotiations. Many citizens in both countries have personal ties with the UK, with approximately 144,000 Spanish (0.4% of Spanish citizens) and 165,000 German citizens (0.2% of German citizens) living in the UK in 2016⁵². Nonetheless, the two countries also vary in some important respects that are relevant to our argument, which increases the generalizability of our empirical findings to other EU-27 countries. With its strongly export-oriented economy, Germany is much more exposed to the costs associated with not accommodating the UK on cooperation issues such as trade than Spain is. For example, Chen et al. (2018) estimate that 5.48% of German GDP, but only 0.77% of Spanish GDP are at risk in a non-accommodative “hard Brexit” scenario. This suggests the hypothesis that *Germans should be more willing to accommodate the UK on the cooperative dimensions of the Brexit deal than Spaniards*. At the same time, Spain (as a net recipient country and a country with a contested territorial debate with the UK about the status of Gibraltar) is more exposed to the costs associated with accommodating the UK on zero sum issues such as continued British payments into the EU budget or the status of Gibraltar than Germany, a net contributor country, is. This leads to the hypothesis that *Spaniards should take a less less-accommodating line on zero zero-sum issues than Germans*. Finally, the two countries differ significantly with regard to public support and elite-level support for the EU. Euroskepticism has traditionally been absent from the Spanish political debate, and this is still the case despite the emergence of populist right-wing and left-wing political parties in the national arena. On the contrary, the rise of a radical rightwing Euroskeptic party - Alternative for Germany - has turned the issue of European integration into a more contested issue in Germany, not just among voters, but also among elites. This suggests that *on average, Spaniards should be more concerned about the stability of the European Union and thus support a less accommodating negotiation stance overall*.

⁵² ONS 2018.

We use original data from two surveys that we designed and conducted in Germany and Spain in December 2017 and March 2019 which were administered to a quota sample of a total of 4,796 respondents.⁵³ In each country 1550 respondents were surveyed between the 9th and 19th December 2017, a few months after the Brexit negotiations had begun. We repeated the survey with 1,696 respondents (838 respondents in Germany and 858 in Spain) between the 4th and 10th March 2019. At the time of the second survey, the withdrawal negotiations had been concluded and the withdrawal agreement was going through the British parliament for ratification – an endeavor that ultimately failed and put the UK on the brink of No Deal Brexit just a few days after our survey was completed. We thus cover two distinct periods of the Brexit withdrawal negotiations. Because exposure and contagion risks are unlikely to vary a lot with such specific circumstances, this allows us to test the stability of negotiation preferences across different settings. The focus on ongoing negotiations allows us to explore respondents’ perceptions of Brexit-related trade-offs without any hindsight bias that might arise from observing the actual Brexit deal.

Research design

Our argument suggests that Europeans’ preference for a more- or less-accommodating negotiation outcome in the Brexit negotiations with the UK depends on the type of issue under consideration and their general level of support for the EU. To test this argument, we proceed in two steps.

Because the Brexit negotiations about the UK’s terms of withdrawal and the future UK-EU relations were a complex affair that covered multiple dimensions and issues, we first use a

⁵³ Quotas were set by gender, age and region (Autonomous Communities in Spain and Länder in Germany). The survey was fielded by the company *Respondi*.

conjoint experiment for our main empirical analysis. Conjoint experiments are a statistical technique for the purpose of analyzing how people value different attributes in a given proposal⁵⁴ and measuring preferences that drive choices⁵⁵. In the experiment, respondents have to choose between two alternative proposals – in our case hypothetical Brexit deals – that contain multiple randomly varied issues (so-called attributes) about which both parties negotiated. In line with our argument, those attributes take different values, namely more- or less-accommodating outcomes for each specific issue. The literature documents the advantages of conjoint experiments: they are an ideal experimental design to study multidimensional preferences, because they allow respondents to analyze several pieces of information jointly, enable them to use the information they consider most relevant, all while reducing social desirability bias⁵⁶. In addition, conjoint experiments allow for a mitigation of partisan biases in the choices of respondents⁵⁷ and have been shown to have more external validity than vignette experiments, which are the typical alternative to conjoint experiments⁵⁸. Conjoint experiments also have disadvantages, such as relying on stated preferences as an outcome variable and inducing cognitive processes that are not always naturalistic. These downsides, however, also apply to any other survey experiment, so we can argue that overall, the advantages of conjoint analyses tend to outweigh their limitations.⁵⁹

Ultimately, what the remaining EU member states had to accept at the end of the negotiations were final Brexit deals, that is huge documents which regulated all the different issues. Rather than pick and choose on individual issues, the final decision thus collapsed the multidimensionality of the Brexit negotiations into a single dimension, namely support of the

⁵⁴ Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014.

⁵⁵ Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016.

⁵⁶ Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014.

⁵⁷ Goggin et al. 2019.

⁵⁸ Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015.

⁵⁹ Hainmueller et al. 2014.

overall Brexit deal. To examine how German and Spanish voters responded to the question of accepting a more- or less-accommodating overall Brexit deal, a second set of analyses evaluates the public's preferences towards the overall EU-27 Brexit negotiation approach.

4. Negotiating Brexit: A conjoint experiment

Experimental design

To what extent did German and Spanish voters want to accommodate the UK on different issues in the Brexit negotiations? We have argued that issue-type and support for the EU jointly shape these preferences. To empirically examine this argument we designed a conjoint experiment that contained a list of seven attributes that were key issues in the negotiations between the UK and the EU about the terms of withdrawal from the EU and the future relationship between both parties. We chose seven issues that were among the most contested in the negotiations and grouped them in broad categories. This number provides a good balance between offering too few attributes, which leads to masking problems, and including too many attributes, which generates satisficing problems⁶⁰. Attributes were presented in a randomized order.

⁶⁰ Bansak, Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2019.

Table 3. Brexit attributes and values in the conjoint experiment.

<i>Type of issues</i>	<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Values (ordered from most to least accommodating)</i>
<i>Zero-sum issues</i>	Brexit bill. Amount that the UK will pay when it leaves the European Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None • Small (20 million €) • Medium (60 million €) • Large (100 million €)
	Rights of EU citizens that currently live in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK is allowed to substantially limit rights • UK is allowed to somewhat limit rights • UK guarantees current rights
	Right of EU citizens to enter and move around freely in the UK (freedom of movement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK is allowed to impose substantial restrictions • UK is allowed to impose some restrictions • The United Kingdom guarantees full mobility
<i>Cooperation issues</i>	Trade relations between the United Kingdom and the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United Kingdom remains in the Single Market: no trade barriers • Some trade barriers between the UK and the EU • Substantial trade barriers between the UK and the EU
	Freedom for businesses to establish and provide services in the United Kingdom and the European Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full freedom • Some limitations • Substantial limitations
	Participation of the UK in European programs (e.g. science, environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full participation in European programs, including cooperation against terrorism and organized crime • Full participation in European programs • Participation in some programs, including cooperation against terrorism and organized crime • Participation in some programs • No participation in European programs
<i>Other issues</i>	Applicability of EU law and European Court of Justice rulings in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No applicability • Applicability in some areas • Full applicability

The issues covered in our conjoint experiment contain both zero-sum issues and cooperation issues. *Zero-sum* issues, in which negotiation outcomes become worse for the remaining member states the closer they are to the British position, and vice versa, are issues which each negotiating party has few incentives to compromise on. This is why we expect respondents to generally prefer a non-accommodating stance on these issues. The clearest zero-sum issue is the issue of UK payments to the EU, the so-called “*Brexit bill*”. The UK had been a net payer into the EU’s budget and its contributions had been an important source of revenue for the EU budget. The Brexit-related loss of revenue was thus going to affect all remaining member states negatively: net payers would have to contribute more in the future, and net recipients would see their payments inflows cut. Higher UK payments to the EU were thus unambiguously positive for the EU-27 states, whereas any compromises on this issue would hurt the EU’s interests. A second zero-sum issue concerns the *rights of EU citizens that already live in the UK*. Because the EU member states do not regard these rights as a burden and were not concerned about granting equal rights to UK nationals already living in the EU, the zero-sum characteristics of this issue dominate.⁶¹ Finally, a third zero-sum issue concerns the *rights of EU citizens to move to the UK in the future*, that is, *freedom of movement (FoM)*. Many in the UK regarded this issue as one of the key costs of EU membership and getting rid of freedom of movement was seen as one of the key purposes of Brexit⁶². However, this principle enjoys a lot of support in the remaining EU member states, so that accommodating the UK on freedom of movement was going to be costly for the EU-27 member states and their citizens, who would lose their right to easily find future work opportunities in the UK.

⁶¹ We classify issues as zero-sum even if non-accommodation on the issue may be associated with some costs as long as the zero-sum characteristics dominate.

⁶² Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley 2017; Goodwin and Milazzo 2017.

The second group of attributes are *cooperation* issues. These issues imply that a non-accommodating negotiation outcome which is less beneficial for the UK than the status quo also hurts the remaining member states. Our conjoint experiment includes three cooperation issues: first, future *UK-EU trade relations*; second *freedom for British and EU businesses to establish and provide services in the EU and the UK*; and third *UK participation in EU programs*. For all of these issues, an accommodating outcome would be the most favorable outcome not just for the UK, but also for individuals, firms, and other actors on the EU side. Because cooperation from both sides is required to generate benefits on these issues, denying the UK these benefits (for instance by reintroducing trade-barriers or limiting the provision of services) means that the remaining member states lose cooperation gains in these areas as well. We therefore expect EU-27 voters to be more accommodating on these issues.

Finally, a highly contested issue in the Brexit negotiations was the *applicability of EU law* in the UK and the role of *the European Court of Justice*. We included this issue in the conjoint experiment because of its prominence in the negotiations, even though this issue cannot easily be classified as either a zero-sum or a cooperation issue. Allowing the UK to diverge from EU rules would make trade with the UK more costly for EU-27 firms, and also creates a risk that British deregulation undercuts EU standards, given a cost-advantage to UK firms vis-à-vis their European competitors. This looks, on paper, to be a zero-sum issue. However, to the extent that the supremacy of EU law is also a key element of the Single Market, one could also debate whether this is perhaps more of a cooperation issue. This middle position raises conflicting expectations for citizens' accommodating preferences over this dimension.

In the experiment, respondents had to choose between two hypothetical Brexit deals that presented a different combination of outcomes randomly assigned to each issue in order to

prevent choices being driven by their specific order.⁶³ The different outcomes (values) ranged from accommodating ways to resolving the respective negotiation issue which were closest to the UK's interests, to less accommodating negotiation outcomes which were far from the preferred position of the British.⁶⁴ Because these values varied randomly across the hypothetical Brexit deal packages presented to respondents, the conjoint analysis allows us to explore which specific Brexit negotiation issues and outcomes in each area exhibited the strongest effect upon an individual's choices.

The unit of observation is the Brexit deal, and the outcome variable is whether the Brexit deal is chosen over its paired alternative or not (1 if chosen, 0 if not). Individuals had to choose six times between two different Brexit deals, so the conjoint analysis generated a total of 57,552 observations over the two waves. We estimate the average marginal component effects (AMCE). As Abramson, Koçak, and Magazinnik (2019) argue, the AMCE averages over two aspects of individual preferences: their direction and their intensity. This means that *“the sign and magnitude of the AMCE depend upon the features included in the experimental design even though individual preferences over these features remain constant across experiments. (p.10)”* Hence, in an experiment like ours, with several features and profiles, we must take caution in interpreting the results as majority-preferred features.

Effect of issue type on citizens' preferences

We begin with the overall results of the conjoint experiment. Figure 1 shows the average marginal component effect that each negotiation outcome per issue has in accounting for respondent's choices across the 57,522 hypothetical Brexit deals.⁶⁵ It shows that overall,

⁶³ Appendix 2 shows the screens that respondents viewed to perform the conjoint choice.

⁶⁴ The item “participation in EU programs” additionally included a specific reference to cooperating in the fight against terrorism and organized crime to examine whether citizens might find certain areas of cooperation particularly relevant.

⁶⁵ All figures use Bischof's 2017 plotplain scheme.

German and Spanish citizens adopt a rather non-accommodating negotiation line. For almost all dimensions, the Brexit deal is more likely to be accepted when the outcomes are less accommodating. Considering that in both countries EU supporters outnumber Euroskeptics, this finding is not surprising and also echoes earlier research from all EU-27 countries.^{66 67}

More importantly, this analysis allows us to test our argument that citizens are more likely to prefer a non-accommodating negotiation approach with regard to zero-sum issues, but a more compromising approach with regard to cooperation issues. As expected, we find variation across issues in terms of how accommodating respondents are. Respondents are highly unwilling to accommodate the UK on zero-sum issues, and a non-accommodating negotiation outcome on these issues strongly increases the likelihood that respondents will accept a Brexit deal. This effect is most pronounced for the *Brexit bill*, with significantly higher support for Brexit deals in which the UK pays large sums of money, but it is also large with regard to the *rights of current EU citizens in the UK* and the *free movement of people*. In both cases, citizens are much more likely to support Brexit agreements in which the United Kingdom is *not* allowed to impose any restrictions. As predicted by our argument, respondents prefer non-accommodative positions on zero-sum issues for which any gains for the United Kingdom represent a cost for the EU-27. Our results suggest that citizens understand this and therefore support less compromising positions on those issues.⁶⁸

By contrast, we find more moderate effects for *cooperation issues*, where cooperation from both sides is required to generate cooperation gains. The less straightforward nature of the

⁶⁶ Walter 2020a.

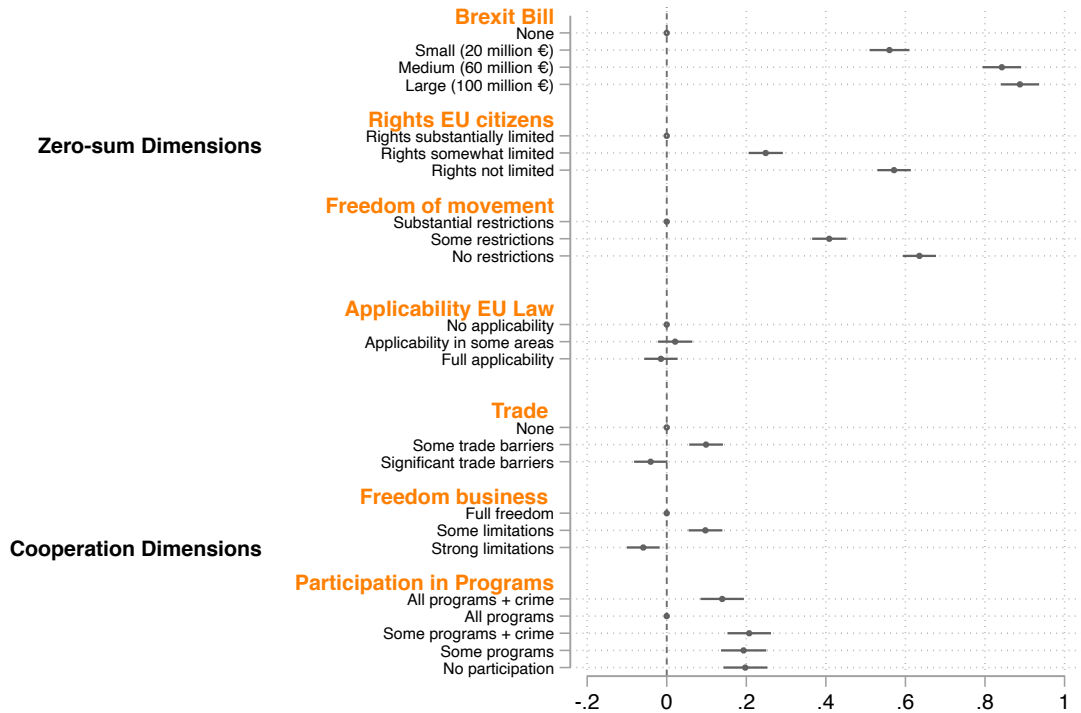
⁶⁷ Results are also stable across the two survey waves, which suggests that our findings reflect underlying preferences over zero-sum and cooperation issues, rather than short-term dynamics driven by the specific nature of the negotiation process and media attention (see Appendix 3).

⁶⁸ This understanding can reflect a genuine understanding of the different issues, or an understanding shaped by media discourse and elite cues. While our analysis is not designed to examine these mechanisms, Figure A.8 suggests that education is not the main driver of the differences between zero-sum and cooperation issues.

choice is reflected in our conjoint experiment. Compared to zero-sum issues, respondents soften considerably on these issues: the most preferred outcome is generally one where some restrictions are imposed. This means that the European public is willing to give up some, but not all, of the gains of cooperation with the UK in the Brexit deal. Respondents are more likely to accept *some* barriers and limitations, but there is a negative and significant effect with regard to *strong* barriers and limitations, both for trade and freedom of businesses to establish in the UK or the EU. With regard to the UK's participation in EU cooperation programs, respondents exhibit a harder position, except when cooperation on security issues is explicitly mentioned. Not allowing the UK to participate in EU cooperation programs or only allowing it to participate in *some* of them increases the likelihood that the Brexit package is the preferred option by respondents. Overall, the magnitude of effects is considerably smaller for cooperation issues than for the zero-sum issues.

Finally, the applicability of EU law and ECJ rulings is not an issue that has a significant effect on respondents' choices among Brexit packages. As discussed, this is neither a zero-sum nor a cooperation issue and we therefore had no clear expectations with regard to this topic. Nonetheless, given the contentiousness of the issue in the Brexit negotiations in the UK, it is interesting that on the EU side, preferences were not so clear-cut.

Figure 1: Conjoint experiment on hypothetical Brexit deals: Overall Analysis



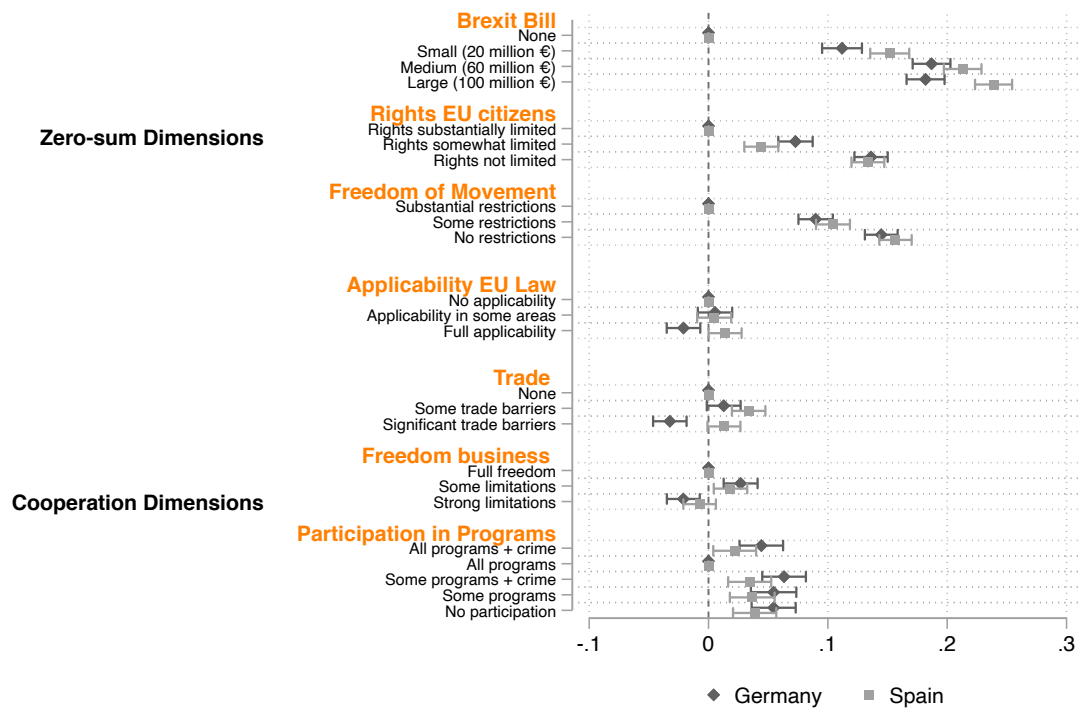
Note: 95% confidence intervals

We next examine whether issue-specific Brexit negotiation preferences vary between Germany and Spain. As explained above, Germany and Spain differ in their exposure to different aspects of Brexit.⁶⁹ Whereas the export-oriented German economy is particularly exposed to the trade-related fallout from Brexit, Spain is more exposed to the financial consequences of the discontinuation of British contributions to the EU budget. At the same time, the two countries have similar exposure with regard to their citizen’s rights related to freedom of movement, as significant numbers of citizens from both countries live in the UK. This suggests that Germans

⁶⁹ Figure A.3 shows that choices also vary by regional exposure to a hard Brexit. In line with our argument, a high regional exposure makes respondents more accommodating with regard to the Brexit bill, the applicability of EU law, and trade.

should be more accommodating than Spaniards with regard to both trade and the Brexit bill, whereas we expect little difference with regard to free movement of people.

Figure 2: Conjoint experiment results by country



Note: 95% confidence intervals

Results in figure 2 show that as expected, Spanish and German respondents differ most strongly with regard to the Brexit bill issue and the trade issue, where, Spaniards are less willing to accommodate the UK than Germans. With regard to trade, respondents even exhibit opposite preferences, with Germans significantly less likely to accept a Brexit deal with significant trade barriers than one with no trade barriers whatsoever.⁷⁰ Germans are also much more willing to accommodate the UK’s wish to avoid full applicability of EU law. In contrast, there are almost

⁷⁰ This preference of the German public for more accommodative deals in terms of trade is also reflected in Angela Merkel advocating for a free trade deal during the negotiations with the goal of keeping the UK as “an important partner for Germany and the EU,” (<https://www.ft.com/content/34dd4cbe-33ef-32f8-9aa2-904339e46bf0>).

no statistically significant differences between Spanish and German respondents for most other issues, including free movement of people.

More generally, these results underscore the argument that exposure to the costs and benefits of accommodation influences respondents' withdrawal negotiation preferences. In the appendix we provide empirical evidence that economic exposure affects an individual's negotiation preferences for the cooperative issues of the Brexit deal. We show that in regions that are highly exposed to an economic fallout from Brexit, respondents are more likely to reject deals that impose substantial restrictions to both trade and the freedom of businesses and firms to provide services in the United Kingdom and the European Union (see Appendix 4).

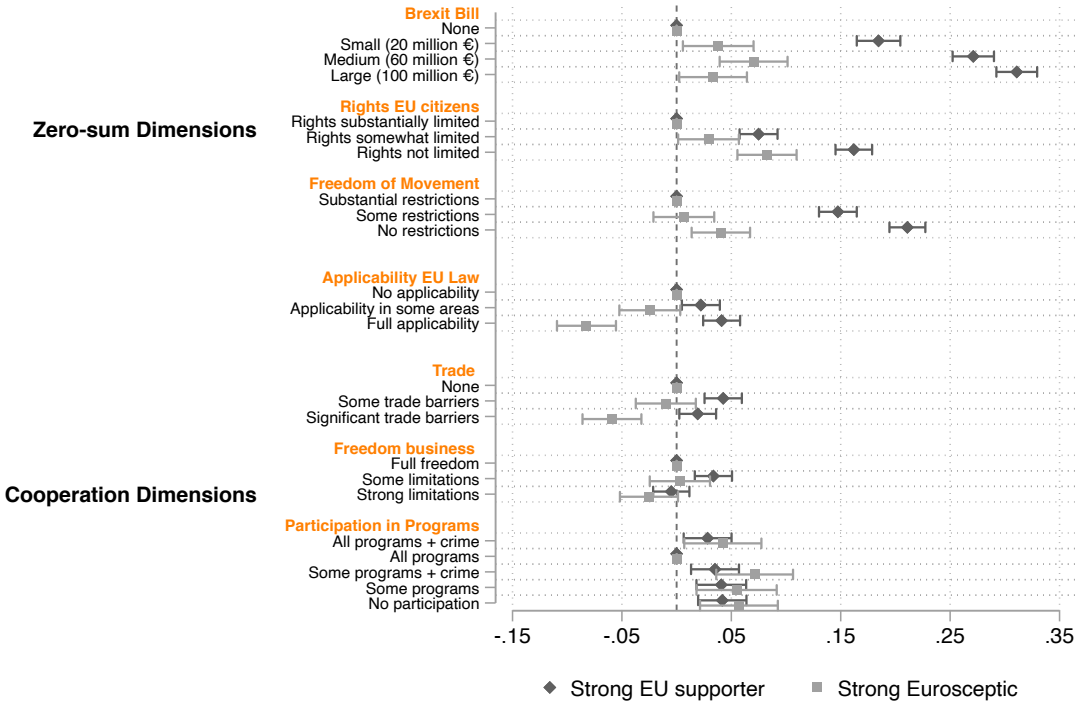
Yet it is not all about economic exposure. An individual's personal links also matter for when it comes to understanding their preferences over specific dimensions of the Brexit deal. Citizens with friends and/or relatives living in the United Kingdom are more likely to reject deals that involve some restrictions to the rights of EU workers (see Appendix 5). Overall, these empirical findings suggest that citizens are not only generally aware of the costs and benefits associated with accommodation on different negotiation issues, but their issue-specific choices are also affected by their particular circumstances.

Concern about political contagion: Euroskeptics vs. Europhiles

So far, our analysis has shown that an individual's Brexit negotiation preferences are informed by negotiation issue type and, more generally, an individual's exposure to the net costs of accommodation. However, we have argued that concern about the ripple-effects of accommodating and non-accommodating withdrawal outcomes also influence how voters evaluate different negotiation approaches. We therefore next explore how attitudes towards the

EU condition a respondent’s negotiation preferences. For this purpose, we include an interaction effect between all values in the conjoint experiment and a variable that captures the respondent’s general opinion of the EU, coded from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive).⁷¹

Figure 3: Conjoint analysis by EU attitudes. The (non-)accommodation dilemma.



Note: 95% confidence intervals

Figure 3 compares the average marginal component effects of each negotiation outcome between citizens with very positive (black) and very negative (gray) opinions of the EU. The analysis shows that as expected, Europhiles are much more supportive of non-accommodating Brexit negotiation outcomes than Euroskeptics, who are more likely to reject deals that do not accommodate the UK. This difference between the negotiation preferences of Europhiles and Euroskeptics holds for all issues except for participation in EU programs. This evidence is in line with our argument that supporters of an international institution are worried about the

⁷¹ Results are robust to using the likely vote in a hypothetical EU membership referendum as a proxy for EU attitudes, see Appendix 6. Results of the conjoint split by other variables can be found in Appendix 7.

potential ripple effects of accommodation, whereas opponents view accommodation positively because it creates an attractive blueprint for future withdrawals from the institution.

(Non-)accommodation dilemmas

As discussed in the theory section, Europhiles' general support for non-accommodation and Euroskeptics' general support for accommodation confronts both groups of respondents with a dilemma (see table 2): non-accommodation is costly where cooperation issues are concerned, which is why we expect Europhiles to face an accommodation dilemma with regard to these issues. By contrast, Euroskeptics face a non-accommodation dilemma on zero-sum issues, because accommodation is costly for the remaining member states. These dilemmas should moderate a respondent's respective support for non-accommodation and accommodation.

The evidence presented in figure 3 supports this hypothesis. Europhiles are extremely supportive of non-accommodation with regard to zero-sum issues, but much less so with regard to cooperation issues. This preference moderation for cooperation issues is particularly pronounced for the freedom of business: here Brexit deals that impose *some* restrictions are preferred to both deals that impose no restrictions and to those with substantial restrictions. But compared to zero-sum issues, the substantive effects are also much smaller for trade and EU program participation (and for the applicability of EU law). Euroskeptics, by contrast, tend to be opposed to Brexit deals that contain non-accommodating outcomes on most cooperation issues, especially those that impose significant barriers to trade and businesses, as well as the applicability of EU law. This support for more accommodating negotiating outcomes is not surprising, as such outcomes create an attractive precedent for future EU withdrawals. However, Euroskeptics' support for accommodation does not extend to zero-sum issues, because these issues confront them with the non-accommodation dilemma: although

accommodating the UK on these issues would set favorable conditions for countries that want to leave the EU in the future, it also creates tangible costs for the citizens of the remaining member states.⁷²

In sum, our analysis of the conjoint experiment corroborates our argument that support for a more- or less-accommodating negotiating approach in withdrawal negotiations is shaped by an individual's concern about both the costs and benefits and about the longer-term ripple effects of accommodation.

5. Preferences for more or less accommodation

The Brexit withdrawal agreement and the Brexit deal on the future EU-UK relationship were, of course, package deals that contained myriad issues. We therefore next examine what kind of overall negotiation approach German and Spanish respondents preferred in the Brexit negotiations.

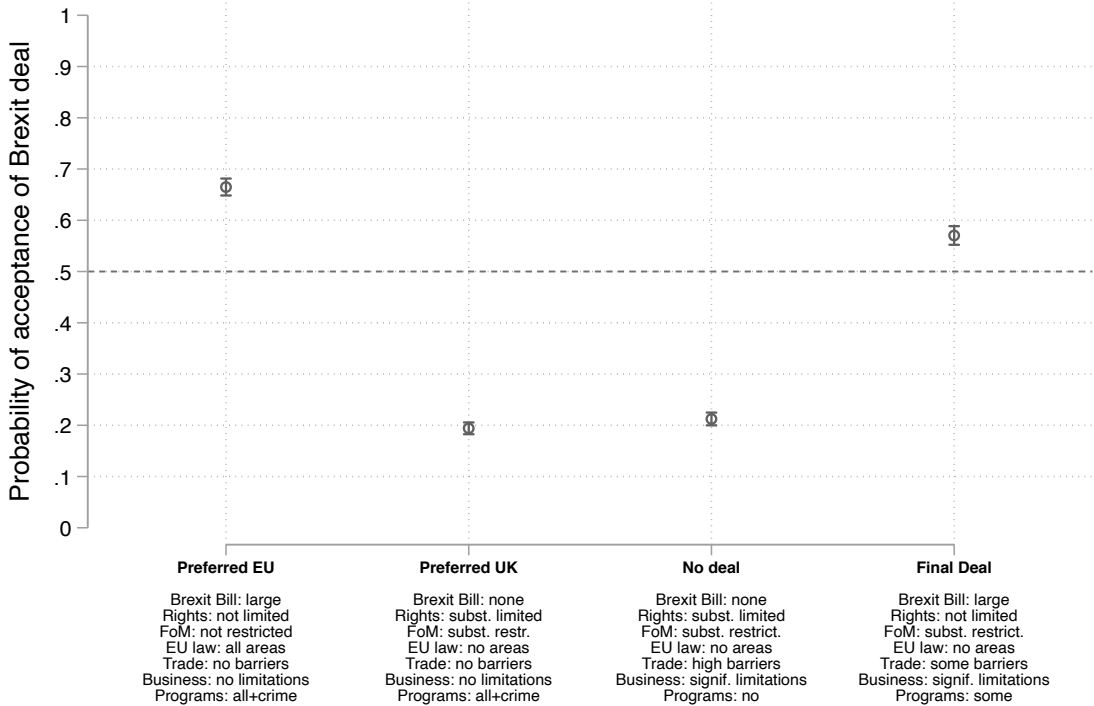
We first use the results of the conjoint analysis to calculate the predicted probabilities that an individual supports a specific Brexit deal. This exercise allows us to be more precise about the average support of German and Spanish respondents for a deal with a particular set of features.⁷³ Figure 4 shows the simulated overall probabilities of supporting four hypothetical Brexit deals and their respective attributes. We start out with the preferred EU deal, which is non-accommodative regarding all zero-sum issues and the question of EU law, but accommodates the UK on cooperation issues in order to keep the existing cooperation gains. This deal is

⁷² These findings are not merely a reflection of variation in satisfaction with the government's handling of the Brexit negotiations or general support for the government (see Figures A.6 and A.7).

⁷³ This should not be interpreted as majority or minority preferences as Abramson, Koçak, and Magazinnik 2019 show.

viewed very positively by our respondents and has a 66% probability of being accepted by a respondent. In contrast, the UK’s preferred deal (accommodation across all dimensions) is the least preferred deal (19%). Next, we examine support for a No-Deal Brexit, the scenario which often loomed over the negotiations and which constituted the reversion point in these negotiations. In this scenario, the UK would have avoided the costs of non-accommodation on all zero-sum issues and the EU law issue, but would have lost all benefits of cooperating with the EU. With a predicted acceptance probability of only 21%, this scenario is almost as unpopular as the UK’s preferred deal, which perhaps explains why the UK’s No-Deal threat did not give it more leverage in the Brexit negotiations.⁷⁴ Finally, we simulate the deal that approximates the eventual outcome of the Brexit negotiations as closely as possible. With a predicted probability of being accepted of 57% by German and Spanish respondents, this suggests that the EU was able to conclude a widely supported Brexit deal.

Figure 4: Probability of acceptance of different hypothetical Brexit deals



Note: 95% confidence intervals

⁷⁴ To show that this is not driven by the Brexit Bill, we show that the same Brexit deal, but with a large bill. Although this deal has a higher probability of being accepted (39%).

We next focus on how what type of Brexit negotiation approach respondents support overall. In other words, how do they make their judgments when the multidimensionality of the Brexit deal collapses into a single dimension? For this purpose, we ask respondents about their overall preference for a more-accommodating (“soft”) or less-accommodating (“hard”) negotiation approach on a five-point scale, ranging from the EU should take a (1) “very soft line” to a (5) “very hard line.” Overall, a majority of respondents (almost 60%) supported a somewhat or hard line, non-accommodating negotiation stance vis-à-vis the UK, whereas not even 10% of respondents opted for a soft approach to the negotiations). Moreover preferences were remarkably stable over the year and a half that lay between our two survey waves, echoing our findings from the conjoint experiment. Although the impending risk of a No-Deal had grown substantially at the time the second survey wave was conducted in March 2019, this did not lead to a softening in negotiation preferences among the Spanish and German public. Both of these findings echo earlier Brexit-related survey research for the EU-27.⁷⁵

Our argument suggests that overall Brexit negotiation preferences should also be moderated by exposure to the consequences of non-accommodation and individuals’ attitude toward the EU. We operationalize exposure in three ways, using two objective and one subjective measure. First, we measure individuals’ regional economic exposure to a hard Brexit, using estimates of regional (German *Länder* and the Spanish *Comunidades Autónomas*) GDP at risk from a hard, non-accommodating Brexit⁷⁶. This variable ranges from 0.51% of regional GDP in the Canary Islands (Spain) to 5.98% of regional GDP in Baden-Württemberg (Germany). Second, we include a variable that measures the exposure to tourism of the respondent’s region, because these regions are likely to be vulnerable to travel restrictions that may arise from Brexit . This

⁷⁵ Walter 2020a.

⁷⁶ Chen et al. 2018.

variable is measured as natural logarithm of the number of nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments per inhabitant in the region in 2015⁷⁷. Third, we include respondents' subjective assessment of how Brexit will affect their own country in the medium term, with answers ranging from 1 (*Germany/Spain will be much better off in five years as a result of Brexit*) to 5 (*Germany/Spain will be much worse off in five years as a result of Brexit*).⁷⁸ As before, we measure attitudes toward the EU as respondents' overall opinion of the EU (from very negative to very positive), but results are robust to using vote intention in an EU membership referendum (Figure A.10). and control for a set of attitudinal, economic and sociodemographic covariates⁷⁹.

Figure 5 shows that in line with our expectations, a higher exposure to the costs of non-accommodation makes respondents more supportive of a softer, accommodating Brexit negotiation approach. Respondents living in regions in which large shares of regional GDP are at risk because of close trade relations with the UK or a high reliance on tourism, and those who expect Brexit to have negative medium-consequences for their own country are more likely to favor a softer negotiation approach. Likewise, attitudes towards the EU emerge as a strong dividing line: Euroskeptic respondents tend to prefer a more accommodating approach, whereas Europhiles support a much more uncompromising approach, largely to avoid encouraging other countries to leave the EU.^{80 81} Because our argument suggests that on cooperation issues, which dominate in the Brexit negotiations overall, Europhiles should experience an accommodation dilemma, the right-hand panel shows results for a second model that interacts regional GDP

⁷⁷ The variable is taken from Eurostat.

⁷⁸ Although a majority of respondents believe that Brexit will not have any effect on their own country, among those expecting an effect, those expecting a negative impact clearly dominate (38% (Spain) and 26% (Germany) of respondents).

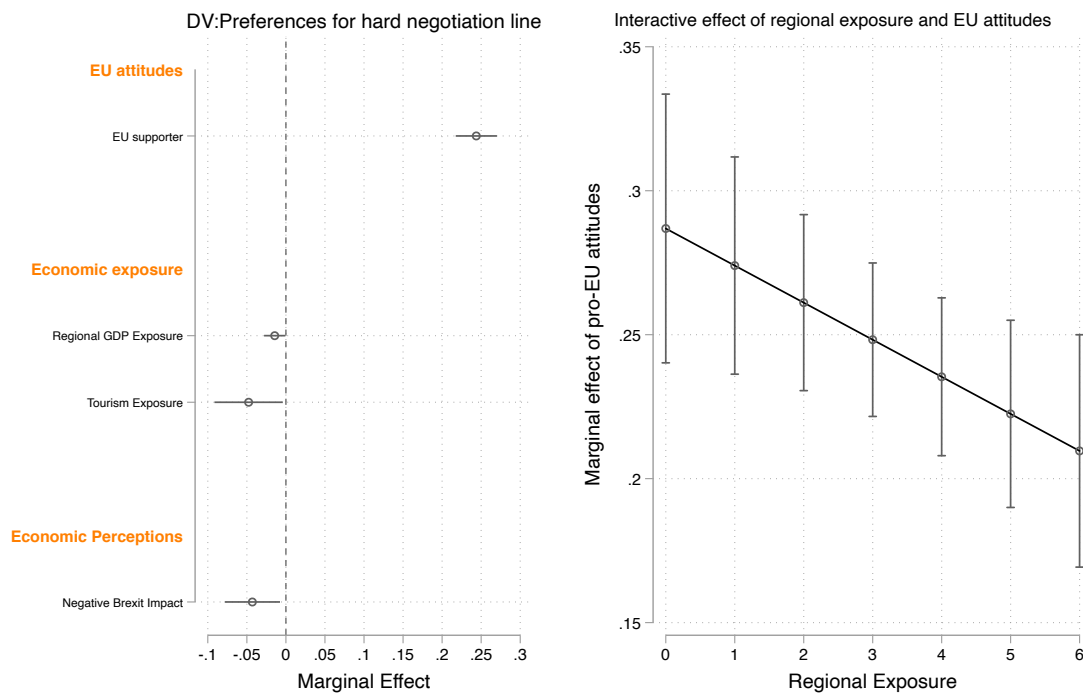
⁷⁹ See the Appendix 8 for details on operationalization, the effect of covariates and robustness checks. Results are robust when we include vote intention covariates to control for the possibility that partisan cues shape both attitudes toward Brexit and EU attitudes.

⁸⁰ See Appendix 9.

⁸¹ Note that we control for education to account for the fact that individuals with higher levels of human capital or those working in tradable industries tend to view the EU more positively.

exposure with EU attitudes.⁸² In line with the accommodation dilemma argument, the preference of Europhile respondents for non-accommodation is softens as their regional economic exposure increases,

Figure 5: Correlates of supporting a non-accommodating Brexit negotiation approach



Notes: OLS regression, dependent variable is answer on five-point scale on preferred Brexit negotiation line (1=soft, 5=hard), 95% confidence intervals, n= 3,925.

6. Conclusion

Unilateral challenges to international institutions have proliferated in recent years. Our paper has examined the receiving end of such challenges: the institutions’ other member states. Focusing on one specific type of challenge – unilateral withdrawal – it has analyzed voters’ preferences about the extent to which the withdrawing member state should be accommodated

⁸² These variables are uncorrelated variables (-0.07).

in the negotiations about the terms of withdrawal and future cooperation. Such negotiations occur when countries unilaterally withdraw, or threaten to withdraw, from international institutions and in the process try to renegotiate better terms for their future relations with their former partner states. While this article has focused on Brexit, the most prominent withdrawal negotiation of this kind so far, our argument also extends to such negotiations in other contexts, such as transboundary freshwater agreements⁸³, bilateral investment treaties⁸⁴, or both successful (e.g. NAFTA, which resulted in a revised treaty) and failed (e.g. Iran deal, which resulted in the US's withdrawal from the treaty) treaty renegotiation efforts by US President Trump.

We argued that governments' and voters' support for more or less accommodation is shaped by their exposure to the costs of accommodation and concern about the ripple-effects of accommodation. Because non-accommodation is only costly with regard to cooperation issues, but not with regard to zero-sum issues, voters can face two types of dilemmas: those concerned about the institution's stability are generally less willing to accommodate, but face an accommodation dilemma with regard to cooperation issues that moderates this preference for non-accommodation. In contrast, critics of the international institution are more willing to accommodate, but face a non-accommodation dilemma with regard to zero-sum issues which moderates their preference for accommodation.

Using survey evidence collected against the backdrop of the Brexit negotiations between the United Kingdom and the EU, we found support for this argument: Higher exposure to the costs of a hard Brexit made respondents more willing to accommodate the UK, whereas Europhiles supported a less-accommodating negotiation approach. Respondents were also much less accommodating on zero-sum issues than on cooperation issues. Moreover, we found

⁸³ De Bruyne, Fischhendler, and Haftel 2020.

⁸⁴ Haftel and Thompson 2018; Huikuri 2020.

evidence that the dilemmas created by Brexit moderated respondents' negotiation preferences as predicted by our argument. Whereas EU supporters preferred the least accommodative options in zero-sum issues, they preferred more accommodative outcomes with regard to cooperation issues. Euroskeptic respondents, however, were very accommodative regarding cooperation issues, but less enthusiastic about accommodation with regard to zero-sum issues. Overall, we found that a majority of respondents favored a less-accommodating negotiation outcome and supported the final, relatively un-accommodating, outcome of the Brexit negotiations.

Our paper makes contributions to three major research strands. First, it speaks to a growing body of research on challenges to international organizations such as withdrawals from, renegotiations of, non-compliance with, or even the decay or demise of these organizations⁸⁵. By conceptualizing the different outcomes of withdrawal processes and showing that the costs and benefits associated with these outcomes depend on the type of issue and the level of contagion risk, it improves our understanding of how governments deal with the dilemmas and intertemporal trade-offs these challenges create. Although this paper has focused on how individuals view these negotiations, the insights obtained can also help us better understand how governments respond to these challenges. For example, Figure 6 illustrates that the distinction between zero-sum and cooperation issues allows for a deeper understanding of governments' negotiation preferences as well. Using data on EU-27 governments' preferences on four Brexit-related negotiation issues from just before the start of the Brexit negotiations⁸⁶, it shows that remaining member state governments were much more supportive of sustained close ties with the UK on cooperation issues (security and trade) than on zero-sum issues (exit bill or UK's cherry-picking on the four freedoms of the EU single market). More generally, our

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; Gray 2018; Haftel and Thompson 2018; Huikuri 2020; Lipsey 2017.

⁸⁶ The Economist 2017.

analysis suggests that governments and voters in member states of challenged international institutions face difficult trade-offs in withdrawal negotiations or treaty renegotiations in which cooperation issues dominate. When contagion risks are relatively low, as is often the case in bilateral trade treaty renegotiations⁸⁷, such withdrawal negotiations are likely to be resolved in a cooperative, accommodating manner. When zero-sum issues dominate, however, as was the case for example in US president Trump’s bid to renegotiate the Iran deal, room for compromise is limited and therefore a failure of the negotiations is a serious possibility.

Figure 6: Average negotiation preferences of EU-27 governments, April 2017



Second, our paper contributes to research on the popular backlash against international cooperation⁸⁸. By clarifying the trade-offs confronting the supporters of international cooperation in the face of unilateral challenges to international institutions, it shows that this

⁸⁷ Castle 2019.
⁸⁸ Walter 2021b.

group does not indiscriminately support cooperation for cooperation's sake. Rather, it is well attuned to issues such as reciprocity and reputation and willing to forgo short-term cooperation gains in order to secure broader long-term cooperation gains. Moreover, by showing that unilateral challenges to existing international institutions also confront nationalists in other countries with considerable dilemmas, we also contribute to newly emerging research on how nationalist and populist movements influence international cooperation⁸⁹.

Finally, our paper contributes to the debate about the extent to which the public is able to understand foreign policy issues⁹⁰. Our analyses suggest that the public is able to understand the costs and benefits of accommodation and non-accommodation in a complex setting such as the Brexit negotiations. Although our results come from a conjoint experiment -which might heighten respondents' attention-, they interestingly contrast with findings for the British public, which has shown more difficulties in grasping the trade-offs associated with Brexit⁹¹. One possible explanation is that European elites have emphasized the trade-offs, whereas this has been much less prominently discussed in the UK. A promising avenue for future research is thus to explore the extent to which individual negotiation preferences are a rationalization of elite preferences, or whether citizens genuinely understand the trade-offs involved.

⁸⁹ Pevehouse 2020; Verbeek and Zaslove 2017.

⁹⁰ E.g.: Baum and Potter 2008; Pelc 2013; Voeten 2013.

⁹¹ Grynberg, Walter, and Wasserfallen 2019; Richards, Heath, and Carl 2018.

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