



# The Mass Politics of International Disintegration

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## Abstract

In the past few years, the world has witnessed an unprecedented popular backlash against international institutions. This paper presents a framework for analyzing the challenges that unilateral, voter-based attempts by one member state to change or terminate the terms of existing international agreements pose for international cooperation. It argues that the mass politics of international disintegration are shaped by an “accommodation dilemma” encountered by the other member states: not accommodating such unilateral attempts is costly, yet accommodating the revisionist country’s disintegration bid carries large contagion risks. Using original survey data from approximately 1.800 British and 60.000 EU-27 Europeans as well as comparative case studies, the paper shows that this framework can help us better understand the ability of foreign governments’ to intervene in domestic disintegration referendum campaigns, the existence of contagion effects across member states and variation in the responses of the remaining member states to voter-based disintegration bids.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed an unprecedented popular backlash against international institutions. Faced with increasing trade-offs between the gains from international cooperation, democracy, and national sovereignty (Rodrik 2011), popular demands to not only slow down, but to reverse international integration have proliferated. The most prominent example of such an instance of “voter-based disintegration” is the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom (UK), in which British voters decided to leave the European Union (EU). This direct democratic vote has set in motion the biggest withdrawal negotiations ever seen in an international organization. Although highly disruptive and unusual, Brexit is, however, not unique. Voters in Greece, Iceland, and Switzerland have used popular referendums to repudiate the terms of existing international agreements in recent years. And US President Trump has fulfilled key campaign promises by withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord and renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Skepticism about the merits of international cooperation is nothing new (see for examples the overviews in Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Kuo and Naoi 2015). But the vehemence with which it has manifested itself more recently is a new development.

Much research has focused on the causes of this popular turn against international cooperation (there is a growing literature on this issue, see e.g., Clarke et al. 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Curtis et al. 2014; Goodwin and Heath 2016; Hobolt 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Sciarini et al. 2015; De Vries 2018). Much attention has also been paid to the internal political struggles that follow upon popular votes to fully or partially withdraw from an international agreement. However, there is much less research about what a unilateral withdrawal from an international institution means for the institution’s other member states. This is surprising because the consequences of voter-based efforts of disintegration reach far beyond the countries in which they originate. Not only does

one member's unilateral bid to improve its membership terms threaten to leave the others worse off. Voter-based disintegration bids by one member state also reverberate among the elites and the mass publics in other countries. These reverberations will be particularly pronounced when the withdrawal occurs in a highly visible and politicized manner such as through a referendum vote, which politicizes the withdrawal process and provides it with a high degree of legitimacy and a lot of attention both at home and abroad. 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."<sup>1</sup> 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.

Voter-based disintegration thus poses considerable risks of political contagion by weakening the benefits of international cooperation and emboldening integration-sceptics elsewhere. Not surprisingly, this phenomenon is widely seen as a serious threat to international cooperation. 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 growing popular support for disintegration poses a fundamental challenge for international institutions such as the EU (e.g., Blyth 2016; Hobolt 2016) and the contemporary liberal world order more generally (e.g., Ikenberry 2018; Pepinsky 2017; Rodrik 2017). However, political contagion does not always occur. For example, public support for the EU has increased since the Brexit referendum (Eurobarometer 2017), popular appetite to leave the Iran Deal has not spread to other countries, and no other country has followed the US' lead in withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord (although Brazil's

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<sup>1</sup> Tweet from June 24, 2016

president Bolsonaro has been toying with the idea). Against this backdrop, it is imperative to better understand how voter-based attempts to revert integration spread, how they can be contained, and which dynamics they produce in the international arena. In short, we need a better understanding of the *mass politics of international disintegration* and their implication for international relations.

So far, however, our theoretical tools to develop such an understanding are underdeveloped. There is vast research on the creation and functioning of international institutions (for overviews, see e.g. Gilligan and Johns 2012; Martin and Simmons 2013; Pevehouse and von Borzyskowski 2016), but analysis of how such institutions disintegrate has remained rudimentary (for notable exceptions, see von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2018; Gray 2018; Helfer 2005, 2017; Leeds and Savun 2007).<sup>2</sup> For example, in the Oxford Handbook of International Organizations (Cogan et al. 2016), none of the 55 chapters focuses on the dissolution of international organizations. Even in research on the European Union, where scholars have had to grapple with the challenges of popular Euroscepticism for some time (Hooghe and Marks 2009), a theory of European disintegration remains elusive (Börzel 2018). Scholars agree that disintegration is not “integration in reverse”, but not on much else (Jones 2018; Rosamond 2016; Vollaard 2014; Webber 2013). A better understanding of the causes, dynamics, and consequences of international disintegration is thus urgently needed (Schneider 2017).

This paper works towards this goal by conceptualizing and systematically exploring the mass politics of international disintegration. It first defines *voter-based disintegration* as a unilateral attempt by one member state to change or terminate the terms of an existing international agreement on the basis of a strong popular mandate. Voter-based disintegration is

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<sup>2</sup> I define international institutions as relatively stable sets of norms and rules that pertain to the international system, the actors in the system and their activities (Duffield 2007). They cover a spectrum that ranges from international treaties to supranational organizations.

thus a specific type of international disintegration. It then examines the challenges that a voter-based disintegration bid by member state presents to the remaining member states: I argue that the mass politics of international disintegration are fundamentally shaped by an “accommodation dilemma,” that is the dilemma that accommodating the revisionist country’s disintegration bid carries large contagion risks, but that non-accommodation is costly to the remaining member states. The remainder of the paper examines how this dilemma shapes how the remaining member states respond to voter-based disintegration, both before and after the vote. I illustrate the merits of this argument by exploring several empirical implications of this argument. Analyses using original survey data from approximately 1.800 British and 60.000 EU-27 Europeans as well as comparative case studies of four voter-based disintegration events show that my framework can help us better understand the ability of foreign governments’ to intervene in domestic disintegration referendum campaigns, the existence of contagion effects across member states and variation in the responses of the remaining member states to voter-based disintegration bids. The conclusion discusses the long-term challenges that the mass politics of disintegration pose for international cooperation.

## **2. What is Voter-based Disintegration?**

I define voter-based disintegration as a *process in which a member state of an international institution attempts to unilaterally change or terminate the terms of an existing international agreement on the basis of a strong popular mandate*. It aims at international disintegration because it seeks to partly or fully withdraw from the rules of an international institution, such as an international agreement or an international or supranational organization. It is voter-based because it is grounded in strong domestic popular support, expressed for example in a referendum vote or as part of a successful candidate’s election campaign. This not only provides the disintegration decision with a high degree of democratic legitimacy, but also

politicizes the question of whether an international treaty can be changed ex post or terminated among the other member states (Hutter et al. 2016; Zürn 2014). Voter-based instances of disintegration therefore tend to be much more politicized and salient in the political debate than disintegration decisions taken by a small foreign policy elite.<sup>3</sup> Voter-based disintegration should be seen as a process. Its starting point is domestic integration skepticism, but it acquires an international dimension as soon as the national government takes up this mounting domestic pressure to negotiate better membership terms with the other member states. If the other states do not accommodate such a request, the process can accelerate: the disintegrating state officially announces its intention to partially or fully withdraw from the international institution, negotiates the terms of withdrawal, and ultimately withdraws from specific rules or the entire international institution. Of course, the process can also end along this way, if the disintegrating state backs down. The most prominent example of such an instance of “voter-based disintegration” is the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom (UK), in which British voters decided to leave the European Union (EU). This direct democratic vote has set in motion the biggest withdrawal negotiations ever seen in an international organization. Although highly disruptive and unusual, Brexit is, however, not unique. Voters in Greece, Iceland, and Switzerland have used popular referendums to repudiate the terms of existing international agreements in recent years. And across the Atlantic, US President Trump has fulfilled key campaign promises by withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord or the Iran deal, and renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

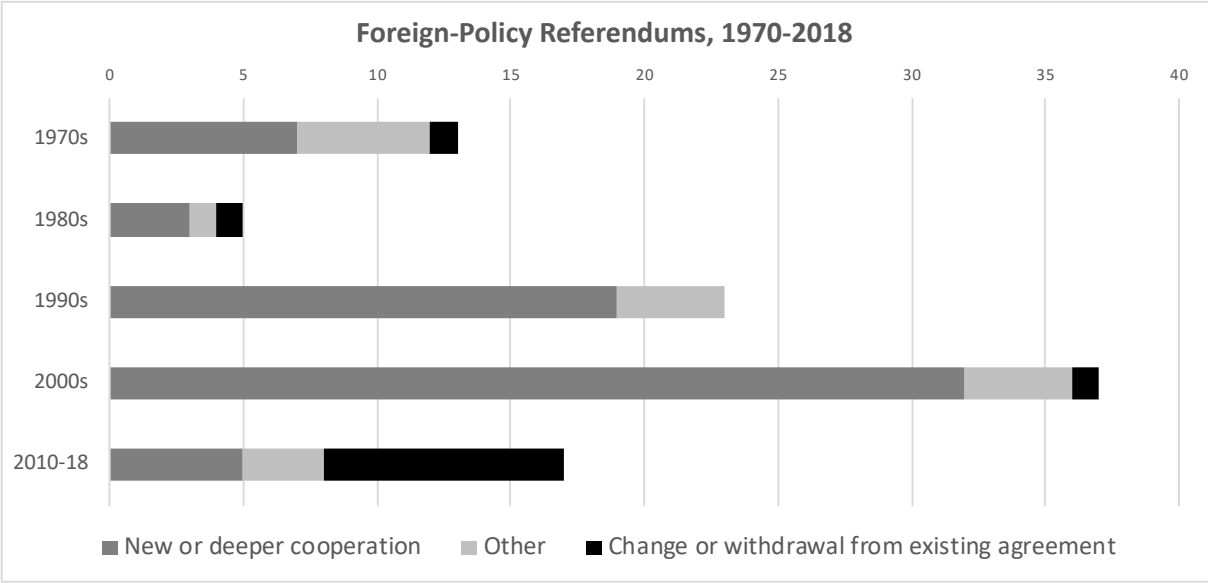
Skepticism about the merits of international cooperation is nothing new (see for examples the overviews in Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Kuo and Naoi 2015). But the vehemence with which it has manifested itself more recently is a new development. Figure 1 shows that voter-based disintegration efforts have proliferated in the recent decade. It focuses on

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these latter instances, see von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019) or Leeds and Savun (2007).

referendums, the clearest form of voter-based disintegration efforts and distinguishes between “integration referendums” that establish or deepen cooperation between states and “disintegration referendums” that, if successful, roll back *existing* forms of international cooperation, either partially by unilaterally mandating changes to an agreement, or fully, by mandating a withdrawal.

**Figure 1: Number of integration and disintegration referendums, 1970-2018**



*Source:* C2D Datenbank, Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau, updated by myself for recent years. Author’s classification of all national referendums on questions concerning international cooperation.

Figure 1 shows that while referendums aimed at international disintegration are still relatively rare, they have become much more frequent and much more dominant in recent years. Nine of the ten disintegration referendums held so far and almost all ‘successful’ ones (i.e. resulting in a disintegrative vote) have been held since 2010.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, populist leaders across

<sup>4</sup> The disintegration referendums are the 1975 UK referendum on continued EC membership, the 1984 Greenland referendum on leaving the EC, the 1986 Spanish referendum on continued NATO membership, the 2000 Brazil IMF referendum, the 2010 and 2011 Icesave referendums, the 2014 Swiss “Against Mass Immigration” initiative, the 2014 Swiss ECOPOP initiative, the 2015 Greek bailout referendum, the 2016 Swiss Implementation Initiative, the 2016 Hungarian refugee quota referendum, the 2016 British Brexit referendum, and the 2018 Swiss self-determination initiative.



Europe have called for more disintegration referendums, so that the number may continue to grow. It is not a coincidence that these referendums are mostly directed against the EU, which has achieved a level of integration that makes the trade-offs between national sovereignty, democracy and international cooperation gains particularly pronounced (Rodrik 2011). Yet we also see strong voter-based disintegration attempts in other countries and directed against other international institutions as well, for example in the US or in Brazil, where presidential candidates have made changing or leaving international treaties key promises in their election campaigns.

### **3. Voter-based disintegration as a challenge for the other member states**

Voter-based disintegration efforts by one member state have significant spillover effects for the other parties to the respective international agreement or international institution. First, such unilateral decisions undermine the overall economic and political attractiveness of the international institution. International cooperation is typically established because both sides benefit from such cooperation, even if the gains of cooperation are not always shared equally (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Gruber 2000; Keohane 1984). This suggests that the withdrawal of one member state or a renegotiation in one state's favor reduces the share of the cooperation gains the other member states enjoy: Reintroducing barriers to cooperation that the international institution had hitherto removed, is costly both in economic and more general efficiency terms. For example, if disintegration leads to the re-introduction of trade barriers, exporters in both the remaining members and the leaving state will be hurt and international supply chains will be disrupted. This is likely to cause job losses and economic downturns in both the leaving state and the remaining members. Other forms of cooperation and policy coordination between the remaining countries and the leaving country – from police cooperation to environmental protection – are also likely to become more difficult. This creates transaction costs, economic

distortions, and also financial risks that arise as economic agents adjust to the new disintegrated environment. As a result, the attractiveness of the international institution for the remaining member states declines, which creates the risks that other member states will find it no longer worth to pay the price of membership. Moreover, especially when the withdrawing member state is an important and powerful member, upholding the institution may be difficult, even when the remaining member states in principle want to do it – the Iran Nuclear Deal is a case in point.

Second, disintegration bids carry political contagion risks because they can embolden integration-sceptics elsewhere. By demonstrating that countries can unilaterally improve their position through voter-based disintegration bids, unilateral renegotiations of or withdrawals from international agreements are likely to spur similar demands in other member states as well. This effect is likely to be particularly strong when the disintegration move is strongly rooted in domestic mass politics, because such instances tend to be highly salient and politicized and therefore tend to reverberate far beyond their own country. As a result, such instances are particularly likely to affect public opinion and disintegration support in other member states (Hobolt 2016; De Vries 2017; Walter 2019b). For voters, it is generally difficult to correctly predict how one's country would fare if it left an existing international institution. But observing another country's disintegration trajectory provides voters with information about the likely response of the other member states and the likely economic, social, and political consequences of disintegration (Kayser and Peress 2012; De Vries 2018). A disintegration experience that improves the situation of the withdrawing country demonstrates that integration can be reversed and that nation states can be better off on their own. A successful renegotiation or withdrawal by one member state is therefore likely to encourage disintegrative tendencies in other member states.<sup>5</sup> This diffusion of disintegrative tendencies among the institution's remaining member

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<sup>5</sup> This effect has also been well documented in the context of secession on the national level (Walter 2006b; 2006a; Coggins 2011).

states poses a threat to the long-run viability of the international institution as a whole. At the same time, however, observing that a country is worse-off post-disintegration (or aborts its disintegration bid for fear of negative consequences) is likely to make them more pessimistic about their own country's post-disintegration future. Such a "deterrence effect" should thus decrease voters' enthusiasm for an exit of their own country.<sup>6</sup>

These spillover effects create considerable challenges for policymakers in the other member states. At the same time, however, even though a country can unilaterally repudiate its membership in an international institution, the remaining member states have a significant say about the terms of any future relationship that is to replace the existing cooperative arrangement. How the disintegration process evolves, and whether the country pursues or aborts its disintegration request, therefore depends to a large degree on the other member states of the international institution. These other states can choose from a wide array of possible reactions: One the one extreme, the remaining states can accommodate the democratically expressed wish of the other people, e.g. by granting the exceptions demanded or by maintaining wide-ranging post-withdrawal cooperation with the withdrawing state. Such an accommodation strategy changes the terms of such an agreement to the disintegrating country's benefit ex post, but also preserves the benefits from cooperation to the extent possible. However, accommodation comes with two downsides for the other member states: not only does it tend to leave the remaining member states worse off than under the status quo, but it also carries considerable political contagion risks by setting an attractive precedent for disintegration. On the other extreme, the remaining member states can take a hard, non-accommodating stance by refusing to make concessions or to grant exceptions and by making withdrawal or non-compliance costly for the disintegrating country. This, in turn, lowers contagion risks and raises the probability that the

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<sup>6</sup> These effects are not limited to voters in other countries but may extend to voters in the leaving state, who may update and potentially change their preferences as the true benefits or costs of disintegration are revealed. Beyond the effect on disintegration support, the encouragement and deterrence effect are also likely to influence how voters evaluate the international institution and the merits of international cooperation more generally (Clements et al. 2014; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012).

withdrawing state will retract its withdrawal bid (as the Swiss and the Greek ultimately did at the end of their negotiations with the EU member states about how to implement noncooperative referendum votes). If the withdrawing state does not back down, however, this strategy tends to be very costly for the remaining member states as they lose out on the benefits of cooperation that they had so far mutually enjoyed.

Given that both main strategies available to member states have significant downsides, the question of how to respond to a unilateral disintegration bid thus presents policymakers with an “accommodation dilemma” (Jurado et al. 2018; Walter 2019a). On the one hand, non-accommodation will be costly not just for the disintegrating state, but also for the remaining member states. But, at the same time, making the disintegrating country better off outside the international institution by allowing it to enjoy the benefits of cooperation without sharing the costs threatens the long-term stability of the international institution. This dilemma creates a strategically difficult situation in which public opinion features both as a constraint on and an outcome of the disintegration negotiations.

Brexit illustrates the accommodation dilemma nicely. While granting the UK continued access to the EU’s single market would maintain existing economic ties and preserve many cooperation gains in the other member states, the remaining EU-27 member states are weary that such a response might put the entire European project at risk in the long run by creating incentives for other countries to defect as well. In contrast, the non-accommodation strategy might dampen others’ incentives to leave the EU, but would come at a high economic price for both the UK and the remaining member states (Hix 2018).

Given these negative externalities, policymakers in the other member states need to confront the question of how to respond to one member state’s unilateral, voter-based disintegration bid. The resulting politics of voter-based disintegration will be fundamentally shaped by the accommodation dilemma, both before a disintegration vote and after such a vote.

### *Challenges for foreign policymakers before the vote*

When faced with a disintegration referendum in another member state or an election in which integration-sceptic candidates have a good chance of winning (such as Donald Trump in the 2016 US elections or Marine Le Pen in the 2017 French presidential elections), policymakers abroad tend to have clear preferences for the voting outcome: Because a unilateral bid for renegotiation of or withdrawal from an international institution puts the remaining member states in a difficult and costly situation, the best case scenario for these policymakers is an election or referendum outcome in which the candidate or proposal favoring disintegration loses and those in favor of continued integration win. This creates incentives for policymakers abroad to get involved in what would normally be regarded another country's domestic affairs: a foreign election or referendum campaign (Walter et al. 2018).

Such foreign interventions in domestic elections or referendum campaigns raise both normative and practical questions. In normative terms, foreign interventions in domestic referendum and election campaigns, especially in its more active forms, violate the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and thus conflict with national sovereignty. Yet, as democratically elected leaders, foreign policymakers are also tasked to represent the interests of their citizens. From this viewpoint, interventions in a foreign campaign with the intention to protect the country's own voters from harm may be legitimate. These normative questions about the legitimacy of foreign campaign interventions are difficult to resolve.

Equally difficult are the practical difficulties of intervening in another country's election or referendum campaign. In principle, voters abroad should be interested in learning about the likely response of the other member states to a noncooperative voting outcome in advance – after all, how such a vote would ultimately play out for the disintegrating country significantly depends on whether the other member states will accommodate such a disintegration bid or not.

Voters tend to understand this strategic complication (Christin et al. 2002; Finke and Beach 2017; Hobolt 2009), but also often misperceive the strategic incentives of the other member states to take a non-accommodating stance and therefore view their country's post-integration future too optimistically (Grynberg et al. 2019; Milic 2015; Sciarini et al. 2015). Such optimism makes voters more willing to risk breaking apart from an international organization.<sup>7</sup> This gives foreign policymakers an incentive to communicate their likely reaction to a disintegrative vote, their preferred voting outcome, and their resolve to the voters abroad. Least intrusive, foreign policymakers can try to coax voters in the other country to vote in favor of continued cooperation, for example by emphasizing the value of continued membership, making normative appeals and promising future benefits. However, they can also take a more aggressive stance, warning, or even threatening, voters about the negative consequences of a disintegrative vote. Finally, they can actively intervene in the campaign, such as European policymakers did in the run-up to the 2015 Greek bailout referendum when they cut off Greece from additional financing during the referendum campaign.<sup>8</sup>

Such intervention is no easy feat, however, because foreign policymakers face obstacles with regard to the credibility, the effectiveness, and the costs of such interventions (Walter et al. 2018). Because foreign policymakers act in the interest of their own country, their interventions in domestic election campaigns may not be credible or effective. Positive foreign messages can easily go unheard in a heated domestic campaign. With regards to warnings, foreign governments face private information and time-inconsistency problems that make it particularly difficult for them to credibly communicate their resolve not to accommodate a non-cooperative vote (Fearon 1995). Because non-accommodation also imposes costs on those other countries themselves, their pledge to punish such a vote *ex post* may suffer from credibility

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<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> Increasingly, foreign involvement in domestic campaigns also occurs in more decentralized forms via social media (e.g., Corstange and Marinov 2012; Sevin and Uzunoğlu 2017). I am not considering outright illegal forms of foreign interventions here.

issues and may therefore not be taken seriously by domestic voters. What is worse, they can also backfire if voters perceive them as an undue interference in domestic affairs (Shulman and Bloom 2012). As such, foreign interventions may not be very effective. To illustrate this problem, consider the 2016 Brexit campaign in the UK: Because of the large risks that Brexit posed for the European integration project, EU and EU-27 policymakers had a strong interest in a 'remain'-outcome in the referendum. Yet, they were rather hesitant to get too strongly involved in the Brexit campaign because it was feared that, given the widespread British distrust towards to EU, such interventions might strengthen, rather than weaken, the Leave-camp (Glencross 2016). In fact, the British prime minister David Cameron, a remainer, had asked the EU Commission not to get involved in the Brexit referendum campaign.

Faced with these difficulties of signaling their resolve, another way for foreign policymakers to increase the credibility of their interventions is to send costly signals about their determination not to accommodate a voting outcome that would harm their own citizens. To be effective, however, these signals have to carry considerable costs, without any guarantee that this investment will pay off. For example, the interventions by Eurozone policymakers in the referendum campaign leading up to the 2015 Greek bailout referendum were very costly, yet ultimately unsuccessful. The Greek government had called the referendum to force the country's creditors to give it better terms on a bailout agreement for the crisis-ridden country. This would have fundamentally changed the existing mode of EMU crisis management, which is why the other Eurozone member states were adamantly opposed to a Greek exception. To underline their resolve, European policymakers resorted to a clear demonstration of their determination not to accommodate a referendum vote against the bailout agreement on offer. When the existing bailout agreement expired during the referendum campaign, they refused to extend it for a few days and the ECB declined Greece's request to increase emergency liquidity assistance to Greek banks. These decisions forced the Greek government to close the banks and to become the first developed country to ever default on an IMF loan early on in the referendum

campaign. The costs of this European signal of resolve were immense, not just for Greece, but also for the other Eurozone governments. This intervention on net did sway about 10% of Greek voters away from voting no and towards voting yes (Walter et al. 2018).<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, right before the vote, a majority of Greeks believed that a non-cooperative referendum outcome would result in continued negotiations, whereas only about one quarter thought that a No-vote would lead to Grexit. Thus, the foreign intervention in the Greek referendum campaign overall failed to convince most Greek voters that the other Eurozone countries were resolved not to accommodate a negative vote. Ultimately, the foreign intervention did not succeed in changing the referendum outcome in favor of a cooperative outcome – despite the huge costs.

Overall, intervening in other countries' election or referendum campaigns is thus a tricky path for policymakers, not just because of normative legitimacy concerns, but also for practical reasons. Credibility problems and the high costs of credible signals about the other member states' resolve thus are likely to reduce the effectiveness of foreign interventions in election or referendum campaigns that champion a pro-disintegration candidate or proposal.

#### *Challenges for foreign policymakers after the vote*

Once the voters in one member state have cast a popular vote in favor of disintegration, the other member states are squarely confronted with the accommodation dilemma. How the disintegration process evolves, and whether and to what extent the country succeeds or aborts its disintegration request, depends to a large degree on the other member states of the international institution. Yet policymakers in these countries confront the trade-off between minimizing the loss of cooperation gains that disintegration entails and minimizing the risk of political contagion.

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<sup>9</sup> The survey evidence suggests that about 12% of voters switched from no to yes, but about 4% also hardened their position and switched from yes to now (Walter et al. 2018).



The degree to which each of these spillover effects will manifest themselves depends on the contours of the future relationship between the disintegrating and the remaining member states. Cooperation losses will be smaller, the closer the relations between the two sides remain to the current level of cooperation. This is most easily achieved by accommodating the disintegrating country's requests. In contrast, the extent and direction of political contagion effects – encouragement or deterrence – will depend on how attractive the disintegrating country's experience is. A positive experience, the more likely is it to encourage exit-tendencies in other member states. In contrast, a non-accommodative stance, such as refusing to renegotiate an agreement or insisting that a withdrawal from an existing agreement means that the disintegrating country can no longer enjoy the benefits of cooperation, makes exit costly for the leaving country, highlighting the benefits of the existing arrangement and is thus likely to reduce the risk of political contagion. Such a strategy is highly costly not just for the leaving state, however, but also for the remaining member states. Whether it is worthwhile to pursue this strategy thus depends both on how real the risks of political contagion are and how high the net costs of non-accommodation are for the remaining member states.

The remaining member states thus face considerable challenges when confronted with a unilateral, voter-based disintegration bid by one member state, which they need to balance in the disintegration negotiations.<sup>10</sup> These negotiations will be fundamentally shaped by the accommodation dilemma, the trade-off between the costs of a non-accommodative strategy and the contagion risks implied by an accommodative strategy. The contours of this dilemma and the extent to which it shapes international disintegration negotiations is likely to vary across disintegration cases, member states, and issue areas however, which is why we see considerable

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the bargaining mandate can also be exercised by representatives of the international institution as such, as the EU did in the negotiations about the implementation of the Swiss mass immigration initiative. But because the bargaining outcome needs to be ratified by the remaining member states if it suggests substantive changes to the existing agreement, member state positions will be influential in these instances as well.

variation in how the other member states of an international institution react to a unilateral, voter-based renegotiation or withdrawal bid by one member state.

First, countries weigh the costs of non-accommodation more heavily when the potential costs of this strategy to the domestic economy and society are high. The net costs of disintegration are usually distributed unequally among member states and differ across different issues. They are highest when a member state depends strongly on cooperation with the disintegrating state, and when its ability to potentially benefit from opportunities created by disintegration is low. This exposure to non-accommodation can vary considerably: a “hard Brexit,” for example, is estimated to put less than 0.5% of Slovakia’s and Bulgaria’s GDP, but more than 10% of Irish GDP at risk (Chen et al. 2018). It also varies across issue areas. The costs of non-accommodation are small for some issues (such as continued financial payments by the leaving state), whereas on other issues the trade-offs implied by the accommodation dilemma bite much more (such as trade restrictions), making non-accommodation more costly (Jurado et al. 2018). States will be particularly hawkish in disintegration cases and regarding negotiation issues in which their net domestic costs of non-accommodation are small, but more dovish on issues where non-accommodation is very costly for their domestic economy and society.

Second, political contagion risks influence national negotiating positions. Because the bargaining outcome is likely to have significant spillover effects on the support for the international institution in all remaining member states, public opinion moves in the spotlight of the disintegration negotiations. Feedback effects between international negotiations and domestic public opinion are well known in international relations research (e.g. research on two-level games (Putnam 1988), audience costs (e.g. Fearon 1994; Tomz 2007) or the role of domestic politics for international politics more generally (e.g. Milner 1997; Moravcsik 1993, 1997)). In addition to these vertical linkages between voters and their governments, however,

the contagion effects in disintegration negotiations mean that policymakers need to consider the contagion risks in other member states and in the withdrawing country (diagonal linkages) in parallel with the political contagion risks in their own country (vertical linkages). The higher the contagion risks in at least one member state, the more hawkish governments' negotiation positions will usually be overall. This means that even if a government represents a country in which the mass public strongly supports continued membership, it will opt for a non-accommodating strategy if it fears that accommodation will encourage integration-sceptics in another remaining member state. High contagion risks at home or in another member state thus increase support for a non-accommodation strategy. This effect will be particularly pronounced when the disintegration process is highly politicized.

Third, the distribution of bargaining power between the disintegrating and the other member state shapes the negotiation dynamics. Relative bargaining power will be a key determinant with respect to how good a deal a withdrawing country can expect from the remaining member states. It also matters because non-accommodation can be very costly, but at the same time increases the likelihood that the withdrawing state might back down – generally the best outcome for the remaining states. This suggests that the remaining member states have stronger incentives to pursue a non-accommodative strategy vis-à-vis the disintegrating state when there are nontrivial chances that such a strategy will result in a retraction of the disintegration bid. This is most likely when the bargaining power of the remaining states is high. The level of bargaining power itself depends on a number of factors (Bailer 2004, 2010; Bailer et al. 2015; Dür et al. 2010; Finke et al. 2012; Moravcsik 1997; Thomson et al. 2006). The leverage of the remaining members tends to be higher when the number of remaining member states is high, when the interdependence between the disintegrating and the remaining member states is asymmetric and in favor of the latter (Keohane and Nye 1977), and when non-accommodation means continuing the status quo (Schimmelfennig 2020). Relative bargaining power also depends on the institutional setup of

the withdrawal process, frequently specified in the form of exit clauses (Huysmans 2019; Kucik and Reinhardt 2008; Pelc 2009; Rosendorff and Milner 2001) that disadvantage the withdrawing state and in the strength of the commitment to disintegration in the leaving state: not following a single-issue vote in a referendum is likely to be more costly than not implementing a campaign promise in an election campaign. Finally, the remaining member states also have more bargaining power when their preferences are homogenous with regard to a certain issue. For example, the ranks will be much more closed on issues such as continued financial contributions of the withdrawing state – which virtually all states are likely to favor – than on issues such as preferential market access, where positions are likely to be much more divided.

Moreover, relative bargaining power also influences the level contagion risk: the extent to which a country's disintegration experience serves as a good counterfactual for citizens in another country depends on how the latter compares to the disintegrating state in terms of bargaining power. The higher the disintegrating country's bargaining power, the more likely will it be to extract concessions from the remaining members. This has implications for the contagion risks associated with the disintegration process. Table 1 shows that the contagion risks associated with accommodation are particularly high when the disintegrating state is relatively weak. If a weak state manages to secure significant concessions from the remaining states, this signals to most remaining states that it will be easy to get similar concessions, resulting in a strong encouragement effect. In contrast, the deterrence effect will be weak in cases where the state does not get concessions because it is unclear whether the unsuccessful disintegration experience can be attributed to a high level of resolve on the part of the remaining member states or simply to the lack of bargaining power of the disintegrating state. Likewise, accommodating a state with high bargaining power will not reverberate strongly. If, however, such a strong state fails to win significant concessions, the deterrence effect will be large.

**Table 1: Disintegration negotiation strategy, relative bargaining power, and contagion risks**

Relative to the disintegrating country, own country has...	Non-accommodation (disintegration as failure)	Accommodation (disintegration as success)
more bargaining power	Weak deterrence effect	Strong encouragement effect
less bargaining power	Strong deterrence effect	Weak encouragement effect

Finally, because ideas also matter in international negotiations (e.g., McNamara 1998; Risse 2004), more integration-sceptic governments will be less concerned about contagion risks and are therefore more likely to accommodate a disintegrating state, not least because they may be interested in setting a positive precedent for leaving (Jurado et al. 2018). Against this backdrop, one would expect the remaining member states to vary in their responses to a disintegration referendum.

**4. Empirical Evidence**

The main purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework on how to think about the mass politics of disintegration, specifically voter-based disintegration processes. The framework has a multitude of empirical implications, which are impossible to test in the context of a single paper. Instead, I present some evidence designed to illustrate the usefulness of the framework. Drawing on original survey data and case study evidence, I explore the framework’s empirical implications regarding the ability of foreign governments’ to intervene in domestic disintegration referendum campaigns, variation in the responses of the remaining member states to voter-based disintegration bids, and the existence of contagion effects across member states.

#### 4.1 Pre-vote interventions in foreign disintegration referendum campaigns

The first analysis focuses on the pre-referendum challenges for foreign policymakers. Because voters' expectations about the likely consequences of a pro-disintegration vote have been shown to influence voters' vote choice in disintegration referendums (Grynberg et al. 2019; Muñoz and Tormos 2015; Walter et al. 2018), it examines to what extent foreign policymakers can influence voters' expectations about the other member states' likely response to a pro-disintegration vote in an ongoing disintegration referendum campaign.

I draw on a survey experiment with 1778 British respondents conducted in a YouGov online poll two weeks before the 2016 Brexit referendum. The experiment explores whether and how warnings about the likely EU reaction to a pro-Brexit referendum vote influence respondents' expectations about that *“after a referendum vote to leave the EU, Britain and the EU [would] have to negotiate an agreement about their future relationship.”* Respondents were randomly given one of four treatments,<sup>11</sup> which informed them that a domestic (The Remain Campaign) or a foreign political actor (the Belgian Prime Minister, the President of the EU Commission, or the US president) had *“warned that the EU will only sign such an agreement if it makes Britain worse off compared to where it stands now.”* Respondents were then asked to rate their expectations about how a post-Brexit world would look like on a four-point-scale ranging from very unlikely to very likely: *“In the run-up to the referendum, we have heard many different arguments about what would happen if the UK were to leave the EU. For each of the following scenarios, how likely do you think that this scenario will come true if Britain votes to leave the EU in the referendum? If Britain votes to leave the EU... a) Britain will lose full access to the EU's single market, b) Britain will negotiate an agreement with the EU that leaves it worse off economically than it is today, c) the EU will do everything it can to make*

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<sup>11</sup> A fifth groups acted as control group and received no additional information

*exit as painful for Britain as possible, and d) Britain will have less influence in international negotiations than as a EU member.”*

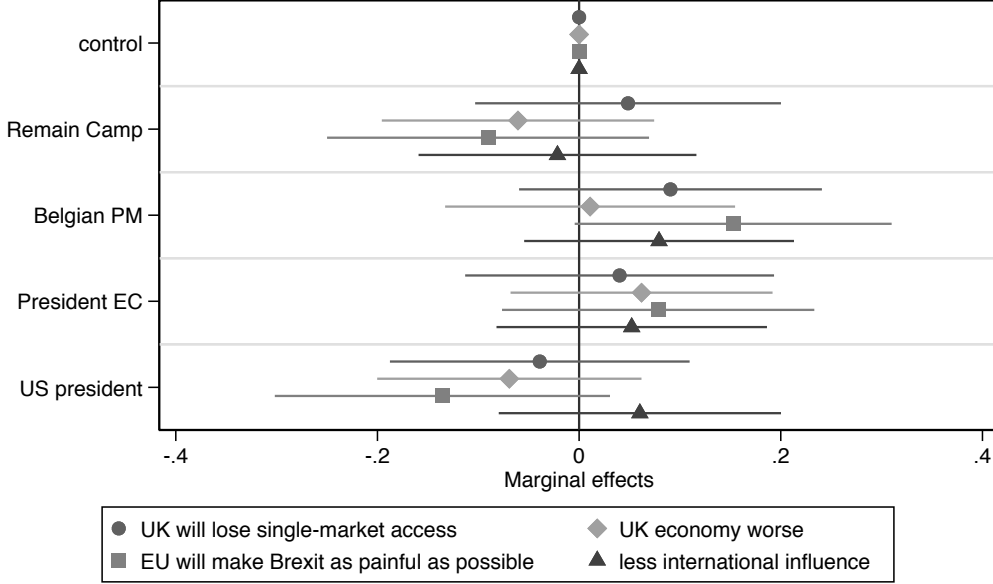
The data show that on average, expectations were rather balanced between optimistic and pessimistic expectations, with Leave-voters significantly more optimistic than Remainers (see also Grynberg et al. forthcoming; Owen and Walter 2017). These expectations were hard to move: Figure 2 shows that warnings by foreign policymakers representing another member state (the Belgian prime minister), the affected international institution (the President of the EU Commission) or another country (the US president) were not able to influence these expectations.<sup>12</sup> The figure presents the marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals of each of the treatments in OLS regressions that control for respondents’ referendum vote intention, gender, age, political attention, social grade, and education on respondents’ expectations about the consequences of a pro-Brexit referendum vote. Although warnings by foreign policymakers, especially European politicians, did make voters somewhat more pessimistic about the consequences of a pro-Brexit vote, these effects were not statistically significant. Warnings attributed the US president made voters even more optimistic at times, although again the effects are not statistically significant.

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<sup>12</sup> Full regression results can be found in the online appendix (table A1.2). Data are weighted. Results are generally robust when no control variables are included and when the control group that did not receive any warning is excluded and the remain campaign is used as baseline instead (Figures A1.1 and A1.2 in online appendix).

**Figure 2: Survey Experiment: Effects of threats by different foreign actors on expectations**

For each of the following scenarios, how likely do you think that this scenario will come true if Britain votes to leave the EU in the referendum?



Note: Controlling for gender, age, political attention, social grade, education, referendum vote intention

This brief analysis suggests that it is indeed difficult for foreign policymakers to sway public opinion in disintegration referendum campaigns. This presents a considerable challenge to foreign policymakers ahead of a disintegration referendum in another member state.

*4.2 Contagion Risk and Brexit*

To explore contagion effects, the second set of empirical analyses returns to Brexit and explores how the Brexit negotiations about the Withdrawal Agreement have affected voters’ support for EU-exit in the remaining EU-27 member states. These negotiations, formally opened on 19 June 2017 and ending with the UK’s exit from the EU in January 2020, took much longer and turned out to be much more difficult than observers had originally expected. They revolved predominantly around the amount of money the UK would pay to the EU as a “divorce bill,” the rights of EU and UK citizens living in the UK and in the EU-27, respectively,



and the question on how to safeguard the Irish peace process by avoiding a hard border between the republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The negotiations became increasingly protracted over time. Twice, around the original Brexit date in March 2019 and in the fall 2019, talks were close to failure as the British House of Commons repeatedly rejected negotiated versions of the Withdrawal Agreement. This was related to the fact that throughout the negotiations, the EU-27 had pursued a rather non-accommodating negotiation strategy. Even when the risks of a “No Deal Brexit” became substantial, the EU-27 did not make major concessions to the UK. Ultimately, Boris Johnson successfully “renegotiated” and passed the Withdrawal Agreement by returning to an earlier EU proposal for the Irish border question. Britain officially left the European Union on January 31, 2020.

Throughout the negotiations, it thus became increasingly clear that the UK’s hopes of a “cake and eat it”-Brexit were not going to be accepted by the EU-27. My argument suggests that this non-accommodating negotiation strategy should have a deterrence effect on voters in the remaining member and thus reduce support for exit in the EU-27. Moreover, this effect should be particularly strong among those countries who have less bargaining power than the UK. Because the UK is a country with high bargaining power, few countries have even more bargaining power. Realistically, only the two largest and oldest member states, Germany and France, have more bargaining power than the UK, because their withdrawal would fundamentally threaten the future of the European Union.

To examine these hypotheses, I use data from a series of six EU-wide online polls that I conducted in six-months intervals between the start of the Brexit negotiations in July 2017 and the end of the withdrawal negotiations in December 2019. Questions were placed on Dalia Research’s Europulse omnibus, which regularly surveys a census representative sample of between 9000-10000 working-age respondents per survey wave, who are drawn across the

remaining 27 EU Member States in sample sizes roughly proportional to their population size.<sup>13</sup> The data are then weighted by age, gender, level of education, and degree of urbanization, based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics. This setup allows me to explore how support for leaving the EU in the remaining member states has evolved in the shadow of the Brexit negotiations and whether we indeed can observe differences in contagion effects between countries with different levels of bargaining power.

To examine whether contagion effects exist and whether they vary among states with high and low bargaining power, I conduct two different analyses. In the first analysis, I focus on the *dynamics* of change in support for EU-exit. For this analysis, I examine whether the propensity to support leaving the EU changed differently in countries with high and low bargaining power. Because the EU's non-accommodating stance became particularly visible in the latter part of the Brexit negotiations, I expect a stronger deterrence effect among EU-27 countries with weaker member states towards the end of the Withdrawal negotiations. Respondents' support for an exit of their own country from the EU is measured with the question "*If [YOUR COUNTRY] were to hold a referendum on leaving the EU today, how would you vote?*" and answer categories (1) "definitely remain" (2) "probably remain" (3) "probably leave" and (4) "definitely leave."<sup>14</sup> To examine the dynamics of exit-support over the course of the Brexit negotiations, I estimate a hierarchical random-effects model that contains an interaction term between the dummy variables for each of the six survey waves and the Germany&France dummy variable, and controls for respondents' demographics (age, gender, education, level of urbanization, and whether they are a citizen in their country of

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<sup>13</sup> This means that small countries such as Malta or Luxembourg only have between 12-13 respondents per survey wave, whereas big countries such as Germany, France, or Italy have over 1000 respondents per wave. This omnibus has been used by other researchers as well (see e.g. Karstens 2019; De Vries 2018). The full sample size is 59 500 respondents.

<sup>14</sup> Those replying "don't know", about 10% of the sample, were coded as missing. Results are robust to using a dummy variable denoting those who would probably/definitely vote leave.

residence) as well as the pre-Brexit country-level euroskepticism (share of people viewing the EU (very) negatively as recorded in the Spring 2016 Eurobarometer wave).<sup>15</sup>

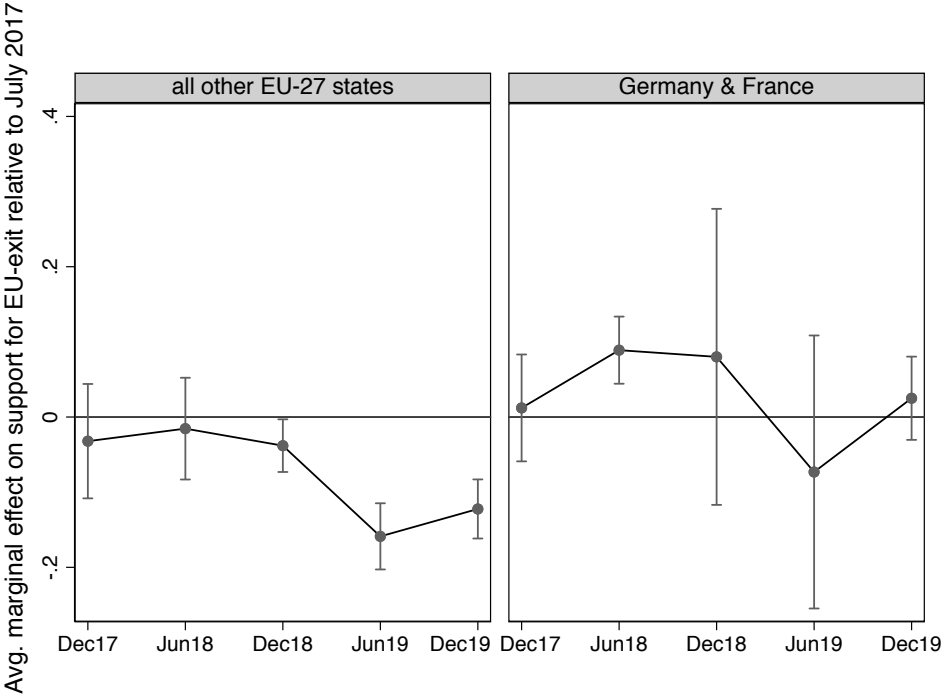
Figure 3 shows the average marginal effects of the different survey waves on respondents' propensity to support an exit of their own country from the EU, relative to the support levels at the beginning of the Brexit negotiations in summer 2017 in Germany and France (right-hand panel), and in the rest of the EU-27 (left hand panel).<sup>16</sup> It shows that over the first half of the Brexit negotiations, exit-support did not change much in most EU-27 states. In line with the expectation that encouragement effects are stronger in countries with high bargaining power, exit support even increased in Germany and France. Average French and German support for EU-exit then remained at levels similar to those at the outset of the negotiations. In contrast, exit-support in the rest of the EU-27 decreased over time, especially when the negotiations became more difficult. Especially the UK's first failed attempt to leave the EU in March 2019, this support decreased considerably. In line with the argument, we thus see a significant deterrence effect for countries with less bargaining power than the UK. At the same time, for those countries with more bargaining power, there is some evidence consistent with an encouragement effect in the early negotiation phase.

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<sup>15</sup> Because EU-related attitudes are likely to be endogenous to the negotiation process, I do not control for any individual attitudinal variables.

<sup>16</sup> Regression tables for all analyses can be found in the online appendix.

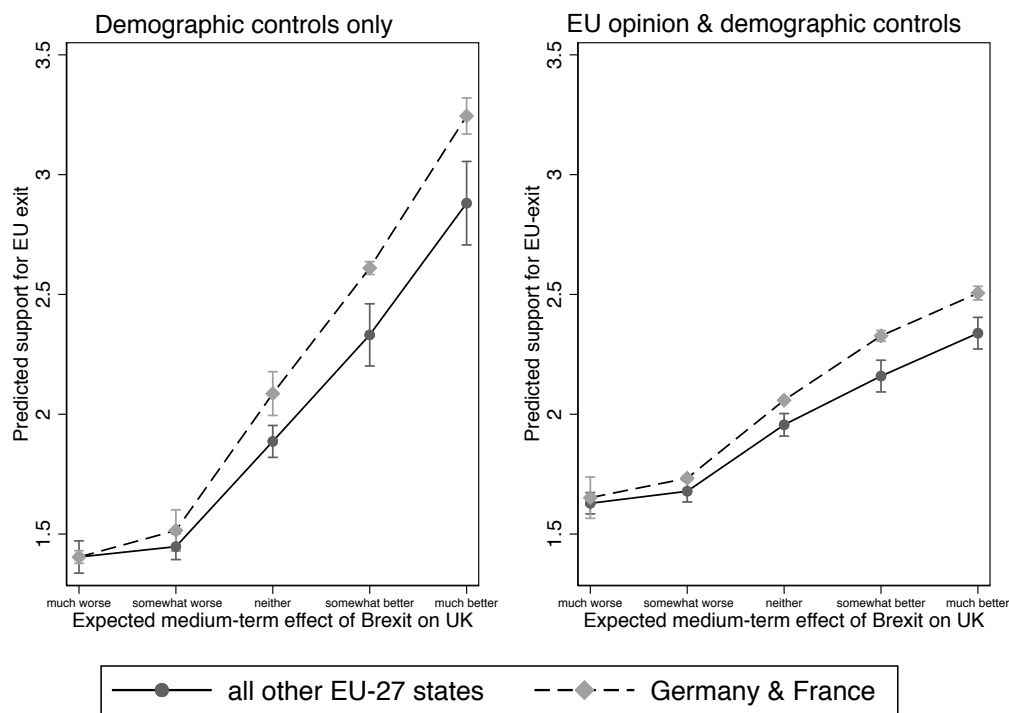
**Figure 3: The Brexit Withdrawal negotiations and propensity to support EU exit:**  
**Average marginal effects relative to July 2017**



To further probe the possible contagion effects of Brexit, I next examine how respondents’ assessment of the British Brexit experience is related to their support for exit, and whether these contagion effects vary by a country’s bargaining power. Respondents’ Brexit assessment was measured with 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?” The answers to this question reveal that EU-27 Europeans differ considerably in their Brexit assessments: About 28% expect that Brexit will be positive and 42% negative for the UK, and these assessments are highly correlated with respondents’ support for an EU-exit of their own country. To examine whether this relationship is moderated by the home country’s bargaining power, I estimate another set of hierarchical models that pools all six survey waves and interacts respondents’ Brexit assessment with the dummy variable that distinguishes between the two countries with similar or larger bargaining power than the UK

(Germany and France) and all other EU-27 member states using the same demographic control variables as above. Because this opinion is highly correlated with people’s assessment of how Brexit is going, I additionally control for individuals’ opinion of the EU, using both a general question about respondents’ opinion of the EU and one measuring respondents’ preferred future course for the European Union.

**Figure 4: Predicted average support for own country’s EU exit, by respondents’ assessment of the medium-term effects of Brexit on the UK.**



My argument suggests that positive assessments of the UK’s Brexit experience should encourage EU-27 Europeans to support an EU-exit of their own country, whereas negative assessments should deter them. Moreover, the encouragement effect should be stronger and the deterrence effect weaker in high-bargaining power countries. Figure 4 shows that we can indeed observe a significantly stronger encouragement effect in high-bargaining power countries. Respondents who think that Brexit will turn out (very) well for the UK are significantly more

likely to support an exit of their own country from the EU, and this effect is significantly stronger in France and Germany than in the other EU-27 countries. We can also observe that those who believe that Brexit will make the UK (much) worse off in the medium term, are significantly less likely to support EU-exit. However, this effect does not vary by bargaining power.

Taken together, the analysis of EU-27 public opinion data suggests that Brexit does indeed have contagion effects in the EU's remaining member states. Both encouragement and deterrence effects can be observed, and there is some evidence that the strength of these contagion effects is conditioned by countries' bargaining power. Especially the encouragement effect is stronger in countries with high-bargaining power, whereas the evidence is less robust that the deterrence effect is weaker in these countries.

#### *4.3 Disintegration Negotiations: Responses of the remaining member states*

To what extent does the argument made in this paper extend beyond Brexit? To examine this question, the final analysis explores how the accommodation dilemma shaped how other countries responded to three other voter-based disintegration bids: Switzerland's 2014 bid to renegotiate its bilateral treaty with the EU on free movement of people, Greenland's 1982 referendum vote to leave the European Community, the 2017 US decision to leave the Paris Climate accord, and compares these responses to the Brexit process that started after the 2016 referendum.

In line with the discussion above about the importance of both bargaining power and the other member states' responses, table 2 classifies these episodes of voter-based disintegration into the four categories introduced above. The upper left-hand corner contains a case of voter-based renegotiation or withdrawal bids by a states with low bargaining power, Switzerland's referendum vote in 2014 to restrict immigration and subsequent decision not to

**Table 2: Bargaining power and response by other member states to voter-based disintegration bids**

	<b>Non-accommodation</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>
Disintegrating country has <b>low bargaining power</b>	<i>[weak deterrence effect]</i> <b>Switzerland:</b> 2014 Freedom of Movement Renegotiation	<i>[strong encouragement risk]</i> <b>Greenland:</b> 1982 end European Communities membership
Disintegrating country has <b>high bargaining power</b>	<i>[strong deterrence effect]</i> <b>UK:</b> 2016 Brexit* * some accommodation	<i>[weak encouragement risk]</i> <b>USA:</b> 2017 NAFTA renegotiations

extend freedom of movement to nationals of a new EU member state (Croatia) in violation of its bilateral treaties with the EU. As a non-EU member with a high trade dependence on the EU, Switzerland has less bargaining power vis-à-vis the EU than most EU member states.<sup>17</sup> Because accommodation in such an instance carries the biggest contagion risks of encouraging similar attempts elsewhere, my argument suggests that the Swiss referendum-based demands to renegotiate the bilateral treaty on the free movement of people should be met with considerable resistance from the other party to the bilateral treaty, the EU and its member states. In line with this expectation, the EU reacted to the Swiss bid by barring Switzerland’s access to the new Horizon 2020 research program, which eventually succeeded in convincing the Swiss parliament not to implement the referendum and to honor its obligations enshrined in the bilateral treaties. The EU and its member states made disintegration very costly for Switzerland, and the Swiss ultimately reconsidered their bid to renegotiate and implemented the 2014 referendum vote on the “Mass Immigration Initiative” in a way that left the rights of EU citizens

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<sup>17</sup> The weak bargaining position was compounded by the institutional setting, in which the so-called “guillotine clause” stipulates that all seven bilateral treaties I will be terminated if Switzerland withdraws from one of them (such as the treaty on the free movement of people).

untouched. As suggested by my argument, Switzerland's failure to win any concessions from the EU in the aftermath of its 2014 referendum "against mass immigration" has not had any significant effect on support for similar demands of limiting free movement in the remaining member states. However, had the EU allowed Switzerland to introduce restrictions on the free movement of people, it is likely that this decision would have sparked a wave of similar demands for exceptions across the EU.

It is therefore not surprising that there is only one case in which the voter-based disintegration demands of a country with low bargaining power were accommodated by the other member states (upper right-hand corner): Greenland's 1982 referendum vote to end European Communities (EC) membership. Although this disintegration process, which resulted in Greenland's exit from the EC but gave it a special status as one of the EU's overseas countries and territories, was far from easy and involved three years of negotiations, the willingness of the other member states to accommodate this request can be explained by the fact that Greenland presented a very special case, which considerably limited contagion risks. Greenland had joined the then EC in 1973 as a part of Denmark even though a large majority of Greenlanders had voted against accession in Denmark's 1972 EC accession referendum. The vote to leave the EC was held shortly after Greenland had gained autonomy and the right to home rule within the Kingdom of Denmark just a few years later. Because this setting was so special, it was unlikely to spark similar demands elsewhere in the EC.

In contrast, my argument suggests that bids for renegotiation of the terms of an international agreement in one country's favor can be relatively successful without sparking major contagion if the disintegrating state is powerful (lower right-hand corner). This is illustrated by the willingness of Mexico and Canada to engage in renegotiations of the NAFTA treaty with the US. In these renegotiations, launched in order to keep a key campaign promise of US president Trump, the US secured concessions from Mexico and Canada in the



renegotiated USMCA treaty that left the former worse off and the US better off than under NAFTA.<sup>18</sup> The success of the world's hegemon in extracting concessions from Mexico and Canada is not likely to fuel similar demands elsewhere, however. At the same time, the fact that even the US had to make some compromises in these negotiations, is likely to create a certain deterrence effect because it underlines how large the losses from a reduction of the existing cooperation gains can be.

Finally, the lower left-hand corner contains a case of non-accommodation of powerful disintegrating states. Empirically, there are few cases in this category and the responses tend to be more accommodating than with regard to less powerful states. To set the previous analyses in context, I focus here once more on Brexit as a prime case in this category. Although the EU has accepted the UK's wish to leave the EU, whereas it refused to even officially open negotiations about a potential treaty change with Switzerland, the EU's approach to Brexit has largely been non-accommodating during the withdrawal negotiations. However, with exception of the negotiations about the Irish question, these negotiations have covered issues (such as the UK "Brexit bill") in which the accommodation dilemma for the EU-27 is less pronounced. In contrast, the negotiations about the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU confronts especially those countries who trade heavily with the UK, such as Germany, Ireland, or the Netherlands, with a significant accommodation dilemma. On the one hand, significantly restricting British access to the EU's Single Market and cooperative relations more generally will be very costly not just for the UK, but also for these remaining member states. But on the other hand, making the UK better off outside the EU by allowing it to enjoy the benefits of EU integration without sharing the costs represents a significant threat to the long-term stability of the EU. Because some member states are much less exposed to the economic Brexit fallout, this perspective suggests that the accommodation dilemma is likely to become more acute for

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<sup>18</sup> Note that it is contested how large these concessions actually were.

some EU member states than others during the Brexit negotiations about the future relationship. This is likely to increase heterogeneity in EU-27 negotiation preferences (Hix 2018).

Overall, this discussion shows that in line with the argument put forward in this article, there is indeed considerable variation in how the members of an international institution respond to one member's bid to withdraw or renegotiate.

## **5. Conclusion: Voter-based disintegration, a democratic threat to international cooperation?**

This paper has introduced a framework for analyzing a relatively recent phenomenon with far-reaching systemic consequences: voter-based disintegration bids. It has argued that these episodes can be analyzed in a coherent framework that puts the accommodation dilemma that these cases generate in the center of attention. Focusing on the challenges that voter-based disintegration poses to the remaining member states, it has argued that these challenges are considerable, both before and after pro-disintegration votes in another member state, because it confronts the remaining member states with an accommodation dilemma. Using original survey data from the UK and the EU-27 as well as case study evidence to explore some implications of this broader framework, the paper has illustrated the frameworks' usefulness.<sup>19</sup>

The recent successes of populist parties, candidates, and initiatives have often been based on a common narrative: that by being more assertive in international relations and putting the nation's interest first rather than accepting compromise, the country's prosperity, national sovereignty, and democratic quality could be improved. Upon closer inspection, however, these promises have usually proven to be built on quicksand. Successes at the domestic polls have

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<sup>19</sup> Although the discussion has centered on voter-based disintegration in this paper, the accommodation dilemma is likely to shed light on the responses to elite-based disintegration and non-compliances as well.

been met with resistance abroad. Renegotiating international agreements has proven difficult, if not impossible, and has sometimes forced populist governments to concede that the status quo is better than what they could achieve if they left such an agreement. Although these setbacks have decreased the appeal of such messages to some extent (De Vries 2018; Walter 2019b), they still garner considerable support. This paper has demonstrated that so far, voter-based attempts to unilaterally change or withdraw from the rules of international cooperation have often failed, not because of poor negotiation skills on part of the governments of the withdrawing states, but because they invoke a central trilemma in international relations: Rarely do the trade-offs between international cooperation, democracy, and national sovereignty (Rodrik 2011) move into the spotlight more prominently than when one country votes on an issue in which other countries equally have a large stake.

Yet the failure of populist promises to materialize bears its own risk. When governments tasked with implementing populist referendum outcomes have not been able to deliver the promised lands of milk and honey, they have been decried by populists 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. And because intergovernmental bargaining tends to take place between a relatively small number of few government officials behind closed doors, its outcomes have often been characterized as elitist decisions by bureaucrats who have lost touch with normal people. There is thus a risk that the failure of voter-based disintegration initiatives breeds even more resentment and feeding ground for populists. Dealing with this democratic threat to the liberal world order is no easy task. It is important, but not easy, for policymakers to communicate clearly the trade-offs and constraints under which they operate. They also need to straddle the rope between accommodating too much and risking contagion on one hand and accommodating too little and risking backlash on the other. Only one thing is certain: it is impossible to ignore this challenge to international cooperation from below.

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## Online Appendix

Table A1.1 Descriptive Statistics, pre-Brexit analysis

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Expectation Single Market Access	1,441	2.503	0.974	1	4
Warning: none (control)	1,441	0.197	0.398	0	1
Warning: Remain Camp	1,441	0.206	0.405	0	1
Warning: Belgian PM	1,441	0.199	0.400	0	1
Warning: EU Commission President	1,441	0.201	0.401	0	1
Warning: US president	1,441	0.196	0.397	0	1
Male (dummy)	1,441	0.484	0.500	0	1
Age in years	1,441	49.770	16.803	18	90
Political attention	1,441	7.322	2.298	1	11
Social grade	1,441	3.205	1.524	1	6
Secondary education	1,441	0.375	0.484	0	1
Tertiary education	1,441	0.455	0.498	0	1
EU-Referendum: Remain	1,441	0.445	0.497	0	1
EU-Referendum: Leave	1,441	0.456	0.498	0	1
EU-Referendum: Would not vote	1,441	0.017	0.128	0	1
EU-Referendum: Don't know	1,441	0.083	0.275	0	1

**Table A1.2: Effectiveness of Foreign and domestic warnings**

	Single Market Access	Economy will be worse off	Eu will make exit painful	UK will have less influence internationally
Remain Camp	0.095 (0.09)	-0.074 (0.08)	-0.107 (0.10)	-0.040 (0.09)
Belgian PM	0.105 (0.09)	0.069 (0.09)	0.230** (0.10)	0.075 (0.09)
President EC	0.081 (0.09)	0.106 (0.08)	0.110 (0.09)	0.079 (0.09)
US president	-0.039 (0.09)	-0.081 (0.08)	-0.137 (0.10)	0.046 (0.09)
male	-0.147** (0.06)	-0.042 (0.05)	-0.112* (0.06)	-0.013 (0.06)
Age	0.002 (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)	0.003 (0.00)	-0.001 (0.00)
Política	0.029** (0.01)	0.037*** (0.01)	-0.007 (0.01)	-0.003 (0.01)
socialgrade	-0.022 (0.02)	0.000 (0.02)	0.012 (0.02)	-0.003 (0.02)
secondary	-0.014 (0.09)	-0.078 (0.07)	-0.195** (0.09)	-0.154* (0.09)
tertiary	0.029 (0.09)	0.074 (0.08)	-0.086 (0.10)	-0.040 (0.09)
Leave	-1.356*** (0.07)	-1.718*** (0.06)	-0.118 (0.07)	-1.982*** (0.06)
Will not vote	-0.434*** (0.14)	-0.520*** (0.12)	-0.536*** (0.14)	-0.910*** (0.14)
Don't know	-0.611*** (0.10)	-0.776*** (0.09)	-0.247** (0.10)	-1.106*** (0.10)
Constant	3.451*** (0.19)	3.718*** (0.16)	3.576*** (0.20)	4.312*** (0.19)
N	1716.000	1716.000	1716.000	1716.000
r2	0.250	0.414	0.029	0.437
r2_a				
F	36.041	83.683	3.706	88.970

**Table A1.1 Descriptive Statistics, EU-27 analysis**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Vote in hypothetical EU-exit referendum	53,706	1.905	1.026	1	4
Leaver (Dummy)	53,706	0.256	0.437	0	1
Age in years	53,706	39.973	13.648	14	69
Education	53,706	3.154	0.786	1	4
Female (Dummy)	53,706	0.475	0.499	0	1
Rural (Dummy)	53,706	0.269	0.443	0	1
Citizenship (Dummy)	53,706	0.970	0.170	0	1
% viewing EU negatively (Spring 2016 Eurobarometer)	53,706	25.542	7.099	9	51
EU Evaluation	53,705	2.396	1.135	0	4
Preferred future course for EU	53,706	1.909	1.094	0	3
ExpectedBrexit-effect on UK	49,488	2.788	1.165	1	5
Germany+France (Dummy)	53,706	0.289	0.453	0	1
July 17 wave	53,706	0.153	0.360	0	1
Dec 17 wave	53,706	0.155	0.362	0	1
June 18 wave	53,706	0.150	0.357	0	1
Dec 18 wave	53,706	0.170	0.375	0	1
July 19 wave	53,706	0.178	0.383	0	1
Dec 19 wave	53,706	0.194	0.395	0	1

**Table A1.2: Support for own country's EU exit over the course of the Brexit withdrawal negotiations: hierarchical random-effects models**

	Vote in hypothetical EU referendum [see figure 3]	Leaver (Dummy)	Vote in hypothetical EU referendum
Age in years	0.005*** (0.00)	0.002*** (0.00)	0.005*** (0.00)
Education	-0.153*** (0.02)	-0.040*** (0.01)	-0.153*** (0.02)
Female (Dummy)	0.005 (0.02)	-0.025*** (0.01)	0.005 (0.02)
Rural (Dummy)	0.065*** (0.02)	0.022*** (0.01)	0.065*** (0.02)
Citizenship (Dummy)	0.210*** (0.05)	0.103*** (0.02)	0.209*** (0.05)
% viewing EU negatively	0.015*** (0.00)	0.005*** (0.00)	
Dec 17 wave	-0.032 (0.04)	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.032 (0.04)
June 18 wave	-0.015 (0.03)	-0.013 (0.01)	-0.015 (0.03)
Dec 18 wave	-0.038** (0.02)	-0.022*** (0.01)	-0.038** (0.02)
July 19 wave	-0.159*** (0.02)	-0.057*** (0.01)	-0.159*** (0.02)
Dec 19 wave	-0.122*** (0.02)	-0.040*** (0.01)	-0.122*** (0.02)
Germany+France (Dummy)	-0.059 (0.09)	-0.023 (0.02)	0.020 (0.09)
Dec 17 * DE+FR	0.044 (0.05)	0.013 (0.02)	0.044 (0.05)
Jul 18 * DE+FR	0.104** (0.04)	0.031** (0.01)	0.104** (0.04)
Dec 18 * DE+FR	0.118 (0.10)	0.044 (0.03)	0.118 (0.10)
Jul 19 * DE+FR	0.086 (0.09)	0.027 (0.03)	0.086 (0.09)
Dec 19 * DE+FR	0.147*** (0.03)	0.033** (0.01)	0.147*** (0.03)
Constant	1.665*** (0.10)	0.069** (0.03)	2.014*** (0.08)
Log Likelihood	-75088.838	-32131.03	-75096.162
N (individuals)	53706	59458	53706
N (countries)	27	27	27

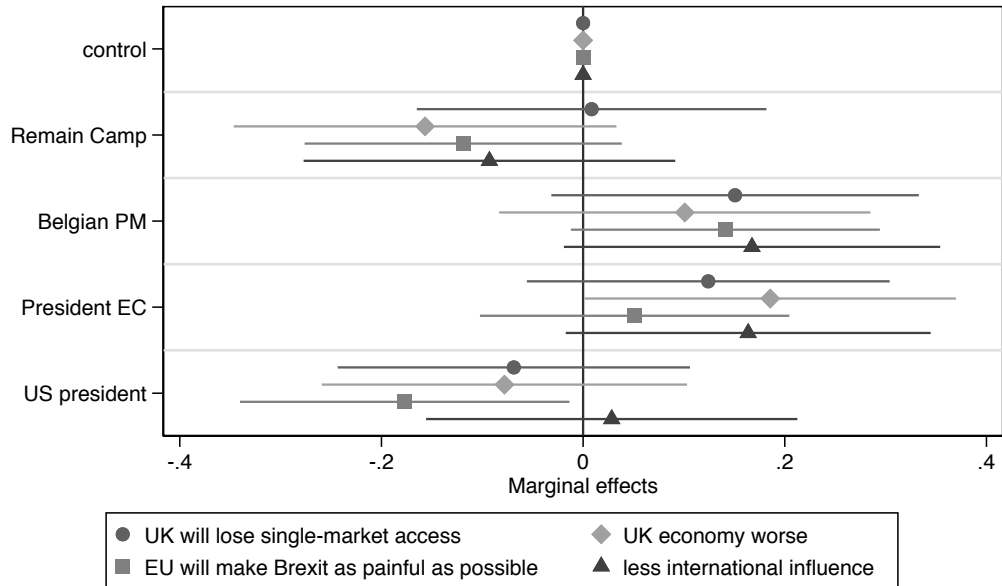


**Table A1.3: Support for own country's EU exit. Hierarchical random-effects models**

	Vote in hypothetical EU referendum	Vote in hypothetical EU referendum
Age in years	0.006*** (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)
Education	-0.077*** (0.01)	-0.039*** (0.01)
Female (Dummy)	0.002 (0.02)	-0.001 (0.01)
Rural (Dummy)	0.059*** (0.01)	0.031*** (0.01)
Citizenship (Dummy)	0.145*** (0.03)	0.090*** (0.03)
% viewing EU negatively	0.011*** (0.00)	0.002 (0.00)
Dec 17 wave	-0.015 (0.03)	-0.010 (0.02)
June 18 wave	-0.006 (0.03)	0.016 (0.01)
Dec 18 wave	0.017 (0.03)	-0.019 (0.02)
July 19 wave	-0.089** (0.04)	-0.087*** (0.02)
Dec 19 wave	-0.036 (0.02)	-0.045*** (0.01)
Brexit = UK much worse off	-0.482*** (0.04)	-0.327*** (0.03)
Brexit = UK somewhat worse off	-0.439*** (0.03)	-0.277*** (0.02)
Brexit = UK somewhat better off	0.444*** (0.05)	0.203*** (0.03)
Brexit = UK much better off	0.994*** (0.07)	0.382*** (0.03)
DE+FR	0.143** (0.06)	0.025 (0.03)
Much worse off * DE+FR	-0.200*** (0.06)	-0.079 (0.06)
somewhat worse off * DE+FR	-0.132*** (0.03)	-0.048* (0.02)
somewhat better off * DE+FR	0.079 (0.08)	0.065** (0.03)
much better off * DE+FR	0.165** (0.07)	0.065** (0.03)
EU very negative		1.286*** (0.03)
EU somewhat negative		0.641*** (0.03)
EU somewhat positive		-0.516*** (0.02)
EU very positive		-0.746*** (0.02)
Preferred future for EU: don't know		-0.040* (0.02)
Preferred future: more competencies for EU		-0.127*** (0.03)
Preferred future for EU: keep current power distribution		-0.117*** (0.02)
Constant	1.479*** (0.10)	1.605*** (0.07)
Log Likelihood	-62057.819	-49686.965
N (individuals/countries)	49488/27	49487/27

**Figure A1.1: Robustness: No control variables**

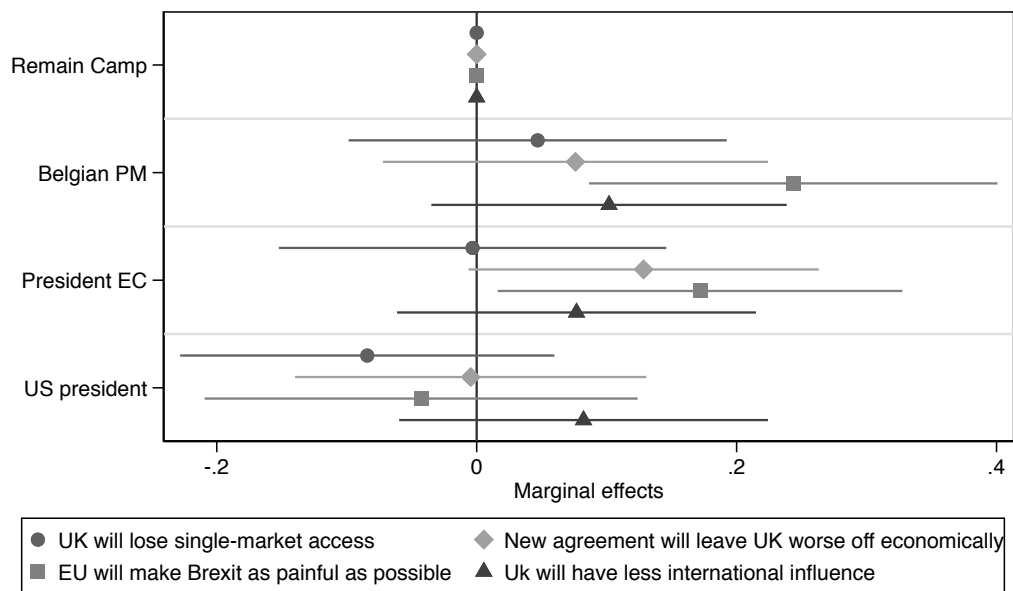
For each of the following scenarios, how likely do you think that this scenario will come true if Britain votes to leave the EU in the referendum?



Note: Controlling for gender, age, political attention, social grade, education, referendum vote intention

**Figure A1.2: Robustness to excluding control group (remain campaign as baseline)**

For each of the following scenarios, how likely do you think that this scenario will come true if Britain votes to leave the EU in the referendum?



Note: Controlling for gender, age, political attention, social grade, education, referendum vote intention

