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The logic of parliamentary action: Brexit, Early Day Motions, and bolstering the personal vote

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ABSTRACT

More than 300 Members of Parliament (MPs) found themselves in an awkward position after the vote on Britain's membership in the EU: They had taken a public stance on Brexit in opposition to their constituents. We investigate whether MPs attempted to bolster their personal vote in response and if this provided electoral protection. Using Early Day Motions (EDMs), we find that MPs supporting Leave in Remain constituencies sponsored more EDMs after Brexit but were also more likely to lose re-election in 2017. Remain supporting MPs in Leave constituencies switched their position on Brexit when voting to trigger Article 50, but did not sponsor more EDMs post-Brexit and did not lose disproportionately compared to Brexit-aligned MPs. We conclude by considering whether the value of the personal vote and incumbency may have declined as affective polarization (Mason, 2018) among the British electorate may be on the rise during the era of Brexit.

The rise in voter volatility among the British electorate has been well-documented (Särilvik & Crewe, 1983; Dalton, 2000; Pattie & Johnston, 2009). Partisan dealignment, originating in the mid-1960s, has made the party system increasingly susceptible to 'electoral shocks', which have re-ordered electoral coalitions and increased vote switching between elections (Fieldhouse et al., 2020). The recent vote on Britain's membership in the European Union was one such shock to the political system, with some studies suggesting that one's position as a 'Leaver' or 'Remainer' has supplanted partisanship as a political identity (Hobolt et al., 2020; Evans & Schaffner, 2019; Fieldhouse et al., 2020).

Prime Minister David Cameron introduced the referendum on British membership in the EU to make good on a manifesto commitment and to prevent the Conservatives from perpetually 'banging on about Europe' to ill-effect. It was also an attempt to 'squeeze' Eurosceptic voters, particularly UK Independence Party (UKIP) defectors, during the 2015 general election

campaign (Cowley & Kavanaugh, 2016; Ross, 2015). The referendum promise may have helped lead the Conservatives to an unexpected majority, but its outcome was also surprising: Leave won. This, in combination with the possible realignment of voter identity around the issue of Brexit, created a potentially nettlesome representational dilemma for members of Parliament in the referendum's wake: Some 278 MPs supported Remain in constituencies voting Leave and another 36 MPs supported Leave in constituencies backing Remain.¹ We collectively label these MPs as 'Crosswise', as opposed to 'Aligned' MPs who supported the winning Brexit position in their constituencies (see Table 1). Most MPs had supported Remain publicly along with their party leaderships. While on many issues legislators can avoid 'their constituents' wrath' because constituents are not attentive, do not care about the decisions being made, or find it difficult to blame their legislator for imposing costs because of long traceability chains (Arnold, 1990, p. 101), Brexit was not such an issue. Given the salience of Brexit and the potential rise of a new political identity re-ordering British politics, how would cross-wise MPs repair their representational relationships while preventing future negative electoral repercussions inflicted by constituents dissatisfied with their Brexit stance?

We claim that the electoral shock of Brexit – combined with long-standing partisan dealignment – motivated some crosswise MPs to focus on burnishing their personal vote. Defined as 'that portion of a candidate's electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities and record' the personal vote provides a mechanism for MPs to avoid negative repercussions arising from adverse partisan swings or changing electoral circumstances (Cain et al., 1987, p. 9). One way MPs can enhance their personal vote is by sponsoring Early Day Motions (EDMs) – calls for a debate on some issue often of significance to their constituency – to signal attention to constituency concerns and stake out positions independent of their party. We show that members of Parliament who supported leaving the European Union but representing Remain constituencies altered their EDM sponsoring patterns in the weeks and months

Table 1. Crosswise and Aligned MPs Post-Brexit Referendum

	Crosswise Remain MPs	Crosswise Leave MPs	Aligned MPs	MPs Taking Brexit Position
Conservatives	135	29	160	324
Labour	138	4	86	228
Liberal Democrats	2	0	6	8
Other	3	3	73	79
Total	278	36	325	639

Caption: Table includes all MPs espousing a public opinion on Brexit in advance of the referendum. Data gathered from the BBC's 'EU Vote: Where the cabinet and other MPs stand' at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35616946> and official referendum returns by constituency.

after Brexit by tabling more EDMs than colleagues who had taken a public Brexit position aligned with their parliamentary constituencies or supporting Remain but representing Leave constituencies.

Many MPs representing Leave constituencies also addressed the Brexit shock by changing their position on Brexit to align with constituency opinion. They did so by voting for the Government's motion to trigger Article 50 in 2017, the mechanism by which the Government requested the initiation of negotiations with the European Union to terminate Britain's membership. We show that constituency support for Leave significantly pre-dicts MP support for triggering Article 50 whether the MP is a Crosswise Remainer or Aligned Remainer. Not a single MP supporting Leave but hailing from a Remain constituency, however, voted against the legislation. We demonstrate that even though this group was particularly sensitive to being out of step on Brexit with the folks back home, they were especially likely to lose in the surprise election called by Prime Minister Theresa May in the spring of 2017. We conclude by considering the usefulness of various personal vote activities to repair strained constituent relationships in a polarised political environment reordered by Brexit.

Attentive publics, the Brexit shock, and the personal vote

The likelihood that taking a position crosswise with constituents will affect an MP's future behaviour depends on whether it necessary to take a public position on the issue, the public's attentiveness concerning the issue, the intensity of the public's preferences, and the perceived costs associated with implementing the policy (Arnold, 1990). Electoral calculations likely mitigated against abstention on Brexit whether an MP supported Remain or Leave. 'Abstention,' writes Arnold, 'makes legislators look like cowards, and few legislators care to provide challengers with solid evidence that they are anything less than fearless representatives battling for their constitu-ents' interests' (1990, p. 62). Re-election was not the only rationale to take a position. Moore (2018) – building on work by Müller and Strøm (1999) – argues that for Conservative MPs, policy, office-seeking, and vote-seeking motivations together shaped the decision of MPs to support Remain or Leave. He finds evidence that socially conservative MPs, long-time back-benchers, and those seeking ministerial office were incentivised to support Leave before the referendum. Newly elected MPs and front benchers, however, supported Remain to protect their position within the party. Some combination of these factors also likely explains the position-taking of Labour MPs, particularly constituency Euroscepticism and the prospect that a Remain loss could shake up the front benches of both parties (Moore, 2018, p. 7). In short, MPs had various reasons to take a position on Brexit before voters cast their ballots.

Inattentive publics with low intensity preferences allow legislators to act as trustees when making decisions as there is little risk of electoral fallout. But the public was neither inattentive nor disinterested in Britain's future relationship with the EU. Fieldhouse et al. (2020) argue that for more than two decades, Britain's relationship with the EU was not a particularly important issue for many voters. This changed following the admittance of ten East European countries in 2004. The resulting swell of immigrants elicited concern and rapidly became one of the most important and salient issues in the minds of the British public (p. 80, Figure 5.3). UKIP capitalised on the public's disquiet with immigration in the 2015 General Election, blaming the European Union for the inability of Labour and Conservative governments to stem the tide (Clarke et al., 2017). 'By 2017, [Europe] had become the most cited [important issue facing the country] by no less than 36 per cent' of voters, write Fieldhouse et al. (2020). Concern with immigration and one's stance on European Union membership shaped the 2017 election outcome, with pro-Leave, anti-immigration voters flowing to the Conservative Party and pro-Remain, pro-immigration voters abandoning the Green and Liberal Democrats for Labour despite the party's somewhat ambivalent stance on Brexit (185). Fieldhouse et al. (2020) call 'Brexit' an electoral shock, which according to their definition, is an event that is 'very difficult for voters and politicians to ignore' (2). By any reasonable definition, Brexit had become a salient issue concerning an attentive public.

Crosswise MPs had also taken a position that many of their constituents assumed would impose substantial costs on them. Remain supporters, who viewed the issue of Brexit largely through the prism of economic considerations (Clarke et al., 2017, p. 84), believed that implementing Brexit would result in negative community and personal consequences from the lost benefits provided by free trade, freedom of movement, and a common regulatory regime reducing business costs. Conversely, Leave supporters saw Brexit as an opportunity to restrict immigration that they viewed both as an economic and cultural threat concentrated in their constituencies (Goodhart, 2017). Constituents in each case might reasonably assume that Cross-wise MPs could not be trusted to deliver their preferred Brexit outcome. Both the salience of Brexit and the costs of implementation as perceived by each side points to legislators needing to align with constituent opinion on Brexit to protect their future electoral prospects regardless of their party's position or personal views.

Alternatively, perhaps taking the wrong stance on Brexit would not be costly to MPs and motivate no particular adjustment in their legislative behaviour beyond implementing the electorate's will. Both the Labour and Conservative parties, while having complicated positions on Europe prior to the referendum, supported delivering the referendum's result. With

parties controlling ballot access and to a large degree electioneering resources (Carey & Shugart, 1995), there is perhaps little reason to suspect that Cross-wise MPs would be negatively affected by taking a public position at odds with constituency opinion. Even so, research demonstrates that MPs can suffer negative electoral consequences when they find themselves unaligned with their constituents on salient issues (Pattie et al., 1994; Vivyan & Wagner, 2012) and constituency opinion does affect how MPs vote and the types of motions they sponsor (Hanretty et al., 2017). The British electo-rate's partisan dealignment should amplify the importance of constituency opinion in the decision-making calculus of members of Parliament. Collec-tively, this suggests that MPs will focus more effort on communicating their value to constituents in a manner distinct from their party and its positions in the wake of Brexit. These activities associated with a member and her brand are collectively known as the personal vote.

MPs assiduously cultivate a personal vote to protect them from negative partisan swings. Cain et al. (1987) uncovered a modest relationship between the activities of MPs and the perceptions voters – and, in particular, constituency service activities. Norton and Wood (1993) report that legis-lators earlier in their career have more to gain from attention to casework and surgeries. Political developments since the early 1980s have accelerated both the demand for casework and its usefulness to MPs electorally. Gay (2005) and Campbell and Lovenduski (2015) note the growth of the British state has fuelled more casework demand from constituents. This has been accompanied by additional representational resources made avail-able to MPs (Norton, 2013, pp. 25–27; 35), as well as new tools such as elec-tronic newsletters and social media allowing MPs to more easily tout their accomplishments (Gay, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Umit, 2017). MPs believe that attention to casework yields an incumbency advantage (Gay, 2005), and con-stituents want MPs to pay considerable attention to constituency matters and casework (Campbell & Lovenduski, 2015). Constituency-based campaigning efforts in the United Kingdom, which often stress an MP's attention to con-stituency concerns and interests, have become more frequent (Pattie & John-ston, 2014). Finally, Parker (2019) shows that EDM sponsorship is associated with constituents perceiving their MPs as protectors of constituency inter-ests. Brexit provides an opportunity to test both whether MPs shift their rep-resentational strategies to bolster their representational relationship with constituents in the wake of an electoral shock and if those activities provide some degree of electoral protection in the shock's aftermath.

Early Day Motions and emphasising the personal vote

Doubling down on nonpartisan activities to build support back home, particularly in the wake of a moment of national division like Brexit, is one

way members can build a personal vote (Cain et al., 1987). A quick and practically resource-free way to demonstrate renewed attention to constituency concerns is by sponsoring Early Day Motions.² Early Day motions are calls for a debate on some subject at the beginning of the Parliamentary Day. Although few Early Day Motions actually result in debate (Rogers & Walters, 2015, p. 262), they are useful ways for MPs to put a position on record and draw constituents' attention. MP efforts to address constituency concerns. 'EDMs are not whipped, are unlikely to result in formal debate, and have limited consequences for policy or the use of parliamentary time,' report Hanretty et al. (2017, p. 245). Kellerman (2013) writes that EDMs are excellent 'methods for MPs to signal their position to others.' He and others have found they provide electoral benefits (Bowler, 2010; Kellerman, 2013; Parker, 2019). According to Kellerman (2013), EDMs generally can be policy-related, 'allow[ing] members to differentiate themselves from their party leadership on politically salient issues', focus on constituency matters to 'recognize the activities of local individuals or organizations or draw attention to local concerns', or can be used to 'score points against other political parties' without a particular policy focus (266). For example, SNP MP Chris Stephens sponsored an EDM on 20 December 2016 'commend[ing] the work of the Govan Toy Bank' for organising a Christmas toy drive for vulnerable children in Glasgow. Early Day Motions are readily available online through the UK Parliament's website and the online portal TheyWorkForYou.³ We use the volume of sponsored EDMs as a rough measure of an MP's desire to show independence from their party and to signal attention to constituency concerns.

We utilised web scraping software to gather all Early Day Motions tabled or sponsored by MPs between the 2015 and 2017 General Elections from the TheyWorkForYou website. To be clear, we do not include EDMs signed by MPs – just those that each MP tabled. We then created one count variable for each MP that includes all EDMs sponsored by that member between the State Opening of Parliament in May 2015 and 23 June 2016 – the day of the EU referendum. We next totalled the number EDMs sponsored by each MP after the EU referendum though the end of April 2017 when Parliament was dissolved in advance of the 2017 general election. This is our key dependent variable. We expect MPs crosswise on Brexit are most likely to alter their EDM-sponsoring behaviour in the wake of the referendum to placate disgruntled constituents and to rebuild their personal vote in anticipation of the next election. Certainly, MPs could respond in other ways, such as holding more surgeries and soliciting more casework. These activities, however, require budgetary changes taking longer to implement. Altering one's approach to EDMs, however, is relatively rapid. It simply requires drafting them, submitting them, and then touting them to constituents in various communications back home.

Independent variables

We are primarily interested in how an MP's position on Brexit, relative to the majority position in that member's constituency, affects her EDM-sponsorship patterns after the EU referendum vote. Our key independent variables are each member's position on Brexit relative to their constituency's as reported in Table 1, in particular Crosswise Remainer MPs and Crosswise Leave MPs as compared to Aligned MPs – MPs who supported the constituency position on Brexit whether Leave or Remain. We expect that Crosswise MPs will sponsor more EDMs than aligned MPs in the period between the EU referendum and the dissolution of Parliament in April 2017.

A member's Brexit stance relative to whether a majority of voters in a constituency supported Leave or Remain is a blunt measure of MP alignment with her constituency. We, therefore, include in our analysis the percentage Leave vote in each constituency and then interact it with the Crosswise Remainer and Crosswise Leaver variables. The greater the distance between an MP and her constituency on Brexit, the greater the need to change behaviour to regain constituent trust. We also anticipate that Cross-wise Remainers feel the most urgency to pivot toward constituency service activities. Crosswise Remain MPs found themselves wrong locally and nationally concerning the referendum results, while at least Crosswise Leavers supported what would become the future direction of Britain's relationship with the EU even if they opposed majority opinion at home. The separate interactions represent the differing effects of the Leave vote on motivating an MP to table EDMs.

Other variables are also important predictors of EDM sponsorship, particularly previous EDM sponsoring behaviour, hence the inclusion of the pre-Brexit EDM total in our model. Some MPs are simply more apt to sponsor EDMs, and this variable controls for this tendency. Government ministers do not support Early Day Motions, and opposition frontbenchers rarely do, so we add indicator variables for each. There was considerable turnover in these positions over the 25 month period between the two general elections, so these variables simply indicate whether the MP served on the frontbench of either party at any time during the 2015 Parliament.

More electorally vulnerable members and those who are relatively new to Parliament should be more likely to sponsor EDMs to build a personal vote, so we add margin of victory in 2015 and the number of parliamentary terms served as two additional controls based on Kellerman (2013). Members in opposition are likely to use EDMs more aggressively than members of the governing party so as to focus what attention they can on their issues given their lack of agenda control. We control for this with a variable indicating if the MP was a member of the governing Conservative party or not. We also add an indicator for whether the MP stood in the 2017 general

election as these MPs may be less concerned about protecting their personal vote. Finally, we include dummy variables for Scotland and Wales to control for any representational differences or expectations related to the unique politics of these countries.⁴

Results

The number of EDMs sponsored post-Brexit is a count variable, and given the presence of overdispersion, negative binomial regression is the appropriate estimation technique. Table 2 provides the negative binomial coefficients associated with predicting the total number of EDMs sponsored by MPs after the EU referendum. As anticipated, previous EDM behaviour is a strong predictor of EDM sponsorship patterns post-Brexit given the variable's significance and positive sign. Longer parliamentary careers and representing a Scottish parliamentary constituency are positively associated with

Table 2. Predicting Early Day Motion Sponsorship Post-Brexit

Variables	Coefficients
EDMs Pre-Brexit	0.118* (0.014)
Did Member Stand in 2017?	0.326 (0.351)
Cabinet	−14.420 (508.609)
Shadow	−0.310 (0.277)
Conservative	−1.398* (0.232)
2015 Vote Majority	−0.910 (0.658)
Tenure	0.031* (0.009)
Scotland	1.198* (0.270)
Wales	0.230 (0.310)
Constituency Leave Vote	−0.645 (1.423)
Crosswise Remainer	−0.645 (1.424)
Remainer * Constituency Leave Vote	0.057 (2.472)
Crosswise Leaver	4.613* (2.019)
Leaver * Constituency Leave Vote	−8.914+ (4.831)
Constant	−1.085+ (0.638)
N	621
χ^2	346.12*

Caption: Entries are negative binomial coefficients which are starred if significant at $p \leq .05$ or better. + indicates significance at $p \leq .10$ or better. Standard errors reported in parentheses beneath.

more post-Brexit EDM sponsorships, and the negative sign on the significant Conservative Party variable demonstrates that the opposition takes greater advantage of EDM sponsorship opportunities post-Brexit.

There is evidence that Crosswise Leaver, but not Crosswise Remainer, MPs utilised an EDM sponsorship strategy after Brexit to repair constituent relations. The Crosswise Leaver variable is significant, as is the Crosswise Leaver-Constituency Leave vote interaction term at $p < .065$. Negative binomial coefficients are not directly interpretable and, given the interaction terms, the direction of the relationship between an MP's position on Brexit and the magnitude of support for Leave in her constituency is not immediately apparent. To understand these complicated effects requires calculating the probabilistic outcomes for the number of post-Brexit sponsored EDMs. Most MPs do not table EDMs; in fact, the modal category is zero EDMs post-Brexit. Sponsoring any EDM is a step toward signalling responsiveness to constituency concerns and interests. In Table 3, we examine the relationship between constituency Leave support, the position the MP took, and the MP's party. The table entries are mean probability estimates for each scenario. Beneath each mean probability estimates are the confidence intervals surrounding the estimate.

Note first that members of the opposition parties are more likely, in all cases, to pursue an EDM sponsorship strategy post-Brexit as compared to their Conservative party colleagues. In addition, a consistent pattern emerges: there is no significant difference between the behaviour of Crosswise Remainer MPs and Aligned Leave MPs given the overlapping confidence intervals. Crosswise Remainer and Aligned Leave MPs are not

Table 3. Probability an MP Sponsors at Least One EDM Post-Brexit

	Crosswise Remainer MP			Aligned Leave MP		
	Mean Leave	65% Leave	74% Leave	Mean Leave	65% Leave	74% Leave
Conservative	9% 6%, 13%	10% 6%, 14%	10% 5%, 20%	15% 11%, 21%	16% 11%, 22%	17% 10%, 25%
Opposition	28% 21%, 34%	28% 21%, 37%	30% 18%, 45%	40% 29%, 51%	41% 28%, 54%	42% 26%, 58%
	Crosswise Leaver MP			Aligned Remain MP		
	Mean Leave	37% Leave	22% Leave	Mean Leave	37% Leave	22% Leave
Conservative	26% 15%, 40%	36% 21%, 52%	59% 22%, 87%	14% 10%, 19%	14% 9%, 19%	13% 7%, 21%
Opposition	54% 37%, 71%	65% 47%, 80%	80% 50%, 96%	37% 29%, 46%	37% 28%, 46%	35% 23%, 47%

Caption: Entries are the mean probability estimates that an MP will sponsor one or more EDMs post-Brexit. Majority, shadow minister, cabinet minister, the incumbent losing in 2017, Wales, and Scotland are all held to zero. Member standing in 2017 is held to one, with other continuous variables held to their mean. Brexit stance relative to the constituency vote, governing party, and Leave vote are allowed to vary. Confidence intervals reported below mean probability estimates.

sensitive to constituency support for Leave in their EDM sponsorship patterns (see Table 3's top two rows). Crosswise Remainer Opposition MPs had a roughly 30% chance of sponsoring one or more EDMs versus 40% chance for Aligned Opposition MPs, regardless of Leave support in their constituency. Among Conservative Crosswise Remainer MPs, the probability of sponsoring at least one EDM was much lower at 10% and about 16% for their Aligned Leave colleagues. Again, these differences are neither statistically significant nor particularly consequential.

The behaviour of the 36 Crosswise Leave MPs, by comparison, is interesting (see the bottom left quadrant in Table 3). Both among Conservative and Opposition MPs, there is a relationship between the strength of the Remain vote and the probability of sponsoring one or more EDMs post-Brexit. The difference between Crosswise Leave MPs and their Aligned Remain colleagues is substantial and significant. Conservative Crosswise Leave MPs where 43% of constituents voted Leave have a 26% chance of sponsoring at least one post-Brexit EDM. This increases by 33 percentage points, to 59% when Leave support plummets to 22% in the constituency. Opposition Crosswise Leave MPs move from a 54% chance of sponsoring one or more EDMs to an 80% chance under the same conditions, a shift of 26 percentage points. Aligned Remain MPs – regardless of the size of the Leave vote – do not differ in their post-Brexit EDM sponsoring strategy (see the right-hand side of Table 3). Opposition Aligned Remain Conservative MPs have a 14% chance of sponsoring an EDM regardless of Remain's electoral strength in the constituency, and for Aligned Remain opposition MPs the probability of sponsoring one or more EDMs is roughly 37% regardless of the strength of Leave support in the constituency.

Discussion

It is notable that only Crosswise Leave MPs significantly and substantially altered their EDM sponsoring behaviour in the weeks and months after Brexit before the 2017 snap election while Crosswise Remain colleagues did not. Why? Crosswise Remain colleagues had another, perhaps even more meaningful way to show they had received a clear message from their constituents on Brexit: They could elect to honour the results of the referendum and thereby align themselves with their constituents. Many Crosswise Remain MPs did precisely that, noting that while they disagreed with the result, it should be respected. Indeed, when Prime Minister Theresa May lay before the House of Commons a bill to trigger Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, all but 114 MPs voted yes.⁵

In Table 4, we estimate the probability of MPs voting to trigger Article 50 using a logistic regression as the dependent variable is binary. As every Crosswise Leaver MP voted yes, we drop that variable from the analysis.

Table 4. Predicting Support for Triggering Article 50

Variables	Coefficients
Shadow	0.337 (0.456)
2015 Vote Majority	1.612 (1.184)
Conservative	5.337* (1.084)
Tenure	0.001 (0.020)
Scotland	-3.942* (0.934)
Wales	-1.615* (0.599)
Constituency Leave Vote	5.574* (2.177)
Crosswise Remain MP	2.119 (4.441)
Remainer * Constituency Leave Vote	0.085 (7.672)
Constant	-2.791* (0.971)
N	600
χ^2	397.17*

Caption: Entries are logit coefficients which are starred if significant at $p \leq .05$ or better. Standard errors reported in parentheses beneath. 93% of cases are correctly classified, including 95% of yes votes and 83% of no votes.

The governing Conservatives fell in line as expected with all but one Tory Remain MP (Ken Clarke, the former ex-chancellor) voting to trigger the article.⁶ Crosswise Remainers were no less likely to vote yes than Aligned Leave MPs. What mattered is how much one's constituency supported the Leave position. The Constituency Leave vote variable is positive and significant, suggesting that MPs were more likely to support their constituency's Brexit position if the constituency spoke with a more unified Leave voice. Given the near unanimous support of the governing party to trigger Article 50, this indicates that opposition MPs were the ones sensitive to the strength of Leave support at home whether they were Crosswise or Aligned Remainers. If an opposition party's constituency voted 74% in favour of Leave, that opposition member had an 83% chance of voting to trigger Article 50 negotiations. This drops to 60%, however, if the constituency supported Leave with only 52% of the vote. This suggests that after Brexit most Remain MPs fell in line with the wishes of their constituents conditional on the strength of Leave support at home, regardless of their personal view on Brexit.

The exception, of course, are the Crosswise Leave MPs – particularly those in opposition. Interestingly, and contrary to our expectations, these MPs were also the most likely to pursue an EDM strategy post-Brexit. Crosswise Leavers may have resisted shifting their Brexit position because some may

had taken a principled stance born out of deep conviction and the national result produced a desirable outcome. Alternatively, some may have stuck by their position because of the need to retain the support of local party activists – or, for Conservative MPs, to advance in a party committed to a so-called hard Brexit under first May and later Boris Johnson’s leadership. Whatever the reason for their position on Brexit, Crosswise Leavers may have been tol-erated by pro-Remain constituents in the years prior to the referendum pre-cisely because the prospect of their views mattering seemed so remote. Most commentators and the political elite never thought a referendum would happen, let alone that Leave would win. Just ask David Cameron. Now, post-Referendum, the views of Crosswise Leaver MPs did have conse-quences, consequences in part the result of their vocal support for Leave during the Referendum campaign. These Crosswise Leave MPs were pre-cisely the ones most in danger of feeling the wrath of disappointed Remainers at the next election.⁷

Did the effects of Crosswise Leave MPs to bolster their personal vote provide political cover in the 2017 general election? In Table 5, we estimate the probability of incumbent MPs losing in the 2017 General Election if they chose to stand using a logistic regression. We employ the same set of

Table 5. Did Crosswise MPs Lose in the 2017 General Election?

Variables	Coefficients
2015 Vote Majority	−16.134* (2.339)
Conservative	2.013* (0.526)
Tenure	0.059* (0.024)
Scotland	3.448* (0.679)
Wales	0.146 (0.652)
Constituency Leave Vote	−3.222 (2.112)
Crosswise Remainer	−0.422 (3.024)
Remainer * Constituency Leave Vote	0.252 (5.328)
Crosswise Leaver MP	7.159* (3.598)
Leaver*Constituency Leave Vote	−16.695+ (8.719)
Constant	0.116 (1.027)
N	584
χ^2	135.30*

Caption: Entries are logit coefficients which are starred if significant at $p \leq .05$ or better. + indicates significance at $p \leq .10$ or better. Standard errors reported in parentheses beneath. 92% of cases are correctly classified, including 93% of incumbent wins and 70% of incumbent losses. Shadow minister and cabinet minister variables excluded as they exhibit no variance.

independent variables minus frontbench status and pre-Brexit EDMs.⁸ What emerges is that Crosswise Leave MPs are significantly less likely to win re-election. There is also evidence their loss is related to the weakness of the Leave constituency vote as the Leaver*Constituency Leave Vote interaction term is significant ($p < .056$).⁹

Generating predicted probabilities shows how supporting Leave in a strong Remain constituency undermined the chances of an MP getting re-elected. If a Crosswise Leave Conservative MP represented a constituency where Leave received only 23% support, that MP had a 65% chance of losing in the 2017 General Election. An Aligned Conservative MP in the same constituency, however, had only a 22% chance of defeat. Given the Conservative party lost its majority in that election, Crosswise Leave Opposition MPs fared much better with only a 38% chance of defeat in the same heavily Remain constituency – which drops to a 6% chance of defeat if the Opposition MP aligned with the constituency on Brexit. Crosswise Remain MPs, alternatively, were no more likely to lose compared to their Aligned counterparts. This provides additional confirmation that Crosswise Leavers in particular were vulnerable electorally and needed whatever additional electoral boost they could muster from paying attention to politically neutral and beneficial efforts to develop a stronger personal vote. It also suggests that Crosswise Leaver efforts to focus voter attention on their personal vote activities could not overcome being on the wrong side of their constituents on a highly salient political issue.

Conclusion

Members of Parliament found themselves in a challenging position after the declaration of the EU referendum results. Many were on the wrong side of the national result and others on the wrong side of voters in their constituencies. Additionally, the decision to implement a withdrawal (or not) was not one from which they could hide. In Arnold's language, Britain's relationship with the EU was a salient issue with a short traceability chain that had the attention of the public. In many cases, constituents do not care about the decisions MPs must make, so MPs can vote as they wish or generally with their party. In the instance of leaving the EU, however, the voting public did care so MPs had little room for manoeuvre. Proceeding against constituency wishes would likely require the MP to pay a price from party selectrates or the electorate. We asked whether MPs crosswise on Brexit would aim to repair constituent relations by sponsoring more Early Day Motions to draw attention to their constituency service and other political positions taken in line with constituency interests. We found that only Crosswise Leave MPs – those supporting leaving the EU yet representing constituencies voting Remain – sponsored more Early Day Motions after Brexit. Although

much of the recent literature documents how legislators pursue a personal vote and often benefit from it, we demonstrate here that sponsoring more Early Day Motions did not rescue Crosswise Leave MPs from defeat in the 2017 general election. It was perhaps too little, too late. Among Crosswise Leave MPs choosing to stand in 2017, 15% lost re-election compared to only 6% of Crosswise Remain MPs who did not pursue a different EDM strategy post-Brexit.

Does this mean that the value of the personal vote is in decline in Britain? We hesitate to draw that conclusion as this is one study with limited measures of the personal vote. Future work should examine the allocation of MP office allowances, the subject matter of Early Day Motions, the questions asked by MPs, and the statements made in debates to develop richer measures of personal vote activities to provide additional insight into the electoral value of the personal vote. We do wonder if the personal vote may be less useful to MPs during the present period of electoral instability, partisan realignment, and perhaps issue polarisation. On the one hand, partisan dealignment through the 2017 election make it 'much more likely [that voters] switch parties between elections', which suggests that voters are open to making decisions based upon candidate qualities and positions are distinctive from the parties (Fieldhouse et al., 2020, p. 194). Conversely, the value of incumbency in U.S. congressional elections has declined in value because the voting electorate has become polarised with party mattering more in voting decisions (Jacobson, 2015). There is some evidence that Brexit has created social identities around which the electorate, MPs, and the parties have begun to sort. Building on the work of Mason (2018) who shows how the sorting of identities in the U.S. has led to a rise of 'in-group bias and negative emotion' making it difficult to trust members of the other party, Fieldhouse et al. (2020) demonstrate how the recent sorting of party identities based upon Brexit 'has some potential to fuel [a similar] affective polarization in Britain' (197-98).

The 2019 general election offers additional evidence of a possible party realignment and Brexit sorting within Parliament and the electorate. Between 2016 and 2020, 33% of Crosswise Leave and 36% of Crosswise Remain MPs were replaced either through retirement, loss, or deselection. By contrast, only 23% of aligned MPs had been replaced. Furthermore, we tracked what happened to Crosswise constituencies and the MPs representing them over that same time period. In 2016, 51% of constituencies were aligned with their MP on Brexit. After the 2019 General Election, that had increased by 16 percentage points to 67% – in large part because pro-Remain or pro-'soft' Brexit Conservative MPs had been purged from the party or elected to retire. The Conservative Party had also adopted a clear manifesto commitment to 'get Brexit done' to which the 2019 Conservative

candidates were pledged. Cutts et al. (2020) maintain that the 2019 general election also continued a longer trend of partisan sorting by class, education, and geography which is turning the Labour party into a 'liberal, metropolitan middle class' party and the Conservatives into a party of the working class. If the parties within the electorate and within Parliament are becoming more clearly sorted both on the issue of Brexit and other social identities, then it would seem to be increasingly difficult for MPs crosswise on a highly salient issue to hope that paying increased attention to constituency matters would provide them with any electoral protection. The value and power of the personal vote may be the most substantial when identities are not well-sorted in the electorate and the differences between the parties on the issues blurred. MPs will likely continue to pursue a personal vote because they believe it matters, but whether it will in a realigning party system is an open question for future research.

Notes

1. The BBC lists the positions of the 639 MPs declaring Brexit intentions before the June 23rd poll. See the BBC's 'EU Vote: Where the cabinet and other MPs stand' at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35616946>. We then collected the constituency-level referendum results from the House of Commons Library to determine how MPs stood on Brexit relative to their constituencies. See at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/parliament-and-elections/elections-elections/brexit-votes-by-constituency/>.
2. This should not be confused with an emergency or urgent debate, which is a different parliamentary activity.
3. See <http://edm.parliament.uk> and <http://theyworkforyou.com>.
4. Our electoral data for 2015 come from Pippa Norris' British Parliamentary Constituency Database located at: <https://www.pippanorris.com/data>. Unfortunately, results from Northern Ireland are not included.
5. 'Brexit: MPs overwhelmingly back Article 50 bill' at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-38833883>. Published 1 February 2017, accessed 10 October 2019.
6. Clarke is an Aligned Remainer as Rushcliffe, his constituency, voted 59% Remain.
7. Crosswise MPs could have also retired instead of bolstering their personal vote or switching their position on Brexit. Few did. We did analyze retirements and found no relationship between an MP's Brexit position and their probability of retiring before the 2017 election. Results available from the authors.
8. As all cabinet and shadow ministers won re-election, there was no observed variance.
9. We do not directly test the effectiveness of EDM sponsorship or support for triggering Article 50 on whether an MP retained their seat in 2017 here because the relationship is complicated and we have already demonstrated that vulnerable Crosswise Leave MPs are the most likely to employ an EDM strategy post-Brexit. We ran the analysis with the post-Brexit EDM variable; this variable is significant and positive, which suggested that sponsoring

more EDMs after Brexit increases the odds of an MP losing re-election. But recall that the strategy is pursued by MPs who are electorally vulnerable due to Brexit. Removing our Leave/crosswise interaction terms and replacing them with an EDM sponsorship-Leave interaction term suggests that EDM sponsorship reduces the probability of losing, but that this effect is overwhelmed by an MP's crosswise Leave position. The Article 50 vote variable is never significant. Results available from the authors.

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