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Why do politicians rebel and vote against the party line when high stakes bills come to the floor of the legislature? We leverage the three so-called Meaningful Votes that took place in the British House of Commons between January and March 2019 on the Withdrawal Agreement that the Conservative government had reached with the European Union to address this question. The Withdrawal Agreement was decisively defeated three times and a major revolt amongst Conservative backbench Members of Parliament (MPs) was instrumental in this. We find that three factors influenced their rebellion calculus: the MP's own preference, constituency preferences and career concerns. Somewhat paradoxically, the rebellion within the Conservative Party came from MPs who had supported Leave in the 2016 Brexit referendum and from MPs elected in Leave leaning constituencies.

# The Three Meaningful Votes: Voting on Brexit in the British House of Commons*

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**Abstract**

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**Keywords**: BREXIT, roll call votes, rebellions, party discipline, party coherence, House of Commons
**JEL codes**: D72

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# 1 Introduction

In January 2019 the UK's Conservative government led by Prime Minister Theresa May suffered the worst defeat ever recorded in the history of the House of Commons. Its flagship policy, leaving the European Union (EU) in a way that compromised between the polarised "Hard Brexit" and "Remain" factions in Parliament, was defeated by 432 to 202 votes, a majority of 230. The principle reason for the defeat was a huge rebellion by 118 Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs). In March the government held two further votes, on the same policy, and again lost by large margins: 149 and 58. Two months later the Prime Minister announced her resignation.

These three so-called Meaningful Votes on May's Withdrawal Agreement rank among the great votes of British parliamentary history. They echo the vote on the repeal of the Corn Laws, which put an end to trade protection of agricultural products and split the Tory party in 1846 (Schonhardt-Bailey 2006), and also the Great Reform Act, which reformed the system of parliamentary representation in 1832, with Tory MPs who broke the party line playing a pivotal role (Aidt and Franck 2013, 2019). It is historically very rare for a UK government to lose with more than 100 votes on a key piece of legislations. The last time was in 1924 when the minority Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald was defeated by margins of 166, 161 and 140.

In this paper, we seek to explain why Conservative MPs rebelled, and understand what drove their individual decisions not to toe the party line. We argue that the three Meaningful Votes can potentially provide valuable general insights into why MPs rebel against their leaders and why the organizational structures and mechanisms that normally ensure party discipline and unity occasionally break down and result in the government being "rolled" and losing important votes. The sequence of Meaningful Votes has at least four appealing features that allow us to do this. First, as already noted, it is rare that a high stakes government bill is so decisively defeated. Second, it was not a so-called free vote where the party leaders allow their MPs to vote as they like. On the contrary,

both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party "whipped", demanding their MPs toe the party line. This means that it was not costless for MPs to rebel. Third, as a consequence of the 2016 Brexit referendum, we, uniquely, observe revealed preferences on the question of leaving the EU for each MP (we know how they voted and campaigned) and for their voters in each of the 650 parliamentary constituencies (we know the share of them who voted Leave and Remain). Fourth, the MPs effectively voted on the same bill three times, which is also highly unusual. This enables us to developed an innovative new test of career concerns.

The purpose of the paper is, therefore, two-fold. First, we want to document the correlates behind the mass rebellion against the Withdrawal Agreement (May's deal) inside the Conservative Party. Second, we want to leverage the unique features of the sequence of Meaningful Votes to test the "tripartite model" of party rebellion (Muller and Strom 1999). The model, which we outline in Section 4, postulates that an MP's vote decision is a function of three potentially conflicting factors: the MP's own preferences (his or her ideology), political career concerns, and the preferences of their constituents. The fact that we observe plausible proxies for the revealed preference of the MPs and their constituents enables us to contribute to the extensive literature on party discipline and rebellion (see Kam 2014; Kirkland and Slapin 2018).

Our inquiry into the rebellion amongst Conservative backbench MPs yields the following insights. First, we find evidence that MPs were influenced by their own preferences (ideology), career concerns and constituency preferences, but that their own preference was almost twice as important as the other two factors. Specifically, MPs who had voted and campaigned against leaving the EU in the referendum (Remain MPs) were almost 40 percent more likely to support May's deal than other (Leave) MPs, while MPs representing constituencies with (one standard deviation) more Leave voters were 17 percent less likely to support the deal. MPs mindful of their career prospects under a May government were about 20 percent more likely to support May's deal. We also present (suggestive) evidence that the prospect of promotion to government posts in a *future* government mo-

tivated the MPs. Somewhat paradoxically, the rebellion within the Conservative Party that defeated May's deal in the House of Commons three times in a row came from MPs who had supported Leave in the referendum and from MPs elected in Leave leaning constituencies. Second, we find that the effects are heterogeneous across different subsamples of MPs in theoretically interesting ways. MPs elected to safe seats placed more weight on career concerns than MPs elected in marginal seats who placed more weight on constituency preferences in their rebellion calculus. Leave MPs but not Remain MPs were motivated by constituency preferences. This is consistent with two types of grandstanding: Leave MPs could signal "ideological purity" to their Leave voters by voting against May's deal; Remain MPs could pander to their Leave voters by "converting" and voting for May's deal. MPs with a history of rebellion did not place different weight on career concerns in their calculus to party loyalists.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 offers a short literature review that places our study in context. Section 3 sets out the background to the three Meaningful Votes. Section 4 presents the "tripartite" model of partisan rebellion. Section 5 presents the data. Section 6 explains our estimation strategy. Section 7 presents the results. Section 8 concludes.

## 2 Literature review

Our analysis of the sequence of Meaningful Votes contributes to two main strands of literature. First, we contribute to the literature on party discipline and roll call rebels (for overviews, see Kirkland and Slapin (2018) or Kam (2014)). The central question in this literature is why individual politicians decide to defy the political party to which they belong and vote against the party's agreed policy in roll call votes or parliamentary divisions (as they are known in the UK). Krehbiel (1993) views it as a competition between politicians' ideological preferences, their concern about re-election, and their loyalty to their party. Loyalty may, in turn, be induced by political career concerns (Muller and

Strom 1999) or through a process of political socialization (Crowe 1986). We build on this theoretical framework. Empirical work has focussed on the US where roll call rebellion is widespread and it is common for moderate legislators to "cross the aisle" (e.g., Kirkland and Slapin 2018). However, in spite of greater party discipline in many parliamentarian systems, it is not uncommon for individual "backbench" politicians (i.e., those with no position in government) to revolt against their party in many other countries too (e.g., Kam 2009; Morgenstern 2003; Carey 2008; Hix et al. 2007; Kauder et al. 2017). Unlike in US politics, however, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere it tends to be politicians with ideologically extreme views who rebel (Kam 2009), and mainly from within the governing party (Kirkland and Slapin 2018). The available evidence suggest that voters pay some attention to how their representatives vote at least when the issue is controversial, and that they reward them for rebelling (e.g., Longley 1998; Johnston et al. 2002; Pattie et al. 1994; Bertelli and Dolan 2009; Vivyan and Wagner 2012; Campbell et al. 2019). The evidence also shows that career concerns play a role (e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007; Eggers and Spirling 2018) although the evidence on whether parties actually punish individual politicians for voting against the party line is mixed (Eggers and Spirling 2016; Kauder et al. 2017). We contribute to this empirical literature by studying how ideology, career concerns and voter preferences shaped the pattern of rebellion within the Conservative Party in the British House of Commons on an especially high stakes bill. In particular, we are able to leverage the fact that we have plausible measures of both MP and voter preferences on the issue to evaluate the relative importance of the three forces that generally influence a politician's decision to rebel.

Second, our analysis contributes to the small emerging literature on the causes of the Brexit referendum result itself.[1] Becker et al. (2017), Arnorsson and Zoega (2018), Zhang (2018) and Fidrmuc et al. (2019) use aggregate vote share results at the local authority, constituency or ward level to study the socio-economic correlates of the Leave vote share. Becker et al. (2017) find that areas with voting populations with low levels of education,

[1]See Clarke et al. (2017) for a comprehensive analysis of Brexit referendum and its background.

low incomes, historical reliance on manufacturing employment, and high unemployment rates were all associated with a higher Leave vote share. There is also evidence that areas with a high proportion of British male adults and with a high proportion of elderly voters predominately voted Leave (Zhang 2018). Arnorsson and Zoega (2018), in addition, find that areas with high net immigration were more suspicious of immigrants in general and, in turn, were more likely to vote Leave. Fidrmuc et al. (2019) show that the Remain vote share is (weakly) positively correlated with the amount of funds that an area received from the EU's Cohesion Fund but that getting funds from the EU was (strongly) negatively correlated with turnout in the referendum. However, there is always a danger trying to infer individual vote intentions from aggregate vote share data (the ecological fallacy). To address this, Alabrese et al. (2019) explore the latest wave of the large UK-based household survey (Understanding Society), which included a question about how individuals voted in the referendum. They find that voting Leave was associated with older age, white ethnicity, low educational attainment, infrequent use of smartphones and the internet, receiving benefits, adverse health, and low life satisfaction. Fetzer (2019) also uses the Understanding Society data to study the determinants of identification with the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) – a single issue party that since the 1990s has campaigned for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Using within individual variation in exposure to welfare cuts, the paper shows that individuals were more likely to "feel close" to UKIP after they were personally affected by the government's austerity program than before. Insofar as UKIP support is a good proxy for how an individual voted in the 2016 referendum, the results suggest that austerity played a major role in bringing about the referendum result. Arnorsson and Zoega (2018) study another UK-based individual level survey (the British Election Study) and find that negative attitudes towards immigration are correlated with voting Leave. Fox and Pearce (2018) document that the generational divide – younger individuals are less Eurosceptic than older ones – reflects a combination of generational effects (experience of the EU during the formative years) and differences in access to education. In conclusion, the

evidence, both from the analysis of aggregate vote share data and from the analysis of individual vote choices, suggest that socio-economic deprivation, austerity, demographic composition, and attitudes to immigration contributed to the referendum result. We add to this literature by studying another aspect of the Brexit process – the sequence of Meaningful Votes. This provides new insights into the link between the referendum result in particular constituencies and the way that the MPs elected in those constituencies subsequently acted.

# 3 The narrative: what actually happened?

The relationship with Europe has been a major issue for the UK's centre-right Conservative Party for the past 50 years. The UK joined the EU in 1973 under a Conservative government, but with a broad base of political support: in a 1975 referendum on EU membership 67% of voters and all major political parties supported membership.[2] However, over the next 40 years, the EU moved from being primarily a trading bloc, to a much closer economic and political union. This process was bitterly, but unsuccessfully, opposed by a minority of Conservative Party MPs, especially in the early 1990s when the Maastricht Treaty (an expansion of EU powers with a corresponding loss of UK sovereignty) came into force (Sowemimo 1996). In parallel to this dynamic, a minority of generally right-leaning voters favoured leaving the EU. Support for this position grew in response to migration from Eastern European countries that joined the EU from 2004 onwards. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a single issue party advocating the UK's departure from the EU, began to gain significant support, principally at the expense of the Conservative Party: in EU Parliamentary elections, UKIP came third in 2004, second in 2009 and first in 2014 (e.g., Clarke et al. 2016).

In an attempt to both neutralise this growing voter support for UKIP and deal with internal divisions in the Conservative Party, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron

[2]At the time the bloc was called the EEC, becoming the EU in 1993. For simplicity this article uses EU throughout.

offered a referendum on EU membership as part of his re-election campaign in 2015, alongside an attempt to renegotiate the UK's relationship with the EU.[3] In the short run, this was a successful policy: somewhat against expectations the Conservatives won the 2015 election and UKIP support collapsed. In order to achieve Cameron's second aim of settling divisions in the Conservative Party, he allowed his MPs to campaign for either side in the referendum, rather than requiring them to toe the party line and support continued membership of the EU ("Remain"). A significant minority of both backbench and frontbench, i.e., those serving in the government, Conservatives subsequently campaigned for leaving the EU ("Leave").

The referendum was held on 23 June 2016, and resulted in an unexpected victory for Leave, with 52% of the vote (and considerable geographic and demographic heterogeneity; see Becker et al. (2017)). Cameron immediately resigned, and was replaced as Prime Minister by Conservative MP Theresa May, who began the process of withdrawing from the EU. Under EU law, a member state can leave the union by triggering Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. This gives that member state up to two years to negotiate a Withdrawal Agreement with the EU, which sets out the terms under which it leaves (covering everything from future customs arrangements to past pension liabilities). If no agreement is in place at the two-year deadline, the member state can leave without an agreement, or can ask for an extension to the negotiating period, during which the country remains part of the EU.

Over the course of the two-year UK-EU negotiation of the Withdrawal Agreement, divisions within the Conservative Party deepened. On one side, many Leavers became "Hard Brexiteers", such as senior government minister Boris Johnson and members of the European Research Group (ERG), who increasingly favoured a policy of little or no future cooperation with the EU ("no deal"). On the other side, a smaller group of former Remainers favoured a "Soft Brexit", a close future relationship with the EU

[3] Bernholz et al. (2004) propose a reform of EU institutions that would protect the subsidiarity principle and create effective checks and balances by breaking the Commission's agenda monopoly. If that proposal had been adopted in the mid-2000s, the critique levied against the EU by many British eurosceptics regarding the risk of an EU super state and democratic deficits would have been answered.

resembling full membership. In November 2018, the final Withdrawal Agreement was agreed between May and the EU. Although this did not specify all aspects of the future UK-EU relationship, generally speaking it was a compromise somewhere between Hard and Soft Brexit. Over the course of the negotiations, Johnson and several other high profile Hard Brexiteer government ministers resigned in protest at compromises made by May.

The final step was for Parliament to pass the Withdrawal Agreement. This requirement itself was the result of an earlier parliamentary setback for May, when MPs succeeded - against the wishes the government - in securing a "Meaningful Vote" on whatever terms the UK eventually left the EU on. Five full days of parliamentary debate were set aside, with the vote to be held on 11 December 2018. The Whips, MPs whose job it is to ensure internal party discipline, worked hard to persuade potential rebels to back the government. The main tool at their disposal is the prospect of future promotion in government. Over the course of the debate, it became clear that May was not going to win the vote, so she delayed it to 15 January 2019, in an attempt to buy more time in which to persuade potential rebels. This was not successful: the first Meaningful Vote was lost by the government by 432 to 202 votes, a majority of 230. This is the largest defeat of a UK government in the history of Parliament.

**Table 1:** Breakdown of Meaningful Votes by Party & Govt. Positions

| | First Vote | | | Second Vote | | | Third Vote | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | For | Against | Abstain | For | Against | Abstain | For | Against | Abstain |
| *Panel A - Vote by Party* | | | | | | | | | |
| Conservative | 196 | 118 | 3 | 235 | 78 | 4 | 277 | 37 | 3 |
| Labour | 3 | 248 | 5 | 4 | 247 | 5 | 6 | 243 | 7 |
| LD | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 |
| SNP | 0 | 35 | 0 | 0 | 35 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 1 |
| DUP | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Other | 3 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 9 |
| *Total* | *202* | *432* | *16* | *242* | *391* | *17* | *286* | *344* | *20* |
| *Panel B - Conservatives by Govt. Position* | | | | | | | | | |
| Frontbench | 93 | 0 | 2 | 93 | 0 | 2 | 93 | 0 | 2 |
| Backbench | 103 | 118 | 1 | 142 | 78 | 2 | 184 | 37 | 1 |
| *Total* | *196* | *118* | *3* | *235* | *78* | *4* | *277* | *37* | *3* |

Note: Frontbench MPs hold government posts; backbench MPs do not. SNP is the Scottish National Party; DUP is the Democratic Unionist Party; LD is the Liberal Democrats. The four Conservative MPs who abstained were the two Whips, the Deputy Speaker and, in the second vote, MP Douglas Ross (who ended up voting with the government in the third vote); the Whips served as Tellers and, as such, they are not counted in the totals of those voting for or against a motion and we include them amongst those who abstained; the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker traditionally abstain on all votes. We record the MPs as belonging to the party that they belonged to in January 2019 (before the first Meaningful Vote), but note that ten MPs (three Conservative MPs and seven Labour MPs) resigned from their respective parties between the first and the second Meaningful Vote. For the purpose of the statistical analysis, it does not make any difference if we eliminate the three Conservative MPs who resigned from the sample for the second and third vote.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of MPs' votes on the three Meaningful Votes by party (panel A) and for the Conservative Party between front- and backbenchers (panel B). From these data, we see that a number of factors contributed to May's defeat. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - a socially conservative, pro-Brexit, Northern Irish party - had an agreement to support the Conservative government (who had lost its majority in the 2017 general election), but rebelled because in their view the Withdrawal Agreement treated Northern Ireland differently to the rest of the UK (related to the so-called Irish backstop problem). Very few pro-Brexit MPs from the centre-Left opposition Labour Party ended up supporting the government.[4] The centrist Liberal Democrats (LD) and centre-left Scottish National Party (SNP) unanimously opposed the government, but this was anticipated. By far the main factor behind May's defeat was the huge scale of the rebellion by her own backbench MPs. The frontbenchers with government posts, on the other hand, toed the line and none of them rebelled (Table 1, panel B).

After the vote, the EU refused to renegotiate the Withdrawal Agreement, and under Article 50 time was running out before the UK would either have to ask for an extension (politically very costly for the Conservatives) or leave without a deal (economically very costly for the country). May therefore held a Second Meaningful Vote on 12 March 2019, essentially a repeat vote on the policy that had been rejected two months ago (there were some minor changes of interpretation of certain aspects of it). May and her Whips worked hard to persuade rebel Conservative MPs, but again unsuccessfully: the government lost by 391 to 242 votes, a majority of 149. Following this defeat, she asked the EU for an extension, rather than leaving with no deal at end of March.

On the day the UK was originally supposed to leave the EU, May held a Third Meaningful Vote, again on essentially the same Withdrawal Agreement. She and her Whips made a final push to persuade rebels, increasingly with the threat to Hard Brexiteers that Brexit may not happen at all if the Withdrawal Agreement was not passed. Again,

[4]Some predictions at the time of the first vote had up to 30 Labour MPs intending to vote with the government. More generally, Brexit has produced serious internal divisions in the Labour Party, though these did not have a major impact on the Meaningful Votes. Hence, this article focuses on the Conservative Party.

the government lost, though it cut its margin of defeat, from 344 to 286 votes, a majority of 58. Johnson was the most prominent rebel to change his mind, and vote with the government for the first time on this final vote.

Immediately after losing the third vote, May had to ask the EU for another extension of Article 50, a further major political humiliation. In local and EU elections in May 2019, the Conservatives did exceptionally badly. With the central policy of the government in disarray and her party falling apart, the Prime Minister announced her resignation on 24 May 2019.[5] Johnson, the frontrunner to replace May among Conservative Party members (who select the party leader), won the ensuing leadership contest on 22 July 2019. A proponent of Hard Brexit, he replaced much of May's relatively balanced government with a group of Hard Brexiteers in all the most senior government posts.

# 4 Theoretical framework

In this section, we develop a theoretical framework that explains why politicians (henceforth MPs) may decide to vote against their party's policy, and which we use to structure our empirical investigation of the Meaningful Votes. For this reason, we formulate the framework with reference to the Westminster system. This system is charaterized by a high level of party unity in general, a clear government-opposition divide, agenda control monopolized by the Cabinet within the governing party, and MPs elected in single member districts with local party organizations having a significant input into who is selected to represent the constituency (e.g., Baughman 2004).[6]

[5]Three major aspects of a breakdown in party unity are the following. May suffered a large number of resignations of both junior and senior ministers: from 11 June 2017 onwards, 33 ministers resigned over Brexit. Four Conservative MPs also defected from the party over Brexit, either to new parties or to sit as independents. On 11 December 2018, the day the first Meaningful Vote was originally to be held, Theresa May faced an internal Conservative Party vote of No Confidence, brought by Hard Brexit ERG members, which she defeated.

[6]Broader legislative institutions and party structures help shape the costs and benefits for politicians to deviate from the party line, and the constraints that party leaders face in creating party coherence (Krehbiel 1993). The differences, for example, between a Westminster-type system and a US-type system are often emphasised (Gaines and Garrett 1993). Stratmann (2006) leverages the mixed plurality and proportional election system in Germany to show that federal politicians who are elected under plurality rule from single member districts are more likely than those elected on a party list under

MPs are members of political parties and are elected under these party labels and on the party manifesto. These members share policy preferences and have common goals, but only up to a point. Within a party there is, in general, substantial preference heterogeneity on particular issues, with extreme and moderate MPs belonging to the same party. This creates a fundamental tension for party members between supporting the party's policy (selected by the party leadership), which will appeal to some but not to all, and pursuing their own preferred policy. Party leaders are, of course, well aware of this and will seek to devise incentives and rules to enforce party discipline, create party coherence and avoid mass rebellion on critical bills (Kam 2014). Party leaders can, in principle, pursue this goal by controlling selection of candidates to be fielded (select only candidates who will toe the party line), by controlling the policy agenda (make sure that proposals are agreeable to most party members), by fostering socialization (Crowe 1986), and by sharing and withholding the perks of government strategically.

Building on Muller and Strom (1999)'s tripartite model, we make a distinction between three factors that affect an MP's decision to rebel against his or her party. The first consideration is *ideology*: MPs care about policy and their position on a particular issue often deviates from the party's official stance. This may motivate an MP to rebel. The second consideration is *career concerns*: MPs usually want a legislative career. In the Westminster system where agenda control is monopolized by the Cabinet, political promotion is about government posts for members of the governing party and about posts in the shadow cabinet for opposition MPs. This makes rebellion costly for backbenchers as well as for frontbenchers (those with government or shadow government posts) because party leaders can withhold promotion for rebellious backbenchers and demote frontbenchers who do not toe the line.[7] The third consideration is *constituency*

proportional representation to vote against the party lines in roll call votes. We restrict our attention to the Westminster system and do not attempt to contrast this with other systems. For a comparative study of the UK and the US, see Kirkland and Slapin (2018) and for a study of the European Parliament see Benedetto and Hix (2007).

[7]Bertelli and Dolan (2009) present evidence from intervention in the House of Commons related to Health care that is consistent with political careerism. The evidence on whether party leaders in actual fact punish rebels by deneying them promotion is mixed. Eggers and Spirling (2016) study over 20,000 parliamentary divisions that took place between 1836 and 1910 in the British House of Commons and

*preferences* and re-election. In the Westminster system, MPs are elected to represent the voters in their constituency. As argued by, for example, Gaines and Garrett (1993), Kirkland and Slapin (2018), Kam (2009) and many others, MPs in this system have an incentive, albeit not necessarily as strong an incentive as US legislators, to develop a persona independent of their party that connects them with their constituents and their local party organization. They can do this publicly by deviating from their party's policy on issues that their voters and selectors in the local party organization care particularly about in parliamentary divisions. This type of grandstanding signals their ideological purity, integrity or trustworthiness, gets them media exposure and can potentially insulate them from the electoral unpopularity (in their constituency) of the party's policy.[8]

Within the Public Choice tradition, MPs are viewed as rational decision makers who need to navigate these three considerations when they decide if they should rebel on a particular issue. More often than not, they pull in different directions and MPs find themselves in the cross fire at the centre of a triangle with their voters, their ideological conviction, and their party pulling them in different directions (Hix et al. 2007; Morgenstern 2003; Saiegh 2011). Figure 1 illustrates this tripartite model of roll call voting.

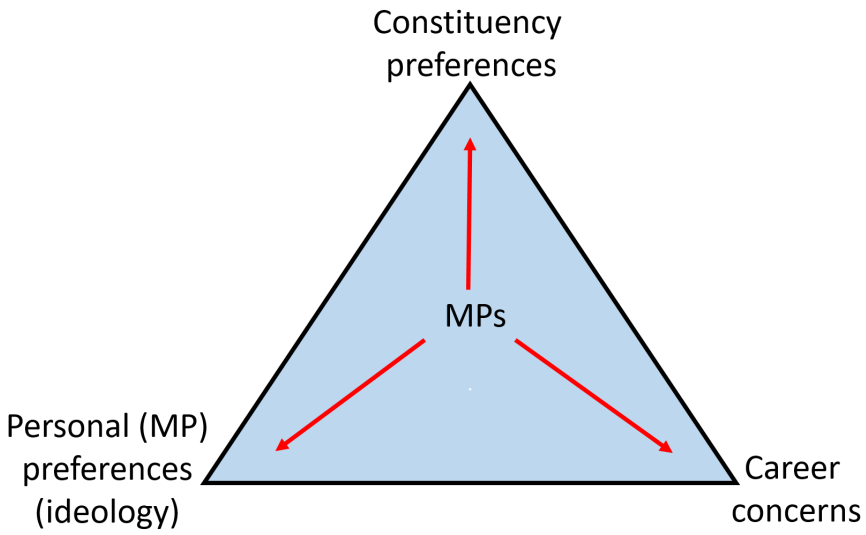
The costs and benefits of rebellion differ systematically between the governing and opposition parties on the one hand, and within the governing party (or coalition) between the frontbenchers with government posts and backbenchers without on the other. First, with regard to the government-opposition split, Kirkland and Slapin (2018) argue that it is MPs with *extreme* preference (far from the center) within the governing party that stand to benefit the most from rebellion. This is because they can signal to their constituents

show that more loyal MPs were more likely to obtain ministerial posts. In contrast, Kauder et al. (2017) study 218 roll call votes in the German federal parliament (Bundestag) and ask if rebels are punished by party leaders by being allocated a less attractive position on the party list in the next election. They find that parties do not punish politicians who have voted against the party line in this way.

[8]Campbell et al. (2019) and Vivyan and Wagner (2012) present evidence from the UK that this strategy can help MPs seeking re-election. Pattie et al. (1994) show that rebellion on high profile issues, such as capital punishment or the poll tax, had an effect on the re-election prospects of the rebels, but otherwise they find no discernible effects. Ragusa (2016) shows that US legislators take more extreme positions if they won election to the Senate after representing a partisan district.

that they are "ideologically pure" by voting against the party line and expect to be electorally rewarded for this. For opposition MPs, the incentive to break the party line to signal "ideological purity" is weaker. Assuming that the opposition policy is to vote against the government's policy, neither extreme nor moderate (who are relatively close to the center) opposition MPs are likely to gain electorally by breaking the party line as most of their voters would, in fact, prefer the opposition party's official policy stance to that of the government. All rebels, of course, face the cost of the disciplinary actions taken by their party leaders in response, but there is a clear asymmetry in the benefit of rebellion between the party of government and the opposition. This logic is consistent with the fact that it is MPs with extreme views that tend to rebel in the House of Commons and that MPs from the governing party are more likely to rebel than MPs from the opposition (e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007; Kirkland and Slapin 2018).

Second, the within party difference between front- and backbenchers is important and arises from the fact that frontbenchers have much more to lose from rebelling (their perks and posts, the ability to formulate policy, etc.). Backbenchers also have to mind their political careers, but those who have been "passed over" for political promotion or those who have previously been demoted from the frontbench have less to lose (Kam 2009). This logic suggests that it is amongst "old" backbenchers that most rebels can be found. The cause of a backbench revolt by this group of MPs may not just be that they are unhappy with the party's policy, but also may be because they hope to destabilize the leader under whom their political careers have stalled. This gives rise to two distinct career motives. On the one hand, MPs can promote their careers by pleasing the current leadership of their party *if* the leadership is sufficiently stable to justify the expectation of rewards for good behaviour. On the other hand, MPs can promote their careers by destabilising the current leader of their party and encouraging a leadership challenge. If successful, the revolting MPs may reasonably expect to be rewarded by the new leader.




Notes: Own illustration

**Figure 1:** The MPs in crossfire: The tripartite model

# 5 The data and operationalization

Our objective is to study how MPs resolved the tension among their personal preference, career concerns and constituency preferences in the context of the three Meaningful Votes on the Withdrawal Agreement that the May government negotiated with the European Union (henceforth "May's deal"). The raw numbers (reported in Table 1) clearly show that party cohesion was strong among all opposition parties. All but 6 opposition MPs in the first Meaningful Vote and 9 in the third toed their respective party lines.[9] An implication, then, is that the rebellion that defeated May's deal three times in a row took place within the governing Conservative Party.[10] Our focus is, therefore, on the 317 Conservative MPs. We have recorded how each of them voted in the three Meaningful

[9] Dewan and Spirling (2011) develop a game theoretical argument for why opposition parties are able to act coherently in spite of the temptation of some of their MPs to support the government's policy. The source of such strategic opposition is that if the opposition as a block vote against the government (and no opposition MP deviates from this), it can force the government to propose a more moderate policy than otherwise and this is in the interest of all opposition MPs.

[10] The "rebellion" by the 10 MPs from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) upon which May's government relayed for a parliamentary majority was also important but not pivotal.

Votes and coded the indicator variable *VOTE* as one if the (Conservative) MP supported the Withdrawal Agreement and voted with the government and zero if the MP rebelled by voting against.

While theoretically the three factors of the tripartite model – ideology, career concerns and constituency preferences – are distinct, in practice they often overlap and it is a challenge to measure them independently. With this caveat in mind, we now explain how we operationalize and measure them. First, we operationalize the MPs' ideological position on the Brexit question by how they voted and campaigned in the 2016 referendum on leaving the European Union. For Conservative MPs, this, arguably, was a "free vote" where the MPs could vote and campaign as they liked. The official policy of the Cameron government that had called the referendum was to vote Remain, but many leading Tory MPs – most notably Boris Johnson and Michael Gove – campaigned to leave. We code the dummy variable *REMAIN MP* as one if the MP voted and campaigned for remain in the referendum and zero otherwise. We argue that this *expressed* preference is a good measure of each MP's personal judgement of the merits of leaving the EU.[11] However, we acknowledge that how the MPs voted in the referendum can, in principle, also reflect career concerns and constituency preferences. In our judgement, it is unlikely that many Conservative MPs viewed their position on the referendum question as a career move. It was widely expected that the Remain side would win and the Cameron government was unlikely to reward or punish the MPs for which stance they took, as Cameron had called the referendum, at least partly, to settle the "Europe question" within the Conservative party once and for all. It is harder to dismiss the possibility that a significant number of MPs (who did not have strong views on the issue of Europe) choose their position to match the (perceived) preference of their constituents. If that were the case, we would expect there to be a strong correlation between an MP's position and that of his or her constituents. In fact, the correlation between the leave stance of the MPs

[11]Moreover, it is plausible to argue that most of them were voting socio-tropically, i.e., were thinking about what, in their view, was best for the country, rather than ego-tropically, i.e., were thinking about the private benefit that they would derive from the result. See Nannestad and Paldam (1994) and Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2013) for a discussion of the distinction between ego- and socio-tropic voting.

and the Leave vote share of their constituents is just 0.119. This does, of course, not rule out that the dummy variable *REMAIN MP* captures a mixture of personal and constituency preferences. To bolster our interpretation of the variable, we exploit in a robustness check that Theresa May called a general election in 2017 and that we can make a distinction between (current) MPs who were elected before (in 2015) and after (in 2017) the referendum. It is reasonable to expect that constituency preferences played little role for the stance taken by the "MPs" who did not get elected till after the referendum and for them, the expressed preference in the referendum is a reflection of their personal views. We also stress that we condition on a host of constituency characteristics and on the share of leave voters in the estimations. This helps isolate the variation in *REMAIN MP* that represents the MPs' personal preference from the variation that may be due to constituency preferences.

Second, to operationalize career concerns, we make a distinction between "junior" and "senior" backbenchers, on the one hand, and between backbenchers and members of the government (frontbenchers) on the other. As discuss above, the group of "senior" backbenchers, i.e., those with long parliamentary tenure, consists of two sub-groups: one group has been "passed over" for government jobs in the past and have little prospect of ever getting one under the current Prime Minister; the other consists of MPs who have previously served in government but have resigned or been dismissed. Either group has little to lose from rebellion as there are limits to what the government and its Whips can do to sanction them for such behaviour since they have little chance of promotion under the current leadership. They are, therefore, *ceteris paribus* more likely to rebel than "junior" MPs who are newly elected to their seat and who are particularly concerned with their political career prospects under the current leadership. On top of this, if the power base of the current leadership inside the party is fragile, then MPs may anticipate that if they rebel, the current leadership will eventually fall and a new Prime Minster will be appointed. Likely, the new leader will replace most of the old frontbench and promote MPs from the backbench. Consequently, MPs who think they have a fair chance

of being part of a new government have an extra incentive to rebel. However, this strategy is, arguably, more appealing to "senior" than to 'junior" backbenchers who hope to get back into government. So, "junior" MPs have two reasons to toe the party line: they fear sanctions from the current government and they do not anticipate rewards from a new government should the current government fall because of rebellion. We code two variables to capture this. The first, *FRONTBENCH*, is a dummy variable coded one if the MP holds a position in government and zero otherwise. The second, *JUNIOR MP*, is a dummy variable coded one if the MP was first elected in either in 2015 or 2017, and zero otherwise.[12] The fact that we observe the same MPs voting on the same policy three times and we observe a change in Prime Minister (from Theresa May to Boris Johnson) opens a window of opportunity for a more refined test of career concerns related to destabilising the current leader. We return to this in Section 7.2.

Third, the Brexit situation provides a unique opportunity to measure the constituency preferences since we know, in the aggregate, how voters in each constituency voted in the 2016 referendum. We code the variable *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* as the share of voters in each constituency who voted Leave in the referendum.

We have also collected information on many other MP and constituency specific characteristics. The constituency specific control variables include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of foreign born residents, the share of residents with higher education, the age structure of the constituency, and share of public employment, all measured at the parliamentary constituency level. The MP specific control variables include the MP's age, gender and win margin in the 2017 election. We also include a rebellion index that proxies for the MP's tendency to rebel against their own party in the past. We have standardized these data so that all non-binary variables have a standard deviation of one. Appendix A lists and defines all the variables we use in the statistical analysis and provides details on the sources. Table 2 reports summary statistics.

[12]The most recent previous election was in 2010, so by the time of the Meaningful Votes in 2018 an MP with *JUNIOR MP*=0 had served as an MP for at least 8 years, long enough to be considered for a government position.

**Table 2:** Summary Statistics for sample of Conservative Backbench MPs

| *Variable* | (1) N | (2) Mean | (3) Std. Dev. | (4) Min. | (5) Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VOTE (Binary) | 662 | 0.648 | 0.478 | 0 | 1 |
| VOTE CHANGE 1-2* (Binary) | 118 | 0.331 | 0.472 | 0 | 1 |
| VOTE CHANGE 2-3* (Binary) | 118 | 0.356 | 0.481 | 0 | 1 |
| *Main Determinants* | | | | | |
| REMAIN MP (Binary) | 222 | 0.464 | 0.500 | 0 | 1 |
| JUNIOR MP (Binary) | 222 | 0.374 | 0.485 | 0 | 1 |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE (%) | 222 | 55.1 | 8.77 | 25.7 | 74.9 |
| JOHNSON GOVERNMENT SENIOR* (Binary) | 118 | 0.068 | 0.252 | 0 | 1 |
| JOHNSON GOVERNMENT JUNIOR* (Binary) | 118 | 0.076 | 0.267 | 0 | 1 |
| *Constituency Controls* | | | | | |
| FOREIGN (%) | 222 | 8.56 | 6.51 | 2.40 | 46.9 |
| POPULATION (No.) | 222 | 100,168 | 11,491 | 58,941 | 140,984 |
| UNEMPLOYED (%) | 222 | 2.06 | 1.07 | 0.547 | 6.03 |
| PUBLIC (%) | 222 | 18.1 | 6.75 | 5.60 | 47.1 |
| EDUCATED (%) | 222 | 27.2 | 6.94 | 12.3 | 55.2 |
| WORKING AGE (%) | 222 | 60.4 | 2.88 | 51.2 | 70.0 |
| *MP Controls* | | | | | |
| AGE (Yrs.) | 222 | 52.3 | 10.8 | 27.0 | 78.0 |
| FEMALE (Binary) | 222 | 0.176 | 0.381 | 0 | 1 |
| REBELLION (Index) | 222 | 0.726 | 1.87 | 0 | 21.8 |
| WIN MARGIN (pp) | 222 | 22.6 | 12.8 | 0.066 | 49.7 |

Note: Appendix A lists the definitions of the variables and provides details regarding the sources. Appendix Table A1 provides summary statistics for the sample of all Conservative MPs. * These variables are coded for the sub-sample of Conservative backbench MPs who voted against the Withdrawal Agreement in the first Meaningful Vote. See Section 7.2 for more details.

# 6 Estimation strategy

We want to estimate the following statistical model

$$\text{VOTE}_{i,v} = F[\alpha_v + \beta_1 \text{IDEOLOGY}_i + \beta_2 \text{CAREER}_i + \beta_3 \text{CONSTITUENCY}_i + \beta_4 X_i] \quad (1)$$

where $i$ is the index for a Conservative MP (and for his or her constituency since all constituencies are single seat), $v$ is the index for the three Meaningful Votes with $v \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ and $X_i$ is a vector of control variables. We want to understand how the three forces – ideology, career concerns and constituency preferences – influence the decision to rebel and vote against May's deal. We use *REMAIN MP* to proxy for ideology, *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* to proxy for constituency preferences and *JUNIOR MP* and *FRONTBENCH* to proxy for career concerns in the main specifications, but consider a number of refinements aimed at validating the three proxies. We estimate equation (1) with a probit estimator and, in specifications where we pool the three voters, we cluster the standard errors at the constituency level to account for the fact that we study a sequence of votes.

We know from Table 1 that all Conservative frontbench MPs supported the government's Withdrawal Agreement in the three Meaningful Votes. This implies that we cannot include *FRONTBENCH* in the probit specification (the variable predicts the outcome perfectly and is dropped). For this reason, the main analysis is restricted to the sample of Conservative backbenchers where we have variation in *VOTE*. To compare the effect of the *FRONTBENCH* variable to the others, we estimate a linear probability model on the sample of all Conservative MPs. We also know from Table 1 that 81 Conservative (backbench) MPs changed their vote from opposition to support in the sequence of votes. To study why they did this, we estimate a version of equation (1) where we replace *VOTE* with the variables *VOTE CHANGE 1-2* or *VOTE CHANGE 2-3* that records if the MPs changed their vote in the second or third Meaningful Vote relative to the position they took in the previous vote.

# 7 Results

We present the results in three subsections. In Section 7.1, we discuss the main results and a validation test of the proxy for the MPs' personal preference. In Section 7.2, we test for career concerns related to promotion to government posts in a future administration. In Section 7.3, we investigate heterogeneity in the effects across three dimensions related to electoral competition, history of rebellion, and the MP's personal preference.

## 7.1 Main Results

Table 3 reports the main results. Column (1) shows a parsimonious specification without any control variables other than the dummy variables for the three Meaningful Votes, column (2) adds the constituency specific control variables, and column (3) adds MP-specific control variables. We report marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the variables. In column (4), we report the results from a linear probability model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) where we can include all Conservative MPs, including those serving on the frontbench in the sample.

Looking across Table 3, we observe that the four variables capturing personal preferences (*REMAIN MP*), career concerns (*JUNIOR MP* and *FRONTBENCH*), and constituency preferences (*LEAVE VOTE SHARE*) are all strongly correlated with MP support for May's deal. The effects are stable across specifications as we add the control variables, except for *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* which is very imprecisely estimated in the parsimonious specification in column (1). This is, perhaps, not so surprising because the constituency specific controls include many of the variables – such as the unemployment rate and the share of highly educated residents in the constituency – which we know are correlated with the share of Leave voters (see, e.g., Becker et al. 2017). Specifically, we find that *REMAIN MP* and the two career concerns variables *JUNIOR MP* and *FRONTBENCH* are positively correlated with the probability of voting for May's deal and that *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is negatively correlated. That is, MPs who had

**Table 3:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement in the three Meaningful Votes combined

| | Backbencher sample | | | Full Sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) Probit | (2) Probit | (3) Probit | (4) OLS |
| FRONTBENCH | - | - | - | 0.327*** |
| | | | | (0.035) |
| | | | | [0.000] |
| REMAIN MP | 0.381*** | 0.373*** | 0.398*** | 0.266*** |
| | (0.048) | (0.049) | (0.048) | (0.034) |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.171*** | 0.128** | 0.204*** | 0.127*** |
| | (0.053) | (0.057) | (0.069) | (0.046) |
| | [0.001] | [0.025] | [0.003] | [0.006] |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.003 | -0.157** | -0.170** | -0.079** |
| | (0.029) | (0.064) | (0.067) | (0.035) |
| | [0.929] | [0.013] | [0.011] | [0.027] |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Const. Controls | NO | YES | YES | YES |
| MP Controls | NO | NO | YES | YES |
| N | 662 | 662 | 662 | 941 |
| (Pseudo-)R2 | 0.22 | 0.25 | 0.27 | 0.33 |

Note: Columns (1)-(3) report Probit estimates (marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the explanatory variables) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers and column (4) reports OLS estimates for the sample of all Conservative MPs. The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero when the MP rebelled by voting against. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency; and *FRONTBENCH* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP holds a position in government. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

voted and campaigned against leaving the EU in the referendum were almost 40 percent more likely to support May's deal than other MPs, while MPs representing constituencies with (one standard deviation) more Leave voters were 17 percent less likely to support the deal. Junior MPs mindful of their career prospects under a May government were about 20 percent more likely to support May's deal and so were frontbench MPs serving in the government (column (4)). Relatively speaking, ideology (as captured by the MP's revealed preference for membership of the EU) appears to be about twice as important a factor as career concerns and constituency preferences. In sum, we conclude that the rebellion did *not* come from MPs with strong career concerns. This is in line with previous findings in the literature on roll call rebels (see, e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007). Rather, and somewhat paradoxically, rebellion came from MPs who had supported Leave in the referendum and from MPs elected in Leave leaning constituencies.

Table 4 reports the results (corresponding to the specification with the full set of control variables (Table 3, column (3)) for each of the three Meaningful Votes separately. This is important to consider because there was a significant shift in the scale of the rebellion from 118 Conservative MPs in the first Meaningful Vote down to 37 in the third. The results are qualitatively similar across the three votes: the marginal effects have the same sign and are statistically significant. Importantly, the tests for whether the marginal effects are the same in the first and third vote reported in column (4), however, show the quantitative importance of ideology and career concerns, but not constituency preferences, weakened over time, in line with the fact that more and more backbenchers rallied behind May's deal as time went on.[13] To illustrate, relative to the first Meaningful Vote, where the MPs who had voted Remain in 2016 were 56 percent more likely to support May's deal, the point estimate dropped down to 16 percent by the time of the third Meaningful Vote. We also note that the part of the variance explained by the three factors (as measured by the Pseudo-$R^2$) drops from 30 to 18 percent.

[13]It is not straight-forward to test for this in a non-linear model. We follow Mood (2010) and use a one-sided z-test to test, for each variable, if one marginal effect (rather than the raw probit coefficients) is greater (smaller) than the other. We use the same procedure in the heterogeneity analysis in Section 7.3.

**Table 4:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal agreement in each of the three Meaningful Votes separately

| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) 1st Vote | (2) 2nd Vote | (3) 3rd Vote | (4) Diff. p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| REMAIN MP | 0.563*** | 0.405*** | 0.161*** | 0.000 |
| | (0.062) | (0.059) | (0.044) | |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.282*** | 0.178** | 0.119** | 0.086 |
| | (0.109) | (0.087) | (0.049) | |
| | [0.010] | [0.042] | [0.015] | |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.203** | -0.148* | -0.126** | 0.253 |
| | (0.103) | (0.087) | (0.054) | |
| | [0.049] | [0.090] | [0.020] | |
| Controls | YES | YES | YES | - |
| N | 221 | 220 | 221 | - |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.30 | 0.22 | 0.18 | - |

Note: The table reports Probit estimates (marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the explanatory variables) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers separately for the three Meaningful Votes. The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero if the MP rebelled by voting against. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; and *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. The p-value reported in column (4) is associated with the one-sided null hypothesis that the marginal effect of the respective row variable is numerically smaller in the third vote (column (3)) than in the first vote (column (1)). Robust standard errors (in round brackets); p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

As discussed above, we cannot fully rule out that the estimated marginal effect of *REMAIN MP*, which records the stance of each MP in the 2016 referendum, captures constituency as well as the MP's personal preferences. The fact that we condition on the *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* and, thus, estimate the effect of *REMAIN MP* holding the preference among the voters of each constituency for leaving the European Union constant militates against this. Yet, it is important to consider the issue further.

The MPs who voted on the Withdrawal Agreement in the three Meaningful Votes can be divided into two groups: those who were elected for the first time in the general election in 2017, i.e., after the referendum, and those who were elected (or re-elected) in 2015 (and re-elected in 2017), i.e., before the referendum. If the MPs' stance in the referendum were selected strategically to match constituency preferences, we conjecture that the incentive to do this would be much stronger for those who were already MPs at the time of the referendum. After all the MPs elected for the first time in 2017 did not know in 2016 that they would be running in a general election shortly after the referendum and, thus, their incentive to match their stance with that of their future voters is arguable much lower. For *them*, it stands to reason that the vote in the referendum does reflect their personal preference.

Given that, we can isolate the effect of the MPs' personal preference by restricting the sample to the Conservative backbench MPs elected in 2017 and test if those who voted Remain are more likely than those who did not to vote for the Withdrawal Agreement. Table 5 reports three specifications with different sets of control variables similar to Table 3. We see that *REMAIN MP* is statistically significant in all specifications, and that the marginal effect is between 28 and 34 percent compared to 37 to 39 percent in the full sample (see Table 3). This bolsters our interpretation of *REMAIN MP* as a plausible proxy for the MPs' personal preference.

**Table 5:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement for the Conservative backbench MPs elected in 2017

| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) Probit | (2) Probit | (3) Probit |
|---|---|---|---|
| REMAIN MP | 0.299*** | 0.286*** | 0.341*** |
| | (0.103) | (0.092) | (0.097) |
| | [0.004] | [0.002] | [0.000] |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.073** | -0.149** | -0.171** |
| | (0.037) | (0.067) | (0.069) |
| | [0.049] | [0.025] | [0.013] |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES |
| Const. Controls | NO | YES | YES |
| MP Controls | NO | NO | YES |
| N | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.27 | 0.35 | 0.39 |

Note: The table reports Probit estimates (marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the explanatory variables) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers elected in the 2017 general election. Since all these MPs are "junior" MPs, the variable *JUNIOR MP* is omitted. The other variables are as in the specifications reported in Table 3, columns (1) to (3). Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

## 7.2 Career concerns and leader replacement

So far we have assumed that the MPs' career concerns are shaped by the ability of the *current* party leadership to reward loyalty and punish rebellion. However, the prospect of a career under a *new* party leader can also be a strong motivator to rebel against the current leadership, particularly so if its position is perceived to be weak and rebellion is a means to further weaken it. In the context of the three Meaningful Votes, it is clear that the position of the May government was fragile. This, combined with the fact that she was eventually replaced by Boris Johnson as Prime Minster, opens up a unique opportunity to test if the backbenchers' vote choices in the Meaningful Votes were influenced by the prospect of a promotion under a future Johnson-led government. To do this, we note two points. Firstly, since Theresa May had "survived" an internal vote of no confidence before the first meaningful vote, it is reasonable to assume that expectations of a change in leadership were lower at the time of the first vote than at the time of the last. This

motivates investigating why some Conservative backbenchers *changed* their position on the Withdrawal Agreement between the first, second and third vote. Secondly, Johnson was widely tipped as the most likely candidate to replace May if her administration were to fall. He announced just before the third Meaningful Vote that he would support it after having vote against in the previous votes.[14] We can use this fact to test if those MPs who (ex post) got promoted to his new administration were "loyal" to him and also switched their vote when he did. If so, this would be consistent with the prospect of promotion under a future government being a motivator.

To implement this test, we code the two variables *JOHNSON GOVERNMENT SENIOR* and *JOHNSON GOVERNMENT JUNIOR* which are equal to one if an MP got a senior (Cabinet) or a junior (non-cabinet) post, respectively, in the Johnson administration. We, then, test whether these variables can predict if the 118 Conservative backbench MPs who voted against the Withdrawal Agreement in the first Meaningful Vote changed the way they voted in subsequent votes. Table 6 reports the results. In column (1), the dependent variable (*VOTE CHANGE 1-2*) is a dummy equal to 1 for MPs who voted against in the first Meaningful Vote and for in the second (zero otherwise). In column (2), the dependent variable (*VOTE CHANGE 2-3*) is a dummy equal to one for MPs who voted against in the second Meaningful Vote and for in the third (zero otherwise). While our results should be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size,[15] we see that the MPs who got appointed to senior positions in the Johnson administration were 33 percent less likely to change their vote between the first and the second vote, but 34 percent more likely to switch between the second and the third vote. Those who got junior positions were not more likely to change their vote than other MPs. This is consistent with a "follow Johnson effect" whereby the rebels who anticipated (correctly) they might get senior posts in a Johnson administration changed their vote when Johnson

[14]Since the DUP was sure to vote against for a third time, it would have required a major rebellion in the Labour Party to create a majority for the Withdrawal Agreement, even if most of the rebels on the Conservative backbench switched their vote. So, Johnson's change of mind was never likely to make a material difference for the outcome of the vote.

[15]Only about seven percent of the backbenchers who initially voting against the Withdrawal Agreement are now part of the Johnson Cabinet.

**Table 6:** Voting with Johnson: The probability that the 118 Conservative backbench MPs who voted against the Withdrawal Agreement in the first Meaningful vote subsequently switched their vote

| *Outcome: VOTE CHANGE* | (1)<br>Switch in 2nd vote | (2)<br>Switch in 3rd vote |
|---|---|---|
| JOHNSON GOVERNMENT SENIOR | -0.333*** | 0.339** |
| | (0.091) | (0.142) |
| | [0.000] | [0.018] |
| JOHNSON GOVERNMENT JUNIOR | 0.140 | 0.005 |
| | (0.190) | (0.187) |
| | [0.462] | [0.977] |
| REMAIN MP | 0.092 | -0.016 |
| | (0.108) | (0.104) |
| | [0.398] | [0.880] |
| JUNIOR MP | -0.079 | 0.131 |
| | (0.132) | (0.130) |
| | [0.552] | [0.313] |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | 0.062 | -0.212* |
| | (0.125) | (0.125) |
| | [0.623] | [0.094] |
| Const. Controls | YES | YES |
| MP Controls | YES | YES |
| N | 118 | 118 |
| $R^2$ | 0.17 | 0.17 |

Note: The sample is restricted to Conservative backbencher MPs who voted against the Withdrawal Agreement in the first Meaningful Vote. In column 1, the dependent variable (*VOTE CHANGE 1-2*) is a dummy equal to 1 for MPs who voted against in the first Meaningful Vote and for in the second (zero otherwise). In column (2), the dependent variable (*VOTE CHANGE 2-3*) is a dummy equal to one for MPs who voted against in the second Meaningful Vote and for in the third (zero otherwise). The dummy variable *JOHNSON GOVERNMENT SENIOR* is equal to one if the MP was appointed to a senior (Cabinet) position in the Johnson administration (zero otherwise). The dummy variable *JOHNSON GOVERNMENT JUNIOR* is equal to one if the MP was appointed to a junior (non-cabinet) governmental position in the Johnson administration (zero otherwise). The model is a linear probability model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). The probit estimates are similar. However, because no MP who got a senior position in the Johnson administration started supporting Theresa May's deal in the 2nd vote, we cannot estimate the specification in column (1) with that estimator. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. Robust standard errors are reported in (round brackets); p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

did. Although there could be other explanations for this pattern, it suggests that career concerns related to rewards by a future leader played a role.

## 7.3 Heterogeneity

We explore three dimensions of heterogeneity in the main results: constituency competitiveness, history of rebellion, and the MP's personal preference.[16]

### 7.3.1 Constituency Competitiveness

The relative importance of ideology, career concerns and constituency preferences in an MP's rebellion calculus is likely to be influenced by how competitive the MP's seat is. An MP elected to a safe seat by a large majority is likely to put more weight on career concerns and ideology than on constituency preferences compared to an MP elected to a marginal seat. To investigate this hypothesis, we split the sample of Conservative backbench MPs into sub-samples defined by their win margin in the 2017 general election and re-estimate equation (1) on these sub-samples. We define a seat as marginal if it is in the bottom 25 percent of the distribution with win margins below 11pp and safe if it is in top 50 percent of the distribution with a win margin above 23pp.

Table 7 reports the results. Column (1) repeats the baseline model estimated on the entire sample of backbench Conservative MPs. In columns (2) and (3), we report the results for safe and marginal seats separately. We observe that there is a remarkable difference in the relative importance of career concerns and constituency preferences between MPs elected in safe and marginal seats. Specifically, the effect of career concerns is significantly weaker in marginal constituencies, while the influence of constituency preferences is significantly stronger. This is in line with previous findings by Baughman (2004) who associates the greater attention paid to constituency preferences by MPs under electoral

[16]Methodologically, we study heterogeneity by splitting the sample along the relevant dimension and then test if the marginal effects of the core variables are different in the two sub-samples. An alternative is to introduce interaction terms. However, since we are interested in heterogeneity across many variables, this approach, despite the efficiency gain associated with a bigger sample, is inferior for our purposes.

threat with a strategy to pander to local party officials whose support is essential for future electoral success. Likewise, Kauder and Potrafke (2019) show that conservative politicians elected in safe rather than in contested districts were less likely to support same-sex marriage a roll call vote in the national German parliament (Bundestag).

While these results should not necessarily be interpreted causally as win margins may be correlated with unobserved mediating factors, we do believe that they bring credibility to our main findings. If the main results from Table 3 were wholly spurious, there would be no reason to expect the particular pattern that we observe when the sample is split between safe and marginal seats. Hence, while making a causal claim is not possible with the data at hand, the results in Table 7 are in line with what we would theoretically expect, which is reassuring.

### 7.3.2 History of Rebellion

While many MPs are loyal, some MPs are serial rebels and have a long history of voting against their party. Famous examples include the now leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn and the shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and amongst the Conservatives, the MP Philip Hollobone. We conjecture that an MP with a history of rebellion would respond differently to, in particular, career concerns than an MP who has always been loyal. An MP who has already rebelled at least once may, from a career point of view, perceive another rebellious vote differently from an MP who has been loyal in the past.

Based on the the "rebellion history index" constructed by the website The Public Whip from divisions in the House of Commons over the period June 2017 to November 2018 (i.e., before the first Meaningful Vote), we have divided the sample of Conservative backbench MPs into two groups: those who never rebelled in the past and for whom a vote against the Withdrawal Agreement would be their first rebellious vote (first-time rebels) and those who rebelled at least once prior to the first Meaningful Vote (serial rebels). We re-estimate equation (1) on the two sub-samples. Table 8 reports the results. From column (2) and (3), we observe that based on a comparison of the marginal effects

**Table 7:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement in safe versus marginal seats

| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) Baseline | (2) Safe | (3) Marginal | (4) Diff. p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| REMAIN MP | 0.398*** | 0.487*** | 0.420*** | 0.280 |
| | (0.048) | (0.075) | (0.087) | |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.204*** | 0.263** | -0.073 | 0.016 |
| | (0.069) | (0.111) | (0.112) | |
| | [0.003] | [0.017] | [0.516] | |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.170** | -0.078 | -0.294*** | 0.064 |
| | (0.067) | (0.112) | (0.087) | |
| | [0.011] | [0.488] | [0.001] | |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES | - |
| Controls | YES | YES | YES | - |
| N | 662 | 330 | 164 | - |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.27 | 0.30 | 0.45 | - |

Note: The table reports Probit estimates (marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the explanatory variables) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers and for the three votes combined. Column (1) replicates the full baseline results from Table 3. Columns (2) and (3) estimate the model separately for safe (top 50 percent of the distribution) and marginal (bottom 25 percent of the distribution). The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero if the MP rebelled by voting against. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; and *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. The p-value reported in column (4) is associated with the one-sided null hypothesis that the marginal effect of the respective row variable is larger (smaller) in one sub-sample than in the other. Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

(24 versus 16 percent), career concerns do appear to matter more for first-time than for serial rebels, but the difference is not statistically significant. The MP's history of rebellion, thus, did not make much of a difference for how they voted.

**Table 8:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement, breakdown by history of past rebellion

| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) Baseline | (2) First-time rebels | (3) Serial rebels | (4) Diff. p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| REMAIN MP | 0.377*** | 0.403*** | 0.412*** | 0.462 |
| | (0.049) | (0.063) | (0.073) | |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.209*** | 0.238** | 0.164* | 0.298 |
| | (0.068) | (0.100) | (0.098) | |
| | [0.002] | [0.018] | [0.093] | |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.173** | -0.247** | -0.179** | 0.312 |
| | (0.068) | (0.111) | (0.083) | |
| | [0.011] | [0.027] | [0.030] | |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES | - |
| Controls | YES | YES | YES | - |
| N | 662 | 306 | 356 | - |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.26 | 0.32 | 0.26 | - |

Note: The table reports Probit estimates (marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the explanatory variables) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers and the three Meaningful Votes combined. Column (1) replicates the full baseline results from Table 3, excluding the rebellion index control. Column (2) restricts the sample to MPs who had not rebelled prior to November 2017 (first-time rebels); column (3) restricts the sample to MPs who had rebelled at least once before (serial rebels). The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero if the MP rebelled by voting against. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; and *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, and the MP's win margin in the last election. The p-value reported in column (4) is associated with the one-sided null hypothesis that the marginal effect of the respective row variable is larger (smaller) in one sub-sample than in the other. Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

### 7.3.3 The MPs' personal Brexit preference

We have already established that conservative backbench MPs who supported Remain in the referendum in 2016 were more likely to support May's deal in the three Meaningful

Votes than Leave MPs. We split the sample into Leave and Remain MP sub-samples in order to investigate if the two groups of MPs reacted differently to career concerns and to constituency preferences. Table 9 reports the results. We observe that Remain MPs reacted to career concerns and not to constituency preferences, while for Leave MPs, career concerns appear to play no role, but they were more likely to vote against the deal if elected in constituencies with a high share of Leave voters. However, despite the fact that the marginal effect on *JUNIOR MP* is insignificant for Leave MPs and significant for Remain MPs, the difference between the two marginal effects is not statistically significant. For *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* the difference is significant. One interpretation of this is that Leave MPs, many of whom belong to the European Research Group (ERG) led by Jacob Rees-Mogg, signalled "ideological purity" to the Leave voters and local party officials in their constituency by voting against May's deal which they considered to be too "soft" (involving a risk of locking the UK into a customs union via the so-called Irish backstop). Remain MPs with a political career to look after, on the other hand, could signal purity to their Leave voters and local party officials by "converting" (accepting the result of the referendum) and supporting May's attempt to get a deal through.

# 8 Conclusions

We study the three Meaningful Votes that took place in the British House of Common between January and March 2019 in which the Conservative government's Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union was decisively defeated. Instrumental for this was a major revolt on the Conservative backbench. We argue that this specific high stakes situation can provide insights into why politicians revolt against their own party more generally. We find evidence that personal preference (ideology), constituency preferences and career concerns mattered. We also find (suggestive) evidence that the rebellion on the Conservative backbench was, in part, motivated by the prospect of bringing the May government down. An interesting question for future research is to study the electoral

**Table 9:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement for Remain and Leave MPs

| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) Baseline | (2) Leave MPs | (3) Remain MPs | (4) Diff. p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| JUNIOR MP | 0.187*** | 0.112 | 0.208*** | 0.227 |
| | (0.068) | (0.114) | (0.059) | |
| | [0.006] | [0.327] | [0.000] | |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.158** | -0.206** | -0.043 | 0.083 |
| | (0.071) | (0.097) | (0.067) | |
| | [0.025] | [0.033] | [0.520] | |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES | - |
| Controls | YES | YES | YES | - |
| N | 662 | 354 | 308 | - |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.15 | 0.21 | 0.27 | - |

Note: The table reports Probit estimates (marginal effects evaluated at the mean of the explanatory variables) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers for the three Meaningful Votes combined. Column (1) replicates the baseline result from Table 3, excluding *REMAIN MP*. Column (2) restricts the sample to MPs who voted Leave in the 2016 referendum (Leave MPs). Column (3) restricts the sample to MPs who voted Remain in the referendum (Remain MPs). The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero if the MP rebelled. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; and *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. The p-value reported in column (4) is associated with the one-sided null hypothesis that the marginal effect of the respective row variable is larger (smaller) in one sub-sample than in the other. Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

consequences of the rebellion for individual MPs. That is, do voters reward or punish them for the way they voted on this highly contentious issue?

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# Appendix

## Appendix A: Definitions and sources

This appendix lists and defines the variables we use in the statistical analysis and gives the sources.

- *VOTE* is a dummy variable coded one if an MP voted for the government's deal and zero if they voted against; coded separately for each of the three votes. This coding takes into account that the Tellers, the Speaker and the deputy Speaker do not cast a vote. Source: House of Commons Votes
- *VOTE CHANGE 1-2* (*VOTE CHANGE 2-3*) is a dummy equal to 1 for MPs who voted against in the first (second) Meaningful Vote and for in the second (third) (zero otherwise). Source: House of Commons Votes
- *REMAIN MP* is a dummy variable coded one if the MP voted and campaigned to remain in the referendum and zero otherwise. Source: SkyNews Analysis
- *FRONTBENCH* is a dummy variable coded one if the MP holds a governmental position and zero otherwise. Source: House of Commons Library
- JUNIOR MP is a dummy variable coded one if the MP first entered Parliament either in 2015 or 2017 and zero otherwise. Source: House of Commons Library
- *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* records the share of voters in each constituency who voted to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. Source: House of Commons Library
- *FOREIGN* records the share of people residing within a constituency that have not been born within the UK. Source: Office for National Statistics
- *POPULATION* records the number of people residing within a constituency. Source: House of Commons Library Local Data
- *UNEMPLOYED* records the unemployment rate within a constituency. Source: House of Commons Library Local Data
- *PUBLIC* records the share of people residing within a constituency employed in the public sector.Source: Office for National Statistics
- *EDUCATED* records the share of people residing within a constituency that have a degree of higher education. Source: Office for National Statistics

- *WORKING AGE* records the share of people residing within a constituency that are between 16 and 64 years years old. Source: House of Commons Library Local Data
- *AGE* records the representative's age in years. Source: House of Commons Library
- *FEMALE* is a dummy variable coded one if the MP is female. Source: House of Commons Library
- *REBELLION* is an index variable which proxies for the number of times a representative has voted against the majority vote of the representative's party. Source: The Public Whip
- *WIN MARGIN* records, for each constituency, the difference between the vote share of the winning candidate and the vote share of the runner up. Source: House of Commons Library
- *JOHNSON GOVERNMENT SENIOR* is equal to one if the MP was appointed to a senior (Cabinet) position in the Johnson administration (zero otherwise). Source: BBC News
- *JOHNSON GOVERNMENT JUNIOR* is equal to one if the MP was appointed to a junior (non-cabinet) governmental position in the Johnson administration (zero otherwise). Source: BBC News

# Appendix B: Additional data and estimation results

**Table A1:** Summary Statistics for sample of all Conservative MPs

| *Variable* | (1) N | (2) Mean | (3) Std. Dev. | (4) Min. | (5) Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VOTE (Binary) | 941 | 0.752 | 0.432 | 0 | 1 |
| *Main Determinants* | | | | | |
| FRONTBENCH (Binary) | 317 | 0.300 | 0.459 | 0 | 1 |
| REMAIN MP (Binary) | 317 | 0.546 | 0.499 | 0 | 1 |
| JUNIOR MP (Binary) | 317 | 0.309 | 0.463 | 0 | 1 |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE(%) | 317 | 55.0 | 8.72 | 25.7 | 74.9 |
| *Constituency Controls* | | | | | |
| FOREIGN (%) | 317 | 8.86 | 6.94 | 2.30 | 52.0 |
| POPULATION (No.) | 317 | 100,943 | 11,608 | 58,941 | 140,984 |
| UNEMPLOYED (%) | 317 | 2.00 | 1.06 | 0.547 | 6.55 |
| PUBLIC (%) | 317 | 17.8 | 6.56 | 5.60 | 47.1 |
| EDUCATED (%) | 317 | 27.6 | 7.14 | 12.3 | 55.2 |
| WORKING AGE (%) | 317 | 60.5 | 2.80 | 51.2 | 73.1 |
| *MP Controls* | | | | | |
| AGE (Yrs.) | 317 | 51.6 | 9.85 | 27.0 | 78.0 |
| FEMALE (Binary) | 317 | 0.211 | 0.409 | 0 | 1 |
| REBELLION (Index) | 317 | 0.638 | 1.60 | 0 | 21.8 |
| WIN MARGIN (pp) | 317 | 23.2 | 13.0 | 0.066 | 49.7 |

Note: Appendix A lists definitions of the variables and provides details regarding the sources. The sample is used to estimate the specification in Table 3, column (4).

**Table A2:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement in the three Meaningful Votes combined, Linear Probability Model

| | *A. All Conservatives* | | | *B. Conservative Backbenchers* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FRONTBENCH | 0.302*** | 0.312*** | 0.327*** | - | - | - |
| | (0.031) | (0.031) | (0.035) | | | |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | | | |
| REMAIN MP | 0.265*** | 0.257*** | 0.266*** | 0.348*** | 0.333*** | 0.346*** |
| | (0.035) | (0.035) | (0.034) | (0.045) | (0.045) | (0.044) |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.112*** | 0.086** | 0.127*** | 0.135*** | 0.100** | 0.155** |
| | (0.037) | (0.038) | (0.046) | (0.045) | (0.048) | (0.062) |
| | [0.003] | [0.024] | [0.006] | [0.000] | [0.038] | [0.013] |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.0001 | -0.081** | -0.079** | -0.006 | -0.103** | -0.099** |
| | (0.017) | (0.034) | (0.035) | (0.023) | (0.045) | (0.045) |
| | [0.994] | [0.017] | [0.027] | [0.810] | [0.017] | [0.030] |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Const. Controls | NO | YES | YES | NO | YES | YES |
| MP Controls | NO | NO | YES | NO | NO | YES |
| N | 941 | 941 | 941 | 662 | 662 | 662 |
| R2 | 0.30 | 0.32 | 0.33 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.29 |

Note: The table reports the results from a linear probability model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) on the sample of all Conservative MPs (panel A) and for the sample of backbench MPs (panel B). The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero when the MP rebelled by voting against. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency; and *FRONTBENCH* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP holds a position in government. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

**Table A3:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement in the three Meaningful Votes combined (Probit coefficients)

| | *Backbencher sample* | | | Full Sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) Probit | (2) Probit | (3) Probit | (4) OLS |
| FRONTBENCH | - | - | - | 0.327*** |
| | | | | (0.035) |
| | | | | [0.000] |
| REMAIN MP | 1.15*** | 1.13*** | 1.24*** | 0.266*** |
| | (0.170) | (0.174) | (0.170) | (0.034) |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.504*** | 0.380** | 0.631*** | 0.127*** |
| | (0.162) | (0.176) | (0.225) | (0.046) |
| | [0.002] | [0.031] | [0.000] | [0.006] |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.007 | -0.451** | -0.498** | -0.079** |
| | (0.083) | (0.0181) | (0.196) | (0.035) |
| | [0.929] | [0.013] | [0.011] | [0.027] |
| Vote Dummies | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Const. Controls | NO | YES | YES | YES |
| MP Controls | NO | NO | YES | YES |
| N | 662 | 662 | 662 | 941 |
| (Pseudo-)R2 | 0.22 | 0.25 | 0.27 | 0.33 |

Note: Columns (1)-(3) report Probit estimates (rather than marginal effects) for the sample of Conservative backbenchers and column (4) reports OLS estimates for the sample of all Conservative MPs. The dependent variable (*VOTE*) is a binary variable equal to 1 whenever an MP voted in support of the Withdrawal Agreement and zero when the MP rebelled by voting against. *REMAIN MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP voted for remaining within the EU in the 2016 referendum; *JUNIOR MP* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP was elected to the House of Commons either in 2015 or 2017; *LEAVE VOTE SHARE* is the standardized share of voters who voted Leave in the referendum in 2016 in each constituency; and *FRONTBENCH* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the MP holds a position in government. All specifications include vote dummies. Constituency controls include population size, the unemployment rate, the share of constituents working in the public sector, the share of constituents with a higher education degree, and the share of constituents who are of working age. MP controls include gender, age, an index of the MP's history of rebellion, and the MP's win margin in the last election. Standard errors (in round brackets) are clustered at the constituency level; p-values are given in [square brackets]; *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

**Table A4:** Breakdown of Meaningful Votes by Party and Government Positions (Alternative Affiliation Definition)

| | First Vote | | | Second Vote | | | Third Vote | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | For | Against | Abstain | For | Against | Abstain | For | Against | Abstain |
| *Panel A - Vote by Party* | | | | | | | | | |
| Conservative | 196 | 118 | 3 | 235 | 75 | 4 | 277 | 34 | 3 |
| Labour | 3 | 248 | 5 | 3 | 238 | 5 | 5 | 234 | 7 |
| LD | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 |
| SNP | 0 | 35 | 0 | 0 | 35 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 1 |
| DUP | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Other | 3 | 10 | 8 | 4 | 22 | 8 | 4 | 21 | 9 |
| *Total* | *202* | *432* | *16* | *242* | *391* | *17* | *286* | *344* | *20* |
| *Panel B - Conservatives by Govt. Position* | | | | | | | | | |
| Frontbench | 93 | 0 | 2 | 93 | 0 | 2 | 93 | 0 | 2 |
| Backbench | 103 | 118 | 1 | 142 | 75 | 2 | 184 | 34 | 1 |
| *Total* | *196* | *118* | *3* | *235* | *75* | *4* | *277* | *34* | *3* |

Note: This table shows the distribution of votes across the three Meaningful Votes taking into account that three Conservative MPs and seven Labour MPs resigned and became independent between the first and the second Meaningful Vote.

**Table A5:** The probability of voting for the Withdrawal Agreement in the three Meaningful Votess separately (alternative affiliation definition)

| *Outcome: VOTE* | (1) 1st Vote | (2) 2nd Vote | (3) 3rd Vote | (4) Pooled | (5) Diff. p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| REMAIN MP | 0.563*** | 0.417*** | 0.166*** | 0.408*** | 0.000 |
| | (0.062) | (0.057) | (0.042) | (0.047) | |
| | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.000] | |
| JUNIOR MP | 0.282** | 0.180** | 0.111** | 0.204*** | 0.075 |
| | (0.109) | (0.086) | (0.047) | (0.067) | |
| | [0.001] | [0.036] | [0.017] | [0.002] | |
| LEAVE VOTE SHARE | -0.203** | -0.136 | -0.113** | -0.164** | 0.216 |
| | (0.103) | (0.087) | (0.051) | (0.067) | |
| | [0.049] | [0.120] | [0.027] | [0.014] | |
| Vote Dummies | NO | NO | NO | YES | - |
| Controls | YES | YES | YES | YES | - |
| N | 221 | 217 | 218 | 656 | - |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.30 | 0.24 | 0.18 | 0.29 | - |

Note: Columns (1) to (3) report the results corresponding to Table 4 on a sample that including only MPs that were officially part of the Conservative party at the time of each vote. This, therefore, takes into account that three Conservative MPs resigned between the first and the second Meaningful Vote (see Table A4. We observe that this makes almost no difference to the results, except in the second Meaningful Vote where LEAVE VOTE SHARE is imprecisely estimated with a p-value of 12 percent. Column (4) reports the results for the combined sample (but in the second and third Meaningful Vote without the three MPs who resigned), corresponding to Table 3, column (3). We see that the results are very similar.