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The Domestic Politics of Brexit: Wedge Issues, Blame Games and the Politics of Intransigence in the UK

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Abstract

Why did Prime Minister Theresa May opt for a divisive approach to secure ratification of her Brexit agreement in the House of Commons? We argue that Brexit constitutes a wedge issue where conflict lines do not coincide with party lines. Therefore, blame in the Commons is attributed not just between government and opposition, but also within the governing party. Due to this intra- partisan blame game, the government has an incentive to employ politics of intransigence. Playing a chicken game with recalcitrant party members, it uses tying hands and brinkmanship tactics. This politics of intransigence brought the Conservative party to a breaking point driving the risk of a political Brexit disaster. Beyond Brexit, our paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of how new social cleavages and the resulting wedge issues translate into political blame games that drive the trend towards politics of intransigence in today's advanced democracies.

Keywords: blame game, Brexit, brinkmanship, chicken game, wedge-issue.