

# Theorizing Public Performances for International Negotiations

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This article theorizes how public performances matter in international negotiations. Studies of international negotiations are predominantly focused on power-political instruments in use around the negotiating table. I argue that public communication cannot be dismissed as cheap talk but that it plays a constitutive role in and on international negotiations. Contributing to the international relations (IR) literature on negotiations, the article suggests an orientation toward an increasingly important aspect of international negotiations in a hypermediated world political context, namely public performances that challenge the distinction between domestic signaling and claim-making toward negotiating parties. Hypermediated negotiations mean that much of what goes on in IR is spread to large audiences in new and emerging digital sites in near real time. Actors use public performances to define and legitimize their desired visions for negotiating outcomes. As public performances, these are power-political instruments in and of themselves, part of the array of tactics that states turn to when competing for influence in international negotiations. The theorization is illustrated with an example from the UK–EU Brexit negotiations. The illustration is a qualitative Twitter analysis that shows the performative toolbox in use, as well as the importance of public performances themselves in the endgame of the Brexit negotiations.

Este artículo teoriza sobre la importancia de las actuaciones públicas en las negociaciones internacionales. Los estudios sobre las negociaciones internacionales se centran predominantemente en los instrumentos de poder-político que se utilizan en la mesa de negociaciones. Sostengo que la comunicación pública no puede ser descartada como palabrería barata, sino que desempeña un papel constitutivo en las negociaciones internacionales. Contribuyendo a la literatura de las RR. II. sobre las negociaciones, el artículo sugiere una orientación hacia un aspecto cada vez más importante de las negociaciones internacionales en un contexto político mundial hipermediado; a saber, las actuaciones públicas que desafían la distinción entre la señalización doméstica y la formulación de reclamaciones hacia las partes negociadoras. Las negociaciones hipermediadas implican que gran parte de lo que ocurre en las relaciones internacionales se difunda a grandes audiencias en sitios digitales nuevos y emergentes casi en tiempo real. Los actores utilizan las actuaciones públicas para definir y legitimar las visiones deseadas para los resultados de las negociaciones. Como actuaciones públicas, son instrumentos de poder político en sí mismos, parte del conjunto de tácticas a las que recurren los Estados cuando compiten por la influencia en las negociaciones internacionales. La teorización se ilustra con un ejemplo de las negociaciones del Brexit entre el Reino Unido y la UE. La ilustración es un análisis cualitativo de Twitter que muestra la caja de herramientas performativas en uso, así como la importancia de las propias actuaciones públicas en el final de las negociaciones del Brexit.

Cet article théorise l'importance des prestations en public dans les négociations internationales. Les études sur les négociations internationales sont principalement axées sur les instruments politiques et de pouvoir qui sont utilisés autour de la table des négociations. Je soutiens que la communication publique ne peut pas être écartée comme étant de la conversation libre car elle joue un rôle constitutif dans et sur les négociations internationales. Cet article contribue à la littérature des RI portant sur les négociations en suggérant une orientation vers un aspect de plus en plus important des négociations internationales dans un contexte politique mondial hypermédiatisé, à savoir les prestations en public qui remettent en question la distinction entre signal national et émission de revendications face aux parties en négociation. Les négociations hypermédiatisées signifient qu'une grande partie de ce qui intervient dans les relations internationales est diffusée à de larges audiences sur des sites numériques nouveaux et émergents en temps quasi réel. Des acteurs ont recours à des prestations en public pour définir et légitimer les visions de résultats de négociations qu'ils souhaitent. Ces prestations en public sont des instruments politiques et de pouvoir en soi faisant partie de l'éventail de tactiques auxquelles les États ont recours lorsqu'ils se concurrencent pour obtenir de l'influence dans les négociations internationales. Cette théorisation est illustrée par un exemple, celui des négociations liées au Brexit entre l'UE et le Royaume-Uni. Cette illustration repose sur une analyse qualitative de Twitter qui montre la boîte à outils performative qui a été utilisée ainsi que l'importance des prestations en public elles-mêmes dans le dénouement des négociations liées au Brexit.

## Introduction

When disagreements reemerged in late 2021 over the Northern Ireland Protocol in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK), the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Simon Coveney, took to Twitter, asking rhetorically whether the United Kingdom wanted an agreed way forward or further breakdown in relations. Coveney's intervention prompted a reply from the UK Minister of State,

David Frost, who noted that he preferred not to do negotiations on Twitter, but that Coveney's first move deserved a reply, a reply that Frost provided in a thread on the social media platform. Contrary to Frost's reluctance, looking closely at social media in the years that the Brexit negotiations have been going on, assuming that states do not negotiate on Twitter becomes less than clear-cut. In that process, central actors were active in using platforms such as Twitter to communicate with both publics and the negotiating parties themselves. Why do international actors take negotiations into the public realm and how do they do it?

In this article, I argue that public communication cannot be dismissed as cheap talk but that it plays a constitutive role

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in and on international negotiations. A substantial body of literature in International Relations (IR) explains processes of international negotiation, but it is generally dismissive of the importance of public communication, rather focusing on behavior and tactics at work in formal processes between negotiating parties (see [Tingley and Walter 2011](#)). I argue that this is due to a delayed response among students of international negotiations to what has become a hypermediated world political context. To this end, the main contribution of the article is to consider public communication as a negotiation tactic in its own right and theorize it as a future-oriented public performance.

The use of public communication in international negotiations is enabled by several factors ([Barberá and Zeitoff 2018](#)). Technological affordances ([Branch 2017](#); [Adler-Nissen and Drieschova 2019](#); [Manor 2019](#)), mediatization ([Pamment 2014](#)), demands for transparency, and increasing politicization are challenging age-old diplomatic principles of silence and sometimes even secrecy ([Leira 2019](#)). This is also manifest in the increasing occurrences of leaks from international negotiations ([Castle and Pelc 2019](#)). Contemporary developments thus challenge the assertion that what goes on around the negotiating table in world politics is axiomatically subject to discretion due to how diplomacy is characterized by “tactful” and “subtle” behavior in order to minimize the effects of friction ([Bull 1977](#), 165). International negotiations no longer unfold around the negotiating table alone but in and through direct communication with publics—domestic and transnational ones. IR scholars need to acknowledge that those communicative acts are power-political instruments that actors apply in negotiations. Furthermore, a main consequence of the increasing use of public communication in hypermediated world politics is that it dissolves the dominant analytical distinction that international negotiations are strict two-level games (cf. [Putnam 1988](#)). This is due to how a message may be aimed at a domestic audience, yet it will necessarily be read and responded to by other negotiating parties. Thus, controlling the receiving end of a public utterance is subject to more complexity than ever.

To accommodate this emergent facet of contemporary international negotiations, the article develops a novel approach to the study of negotiations by theorizing them as relational–processual phenomena where politics struggle to define meaning on the public stage. To use the dramaturgical language developed by [Goffman \(1959, 78\)](#), international negotiations are usually confined to the backstage, leaving concealed the “language of behaviour for occasions when a performance is being presented” to a broader public. By moving front stage, the struggle is played out in and through performing future scenarios or the struggle to define the best possible future scenario through uttering desired outcomes of the negotiations in the public realm. This assertion means that we should be studying public performances as power-political instruments in international negotiations, assuming also that they may exert constitutive influence over negotiation outcomes. Public performances are thus part of a broader toolkit from which actors choose when seeking to reach negotiation ends (see [Goddard, MacDonald, and Nexon 2019](#)). These performances add to already known tactics such as “opening with high demands, refusing to make concessions, exaggerating one’s minimum needs and true priorities, manipulating information to others’ disadvantage,” and so forth ([Walton and McKersie 1965](#), cited in [Odell 2013](#), 381).

The article includes a brief empirical illustration from the Brexit process to demonstrate the salience of its theoretic

cal proposition. Early research on the Brexit negotiations has drawn on established middle-range theories from the bargaining tradition in negotiation studies ([Ott and Ghauri 2019](#); [Martill and Staiger 2020](#)). This literature finds that the United Kingdom’s approach to the negotiations by and large was a failure. Several explanations for that failure are on offer, such as hard bargaining from a weak relative position ([Martill and Staiger 2020](#)), flawed assumptions about the EU ([Figueira and Martill 2021](#)), distributive behavior by the United Kingdom ([Larsén and Khorana 2020](#)), domestic divisions in the United Kingdom ([Jones 2019](#)), and Theresa May’s lack of openness ([Heide and Worthy 2019](#)). The EU’s performance in the negotiations, on the contrary, is generally evaluated in favorable terms, particularly due to the cohesive nature of the bloc’s approach ([Šimunjak and Čaljan-dro 2020](#); [Schuette 2021](#)).

The contribution that this article makes to the Brexit literature is not connected to the parties’ negotiation performance per se, but by mapping the performative aspect of the negotiations and how public performances were used to legitimize the state of play domestically and signal positions toward the other negotiating party. As such, it asks how and with what effects the United Kingdom and EU interacted in a struggle to perform the best possible future not around the negotiating tables in Brussels, London, and in digital diplomacy but in and through public performances in the negotiation of Brexit. As such, the article sheds novel light on Brexit by taking seriously the idea that public pronouncements are part of international negotiations and may even have a productive role in such talks. Consequently, the theorization in the article also provides new methodological entry points for students of international negotiations due to how public performances are readily available as opposed to formal negotiations behind closed doors.

The rest of the article is divided into five parts. The first section relates the contribution to the existing literature on international negotiations. The second section moves on to theorize the performative power politics of international negotiations and how they emerge in and through struggles to define the most salient futures. In order to connect the theoretical considerations to the empirical illustration, the fourth section presents the methods and data used in the empirical illustration. The fifth section contains the empirical illustration of public performances in Brexit, analyzing EU and UK performative agency on Twitter as part of the endgame of the negotiations on the United Kingdom’s Withdrawal Agreement with the EU in 2019. Finally, the article concludes by identifying what the argument promises for international negotiations as well as the broader implications for the study of negotiations in IR, particularly in taking the study of international negotiations out of the negotiating room and into the realm of public performances in a hypermediated world political context.

### Public Communication and International Negotiations

The kind of conflictual cooperation that characterizes international negotiations is much more common than war ([Zartman and Touval 2010](#)), and as a central feature of “complex interdependence,” negotiations have never been more important in world politics ([Butler 2019](#)). The massive field of international negotiation studies ranges from traditional IR approaches to the more specifically geared negotiation analysis and game theory. Following [Odell \(2013, 379\)](#), “negotiation is a sequence of action in which two or more parties address demands, arguments, and proposals to

each other for the ostensible purpose of reaching an agreement.” Despite this broad definition and interest in understanding the production of outcomes in international negotiations, few regard public communication as relevant in and on those outcomes. In order to do so, two limitations in the existing literature need to be addressed.

First, the significance of the mobilization of public communication in a hypermediated world political context must be acknowledged. The fact that politicians, state representatives, and diplomats use public diplomacy to seek influence in world politics is no novelty, but whereas those communicative acts are well studied in IR, they are not properly considered one of the negotiation tactics that states and other polities have at their disposal in international negotiations. Public communication has been considered a separate activity that does not matter for international negotiations (see, e.g., Avenhaus and Zartman 2007; Galluccio 2014). The relative neglect of the use of communication to the public stems from the fact that the analytical confines of negotiation studies are too narrow to grasp the public spectacle that many international negotiations are today, and as such it has been considered cheap talk (Fearon 1995; Ramsay 2011). Conceptualizing international negotiations as something that goes on around the negotiation table alone downplays the power-political instrument that public interventions at certain moments in negotiations are.

Appreciating the significance of public communication in a hypermediated negotiation context also challenges what is both an explicit and an implicit framework for understanding international negotiations, namely Putnam’s (1988) two-level game model. This model continues to provide a way to operationalize how bargaining between government parties (level I bargaining) plays out at the same time as bargaining with domestic constituents (level II bargaining). This dynamic means that ratification of an international agreement needs domestic ratification in order to be accepted, which in turn means that domestic groups would have their preferences reflected in the final agreement (Tarar 2005). Yet, the binary between the two is analytically problematic in the mediated type of contemporary international negotiations, as they are characterized by the lack of clear boundaries between the national and the international audiences (Bjola and Manor 2018). The interplay between domestic politics and international cooperation has been a core focus in IR due partially to the deepening of international institutions as well as to sociological–institutionalist accounts of increasingly global norms (Zürn 2018, 261), but the hypermediation of world politics fundamentally challenges its theoretical premises, accentuating a need to adjust the model accordingly.

Furthermore, “research on two level-games in international negotiations argues that governments can use voters’ preferences as a device to enhance their bargaining power” (De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021, 307). Yet, public communication toward a strictly domestic or international audience is simply not possible in a hypermediated contemporary context. A strong expression of dissatisfaction aimed at a domestic population will necessarily be picked up in the international space, contributing to the “game” at that level, and vice versa. Using public communication to scold or make negotiation claims toward other negotiating parties serves the dual purpose of attempting to secure legitimacy toward a range of actors domestically and internationally, as well as directing pressure toward the formal negotiations. Public communication in negotiation processes is endemic to those processes themselves, made possible by the diffusion of the possibility of playing a strict two-level game.

Bjola and Manor (2018, 29) find that due to this, “governments need to monitor opponents, map their arguments and refute them in near real time.”

Second, when negotiations move to the public realm and the distinction between domestic and international messaging becomes blurred, power not only works as a possession brought to the table but also takes on emergent qualities (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014). Studies on international negotiations more or less take power for granted as a possession that agents apply in negotiations and that is the core determinant of outcomes. In negotiation analysis, power is capability and force (Zartmann and Rubin 2000), or as McKibben (2020, 898) notes when considering the common explanation for negotiation outcomes: “power is a typical answer.”

Negotiation studies have been predominantly occupied with rationalist models from bargaining theory and game theory, where power equates with exercising compulsion (Grobe 2010). These approaches take states as more or less rational units that interact on the basis of equal status (Zartman 2016). Constructivist students of international negotiations have, however, gone some way in opening up to the possibility that power is emergent and subject to negotiation (Checkel 2005; Niemann 2006). As noted by Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, 402) a long time ago, “IR scholars have tended to treat speech either as ‘cheap talk’, to be ignored, or as bargaining, to be folded into strategic interaction.” Yet, as they argue, speech is also social construction at work, “creating new understandings and new social facts that reconfigure politics” (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Constructivist studies of negotiations find “that argumentative persuasion, if successful, leads to a change in agents’ preferences” (Grobe 2010, 6). As Wendt (1999, 134–35) argued, “if interests are made of ideas, then discursive processes of deliberation, learning, and negotiation are potential vehicles of foreign policy and even structural change.” Power as such is assumed to be a product of state interests that are constituted by ideas. Thus, international negotiations are path-dependent processes in which norms, ideas, and identity guide negotiators in the definition of the national interest (Goldstein and Keohane 1993).

This constructivist strand of research studies the effects of Habermasian communicative action and shared norms, yet the literature arguably throws the baby out with the bathwater by neglecting the semiotically related *negotiation of meaning* through which international negotiations unfold and how resources are mobilized and produced in and on the public performances of international negotiation (cf. Müller 2004). Thus, whereas it is widely acknowledged that power is central to producing negotiating outcomes (Kim, Pinkley, and Fragale 2005), power is treated primarily as a predetermined capability in negotiations, a possession that states seek to maximize in order to reach a desired agreement on their terms, rather than as a productive force that plays out and structure processes of international negotiations in and of themselves (see Barnett and Duvall 2005). Taken together, the public spectacle that international negotiations have become in the hypermediated contemporary context illustrates how power is both mobilized and produced, in situations also outside of the negotiation room.

### Public Performances as International Negotiation Tactic

International negotiations are power-political phenomena, where *realpolitik* concerns “the politics of collective mobilization in the context of the struggle for influence among

political communities” (Goddard and Nexon 2016, 5). As repertoires, the relatively stable array of situated, habitual, and taken-for-granted tactics that states apply in international negotiations, interaction between states when negotiating is predisposed both in the structure of world politics and in the emergent productions that bring about change.<sup>1</sup> Thinking in terms of repertoires provides “a methods clue for capturing how actors in global politics perform multiple geopolitical narratives and political practices simultaneously” (Rowe 2020, 4), and it foregrounds performances and strategic improvisation to an extent that posits strategic agency (see also Cornut 2017). The latter point implies “a shift from making assumptions about what counts as power to the examination of the performance of power and what power does in practice” (Rowe 2020, 4). International negotiations are episodes in which agents struggle, applying power-political instruments within their distinct repertoires, in an attempt to yield influence over the other negotiating parties, and thus secure a desired outcome. We may therefore ask how actors “categorize performances, and how does this lead actors to perform and thus manifest or produce the state in *different* ways for different audiences and in different contexts?” (Neumann and Sending 2021, 4).

Goddard, MacDonald, and Nexon (2019) classify statecraft in categories of instruments: military force, economic instruments, diplomatic instruments, and cultural instruments. These are “the range of tools that state leaders can employ to influence others in the international system – to make their friends and enemies behave in ways that they would have otherwise not” (Goddard, MacDonald, and Nexon 2019, 3). Military instruments—the threat to use or actual use of military means—have traditionally been considered an instrument of “supreme importance” in IR (Carr 1946, 109). Although Goddard, MacDonald, and Nexon (2019) offer a useful typology for mapping state repertoires, they underplay an increasingly central power-political instrument in international negotiations, namely the performative aspect of public, representational politics. Contemporary international negotiations are particularly structured by these symbolic instruments, but they have been ignored as irrelevant to understand the outcome of international negotiation processes. Instruments such as sanctions and military means may be mobilized in parallel with negotiations, but there is also a specific set of practices associated with negotiations that begin with spoken words. Particularly, these are publicly made utterances that are bound up by and construct parties’ identities and aim not only to be a conduit of meaning but also to impact on the process and outcome of the negotiations (see Austin 1962; Butler 1997). In these struggles, “the subject emerges with a distinct identity through the performance of available practices” (Neumann and Sending 2021, 2). Performances are public utterances that “do” something in and on international negotiations, both as expressions of potential futures and as representations of historically derived dispositions, or logics (Adler-Nissen, Galpin, and Rosamond 2017; Goddard, MacDonald, and Nexon 2019; Neumann and Sending 2021). As such, performances as productive linguistic interventions aimed at the public eye—in and on negotiations—demand a theoretical innovation that reorients the study of negotiations as well as making them methodologically available.

The mediatization of diplomatic practice is testament to the shifting dynamics that make the public sphere—both

in traditional news media and in social media such as Twitter—of real concern and engagement also in international negotiations (Pamment 2014). Mediatization here refers to the advanced stage of a process in which political actors are governed by a media logic rather than a purely political logic (Strömbäck 2008). Goffman’s dramaturgical model easily translates to account for this development: the mediatization of politics has opened up the field of international negotiations to the frontstage of politics—to the public eye—both in terms of interventions into the public debate that seek to impact on the negotiations and through the ability to offer a “side-stage” view into the negotiations themselves (Goffman 1959; Meyrowitz 1985). Aided by technology, information flows more easily between sites, making the distinction between domestic and international, as well as between public diplomacy and negotiation, increasingly complex (Bjola, Cassidy, and Manor 2019). In hypermediated world politics, “digital diplomacy is simultaneously a front stage (...), a window into a backstage are previously out of public reach, a journal of cumulative record of everyday practices of diplomacy, and a set of tools that facilitate ways of doing diplomacy” (Hedling and Bremberg 2021, 5).

Social media including Twitter enables new forms of political engagement, which was evident for instance when these platforms were used to circumvent government-controlled national media during the Arab Spring (Bosetta, Segesten, and Trenz 2017; Calderaro 2017). Yet, are audiences actively receiving messages from these platforms or is a platform like Twitter primarily used to send signals between negotiation parties? Shehata and Strömbäck (2018) have illustrated that it has a negative effect on the current affairs and news learning when audiences replace traditional news media and online news websites with social media. Boukes (2019), however, finds that Twitter usage has a positive effect on knowledge acquisition for people with both high and low political interest. This is partly due to the political nature of Twitter content, particularly when compared to Facebook (see also Cacciatore et al. 2018). Nonetheless, social media has become a core site for public communication and claim-making among negotiating parties.

Acknowledging the significance of hypermediated global politics also for negotiations, the focus on public performances as power-political instruments is closely related to the practice turn in the humanities and social sciences. Here, international negotiations are treated as an object of analysis in its own right (Goddard, MacDonald, and Nexon 2019, 8–9). IR practice scholarship has focused on how particular practices come to structure world political phenomena (Neumann 2002; Adler and Pouliot 2011). Critics have pointed to the fact that the concept of practice has been applied in elusive ways (Ringmar 2014; Kustermans 2016), that its analytical rope is too tight to explain the normative basis of international negotiations (Ralph and Gifkins 2017), and that studies of practice ignore the centrality of struggles (Martin-Mazé 2017). Leveraging a different, albeit sympathetic critique, I argue that whereas scholars of practice have been explaining world political phenomena describing single practices such as pen-holding (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014) or diplomacy (Pouliot 2016), the added value of turning to public performances in international negotiations adds a broadened perspective on the different tools and tactics that states apply when struggling for influence in world politics.

Public performances as part of actors’ negotiation repertoire offer a productive avenue toward broadening the analytical reach of experience-near IR scholarship in a way that can capture the many different power-political instruments

<sup>1</sup>The conceptual structure around power-political instruments and repertoires draws on the contentious politics literature (Tarrow 2008; Tilly 2008; Lichbach and Zucherman 2009).

that states and politics apply when seeking influence in and through international negotiations. The concept of performance furthermore bridges understandings of practice as linguistic and/or based on everyday doings by social agents (cf. Hansen 2011)—language does things. Finally, practice theories have tended to prefer the unarticulated and tacitly agreed upon engines of world political agency—the logic of practicality (Pouliot 2010)—whereas a focus on repertoires alludes to a much greater degree of strategic state agency. Accommodating this strategic agency for the study of public performances in international negotiations, the following sections add struggles concerning visions for the future as an underlying concern in mediatized public performances.

### *The Temporality of Performance*

Representational practices, tactics, and instruments link up to visions and anticipations of the future—what students of negotiations restrict to outcomes (see Knappe and Schmidt 2021). Adding to the theorization of public performances in and on international negotiations, we can discern a specific struggle through which these performances emerge. The meaning-making struggles in international negotiations—both inside of concrete negotiation situations (e.g., Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014; Pouliot 2016; Adler-Nissen and Drieschova 2019) and in the publicly available political discourses—are bound by time, temporality, and timing. The argument here is that especially the struggle to represent the most salient possible future—visions for the outcome of the negotiations—takes center stage. As such,

Representatives *create* images of the future that stand for certain beliefs, ideas, and *political goals* and use those future representations to push for specific agendas (...). Not only do representative claims about the future often deal with it as a representational subject; they also create, shift, and challenge the political space in which they are acting through these future representations. Through aesthetic representation, representatives make politics, enter into political debates and struggles, and formulate *political goals* and agendas. (Knappe and Schmidt 2021, 5)

This assertion about time is fully compatible with the theoretical premises of public performances. Crucially, agents in international negotiations use timing tactics in order to control the temporal constructs that determine negotiation processes (Hom and Beasley 2021). The representational politics in international negotiations are bound to past practices, habits, and cultural dispositions through cultural distance and cultural proximity. Parties to international negotiations represent a constituency, normally a national population that is defined by its negative definition of self. As such, there is in any international negotiation—of agreed common interest in defining an outcome—an intrinsic politics of difference at work that is tied to the local context from which the parties negotiate and that is tied to past constructions. However, there is also an internationally bound-up culture—with adjoining habits, practices, and competent performances—that structures the dynamics of power politics in international negotiations. The double bind that actors must act within international negotiations, however, is not always easily demarcated.

Again, from a social theoretical point of view, the above reinforces the problematic understanding of international negotiations as two-level games. The double bind is a deeply situated and structuring social fact that is also fluid. It is rather a “two-level language game,” not only in terms of lan-

guage itself but also as a conduit of meaning across different audiences (see Wigen 2015). Sometimes, national culture comes to the surface in international negotiations; sometimes, international culture acts as a base logic—often structured by the foundational practice of international negotiations themselves. Importantly, it is the process and the interaction between the actors as the application of certain power-political instruments comes into play that establishes the episode, yet they can only be ascertained in an ideal-typical fashion. Crucially, whereas agents can select very consciously which futures they mobilize in the performative struggle to define negotiation outcomes (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), they cannot emancipate those performances from the identity consolidating logics embodied in past practices and habits (Svendson 2020).

Furthermore, temporality matters in at least three ways for performances in and on international negotiations. First, embodied time is rhythmic: “rhythm is not only the repetition of the same, but also the emergence of difference within that repetition as each human performance differs in nuanced ways that gradually unfold new practices and understandings” (Solomon and Steele 2017, 278; see also Lefebvre 2013). As such, change is incremental and mobilized in and through minor changes in social rhythm. Second, international negotiations are also structured by time and scarcity of it. Pace can act as a pulling force on parties with an interest in reaching agreement (Ekengren 2010). Bearce, Eldredge, and Jolliff (2015) show, for instance, that finite duration provisions substantially reduce bargaining delay. Thus, negotiating a peace agreement when there is no ceasefire in place adds haste and can be a constructive force for reaching agreement, or it could be detrimental for agents and necessary intercultural understanding (Pinfari 2011). Third, and most importantly, time matters in the sense that international negotiations aim at upending a past/present relationship, making a future that looks different. As such, the future is mobilized by state agents in struggles to define the most salient future scenario, often under diverse cultural situations and time constraints.

Thus, in terms of temporality, episodes of international negotiation are not structured by predisposed understandings of the world and set ways of doing things. The struggle to define the outcomes of the process produces a dynamic in which states and other actors engage in future-oriented performances—strictly scripted imaginaries and representations of potential futures that can be dystopian or utopian, but that in any sense are tactical mobilizations to give credit or discredit to particular possible futures, making desired outcomes more salient. Actors have perceived interests that can be tacit or explicit, shared or individual, and the struggle to represent salient futures in the public realm becomes power-political instruments in the negotiation process, both for the purpose of domestic legitimation and claim-making toward other negotiation parties. This is tied to expectations; in the words of Koselleck (2004, 259), it concerns “the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet, to the nonexperienced, to that which is to be revealed. Hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive display and curiosity: all enter into expectation and constitute it.”

To be sure, a relational-processual approach to the temporal aspects of international negotiations does not aim to explain the future as such. In the social sciences, prediction remains controversial despite some evidence of an increasing tendency toward prediction in IR (Bernstein et al. 2000). The future is mobilized in public debates as states seek to wield influence in international negotiations. As such, we

can meaningfully approach the future as a social force with causal influence even though we cannot know the future as such (Berenskoetter 2011). Representing future scenarios in and through public performances becomes part of the repertoire of power-political instruments that states apply in international negotiations, as agents deliberately make use of the hypermediated condition of world politics, expanding the domain of negotiation to the domestic, international, and transnational public sphere, imbued in transversality (Hoffmann 2021).

### Methods, Data, and Twitter

Whereas the main aim of the article is theory development, some words should be said about methods and data, particularly the suitability of Brexit as an illustration and the use of Twitter in the analysis. Brexit provides an appropriate illustration of the salience of the theoretical proposition that public performances are more than cheap talk in international negotiations. As an illustrative example of an international negotiation playing out as a public spectacle, Brexit can help shed light on how public performances are used actively by central negotiators as part of international negotiations. Admittedly, due to the specificities of Brexit and the interpretive mode of research, it is not possible to generalize *stricto sensu* from the empirical illustration. The Brexit process was characterized by massive public interest, which other negotiations might not. As such, the public spectacle surrounding Brexit can be explained partly not only by the hypermediation of politics but also by the very political importance of the United Kingdom's exit from the EU and the vast public interest in it. However still, the general theoretical proposition and the findings from the illustration can be used to draw analytical generalizations and thus should be transferable to other instances of international negotiations, if the theory proves useful "in making sense of the messy array of practices" of which public performances are part (Pouliot 2014, 239; see also Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014, 896–97).

The empirical illustration is a qualitative Twitter analysis relying on tweets from the central actors involved in the Brexit negotiations. Any study of public performances in international negotiations must select certain "sites" to look at (Bueger 2014). For the performative aspect of Brexit, Twitter is the most obvious place to start.<sup>2</sup> As is argued herein, Duncombe (2019, 425) finds that "technological shifts in temporality and functionality of communication have shaped politics so fundamentally," which has "had an effect of how easily states can control and legitimize their political messages." Twitter remains the most popular social media platform in politics, and it is also the most appropriate place to study how the hypermediation of politics affects international negotiations. Whereas tools such as press releases, websites, op-eds, and adverts serve the same purpose, the use of social media and Twitter has become a primary platform for communication with public audiences (Golan and Viatchaninova 2014; see also Simunjak and Caliandro 2020, 441). Furthermore, Twitter was only a "node on a network of fields sites" in the Brexit negotiations, but it is still the most apt social media outlet from which one can qualitatively "observe interactions between people over a period of time" (Marwick 2013, 116).

<sup>2</sup>There are already studies of Brexit that look to Twitter. For instance, Llewellyn et al. (2019) used Twitter to study troll behavior in the Brexit process, and Simunjak and Caliandro (2020) investigated how a disciplined social media usage by the EU 27 contributed to upholding the EU's unity in the negotiations.

Considering how tweets in the Brexit process concerned a struggle to give meaning and future direction to the EU-UK relationship, as well as signaling to domestic audiences and negotiating counterparts alike, a reading of tweets from the central actors in the process warrants not a large-*n* study, but selecting a "relatively small sample of tweets to analyse". (Marwick 2013, 118).<sup>3</sup> The following analysis is based on a sampling of all tweets (*n* = 125) from Boris Johnson (*n* = 65), Stephen Barclay (*n* = 29), Michel Barnier (*n* = 8), and Donald Tusk (*n* = 23) in the period between October 1 and 18, 2019.<sup>4</sup> This period was the endgame of the Johnson government's attempt to renegotiate Theresa May's withdrawal agreement, especially the protocol on the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland that May had negotiated but failed to get ratified in the House of Commons. During this time, there were major Brexit-related troubles in UK politics, due to Johnson's attempted prorogation of the British Parliament that was intended to last until mid-October, the government's insistence on leaving the EU with or without a deal at the end of the month, and calls for a general election. The analysis presents the data chronologically, illustrating how the theorization of public performances can shed new analytical light on that process.

The main methodological benefit of studying public performances in international negotiations is that they are readily available, constantly emerging also from ongoing negotiations as they are aimed at the broader public. Yet, recalling that the theoretical section discerned a specific meaning-making struggle over performing future scenarios, the analytical strategy involves reading claim-making in and through anticipations of the future in the data material. Thus, whereas there is no settled way in which scholars should "read" qualitative data (see, e.g., Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014), the methodological implication of the theoretical propositions in this case means reading public performances in international negotiations through how actors attempt to construct a salient future or question and criticize others' representations of future scenarios.

### Hypermediated Brexit Negotiations on Twitter

The ever-present dissatisfaction in the United Kingdom with European integration, and the notion of "ever closer union" in the EU treaties especially, eventually led to a referendum on June 23, 2016, in which the UK electorate voted by a small margin (52 percent to leave and 48 percent to remain) to leave the EU. The Brexit negotiations that followed provide a recent and archetypical example of the significance of public performances in and on international negotiations. Here, "understanding Brexit as performative" (...) "assumes that the very language of Brexit does something politically" (Adler-Nissen, Galpin, and Rosamond 2017, 575), and the negotiations were subject to vast public interest and attention. This also meant that the language of Brexit was a very publicly visible language, and the negotiation of its meaning was a public endeavor that involved both the negotiating actors themselves and the domestic audiences. As a first of its kind in the EU,<sup>5</sup> the formal process was designed in accordance with the procedures set out in Article 50 of the

<sup>3</sup>Even though Twitter provides opportunities for big data studies, the performative aspect of tweeting desired future scenarios in and on the negotiations can be read in a close reading of texts associated with some of the central agents in the negotiations. For an analysis and overview of the possibilities of large-*n* studies of Brexit on Twitter—especially related to audience involvement and the broader debate—see del Gobbo et al. (2021).

<sup>4</sup>Twitter search caption: (from:BorisJohnson OR from:SteveBarclay OR from:MichelBarnier OR from:eucopresident) until:2019-10-18 since:2019-10-01.

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.<sup>6</sup> The EU quickly tasked the European Commission with the lead in the negotiations, including naming the French center-right politician Michel Barnier the bloc's chief negotiator, supported by the establishment of a task force, EU TF50. The United Kingdom established a new government department, the Department for Exiting the EU (DexEU), led by David Davis, Dominic Raab, and finally Stephen Barclay in the course of the negotiations (see Schnapper 2020). Crucially, the negotiations had a set deadline, as the time to negotiate a divorce agreement was set to two years after the leaving state had notified the EU of its intention to leave. As Theresa May's government submitted the notification to European Council President Donald Tusk on March 29, 2017, the negotiations were initially supposed to lead to a March 29, 2019, withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, but the negotiations and particularly difficulties in the ratification process in the United Kingdom led to delays. This was due especially to the fact that the UK Supreme Court decided that the constitutional requirements in the United Kingdom would include Parliament approval—a meaningful vote—on the Withdrawal Agreement. Therefore, the May government faced serious domestic obstacles to oversee a UK ratification of the negotiated agreement. In accordance with delay provisions in Article 50, the United Kingdom eventually left the EU on January 31, 2020.

Both the United Kingdom and the EU respected the procedural rules set out in Article 50 and the agreed terms of reference. In the latter, under the heading of “public messaging,” it was agreed that “where possible, both Parties will seek to agree public statements relating to negotiating rounds” (European Commission 2017). Yet, of course, much more was uttered publicly. Studies of the performative and discursive elements of the Brexit process have focused primarily on national politics rather than the power politics of the negotiations themselves (Jensen and Kelstrup 2019; Koller, Kopf, and Miglbauer 2019). The dominant narrative is that the EU appeared well organized and consistent, whereas the United Kingdom stumbled into the negotiations on the basis of Theresa May's tautological assertion that “Brexit means Brexit.”

Already during the course of 2017, the parties' main negotiation terms had been published and communicated to the negotiating parties and the public (Fabbrini 2019, 4n10). These were defining for the visions for the future, or desired negotiation outcomes of the parties. The United Kingdom's position was defined as follows:

The United Kingdom will be a fully independent, sovereign country, free to make our own decisions on a whole host of different issues such as how we choose to control immigration. But we still want to trade freely – in goods and services – with Europe. (May 2016)

Publishing its own position, the EU emphasized:

that any agreement with the United Kingdom will have to be based on a balance of rights and obligations, and ensure a level playing field. Preserving the integrity of the Single Market excludes participation based on a sector-by-sector approach. A non-member of the Union, that does not live up to the same obligations as a member, cannot have the same rights and

enjoy the same benefits as a member. In this context, the European Council welcomes the recognition by the British Government that the four freedoms of the Single Market are indivisible and that there can be no “cherry picking”. The Union will preserve its autonomy as regards its decision-making as well as the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union. (European Council 2017)

Yet, these official baselines were used, represented, and given meaning in public communications during the negotiations. Whereas the positions expressed desirable futures, they were also demarcated by differences relating to historically and culturally situated dispositions that undergird any public negotiation performance. In the UK case, the traces of its imperial legacy were evident (Beaumont 2017) and the EU drew on its established repertoire of principal institutionalized bureaucracy, clearly signaling that there are certain privileges that are reserved for full members of the union only.

*Transcending the Domestic–International Binary: Getting Brexit Done and Pushing the Opposition*

In the beginning of October 2019, Boris Johnson was busy taking part in the Conservative Party Convention under his initial premiership slogan #GetBrexitDone. This was also the endgame of the negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement. Whatever national policy priority Johnson mentioned, he connected its success discursively to the need to leave the EU by the current exit date, October 31, 2019: “I want to #GetBrexitDone so we can lead this country forward and invest in our NHS, schools & police” (Johnson [@Boris Johnson] 2019a). Johnson's government was rhetorically trapped to the simple tenet of “getting it done,” which grasped the feeling of many Britons after years of uncertainty and contention over Brexit. This vision of getting it done was paired with a clear use of the finite duration provisions in the negotiations to publicly accuse the EU of being the laggard responsible for the lack of an agreement. Thus, the positive vision for exiting in the near future not only signaled a determination to “deliver” to a domestic audience but also worked to put pressure on Brussels to finish according to the set deadline.

In connection with the Conservative Party Convention, Johnson used Twitter on several occasions to emphasize how success in pressing domestic policy issues was contingent on delivering on his promises regarding Brexit, at the time with or without a deal, as the discourse went. Following the Prime Minister (PM)'s address to the convention, Brexit secretary Steve Barclay posted a video assessing the speech, accompanied with a text stating that Johnson had a clear vision in his speech and reiterating the main message: “Let's #GetBrexitDone and focus on the priorities of record investment in our NHS, 20,000 extra police officers and levelling up across the UK” (Barclay [@SteveBarclay] 2019a). Aimed at a domestic audience tired of the lengthy negotiations, these performances drew on public sentiment in the United Kingdom, but they also signaled to Europe and the EU a continuing stance that the United Kingdom would leave the EU on the set date, a deal being the basis of it or not. As such, Brexit itself promised a better future, “not just because we have such an immense agenda to take this country forward – but Brexit is an opportunity in itself” (Johnson [@Boris Johnson] 2019b). Discursively combining the vision of a positive future with success in leaving the EU according to the plan sought to legitimize the state of play at home and abroad.

<sup>5</sup> Greenland left the European Communities (EC) in the 1980s, but that process was not remotely comparable to the UK exit, also because it remained an overseas territory due to its postcolonial constitutional ties to Denmark.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent discussion of the Article 50 Treaty provisions and the stages in the withdrawal process, see Craig (2017).

These messages thus played into the domestic legitimization game by tying more or less *any* agreement to success for the government's domestic agenda, while at the same time putting pressure on the EU to agree to a deal without further delay in the negotiations.

*Publicly Scolding the Negotiating Approach of the "Other": UK–EU Blame Game toward the Finish Line*

The substance of the proposed agreement was communicated to the public and TF50 on the same day as the PM's address. Johnson sent a letter to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker titled "A fair and reasonable compromise: UK proposals for a new protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland." Both Johnson and Barclay posted the texts in full on Twitter. Johnson labeled the suggested compromise "fair" and "reasonable" (Johnson [ @Boris Johnson ] 2019c), whereas Barclay wrote that the PM had "put serious & workable proposals for the Irish border to the EU" that were "a fair and reasonable compromise for all sides that respects the referendum" (Barclay [ @SteveBarclay ] 2019b). As such, the UK government used their perceived momentum from the Conservative Party Convention to put public pressure on the EU to accept their vision for the endgame and revised protocol in the eventual agreement. Steve Barclay also tweeted advertisements for the Brexit readiness workshops—similar to what the Commission had already been doing for some time—in case of a no-deal scenario. The meaning of these workshops was well established also in the EU, as a speech act making the undesired no-deal scenario come into being, and it illustrates the performative effect of their advertising. Through these events, the United Kingdom sought to leverage a firm grip on the process, pressuring the EU to accept its visions for the near and more distant future.

Johnson and Barclay reiterated in several tweets the "serious," "reasonable," "realistic," and "workable" nature of their proposal. Johnson tweeted assertively, introducing also a new hashtag to the twitter representation game: "New deal or no deal - but no delay. #GetBrexitDone #LeaveOct31" (Johnson [ @Boris Johnson ] 2019d), and later: "On October 31st we are going to #GetBrexitDone" (Johnson [ @Boris Johnson ] 2019e). As the dust settled on the Tory Party Convention, the EU's negotiation leader Michel Barnier responded:

I updated @Europarl\_EN & EU27 on #UK's proposals. EU wants a Withdrawal Agreement w/ workable and effective solutions that create legal and practical certainty now. We owe this to peace & stability on the island of Ireland. We must protect consumers & businesses in the EU market. (Barnier [ @MichelBarnier ] 2019a)

Whereas the TF50 leader took a more balanced view in responding to the United Kingdom's very public move in light of the proposed agreement, Commission President Tusk was blunter. He responded to the United Kingdom's request for a new protocol on the Irish border that "Today I had two phone calls on #Brexit, first with Dublin then with London. My message to Taoiseach @LeoVaradkar: We stand fully behind Ireland. My message to PM @BorisJohnson: We remain open but still unconvinced" (Tusk [ @eucopresident ] 2019a). This was the first attempt to put into question whether the future arrangements envisioned by the Johnson government were in fact interpreted in Brussels as reasonable or realistic. These public performances were part of

a struggle to define the appropriate way ahead, seeking to legitimize their respective visions for the future.

Following this, the tone soured even more on Tusk's side. Repeating the "Deal or no deal – but no delay," Johnson (Johnson [ @Boris Johnson ] 2019f) on October 8 prompted another reply from the Commission President. Tagging @BorisJohnson, he tweeted that "what's at stake is not winning some stupid blame game. At stake is the future of Europe and the UK as well as the security and interests of our people. You don't want a deal, you don't want an extension, you don't want to revoke, quo vadis?" (Tusk [ @eucopresident ] 2019b). This performative move was an attempt to put into question whether the United Kingdom had a vision for the future or not, and despite the United Kingdom's insistence that it had proposed realistic visions, Tusk wondered if they had one at all. Thus, the actors did not only perform competing visions for the future as a tactic but also communicated publicly to signal the extent to which the other could concretize a vision for the future at all. This is illustrative of how the struggle to define and legitimize an appropriate vision for the future is so central to contemporary instances of hypermediated international negotiations.

Around the same days, Michel Barnier tweeted about good meetings with EU ministers and Ireland in efforts to find a workable and sustainable deal that would protect peace and stability on the island of Ireland (Barnier [ @MichelBarnier ] 2019b,2019c). In general, the TF50 negotiation leader had a less confrontational agency on Twitter than did Tusk. Steve Barclay posted a video with a positive spin on the opportunities associated with "getting Brexit done," accompanied by the text "We've put forward serious proposals and have been willing to be flexible. Now it's time for the EU to do the same" (Barclay [ @SteveBarclay ] 2019c). Tusk, remaining unconvinced, tweeted that "the UK has still not come forward with a workable, realistic proposal. But I have received promising signals from Taoiseach @LeoVaradkar that a deal is possible. Even the slightest chance must be used. A no deal #Brexit will never be the choice of the EU" (Tusk [ @eucopresident ] 2019b). Thus, Barclay and Tusk's public performances communicated that securing an orderly future, a "hard Brexit" including a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland that had become the main benchmark for failed negotiations, was in the hands of the other party.

*Scarcity of Time, Agreement, and Performative Struggles to Legitimize Outcomes*

Barnier later tweeted that "we are not there in #Brexit talks. (...) We will remain calm, constructive, respectful. We need real, credible solutions for the island of Ireland. Finding an agreement is difficult, but still possible (Barnier [ @MichelBarnier ] 2019d). This sobering expression of time trouble alluded to the way in which haste should limit bargaining delay, and a de-escalation of political tensions. Steve Barclay posted a picture from a meeting with the Italian Europe Minister emphasizing that the United Kingdom has shown flexibility, this time asking that the European Commission do likewise (Barclay [ @SteveBarclay ] 2019d). Barnier tweeted on October 11 that "We are intensifying technical discussions with #UK over the coming days, in a constructive spirit. (...) The EU will do everything it can for an agreement, fully in line with our principles" (Barnier [ @MichelBarnier ] 2019e). The tweet ended with an emoji of a mountain. Barclay posted a similar tweet, telling of a constructive meeting with Michel Barnier. In general, as the European Council was approaching, the confrontational



tone became less evident. And as the temporal structure of the negotiations increased the severity of delay, both parties limited public performances that presented broader visions for the future, focusing instead on the need for successful agency within a very short time frame.

Boris Johnson's tweets, however, continued to link success in national political priorities, for example, "safer streets, better hospitals and improved schools" (Johnson [@Boris Johnson] 2019g) to "getting Brexit done," or to a future where the United Kingdom would be leaving the EU on October 31, 2019. Between October 8 and 16, 2019, the UK Parliament was under prorogation. This second and highly contentious closing of Parliament was deemed one of the Johnson government's many tactics to push through with Brexit on October 31, no matter the outcome of the endgame negotiations. On the day before the EU Council preparation meeting, Johnson tweeted, again reiterating the message that promised a simple message to his constituents and signaled discontent toward the EU, "Let's #GetBrexitDone and take Britain forward" (Johnson [@Boris Johnson] 2019h). Certainly, domestic legitimization was a necessity for the UK government and arguably never as troubling for the EU. On this basis, it is also worth noting that some of the Brexit messaging on the UK side was primarily aimed at domestic political consumption. Indeed, the need to "take the fight to the EU" was important to uphold the UK's Brexit narrative, and as such a lot of energy was spent on domestic signaling. It is also a plausible assumption that the EU actors were able to filter out messaging that was meant for a domestic audience. This was evident with the relative silence from the EU side when the Conservative convention took place, but at the same time those narratives and visions for the future were necessarily carried into subsequent exchanges of public performances and responses.

On October 15, Barnier and Barclay both tweeted in a positive spirit from the General Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg that prepared the all-important EU Council meeting to be held on October 17–18. Barclay emphasized that "detailed conversations are underway and a deal is still very possible" (Barclay [@SteveBarclay] 2019e), also mentioning in three tweets constructive talks with several European ministers. Barnier wrote that "talks are difficult but I believe an agreement is still possible" (Barnier [@MichelBarnier] 2019f). On the day before the EU Council meeting, Johnson posted several tweets about how his government would invest in the National Health Service (NHS) as soon as the United Kingdom had left the union, with abundant use of the hashtags #GetBrexitDone and #LeaveOct31st. The latter tweet was clearly meant for domestic consumption, but in combination they showed how public performances played the two-level game simultaneously. Whether the positive spirit emerged in the negotiation room or in public performances is unknown—ontologically speaking, it should be considered co-constitutive—but the public performances themselves aimed to legitimize the agreement that was about to be reached, albeit in some contrast and toward different audiences.

Following the agreement and among the four Twitter accounts analyzed here, Boris Johnson was first to announce that a deal had been struck: "We've got a great new deal that takes back control – now Parliament should get Brexit done on Saturday so we can move on to other priorities like the cost of living, the NHS, violent crime and our environment #GetBrexitDone #TakeBackControl" (Johnson [@Boris Johnson] 2019i). Following this tweet, Johnson posted a long thread promoting his version of the agreement he had made with the EU:

This new deal ensures that we #TakeBackControl of our laws, borders, money and trade without disruption & establishes a new relationship with the EU based on free trade and friendly cooperation (...) This is a deal which allows us to get Brexit done and leave the EU in two weeks' time, so we can then focus on the people's priorities and bring the country back together again (...) Under the previous negotiation, Brussels maintained ultimate control and could have forced Britain to accept EU laws and taxes for ever (...) Let's #GetBrexit done and lead this country forward. (Johnson [@Boris Johnson] 2019j)

Johnson now sought to legitimize his approach to leaving the EU on October 31, 2019, domestically by assuming it pivotal to deliver on national political priorities, while now threatening not the EU, but domestic actors with a no-deal scenario that most were hoping to avoid. Yet, the focus clearly shifted to the domestic audience, as the ratification of the agreement would be contingent on parliament support. Thus, Johnson reintroduced a bleak image of past life under EU membership and provided instead a positive vision for the future for the United Kingdom should his agreed settlement with the EU be accepted in Westminster.

This brief illustration is merely a snapshot of a particular moment in the contentious politics of Brexit, developing on one public and digital site, namely Twitter. Yet, it illustrates well how public pronouncements on the platform were used as a negotiating tactic, placing pressure on counterparts through positive self-identification and yielding responsibility toward the other party to succeed amid the finite duration provisions. In so doing, it was not so much the substance of the agreement that took center stage on Twitter, but the yielding of responsibility for the process to the other party and the purpose of envisioning a desired future toward domestic and international audiences. Especially, the illustration shows how Johnson in particular used this public space to define the meaning of Brexit to his constituent domestic population and his negotiating counterparts simultaneously, performatively breaking down the distinction between two-level game negotiations. In so doing, the performative agency of public communication in the negotiations was also a negotiation structured by the domestic sources of negotiating power.

In hindsight, it can be questioned how much space there actually was for outcomes that would depart from the one that was eventually agreed upon. This also raised the question of the fundamental role of public performances as a legitimizing device for international actors when engaging in negotiations. The EU presented (and ruled out) the concrete options, including the United Kingdom's red lines, already in 2017 (European Commission 2017). Despite how the "no-deal" scenario was used to present visions for a future that no one involved closely in the negotiations really wanted, and the possible deals that could be made were limited, the process was difficult and lengthy. Thus, we might propagate that much of the negotiations in fact was as much of a reputation game as it was a formal negotiation to produce some outcome over others. Getting to this realization is contingent on considering the impact that hypermediation has on international negotiations, and politics in general. The fact that Boris Johnson's government accepted the revised Northern Ireland protocol illustrates how far also London was willing to go to secure a result, but at the same time playing a public blame game that made the agreement feasible in the United Kingdom's domestic context, constantly

signaling discontent with the EU as a necessary consequence due to the hypermediation of politics.

### Conclusion

The current era is hypermediated, meaning that much of what goes on also in world politics is spread to large audiences on new and emerging digital sites in real time. This has substantial consequences also for how international negotiations are conducted, and the article has theorized how public performances work in international negotiations. Shifting the theoretical focus in studies of international negotiations to the mediatised public sphere reveals how future-oriented public performances complement the set of power-political instruments that states and other actors turn to when seeking influence in negotiations. Because performances are not merely expressions of words but convey meaning and “do” things in and on the material world, they should also inform the study of international negotiations. Actors use public performative tactics in international negotiations so that they produce independent constitutive influence on them, and they do so by struggling to define and legitimize desired outcomes of the negotiations.

The exceptionally public Brexit process and top-level politicians’ and negotiators’ presence on Twitter have been used to illustrate the salience of the theoretical proposition about public performances. The framework was used to show how even the most central politicians and negotiators used public communication to legitimize the state of play in the negotiations to a broad audience as well as signaling and communicating with the other negotiating parties. Despite some clear attempts at domestic legitimation, especially from the UK side, tweets were picked up and responded to by negotiating actors, as competing visions for the future at times clashed. The Brexit process provided a clear example of how public communication, especially on Twitter, was used to simultaneously legitimize the state of play in the negotiations domestically and signal claims to the other negotiating party, and how they work in tandem.

However, as hypermediated politics is a general phenomenon in world politics, the use of public performances as a tactic in international negotiations extends beyond the Brexit case. We saw it in the endgame of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear deal—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—in 2015 when actors such as Ayatollah Khamenei and Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif made public statements about the process of lifting sanctions on banking and oil as well as not granting observers access to military facilities that Iran’s own negotiation team allegedly had not agreed to (Tabatabai and Pease 2019, 41). Observers can follow international climate conferences live, as civil society actors, civil servants, and world leaders alike send out a constant stream of signals on the state of play (Hopke and Hestres 2018). This article offers an operationalizable framework that identifies the significance of public performances for international negotiations. Future studies could expand this framework with insights from a range of different negotiations, also addressing the extent to which these performances matter across types of negotiations, and the impact of hypermediation upon them. Furthermore, studies should inquire into the interaction between what goes on around the negotiation table and public performances as instruments in and of themselves. When do they intersect, how do they intersect, and when do they work independently from each other? Also, to what extent can certain actors control the audience of public performances so that what is meant for domestic consumption reaches primarily a domestic audience and vice versa?

The article also makes a larger contribution to the field. It contributes to negotiation studies by moving away from the assertion that public pronouncements are cheap talk, instead appreciating them as a negotiation tactic in its own right. Consequentially, this enables students of international negotiations to explore the dynamics of contemporary negotiations in new sites, using new methods and techniques in so doing. Furthermore, hypermediated politics challenges the basic premise of two-level games, exposing the complexity of moving between those levels and controlling audiences and message reception. Due to the impossibility of strictly dual track processes, states and other actors abandon it, instead actively using public communication tactically at both levels simultaneously. The concept of public performance helps ground how such public communication works performatively in and on international negotiations. Finally, theorizing public performances for international negotiations in a hypermediated world political context speaks to the broader way in which politics fundamentally works, including how and where actors communicate and engage in claim-making and with what effects they do it.

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