

Responding to Non-Cooperation in International Relations

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Responding to non-cooperative behavior – including non-compliance with international law, exit threats, and outright aggression – is a central challenge of our time. We conceptualize this challenge as a dilemma: On one hand, accommodating non-cooperative behavior preserves cooperation, but risks encouraging further non-cooperation. On the other, non-accommodation punishes and deters such behavior, but often at a significant cost. This special issue introduction develops the “Accommodation Dilemma Framework”, a theoretical approach to explaining why and how various actors navigate these trade-offs. Non-cooperative behavior takes many forms, and we apply this framework across multiple issue areas, including aid and development, environmental governance, human rights, trade and investment, and nuclear nonproliferation. We also examine the responses of a wide range of actors. Taken together, this collection of articles shows that the Accommodation Dilemma Framework offers a unified and versatile framework for studying responses to non-cooperation in international relations.

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Responding to non-cooperative behavior in international relations is a fundamental challenge of our time. Non-compliance, norm violations, withdrawal from international organizations (IOs), outright violence and military aggression all confront the international community with the question of how to respond to non-cooperative behavior (Fearon 1998). The stakes are often high, as important cooperation gains, such as security, human rights and economic stability, may be jeopardized in the process. Research has shown that responses to non-cooperation vary widely across governments, IOs, and individuals.²

Across different strands of International Relations (IR) literature, scholars have generated important insights into the forms, drivers, and consequences of such variation. For example, work on sanctions has explored how states and IOs deploy economic and political coercion to deter or punish unwanted behavior (Drezner 1999; Kim and Margalit 2021; Grossman et al. 2018; Whang et al. 2013). Research on non-compliance demonstrates that violations of international rules and norms can trigger very different reactions, ranging from inaction over rhetorical “naming and shaming” to material punishment for defecting states (T. A. Börzel 2001; Dai 2005; Girod and Tobin 2016; Allen and Bell 2022). And research on citizens and elites shows that individuals tend to hold clear ideas about how their governments should respond to non-cooperative actions.³ Yet this work remains fragmented across IR subfields and issue areas, limiting the cumulative knowledge that could be generated by systematically integrating findings across studies of responses to non-cooperative behavior.

This special issue therefore proposes a theoretical framework – the “Accommodation Dilemma Framework” (ADF) – which offers a common terminology and an integrated framework for analysis of responses to non-cooperation and can be applied across different

² On governments, see e.g. Fearon 1998; Drezner 1999; Kelley 2007; Hensel 2001; Von Soest and Wahman 2015; Carter 2015; Walter and Plotke-Scherly 2025). On IOs, see e.g. Lipsy 2017; Hirschmann 2021; Heinkelmann-Wild and Jankauskas 2022; Dijkstra, Allwörden, et al. 2025. On individuals, see e.g. Chilton et al. 2020a; Walter 2021c; Jurado et al. 2022; Steinberg and Tan 2023.

³ On citizens, see Hobolt et al. 2021; Malet and Walter 2023; Walter 2021a, on elites, see Hunter 2024; van Kessel et al. 2020; Carnegie and Carson 2019.

types of actors and issue areas. The ADF argues that when actors such as national governments, IOs, and individuals, perceive behavior as non-cooperative, in the sense of reducing their own actual or potential gains or goals (cf. Milner 1992), they need to decide how to respond. Such responses to non-cooperation can be located on a continuum ranging from accommodation to non-accommodation. Choosing between different responses can be difficult, because each carries costs and risks, and thus a fundamental dilemma: On the one hand, a harsh, punitive response (i.e., non-accommodation) puts existing or potential cooperation benefits at risk. On the other hand, accommodating violators may encourage more such behavior in the future.

The ADF posits that this dilemma varies by the nature of non-cooperation—for example whether the behavior is seen as intentional or not; whether it is perceived to be within or outside existing international rules and norms; to what extent it is visible; and to what degree it causes costs for the other party. The framework predicts that responding actors weigh the risks of accommodation against those of non-accommodation and select their response accordingly. They are likely to accommodate non-cooperative behavior when substantial cooperation gains are at stake, and are more likely to resist when contagion risks are significant. The choice is hardest when both risks are large. In such situations, how actors choose to respond depends on context-specific factors that shape how they weigh cooperation gains against contagion risks.

This introduction first develops the key concepts and causal mechanism at the core of the ADF. It then discusses how the individual contributions in this special issue apply, probe, test, and extend this framework. The contributions demonstrate the usefulness of the framework by using it fruitfully to explore responses to non-cooperation across a multitude of issue areas, including aid and development, environmental governance, human rights, trade and investment, and nuclear nonproliferation. They also showcase how the ADF provides a common terminology to speak about similar processes across different types of actors and issue areas. Taken together, this special issue demonstrates that the ADF provides a versatile and powerful

lens for analyzing responses to non-cooperation in international relations in a manner that allows for cumulative research across issue areas.

Responding to Non-Cooperation: Accommodation and Non-accommodation

Building on research that theorizes responses to IO exit and other forms of non-cooperation within IOs (Walter 2021c; Jurado et al. 2022; Walter and Plotke-Scherly 2025), we develop the ADF as a broad theoretical approach for the systematic study of how various actors respond when another state's non-cooperative behavior forces them to decide whether and how to react. While a range of actors can engage in non-cooperation, including individuals, networks, private firms, and hybrid governance arrangements, states are central in international relations and thus our main interest. Non-cooperation refers to behavior that reduces the actual or potential gains available to others or impedes their goals. This broad definition, inspired by Helen Milner (1992, 468),⁴ can be applied to the study of non-cooperative behavior across different issue areas. It includes a broad range of behaviors, including failure to comply with rules to which they previously agreed (Simmons 2010; Börzel 2022), foreign policies that weaken international institutions (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Voeten 2020; Kelemen 2025; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2025; Schmidt 2025), and outright violence and war directed against other countries (e.g., Waltz 1959; Gilpin 1981; Mearsheimer 2001; Slantchev 2011; Braumoeller 2019). This definition thus includes behavior that other parties will identify as illegitimate non-cooperation, but also behavior that is conventionally viewed as a part of regular politics, despite the negative consequences for the other party.

⁴ Whereas many IR studies implicitly treat non-cooperation as absence of cooperation (e.g. Oye 1986; Martin 1994), Milner (1992, 468) defines non-cooperation explicitly as “goal-seeking behavior that strives to reduce the gains available to others or to impede their want satisfaction” as well as “behavior that does not reduce the negative consequences of others of each party’s policies”.

This exposes an ‘eye of the beholder’ problem. For example, policy shifts in the direction of one state’s preferences without consideration of losses for another state may be perceived by some as legitimate politics yet as non-cooperation by others. What counts as non-cooperative behavior (or who started behaving non-cooperatively) can thus be contested (Parizek et al. this issue, Schmidt, this issue), especially in today’s politicized (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; De Vries et al. 2021; de Wilde and Zürn 2012), and contested (Morse and Keohane 2014; Börzel and Zürn 2021; Hooghe et al. 2019) global governance landscape.

Whether states see a need to respond to non-cooperation, and how they respond, varies with the characteristics of the non-cooperative behavior in question, such as intentionality, rule or norm alignment, visibility, and cost size. Intentionality refers to whether the non-cooperative behavior is purposeful or not. For example, studies of non-compliance show that non-cooperation can emerge involuntarily from issues such as ambiguous legal formulations or a limited administrative capacity to comply (Heinzel 2026). Other non-cooperative behavior is intentional, such as the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Qian et al. 2026). Non-cooperation can also occur within or outside existing rules or norms. For example, governments are usually within their legal rights to exit an IO or to renegotiate better terms (Castle 2026). Other behaviors clearly violate international norms, ranging from small breaches of law, such as non-compliance with reporting duties (Kahn-Nisser 2026), to major breaches, such as the decision to build nuclear arms (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2026) or to invade another country (Parizek et al. 2026; Walter 2026).⁵ Non-cooperation also varies by visibility, that is by how easy it is to detect by other parties. Highly visible forms of non-cooperation tend to be harder to ignore, whereas less visible forms can sometimes be hard to detect in the first place. Finally, some forms of non-cooperation imply negligible costs to the other party, whereas

⁵ Classifying non-cooperative behavior in these terms is not always easy, as such behavior can breach one rule or norm, while upholding another.

others put considerable gains at stake or massively interfere with other countries' goals (Dellmuth 2026). The size of the costs can also increase over time.

Responses to non-cooperative behavior fall on a continuum ranging from accommodation to non-accommodation (Jurado et al. 2022; Walter and Plotke-Scherly 2025). *Accommodation* means that the non-cooperative state's demands are met at no or minimal cost to said state (Lipsy 2017).⁶ Examples of accommodation strategies include appeasement, acceptance, and the granting of exceptions or concessions demanded by the challenging state without receiving much in return. Accommodation thus allows a non-cooperative state to continue to enjoy the benefits of cooperation, while having to bear less of the costs. This is a favorable outcome for the non-cooperative state, effectively rewarding it for its non-cooperative behavior. Accommodation is not rare: foreign aid continues to be disbursed even if countries do not meet the conditionality attached to aid programs (Girod and Tobin 2016; Heinzel 2026; Qian et al. 2026), countries acquiesce to renegotiation demands of preferential trade agreements even if they are unfavorable to them (Flores-Macias and Sánchez-Talanquer 2019; Castle 2026), and international responses to human rights violations have often been tame (Lebovic and Voeten 2009; Schmidt 2026). Even violent changes of state borders have at times been accepted (Goddard 2015).

Located on the other end of the continuum of possible responses, *non-accommodation* means that the non-cooperating state's demands are not met, or that the state is punished for its non-cooperative behavior by losing the benefits that international cooperation provides, or that it incurs some other form of punishment.⁷ Non-accommodation can take various forms, such as a refusal to make concessions or to grant exceptions, threats or decisions to end existing

⁶ Other literatures refer to this response for example as “unrequited cooperation” (e.g., Oye 1986) or a “conciliatory” response (Heinkelmann-Wild and Jankauskas 2022).

⁷ This corresponds to a reciprocal or defection strategy in game-theoretic models (e.g., Oye 1986) and is conceptually similar to enforcement (Fearon 1998) and resistance (Lipsy 2017; Dijkstra, von Allwörden, et al. 2025).

cooperative relations, and punitive measures against the non-cooperative country. For example, states, IOs, and other actors impose sanctions (Drezner 1999; Von Soest and Wahman 2015; Dellmuth 2026; Niemeier and Schneider 2026), threaten to use (or actually use) military force (Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2026), or publicly shame countries for their non-compliance with international treaties (Lebovic and Voeten 2006; Hafner-Burton 2008; Kahn-Nisser 2026; Schmidt 2026).

Many international responses lie somewhere in between these extreme responses. For example, actors could reject most demands by a non-cooperative state but still make minor or symbolic concessions. They could also refrain from taking countermeasures, while at the same time neither acquiescing to the challenge nor offering concessions. Or they could respond in a somewhat, but not fully, accommodative manner, for example by allowing small deviations from certain rules, timelines, or obligations but requiring some concessions from the challenging state as well. Examples include the EU's inconsistent responses to member state rule of law violations (Müller and Slominski 2025; Kelemen 2025), harsh tariff reactions to protectionist policies on some products but not others (Dellmuth 2026), as well as responses that combine elements of accommodation and non-accommodation (Kahn-Nisser 2026).

Choosing How to Respond: Trade-offs and the Accommodation Dilemma

Actors confronted with non-cooperation weigh the risks associated with accommodation and non-accommodation against each other and design their response based on this comparison. They do so by comparing the actual or expected consequences of different responses along two dimensions: the short- to medium-term cooperation gains at stake and the reputational effects and long-term consequences of a given response. When both consequences are grave, actors face an “accommodation dilemma.”

Cooperation Gains at Stake

How governments, IOs, individuals, and other actors respond to non-cooperative behavior affects the size and distribution of cooperation gains going forward. A main motivation for international cooperation is the mutual benefits it generates, even if the benefits can be unevenly distributed (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Gruber 2000; Keohane 1984). When countries challenge existing relations and institutions, they typically hope that this will leave them better off *ex post*. But this means that the challenged actors often lose out when they accommodate such challenges (Daßler et al. 2024; Kelemen 2025).

This creates incentives for the actors facing non-cooperative behavior not to accommodate such non-cooperation. Unless the non-cooperative state backs down quickly or begins to cooperate again, however, this response can be even more costly, especially in the short run. Such costs emerge because non-accommodation tends to scale back the scope and value of existing cooperative relations, thus lowering existing cooperation gains, or generating opportunity costs in the form of unrealized gains from cooperation. A re-introduction of trade barriers, for example, hurts exporters and firms with large international supply chains and undermines multilateralism (Winters 2017). The weak implementation of major environmental treaties generates opportunity costs as transnational environmental problems remain unresolved (Young 2011, 201). If non-accommodation leads to a serious breakdown of existing cooperation, this tends to be particularly costly, as all involved parties lose out on the benefits of cooperation. A reduction in global security cooperation, for example, makes everyone less safe.

Cooperation gains at risk play a big role in existing research on international cooperation. In game-theoretic models of international cooperation, they are modeled as the payoff associated with defection (Oye 1986; Kydd 2015) or as signals that credibly convey information to the challenging state that non-cooperative behavior will not be tolerated (Fearon

1997). Cooperation gains at risk are also central to research on economic sanctions (Martin 1994; Drezner 1999; Morgan et al. 2014; Attia and Grauvogel 2023). For example, the sanctions that Western countries imposed against Russia in 2022 in a non-accommodating response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have been very costly not just for Russia, but also for the sanctioning countries.

When evaluating the cooperation gains at risk, governments, IOs, and individuals need to gauge how much they stand to lose from a non-accommodating stance. This includes assessing how critical maintaining—less favorable, yet still viable—cooperation with the non-cooperative state is for them, how many policy areas would be affected by the fallout associated with non-accommodation, and how enduring the consequences might be (Walter and Plotke-Scherly 2025). Cooperation gains put at risk with a non-accommodating response are more consequential when they are bigger in size, broader in nature, and constitute medium- to long-term or repeated rather than one-off losses (Carter 2015). For example, when large and powerful member states withdraw from or are excluded from an IO as a result of non-accommodation, costs tend to be higher than when less powerful member states withdraw (Daßler et al. 2024; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024). The stakes associated with a hawkish response are also higher when non-accommodation has far-reaching consequences that affect not just one issue, but multiple areas of cooperation. And long-term or repeated disruptions are more significant than one-off events in determining the overall costs of potential cooperation losses. Intentional non-cooperation and non-cooperative behavior that openly breaks international rules and norms or is very visible tends to require a tougher response than when confronting unintentional noncooperation, which in turn increases the cooperation gains such a response puts at risk.

Overall, the higher the risks to cooperation gains, the more costly and less attractive a hawkish, non-accommodating response becomes—both for the non-cooperating state and the responding actors.

Contagion Risks

How actors respond to non-cooperation also has reputational consequences that can have far-reaching long-term effects via contagion effects. Observing the responses to one country's behavior provides insights into the likely economic, social, and political consequences of non-cooperative behavior. This can influence the non-cooperative state's next moves, as well as affect the incentives of governments, political elites, and voters in other states to challenge the status quo. By highlighting the costs associated with non-cooperative behavior, non-accommodating responses deter non-cooperative behavior, whereas accommodation suggests that non-cooperation may well pay off and thus risks inviting more of it.

Non-accommodating responses send a signal that non-cooperative behavior will not be tolerated and thus decrease likelihood of future non-cooperation. A number of studies show that non-accommodating responses make individuals (Hobolt et al. 2021; Malet and Walter 2023; Walter 2021a), political elites (Hunter 2024; van Kessel et al. 2020; Martini and Walter 2023; Carnegie and Carson 2019), and governments (Katagiri and Min 2019) more pessimistic about the benefits and less supportive of non-cooperation. Non-accommodation can thus deter non-cooperative behavior.

However, if audiences come to view non-cooperative behavior as both feasible and advantageous – because they think other actors will accommodate it – they may be tempted to follow suit, generating dynamics of political contagion (Adler-Nissen et al. 2017; De Vries 2018; Coggins 2011). Accommodation can damage actors' reputation for resolve (Dafoe et al. 2014; Weisiger and Yarhi-Milo 2015; Kertzer 2016) and thus create expectations that non-cooperative behavior will not be unpunished. This suggests that non-cooperative behavior may be a winning strategy, thus tempting others to pursue a similar path. Consistent with this logic, actors who expect an accommodating response are more supportive of defection than those who expect a non-accommodating response (Tingley and Walter 2011; Owen and Walter 2017;

Walter et al. 2018). For example, the West's meek response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Donbass region in 2014 seems to have contributed to a belief among Russian policymakers that the West was risk-averse and would be likely to accommodate a full invasion of Ukraine (Göransson 2024).

Accommodation can thus encourage further non-cooperation and negative political contagion dynamics that can evolve into a serious medium- to long-term threat to cooperation gains (Downs et al. 1996; Hobolt 2016; Solingen 2012). Examples for such negative contagion dynamics include the EU's Stability and Growth Pact, where rule-breaking by one member state encouraged others to follow suit (Baerg and Hallerberg 2016), the export finance regime, where a muted response to an initial defector (China) led to unraveling cooperation in the regime (Bunte et al. 2022), and the Brexit process, where the discourse of Euroskeptic parties in EU-27 countries became more aggressive towards the EU whenever Brexit was perceived as advantageous for the UK (Chopin and Lequesne 2020; Hunter 2024; Martini and Walter 2023). The destabilizing effect of political contagion is also evidenced in the finding that the exit of a leading member state from an IO increases the risk that other countries will withdraw from the IO in the following year (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019).

The extent to which an accommodating response creates political contagion risk, both in terms of encouraging and deterring future non-cooperative behavior, varies considerably and is shaped in part by the characteristics of non-cooperative behavior itself. Accommodating intentional, highly visible breaches of an international agreement, for example, is likely to considerably damage the viability of the agreement. Intentionality matters because it signals whether states' deliberate attempts to improve their situation by not cooperating are likely to meet resistance or not. States sometimes only weakly comply with international treaties due to capacity constraints rather than malintent, which can for example help explain that non-cooperation under the Paris Agreement entails limited contagion risks (Beiser-McGrath and

Bernauer 2019) despite a broadly accommodative stance by actors confronted by non-cooperative behavior. Contagion risks are also magnified when the non-cooperative behavior is accommodated even though it is in breach of international law or norms, because this can generate pessimism about overall compliance with international rules (Carnegie and Carson 2019). Likewise, visibility matters: by providing relevant information about the costs and benefits of taking a non-cooperative foreign policy approach, it enables other actors to learn (Simmons and Elkins 2004).

Other important factors that influence the extent of political contagion risks are the attractiveness of the accommodative outcome, the uniqueness of the case, the challenger state's bargaining power, and the potential for politicization (Walter and Plotke-Scherly 2025). Political contagion risks are likely to be particularly high in contexts in which accommodation makes the challenging state significantly better-off (e.g. in financial or territorial terms or in terms of relaxed obligations), when the situation can easily be translated to another context, or when other states face similar incentives to behave non-cooperatively. In contrast, small gains and rather unique circumstances reduce the applicability of the situation to other contexts and thus mitigate the contagion effects of the response. The challenging state's bargaining power also matters: When a state with high bargaining power secures concessions, states with less power or few outside options will not necessarily be more confident that they could achieve a similar outcome. However, if challenges by a weak state are accommodated, strong states will become much more confident that they should be able to secure similar concessions.

Finally, contagion dynamics are particularly relevant in contexts in which cooperation-skeptic political entrepreneurs are politically powerful and likely to seize on accommodated non-cooperation precedents to advocate for more non-cooperative behavior (Colgan et al. 2020; Hale 2020; Jurado et al. 2022; Walter 2021a). For example, the Trump administrations' decisions to withdraw from the Paris Agreement may have encouraged political leaders

skeptical of international climate cooperation such as Javier Milei of Argentina or Narendra Modi of India to scale back their own commitments and may have emboldened populist politicians across many countries to demand similar steps from their governments, thus amplifying the effect of the US withdrawal, even if other states have responded by stepping up their climate commitments (Beiser-McGrath and Bernauer 2019). The increasing politicization of international cooperation (De Vries et al. 2021; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2014; Hooghe et al. 2019; Rixen and Zangl 2013; Zürn 2014) makes this an increasingly pressing concern.

Responding to Non-cooperation: The Accommodation Dilemma

As we have seen, there are different options to respond to unilateral, non-cooperative state behavior. These options come with advantages and disadvantages, creating considerable trade-offs: Non-accommodation has the advantage that it might convince the non-cooperative state to return to cooperative behavior. It also lowers contagion risks, thus deterring future non-cooperative behavior. However, this response can be very disruptive and involve a significant loss of cooperation gains and is thus costly to both the non-cooperative state and the responding actor.

In contrast, accommodation allows challenged actors to maintain many existing cooperation gains, because they can continue mutually beneficial exchange with the non-cooperating state without major disruptions. But because accommodation will typically result in a more favorable outcome for the non-cooperative state, it makes the accommodating actor worse off than under the status quo. More importantly, by demonstrating that non-cooperation can be a successful strategy, it is likely to encourage similar behavior in the future and/or by others. Accommodation thus can generate considerable political contagion risks.

In light of these trade-offs, the ADF predicts that concerns about the cooperation gains at stake and the political contagion risks jointly influence actors' decision of how to respond to

non-cooperative behavior (Walter 2021c; Jurado et al. 2022; Walter and Plotke-Scherly 2025). Table 1 lays out four ideal-type scenarios. It shows that the choice between response strategies is straightforward in some instances, whereas it confronts actors with trade-offs and a dilemma in others. When one type of risk clearly outweighs the other, the choice is clear and actors will opt for the superior response that clearly outperforms the other (Von Soest and Wahman 2015; Morgan et al. 2014). Table 1 shows that there are two such scenarios. In the first one (upper right-hand corner), cooperation gains at risk from non-accommodation far outweigh the contagion risks associated with accommodation. In this case, the best response will be to accommodate the non-cooperative behavior. In contrast, when contagion risks are large, but cooperation gains at risk are relatively minor (lower left-hand corner), non-accommodation is the best response.

The choice is much harder when both types of risks are of similar size. When neither response is likely to carry grave consequences (upper left-hand corner), the choice is not clear, but also not too consequential. However, when both risks are large (lower right-hand corner), actors face a strong “accommodation dilemma” in which all responses come with considerable downsides. In such a situation, not accommodating non-cooperative behavior is very costly, but accommodation carries the risk of encouraging more such costly situations in the medium- to long-term. In these situations, individuals, governments, IOs, and media actors alike have incentives to sanction and not accommodate non-cooperative behavior for reputational reasons, yet they face the problem that this response puts large cooperation gains at risk. Faced with such a dilemma, these actors are likely to moderate their response, seeking a middle ground between full accommodation and non-accommodation.

Table 1: Distribution of risks and predicted responses to non-cooperative behavior

		Cooperation gains at risk	
		Low	High
Contagion risk	Low	Weak accommodation dilemma	Accommodation
	High	Non-accommodation	Strong accommodation dilemma

Note: Adapted from Walter and Plotke-Scherly (2025).

The characteristics of the non-cooperative behavior in question matter for these choices as well. For example, a harsh, non-accommodating response to unintentional non-cooperation, such as failure to fully implement international policies due to capacity constraints, may undermine the cooperation gains to be achieved by continued cooperation much more than it deters future noncompliance, particularly when such violations are not very visible to external audiences. Similarly, accommodating non-cooperation within the rules, such as unambitious climate policies under the Paris Agreement, can yield more favorable long-term results than punishment (Keohane and Victor 2016). In fact, most non-cooperation that forms part of “normal politics” is likely to be accommodated because the gains from continued cooperation far outweigh a non-accommodating response. In contrast, the contagion risks of accommodating highly visible, intentional breaches of international law are often very high, which is why such non-cooperative behavior is much more likely to be met with a non-accommodating response.

Contextualizing Responses to Non-cooperation

While the ADF provides broad insights into situations of non-cooperative state behavior, responses are also context-dependent. This section therefore identifies key moderators and mediators that shape the trade-off between cooperation gains at risk and

contagion concerns. To enable a comparative analysis, it uses the type of responding actor as an analytical lens to discuss key context factors. Focusing on individuals, governments, and IOs as three central types of actors in international relations, we employ a comparative perspective on how different moderators and mediators condition responses to non-cooperative behavior. To illustrate these mechanisms, we draw on existing research from a variety of research strands, as well as the findings from the individual contributions in this special issue. This strategy allows us to move beyond issue-specific literatures such as research on non-compliance and sanctions, and to demonstrate dynamics that are relevant for a variety of research on responses to non-cooperative behavior.

Individual Responses

At the individual level, we examine how contextual factors affect individual perceptions of non-cooperation, assessments of cooperation gains at risk and contagion risks, as well as preferred responses to non-cooperative behavior across individual-level moderators and mediators. We identify three central moderators and mediators: individuals' ideological orientation, the information environment, and perceived relations with the non-cooperating state. These are known to influence foreign policy preferences, and we consequently expect them to matter for attitudes toward the three central aspects of the ADF: non-cooperation, cooperation gains at risk and contagion risks, and responses to non-cooperative behavior.

First, individuals differ in their *ideological orientation* about the extent to which they believe that people who disobey the rules, cheat, betray, or trick other people should be punished. It is well established that political ideology shapes foreign policy attitudes, both among citizens (Brutger and Clark 2023; Ecker-Ehrhardt et al. 2024) and elites (Dellmuth et al. 2022; Otjes et al. 2023; Hooghe et al. 2024), and that such ideological orientations can mediate or moderate the effect of non-cooperative behavior on foreign policy preferences (Gries 2022).

Ideology is also likely to affect to which extent individuals believe that non-cooperating states should be accommodated (Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016; Bush et al. this issue). For example, the effects of impressions of Brexit politics on attitudes toward domestic foreign policy vis-à-vis the EU depends on pre-existing attitudes toward the EU (Walter 2021b). World Bank staff are less inclined to accommodating countries whose development projects deviate from agreed objectives if they come from countries whose national norms prioritize the punishment of rule breakers (Heinzel 2026). Retaliatory responses to non-cooperation in trade depress regime support especially among individuals who do not share the political ideology of the government (Dellmuth 2026). More generally, individuals and policymakers who are skeptical about international cooperation are likely to be less concerned about contagion risks and more likely to accommodate, not least because this allows for a favorable precedent for challenging international cooperation to emerge (Jurado et al. 2022).

Second, the *information environment* is likely to shape individuals' assessment of non-cooperation, cooperation gains, and contagion risks as well as their support for accommodative responses. Citizens form foreign policy attitudes under greater uncertainty than policy elites (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Dellmuth et al. 2022) and often rely on framed information (Chapman 2009; Ardanaz et al. 2013; Ghassim 2024). How another state's behavior should be interpreted, how gains from cooperation should be understood, and to what extent contagion risks exist is often publicly debated (De Vries et al. 2021; Hooghe et al. 2019; Parizek et al. 2026; Walter 2026). For example, domestic politicization of IOs increases the relevance of international matters in the eyes of citizens and affects public confidence in IOs (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023). More generally, through domestic public debates, citizens tend to update their foreign policy preferences in line with media reporting (Brutger and Strezhnev 2022; Mikulaschek and Parizek 2025), peer opinions (Ecker-Ehrhardt et al. 2025; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017) or the messages of trusted or ideologically aligned partisan elites (Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Chapman

2011).

Finally, perceived relations with the non-cooperating state matter for how the accommodation dilemma is assessed on the individual level. Non-cooperation by foreign states can generate threat perceptions and a subsequent turn to the national in-group bias or hostility toward out-group (Kertzer 2023), that can generate rally around the flag effects (Grossman et al. 2018) and bring about a greater willingness to follow leader cues (Gadarian 2010). Reciprocity also matters in this context, which reflects a “general preference for mutual and equal gain with a simultaneous insistence on not being exploited” (Brutger and Rathbun 2021). When non-cooperation triggers concerns about reciprocity, it can increase support for a non-accommodating, hawkish response in trade policy (D. Steinberg and Tan 2023; Schweinberger 2022), foreign investment (Chilton et al. 2020), and military disputes (Chapman 2009). Reciprocity concerns also influence how the local repercussions of non-accommodating responses, such as exceptionally large retaliatory tariffs, shape citizens’ support for the regime implementing such a response (Dellmuth this issue).

Government Responses

Governments also operate in a variety of contexts that are likely to condition their assessments of the cooperation gains at stake, the extent of contagion risks, and how the accommodation dilemma more broadly influence their foreign policy response. We consider two factors: the bargaining context and audience costs. Regarding the bargaining context, traditional determinants of negotiation strategies matter. One particularly relevant factor here is the distribution of bargaining power (R. Steinberg 2002; Lipsky 2017; Frieden and Walter 2019; Castle 2026), because states with greater leverage can better afford to take non-accommodating stance, because the likelihood that the non-cooperative state will back down is higher, thus limiting any fallout in cooperation gains in these contexts (Walter and Plotke-

Scherly 2025). Other factors include geopolitical considerations (Lebovic and Voeten 2009), economic and security dependence (Niemeier and Schneider 2026; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2026), the size and composition of a coalition of partners (Finke and Bailer 2019; Lundgren et al. 2018), and identity issues (Schmidt 2026). All of these aspects can influence to what extent governments are willing to accommodate a non-cooperating state.

Governments have to bring their domestic audiences on board and therefore need to consider public support for different response strategies (Schneider 2018; Liou 2024), and need to consider audience costs (Tomz 2005; Fearon 1994). The more foreign policy is contested and discussed, the more it can have a constraining effect on government responses to non-cooperation (Chapman 2009; Mikulaschek 2023). Domestic audiences care about their countries' reputation for resolve (Kertzer 2016; D. Steinberg and Tan 2023; Walter 2026), and may therefore expect the government to react in a non-accommodating manner. Such concerns can generate strong public expectations for governments to respond decisively rather than to accommodate adversaries. Governments seen as backing down may be viewed as weak, which can undermine political legitimacy at home (Brutger and Kertzer 2018). As a result, leaders often have incentives to punish non-cooperative states to maintain domestic support and to preserve a credible commitment to strength abroad.

IO Responses

IO responses to non-cooperation are also affected by several context factors. The extent to which IOs risk cooperation losses or contagion can vary significantly across geopolitical constellations, the divisiveness of an issue, and the institutional context. In a changing geopolitical context, IOs are often confronted with geopolitical struggles and conflicting interpretations of existing norms and rules between established and rising powers (Thakur 2016). IOs have faced pressures from established powers who seek to circumvent or challenge IO rules (Dingwerth et al. 2019; Heinzl et al. 2023) as well as rising powers that have in the

past decades become more vocal in demanding more recognition and voting rights (Ikenberry 2010; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021). In some cases IOs take strong measures, such as sanctioning, withholding funds, or naming and shaming, while in other instances they remain inactive or take minimal action (Schoner 2024; Hafner-Burton 2008; Donno 2010). Geopolitical alignment influences these decisions, though how this plays out varies in subtle ways: Whereas IO member states tend to police in-group human rights violations more strongly than those committed by their out-group in the context of human rights reviews within the UN (Schmidt 2026), IOs tend to be less accommodating to violations of IO rules such as reporting duties when these originate in states opposing the US-led liberal order (Kahn-Nisser 2026).

Responding to these challenges is particularly difficult for IOs when member states are internally divided about how to respond. For example, punishment of a member state that violates an IO's mandate to promote democracy because it experiences a coup is often highly contentious among member states. Sanctioning violators signals commitment to democratic norms but risks backlash and internal division (Pevehouse and Schneider 2026). One way in which IOs navigate such difficult situations is to decrease the visibility of their response, for example by hiding behind the actions of the hegemon (Pevehouse and Schneider 2026) or by accommodating non-cooperative member states in ways that are subtle enough to minimize contagion risk, but offer enough benefits to appease these states (Qian et al. 2026).

Finally, institutional design, such as voting rights, can also constrain IOs' room for maneuver in responding to non-cooperation. For example, unanimity requirements can be used by non-cooperative member states to prevent a non-accommodating response. Non-cooperative states thus may be able to block enforcement actions against themselves, even in cases of clear non-compliance or aggression. For example, part of the reason why the EU has often accommodated Hungary even after repeated violations of EU rules and the country's efforts to undermine EU-wide consensus is that Hungary can veto EU foreign policy decisions, such as

decisions concerning support for Ukraine after the invasion by Russia (Müller and Slominski 2025).

Contributions to the Special Issue

By introducing the ADF, this special issue advances a more unified research agenda for studying responses to non-cooperation in international relations. The ADF posits that responding to non-cooperative state behavior confronts actors with a fundamental tension: they can safeguard the benefits of cooperation by making concessions, or they can seek to deter further non-cooperation by refusing to accommodate. In this final section, we discuss how the contributions in this special issue engage with this framework.⁸ Taken together, the contributions apply the ADF across diverse issue areas, levels of analysis, and methodological approaches, thereby demonstrating its broad analytical reach. At the same time, the contributions probe, refine, and extend key aspects of the framework. Table 2 summarizes how each contribution engages with the framework and shows that the framework's shared theoretical lens and common terminology allows for an analysis of very different forms of non-cooperation.

A first set of articles explore the ADF at the individual level. Paper 1 explores how voters want their governments to respond when other states behave non-cooperatively in international politics. Applying the ADF to the individual level, she argues that voters balance the costs of a harsh response against the reputational and contagion risks associated with accommodation. Drawing on comparative survey experiments embedded in seven different real-life contexts, the paper examines how voters respond to three types of non-

⁸ The special issue contributions were selected based on an open call. Two workshops held in Au (Switzerland) and Stockholm (Sweden) served to discuss and develop the ADF framework and the individual contributions.

Table 2: Overview of how the special issue contributions engage with the Accommodation Dilemma Framework

	Issue area	Form of non-cooperation	Responses: Accommodation vs. Non-Accommodation	Cooperation gains at risk <i>(variation from low to high)</i>	Contagion risks <i>(variation from low to high)</i>
<i>Individual-level analyses</i>					
Paper 1	Security, EU integration	Intl. law violations, coercive bargaining, cherry-picking	Sanction relief / concessions vs. more sanctions / no concessions	Economic and security benefits	Norm erosion and demands for exceptions
Paper 2	Development finance	Non-compliance with aid conditionality	Continued disbursement vs. suspension or halt of disbursement	Development gains from continued project implementation	Expectation of funding despite non-compliance
Paper 3	Trade	Protectionist measures	Toleration of trade barriers vs. trade-restrictive measures / retaliatory tariffs	Gains from open trade and rule-based dispute settlement	Protectionist spillovers
<i>State-level analyses</i>					
Paper 4	Security	Aggression justified by prior non-cooperation	Acceptance or limited pushback vs. sanctions, isolation, etc.	Preventing widespread trade, energy, and security disruptions	Normalization of aggression, revisionism, atrocities
Paper 5	Economic Coercion	Sender / target behavior opposes Liberal International Order	Accepting vs. rejecting challenges to Liberal International Order	Cooperation with unruly target/sender	Diffusion of rule-breaking behavior
Paper 6	Trade	Unilateral renegotiation demands for trade agreements	Acceptance vs. rejection / counter-demands of renegotiation demands	Gains from existing trade agreements	Spread of norm violations or coercive practices
Paper 7	Security	Nuclear proliferation	Concessions or tolerance vs. sanctions, military threats, or force	Non-proliferation principle and nuclear status quo	Cascading proliferation risks
Paper 8	Human rights	Human rights violations	Silence or mild criticism vs. public condemnation	In-group standing and human rights cooperation	Norm weakening and spread of permissive practices
Paper 9	Investment	Investor challenges to national regulation via BIT arbitration	Maintain vs. restrict/exit BITs	FDI and investment-protection	Additional investor challenges
<i>IO-level analyses</i>					
Paper 10	Monitoring	Procedural non-compliance (reporting failures)	Delay/suspend review vs. punishment or review in absentia	Gains from monitoring and policy compliance	Diffusion of procedural non-compliance
Paper 11	Development finance	Support for a rival IO challenging the existing order	Favorable treatment vs. no special treatment in project evaluations	Financial means and influence	New actors defect to extract similar gains
Paper 12	Democracy	Violations of democratic mandates	Mild vs. strong sanctions or sanction threats	Within-IO cooperation and cohesion	More democracy violations as deterrence weakens

cooperative behavior: serious violations of international law, coercive bargaining, and cherry-picking attempts. Across all cases, highlighting long-term contagion and reputational risks associated with a soft response reduces voter willingness to compromise relative to conditions in which they are informed about the costs of non-accommodation. Moreover, dilemma situations are difficult, although reputational concerns tend to dominate. The article shows that the dynamics predicted by the ADF also operate on the individual level, provided that the ADF's scope conditions are met, that is, if voters perceive the other state's behavior as non-cooperative and harmful.

Paper 2 examines how delegation to international bureaucracies shapes the resolution of the accommodation dilemma at the World Bank. He conceptualizes non-cooperation as deviations from agreed project objectives and combines project-level disbursement data, and data on the staff members responsible for disbursement decisions for thousands of World Bank projects between 1985 and 2021. The analysis shows that the willingness of staff to accommodate flawed project implementation through the continued disbursement of funds varies with their national cultural background. These findings highlight two important scope conditions of the ADF. First, delegating to agents adds complexity since different individuals working for the agent resolve the dilemma differently, even under similar constraints and information. Second, the normative frameworks individuals operate with shape how they interpret the information needed to make decisions in the accommodation dilemma.

Paper 3 examines the political costs of putting cooperation gains at risk, by examining the political and long-term effects of state responses to restrictive trade policies on public regime support. The article argues that non-accommodating trade retaliation can bolster regime support in the state responding to non-cooperation when it activates concerns about reciprocity and fairness, but tends to erode regime support when the domestic costs of retaliation become visible. Using US public opinion data from 2002–2022, the study highlights the political cost

associated with non-accommodation, as the US public reacts negatively to costly foreign trade retaliation. The findings stress an important scope condition for the Accommodation Dilemma Framework: once the costs of non-accommodation become visible, public support for core political institutions in targeted states weakens and even co-partisans grow more skeptical of the political institutions enabling costly retaliation. Non-accommodation, in other words, can have effects beyond short-lived policy preferences and incumbent support in target states to shape citizens' more deep-seated attachment to the institutional foundations of political rule.

A second set of articles focuses on responses to non-cooperation at the state level. Paper 4 uses the ADF to conceptualize and measure how competing views on non-cooperation and the contagion risk it generates become prevalent in national media debates across the globe. Examining national public debates about the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza conflicts through an analysis of conflict framing in more than 14 million news articles in over 140 countries, they show that both geopolitical alignments and socio-economic factors structure global variation in frame prevalence, and that the patterns differ for the two wars. Taken together, their results highlight that public narratives about non-cooperation vary considerably across countries and geopolitical cleavages, producing different understandings of appropriate policy responses.

Paper 5 additionally shows that depending of context, the same policy can constitute a form of non-cooperation or a form of non-accommodation. Focusing on economic sanctions, they distinguish between norm-protecting sanctions that punish non-cooperative behavior, and norm-breaking sanctions that themselves constitute non-cooperative behavior by the sender. Analyzing US-led sanctions from 1989 to 2015, they show that this distinction affects both the costs and success of sanctions. Efforts to defend norms are less costly for the sender than sanctions that break norms. In turn, norm-breaking targets are under stronger pressure to change their behavior compared to norm-complying targets. Moreover, norm-protecting sanctions put cooperation gains from interactions with the target at risk, whereas norm-breaking sanctions

threaten to reduce cooperation gains enabled by the Liberal International Order. The study shows the importance of specifying the type of sanctions as a scope condition of the accommodation dilemma.

Paper 6 studies when, why, and how trade partners accommodate unilateral demands to renegotiate preferential trade agreements. This article teases out how trade partners' credibility and the exceptionality of circumstances create incentives for trade partners to rebuff, contest, or accommodate non-cooperative behavior. It argues that accommodation of PTA renegotiation demands is more likely when outside options or domestic constraints allow challengers to credibly threaten termination, or when demands arise from exceptional circumstances, whose rarity mitigates precedent risk. Drawing on novel data on the near universe of non-cooperative renegotiation episodes of agreements signed since 1990, he finds that trade partners tend to accommodate credible and exceptional demands, but usually resist those likely to recur. The results confirm the expectations of the ADF, but –similar to Dellmuth and Parizek et al. —show that the perception of non-cooperative behavior is an important scope condition. When trade agreement renegotiations are seen as constructive or beneficial to actors on both sides, an accommodation dilemma does not arise.

Paper 7 applies the framework to the field of nuclear non-proliferation. The article argues that whether other states respond to violations of nuclear non-proliferation norms with 'toleration', 'partial accommodation', or 'punishment' is mainly a function of perceived contagion risk, i.e., the perceived risk that one instance of nuclear pursuit may trigger further challenges of the nuclear status quo. Employing a medium-*N* analysis of US responses to fifteen cases of nuclear pursuit since 1945 and three in-depth case studies, this contribution demonstrates that a nuclear enforcer is significantly less likely to accommodate a nuclear challenger when reputational risks are high, but more likely to either tolerate or accommodate nuclear pursuit when reputational costs are low or when security-based contagion risks are

perceived to outweigh reputational ones. It shows that in a high-stakes context like nuclear proliferation, the ADF is a useful framework for capturing the trade-off between deterring violations and preserving the fragile cooperation within the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The study also shows that traditional drivers of nuclear proliferation (technology supply and nuclear insecurity) can be usefully conceived as contagion vectors that vary across countries and across time to determine optimal counterproliferation strategies.

Paper 8 argues that states resolve the accommodation dilemma differently depending on whether the non-cooperating state is in the in-group or out-group. When ingroup states criticize one another, it threatens ingroup standing and incentivizes reciprocal behavior to affirm commitment to shared norms. Criticism from outgroup members, in contrast, is discounted and ignored. Leveraging a natural experiment at the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), he disentangles reciprocity from other determinants of human rights diplomacy and shows that states practice reciprocal ingroup policing. The analysis speaks to a key aspect of the ADF in a context where the risks to material cooperation gains are low: states' responses to non-accommodation depend on whether they agree on standards of appropriate behavior. More broadly, the article sheds light on the role of identity in shaping ADF processes and outcomes.

Paper 9 shifts attention to state responses to non-cooperative behavior by private actors, here investors who exploit existing bilateral investment treaties (BITs) in their favor. The article shows that in line with the ADF, states face a strategic choice between accommodating investor challenges by upholding BITs or pursuing non-accommodation through BIT termination, with their response shaped by two core dimensions: contagion risk from existing agreements and potential FDI loss from treaty exit. An analysis of over 2,200 BITs shows that states are more likely to terminate BITs when contagion risk is high and the risk of future FDI loss is low, whereas they tend to accommodate expropriation claims when contagion risk is low and treaty termination is likely to put future FDI flows at risk. The article also explores the sources of

these types of risks and identifies the interpretability of the BITs' substantive terms as a source of contagion risk, and investor perceptions of legitimacy as a driver of cooperation gains at risk.

The final set of articles examines the ADF at the IO level. Paper 10 examines how international monitoring bodies that oversee compliance with global agreements respond to procedural non-cooperation, such as delays in the submission of required state reports. Focusing on treaties in human rights (UN Convention Against Torture), environmental governance (Montreal Protocol), and labor rights (ILO Equal Remuneration Convention), the study develops a typology of monitoring responses that vary in their degree of publicity. The article builds on the ADF and newly coded data to argue and show that publicly visible responses aim to prevent contagion by signaling accountability, while private responses seek to preserve cooperation through diplomatic engagement. It also provides insights into temporal dynamics by demonstrating that while non-accommodating responses may initially alienate governments, they lead to reduced delays over time, both by the target state and its treaty peers. These findings elucidate how international organizations manage the ADF and the trade-offs inherent in ensuring accountability and promoting compliance while maintaining cooperation.

Similarly, paper 11 shows that IOs can attenuate the accommodation dilemma by choosing forms of accommodation that are hard to observe from the outside and thus minimize contagion risk. They demonstrate such “quiet accommodation” by showing that the World Bank responded to the emergence of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) by offering AIIB founding members more favorable project evaluations. This article illuminates how IOs manage the trade-offs inherent in promoting compliance while maintaining cooperation. In line with the ADF, the article highlights how evaluations—often viewed as technical instruments—can serve as a nuanced mechanism for managing institutional competition.

Paper 12 analyzes how the systemic context shapes how IOs respond when member states violate their core rules, especially democracy mandates and constitutional order. They argue that such non-cooperation confronts IOs with an accommodation dilemma because sanctioning violators signals commitment to democratic norms but risks backlash and internal division, while accommodation preserves cooperation at the cost of credibility and deterrence. IO members navigate this dilemma by adjusting their collective response to the hegemon's unilateral actions. Free riding on the hegemon's enforcement and the accountability signals and deterrence it provides frees IOs up to pursue a less hawkish strategy themselves. Employing a new high-frequency events dataset on IO and hegemon responses to 196 coups across 21 IOs with democracy mandates (1979–2023), the article shows that IOs are systematically less likely to sanction or threaten when the hegemon has already done so. These findings show that applying the ADF can shed new light on how IOs balance enforcement and unity, and in particular how they use opportunities to shift the costs of coercion onto the hegemon.

While this special issue is the first to bring together studies on the responses to non-cooperative behavior by states from various sub-fields of IR, it also points to promising avenues for future research. One way forward is more conceptual work, delving deeper into what constitutes “non-cooperation” or refining the conceptualization of responses to non-cooperation, contagion risks, and cooperation gains at risk. After all, not all possible responses are likely to fit neatly on the one-dimensional, linear continuum between non-accommodation and accommodation proposed by the ADF. In terms of theory, we see promise in questioning the common assumption in contemporary research in international relations that non-cooperation always undermines positive-sum cooperation and the common good. Likewise, the relative importance of normative commitments and strategic incentives and the contexts under which they are likely to matter most are interesting issues to explore. Finally, future studies could fruitfully explore how power asymmetries between actors relate to the ADF. What happens when powerful states bend institutional rules in their favor or severely undermine

cooperation? How do material hierarchies, but also inequalities stemming from colonial history and racialized politics matter for how actors solve the accommodation dilemma? Taken together, these avenues for future research highlight the ADF's potential to motivate research and generate new insights into how international cooperation proves resilient, adaptive, or fragile in the face of non-cooperation.

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