
Between Risk and Opportunity

News Framing and its Effects on Public Support for EU Enlargement

■ *Andreas R.T. Schuck and Claes H. de Vreese*



ABSTRACT

■ This multi-methodological study examined the news framing of the 2004 European Union enlargement in terms of risk and opportunity and the effect both frames had on public support for the enlargement. A content analysis showed that EU enlargement was portrayed as a controversial issue, but with an overall balanced tone of coverage. Risk and opportunity framing played an equally prominent role in the news. An experiment examined the impact of both frames on support for EU enlargement. Participants in the opportunity frame condition showed significantly higher levels of support compared to participants in the risk condition. This framing effect was moderated by political knowledge. Individuals with low levels of political knowledge were more affected by the news frames and more susceptible to risk framing. ■

Key Words EU enlargement, framing effects, moderators of framing effects, news framing, risk and opportunity framing

Introduction

Framing refers to the observation that media can portray one and the same topic in very different ways, emphasizing certain evaluations or only parts of an issue at the expense of others. Framing research in political

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contexts is particularly interested in the impact of such framing on political attitudes (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Nelson and Kinder, 1996). Recently, this research has been extended to European politics. However, given the increasing political relevance of the EU, it is striking that the number of studies within this context is still rather limited. The few studies dealing with the impact of framing on public support for further EU integration demonstrated framing effects on either issue interpretation (de Vreese, 2004) or levels of support for the EU and further EU integration (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003).

Media frames are generally seen as coherent packages of information containing 'a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987: 143). News media employ such frames in order to organize and structure their presentation of issues to the public. Based on selection processes and working routines, journalists provide an overall context for an issue within public debate through the classification of information (e.g. Price et al., 1997; Tewksbury et al., 2000). This is then characterized as the 'process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue for its audience' (Nelson et al., 1997a: 221). Thus, a news frame is more than just an isolated argument or position on a topic – it represents a coherent construction of an issue (Nelson and Kinder, 1996; Pan and Kosicki, 1993).

A recent study introduced *valence* framing to political communication research (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003). Valence frames evaluate political issues or situations in either positive or negative terms. However, the effects of such framing have been analysed more intensively within other disciplines like psychology, marketing or health communication. Studies in these fields of research found considerable effects of valenced frames on perceptions, judgements, evaluations and behaviour.

The present study focuses on individuals' cognitive responses and evaluations in response to the exposure to valenced news frames. Previous studies have repeatedly shown that news frames can affect the evaluative direction of thoughts (e.g. Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999), interpretations (e.g. Rhee, 1997) or perceptions of an issue (e.g. Nelson et al., 1997b; Nelson and Kinder, 1996). With regard to their effect on public opinion, news frames thus have to be seen as a powerful tool in constructing meaning in public debate and in shaping understanding of political issues. The potential impact of news frames on public opinion becomes crucial when we assume public opinion to be influential in affecting real policy decisions (e.g. Page and Shapiro, 1983). Better

understanding of media effects in democratic societies is especially important as the literature in political communication research is still divided. Some authors stress the positive effects of news coverage on learning and mobilization (e.g. Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000), whereas others conclude that the dominant focus on negativity in news leads to an increase of cynicism among the public and serves generally to demobilize citizens (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Other studies suggest both processes take place at the same time (e.g. Aarts and Semetko, 2003; de Vreese and Semetko, 2002) and see effects as contingent upon media content (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005).

Indeed, framing effects are not necessarily omnipresent. News media are just one source in the formation process of individuals' attitudes and opinions. Although many media effect studies acknowledge the relative nature and general dependency of observed effects on other factors, the analysis of those variables is lacking more systematic approaches. According to Scheufele (2000), models of framing effects have to pay more attention to the individual orientations and attitudes of media users that exist prior to the exposure to certain news frames. Different concepts have been introduced and operationalized but empirical results on their function as possible moderators of framing effects are still mixed.

Political knowledge in particular has been found to be an influential factor in frame analyses but has yielded inconsistent results (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Kinder and Sanders, 1990; Nelson et al., 1997b; Price et al., 1997; Rhee, 1997; de Vreese, 2004). Kinder and Sanders (1990) found a relationship between low political information and higher susceptibility to framing effects, whereas Nelson et al. (1997b) found the opposite. Moreover, political knowledge has previously been found to be positively associated with a higher degree of support for EU integration (Inglehart et al., 1991). In this study, political knowledge is tested for its moderating function of framing effects.

Valence framing

Valenced frames 'are indicative of "good and bad" and (implicitly) carry positive and/or negative elements' (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003: 363). In other disciplines, such as psychology, marketing and management, or medical and health communication, the analysis of specifically valenced frames has received much more attention than in political communication.

Valence framing in psychology

In psychology, analyses focus on the effects valenced frames have on decision-making (for an overview, see for example Kuhberger, 1998; Levin et al., 1998, 2002). Judgements and evaluations of situations were found to be affected by the way a decision or problem is framed. Frames were operationalized as carrying identical information in either positive or negative terms.¹ The most prominent approach to framing effects in psychology is risky choice framing, which is based on prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981) and deals with individual decision-making in a context of risk. Hereby, decision-making is seen as largely dependent on the way the outcome of a decision problem is presented – in terms of either potential gains or losses.² Individuals have been identified as risk-seeking when the decision's outcome is discussed in terms of potential losses, but risk-averse when it is discussed in terms of potential gains. On a more general level, it demonstrates that negative and positive framing have an effect on people's judgements. This finding has far-reaching implications because the outcome of many situations can be perceived in terms of loss or gain. That is why this approach has been applied to various other contexts, testing framing effects for scenarios of alternative choices (e.g. Highhouse and Paese, 1996; Kuhberger, 1998; Levin et al., 1986, 1998, 2002; Li and Adams, 1995; Rutte et al., 1987; Schneider, 1992; van Schie and van der Pligt, 1995; Vaughan and Seifert, 1992).

Risky choice framing inherently implies the use of 'negative' or 'positive' frames. However, these two labels are denominators for a variety of more specific valence notions. Tversky and Kahneman (1981) used the terms 'gain' and 'loss'. In other studies, these valence labels were altered depending on the particular study context. Issues or situations were, for example, framed in a 'threat' vs 'opportunity' situation (Jackson and Dutton, 1988), as 'winning' vs 'losing' (Levin et al., 1986), or as a 'give-some' vs 'take-some' game (Rutte et al., 1987). This suggests a high level of possible differentiation, complexity and diversity within 'negative' and 'positive' framing.

Valence framing in marketing and management research

Framing analyses in marketing and psychological research both share an interest in the impact of framing on decision-making. In addition, frame analyses in marketing and management also focus on bargaining behaviour, product evaluations and consumer choices. Positive attribute framing, for example, consistently leads to more positive product

evaluations compared to negative framing within factually identical scenarios (e.g. Levin and Gaeth, 1988).³ Frame-related communication in negotiating situations has shown that knowing if a negotiation partner operates with a gain frame (coding outcomes in positive terms) or with a loss frame (coding outcomes in negative terms) affects cognition and behaviour (de Dreu et al., 1994). Negotiators thus reflect the valence framing of their negotiation partners. Furthermore, Schurr (1987) analysed the effect of gain and loss decision frames on risky purchase negotiations. He discussed the effects of a 'potential gains' frame compared to a 'potential reduced losses' frame. Bargaining teams that were framed to judge a decision situation in terms of gains made less risky agreements than other teams framed to think about loss reduction. Gain and loss frames in bargaining contexts thus proved to affect individuals' perspectives.

Valence framing in medical and health communication

In health communication, studies analysed the framing of issues such as genes and mental illness (Conrad, 2001), and the nicotine debate (Murphy, 2001). Other studies tested the effects of message framing in the context of health preventive behaviour (e.g. Kalichman and Coley, 1995; Raghurir and Menon, 2001; Rimal and Real, 2003; Rothman and Salovey, 1997; Schneider et al., 2001). According to Murphy, 'the presentation of health risk functions in the same way as the framing of other types of studies' (Murphy, 2001: 121). However, due to the thematic context (life, death, illness, etc.), the valence of frames received particular attention in health communication research: 'Nearly all health-related information can be construed in terms of either benefit or costs' (Rothman and Salovey, 1997: 4). Thus, many studies within this field focused on the risk perception of people (e.g. Raghurir and Menon, 2001; Rimal and Real, 2003) or on self-protective behaviour dependent on either positive or negative framing conditions (e.g. Rothman and Salovey, 1997; Schneider et al., 2001). Valenced frames within health communication are, for example, conceptualized in terms of 'gains' vs 'losses' or 'benefits' vs 'costs'. People are exposed to factually equivalent scenarios either emphasizing potential losses or potential gains of optional subsequent behaviours. Schneider et al. (2001) found that 'loss'-framed messages in the context of preventive medical practices were more persuasive than 'gain'-framed messages. Loss framing is seen as more effective in order to motivate healthy behaviour because it emphasizes the risk of not taking action, which according to prospect

theory induces risk-seeking behaviour (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky, 1979).⁴ Risk framing thus can be considered to have an effect on behaviour and judgements and functions as a motivator for change more so than positive framing.

Framing European politics in terms of 'risk' and 'opportunity'

Shah et al. (2001) specified the need in framing research to pay more attention to the implicit qualities of media frames. Some examples of issue-specific media frames with inherent valence are the 'anti-feminism' frame (Terkildsen and Schnell, 1997), the 'discrimination' frame (Gandy et al., 1997), the 'advocacy' frame (Tewksbury et al., 2000) or the 'Holocaust' frame (Tankard, 2001). Rössler (2001) analysed the framing of 'the internet' as either something good ('online heaven') or bad ('cyber hell'). Entman (1991) analysed the different framing of an American and a Soviet plane accident as either 'tragedy' (in the US case) or 'attack' (in the Soviet case). For Entman (1993), frames have inherent valence by nature as they contain a 'moral evaluation' as one of their defining characteristics.

Few studies within political communication have tested the *effects* of valenced news frames on individuals. Valenced frames provide an evaluative framework for individuals that influences their thoughts (e.g. Domke et al., 1998; Pan and Kosicki, 1993). McLeod and Detenber (1999), for example, analysed how differences in the portrayal of a social protest group affected viewers' support for the protesters' action. Results show a smaller degree of support in a negative framing condition. Nelson et al. (1997b) conducted an experiment presenting actions of the Ku Klux Klan either in a 'free speech' frame or in a 'disrupting public order' frame. Results showed a higher level of tolerance towards the Ku Klux Klan among participants in the positive frame (free speech) condition. Drawing upon empirical evidence derived from these studies and framing analyses in psychology, marketing and health communication, we can conclude that frames have important implications for the balance of public opinion. These studies consistently demonstrate a considerable effect of valence framing on cognitive processes and stress their potential to guide interpretations and evaluations of individuals.

Valence notions of frames are insufficiently summarized by a general, clear-cut distinction between 'positive' and 'negative'. These rather simplistic valence labels are too broad and are often only loosely defined, if at all. In the context of European politics, threats and benefits are often emphasized. McLaren (2002) stresses the relevance of perceived

cultural threat for public support for the EU and Gabel and Palmer (1995) emphasize the impact of personal benefit expectations on support for EU integration. The present study analyses the presence and effect of two specifically valenced frames in news coverage of EU enlargement: (1) EU enlargement as an *opportunity* for Europe and (2) EU enlargement as a *risk* for Europe.

The 'risk' frame raises concerns and emphasizes potentially negative consequences of the enlargement process such as high costs, increase of crime and instability. The 'opportunity' frame raises hope and confidence and emphasizes potentially positive consequences of the inclusion of new countries into the EU, such as the spread of democracy, freedom and human rights or economic growth. Within this study's context, we define 'risk' as the expectation of a future disadvantageous situation and the perception that an action or process may involve an unpleasant future outcome (see, for example, Rothman and Salovey, 1997). Similarly, framing issues in terms of 'opportunity' involves the perception that an action or process may involve a pleasant future outcome and is connected to an expectation of likely future advantages.

Hypotheses and research questions

Drawing upon existing empirical evidence from previous studies, we formulate the following set of research questions and hypotheses:

Research Question 1a: To what extent is EU enlargement framed in the news in terms of risk and/or opportunity?

Research Question 1b: What is the overall tone of news coverage towards EU enlargement?

We additionally test two hypotheses on the effects of valenced news frames based on previous research:

Hypothesis 1a: Framing EU enlargement as a 'risk' for Europe has negative effects on public support for the enlargement.

Hypothesis 1b: Framing EU enlargement as an 'opportunity' for Europe has positive effects on public support for the enlargement.

We expect the effects of exposure to news frames to be moderated by political knowledge:

Hypothesis 2: Political knowledge moderates framing effects so that individuals with low levels of political knowledge are more affected by the news frame than individuals with high political knowledge.

Methods

A multi-method research design including a content analysis and an experiment was employed, first, to investigate how EU enlargement was portrayed in the news coverage as either 'risk' or 'opportunity', and second, to assess the effect of both frames on public support for the enlargement.

Content analysis

Newspaper sample The content analysis was carried out on a sample of news articles in national and regional German newspapers. Germany was chosen because of its central role as political driver in the EU and its location as border country in the geographical centre of Europe. An analysis of national and regional news media in the context of European politics is of special interest given the multi-level governance of the EU. The German regional press has a large circulation so that its inclusion further contributes to the representation of the national press.

Four national daily newspapers were included in the sample: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Die Welt*.⁵ These four national dailies are opinion-leading quality newspapers within the German press landscape and represent a balanced spectrum of political orientation (e.g. Hagen, 1993; Kepplinger, 1985).⁶ Six regional daily newspapers were included in the analysis based on circulation numbers and geographical location: *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Freie Presse*, *Tagesspiegel* and *Berliner Zeitung*.⁷

Period of study The content analysis was conducted for news articles published between 1 November 2002 and 31 October 2003.⁸ Following a systematic random sampling approach, one day for each week was included in the sample starting with Friday 1 November 2002 and then moving on one day in every subsequent week.⁹

Data collection The articles were collected using the Central Documentary System and the Central Press Archive of the German Federal Press Office. Articles from all sections of the newspapers except sports, advertising and supplements were included in the analysis. The articles of the national newspapers were selected from the Central Documentary System's online archive. Therefore a specific keywords scheme had to be developed. Only articles were selected in which three different content levels were

combined: (1) articles had to contain at least one out of a list of keywords on a thematic level (e.g. EU, Europe, EU Commission, Brussels, etc.); (2) a second category was established by a list of keywords on a procedural level (e.g. EU enlargement, EU integration, European unification, etc.); (3) finally, on a country level, each selected article had to refer explicitly to at least one of the EU candidate countries.¹⁰ As a result, 1256 articles of the four *national* daily newspapers fit the requirements for the overall time period and 170 articles were included in the sample following the sampling scheme. The news articles for the regional press were collected manually (based on the same keyword scheme) from the Central Press Archive.¹¹ A total of 115 articles for the six *regional* newspapers were collected so that 285 news articles were finally included in the overall sample.¹²

Coding procedure Coding was conducted by two German native speakers. An inter-coder reliability test was conducted based on 50 randomly chosen news articles and yielded satisfactory results (reported later). The unit of analysis and coding unit was the distinct news story.

Measures of content analysis

News frames The present study stands within the tradition of deductive approaches, predefining certain frames as content analytical categories and drawing upon multiple indicators for the presence or absence of frames (e.g. Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; de Vreese et al., 2001). As the operationalization of 'opportunity' or 'risk' frames in a political communication context is not available from previous research, two sets of five questions were developed to indicate their presence or absence in the news. These items cover multiple conceptual dimensions that are of theoretical relevance to both frames.¹³ The items are similarly structured and only point to alternative evaluative directions according to the inherent valence of the particular frame.

A primary way of either welcoming or rejecting EU enlargement is the use of (1) *emotional expressions*. Another indicator is (2) the use of *positive or negative quotes* as an additional source suggesting a particular interpretation of the issue: 'A well-placed quote . . . will convey a construction of an issue that could ultimately benefit a particular interest' (Nelson et al., 1997b: 567). Furthermore, EU enlargement can be perceived as risk or opportunity with reference to any general or specific (3) *future benefit or cost* for Europe (EU), Germany or the candidate countries. (4) *Rational argumentation* is another possible way to mark EU

enlargement as either opportunity or risk. The last dimension turns to (5) the *positive or negative evaluation* of the current state within the new EU member countries and their expected future development.

The binary codes ('yes' = 1 or 'no' = 0 for each question) were added up for each article and divided by the number of frame items, so that two index scales for the presence of each frame were built ranging from 0 (frame not present) to 1 (frame present). A high score on the 'opportunity' scale indicates that a story accentuates future benefits or any kind of gains of EU enlargement, whereas a high score on the risk scale indicates a high level of concern expressed in an article, pointing more to expected future disadvantages, costs or losses. A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation on the 10 framing questions confirmed a loading on two distinct factors, producing two consistent and distinguishable frames.¹⁴ The two indices show almost no correlation with each other ($r = -.03, p > .05$). Both groups of items were tested for their scale reliability showing sufficiently high values for the 'opportunity' frame of ($\alpha = .67$) and the 'risk' frame of $\alpha = .62$). The inter-coder reliability for the 'opportunity' frame items was $\kappa = .67$ on average and $\kappa = .76$ for the 'risk' frame items.

Tone The overall tone shows if there is a bias in either a more positive or negative direction within the news coverage of EU enlargement. In this study, the tone of articles was first coded as either 'positive', 'negative', 'neutral' or 'balanced' towards EU enlargement. The coding decision was based on the sum of explicit statements per article that had a qualitative dimension and that could be thematically referred to the topic of EU enlargement. In order to measure an average tone for articles, the two categories 'neutral' and 'balanced' were later combined into one common category (indicating no dominant evaluative direction). The final scale measurement ranged from -1 (negative) to +1 (positive) with 0 (balanced) in between. The inter-coder reliability for this measure was $\kappa = .74$.

Experiment

Design To test the possible effects of framing EU enlargement as either 'opportunity' or 'risk', this study used a single-factor, post-test only, between-subjects experimental design with random assignment to one of two conditions. Within this design the first condition represents the 'opportunity' frame and the second condition represents the 'risk' frame. Similar experimental designs have been employed in previous research on

the framing effects of print media (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Rhee, 1997).

Procedure The experiment was conducted in January 2004 in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Greifswald (Germany) in an introductory-level seminar. In class, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. They were informed that they would participate in a project on 'European identity'. Participants first completed a pre-test questionnaire asking for demographic details and tapping political knowledge. Next, participants were exposed to two news articles of which the first was equal across conditions and the second established the two alternative framing conditions. Finally, participants completed a post-test questionnaire, which asked for their support for EU enlargement and included a manipulation check. Upon completion of the post-test questionnaire, participants were debriefed. The entire procedure lasted about 45 minutes.

Sample A total of 88 undergraduate university students participated in the experiment, with equal numbers in both conditions (69 percent females, age = 18–29 [$M = 21.8$, $SD = 2.4$]).

Stimulus material The experimental stimulus material consisted of one news article in two alternative versions (see Appendix), which was produced rather than selected. This ensures that the stimulus material reflects the frames as they have been conceptualized earlier in this study and it gives full control over the experimental manipulation. In both versions, the headline, sub-headline and the story were identical, dealing with a general discussion of the EU enlargement process. Combining an identical core section with factual information and sections establishing alternative frames has been common practice in previous experimental framing analyses (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999; de Vreese, 2004). To increase the external validity of this study and addressing a shortcoming of the experimental operationalizations of framing stimuli (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson, 1997) we designed the material according to our content analysis data. This guarantees that the specific characteristics and various dimensions of both frames are really mirrored in the experimental design.

In total, there were four different parts within the experimental news article that varied according to the valence of the two different frames. The first part consisted of a quote that explicitly qualified EU enlargement as either 'risk' or 'opportunity' for Europe without giving a

rational justification. This part covers two of the frame dimensions that have been introduced in the section explicating the defining conceptual dimensions of both frames: (1) *emotional pro/contra* and (2) *positive/negative quote*. The second part referred to 1 May 2004 as the starting date for further integration and either referred to an 'import of problems' (risk condition), explicitly mentioning crime, corruption, discrimination and human rights violations as threats to political stability in Europe, or to an 'import of progress', pointing to a spread of democratic values, human rights, laws and security and their transfer to Eastern Europe, guaranteeing freedom and political stability. This second part covers another frame dimension: (3) *future benefits/losses*. The third part evaluates the enlargement process as finally overcoming an 'artificial' division of the European continent and qualifying the candidate countries as substantial and original core parts of a common cultural, geographical and historical union (opportunity frame) or qualifying EU enlargement itself as an artificial process and the candidate countries as distinct and foreign (cultural, geographical and historical) parts of Europe (risk frame). This part covers another frame dimension: (4) *rational pro/contra*. The last part judges the current economic situation in the new member countries and evaluates their future potential as either promising or threatening. This part covers the last frame dimension: (5) *negative/positive evaluation*.

Measures

Support for EU enlargement Our key dependent variables were a set of six question items tapping EU enlargement support and measured on five-point Likert scales and tested for scale reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.76$).¹⁵ This measurement was complemented by an open thought listing procedure asking participants to list all possible reasons for and against EU enlargement that come into their minds and which they personally support. The numbers of supportive and opposing arguments were counted and an average index scale was built by subtracting the negative from the positive arguments. In addition, participants were asked if they see more risks or opportunities for themselves personally and how much they believe the EU and Germany will profit from EU enlargement.

Manipulation check A manipulation check revealed successful manipulation. The two experimental conditions were sufficiently strong and realized as such by the two groups, allowing the between-group differences in the dependent measures to be ascribed to the experimental manipulation.¹⁶

Moderator of framing effects Political knowledge was measured with seven factual, open-ended questions that were binary coded as either 0 (wrong answer) or 1 (correct answer).¹⁷ Cronbach's alpha for this scale, ranging from 0 (low political knowledge) to 1 (high political knowledge), was $\alpha = .69$ ($M = 0.15$, $SD = 0.21$). To test the moderating effect of political knowledge the variable was recoded into two groups at the mean: (1) participants with 'low political knowledge', and (2) participants with 'high political knowledge'.¹⁸

Results

Content analysis

Risk and opportunity framing of EU enlargement The 'risk' frame received an overall mean score of $M = 0.29$ ($SD = 0.28$) and the 'opportunity' frame of $M = 0.28$ ($SD = 0.29$). Table 1 indicates that both frames play a considerable role and are almost equally present in press coverage, giving an answer to Research Question 1a. A one-way ANOVA did not yield any significant between-group difference in the prominence of the 'opportunity' frame ($F(9, 275) = 1.81$, $p > .05$) or the 'risk' frame ($F(9, 275) = .72$, $p > .05$). There is thus a consistent way of framing the issue of EU enlargement in terms of 'risk' and 'opportunity' in the national and regional press.

Tone The press coverage of EU enlargement did not take a clear direction and can best be described as 'balanced' although only 10.5 percent ($N = 30$) of all articles have been explicitly coded into this category. However, a similar share of articles were coded as 'neutral' (11.2 percent) ($N = 32$) and those articles that were either 'positive' (36.8 percent) ($N = 105$) or 'negative' (41.4 percent) ($N = 118$) almost balanced each other out. This resulted in an overall tone of debate that does not show a clear bias in either direction, giving an answer to Research Question 1b. The average tone on the index scale measurement was $M = -0.05$ ($SD = 0.88$). A one-way ANOVA showed a non-significant between-group difference for tone ($F(9, 275) = .70$, $p > .05$).

Experiment

Effects on support for EU enlargement Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicting that participants in the 'opportunity' condition will show significantly higher support for European enlargement than those in the 'risk' condition were

Table 1 Prominence of risk and opportunity frames in press coverage of EU enlargement

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Opportunity frame</i>	<i>Risk frame</i>
<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (<i>n</i> = 60)	0.24 (0.26)	0.27 (0.25)
<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> (<i>n</i> = 46)	0.25 (0.28)	0.28 (0.30)
<i>Frankfurter Rundschau</i> (<i>n</i> = 29)	0.45 (0.29)	0.36 (0.32)
<i>Die Welt</i> (<i>n</i> = 35)	0.21 (0.26)	0.31 (0.27)
<i>Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (<i>n</i> = 13)	0.31 (0.35)	0.43 (0.30)
<i>Freie Presse Chemnitz</i> (<i>n</i> = 12)	0.32 (0.34)	0.25 (0.28)
<i>Stuttgarter Nachrichten</i> (<i>n</i> = 23)	0.23 (0.29)	0.27 (0.27)
<i>Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (<i>n</i> = 29)	0.32 (0.26)	0.26 (0.26)
<i>Berliner Zeitung</i> (<i>n</i> = 20)	0.29 (0.31)	0.32 (0.29)
<i>Tagespiegel</i> (<i>n</i> = 18)	0.31 (0.32)	0.29 (0.29)
Total (<i>n</i> = 285)	0.28 (0.29)	0.29 (0.28)

Note: Cell entries are means with standard deviations in parentheses. Means range on a scale from 0 (frame not present) to 1 (frame present). There are no significant mean differences for the prominence of both frames between national and regional newspapers.

confirmed. Framing EU enlargement in terms of opportunity and risk had a significant effect on readers' support for the enlargement.¹⁹ Table 2 displays a significant mean difference in support for EU enlargement between participants in the opportunity condition ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.77$) and in the risk condition ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.69$). This mean difference is in the expected direction and statistically significant ($t(86) = 3.10$, $p < .01$).

Table 2 EU enlargement support by experimental condition

	<i>Opportunity condition</i> (<i>N</i> = 43)	<i>Risk condition</i> (<i>N</i> = 44)
EU enlargement support	3.18 _a (0.77)	2.70 _b (0.69)

Note: Cell entries are mean scores of EU enlargement support on a five-point scale, standard deviations in parentheses. Different subscripts _{a,b} indicate significant between-condition difference with $p < .01$.

Table 3 Effect of experimental condition on perceived opportunities and benefits

	<i>Opportunity frame</i> (<i>N</i> = 43)	<i>Risk frame</i> (<i>N</i> = 44)
Personal opportunities	3.72 _a (0.98)	3.25 _b (0.94)
EU benefits	3.60 _a (1.00)	3.10 _b (0.80)
German benefits	3.05 _a (0.90)	2.55 _b (0.93)

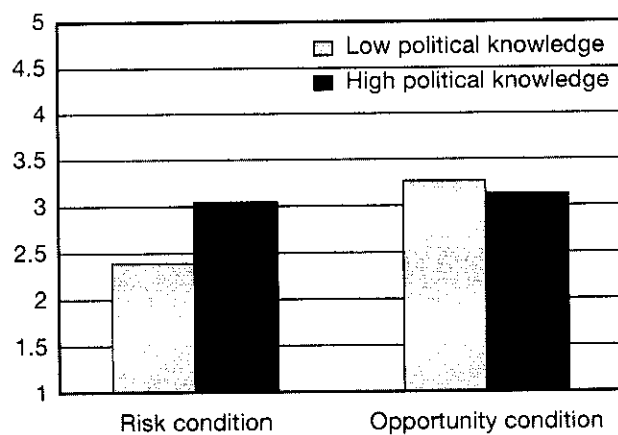
Note: Cell entries are mean scores on a five-point scale (for personal opportunities: 1 = seeing more risks, 5 = seeing more opportunities; for EU benefit and German benefit: 1 = no profit at all, 5 = very strong profit), standard deviations in parentheses. Different subscripts _{a,b} indicate significant between-condition difference with $p < .05$.

A second way of measuring participants' support for EU enlargement in relation to the experimental manipulation was via the thought listing procedure. The mean index scores between participants in the opportunity condition ($M = 1.41$, $SD = 2.15$) and the risk condition ($M = 0.45$, $SD = 1.92$) showed that participants in the opportunity condition mentioned significantly more supportive than opposing arguments than those in the risk condition ($t(86) = -2.20$, $p < .05$). Table 3 shows that, furthermore, respondents in the opportunity condition ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.98$) identified significantly more personal opportunities through EU enlargement than respondents in the risk condition ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.94$), ($t(85) = 2.28$, $p < .05$). Respondents in the opportunity condition also saw the EU ($t(85) = 2.64$, $p < .05$) and Germany ($t(85) = 2.56$, $p < .05$) as profiting significantly more from EU enlargement than respondents in the risk condition.

These results further confirm the general effect both news frames had on EU enlargement-related thoughts and evaluations. If EU enlargement was presented as an 'opportunity', readers saw more opportunities and greater benefits for themselves, Germany and the EU and had more positive associations compared to situations in which EU enlargement was presented to them as a 'risk'.

Moderator of framing effects An interaction model was tested and we found a significant interaction effect for political knowledge and condition on EU enlargement support ($F(1, 84) = 8.10, p < .01$) controlling for main effects. Figure 1 shows different levels of support for high and low politically knowledgeable participants in both conditions. Support for EU enlargement among participants with low political knowledge in the risk condition was lower ($M = 2.36, SD = 0.61$) ($N = 22$) than for participants with high political knowledge ($M = 3.04, SD = 0.60$) ($N = 22$). Participants in the opportunity condition who had high political knowledge ($M = 3.10, SD = 0.60$) ($N = 22$) showed a slightly lower degree of support for EU enlargement compared to participants within the same condition and with low political knowledge ($M = 3.27, SD = 0.91$) ($N = 22$).

In conclusion, individuals with low political knowledge were more strongly affected by the news frames. Less knowledgeable participants



Note: Bars show mean scores of EU enlargement support of participants with low and high political knowledge on a five-point scale in the risk frame and opportunity frame conditions.

Figure 1 EU Enlargement support for high and low politically knowledgeable participants in risk and opportunity condition

were especially affected by the risk news coverage. Individuals with greater political knowledge responded similarly in the risk and opportunity condition, and were thus not as affected by the risk condition as those with less political knowledge.

Discussion

This article provides empirical evidence for (1) the presence of a 'risk' and an 'opportunity' frame in press coverage of the EU enlargement process and (2) their effect on public support for the enlargement. First, a content analysis demonstrated that both frames played a considerable role in public debate and were almost equally prominent. Based on previous research on the negativity of EU news (e.g. Norris, 2000), one could have expected a stronger bias in a negative direction, but this was not confirmed by the present study. EU enlargement was portrayed as controversial, but also balanced in terms of risk and opportunities.

In the second phase, the study analysed the effect of 'risk' and 'opportunity' framing on individuals' support for EU enlargement. Our experimental study revealed a significant effect of the two framing manipulations on EU enlargement support. Individuals were affected by the exposure to either risk or opportunity news framing. If EU enlargement was presented as a risk, people's support was generally lower than if it was presented as an opportunity. Both frames also induced more positive (opportunity condition) or negative (risk condition) thoughts and led people to see either more advantages (opportunity condition) for themselves, the EU and Germany or more disadvantages (risk condition). This finding is in line with previous research in political communication on the effect of framing on individuals' cognitive responses (e.g. Price et al., 1997; Rhee, 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999), and on the effect of valenced news frames on EU integration support (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003).

It was found that the framing effect is not fully independent – it is moderated by political knowledge. Less knowledgeable individuals were generally more affected by the experimental manipulation and more susceptible to risk framing. This result supports earlier findings, which found a relationship between low political information and higher susceptibility to framing effects (e.g. Kinder and Sanders, 1990). Furthermore, previous research has shown that people are generally more affected by negative framing compared to positive framing. This can be explained by the strong emotional appeal and higher personal involvement of risk framing in particular (e.g. Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy,

1990; Schneider et al., 2001; see also Shah et al. [2004] for discussion of differential effects of gain and loss frames). This indicates that even if opportunity and risk framing play an equally prominent role in press coverage, there are still important implications for public opinion formation. If risk framing is generally more effective, an almost equal presence of both frames, as found in our analysis, could still produce a negative net impact on public opinion.

Unlike previous studies in political framing research, the present study analysed the effect of two news frames with *explicit* valence on individuals' attitudes. To uncover the multiple dimensions of public opinion, special attention has to be given to the definition of specific valence notions of frames, the operationalization of the respective frame concepts and the design of the stimulus material as has been done in this study. Distinguishing only between 'positive' and 'negative' framing ignores more detailed aspects and particularities of an issue. The present study was a first step to analyse opportunity and risk framing within a political communication context and to develop an operationalization of these frame concepts. We do not see 'risk' and 'opportunity' frames as inherent to EU-related news, i.e. as issue-specific frames, and we expect them to be part of a broader range of topics within political communication. In contrast to other issue-specific frames, the two concepts introduced in this article have a theoretical foundation in previous research within other disciplines, such as psychology, marketing and health communication, in which they are well established. These studies have delivered empirical results on the potential effects of valenced frames with strong theoretical implications. Consistently, valenced frames and risk framing in particular are shown to affect individuals' perceptions, evaluations and behaviour (e.g. Kalichman and Coley, 1995; Levin and Gaeth, 1988; Raghbir and Menon, 2001; Rothman and Salovey, 1997; Schneider et al., 2001). The present study advances research on valence framing effects and stresses the need for further elaboration and adjustment of the 'opportunity' and 'risk' frame concepts in political communication contexts.

In the specific context of framing EU affairs in the news, our results stress the potential impact opportunity and risk framing can have on the formation of public opinion. Based on our empirical findings, we have good reason to believe that public opinion about EU integration could shift in one or the other direction if either of the two frames received more emphasis within news coverage. As a recent example, the possible entry of Turkey into the EU has induced a lively debate among the public, including voices for a campaign against the full membership of

Turkey. Such a campaign provides one example of how risk framing in a European context might suddenly become crucial for the formation of public opinion. The strong affective potential of risk framing together with the fact that factual and self-perceived knowledge about European affairs is rather low in general (see, for example, *Eurobarometer* 60/61) and less politically knowledgeable individuals are more susceptible to risk framing indicates that risk framing can have a considerable effect on public opinion and thus on politics (Page and Shapiro, 1983).

We investigated the concepts of risk and opportunity framing only within one national context for print media. Moreover, we relied on a convenience sample in our experiment. We cannot therefore assess the frames employed by other media or in other journalistic cultures. The limitations notwithstanding, our study delivered a consistent and empirically grounded picture of news coverage of EU enlargement. It can function as an addition to the ongoing debate about EU integration and it demonstrates the effects of opportunity and risk framing of political issues on public opinion.

**Appendix: News article for experiment in alternative versions
(opportunity and risk [in parentheses] condition)**

EUROPE GROWS TO THE EAST

Entry of Eastern European states at 1 May 2004 / Soon 450 million people in 25 countries

BRUSSELS, 05. January. Soon the European Union will consist of 25 countries with 450 million people. This was decided on in April last year in the stoa of the Attalo, a former columned hall and now museum beneath the Acropolis in Athens. There was no shortage of important words said: 'EU enlargement is a great opportunity for Europe' ('EU enlargement is a great risk for Europe') Giscard d'Estaing, head of the EU convention, encouraged (warned) his colleagues. Now the long preparation process, that started nearly ten years ago at the EU Copenhagen summit with the formulation of the requirements for the candidate countries, has come to an end. After decades of division by the Iron Curtain, the near integration of the former Soviet satellite states into the European community is sealed. At the first of May 2004 the enlargement of the European Union will become a reality. It fulfils the hope of a transfer of the successful EU model with its values – democracy, rule of law and protection of human rights and minorities – to the Middle and Eastern European states. Freedom and political stability will be permanently guaranteed. (It raises the concern of an import of problems – crime

and corruption, discrimination of minorities and disregard for human rights – from the East to the Centre of Europe. Security and political stability will be permanently threatened.)

Thus, this is the right point in time to take a look back and forward. From the point of view of the entering countries one must remember the long time of occupation and oppression. Still, one should be aware that the entry does not mean an end to the countries' own efforts but the taking over of new responsibility, said Czech president Klaus in his new year's speech to the nation. With the enlargement, the artificial division of Europe will now be overcome. The Middle and Eastern European countries take back their appropriate position as core countries in a common historic and cultural Europe. Germany will move from the border region of the European Union into its centre. The whole of Europe will have a geo-strategic advantage. (With the enlargement, something comes together that does not really belong together. The Middle and Eastern European countries are for a long time now not core countries of a common historic and cultural Europe. Germany will be confronted with the consequences of open borders in the East. The whole of Europe will have a geo-strategic disadvantage.)

For many years now, in small steps politicians have had to compromise, first starting with only six, then nine, then 10, then 12 and later even more member countries. First, Southern and Scandinavian Europe joined the EU and now finally Eastern Europe.

Almost unnoticed by its 375 million citizens, the EU has become an influence in almost every area of life. Since the Maastricht Treaty everybody is not just a citizen of his or her own country but an EU citizen also.

From the beginning the Union understood its role as guarantor for freedom and prosperity – and tried to act accordingly. The two Southern extensions in the 1980s were examples of this. For Greece as also some years later for Spain and Portugal the integration was above all a politically motivated decision of the heads of states of the EU. Preventing a return to dictatorship in Greece and the Iberian peninsula was a deciding factor in giving them full membership. There is no reason to believe that the Eastern European countries now joining the EU could fall back to dictatorship but again it is mostly poor countries joining the community. However – there is now a big difference – the Eastern countries have had to quickly realize and accept that Brussels' funds for whitewashing economic structural deficits can no longer be endlessly increased. The EU now grows with the entry of for example Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to the world's largest economic market, which provides a very good preparation for the challenges of global

competition. The joining countries have a strong economic potential – adding growing markets to the EU. (which have mostly agriculturally dominated economies linked with high transformation costs and disadvantages for global competition. The economic potential of the joining countries is low – and the expected growth rates will be limited for a long time.)

After the inclusion of the new member countries EU enlargement has not yet come to an end. Europe stays open for new applicants.

BERND RUHLBEN

Notes

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1. Levin et al. (1998) provide a classification of valence framing effects from a psychological point of view by identifying three distinct fields: (1) *attribute framing*, (2) *goal framing* and (3) *risky choice framing*. In a subsequent study, Levin et al. (2002) were able to confirm framing effects for attribute and for risky choice framing but not for goal framing. Attribute framing refers to the effect of either positive or negative framing of some characteristics of an object or an event on people's evaluations. Goal framing deals with the effect of persuasive messages that frame an action or behaviour as having either positive or negative consequences.
2. In the original example of the 'Asian disease problem', the optional outcomes of an alternative choice scenario were either positively framed in terms of 'lives saved' or negatively in terms of 'lives lost', whereas the factual outcome (number of lives saved in relation to lives lost) was identical for both options.
3. Levin and Gaeth (1988) tested how consumers perceived the quality of ground beef that was either framed positively as '75 percent lean' or negatively as '25 percent fat'. Results showed that the quality was better evaluated in the positive framing condition. For an overview, see also Hallahan (1999: 212–13).
4. Schneider et al. (2001) found that low-income women from different ethnic groups were more likely to obtain mammography screenings after being exposed to a 'loss' frame compared to a 'gain' frame. Kalichman and Coley (1995) found that a 'loss' frame in the context of HIV prevention had a clear effect on the likelihood of women to get tested.

5. Circulation numbers for the national newspapers are as follows: (1) *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: 408,600, (2) *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: 436,100, (3) *Frankfurter Rundschau*: 192,200, (4) *Die Welt*: 255,200 (*Media Perspektiven Basisdaten, 2001* [Arbeitsgemeinschaft der ARD-Werbegeellschaften, 2001]).
6. *Bild*, the biggest German tabloid newspaper, was not included in the analysis because of the low number of articles that fitted the selection criteria ($N = 7$).
7. In a first step, the regional newspapers with the highest circulation numbers in each of the 16 German federal states were identified. Five of these states were selected, representing different geographical regions within Germany: Baden-Württemberg (southern Germany), Nordrhein-Westfalen (western Germany), Niedersachsen (northern Germany), Sachsen (eastern Germany) and Berlin (central Germany). For each of these federal states, the regional newspaper with the highest circulation was included in the sample, and only in the case of Berlin were two outlets included, the former 'eastern' and the former 'western' regional newspaper. Circulation numbers for regional newspapers: (1) *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*: 270,900, (2) *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*: 558,300, (3) *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*: 423,800, (4) *Freie Presse*: 386,000, (5) *Tagesspiegel*: 148,800, (6) *Berliner Zeitung*: 197,300 (*Media Perspektiven Basisdaten, 2003* [Arbeitsgemeinschaft der ARD-Werbegeellschaften, 2003]).
8. The time period of the study covers different key events relevant to the issue: all referenda that took place within the EU candidate countries, the Copenhagen summit on 13 December 2002, the European Parliament decision on EU enlargement on 9 April 2003, the EU summit in Athens on 16 April 2003, and the EU summit in Brussels in October 2003.
9. Through this approach, a similar number of all weekdays has been included in the sample. If a selection day fell on a Sunday or a holiday the next weekday was included instead.
10. Only articles have been included in the analysis that contained a combination of at least one of the keywords out of every set (in translation): (1) EU Commission, Brussels, EU, Europe, European Union (EU); (2) European (EU) enlargement, Eastern enlargement, EU entry, European (EU) integration; (3) Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta.
11. Because the articles were taken from an online archive we checked how many articles from the original print editions were missing despite meeting the defined selection criteria. Therefore the online results of one specific month (September 2003) were compared with the original print editions (taken from the Central Press Archive) of all four national newspapers. The levels of correspondence between online archive and printed editions proved to be sufficiently high: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* = 97.4 percent,

- Süddeutsche Zeitung* = 96.0 percent, *Frankfurter Rundschau* = 96.7 percent and *Die Welt* = 92.2 percent.
12. The number of news articles analysed per outlet were as follows: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: 60, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: 46, *Frankfurter Rundschau*: 29, *Die Welt*: 35, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*: 23, *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*: 13, *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*: 29, *Freie Presse*: 12, *Tagespiegel*: 18 and *Berliner Zeitung*: 20.
 13. 'Opportunity frame': (1) Does the story employ emotional expressions that welcome the entry of one or more of the candidate countries to the EU (emotional pro)? (2) Does the story deliver arguments or facts that support the inclusion of one or more of the candidate countries (rational pro)? (3) Does the story outline any general advantage or specific future benefit of EU integration for the EU, Germany or the candidate countries (future benefit)? (4) Is there a quote of any kind from an actor that is positive in tone towards the integration of one or more of the candidate countries (positive quote)? (5) Does the story see promising future development or praise the current state within one or more of the candidate countries (positive evaluation)? 'Risk frame': (6) Does the story employ emotional expressions that oppose the entry of one or more of the candidate countries to the EU (emotional contra)? (7) Does the story deliver arguments or facts that oppose the inclusion of one or more of the candidate countries (rational contra)? (8) Does the story outline any general disadvantage or specific future cost of EU integration for the EU, Germany or the candidate countries (future cost)? (9) Is there a quote of any kind from an actor that is negative in tone towards the integration of one or more of the candidate countries (negative quote)? (10) Does the story see problematic future development or criticize the current state within one or more of the candidate countries (negative evaluation)?
 14. Eigenvalue for the first factor: 2.22, and for the second factor: 2.10; total variance explained: 43.2 percent. *Items loading on the first factor (opportunity frame)*: 'Positive quote' = 0.79, 'Rational pro' = 0.76, 'Future benefits' = 0.74, 'Emotional pro' = 0.49, 'Positive evaluation' = 0.44. *Items loading on the second factor (risk frame)*: 'Negative quote' = 0.75, 'Future costs' = 0.69, 'Rational contra' = 0.65, 'Negative evaluation' = 0.52, 'Emotional contra' = 0.45.
 15. EU integration support was measured via six questions (in translation) on a scale from 1 = do not agree at all to 5 = strongly agree: (1) 'Enlargement of the EU is a good thing', (2) 'Europe will get stronger due to the enlargement of the EU', (3) 'The integration of the new countries will cause many troubles' (reverse coding), (4) 'Germany will profit from the enlargement of the EU', (5) 'EU enlargement will bring more advantages than disadvantages'.
 16. A first control measurement was established by an initial news article that was not subject to any experimental manipulation and thus identical for all

participants. It represents a non-manipulation check and was placed subsequent to the pre-test questionnaire and before the second, manipulated news article. After participants had read this first article (dealing with the European constitution) they were asked two questions, which showed no significant mean difference between the two groups. Two more control measures (support for Euro and attitude towards security issues) were tested and did not show any between-condition differences, as expected. As part of the post-test questionnaire, participants were asked for their personal impression on how the second news article presented EU integration, either as (1) 'opportunity' or as (2) 'risk' for Europe. A *t*-test yielded a significant mean difference between participants in the two conditions in the expected direction ($t(86) = 7.79, p < .01$).

17. Knowledge was measured by the following questions (in translation): (1) 'How many countries will join the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004?'; (2) 'In which year are Romania and Bulgaria currently expected to join the EU?'; (3) 'What is the name of the current president of the EU Commission?'; (4) 'Can you give the name of at least one German commissioner and the area he or she is responsible for?'; (5) 'Which country currently holds the presidency of the EU?'; (6) 'Where is the European Court of Justice located?'; (7) 'In which year will the next European elections be held?'
18. Participants were defined as having 'low political knowledge' when they gave no correct answer to any of the knowledge questions (index score below 0.14), and as having 'high political knowledge' when they gave one or more correct answers (index score 0.14 or higher). This classification can be justified with regard to the low average mean score for political knowledge.
19. In addition, the effect of both frames on general EU support was tested yielding no significant result, pointing to the multi-dimensions of public opinion.

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