

How threats and promises affect support for international cooperation

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Although states usually agree to cooperate internationally when the benefits of such cooperation exceed the costs, these costs can still be substantial. How can political actors intent on ratifying international agreements convince the public that these costs are worth bearing? We argue that how policymakers discuss the consequences of cooperation and of not cooperating affects the public's attitudes on international negotiations. Using three pre-registered survey experiments fielded in four countries and concerning different ongoing international negotiations, we examine the effect of highlighting the consequences of cooperation on people's willingness to comply in negotiations. Moreover, we study whether framing cooperation as a potential gain, or its absence as a potential loss influences voters' willingness to compromise. We find that that people strongly react to the messages that highlight the costs and benefits of cooperation, and that making the benefits of cooperation more concrete can further increase support for international agreements. At the same time, the effect of framing these consequences in terms of gains or losses depends on context. These findings have broader implications for our understanding of the (lack of) persuasiveness of elite endorsements, especially with regards to the potential backlash to "project fear" campaigns.

Introduction

International agreements involve both benefits and costs for countries who sign up to them. Benefits include welfare gains from international cooperation, access to shared information, networks, joint projects and initiatives, as well as more concrete advantages such as money from international programs. But such agreements also create costs, such as financial commitments, potentially costly compliance with mutually agreed-upon rules, and limitations of national sovereignty (Thompson et al. 2019). For most countries, the benefits outweigh the costs; otherwise, sovereign governments would not participate (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Keohane 2005). Nonetheless, public pushback against new agreements has grown. Widespread public opposition has derailed several international agreements, from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). For political actors intent on signing international agreements in the face of public controversy, this raises the question how they can convince the public that any potential costs of an agreement are worth bearing in light of its benefits.

Lots of research has studied this backlash against various forms of international cooperation (see for example Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019, Mansfield et al. 2021, Walter 2021, Bonifai et al. 2022). Here, much focus has been on the role of nationalist and isolationist political actors, such as populist-right parties and politicians, who oppose international cooperation and international institutions (Vasilopoulou 2018, Mansfield and Pevehouse 2022). Other studies have focused on how negative media coverage of international cooperation can mobilize opposition against international institutions (e.g., Vliegthart et al. 2008, Brutger and Strezhnev 2022).

Less attention has been paid to the question of how political actors can *raise* support for international cooperation. We contribute to this debate by studying how different ways of communicating the benefits of an international agreement affect individual support for the agreement. In fact, there is considerable variation in how proponents of international cooperation try to convince voters to support an international agreement. Some emphasize the benefits of the cooperative arrangement in question. For example, endorsing a proposed free trade agreement between Switzerland and Indonesia in a referendum campaign, the Swiss business association *economiesuisse* argued that this agreement “gives Swiss exporters important competitive advantages over their competitors, for example from the EU or the USA. At the same time, the free trade agreement contributes to sustainable development and is a great opportunity for sustainable trade.”¹ Others emphasize the costs of not entering or remaining in such agreements. The most famous example of such a strategy is the Remain-

¹ <https://www.economiesuisse.ch/de/artikel/schweizer-wirtschaft-folgt-bundesrat-und-sagt-ja-zum-freihandelsabkommen-mit-indonesien>

campaign leading up to the Brexit referendum, which warned that leaving the EU would create economic uncertainty, job losses, a downturn in growth, investment, and trade, as well as diminished British influence in the world. Derided as “Project Fear” by Brexit-supporters, this campaign mostly focused on the benefits of EU membership that would be lost if Britain were to leave the European Union (EU).

In addition, policymakers also often combine statements about the promises of an international agreement with warnings about the consequences of a failure to ratify the agreement. For example, in his statement on the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), a highly contested international agreement, US President Barack Obama praised the agreement’s benefits, arguing that “because of this deal, Iran will remove two-thirds of its installed centrifuges [...] Iran will also get rid of 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium.” Emphasizing the costs of failing to reach an agreement, he also warned to “consider what happens in a world without this deal”, warning that “Without this deal, there would be no agreed-upon limitations for the Iranian nuclear program [...] Such a scenario would make it more likely that other countries in the region would feel compelled to pursue their own nuclear programs, threatening a nuclear arms race in the most volatile region of the world. [...] Put simply, no deal means a greater chance of more war in the Middle East.”²

How effective are these different communication strategies in swaying public opinion in favor or against a disputed international agreement? In this paper, we focus on how voters respond to two communication strategies: Making the benefits of cooperation concrete, and highlighting the positive consequences of cooperation vs. the negative consequences of non-cooperation. We argue that specifying the concrete benefits of an international agreement or policy proposal makes these benefits more tangible and therefore increases support for the type of international cooperation in question. We then explore whether the framing of these benefits as something to be gained (gain frames) or something to be lost (loss frames) have a stronger effect on voter support for the international agreement or policy in question.

To examine this argument, we fielded three pre-registered survey experiments in which respondents were asked to evaluate actual proposals for international cooperation that were salient in their respective countries at the time the survey was fielded. Two experiments, fielded in Switzerland and Hungary, examine how specifying the benefits of cooperation and discussing these benefits in terms of gain and loss frames affects support for specific international cooperation proposals, concluding an Institutional Framework Agreement with the EU in the Swiss case, and complying with EU demands to increase judicial independence and tackle corruption in Hungary. A third experiment explores support for NATO accession

² Barack Obama, «Statement by the President on Iran» The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 14 July 2015. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/statement-president-iran>

in Sweden and Finland and varies gain and loss frames, but additionally highlights that due to Turkey's refusal to agree to these countries' NATO accession unless the countries toughened their policies on Kurdish groups, such a policy also carried considerable costs. The experiments thus examine two specific aspects of framing: making the consequences of cooperation more concrete, and framing consequences in terms of gains or losses.

Our results show that highlighting the specific benefits of an international agreement increases support for international cooperation, whereas specifying the concrete costs associated with the agreement decrease support. Moreover, making the benefits of cooperation more concrete can have an effect on support for cooperation and willingness to compromise, although not in all the cases. Finally, the effect of framing consequences in terms of gains or losses is found to be context-dependent. While in Sweden and Finland loss-framed messages are clearly more effective in convincing people in support of international cooperation, in Hungary gain frames are more persuasive and in Switzerland loss-framed messages seem to backlash.

How messaging affects public support for international cooperation

Public opinion is an important determinant of state behavior in international negotiations, and its influence has grown more significant as international cooperation has become more politicized in recent years (Hutter et al. 2016; Zürn 2014; Zürn et al. 2012). Given the complexity and multidimensionality of international affairs, public opinion about international cooperation tends to be ambivalent (De Vries et al. 2021; De Vries and Steenbergen 2013; Walter 2021). In such a context, voters tend to be receptive to cue-giving by elites and the media on international affairs.

Many studies have therefore examined how diverse messages can influence public opinion on foreign issues. Survey experiments have allowed scholars to explore the determinants of public attitudes on trade (Guisinger 2017; Herrmann et al. 2001; Hiscox 2006; Naoi and Kume 2015), security (Kreps 2014; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Tomz and Weeks 2013), and transnational issues such as climate change and international organizations (Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Bush and Prather 2020; Tingley and Tomz 2014). These studies have focused either on the content of the message or on the actor who delivers it. Some studies have shown that the information contained in a message is the primary driver of attitude shifts, regardless of who carries the message; others have found that partisans shift toward the opinion they receive when the cue comes from their own party and are unresponsive to out-party cues. Less attention has been paid to the effect of the way information is presented. However,

information is rarely presented in a neutral manner, especially when it concerns uncertain consequences.

Media, politicians and campaigns can portray information in different ways, stressing certain evaluations or parts of an argument. It is well established in political science that frames select and organize information on issues, give meaning, attribute positive or negative values, and can influence attitudes. Frames supply a readily comprehensible basis on which to think about the issue and how to justify what should be done about it (Chong and Druckman 2007a; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). A framing effect occurs when individuals who are exposed to different frames arrive at different positions on the issue, depending on the priority given to various considerations in the frame (Druckman and Nelson 2003). Also in the field of foreign policies, how particular international issues are framed determines how people expect their government to respond (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Nguyen and Spilker 2022). According to a recent review of the literature,

“the complex and multidimensional nature of international cooperation (...) makes the actions of political entrepreneurs, and the media response that they might invoke, crucially important in trying to understand how trade-offs related to international cooperation are framed and how the mass public thinks about them as a result” (De Vries et al. 2021).

We can identify two types of framing effects: emphasis and equivalency framing effects (Cacciatore et al. 2016; Druckman 2001). Emphasis frames occur when highlighting different considerations regarding a political issue or event influences individuals (for example, presenting a hate group rally as a free speech vs. a public order issue). They focus the attention on different arguments in favor or against a problem, thus varying the content of the information presented. Equivalency frames are instead “logically identical ways of making the same statement” (Druckman 2001, 230). They occur when a different presentation of the same information in either a positive or negative light affects people (for example, 90 per cent employment vs. 10 per cent unemployment).

Emphasis frames yield, on average, larger effects than equivalency frames (Chong and Druckman 2007; Nabi et al. 2020; but see Amsalem and Zoizner 2022). The reason for this is that emphasis frames vary more elements of the message (Nabi et al. 2020). They vary both how the information is presented and its content (Cacciatore et al. 2016); each emphasis frame highlights a different consideration. Since people often possess a mix of conflicting considerations on political issues (Zaller 1992), emphasis frames can alter the weight they attach to different aspects of an issue (Chong and Druckman 2007b; Nelson et al. 1997). Therefore, they are more likely than equivalency frames to drive attitudes in opposing directions.

In the context of international negotiations, framing the consequences of international cooperation as positive and beneficial can increase people's willingness to compromise and support international cooperation. On the other hand, if the consequences of international cooperation are framed as negative or costly, it can decrease people's willingness to compromise and support international cooperation. For example, with regard to framing and the EU, “[t]he basic finding of two decades of research is that political communications that frame European integration in terms of its benefits increase public support for European integration, while messages that frame it in terms of costs, risks or cultural threats lower support for European integration” (Abbarno and Zapryanova 2013, 583; Medrano 2003; Schuck and De Vreese 2006; De Vreese 2004).

Cost/benefit hypothesis: Highlighting the benefits (costs) of cooperation increases (decreases) people’s willingness to compromise in international negotiations.

Moreover, we argue that when people consider the consequences of international cooperation more concretely, it can have a significant and strong effect on their willingness to compromise. One of the reasons that making the consequences of international cooperation more concrete has a strong effect on willingness to compromise is that it helps to clarify the stakes and potential outcomes of the situation. When the consequences are abstract or uncertain, it can be difficult for people to fully understand the implications of different courses of action and to weigh the pros and cons of different options. By making the consequences more concrete, it becomes easier for people to understand the potential costs and benefits of different choices, and to make informed decisions about whether or not to compromise.

Concrete benefits hypothesis: Making the benefits more concrete increases people’s willingness to compromise in international negotiations.

Table 1 summarizes the combined effects of the two hypotheses.

Table 1 - Overview of hypotheses on emphasis frames
Effects on willingness to compromise

		Emphasizing the consequences	
		Costs	Benefits
Making the benefits concrete	No	<i>Decrease</i>	<i>Increase</i>
	Yes	<i>Decrease less</i>	<i>Increase more</i>

The influence of gain- and loss-framed messages

Cacciatore, Scheufele, and Iyengar (2016), in a recent prominent piece, argued for a paradigm change in framing research, pushing researchers to revert to a smaller definition of framing based solely on equivalence. According to these authors, a broad definition of framing that includes emphasis frames 'has undoubtedly contributed to making framing effects appear as much more widespread and powerful than they actually are' (Cacciatore et al. 2016, 14). Equivalence framing is based on prospect theory (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), a behavioral economic theory that posits that framing a behavior in terms of its prospective costs (loss-framed) or benefits (gain-framed) can have significantly different effects on individuals' decision making. Tversky and Kahneman demonstrated that human choice was contingent on the description of choice problems: People behaved differently depending on whether outcomes were framed as potential gains or potential losses, and they tended to tolerate more risk in the domain of losses.

According to prospect theory, people are more sensitive to prospective losses than to prospective gains (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), so negative outcomes are assigned a higher psychological weight than positive ones (Druckman and McDermott 2008). Different studies indicate that negative stimuli are detected more reliably (Dijksterhuis and Aarts 2003), lead to more elaborate attributions (Bohner et al. 1988), and generally demand more attention, thus entailing more elaborate processing (Baumeister et al. 2001). By stimulating more attention or activation, negative frames allow for easier retrieval of relevant knowledge or generation of evidence (Hilbig 2012). On the contrary, positively framing statements can lead recipients to feel that the source is trying to persuade them, which triggers reactance, reducing the perceived truth of the message and the trustworthiness of the source (Koch and Peter 2017). As a result, negatively framed statements were shown to receive substantially higher truth ratings than formally equivalent statements framed positively (Hilbig 2009).

However, other scholars have proposed a different associative model to explain attribute framing effects on evaluations (Levin 1987; Levin et al. 1998). Depending on the (positive or negative) frame, information is encoded differently relative to its descriptive valence (Levin and Gaeth 1988; Levin et al. 1998). Biased encoding leads to activation of (positively or negatively) valenced knowledge that is applied in subsequent evaluations (Cacciatore et al. 2016; Price and Tewksbury 1997; Price et al. 1997). Consequently, positive frames evoke more favorable associations with the message or object presented, leading to a more positive overall evaluation than negative frames. For example, presenting citizens with a dissatisfaction rate of 10 percent induces a much more negative evaluation of public services than presenting them with a satisfaction rate of 90 percent (Olsen 2015).

Research on the relative influence of threats and promises in conflict situations has also produced inconclusive findings. According to conflict spiral theory (Jervis 1976), a threat from an opponent in conflict elicits counterthreats, leading to an escalation of the threat exchange, a motivation to retaliate, and increasing levels of punitive action (De Dreu 1995; Herman et al. 1999). Further findings also link out-group threat with decreased willingness to compromise or make concessions to the other side, which is perceived as having negative intentions toward one's own side and therefore as untrustworthy (Gordon and Arian 2001; Maoz and McCauley 2005). Promises, meanwhile, have been found to elicit favorable responses toward their communicators and to increase cooperation, liking, and trust (De Dreu 1995). Yet, there is also evidence suggesting that in a context of prolonged conflict, threat frames may be actually more persuasive than promise frames. According to the deterrence model (Bacharach and Lawler 1981), threats from the opponent can act as effective deterrents, eliciting fear of the opponent's retaliation. In this view, threat from the out-group can increase the tendency toward compliance and concession making (De Dreu 1995).

Question: What is the relative influence of gain- and loss-framed messages on people's willingness to compromise in international negotiations?

Case studies

We test our hypotheses in the context of two international negotiations. First, we analyze Swiss voter willingness to compromise in the context of the negotiations between Switzerland and the European Union over a new institutional framework agreement. Second, we study the attitudes of Hungarian voters in the negotiations with the EU over violations of rule of law and the unblocking of EU funds. Finally, we study the willingness of Swedish and Finnish voters to comply with Turkey's demands for backing their NATO bids.

Study 1: EU negotiations in Switzerland

The first study focuses on Switzerland, a country with very close ties with the EU despite having rejected, in 1992, membership in the European Economic Area. Since then, Switzerland and the EU created a tight web of over 120 bilateral treaties that allow for close cooperation on issues as diverse as market access, research cooperation and free movement, and even membership in the Schengen/Dublin regime (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Oesch 2020).

In 2014, Switzerland and the EU began to negotiate about a new "institutional framework agreement" (InstA). The idea was to institutionally bundle the seven main bilateral

agreements (Bilaterals I) and any future agreements together into one overarching legal agreement that would provide for a dynamic adoption of Swiss law in response to changes in relevant EU law and the introduction of a dispute resolution mechanism. Because the framework agreement put in writing the supremacy of EU law in issues related to the Single Market and gave the European Court of Justice an important role in dispute resolution processes, perhaps unsurprisingly, there was large resistance in Switzerland. The institutional framework agreement was contested in Swiss politics from the start of the negotiations in 2014.

The EU announced and has since reiterated again and again that it is unwilling to update any existing agreements or conclude new ones until a framework agreement is in place. Because of the static nature of the existing bilateral treaties, this means that their value to Switzerland and their ability to maintain close integrated relations will decay over time. As a result, Switzerland saw itself confronted with a choice between signing up to more cooperation with the EU or letting cooperation erode. Despite these threats, the Swiss government pulled out of the negotiations in spring 2021, and the EU has responded by living up to its word: right after Switzerland terminated the negotiations, new certification hurdles for the medtech industry emerged as the EU refused to update a relevant directive, and Swiss researchers lost their association to the EU's large research program Horizon Europe. In the medium term, certification hurdles for the machinery industry and reduced electricity security loom large, and in the long run, Swiss-EU cooperation could fall far below current levels. In the meantime, the question of how to develop Switzerland-EU relations remain on the table – with most of the EU's demands and Switzerland's reluctance to meet them unchanged.

Study 2: EU negotiations in Hungary

Relationships between Hungary and the EU started to deteriorate 2010 when Viktor Orbán's conservative Fidesz party won the elections on a deeply nationalist and traditionalist platform. The EU's first serious infringement proceedings against Hungary took place in 2012, over forced personnel changes within the leadership of state institutions, which the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled as a first violation of the rule of law. Since then, the European Commission's numerous referrals to the ECJ against Hungary have concerned several issues, including the obligation for NGOs to disclose their foreign financiers, Hungary's refusal to accept migrants, the poor treatment of asylum seekers, or banning the portrayal to minors of homosexuality or sex reassignment.

To have a more effective instrument against the Hungarian government (as well as the Polish one), in 2020 the European Council adopted the "conditionality mechanism." The

disbursement of funds would henceforth be linked to the rule of law in the respective country. In 2022 the relationship between Hungary and the European Union has become particularly strained, given the country's opposition to sanctions against Russia, ongoing rule of law concerns and Brussels' decision to withhold funding equivalent to 8.5 percent of the country's GDP. Negotiations between the two sides became very intensive. The discussions have had two distinct legal legs — one relating to steps Orbán must take to unlock €14.9 billion in grants and soft loans from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), and the other relating to remedial measures the government must take to satisfy the “rule of law conditionality mechanism” to unlock €7.5 billion of EU cohesion funds. These will ultimately come to form one political package, with the aim of serving one key political objective: protecting the financial interests of the EU's budget and forcing Budapest to align more closely with the bloc's treaties, norms and values.

Study 3: NATO negotiations in Finland and Sweden

In our second study, we study the ongoing negotiation between Finland and Sweden, on one side, and Turkey, on the other, to allow the two Nordic countries to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). After decades of neutrality, Finland and Sweden have expressed interest in joining NATO in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. However, they have faced a major obstacle in Turkey's veto. The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has publicly stated his oppositions to the entry of these two countries into the alliance. The rules for entry into NATO require unanimity among current members, meaning Turkey can effectively veto the entry of Finland and Sweden.

Erdogan's opposition is based on his view that Finland and Sweden support "terrorists" by providing protection and residence to members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group that is mounting resistance to Turkey's harsh treatment of its Kurdish citizens. Despite the PKK being listed as a terrorist group by the U.S. and EU, Finland and Sweden have been reluctant to extradite members of the group to Turkey over human rights concerns. Moreover, as neutral countries, Finland and Sweden have not been bound by the strategic compromises that NATO members were required to make in order to keep the alliance together. Therefore, both countries have been free to take a moral stance on Turkey's position on Kurdish rights and have publicly condemned repressions of dissidents, intellectuals, journalists, and minority groups.

Research design

Survey experiments can provide valuable insights into the ways in which issue framing can affect public opinion on international cooperation issues. These experiments involve presenting the same issue or policy proposal to different groups of people in different ways (i.e., using different frames), and then measuring the impact of these different frames on public opinion. We fielded three pre-registered survey experiments in which respondents were asked to evaluate actual proposals for international cooperation that were salient in their respective countries at the time the survey was fielded. Two experiments, fielded in Switzerland and Hungary, examine how specifying the benefits of cooperation and discussing these benefits in terms of gain and loss frames affects support for specific international cooperation proposals, concluding an Institutional Framework Agreement with the EU in the Swiss case, and complying with EU demands to increase judicial independence and tackle corruption in Hungary. A third experiment explores support for NATO accession in Sweden and Finland and varies gain and loss frames, but additionally highlights that due to Turkey's refusal to agree to these countries' NATO accession unless the countries toughened their policies on Kurdish groups, such a policy also carried considerable costs.

Study 1

We fielded two original surveys, one in Switzerland in May 2022, and one in Sweden and Finland in November 2022. The Swiss survey is the fifth wave of multi-year online panel survey that we fielded among the voting-age Swiss population. The survey was implemented as a web survey (CAWI) by the polling company gfs.bern and relies on its internet panel to recruit respondents using quotas for age, gender, and language region. The data is weighted based on language region, age, gender, education, and party affinity in order to ensure the representativeness of the sample. We included a refreshment sample to rebalance the representativeness that panel attrition had reduced. The survey was fielded in May 2022, and included 1800 respondents (1100 of previous panelists, plus 700 new respondents).

The pre-treatment question asks:

“Although the Federal Council has broken off negotiations on the institutional framework agreement with the EU, bilateral cooperation issues are still on the agenda. In your opinion, what should Switzerland do in the event of new negotiations with the EU for a deeper, institutionalized relationship?” Responses range from 1 (Switzerland should not make any compromises) to 7 (Switzerland should fully comply with the EU's demands).

After two experimental manipulations (whose order was randomized), respondents were then asked again about their support for Switzerland’s strategy in the negotiations with the EU in the context of two policy issues. In the case of the first experiment, the question asks:

“In your opinion, how should Switzerland behave in the negotiations with the EU on a deeper, institutionalized relationship **to enable Switzerland's integration into the EU internal electricity market?**”.

Similarly, in the case of the second experiment, the question asks:

“In your opinion, how should Switzerland behave in the negotiations with the EU on a deeper, institutionalized relationship **to gain access to Horizon Europe?**”.

In both cases, answers ranged from 1 (Switzerland should not make any compromises) to 7 (Switzerland should fully comply with the demands of the EU).

After the first question, we implemented two experimental manipulations (whose order was randomized). In the first one, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following three conditions:

<p><u>Control</u></p> <p>A concrete topic of discussion between Switzerland and the EU is the creation of a new electricity agreement to ensure cooperation between Switzerland and the EU in the electricity sector.</p>	
<p><u>Loss frame</u></p> <p>[control text] + “The EU is prepared to exclude Switzerland from its internal electricity market if Switzerland is not willing to deepen and institutionalize bilateral relations within a general framework. In the medium term, the absence of an electricity agreement will endanger the stability of the electricity supply and there is a risk of electricity shortages and blackouts. The exclusion of Switzerland from the EU internal electricity market is therefore a real threat to the Swiss economy and the well-being of the Swiss population.”</p>	<p><u>Gain frame</u></p> <p>[control text] + “The EU is prepared to include Switzerland in its internal electricity market if Switzerland is willing to deepen and institutionalize bilateral relations within a general framework. In the medium term, an electricity agreement will enable Switzerland to ensure a stable electricity supply so that there is no risk of electricity shortages and blackouts. The integration of Switzerland into the EU internal electricity market is therefore essential for the Swiss economy and the well-being of the Swiss population.”</p>

In the second manipulation, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following three conditions:

<u>Control</u>	
Another topic of discussion between Switzerland and the EU is Switzerland's access to Horizon Europe, the EU's major research program.	
<u>Loss frame</u>	<u>Gain frame</u>
[control text] + “The EU has excluded Switzerland from Horizon Europe until Switzerland is willing to deepen and institutionalize bilateral relations within an overall framework. Swiss researchers thus lose access to funding and research collaborations from the world's largest international research program. Switzerland's exclusion from Horizon Europe thus poses a real threat to Switzerland as a research location.”	[control text] + “The EU is ready to admit Switzerland into Horizon Europe if Switzerland agrees to deepen and institutionalize bilateral relations within an overall framework. Swiss researchers would then again have access to funding and research collaborations from the world's largest international research program. Joining Horizon Europe is therefore essential for Switzerland as a research location.”

We first present differences in the answers between the pre-treatment question and the two post-treatment questions to show the effect of priming the benefits of cooperation.

In a second stage, we analyze the effect of gain- and loss-framed messages with a linear regression with individual fixed effects predicting changes in support for the Swiss strategy in negotiation with EU between the pre-treatment outcome variable and the two post-treatment outcome variables. The analyses will be performed applying post-stratification survey weights. We analyze differences between each treatment and control to test the hypothesis that priming the consequences of (non-)cooperation increases respondent's willingness to accept compromises. We analyze differences between the two treatments to test the relative strength of gain- and loss-framed messages. We exclude participants who incorrectly answer our attention check.

Study 2

We fielded an online survey among 3255 Hungarian citizens between March and May 2023 in partnership with the survey company Bilendi&Respondi. Respondents were asked to rate their support with complying with the EU's demands in the ongoing negotiations with the Hungarian government over violations of the rule of law.

The pre-treatment outcome asks: “Relations between Hungary and the European Union have deteriorated over the last decade. The European Commission has repeatedly argued that certain reforms introduced by the Hungarian government violate EU rules and standards, and

therefore demands changes. In your opinion, how should Hungary deal with the EU's demands?" Answers range from 0 (Hungary should not compromise) to 10 (Hungary should fully comply with the EU's demands).

The post-treatment outcome variable asks: "In your opinion, how should Hungary deal with the EU's demands **in order to unblock EU funds?**". Again, answers range from 0 (Hungary should not compromise) to 10 (Hungary should fully comply with the EU's demands).

After the first question, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following three conditions:

<p><u>Control</u></p> <p>As part of this conflict, the European Union recently decided to freeze billions of euros budgeted for Hungary due to concerns over the respect of the rule of law and corruption. Hungary will not receive any payments until it approves reforms to increase judicial independence and tackle corruption.</p>	
<p><u>Loss frame</u></p> <p>[control text] + If the government does not comply with the EU's demands, Hungary will lose access to 6.3 billion euros in regional funds, and will additionally lose 5.8 billion euros from the new COVID recovery fund. Losing this money would pose a real threat to the recovery of the Hungarian economy, and harm the welfare of Hungarians.</p>	<p><u>Gain frame</u></p> <p>[control text] + If the government complies with the EU's demands, Hungary will continue to access around 6.3 billion euros in regional funds, and will additionally gain 5.8 billion euros from the new COVID recovery fund. Receiving this money would greatly benefit the recovery of the Hungarian economy, and improve the welfare of Hungarians.</p>

We first present differences in the answers between the pre-treatment question and the two post-treatment questions to show the effect of priming the benefits of cooperation. In a second stage, we analyze the effect of gain- and loss-framed messages with a linear regression with individual fixed effects predicting changes in support for the Hungarian strategy in negotiation with EU between the pre-treatment outcome variable and the post-treatment outcome variable.

Study 3

In the third study, we partnered with the company Bilendi&Respondi to field a survey in Finland and Sweden. We interviewed 3000 citizens in each country in November 2022.

Respondents rated their support for their country’s NATO accession bid in two outcome variables. The first one is asked pre-treatment. The second one is asked after the experimental manipulation, and makes reference to Turkey’s demands in the negotiations, thus priming the consequences of (non-)cooperation. The pre-treatment outcome variable asks:

“[Sweden/Finland] has recently applied for NATO membership. How much do you agree or disagree with the [Swedish/Finnish] **decision to join NATO?**”. Answers range from 0 (Fully disagree) to 10 (Fully agree).

The post-treatment outcome variable measures respondents’ support for the Swedish/Finnish promise to comply with Turkey’s demands in order to join NATO. It asks:

“How much do you agree or disagree with the [Swedish/Finnish] **promise to comply with Turkey’s demands in order to join NATO?**”. Answers range from 0 (Fully disagree) to 10 (Fully agree).

We implemented one experimental manipulation, with one control and two treatment groups. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following three conditions:

<p><u>Control</u></p> <p>“[Sweden/Finland] can only join NATO if all member states ratify [Swedish/Finnish] accession. Currently, Turkey is the only NATO member holding up this process. Turkey has said that it will only let [Sweden/Finland] join NATO if the country stops supporting Kurdish groups, for example by extraditing people that Turkey considers terror suspects.”</p>	
<p><u>Loss frame</u></p> <p>[control text] + “The war in Ukraine has highlighted the security risks [Sweden/Finland] faces if it remains outside NATO. [Sweden’s/Finland’s] exclusion from NATO therefore poses a real threat to the country and the security of its citizens.”</p>	<p><u>Gain frame</u></p> <p>[control text] + “The war in Ukraine has highlighted the security benefits that [Sweden/Finland] would enjoy as a NATO member. [Sweden’s/Finland’s] NATO membership is therefore very important for the country and the security of its citizens.”</p>

We first present differences in the answers between the pre-treatment question and the post-treatment question to show the effect of priming the cost of cooperation. We then present results from linear regression models with individual fixed effects predicting changes in support for the Swedish/Finnish NATO accession bid between the pre-treatment outcome variable and the post-treatment outcome variable. The analyses will be performed applying post-stratification survey weights. We analyze differences between each treatment and control to test the hypothesis that priming the consequences of (non-)cooperation increases respondent’s willingness to accept compromises. We analyze differences between the two treatments to test the relative strength of gain vs. loss frames.

Results

We have argued that making the consequences of cooperation more concrete affects people's attitudes towards international agreements. Before testing the effect of different messages, we can compare differences in respondents' answers to the two questions we asked. In both studies, we first asked respondents to rate their attitude toward the negotiation. After the experimental manipulation we asked a second question that paralleled the first on, but that contained a specific prime.

In the Swiss study, the first question asked respondents about their willingness to compromise with the EU in negotiation about a new institutional agreement, and the second set of questions asked after the experiment contained a prime about two concrete advantages of such agreement: access to the EU electricity market and access to the EU research program Horizon. Figure 1 shows that priming these benefits in the question wording increases people's willingness to compromise with the EU by 0.5 points on six-point scale. Swiss respondents are more willing to comply with EU's demands in order to achieve concrete benefits.

Figure 1 – Swiss' willingness to compromise with the EU with and without priming the benefits of cooperation

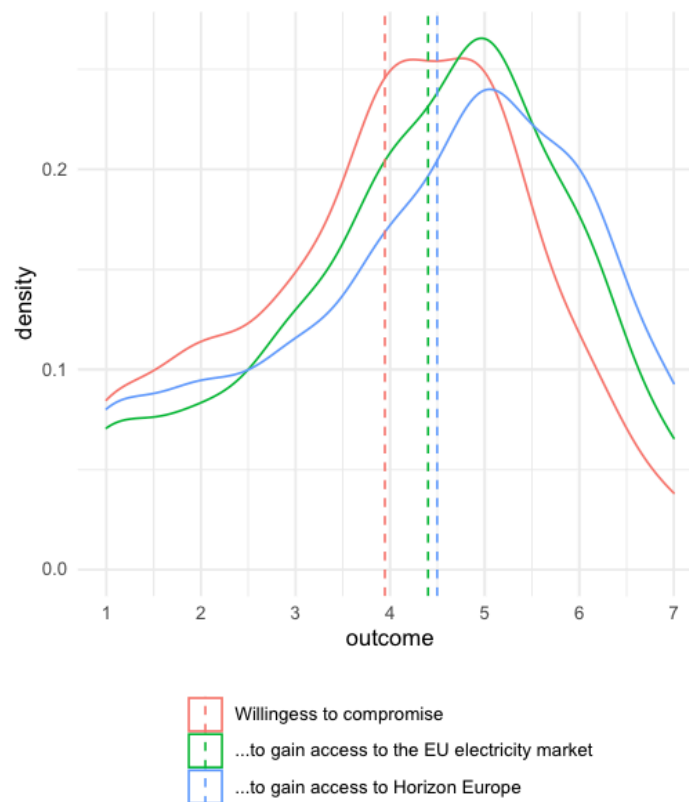
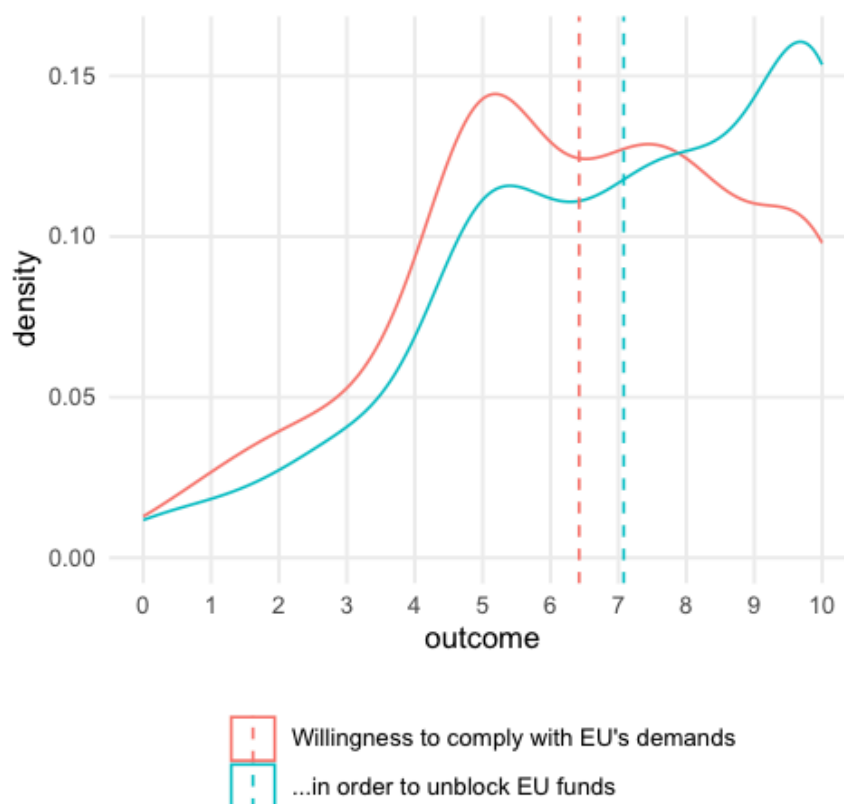


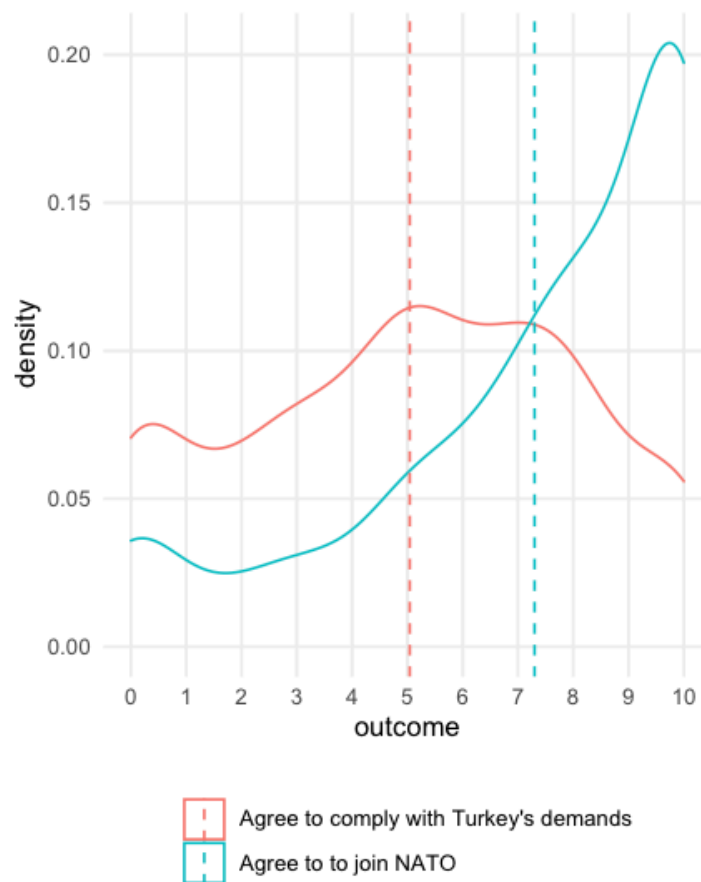
Figure 2 – Hungarian willingness to compromise with the EU with and without priming the benefits of cooperation



Similarly, in the Hungarian case, respondents were asked about their willingness to comply with EU's demands in the negotiations, and were asked the same question with the additional prime of the benefits of cooperating with EU, namely unblocking the EU funds. Figure 2 shows that people are more willing to comply (+ 7 percentage points) when they are reminded of the benefits of cooperation.

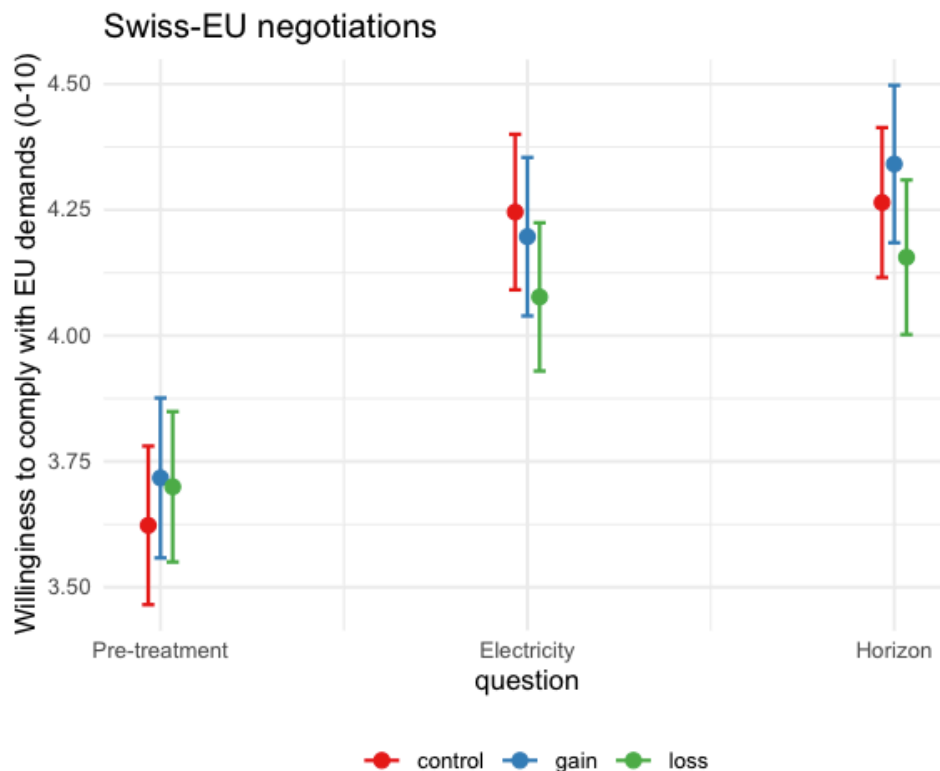
On the contrary, in Sweden and Finland we can measure the effect of priming the costs of cooperation. In a pre-treatment question, we asked respondents whether they agree with their government's decision to join NATO. After the experiment, we asked them whether they agree with their government's promise to comply with Turkey's demands in order to join NATO. Swedes and Finns display a very high support for their country's NATO accession bid (see Figure 3). However, such support decreases by more than two points on 0-10 scale when such accession bid is explicitly made conditional on complying with Turkish demands.

Figure 3 – Swedes and Finns' attitude towards NATO accession with and without priming the costs of cooperation



People's attitudes towards international cooperation are responsive to the potential costs and benefits of cooperation. How can different messages about the consequences of cooperation convince people to support international agreements when these agreements are costly? Does making the benefits of cooperation more concrete increase people's support for cooperation? And do gain- and loss-framed messages have a different persuasive power?

Figure 4 – The effect of gain- and loss-framed messages on Swiss’ willingness to comply with EU demands



In the Swiss study, we exposed respondents to two experimental treatments (whose order was randomized). In both manipulations, one group was assigned to a control condition, and a read a brief statement about one of the issues at stake in the negotiations (access to the electricity market and to Horizon Europe). The other two groups received a more detailed description of the problem either in terms of potential gains (benefits) or potential losses (risks). Contrary to our expectations, making the benefits of cooperation more concrete does not make respondents more willing to comply with the EU’s demands (see Figure 4). People in the two treatment groups are not more open to compromises than people in the control group. However, we do find some difference between gain- and loss-framed messages. In particular, loss-framed messages seem to reduce people’s willingness to compromise in both experimental scenarios. Results from fixed effect models that analyzes difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment outcomes confirm the visual findings (see Table 2). Model 1 presents results from a pooled analysis of both experiment and confirms that loss-framed messages exert a substantial negative effect on people’s willingness to comply with EU demands. In model 2, we analyze the effect of the two experiment separately. We find that the negative effect of the loss-framed is statistically different when we compare it to the control group in the case of the electricity experiment, and statistically different from the gain frame group in the case of the Horizon Europe experiment.

Table 2 – Swiss-EU negotiations: Fixed effects models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Willingness to comply with EU demands	
	Model 1	Model 2
Gain	-0.039 (0.122)	-0.065 (0.124)
Loss	0.163 (0.106)	0.151 (0.112)
Post-treatment	0.540*** (0.119)	
Electricity		0.554*** (0.137)
Horizon	-0.066 (0.080)	0.444*** (0.098)
Gain X Post-treatment	-0.030 (0.103)	
Loss X Post-treatment	-0.210** (0.103)	
Gain X Electricity		-0.058 (0.128)
Loss X Electricity		-0.224* (0.125)
Gain X Horizon		0.034 (0.134)
Loss X Horizon		-0.180 (0.142)
Electricity X Order: Electricity first	-0.099 (0.094)	-0.099 (0.094)
Horizon X Order: Electricity first	0.201** (0.092)	0.201** (0.092)
Observations	4,735	4,735
Adjusted R ²	0.762	0.762

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Data are weighted, and only include respondents who passed the attention check.

In the Hungarian study, we exposed respondents to one experimental treatment: one group was assigned to a control condition, and a read a brief statement about the EU’s decision to freeze billions of euros budgeted for Hungary due to concerns over the respect of the rule of law and corruption. The other two groups received a more detailed description of the problem either in terms of potential gains (benefits) or potential losses (risks). Here, making the benefits of cooperation more concrete does make respondents more willing to comply with the EU’s demands, but only when they read a gain-framed message (see Figure 5). Instead, loss-framed messages do not affect people’s willingness to compromise compared to the control condition. Results from fixed effect models that analyzes difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment outcomes confirm the visual findings (see Table 3). Model 1 presents a model without survey weights. It shows that people who were exposed to a gain-framed message were 1.3% more willing to comply with the EU’s demands compared to the control. In model 2, when we present model applying survey weights, the effect is not anymore significant.

Figure 5 - The effect of gain- and loss-framed messages on Hungarians’ willingness to comply with EU demands

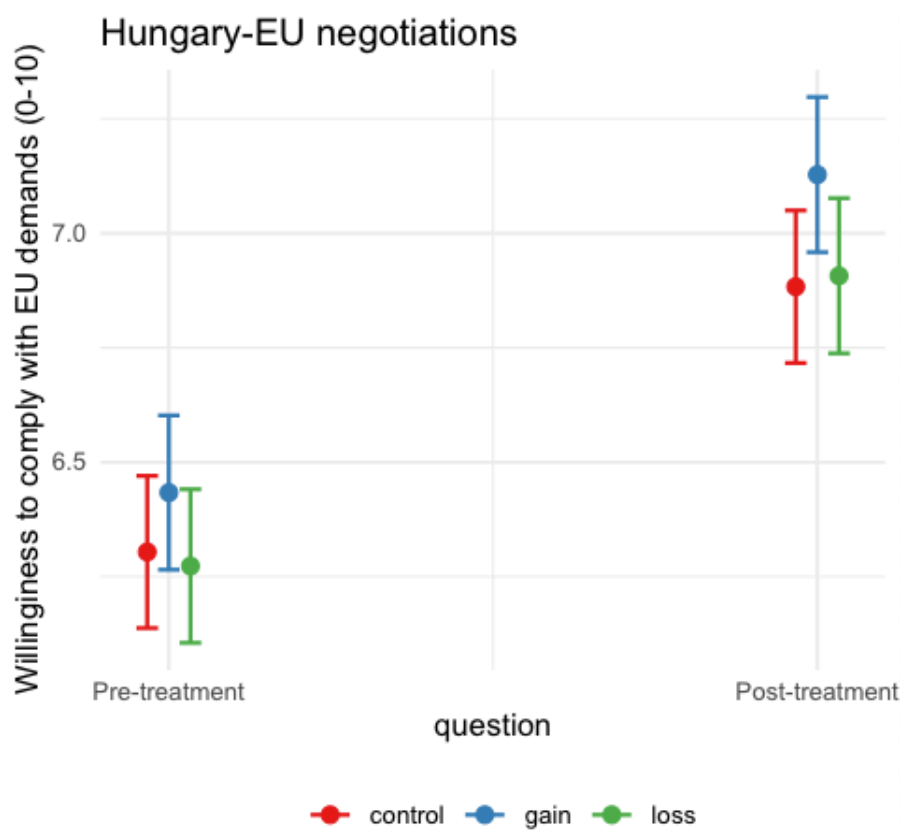


Table 3– Hungary-EU negotiations: Fixed effects models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Willingness to comply with EU's demands	
	(1)	(2)
Post-treatment	0.587*** (0.052)	0.575*** (0.062)
Gain X Post-treatment	0.132* (0.071)	0.084 (0.081)
Loss X Post-treatment	0.002 (0.074)	0.028 (0.099)
Observations	6,151	6,151
Adjusted R ²	0.799	0.819
Survey weights	NO	YES

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In the Finnish and Swedish study, we exposed respondents to one experimental treatment. One group was assigned to a control condition, and a read a brief statement about Turkey's veto on the two country's NATO accession. The other two groups received a message about the consequences in terms of security: One group read about the security benefits of joining NATO, the other about the security risks of staying out of NATO.

Figure 6 shows that making the benefits of joining NATO more concrete reduce the effect of reminding people about the costs of joining. Respondents who received a message about the security implication of NATO accession, either in terms of benefit of joining or in terms of risks of not joining, tend to agree more with their governments' decision to comply with Turkey's demands compared to people in the control group. Differently from the Swiss and Hungarian cases, here we find that a loss-framed message is more persuasive than a gain-framed message. People who read about the security risks of staying out of NATO were more willing to compromise than people who read about the security benefits of joining NATO.

Figure 6 – The effect of gain- and loss-framed messages on Swedes and Finns’ willingness to comply with Turkey’s demands in order to join NATO

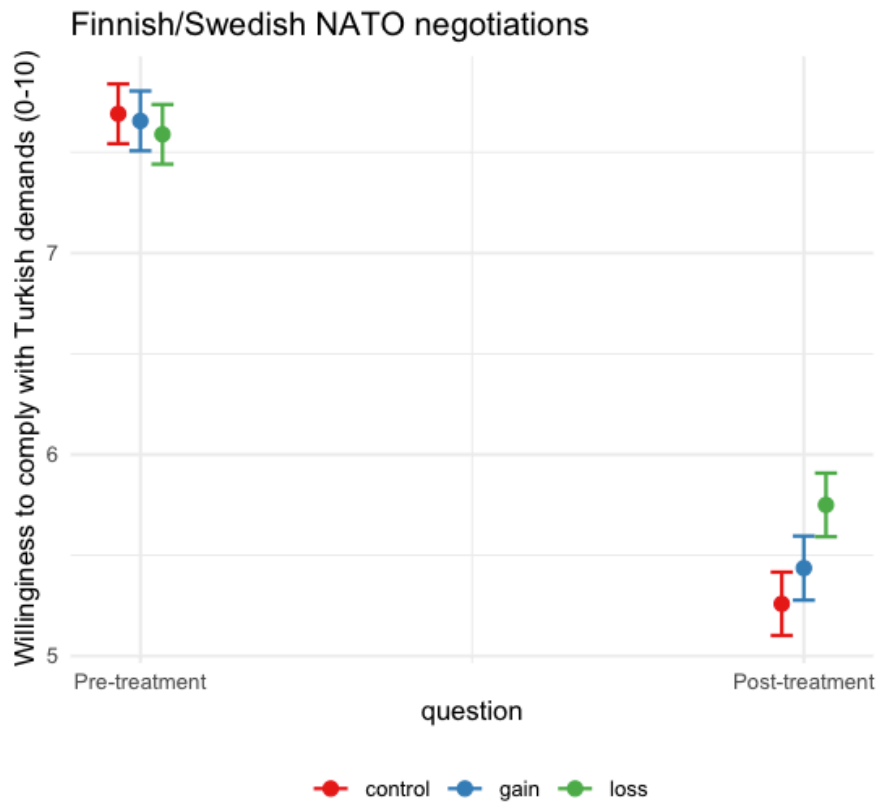


Table 4 – NATO negotiations in Finland and Sweden: Fixed effects models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Willingness to comply with Turkish demands		
	All (1)	Finland (2)	Sweden (3)
Post-treatment	-2.429*** (0.090)	-2.914*** (0.127)	-1.951*** (0.125)
Gain X Post-treatment	0.199 (0.124)	0.118 (0.174)	0.308* (0.173)
Loss X Post-treatment	0.511*** (0.127)	0.595*** (0.179)	0.441** (0.176)
Observations	10,408	5,272	5,136
Adjusted R ²	0.458	0.401	0.510

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Data are weighted.

Fixed effects models that analyze differences between the pre-treatment and post-treatment question confirm the visual finding. Loss-framed messages exert a positive and significant effect on Swedes and Finns' attitude. The effect of gain-framed messages is smaller, and only significant in the Swedish case.

Table 5 summarizes the findings across the three studies. First of all, the findings confirm our first hypothesis. Priming the benefits of cooperation increases people's willingness to compromise (as in the case of Switzerland and Hungary), while priming the costs decreases it (as shown in Finland and Sweden). Making the benefits more concrete seems to have an impact but not in all the experiments: in Sweden and Finland it has a clear impact, as people's support for cooperation decreased less compared to the pre-treatment support for joining NATO that did not mention the costs of Turkey's requests. In Hungary, it also has an impact, but only for respondents who received the gain frame, and it has no impact in Switzerland. Finally, the effect of framing consequences in terms of gains or losses is found to be context-dependent. While in Sweden and Finland loss-framed messages are clearly more effective in convincing people in support of international cooperation, in Hungary gain frames are more persuasive and in Switzerland loss-framed messages seem to backlash.

Table 5 – Overview of findings
Effects on pre-treatment support for cooperation

		Priming the consequences	
		Costs (FI and SE)	Benefits (CH and HU)
	Control	<i>Decrease</i>	<i>Increase</i>
Framing concrete benefits	Gain	<i>Decrease a bit less than control</i>	<i>Increase much more than control in HU No effect in CH</i>
	Loss	<i>Decrease much less</i>	<i>No effect in HU Increase less than control in CH</i>

Note: The tables below show the combined effect of the priming experiment (the difference between the pre- and post-treatment question) and the framing experiment (the gains and loss frames) compared to the pre-treatment levels of support for cooperation.

Conclusion

International cooperation has become an increasingly politicized and hotly debated topic in recent years (de Vries et al. 2021). *How* political elites talk about the costs and benefits of cooperation thus has turned into an increasingly relevant issue, especially as approaches to framing the debate vary significantly. During the Brexit referendum campaign, for example, the pro-Brexit camp emphasized the expected benefits of leaving the EU, promising that Brexit would free up funds for the national health system, limit immigration, and create new opportunities for trade, jobs, and growth. The anti-Brexit camp, in contrast, warned that EU exit carried significant risks and would mean losing access to the Single Market, many EU programs, and a loss of cooperation benefits more generally. Derided as “Project Fear”, this strategy of highlighting the stakes of Brexit, proved ineffective, even though many of the warnings proved correct as the Brexit process unfolded. This raises the question whether highlighting the risks associated with non-cooperation is an ineffective framing strategy in other contexts as well, as well as the question of how framing the consequences of cooperating or not cooperating internationally influences public attitudes towards international cooperation more generally.

This paper has investigated these questions by focusing on two specific aspects of framing the consequences of international cooperation. We have argued that voters strongly react when specific consequences of cooperation are highlighted, in contrast to more general statements about the costs and benefits of international cooperation. Moreover, we have examined whether framing cooperation as a potential gain, or its absence as a potential loss, changes voters’ willingness to compromise in order to enable a cooperative solution. Prospect theory would suggest that loss frames should exert a stronger effect on voters, but the empirical evidence is very mixed.

Empirically, we examined these hypotheses in three different contexts: Switzerland’s negotiations with the EU about a deepened framework for closer cooperation, Hungary’s negotiation with the EU over violations of the rule of law and the unblocking of funds, and Sweden’s and Finland’s negotiations with Turkey about the accession of these countries to NATO. Analyzing pre-registered survey experiments, we find that highlighting the specific benefits of cooperation makes respondents significantly more likely to compromise, whereas pointing out the specific costs makes them significantly less willing to do so. Making the policy consequences of cooperation more concrete has a significant effects on support for international cooperation and respondents’ willingness to compromise in international negotiations, in all cases but Switzerland.

We next analyzed how framing these specific consequences in terms of gains or losses affects respondents' willingness to compromise in international negotiations and find that the effect here is strongly context-dependent. In the Swiss case, we found that negative messages that warned of the potential risks associated with not reaching an agreement were counterproductive, as they reduce respondents' willingness to compromise. Just like in the UK, "Project Fear"-type messages do not seem to resonate in Switzerland and to increase, rather than decrease, opposition to closer international cooperation. In contrast, positive messages that highlighted the benefits to be gained from such cooperation, either had no effect or slightly increased people's willingness to compromise. Similarly, in the Hungarian cases gain-framed message seem to be more effective in increasing people's willingness to comply with the EU's demands.

Whereas the Swiss and Hungarian experiments highlighted the benefits of cooperation, Swedish and Finnish respondents were exposed to statements that NATO accession would carry the cost of complying with Turkish demands. While mentioning these costs significantly reduced respondents' willingness to cooperate, additionally highlighting the security benefits of NATO made them more amenable to compromise. Here, the loss frame – warnings about the security risks associated with not becoming a NATO member – proved most effective.

Our analysis shows that *how* political elites speak about international cooperation and the costs and benefits associated with such cooperation, matter for public opinion on these issues. Speaking about concrete benefits can garner support, whereas an emphasis on concrete costs can increase opposition to the compromises necessary for international cooperation. Whether warnings about opportunity costs (loss frames) or an emphasis on the potential gains of cooperation (gain frames) are more effective, seems to depend on context however. Future research should explore these context conditions in more detail.

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