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Reversed Mobilization in Referendum Campaigns

How Positive News Framing Can Mobilize the Skeptics

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This multimethodological study focuses on risk-induced electoral mobilization in referendum campaigns. Positive news framing in a referendum campaign can generate a perception of risk among those voters opposing the proposal and stimulate electoral participation to prevent an undesired outcome that would alter a status quo situation. To test this claim, the authors analyze the effect of news framing on turnout in the context of the 2005 Dutch EU Constitution referendum campaign and combine a media content analysis of national newspapers and television news (n = 6,370) with panel survey data (n = 642) and an experiment (n = 687). Experimental findings show that individuals who are skeptical toward the EU and are subsequently exposed to positive news framing about the EU Constitution are mobilized to turn out and vote against it. The results of the content analysis show that during the Dutch referendum campaign, news media framed the EU Constitution in positive terms. Building these findings into a measure of news exposure in our panel survey, the authors find that higher exposure to referendum news had a mobilizing effect on those opposing the proposal. The experimental and panel data thus show corroborating evidence supporting the central hypothesis about how positive news can mobilize the skeptics to turn out and vote in a referendum.

Keywords: news framing; referendum campaign; turnout; mobilization; prospect theory

Who gets mobilized in a referendum campaign? To understand the dynamics of mobilization in referendums, it is important to take the nature of the decision-making situation into account as well as the theory that explains how citizens decide on their own participation. Previous research has shown that people are more likely to get mobilized to avoid risks rather than to achieve potential gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Marcus et al. 2000; Martin 2004). For the perception of risk to emerge in an election, individuals need to be exposed to information on the basis of which perceptions can be shaped and how subsequent behavior can be affected. An assessment of risk depends on the content of the information received in interaction
with preexisting attitudes. The most important information source during referendums are the news media (e.g., Jenssen et al. 1998), and previous research suggests that the way in which a referendum issue is framed in the news can affect voter participation (de Vreese and Semetko 2002).

Referendum campaigns are unusually influential because they are marked by a higher degree of electoral volatility as compared to national elections (Magleby 1989), and the perceived salience and involvement are oftentimes comparably low (e.g., Franklin et al. 1994). However, the degree to which voters hold preexisting opinions on the issue at stake varies across referendums, and thus the level of uncertainty among voters can vary as well (LeDuc 2002). Previous research on EU referendums suggests that oftentimes in referendums voters rely on domestic second-order considerations (such as evaluations of the incumbent government) when deciding on their vote choice because they feel that there is not much at stake (e.g., Franklin 2002). However, some referendums are perceived as more important by voters, making issue considerations about Europe more salient (Hobolt 2005). In such a context, the influence of the campaign on vote choice has limits, while at the same time the campaign has the potential to raise perceptions of risk among certain parts of the electorate and motivate electoral participation to prevent an undesired outcome.

Previous research on campaign effects on voter turnout in U.S. contexts has mainly been concerned with the role of campaign ads (e.g., Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Finkel and Geer 1998; Goldstein and Freedman 2002) or campaign spending (Cox and Munger 1989; Dawson and Zinser 1976) or relied on proxies tapping the intensity of the campaign (e.g., see Geys [2006] for an overview). In a European context, most people perceive a campaign through the news media (e.g., Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999), and EU citizens have repeatedly named the news media as their dominant source of information on EU matters (Eurobarometer 60, 61). Szczerbiak and Taggart (2004) suggested a base model for explaining turnout in European referendums in which the role of the campaign is addressed only indirectly through the overall level of resources invested in the campaign. This conception focuses solely on campaign efforts undertaken by political actors and not on the actual content of campaign coverage in the news media. Only very few studies so far have systematically analyzed news media content throughout a referendum campaign and modeled its effect on turnout (e.g., de Vreese and Semetko 2004; Kriesi 2006). Thus, investigations of campaign effects on voter turnout are still missing more compelling links between the actual content of campaign coverage in the news and people’s decision to participate in referendums. The present study aims to show how positive news framing can mobilize voters who oppose a referendum proposal to turn out and vote to prevent an undesired outcome. We first test this claim in an experiment and then also in a real-world setting combining a two-wave panel survey with media content data.
Risk-Induced Electoral Mobilization

In political communication, studies commonly focus on the effect of frames on political attitudes (e.g., Iyengar 1991) rather than on actual behavior. Previous research has shown framing to have the power to influence the evaluative direction of thoughts (Price et al. 1997) or issue interpretations (e.g., de Vreese 2004). Studies that have linked framing to political behavior have focused on the effect of campaign news framed in terms of strategy on public cynicism and electoral participation (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Valentino et al. 2001). This sort of framing has often been accused of turning voters off (e.g., Patterson 1993). However, more recent studies show that voters might well become cynical by such framing but not necessarily less engaged (de Vreese and Semetko 2002). Other research has stressed the mobilizing effects of exposure to certain types of news outlets through political learning and information gains (e.g., Newton 1999). Finally, in the debate around negative attack advertisements (Finkel and Geer 1998; Goldstein and Freedman 2002) and negative campaign tone, more recent studies have yielded tentative support for a mobilization rather than a demobilization hypothesis (see Lau et al. [2007] for an overview).

The present study investigates the potentially stimulating effect of risk perception in a referendum context. Psychological research has repeatedly shown that people pay greater attention to negative information as compared to positive information (e.g., Fiske 1980; Pratto and John 1991) and negative attitudes are more likely to motivate behavior as compared to positive attitudes (e.g., Lau 1982). Most prominently, prospect theory argues that people are more strongly motivated to avoid costs rather than to achieve gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). This risk-averse mobilizing effect has been studied in various contexts, especially within health communication and the context of health preventive behavior (e.g., Rimal and Real 2003; Rothman and Salovey 1997), such as the effect of risk appeals on mammography use (Schneider et al. 2001) or the likelihood for people to get HIV testing (Raghubir and Menon 2001; Kalichman and Coley 1995). Other studies on the subject focused specifically on the role of media coverage in fostering risk perceptions (Dunlop et al. 2008; Morton and Duck 2001). All these studies suggest a causal link between perceived risk and behavior. Thereby, perceived risk is seen as a motivator of self-protective behavior and is inducing preventive actions.

The notion that the perception of risk can have an impact on subsequent participation has also been applied to electoral contexts. Hobolt (2006) assumes that “people tend to have a particular aversion to losses that makes them risk averse” (p. 627) in a referendum context, making it less likely for voters to support a proposal when uncertainty about the outcome is high. Alvarez (1997) reports empirical evidence for risk aversion of voters in an American electoral context. Kahn and Kenney (1999) stress the potential risks associated with certain electoral choices.
They conclude that negative messages, compared to positive appeals, generate more interest and involvement in campaigns (see also Marcus et al. 2000; Martin 2008; Wattenberg and Brians 1999). Corroborating this, Martin (2004) has demonstrated how perceived candidate threat mobilized supporters of the other candidate (see also Marcus et al. 2000). Voters who are opposed to a certain candidate are more likely to accept negative information about him or her, while at the same time they resist negative information about their preferred candidate. In this view, voters are more likely to vote “against” rather than “for” a candidate in an election (see also Key 1966; Lau 1985), and a campaign can foster feelings of anxiety and increase participation in an election to prevent an outcome that is perceived as unwelcome. Transferring these findings to a referendum context, we may expect that the portrayal of a certain referendum outcome can induce a perception of risk and stimulate electoral participation to prevent an undesired outcome. However, this largely depends on the concrete referendum context, and we can only expect voters to be mobilized because of risk perception when stakes are high and the referendum issue is sufficiently salient to voters.

Previous research has pointed out that it is easier to mobilize people against a referendum proposal rather than in favor of it (Kirchgässner and Schulz 2005). Voters are risk-averse, and every new policy proposal involves uncertainty over its consequences as compared to the status quo (Christin et al. 2002; Ingberman 1985; Hobolt 2006). In a referendum context, risk is—ceteris paribus—usually higher for an individual who opposes the proposal. Such an individual is, in most instances, faced with potential, undesired change of the status quo in case of a positive (“yes”) referendum outcome (Brunetti 1997). An individual who supports the proposal, on the other hand, is usually not confronted with change in case of a negative (“no”) referendum outcome. Therefore, the potential cost is normally higher for those opposing the proposal than for those supporting it. This should lead to opposing individuals being more likely to get mobilized to avoid such costs. Hastings et al. (2007) provide an example for the asymmetric mobilization of winners and losers in a different electoral context. They report how the experience of past negative outcomes (i.e., losing in a school choice lottery) increased turnout in subsequent elections among motivated individuals, whereas past positive experiences had no mobilizing effect.

However, whereas we expect opposing individuals in a referendum to be more easily mobilized in most cases, the risks might not always be greater for no-voters. In some referendum contexts, the particular consequences of a no-vote may be considerable and the outcome of a rejected ballot may not always equate status quo (see, e.g., Hobolt 2006; Romer and Rosenthal 1979). Thus, the respective referendum context has to be taken into account to assess the risk associated with a certain referendum outcome and before making concrete assumptions about possible mobilization dynamics during the campaign.

How can the contents of campaign news coverage contribute to a perception of risk among certain parts of an electorate and mobilize voters to turn out and vote? Voters
can draw different conclusions than indicated by the actual content of campaign messages. Meffert et al. (2006) provide an example for how voters with an initial candidate preference selected and spent more time reading negative information about their preferred candidate yet ended up with more polarized evaluations in favor of their preferred candidate. Thus, citizens may “resist” the inherent tone of campaign messages and media content on the basis of their existing opinions, a process that has been called “motivated skepticism” (Ditto and Lopez 1992). Importantly, potential electoral outcomes are perceived differently by individuals depending on their preexisting attitudes and outcome preferences. This makes it necessary to determine a reference point to judge under which conditions a campaign message is perceived as either negative or positive. Sigelman and Kugler (2003) point to the importance of voters’ perceptions of campaign tone and stress that campaign tone should not be seen just as an objective attribute of a campaign. They show how perceptions of the same campaign can vary widely between citizens and evoke different images in the minds of certain segments of the electorate. Indeed framing research has also emphasized the need to incorporate existing opinions as moderators for understanding the effects of frames (Domke et al. 1998). In a referendum context, coverage emphasizing a negative election outcome does not per se represent a risk to all voters. This perception rather depends on if this negative coverage is in line with or in opposition to the preexisting outcome preferences of voters. For example, voters who intend to vote no in a referendum prior to the actual start of the campaign and are subsequently confronted with a positive news environment might, as a consequence, perceive the scenario of a positive election outcome as more of a risk and become more opposed to it. In this vein, a positive election outcome (and thus, positive news coverage promoting such an outcome) is perceived as negative, which in turn carries the affective potential to mobilize voters to avoid such an outcome.

We develop and test these expectations about the potentially mobilizing effect of risk perception on electoral participation in the context of the Dutch EU Constitution referendum. In June 2005, a majority of 62 percent rejected the EU Constitution in a national referendum in the Netherlands. Turnout was high (63 percent) compared to elections for the European Parliament in the Netherlands, for which rates had dropped from 58 percent in 1979 to 30 percent in 1999 and 39 percent in 2004, and was much higher than the 30 percent threshold informally agreed upon before the referendum by the main political parties for the referendum to be considered valid. For the perception of risk to emerge among parts of the electorate, the referendum issue has to be perceived as sufficiently salient. During the Dutch referendum campaign public debate has been intense (e.g., AUTHORS 2008; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2005), and issue considerations about Europe as well as attitudes toward further European integration mattered to voters in their decision-making process (see, e.g., Aarts and van der Kolk 2006; Glencross and Trechsel 2007; European Commission 2005a, 2005b), indicating the perceived salience of this referendum within the electorate (see European Commission 2005c: 3). In this context, threat perceptions had
an impact on voting behavior. As Lubbers (2008) reports, one of the strongest reasons for no-voters to go and vote in the referendum has been a perceived threat to Dutch culture. At the same time, the EU Constitution for many voters has been a symbol for further and faster EU integration, and opposition to this development has been at the core of the opposition of many Dutch voters against the EU Constitutional Treaty (Aarts and van der Kolk 2006).\(^2\)

In this context, the present study aims to show how positive news framing can mobilize voters who are in opposition to a referendum proposal to turn out to vote. In the case of the Dutch referendum, most political elites and almost all mainstream media had campaigned in favor of a positive (“yes”) outcome. Therefore, individuals opposing the Dutch ratification of the Constitutional Treaty could not have been certain that the referendum would fail. In line with our theoretical reasoning and given the context characteristics of the Dutch 2005 referendum as described above, we argue that the opposition toward further EU integration, which has been pronounced and widespread among the Dutch electorate at the time, made it less likely for positive campaign appeals to persuade voters. Instead, we expect that positive news framing during the campaign had the contrary effect and led to intensified opposition and higher risk perception among opponents of the proposal. This, in turn, mobilized skeptical voters to turn out and vote against the proposal to prevent a positive outcome and to maintain the status quo.

In a first step, we analyze the framing of news during the referendum campaign to see if a successful referendum outcome was framed more in negative or positive terms. Therefore, we conduct a content analysis of news coverage of the Dutch EU Constitution referendum:

*Research Question 1:* What is the degree of positive and negative framing in news coverage about the Dutch EU Constitution referendum?

Next, we report on a media effects experiment and a two-wave panel survey designed to test for a reversed mobilization effect of positive news framing on individuals opposing the EU Constitution, both in a controlled, as well as a real world setting. As we have pointed out, in some instances the consequences of a negative referendum outcome can be considerable. However, usually the risk for those who oppose a referendum proposal is greatest. For example, in the Dutch EU Constitution referendum, a positive referendum outcome for many represented a threat to Dutch culture, whereas it was unlikely that a negative outcome would yield particular repercussions for the Netherlands. In this context, a negative outcome would not have had immediate negative consequences but rather be meant to protect the status quo (see, e.g., Baden and de Vreese 2008) and prevent a development toward further EU integration, which was opposed by many (e.g., Aarts and van der Kolk 2006). Thus, in our study context, risk is higher for an individual who opposes the proposal because he or she is faced with potential, undesired change of the status quo in case of a positive outcome (Brunetti 1997) as compared to an individual who supports the
proposal and is confronted with a potential negative outcome. In such a context, we assume that news promoting a successful referendum outcome will be perceived as negative from the standpoint of a voter who is in opposition. Because the potential cost is higher for those opposing the proposal, we expect that these voters will become more mobilized to turn out and vote as compared to voters who are in support of the proposal. We specifically expect that

**Hypothesis 1:** Individuals who oppose the referendum proposal prior to a campaign and are subsequently confronted with a pro/positive frame, which is promoting a positive outcome, are mobilized.

**Hypothesis 2:** Individuals who support the referendum proposal prior to a campaign and are subsequently confronted with a con/negative frame, which is promoting a negative outcome, are either not or less mobilized.

### Methods and Results

To test the hypotheses, a multimethod research design combining a content analysis, a media effects experiment, and a two-wave panel survey was employed. The purpose was, first, to assess the degree to which news media have framed the EU Constitution in either positive or negative terms; second, to test how such framing affects turnout intention of different kinds of voters; and finally, to investigate the impact news coverage about the referendum had on mobilizing voters.

### Content Analysis

**Design.** The content analysis was carried out on news articles of all relevant national Dutch newspapers and national TV news and current affairs programs. Six national daily newspapers were included in the analysis: de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, and Trouw are all broadsheet newspapers and represent the Dutch national quality press. De Telegraaf, Metro, and Algemeen Dagblad represent the Dutch national tabloid press. In addition, the most widely watched Dutch public evening news program NOS Journaal (Nederland 1: 20.00-20.25), the main private program RTL Nieuws (RTL 4: 19.30-19.55), and the main public TV current affairs program NOVA—Den Haag vandaag were analyzed.

**Period of study.** The content analysis was conducted for news articles and TV news items published or broadcast within the six weeks prior to the referendum (between April 16 and June 1, 2005).

**Data collection.** For the newspapers, all articles on the front page, all articles on one randomly chosen page inside the newspaper, and all articles about the referendum...
were coded. For the TV news programs, all news items have been coded, and for the one TV current affairs program, all items about the referendum have been coded. In total, 5,157 newspaper articles (1,213 TV items) were coded, of which 1,146 articles (158 TV items) dealt with the referendum or the Constitution.3

**Coding procedure.** Coding was conducted by six Dutch native speakers. An intercoder reliability test was conducted by all six coders on twenty randomly chosen articles and yielded satisfactory results (reported below). The unit of analysis and coding unit was the distinct news story.

**Measures.** A set of items indicating the presence of positive and negative news frames as introduced by Schuck and de Vreese (2006) was employed in this study after adjustment to the issue-specific context of the EU Constitution. The dimensions covered are structurally identical for both frames and cover the following dimensions for the example of the positive frame: (1) rational argument pro EU Constitution (negative frame: rational contra), (2) portrayal of specific advantage of EU Constitution (negative frame: specific disadvantage), (3) positive quote toward EU Constitution (negative frame: negative quote), and (4) promoting positive opportunities or long-term development with a common EU Constitution (negative frame: negative future outlook).4 Intercoder reliability was \( k = .83 \) on average for the negative frame items and \( k = .80 \) for the positive frame items. For each news item the binary codes (yes = 1 or no = 0 for each question) were added up and divided by the number of frame items, so that two index scales for the average presence of each frame in news coverage could be built ranging from 0 (frame not present at all) to 1 (frame strongly present). A high score on the “positive frame” scale indicates that a story emphasizes future benefits or any kind of gains from a common EU Constitution, whereas a high score on the “negative frame” scale indicates a high level of concern expressed in a news item, stressing expected future disadvantages or costs. To assess if both sets of frame items build reliable scales, we apply Mokken scale analysis (MSA) which is a hierarchical scaling method that can be used for binary and ordered items (Mokken 1971). Results from the scale analysis reveal a two-dimensional structure with both sets of frame items forming strong and reliable sub-scales (positive frame: scale coefficient \( H = .67 \), reliability Rho = .83, scale \( Z = 47.78 \); negative frame: scale coefficient \( H = .64 \), reliability Rho = .80, scale \( Z = 44.22 \); \( n = 1,302 \)).5

**Results of the Content Analysis**

As Table 1 shows, and in response to the first research question, the Constitution was framed more in positive than in negative terms in campaign news coverage. This positive directional bias is consistent across all outlets (see also Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2005; AUTHORS 2008). While both frames were present, the overall news environment can be characterized by having put more emphasis on potential advantages of a common EU Constitution rather than on potential negative consequences.6
To test the possible effects of framing the EU Constitution in either negative or positive terms, we used a single-factor, posttest only, between-subjects experimental design with random assignment to one of two conditions. Within this design, the first condition represents the “pro EU Constitution/positive” frame, and the second condition represents the “con EU Constitution/negative” frame.

The experiment was conducted in May 2005 by CentERdata at the University of Tilburg (the Netherlands). Participants first completed a pretest questionnaire asking for demographic details and political predispositions (described below). Next, participants were exposed to one news article establishing either of the two alternative framing conditions. Finally, participants completed a posttest questionnaire, which asked for their turnout intention (and their vote choice intention) and included a manipulation check.

In total, 687 individuals participated in the experiment (47.5 percent females, age = 18-90 years \([M = 49.3, SD = 15.67]\)), 355 in the negative frame condition and 332 in the positive frame condition. Respondents were sampled from the online CentERpanel, which consists of a representative sample of 2,000 Dutch households.\(^7\)

### Table 1
Presence of Positive and Negative Frame in News Coverage about the Referendum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Frame Index</th>
<th>Negative Frame Index</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadsheet newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRC Handelsblad ((n = 371))</td>
<td>.19 (.32)</td>
<td>.13 (.27)</td>
<td>+.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkskrant ((n = 230))</td>
<td>.23 (.33)</td>
<td>.13 (.24)</td>
<td>+.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouw ((n = 161))</td>
<td>.20 (.30)</td>
<td>.16 (.29)</td>
<td>+.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabloid newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algemeen Dagblad ((n = 145))</td>
<td>.18 (.30)</td>
<td>.17 (.29)</td>
<td>+.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraaf ((n = 123))</td>
<td>.21 (.35)</td>
<td>.11 (.24)</td>
<td>+.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro ((n = 109))</td>
<td>.19 (.34)</td>
<td>.15 (.29)</td>
<td>+.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOS Journaal ((n = 43))</td>
<td>.28 (.35)</td>
<td>.20 (.31)</td>
<td>+.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTL Nieuws ((n = 37))</td>
<td>.39 (.41)</td>
<td>.30 (.41)</td>
<td>+.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOVA Den Haag vandaag ((n = 77))</td>
<td>.45 (.39)</td>
<td>.28 (.34)</td>
<td>+.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scores in the first two columns represent the average presence of the positive and the negative frame (standard deviations in parentheses) in referendum news coverage on a scale from 0 \((not present at all)\) to 1 \((strongly present)\). Scores in the third column represent the difference between the two frames and thus the relative dominance of the positive frame over the negative frame.
Stimulus material. The experimental stimulus material consisted of one news article in two alternative versions (see Appendix A). The news articles were inspired by the media content analysis, but the articles were produced for the study rather than selected from the media sample. This ensures that the stimulus material reflects the frames as they have been conceptualized in this study, it gives full control over the experimental manipulation, and it ensures that no respondent has been exposed to the article in advance. In both versions, the core of the story was identical, dealing with a general discussion of the EU Constitution referendum in the Netherlands. 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). In total, five different parts within the stimulus material varied according to the “con EU Constitution/negative” and “pro EU Constitution/positive” frames.

Measures of the Experiment

Dependent variable: Turnout intention. The intention to turn out and vote in the referendum was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very likely not to go and vote, 5 = very likely to go and vote); (M = 4.06, SD = 1.16). We also tapped vote choice but did not expect this to be affected by the experimental manipulation.

Moderating variable: EU support. Before the experimental intervention, respondents were asked for their general support for the EU, their support for the EURO, their support for EU enlargement, and their support for a possible integration of Turkey into the EU on 5-point Likert scales (1 = low support, 5 = high support). These four items together build a reliable index scale (M = 2.67, SD = 0.78, α = .76). To discriminate between respondents later on in our analysis, we classify individuals as either being EU skeptics (respondents with index scores below the scale midpoint) or EU supporters (respondents with index scores above the scale midpoint).

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

Results of the Experiment

Vote choice intention was not affected by the experimental manipulation, being similar in the “con EU Constitution/negative” condition (M = 2.74, SD = 1.31) and in the “pro EU Constitution/positive” condition (M = 2.85, SD = 1.31); (measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = very likely to vote against the EU Constitution to 5 = very likely to vote in favor of the EU Constitution), t(675) = −1.14, p > .05. However, in line with our expectations, the experimental manipulation did affect the participants’ turnout intention, t(675) = 2.40, p < .05. Respondents in the
positive framing condition ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.10$) expressed higher levels of turnout intention as compared to respondents in the negative framing condition ($M = 3.96, SD = 1.21$). More specifically (see Table 2) and in line with our first research hypothesis, EU skeptics in the positive framing condition expressed significantly higher turnout intention ($M = 4.13, SD = 1.12$) as compared to EU skeptics in the negative framing condition ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.30$), $t(387) = 2.51, p < .01$. The second research hypothesis is supported as well. For EU supporters there was no significant difference, $t(193) = -.291, p > .05$, in turnout intention between the positive ($M = 4.35, SD = 0.91$) and the negative ($M = 4.38, SD = 0.93$) condition. In addition, we tested an interaction model to test for the significance of the difference in effects across the two groups, yielding a significant interaction effect for EU attitudes (being a supporter vs. being a skeptic) and the experimental condition (negative vs. positive); ($b = 0.35, p < .05$), $F(3, 580) = 8.00, p < .001$, on turnout intention controlling for main effects. Thus, attitudes toward the EU moderate the effect of the experimental condition on turnout intention and framing the Constitution in positive rather than in negative terms had a mobilizing effect only on EU skeptics and not on EU supporters.

**Two-Wave Panel Survey**

 Procedure. Our final data come from a two-wave panel survey conducted by CentERdata at the University of Tilburg (the Netherlands). Field dates for the first wave were May 6 to 11 and, for the second wave, June 3 to 8. The response rate in the first wave was 68 percent (American Association for Public Opinion Research 2006: RR1), and 81 percent of the wave 1 respondents participated in the second wave, resulting in a net panel of $n = 642$.

 Sample characteristics. The online CentERpanel is reflective of the Dutch adult population on key social demographics. Our sample consists of 52.3 percent male; average age is 49.4 years ($SD = 15.25$). Most respondents are household heads (62.7 percent), loan workers (49.4 percent), work in industrial companies (17.3 percent), and have a net income of more than 2,600 € per month (34.7 percent). Compared to census data our sample is representative of the Dutch electorate. Comparing the reported turnout in our sample with actual turnout, 86.3 percent of our sample respondents reported to have participated in the referendum, compared to the actual turnout of 63 percent. This difference reflects a well-known bias in self-reported turnout (e.g., Granberg and Holmberg 1991).

 Measures of the Two-Wave Panel Survey

 The specific wording of all items and the descriptives for the independent variables listed below can be found in Appendix B. We specify logistic regression models with turnout intention (wave 1) and voter turnout (wave 2) as the dependent variables.
variables. In the turnout intention model (wave 1), we include several variables that extant research shows to predict turnout. In the voter turnout model (wave 2), we focus on change between our panel waves and include turnout intention (wave 1) and control as well as campaign related variables.

**Turnout Intention Model (Wave 1)**

**Dependent variable**

*Turnout intention (wave 1)*. Respondents indicated their turnout intention on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very likely not to go and vote*) to 5 (*very likely to go and vote*). Respondents who reported being either very likely or likely to participate in the referendum were coded as 1; all others were coded as 0.15

**Independent variables**

*Political predispositions*. Political interest is positively related to turnout (e.g., Markowski and Tucker 2005), and in the present study we combine two questions about general political interest and interest in EU politics in particular. Political knowledge has been shown to result in higher turnout (e.g., Verba et al. 1995) and has been measured through the answers to four political knowledge questions concerning national and EU politics. Political efficacy is another factor contributing to political participation (e.g., Bandura 1997) and was tapped with one item. Furthermore, individual levels of EU support have been shown to be positively related to higher turnout in European elections (AUTHORS 2007) and were measured with a multiple-item index covering individuals’ general EU support, support for the EURO, support for Turkish EU membership, and support for EU enlargement.

*Social-demographics*. We control for age, gender, and education. Findings on gender and age are mixed, but higher levels of education are commonly associated with higher levels of participation (e.g., Dreyer Lassen 2005). Education was
measured on a 6-point scale, the respondents’ gender was coded as male, and age was measured in years.

**Campaign Effect Model (Wave 2)**

**Dependent variable**

*Voter turnout (wave 2).* Voter turnout was measured as 1 (voted in referendum) or 0 (not voted in referendum).

**Independent variables**

*Exposure to positive and negative framing in news coverage.* The key independent variable in this study is media use. Respondents reported the number of days they turn to different newspapers and TV news shows in an average week. We specifically asked for those media that have also been included into our content analysis. This enables us to build actual content features into our exposure measure. In particular, we integrated the degree to which news coverage in each individual outlet framed the Constitution in either more positive or more negative terms into our news exposure measure. Therefore, the “con EU Constitution/negative” index score was subtracted from the “pro EU Constitution/positive” index score (representing the relative prominence of the positive frame) for each medium and multiplied with the reported exposure to each respective outlet. These single scores were added up to build an additive index for individual news exposure weighted by the degree of positive versus negative framing. This results in the following formula to construct our individual news exposure measure (see Appendix B for full formula):

\[
[\text{exposure medium } 1 \times (\text{positive frame index medium } 1 - \text{negative frame index medium } 1)] + (\ldots) + [\text{exposure medium } n \times (\text{positive frame index medium } n - \text{negative frame index medium } n)].
\]

**Moderating variable: Opposing or supporting the referendum proposal.** Respondents who expressed being likely or very likely to vote against the referendum proposal before the campaign (wave 1) were coded as 1; respondents who reported being either likely or very likely to vote in favor of the referendum proposal were coded as 0.

**Control variables.** As in the previous model we control for age, gender, and education and also for political interest, political efficacy, and political knowledge. Furthermore, we control for the impact of political cynicism, which has been shown to depress turnout (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson 1996; Valentino et al. 2001), although this has not been confirmed in all research (e.g., de Vreese and Semetko 2002). In the present study, political cynicism is measured with a two-item index assessing the degree of cynicism about the campaign.
Results of the Two-Wave Panel Survey

The logistic regression model in Table 3 explains turnout intention three weeks prior to the referendum and thus before the hot phase of the campaign actually started. Controlling for sociodemographic factors and other political predispositions, we find that at this point in time higher levels of political knowledge, greater political interest, and higher educational levels positively contributed to the intention to participate in the referendum. Other factors such as political efficacy or the level of support for the EU did not show a systematic impact on turnout intention. Thus, at this point in time, those most aware and most knowledgeable about political matters were also most likely to participate in the referendum.

In a next step, we are interested in the question of who got mobilized during the referendum campaign. Looking at the aggregate level first, 77.2 percent of those opposing the Constitution intended to participate in the referendum before the start of the campaign, and 89.6 percent reported having ended up voting. Compared to voters who supported the proposal (87.9 percent intended to turn out before the campaign and 90.2 percent reported having voted), those who opposed the proposal became significantly more mobilized, \( t(415) = -2.79, p < .01 \). Next, we analyze the impact of the positively framed news coverage during the campaign on actual turnout on the individual level. Therefore, we control for turnout intention prior to the campaign to examine change between turnout intention and actual turnout. As model 1 in Table 4 shows, higher levels of news exposure increased the likelihood to turn out
### Table 4
Logistic Regression Explaining Turnout (Wave 2) for No-Voters, Yes-Voters, and All Voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnout intention (at time 1)</th>
<th>Model 1: No-Voters</th>
<th>Model 2: Yes-Voters</th>
<th>Model 3: All Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention to turn out</td>
<td>3.868*** (0.764)</td>
<td>3.246* (1.252)</td>
<td>3.839*** (0.613)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not decided about turning out</td>
<td>1.828* (0.779)</td>
<td>1.095 (1.162)</td>
<td>1.656** (0.599)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic controls</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.044 (0.023)</td>
<td>1.045</td>
<td>0.025 (0.025)</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>0.036* (0.016)</td>
<td>1.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>0.057 (0.554)</td>
<td>1.059</td>
<td>-0.572 (0.711)</td>
<td>0.565</td>
<td>-0.060 (0.418)</td>
<td>0.942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.164 (0.222)</td>
<td>1.178</td>
<td>-0.227 (0.243)</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.152)</td>
<td>0.995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political predispositions</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>-0.164 (0.341)</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>-0.126 (0.487)</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>-0.216 (0.264)</td>
<td>0.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
<td>0.280 (0.306)</td>
<td>1.323</td>
<td>0.658* (0.335)</td>
<td>1.932</td>
<td>0.399 (0.215)</td>
<td>1.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political efficacy</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.297)</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.321 (0.348)</td>
<td>1.379</td>
<td>0.138 (0.225)</td>
<td>1.148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign variables</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Logistic Regression Coefficient (SD)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political cynicism</td>
<td>0.302 (0.381)</td>
<td>1.353</td>
<td>-0.212 (0.394)</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td>0.047 (0.266)</td>
<td>1.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News exposure</td>
<td>1.511* (0.695)</td>
<td>4.530</td>
<td>-0.687 (0.625)</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>-0.779 (0.578)</td>
<td>0.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote choice intention (0 = yes, 1 = no)</td>
<td>2.253** (0.839)</td>
<td>9.521</td>
<td>1.289 (0.953)</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Nagelkerke pseudo-$R^2$       | .47                                  | .34        | .40                                  |
| Percentage correctly classified| 92.9                                 | 91.4       | 92.3                                 |
| $N$                          | 239                                  | 174        | 413                                  |

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tailed).
and vote among skeptics but not among supporters of the proposal (see model 2 in Table 4), controlling for other factors. To test the significance of the difference in effects between the two groups, we specified another model with all voters, including an interaction term between news exposure and vote choice intention controlling for main effects (see model 3 in Table 4). Consistent with our hypothesis, we find that the mobilizing effect of news exposure on actual turnout is moderated by vote choice intention ($b = 2.25, p < .01$). Those opposing the proposal were significantly mobilized by exposure to the positively framed news coverage during the campaign, whereas those supporting the proposal were not. These findings corroborate our experimental findings, according to which exposure to positive framing resulted in higher turnout levels among skeptics.

**Discussion**

This article investigated how positive news framing has the potential to mobilize individuals opposing a referendum proposal to turn out to vote. Our example of the Dutch referendum campaign in 2005 showed that the EU Constitution was framed in dominantly positive terms, promoting future benefits over potential disadvantages. Our findings suggest that framing the Constitution in positive terms rather than in negative terms mobilized voters. However, this mobilization effect was reversed and mobilized the skeptic, potential no-voter rather than the yes-voter.

Previous research has stressed the importance of motivational factors with regard to their potential impact on political participation (Marcus et al. 2000; Miller and Krosnick 2004). In the present study, we have focused on risk aversion as one motivation for voters to participate in an election. Based on prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), theory on the mobilizing role of negative information and attitudes (Lau 1982, 1985), as well as research pointing to the mobilizing impact of threat perception in electoral contexts (Marcus et al. 2000; Martin 2004), it was assumed that for voters opposed to a referendum proposal being confronted with news promoting a positive outcome would represent a risk that they would want to avoid by turning out to vote. Our data provide support for this hypothesis.

We argue that preexisting attitudes need to be taken into account when determining the reference point from which a situation is perceived as a risk. A positive referendum outcome does not per se represent a welcome scenario for everyone. It can represent a risk to those who hold strong predispositions against the proposal and hope for a negative outcome. Thus, we argue that it is the context—being confronted with the prospect of unwanted change—that creates the perception of negativity, which, in turn, has the mobilizing potential for voters to turn out and vote against a proposal. A message does not have to be negative to create the perception of negativity, and it is rather the perception of information as negative—in the light of existing
opinions—that has mobilizing potential and not the message content as such. If there are a lot of voters who hold negative outcome preferences, a positive campaign can mobilize these voters to turn out and vote against the proposal.

Why is there a mobilization effect of positive framing for voters in opposition to the proposal but no effect of negative framing for the supporters? We argue that the notion of prospective change is of special importance in electoral contexts. Miller et al. (2006) describe a threat as a future-oriented perception of possibility. Facing threats of unwanted future changes carries the potential to mobilize people to protect the status quo (Brunetti 1997; Christin et al. 2002; Ingberman 1985). In our example of the Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum, we argue that voters who opposed the referendum proposal and who were confronted with a media environment that stressed the advantages of a positive outcome perceived such an outcome as more of a risk because it would change the status quo in an unwanted way. On the contrary, for supporters of the proposal, the prospect of a negative outcome, however inconvenient, represented less of a risk since it would at least not change the status quo. However, in a different context (e.g., if the Dutch were the last to vote about the Treaty), a no-vote might have had very different consequences, and a negative outcome does not always equate status quo (Hobolt 2006; Romer and Rosenthal 1979). Thus, we do not make the generalization that the risks in a referendum are always greater for no-voters, and we do not generalize our findings to other contexts in which a negative referendum outcome would have more serious implications. Rather, preexisting policy preferences and the meaning of outcomes with regard to a potential change of the status quo have to be considered as reference points for the perception of risk as a mobilizing factor in referendum campaigns.

In our data, the initial degree of intended participation was higher among supporters as compared to those opposed to the proposal. However, our findings suggest that the skeptics were significantly mobilized during the campaign and by the positive news framing. We cannot exclude that a “regression-to-the-mean” effect took place among skeptical voters in our survey. However, attitudes toward the EU were unrelated to turnout intention in our first panel wave, and our experimental findings corroborate the findings of our panel survey. Thus, in line with our theoretical reasoning and the corroborating evidence from both our experiment as well as our survey analysis, we do find support for the hypothesis that positive framing can mobilize skeptical voters to turn out and vote. Nevertheless, further research is needed to further substantiate our findings. We also do not rule out the possibility for supporters who received positive, affirmative information to get mobilized to some degree. Prospect theory indeed does not claim that positive information has no mobilizing effect at all but, rather, that the effect is smaller as compared to risk inducing negative information. Thus, some sort of mobilization among supporters when exposed to positive, affirmative information is of course possible. However, given
the potential ceiling effect in our data, we focus on the main theoretical claim, namely, the mobilization of skeptics by positive news framing.

Further exploration is needed, and other factors need to be identified and theoretically built into a broader framework that can explain the psychology behind these effects. For example, future studies need to engage in testing the mediation dynamics which underlie the effects we report, as well as possible moderating factors, and include measures of risk perception and also attitude strength measures into their design to further substantiate our theoretical arguments and corroborate our empirical findings. Given the data we have at hand, we cannot empirically demonstrate, in this article, how risk perception was the decisive factor accounting for the mobilization of the skeptics. Future research also has to undertake more effort to look at the role and function of information and the way information is processed under the condition of risk. The same information provided during a campaign is perceived differently by voters. Preexisting attitudes, such as election outcome preferences, have to be taken into account to arrive at a better understanding of framing effects on participation. In this way, the complex interaction between information content, risk perception, and actual behavior can be further disentangled.

Our study also raises the question of to what extent the media have the power to affect people’s opinions, given the fact that our findings show that the majority of skeptical voters were not persuaded by the positive news framing and rather got mobilized to turn out and vote against the proposal. We argue that while news framing, in general, can have persuasive effects (e.g., Slothuus 2008), there is less space for the media to affect voting preferences in a high-salience referendum such as the Dutch 2005 referendum, when people hold strong attitudes and Europe matters (e.g., Lubbers, Schuck, and de Vreese 2008), as compared to a context in which involvement and interest in the issue are low. Thus, while media can potentially sway public opinion during a campaign, the magnitude depends on the concrete context. Schmitt-Beck and Farrell (2002) argue that if voters hold strong political predispositions, campaigns are less likely to affect opinions, and campaign effects are more likely to be found with regard to mobilization. Thus, while the influence of the media on opinion change in such contexts has limits, they still are of relevance in mobilizing the electorate. As our study suggests, such mobilization can be reversed and mobilize voters when they are confronted with information that is opposed to their own predisposition.

The present study focuses on the impact two particular news frames have on political participation. However, we acknowledge certain limitations of our design. Our experiment and survey tap self-reported turnout (intentions), not actual turnout. This leads us to be cautious about our conclusions and stresses the need for further research to substantiate the patterns we have reported here. These limitations notwithstanding, we believe that our study contributes to a better understanding of how news framing can influence voting behavior in referendums and
provides a basis from which future research can advance toward a theory of risk-induced electoral mobilization.

Appendix A

Stimulus Material Positive Frame
(Negative Frame Italicized and in Parentheses):
Referendum about European Constitution

The difficult negotiations around the Nice Treaty in the year 2000 can be seen as the starting point for the work on a common EU Constitution. The Nice Treaty was seen as unnecessarily complicated and quickly got outdated after the 2004 EU enlargement. That was why a special convention under the leadership of former French president Giscard d’Estaing was installed. The Convention consisted of both members of the European Parliament and national parliaments and worked on developing a constitutional treaty. The Constitution contains one part about civil rights for European citizens, the functioning of the EU, and rules for the ratification process of the treaty. Some EU countries, among them also the Netherlands, will decide over the Constitution via a national public referendum. But what is the relationship between the European and the Dutch Constitution? As a guideline, European law is above national law. But this does not say it all since the Dutch national Constitution for example sets rules that specifically concern the Dutch national state. “The European Constitution is very good for the Netherlands” (“The European Constitution is very bad for the Netherlands”), says Henk Koevermans from the Initiative “Democratic Europe.” “because the Netherlands remain independent and at the same time become part of a stronger Europe” (“because the Netherlands become more dependent on a Europe that has become too strong”). As much as every national Constitution also the European Constitution guarantees a certain number of civil rights. A declaration of civil rights has been integrated into the constitutional treaty. With the Constitution this declaration will become legally binding. All national institutions have to stick to the rules and regulations within this catalogue. The Constitution is a good deal for European citizens thinks Henk Koevermans: “Dutch citizens will receive more rights. Thus, there is absolute need for a European Constitution.” (The Constitution is a bad deal for Dutch citizens thinks Henk Koevermans: “Dutch citizens do not receive any more rights than they already have. Thus, there is absolutely no need for a European Constitution.”) With the European Constitution the EU now also will have a common foreign minister and a common foreign service. The foreign minister has two important functions: To represent the EU to the outside world, and as a initiator and coordinator within the EU. Thus, the Constitution leads to more unity in the field of EU foreign affairs. That sets an end to the confusion about responsibilities and competences. The new minister will be appointed by the national governments but will also be member of the EU commission and as such also can be hold accountable by the European Parliament. That is a strong and clear position. (But the Constitution does not lead to more unity in the field of EU foreign affairs. There will still not be an end to the confusion about responsibilities and competences. The new minister will be appointed by the (continued)
The first part of the Constitution contains the rules about the democratic functioning of the EU. With the Constitution, the European Parliament can decide on more laws and regulations but does still not have the same power like the Dutch national parliament. “The Constitution extends the rights of the European Parliament. With the Constitution citizens will have more of a say in the EU. That is a breakthrough for the democratic functioning of the EU,” explains Henk Koeveermans. (“The Constitution limits the rights of the European Parliament. With the Constitution citizens have less to say in the EU. That is a set-back for the democratic functioning of the EU,” explains Henk Koeveermans.) The European Constitution also installs a common immigration policy that gives a uniform status to asylum seekers in the whole of Europe and to the procedure of how asylum seekers have to be treated. The goal of this is to distribute the number of asylum seekers in a fair way, in a Europe without internal borders. The Constitution makes it easier for the Netherlands to achieve agreements about immigration on a European level. (The Constitution makes it more difficult for the Netherlands to achieve agreements to decide itself how many immigrants it wants to accept within its national borders.)

Appendix B
Overview of Independent Variables

Gender: Male = 1 (52.3 percent); female = 0 (47.7 percent).

Age: in years (M = 49.4, SD = 15.25).

Education: Six levels of education from lowest to highest (Dutch originals): (1) basisonderwijs (5.9%), (2) vmbo (27.6%), (3) havo/vwo (12.8%), (4) mbo (19.5%), (5) hbo (21.7%), (6) wo (12.5%).

Political knowledge (index): Four factual knowledge questions: (1) “What party is Henk Kamp from?” (2) “How many countries are members of the EU at this moment?” (3) “What is the name of the Dutch EU commissioner?” (4) “What office does Karla Peijs hold?” Final scale ranges from 0 (all wrong) to 4 (all correct) (M = 2.14, SD = 1.30, α = .56).

Political interest (index): Two-item index scale ranging from 1 (low interest) to 5 (high interest): (1) “How much interest do you have in politics?” (2) “How much interest do you have in political subjects that have to do with the EU?” (M = 2.72, SD = 0.89, α = .81).

Political efficacy: One item: “The political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.” Item reversely coded on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (low level of political efficacy) to 5 (high level of political efficacy); (M = 2.61, SD = 1.00).

(continued)
Appendix B  (continued)

EU support (index): Multiple-item index scale ranging from 1 (low support) to 5 (high support): (1) “People have different opinions about Europe: What is your opinion about the EU?” (2) “It is bad that the Netherlands participate in the EURO” (recoded); (3) “EU enlargement is progressing too quickly” (recoded); (4) “Turkey should become a member of the EU” (M = 2.73, SD = 0.78, α = .69).

Political cynicism: Two-item index scale ranging from 1 (low level of cynicism) to 5 (high level of cynicism): (1) “The campaign about the European Constitution made it clear what the Constitution is about”; (2) “The proponents and opponents were open and honest in their discussion about the European Constitution.” Original scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) (M = 3.60, SD = .81, α = .61).

Exposure to news coverage: Exposure to each newspaper outlet was measured on a scale from 0-6 and for each TV news show on a scale from 0-7 indicating exposure in an average week. Means and standard deviations for single exposure measures: Telegraaf: M = 0.79, SD = 1.86; Volkskrant: M = 0.59, SD = 1.65; Trouw: M = 0.28, SD = 1.21; NRC Handelsblad: M = 0.45, SD = 1.50; Algemeen Dagblad: M = 0.34, SD = 1.25; Metro: M = 0.62, SD = 1.42; NOS Journaal: M = 4.84, SD = 2.36; RTL Nieuws: M = 2.96, SD = 2.50; NOVA Den Haag vandaag: M = 1.69, SD = 1.94. The frame index scores for each individual news outlet in the below formula are based on the subtraction of the negative frame index score from the positive index score. The full formula based on our content analytic findings (M = 1.14, SD = .61) is:

(exposure NOS × 0.08) + (exposure RTL × 0.09) + (exposure NOVA × 0.17) + (exposure Volkskrant × 0.10) + (exposure NRC × 0.06) + (exposure Trouw × 0.04) + (exposure Telegraaf × 0.10) + (exposure Metro × 0.04) + (exposure Algemeen Dagblad × 0.01).

Notes

1. The consequences of a no-vote, for example, in the second Nice referendum in Ireland or in the second Maastricht referendum in Denmark (or also potentially in a possible second Lisbon referendum in Ireland), represented a considerable risk to proponents of the proposal (e.g., exit from the EU) and a negative outcome could have led to a change of the status quo. In such a context, in which voters perceive that there are considerable costs associated with a rejection of a referendum proposal, these voters may experience as much risk as voters who oppose the proposal and fear the consequences of its implementation.

2. In their prereferendum survey, the authors asked voters about the most likely consequences of further EU integration. They report that an overwhelming majority of voters (91.7 percent) expected jobs to get lost in the Netherlands, pointing to a pronounced concern very closely related to peoples’ personal lives. Furthermore, they report that many voters assumed that small member states such as the Netherlands would lose influence in the future. Finally, the authors also report fears with regard to a loss of national sovereignty as perceived by many voters (Aarts and van der Kolk 2006: 245; see also European Commission 2005a: 37; 2005b: 28; 2005c: 28).

3. Stories were considered to be about the referendum if either the referendum or the Constitution, or any aspect of either one, were specifically mentioned at least twice throughout the story (for TV items) or mentioned at least once in either the headline, subheadline, or first paragraph (for newspaper stories).
4. Positive frame: (1) Does the story deliver any (substantial) arguments or report any concrete facts that support the EU Constitution? (2) Does the story portray the EU Constitution as beneficial for the EU/Europe or the Netherlands in particular? (3) Is there a quote of any kind of actor that is positive in tone toward the EU Constitution? (4) Does the story promote promising future opportunities or long-term development with a common EU Constitution? Negative frame: (1) Does the story deliver any (substantial) arguments or report any concrete facts that oppose the EU Constitution? (2) Does the story portray the EU Constitution as detrimental for the EU/Europe or the Netherlands in particular? (3) Is there a quote of any kind of actor that is negative in tone toward the EU Constitution? (4) Does the story promote threatening future risks or long-term developments with a common EU Constitution?

5. A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation confirmed a loading of our items on two distinct factors, producing two consistent and distinguishable frames (Eigenvalues 3.11 and 2.09; total variance explained: 65 percent). Items loading on the first factor (positive frame): "Rational pro" = .85; "EU/NL opportunity" = .84; "Positive outlook" = .79; "Positive quote" = .76. Items loading on the second factor (negative frame): "Rational contra" = .83; "Negative outlook" = .83; "EU/NL risk" = .82; "Negative quote" = .66. The items for both frames formed reliable scales; Cronbach's alpha for the positive frame items was .83 and for the negative frame items .80.

6. The extreme positive value (+1) on our final scale as well as the extreme negative value (−1) both are merely theoretical possibilities. Only if all four indicators for the positive frame in all news stories in a particular medium have been coded as "present" (1) and at the same time all negative indicators of all news stories have been coded as "not present" (0) the final scale measurement in Table 1 would be +1 (or −1 in the reversed scenario). Thus, extreme values on our scale are highly unlikely to occur considering that not all news is evaluative and the coefficients we report are indicative of a consistent positive bias in news reporting toward the issue. Furthermore, negative news in general (Kepplinger and Weissbecker 1991) and also news about the EU in particular (e.g., de Vreese et al. 2006) usually show a consistent moderately negative bias. Thus, it was all the more striking and unusual for recipients that in our context the media have portrayed the issue not in negative terms but with a positive bias.

7. Participants of the CentERdata panel are first contacted via telephone and asked if they are generally willing to become regular panel members. If that is the case, their sociodemographic information is entered into a database, and based on this information a panel of 2000 Dutch households, representative of the Dutch population, has been established that has been used since 1991 for both small and large scale studies (such as the DNB Household Survey). If a household stops its participation, it is replaced by a new household that mirrors the characteristics of the old household. The potential new household then receives a letter and is asked if it is willing to become a new member of the panel. The surveys are filled out by the panel members online. However, if there is no computer or Internet connection available in a household, CentERdata provides the technical devices to enable participants to fill out the questionnaires at home.

8. Looking at the list of pretreatment measures, we see that randomization was successful. There were no significant differences between the experimental groups with regard to any of the individual-level attitude measures: EU support, t(683) = 0.164, p > .05; political efficacy, t(685) = -0.085, p > .05; political interest, t(685) = 1.702, p > .05; political knowledge, t(687) = 1.555, p > .05; education, t(686) = 1.175, p > .05; age, t(687) = 0.645, p > .05.

9. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale to what extent they thought the presented news article had portrayed the EU Constitution as a threat (1 = very much as a threat, 5 = not at all as a threat). A t test yielded a significant mean difference between participants in the positive condition (M = 3.53, SD = 0.86) and in the negative condition (M = 2.86, SD = 0.87) in the expected direction, t(675) = 10.10, p < .001.
10. Vote choice intention within the subgroup of EU skeptics, \( t(387) = 0.62, p > .05 \); and within the subgroup of EU supporters, \( t(193) = -0.817, p > .05 \), was not affected by the different experimental conditions.

11. EU attitudes were coded as follows: 0 = EU supporter, 1 = EU skeptic. Experimental condition was coded as follows: 0 = negative, 1 = positive. Given our theoretical predictions, we report one-tailed \( p \)-values.

12. The effect we report remains significant also in a more conservative test when we exclude respondents who are categorized as EU skeptics but express support for the EU Constitution in the posttest and respondents who are categorized as EU supporters but express opposition against the EU Constitution in the posttest (not reported here).

13. Compared to CBS census data and with regard to gender, age, and education we report the following slight under- or overrepresentations. There is a slight overrepresentation of men in our net panel (52.3% versus 49.5%). Regarding age groups, 15-24 year olds are slightly underrepresented (4% versus 11.9%), 45-54 year olds are slightly overrepresented (22.7% versus 14%) and 65+ year olds are slightly overrepresented (19% versus 13.7%). And finally, with regard to education, we report a slight over-representation of people with higher professional education (HBO) (21.7% versus 16%) and an under-representation of people with upper secondary vocational education (MBO) (19.5% versus 32%).

14. Because the degree of self-reported turnout is higher than the actual turnout rate, it reduces the number of nonvoters. The overreporting is acknowledged but not of greater magnitude than in other studies relying on self-reported turnout measures.

15. In the campaign effects model and to explain change between turnout intention and actual turnout, we control for the intention to turn out and having been undecided about turning out in wave 1. The first control variable was coded 1 for those who intended to turn out and 0 for all others. For the second control variable, those having been undecided about turning out in wave 1 have been coded as 1 (Not decided about turning out), and all others have been coded as 0.

16. We acknowledge existing criticism of self-reported exposure measures, but emphasize, like Zaller (1996), the need for specific exposure measures when trying to establish differential effects of media content. Slater (2004) indeed also argues the necessity to have detailed exposure measures when linking media content to effects.

17. Furthermore, previous studies in media effect research have stressed the importance to integrate attention measures into news exposure measures (Chaffee and Schleuder 1986). In an alternative model (not reported here), we multiplied our weighted news exposure index by a score indicating how much attention individuals have devoted to news about the referendum during the campaign (measured on a 10-point scale on which high scores indicate higher levels of attention (\( M = 6.97, SD = 2.03 \)), yielding the same significant patterns as we report in the results section.

18. Voters who have changed their vote choice intention over the course of the campaign and turned out to vote in the referendum would yield unwanted support for our hypothesis. For example, someone who was leaning to vote no prior to the campaign but was unlikely to turn out and finally ended up voting yes in the referendum did get mobilized to vote but not out of risk perception and to prevent a “yes” outcome. To provide a conservative test of our hypothesis, we therefore exclude these respondents (\( n = 46 \)) from the analysis.

References


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