

“It’s a war! It’s a fight! It’s a shielding!”: Framing effects in times of the Corona crisis

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Aim of the project



“Nous sommes en guerre!”
March 16, 2020

How do military metaphors affect attitudes and behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Previous findings

- metaphorical language increases comprehension and communication skill evaluations in physician-patient-interactions (Casarett et al., 2010)
- talking about a “war against climate change” increases urgency perceptions and conservation behavior compared to a “race against climate change” (Flusberg et al., 2017)
- military language is often used in the medical context (Nie et al., 2016)
 - with all its advantages (see Hodgkin, 1985 for a discussion)
 - and disadvantages (e.g. cancer patients are blamed for weakness when succumbing to the disease, Hendricks et al., 2018)

Study 1

WAR



FIGHT



SHIELDING



Study 1

$N = 314$ German participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 29.25$, $SD = 11.95$, 78 % female, 21.5 % male)

mostly student population

Field time: March 22 to 27 2020

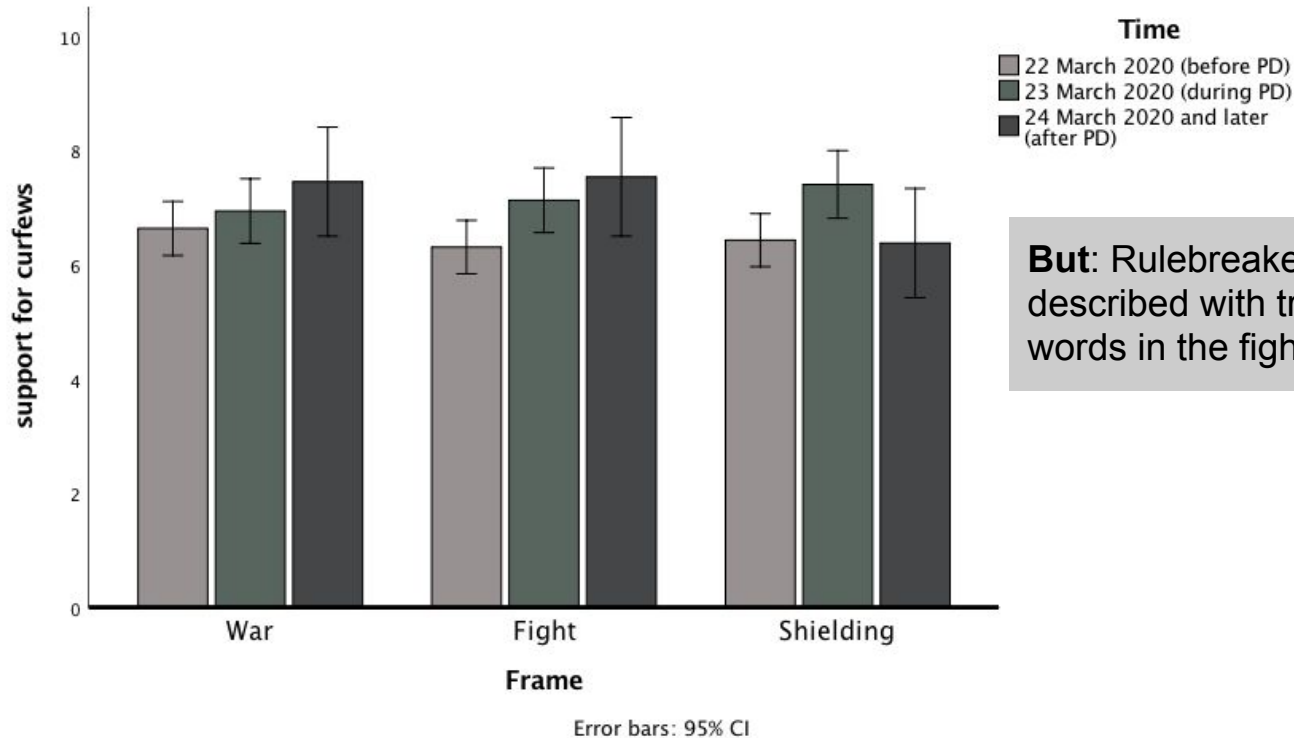
Politics & Research
The fight against the Corona virus



The fight against the Corona virus has already begun in Germany. The number of infections and deaths is rising rapidly. Clinics and care facilities are already preparing for heavy overload and are equipping themselves with protective clothing, additional personnel and flexible extensions. While some small entrepreneurs are facing financial ruin and the predicted number of unemployed is increasing, there are still massive behavioral violations in public life. Some people continue to engage in social contacts, Corona parties are celebrated in parks and public places, and in particularly severe cases, younger people cough on older people.

[more](#)

Study 1: Results

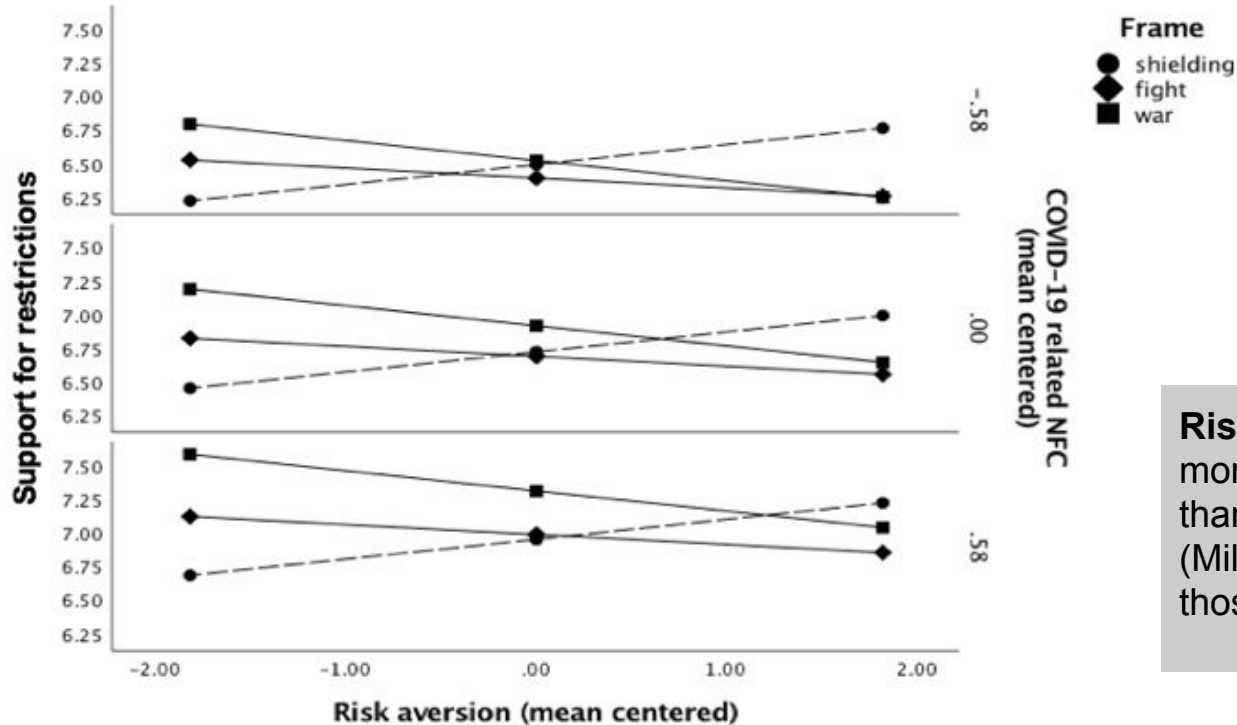


But: Rulebreakers were described with treason related words in the fight-condition.

No main effect of frame type: $F(2, 298) = .54, \eta^2 = .004, p > .05$

Main effect of time: $F(2, 298) = 5.95, \eta^2 = .038, p < .01$

Study 1: Results



Risk averse participants reacted more strongly to military language than risk seekers. (Military metaphors might address those who are already careful.)

$B_{interaction} = -.30, t = 2.23, CI [-.57, -.02], p < .05$
 $R^2 = .04, F(8,299) = 1.77, p = .083$

Study 2

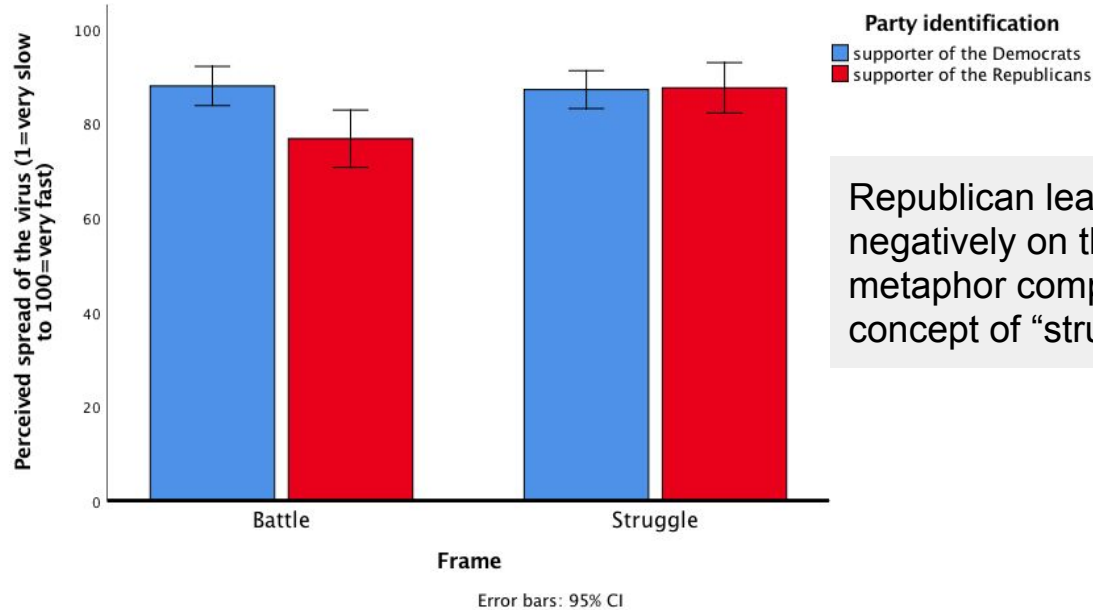
Battle vs Struggle

$N = 176$ US American participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.63$, $SD = 12.28$, 62.6 % male)

recruited via MTurk

Field time: April 27 2020

Study 2: Results



Republican leaners responded negatively on the “battle” metaphor compared to the concept of “struggle”.

Interaction effect: $F(2, 139) = 5.28, \eta^2 = .037, p < .05$

Study 3 & 4

War vs. Struggle

Narrative vs. Factual Reporting

Pre-test of stimulus materials ($N_{\text{German}} = 105$, $N_{\text{US American}} = 108$)

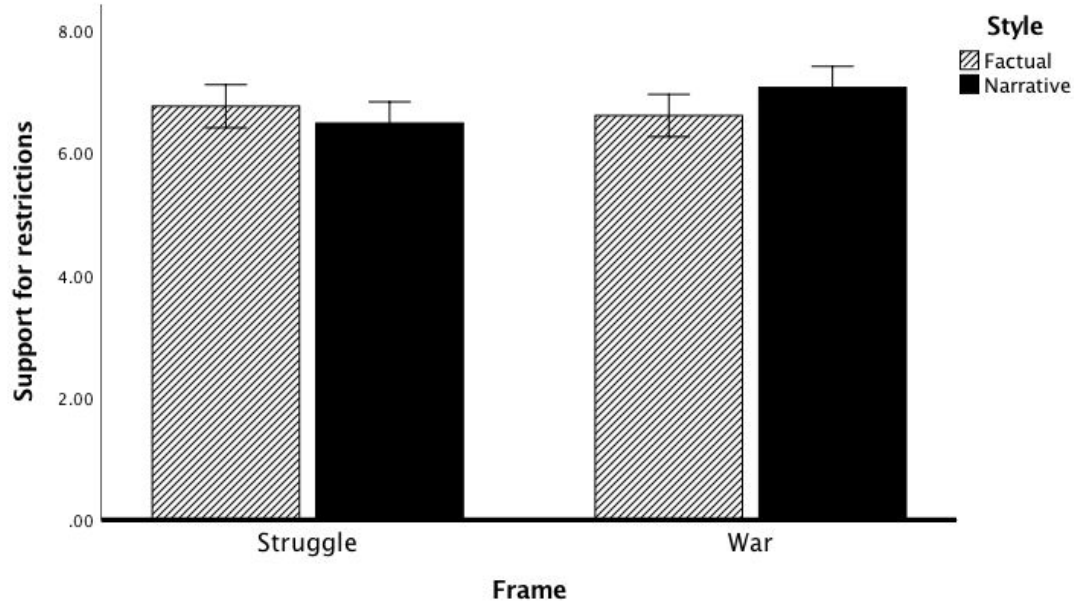
Main study:

$N_{\text{German}} = 476$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 46.11$, $SD = 14.24$, 57.8 % male), via www.respondi.de

$N_{\text{US American}} = 430$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.49$, $SD = 11.35$, 62.3 % male), via MTurk

Field time: July 6 to 10 2020

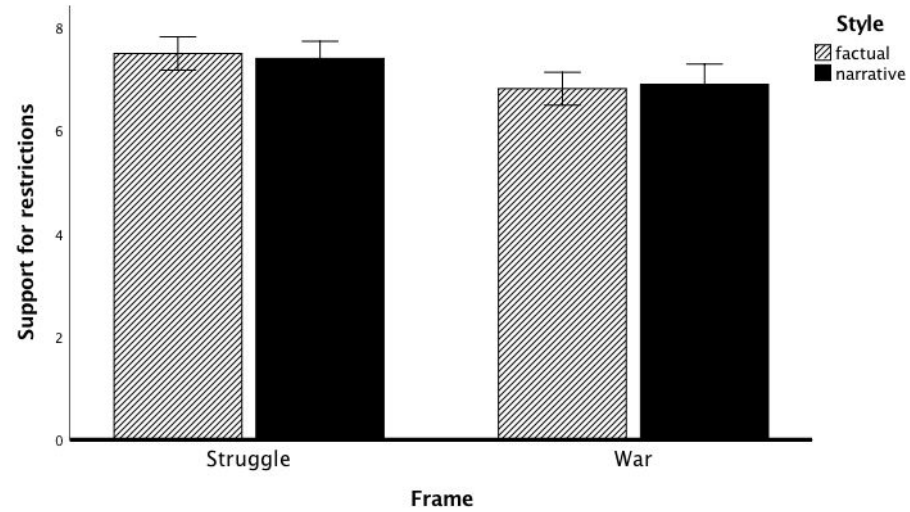
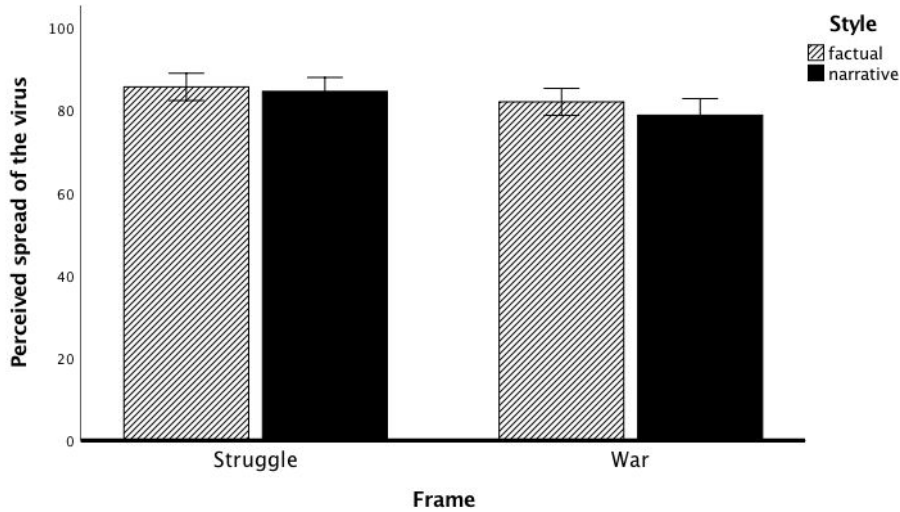
Study 3 & 4: Results



German sample:

Interaction effect: $F(3, 472) = 4.34, \eta^2 = .009, p < .05$

Study 3 & 4: Results



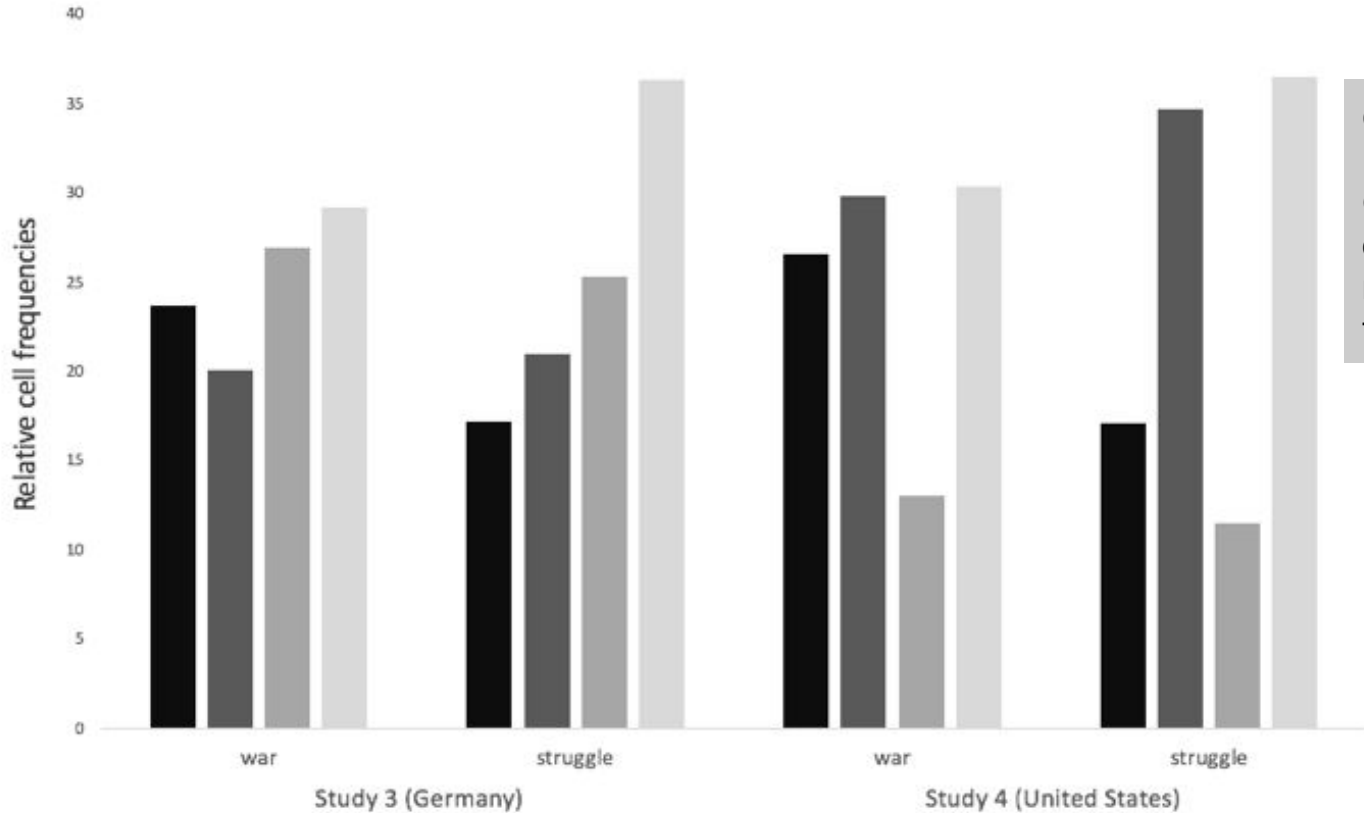
US American sample:

Main effects of frame:

$F(1, 363) = 6.94, \eta^2 = .019, p < .01$

$F(1, 363) = 11.58, \eta^2 = .031, p < .001$

Study 3 & 4: Results



Government perceptions

Governments are more often described with military metaphors when exposed to the war-frame.

“I see the government as...” ■ tower in the battle ■ observer between the fronts ■ solid as a rock ■ plaything of the events

Recommendation for policy makers

- Making use of **neutral language** rather than military language.
- Using **simple** instead of sophisticated language.
- Enhancing feelings of individual and collective **responsibility**.

Meeting Open Science Criteria

- research questions and hypotheses were preregistered at the **OSF**:

https://osf.io/tg7k8/?view_only=e0f419b8e64a4dcc94374754a95c9116

- open data access
- press releases and newspaper articles
- publication under review in *International Journal of Psychology*

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