

Conflict or Cooperation?

Voters' responses towards opposition party strategies

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Abstract When voters decide to ‘throw the rascals out’, opposition parties are called upon to offer a credible choice. This requires, among other things, taking a stand against the government and criticizing its decisions. However, recent research shows that in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine, voters may ‘rally round the flag’ and cooperation rather than conflict may be the best strategy for opposition parties to attract voters. Still very little is known about the effects of different opposition strategies on voters. In our study, we analyze how German citizens respond to opposition parties’ strategies of conflict or cooperation in the context of a current crisis - the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – and everyday politics. We employ data from four large survey experiments conducted between July 2020 and May 2022. In this way, we cover periods in which a crisis dominated the political debate and periods in which it did not, as well as different configurations of government and opposition. We find that compromise-oriented strategies, rather than harsh criticism, are a credible pathway for opposition parties to attract voters not only in times of crisis but also in everyday politics. By systematically examining various opposition strategies on very different political issues at different points in time, our study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role of opposition parties in liberal democracies and the implications of their strategic choices for citizens’ attitudes.

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1. Introduction

The study of opposition parties has received some research attention since Dahl’s (1966) seminal approach. There has been some exploration of opposition party strategies and their determinants at the party level, particularly in understanding the conditions under which opposition parties are inclined to cooperate with the government or adopt a more critical stance (for a recent review see Helms 2023).

However, little scholarly attention has so far been devoted to understanding citizens’ perspectives and preferences regarding opposition party strategies. This study aims to address this research gap by examining citizens’ responses to opposition party behavior, with a particular focus on the choice between cooperative and confrontational approaches toward the ruling government.

To address this research question, we employ a comprehensive research design that includes four experimental studies. In these survey experiments, we varied opposition party stances towards the government to test the effects of cooperation or conflict on several dimensions, including opposition party evaluations, evaluations of the ruling party, and evaluations of potential government coalitions. Importantly, the studies were conducted in different contexts, including periods of imminent crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as more stable political environments, and at different points in the political cycle, i.e., during a legislative term and at the beginning of a federal election campaign. The research design also examines different configurations of government and opposition, providing a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play.

The results of our analysis shed light on the impact of opposition party behavior on public opinion. Specifically, we find that opposition parties tend to receive higher ratings when they adopt a cooperative stance, regardless of whether the political landscape is characterized by crisis or everyday politics. Notably, the behavior of opposition parties in our experiments has no discernible effects on the ratings of government parties. Moreover, we observe an interesting pattern among party supporters, as those who identify with the opposition parties are less susceptible to the influence of their party’s strategy. Conversely, the adoption of cooperative strategies resonates with various segments of the electorate that are not the core base of the opposition party.

2. Voters’ responses towards opposition parties’ strategies

Political discourse in democracies is not only shaped by the political actors in government but also by those in opposition. Voters following the day-to-day political debates will be confronted with both arguments of government parties and opposition parties. Most likely, voters’ evaluations of policies and performances of parties will therefore also be shaped by the communications and strategies of both government and opposition.

From a minimalist Schumpeterian perspective, one might assume that voters only evaluate the government’s performance and vote out bad performers (Schumpeter 1942), paying little heed to opposition parties. However, it is implausible to make this assumption for all voters, which incentivizes opposition parties to act strategically. To get more popular and get into government in the next election, opposition parties will try to persuade voters of their competence and vision – and of the government’s incompetence and political failures throughout the election cycle. This will structure the political debate and will also be recognized by voters.

However, there is very little research that systematically incorporates opposition party strategies into studying voters’ evaluations of both government and opposition parties. There is still not much known about whether and how opposition parties can influence the way voters view them and those in government. There is some evidence though, that voters care about the strategies and performances of opposition parties. For Germany, Plescia and Kritzinger (2017) find that assessments of party performance do not only matter for citizens’ evaluation of government but also opposition parties (see also Stiers 2019b for a comparative approach). Similar conclusions are drawn by Stiers (2019a) for the Icelandic context. Additionally, Williams, Stegmaier, and Debus (2017), find that economic perceptions by voters not only bolster backing for the major governing party but also play a pivotal role in determining voting preferences for the largest opposition party.

Despite the significance of these findings, research on the explicit connection between opposition party strategies and voters’ responses to them is still very scarce.

Opposition party conflict

Tuttnauer and Wegmann (2022) put forth two distinct theoretical arguments on how a confrontational approach may affect opposition parties’ electoral appeal. First, they contend that as it is even terminologically inherent to the opposition to *oppose* the government, parties conforming to this role signal to voters that they are just fulfilling their role. When opposing the government is perceived as ‘doing their job’ by citizens, opposition parties signal valence by criticizing the incumbent and projecting a greater competence of their own in handling the state’s affairs, irrespective of its policy positions. Second, they argue that opposition parties may also aim for ideological differentiation, i.e. the opposition party does not target the government’s competencies, but takes distinct positions from those of the government to address citizens based on their policy positions. In their comparative examination of the impact of opposition parties’ legislative voting behavior on their electoral success, Tuttnauer and Wegmann (2022) uncover evidence for both the *opposition valence mechanism* and *ideological differentiation mechanisms*.

Based on these findings, it could be expected that voters prefer opposition parties that are highly critical of the government. It suggests that such confrontational strategies can signal competence and ideological differentiation, both of which can appeal to voters and eventually contribute to electoral success.

Opposition party cooperation

In contrast to a conflict-oriented approach by opposition parties, there is a theoretical foundation supporting the notion that more collaborative strategies could be beneficial. Voters in parliamentary systems may want to have cooperative opposition parties which help the government to accomplish ‘better’ legislation and facilitate ‘good governance’. This may be particularly the case in so-called consensus systems which adhere to the normative ideal of incorporating diverse interests and achieving consensus among multiple political actors (Powell 2000; Lijphart 2012). In fact, in consensus democracies like Germany, opposition parties wield significant power in policymaking (see Garritzmann 2017). While we mentioned above that the role of opposition parties may be perceived as opposing the government, this notion may shift in consensus systems. Because voters have been socialized in systems that balance interests, they may have incorporated a more consensual sense of politics. Voters may expect opposition parties to be more constructive in their behavior because of their legislative responsibilities. Therefore, it might be beneficial for opposition parties to adopt a constructive and cooperative role within a consensual political system.

Empirically, there is some first evidence that voters prefer a more cooperative approach of opposition parties. The study conducted by Stiers (2022) analyzing survey data from Belgium is thus far the only one to directly inquire what voters expect from opposition parties. Their findings suggest that voters do indeed expect opposition parties to critically scrutinize the government, but simultaneously reject opposing the government out of principle. In their study, voters tend to value constructive proposals and cooperation by opposition parties. They highlight the fact that opposition parties have the potential to be perceived as more effective and legitimate if they approach their role collaboratively and constructively. When opposition parties have an opportunity to shape policy outcomes, the extent to which they embrace a cooperative approach could play a significant role in their electoral success. This assertion is also consistent with Tuttnauer and Wegmanns (2022) study, which reveals a moderation effect of the institutional rights afforded to opposition parties within a country on the effect of opposition criticism. The appeal of confrontation seems particularly strong for opposition parties operating in countries with limited legislative power. Conversely, in countries where the opposition has greater legislative power, cooperation appears to be a more promising approach than confrontation.

Although conflict may be an effective strategy for opposition parties seeking to fulfill their role as government inspectors through scrutiny and criticism, it may thus not necessarily be the optimal approach. When opposition parties are provided the necessary legislative rights, a cooperative approach might help them to position themselves as a constructive corrective in support of the *common good*.

Taken together, we derive two overarching, contrary assumptions about the impact of opposition party strategies of conflict or cooperation on voters’ assessments of the respective parties. First, voters may perceive opposition parties as fulfilling a crucial role in criticizing and scrutinizing the government’s actions and presenting clear and distinct political alternatives. Second,

the legislative responsibilities of opposition parties in parliamentary systems may cause voters to prefer a more constructive and collaborative approach to government actions and policies. We will test these two competing propositions below.

Opposition party strategies and government ratings

The actions of opposition parties are not only used to improve their popularity but also to impair the popularity of a government and its parties. It may sometimes be more effective to focus on challenging the government even if that strategy does not help in improving one's reputation and only diminishes the standing of the government. As previous research has pointed out, opposition parties can shape the public debate by raising political issues and challenging the government on these issues (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2016). By putting these issues at the forefront of public attention, they may also shape citizens' perceptions of government competence in resolving them (Seeberg 2020). Lefevere, Seeberg, and Walgrave (2020) use an experimental approach similar to ours, employing mock articles that depict one party discrediting the reputation of another in specific policy issues. Their study shows that these *issue attacks* indeed have a detrimental effect on the perceived competence of the targeted party in the respective domain. This finding is further supported by Seeberg and Nai (2021), who use a similar experimental design and find that negative messages can potentially undermine a target party's perceived ownership of an issue. Thus, this research suggests that opposition parties can harm the government by criticizing them and revealing their shortcomings. In this study, we will therefore not only analyze the effects of opposition strategies on the evaluation of opposition parties but also the effects on evaluations of government parties.

Opposition party strategies and coalition preferences

Parties' communication strategies might furthermore inform (perceptions of) opportunities of potential future collaborations of parties. Multiparty systems often result in coalition governments consisting of multiple parties instead of a single ruling party. The formation of a coalition largely depends on the agreement between parties (e.g. Martin and Stevenson 2001).

Quite regularly parties are forced to come to terms with new alliances and coalition partners. Voters in multiparty systems are confronted with the general complication that their vote does not unconditionally transfer into a vote for a specific government (Hobolt and Karp 2010). The formation of government is often based on post-election bargaining and voters will therefore anticipate potential coalition outcomes in their electoral decision-making (e.g. Duch, May, and Armstrong 2010). Consequentially, coalitions represent distinct and meaningful political objects for voters (Huber 2014), and attitudes towards them have been shown to significantly impact vote choices (e.g. Blais et al. 2006), even in times of changing configurations of coalition politics like in Germany (Huber and Welz 2022).

Previous research has shown that voters tend to prefer homogeneous coalitions over those with greater potential for conflict (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008; Plescia 2017; Welz 2022). Additionally, historic patterns of party cooperation (Debus and Müller 2014) and more generally a valence component also play a crucial role in shaping coalition preferences (Nyhuis and Plescia 2018). The strategy of an opposition party might target these considerations. Positioning themselves as a credible coalition partner for one or more government parties may increase the valence and the popularity of such a coalition among voters, indirectly enhancing the electoral fortunes of the opposition party, as voters are more likely to support the constituent parties of their preferred coalition. Consequently, we expect that the evaluations of prospective coalitions consisting of an opposition and a government party will yield higher ratings when the opposition party demonstrates a cooperative stance, as opposed to a confrontational one. In our study, we will therefore not only analyze party evaluations but also the effects of opposition party strategies on coalition evaluations.

Partisan differences in reactions to opposition party strategies

Not all citizens are equally affected by party communication strategies, and partisanship is likely to function as a moderator. It profoundly shapes individuals' perceptions and understanding of the political landscape (Campbell et al. 1960). A substantial body of research has provided compelling evidence regarding the influence of partisanship, revealing its impact not only on how partisans interpret and process information but also on their propensity to adhere to party cues (e.g. Bartels 2002; D. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Importantly, party elites play a central role in shaping these partisan perceptual differences (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018) and voters tend to align themselves closely with the positions advocated by their respective parties (Brader and Tucker 2012).

Given these dynamics, it is reasonable to expect that partisans will predominantly adhere to their party's stances and remain relatively unaffected by the strategic choices of the opposition party. However, partisans of the government parties may exhibit a distinct pattern, rating the opposition party higher when it adopts a cooperative rather than a confrontational approach with their party. In addition, these supporters may evaluate coalitions formed between their and the opposition party more favorably when they are characterized by cooperative dynamics, as opposed to instances characterized by conflictual interactions.

Crisis and everyday politics

The context in which opposition parties operate is an important factor that might shape voters' responses. Times of crisis may offer a special setting in which cooperative behavior by opposition parties is especially favored. During times of crisis, voters tend to 'rally around the flag' (Mueller 1970), which benefits the government and its parties (Baker and O'Neal 2001; Hetherington and Nelson 2003), as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kritzing et al. 2021) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Steiner et al. 2023). In such contexts, opposition

parties may be able to join the electorate in their support of the government and gain from cooperative behavior. Furthermore, research on opposition party behavior during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has shown that opposition parties tend to be more cooperative in such circumstances (Louwerse et al. 2021). In contrast, everyday politics may lead voters to favor a more critical opposition. This might be especially true when opposition parties own the issue and might be willing to signal their competence to the electorate (J. Green and Hobolt 2008).

Therefore, we expect that cooperative opposition strategies will be particularly valued during times of crisis when much is at stake. However, in everyday politics, when parties' positions and issue differences play a larger role, confrontational approaches might be more beneficial for opposition parties. Ultimately, understanding the contextual factors that shape voters' responses to opposition parties' behavior is crucial for analyzing the electoral consequences of opposition party strategies. In this study we try to capture some of the contextual variation by running experiments during 'times of crisis' – the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the first months of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and more regular times of everyday politics in between.

3. Methods

We employ a set of experiments to investigate the effects of cooperative and confrontational opposition party strategies. While observational data can provide useful insights about correlations between variables, it is often subject to biases and unobservable confounders that can make it difficult to draw causal inferences. By making use of thorough treatment manipulation, we can trace changes in the dependent variable of interest back to variations in the treatment. Additionally, by employing survey experiments situated in real-world settings, we can enhance the external validity of our findings and provide a more realistic treatment for respondents.

Our study comprises four experiments conducted at different points in time between 2020 and 2022, enabling us to explore the effects of opposition strategies in diverse contexts with varying degrees of crisis and with two different government opposition patterns. Figure 1 provides an overview of our surveys, which were conducted in different phases of the pandemic and other political developments. Study one was conducted in July and August 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, while study two was fielded in January and February 2021, as the crisis was receding. Study three was conducted in July 2021, when most COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, and the German federal election campaign gained momentum. Finally, study four was conducted in May 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. During studies one to three a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD was in office, while study four was conducted during the incumbency of a coalition of SPD, Greens, and FDP. We provide a detailed description of each study below. To track the relative strengths of the parties during the survey field times, Figure 1 also presents poll data.

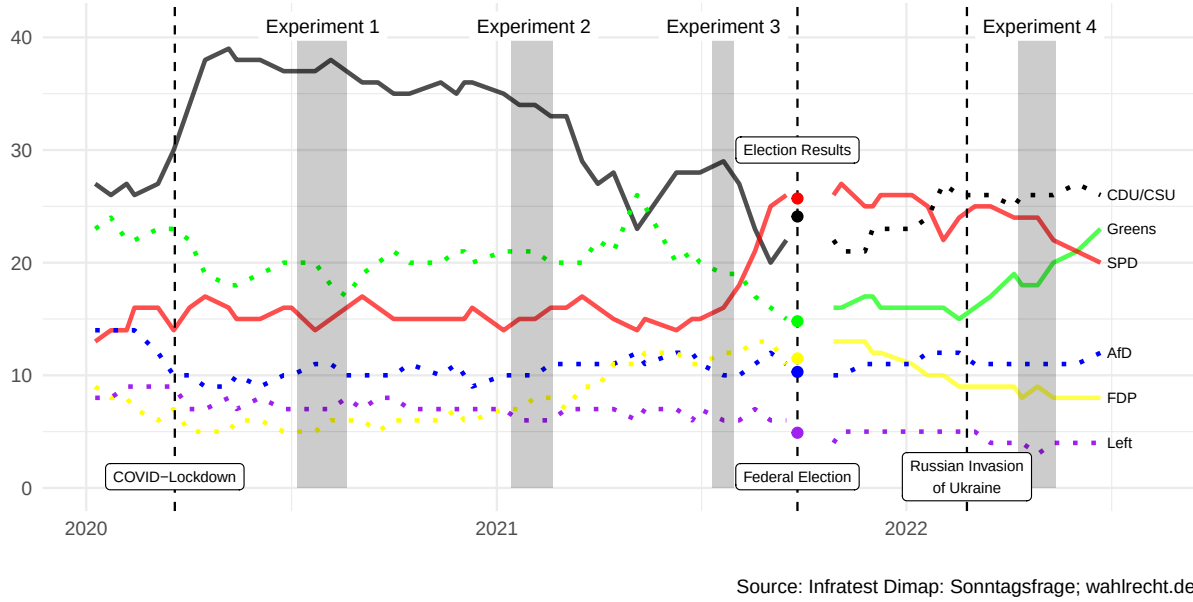


Figure 1: Overview of field time of experiments

All four surveys employed experimental designs, wherein respondents were randomly assigned to experimental treatments aimed at manipulating the stances of opposition parties regarding conflict or cooperation. Respondents were either presented with a text containing statements from opposition politicians that were relatively favorable toward the government and signaled cooperative behavior or received a text containing confrontational statements from opposition party politicians, criticizing the government and positioning themselves as the better alternative. All statements were actual statements made by politicians and were embedded in a short mock newspaper article that we created. We present a translated example of the articles from Study 4 as well as original German texts in the Appendix.

To assess the impact of these distinct opposition party strategies, we rely on respondents' sympathy ratings of parties. In Experiments 3 and 4 we also asked respondents for their coalition ratings which we will use as additional dependent variables. Party and coalition ratings were measured on an eleven-point scale reaching from -5 ('strongly dislike') to +5 ('strongly like'). For our analysis, these ratings serve as the dependent variable in ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models.¹ To assess the effect of the conflict/cooperation treatment, we include a

¹Following the treatment, respondents were requested to provide their evaluation of the opposition parties' stance on a 5-point scale, ranging from being perceived as completely cooperative to completely confrontational. In order to ensure the internal validity of the analysis, we excluded participants from the analysis who provided responses completely contradicting the information presented in the treatment. Specifically, respondents who indicated that a party was entirely cooperative (in conflict) while the treatment clearly stated that the party's stance was focused on conflict (cooperation) were excluded. This approach allows us to maintain internal validity and mitigate potential confounding effects, allowing us to assess whether the intended treatment was effectively delivered and understood by participants. Participants who provide

dummy variable that takes the value of 1 for the cooperation groups and 0 for the conflict groups. In addition, we use the standard item used in Germany to operationalize partisan identification. This measure allows us to analyze the differential effects among partisans of the relevant parties in our experimental treatments, including supporters of the opposition party under study, supporters of the government parties, and those with other or no party identification. Subsequently, we incorporate interaction effects between the treatment variable and respondents’ party identification into our models to investigate a potential moderation. In the models for the coalition preferences, we additionally control for respondents’ ratings of the constituent parties of the respective coalition.

4. Results

Experiment 1

Table 1: Overview of Conditions in Experiment 1

Condition	N
AfD: Conflict; Left: Cooperation	356
AfD: Cooperation; Left: Conflict	345
Greens: Conflict; FDP: Cooperation	356
Greens: Cooperation; FDP:Conflict	320

Our first experiment was conducted in an extraordinary moment of crisis, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The online survey was fielded in July and August of 2020. Participants were mainly recruited from an opt-in respondent pool with some additional recruitment of students enrolled at the University of Mainz. In this experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups. Each group was presented with *two* mock articles that depicted the stands of different opposition parties on the government’s COVID policies. The treatment varied the political parties mentioned in the mock articles. Two groups were presented with ideologically extreme opposition parties, AfD and Linke, while the other two groups were presented with more moderate opposition parties, FDP, and Greens. The experimental groups also differed in which party expressed cooperativeness and which party expressed confrontational signals. In each group, one party expressed cooperation with the

responses that are inconsistent with the manipulation check indicate a potential failure in the effectiveness of the treatment. Including such participants in the analysis could introduce noise and bias the interpretation of the results, ultimately compromising the internal validity of our findings. Given that participants were recruited through internet advertisements, there is a potential risk of attracting respondents who are primarily motivated by the survey’s raffle incentive rather than a genuine interest in comprehending the survey items. The number of respondents that are excluded is overall manageable: Experiment 1: 4 (0.29%); Experiment 2: 35 (3.44%); Experiment 3: 180 (7.88%); Experiment 4: 150 (5.37%)

government while the other party signaled conflict. To minimize the potential influence of sequence effects, the order of the mock articles was randomized within each group. Table 1 presents an overview of the experimental conditions.

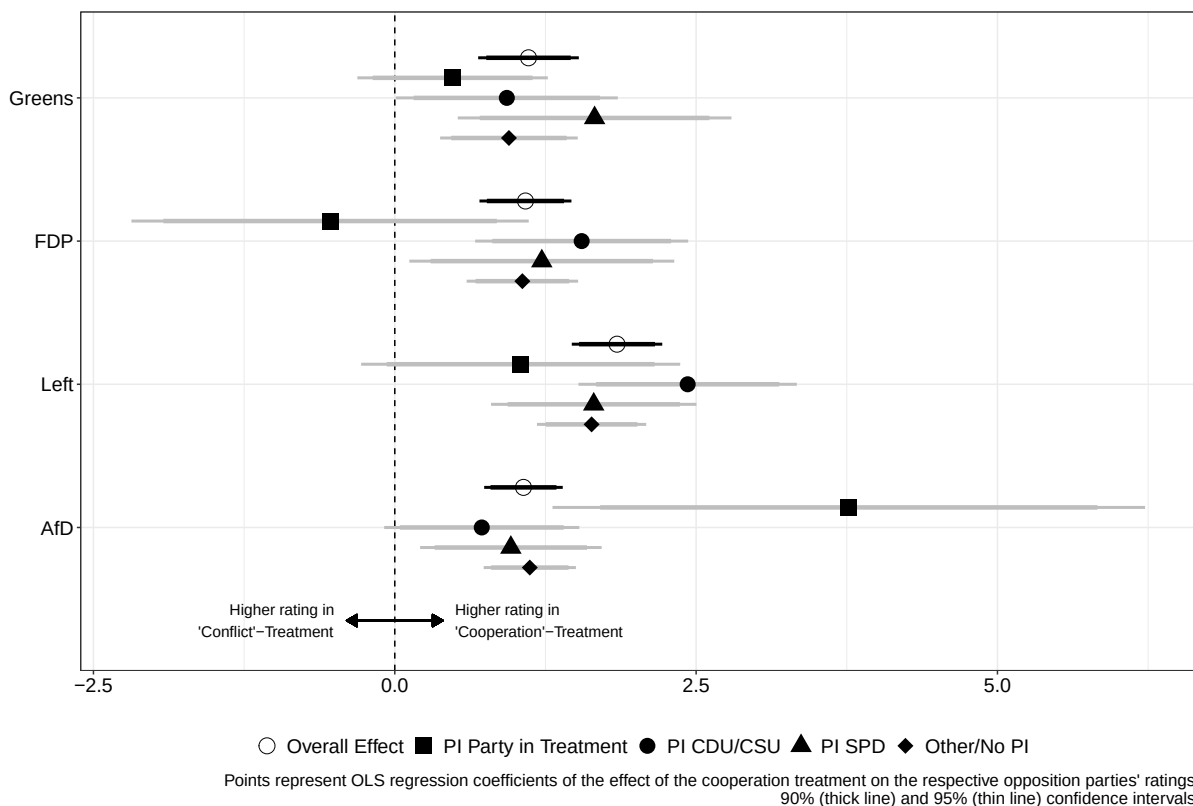


Figure 2: Treatment Effects on Party Ratings in Experiment 1

Results of the analysis are presented in Figure 2, which displays OLS regression coefficients. A positive coefficient indicates that a party received higher ratings in the experimental condition in which cooperation was signaled, as opposed to the group in which the opposition party employed a confrontational strategy. The topmost coefficients indicate the overall treatment effect, represented by the black confidence interval. For each of the four opposition parties, a significant positive coefficient can be observed. Each of the parties was rated higher when the article described a cooperative approach of the party compared to a confrontational approach.

The coefficients below - accompanied by gray confidence intervals - present our subgroup analysis and reflect the effects for different groups of party identifiers from linear regression models in which the treatment was interacted with respondents' party identification. Considering this moderation by party identification, a noteworthy pattern emerges. There are almost no significant differences between conflict and cooperation for respondents who identified with the party that emitted the signal. Partisan respondents, for the most part, remained unaffected

in their assessments of their respective parties. Conversely, partisans of other parties as well as independents rated opposition parties higher when they signaled cooperation in comparison to when they signaled conflict. One exception to this pattern was observed in the case of the far-right AfD.

These findings suggest that at least during times of imminent crisis, opposition parties can effectively attract a broad spectrum of the electorate by positioning themselves as constructive forces dedicated to overcoming the crisis. Moreover, with a cooperative approach, they also manage to avoid alienating their supporters. Overall, these results suggest that a cooperative strategy may appeal to new voters without significantly discouraging the party’s existing base.

Experiment 2

Given these strong findings of Experiment 1, clearly suggesting cooperation to be beneficial, the obvious question is how robust these findings for opposition parties are and whether they hold in times with less crisis, less rallying around the flag, and across different policy domains. Experiment 2 was conducted between January and February 2021, during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was still a concern but its (political) impact in Germany was slowly declining. Again, participants were recruited from an opt-in participant pool and amongst students at the University of Mainz. This experiment focused exclusively on the Green party as the main opposition party as they came second in the polls at the time. Additionally, we extended our experimental design with another dimension. The study design was thus a 2x3 experimental design in which cooperation or conflict by the parties’ politicians was again our main manipulation. The other dimension we manipulated was the issue domain that was spoken of in the mock articles. As strategies of confrontation and cooperation could have different effects in different policy domains, we varied three different policy domains in the statements: First, the public health issues of the COVID pandemic, second the economic issues of the COVID pandemic, and third as a non-COVID-issue climate change policies. Given the results of our first experiment, we expected cooperative statements to be most beneficial for the opposition party in the COVID conditions, particularly when referring to public health issues. Table 2 presents an overview of the experimental conditions.

Table 2: Overview of Conditions in Experiment 2

	Conflict	Cooperation
COVID-19: public health	177	167
COVID-19: economy	151	185
Climate	171	168

Figure 3 displays the main results of our analysis. Like above the effects of the cooperation treatment compared to the conflict treatment are presented; positive coefficients indicate that

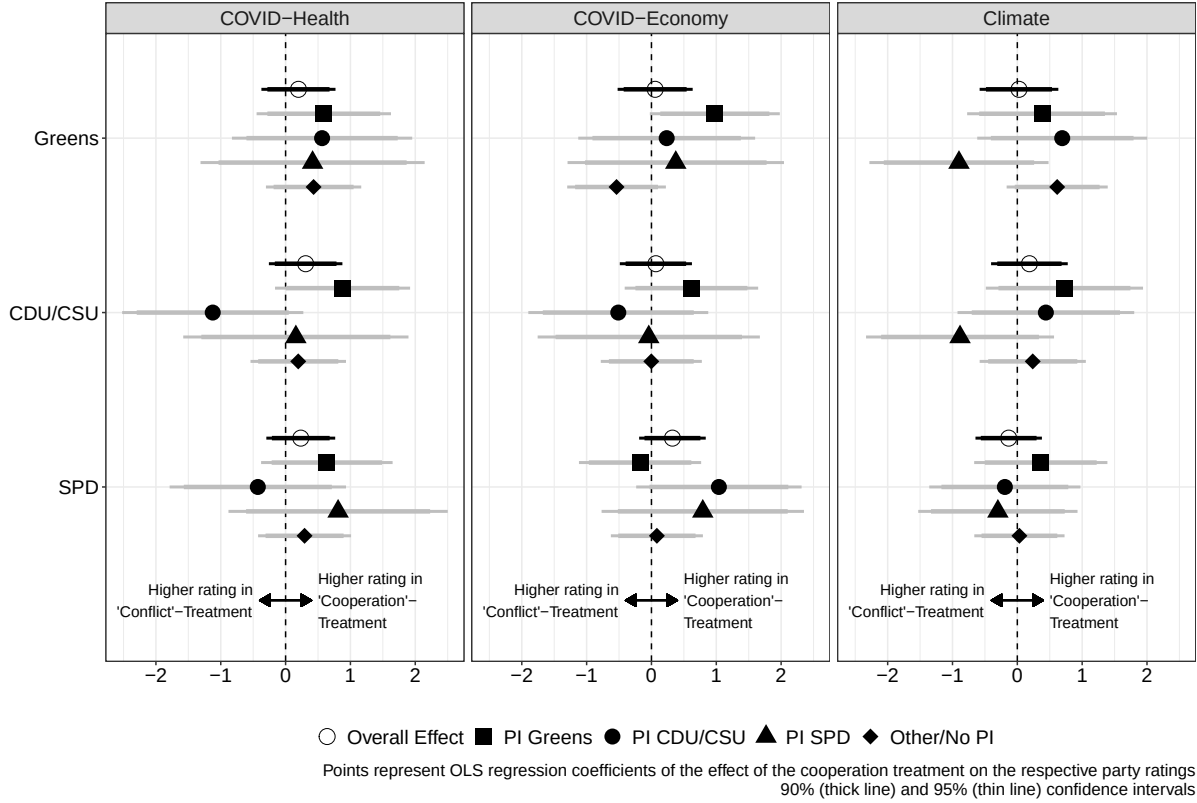


Figure 3: Treatment Effects on Party Ratings in Experiment 2

a party received higher ratings in the treatment conditions in which the Greens signaled cooperation compared to those where the party took a confrontational stand. The coefficients are presented separately along the y-axis, based on the corresponding dependent variables. The topmost coefficients pertain to the models with the ratings of the Green party as the dependent variable. In the middle, the treatment effects on the ratings of the Chancellor party at that time, the CDU/CSU, are plotted. Lastly, the lowermost coefficients relate to the effects of the treatments on the ratings of the junior coalition partner, the SPD. In contrast to Experiment 1, Figure 3 does not reveal any clear and robust effects of conflict or cooperation. Neither the ratings of the Greens nor those of the two government parties are influenced by the treatments of conflict or cooperation for neither of the three topics of the mock articles. Interestingly, the effects were rather similar across the different policy domains. For the COVID condition referring to public health issues, the effect of cooperative statements is a bit more beneficial for the Green party compared to the other policy domains. Still, the effect is only small and not significant.

In addition to the overall effect observed across all respondents, the effects for subgroups based on party identification confirm the absence of an effect of the treatments. Neither for Green party supporters nor for those of the CDU or the SPD differences between the experimental

conditions can be observed.

One possible interpretation of these findings is that in the absence of an imminent crisis or heightened political competition, such as during an election campaign, opposition party strategies have less influence. Possibly, opposition parties’ impact may be more pronounced when far-reaching and extensive decisions need to be made or when government formation is imminent. Another possible explanation would be our sole focus on one opposition party – the Greens – in this experiment. Our third experiment was therefore conducted during the start of the campaign of the 2021 German Federal Election and with signals from different opposition parties.

Experiment 3

We fielded our online survey for our third experiment in July 2021. Participants were recruited through ads on Facebook and Instagram using quotas on age and gender (see [Neundorf and Öztürk 2021](#)) and from an opt-in participant pool. The study used a 2x2x2 experimental design, with half the groups featuring the FDP and the other half featuring the Greens in mock newspaper articles. As in Experiments 1 and 2, these opposition parties either signaled cooperation or conflict with the government. Additionally, we varied whether the articles featured statements about COVID-policies of the government or statements on an issue salient to the respective party at the start of the campaign. For the Greens the salient issue we chose was climate change, for the FDP it was digitalization. Table 3 presents an overview of the experimental conditions. We expected confrontational strategies to be more beneficial to opposition parties when talking about issues that are important to them and their voters. Again, for the issue of COVID, we expected confrontational statements less beneficial.

Table 3: Overview of Conditions in Experiment 3

	Conflict	Cooperation
Greens		
COVID-19	317	270
Climate	309	275
FDP		
COVID-19	295	302
Digitalization	236	285

Party ratings

The two upper panels in Figure 4 depict the effects of the treatments involving the Greens on the party’s rating, as well as the ratings of the two government parties CDU/CSU and SPD. Examining the effects on the opposition parties’ ratings, the overall effects in both the COVID

and climate conditions reveal significantly higher ratings under cooperation compared to conflict. This positive effect of a cooperative strategy aligns with the findings from Experiment 1, indicating that when the opposition party signals a willingness to constructively cooperate with the government, it receives higher ratings. Interestingly, the overall effects of the treatments on the ratings for the two government parties are statistically insignificant. Again, confrontational strategies of the opposition do not cause a decline in the ratings of government parties. These results suggest that opposition parties can attract voters through cooperative strategies. The potential risk for the opposition party that a strategy of cooperation may also enhance the likability of the government and consequently offer no relative benefit for the opposition does not seem to hold. Quite surprisingly, we find very similar effects for both issue domains. A cooperative communication strategy is beneficial not only in the COVID condition but also in the condition of climate change. Confrontational statements do not help the Greens even in their most salient issue domain.

Regarding the moderation effect of party identification on the ratings of the Greens, the graph, once again in line with the results from Experiment 1, reveals that Green party supporters are relatively unaffected by the choice of strategy. However, independent respondents (significant effect for the COVID treatment) and those identifying with the Christian Democrats (significant for the climate treatment) rate the Green party higher in the cooperation treatment. This finding suggests that opposition parties have the opportunity to appeal segments of the electorate that are not necessarily supporters of the party with a cooperative rather than confrontational approach. Furthermore, the insignificant effect on their supporters suggests that they do not alienate their base in doing so.

Given the strong effects for the treatments of the Green party statements., it is rather surprising that we do not find any clear pattern or significant effects for the treatments of FDP statements shown in the two lower panels of Figure 4. The overall treatment effects as well as the interaction effects with party identification remain insignificant. These differences in effects between the Greens and the FDP may be attributed to their distinct perceptions by citizens.

Coalition ratings

Apart from party ratings, opposition strategies could also influence how voters view possible coalitions. Figure 5 displays the effects of the treatments on coalition ratings as the dependent variable, analogous to the previous analysis of party ratings. The two upper panels depict the effects of the Green party treatments. The upper left panel shows an interesting pattern for the COVID treatments. A cooperative strategy has a significant positive effect on the ratings of the two coalitions in which the Greens would be in non-traditional coalitions with the ideologically conservative parties CDU/CSU and FDP. While no overall treatment effect on the rating of the SPD-Greens-FDP coalition can be found, the clear left-leaning coalition of SPD, Greens, and Left has overall higher ratings in the conflict treatment compared to the cooperation condition.

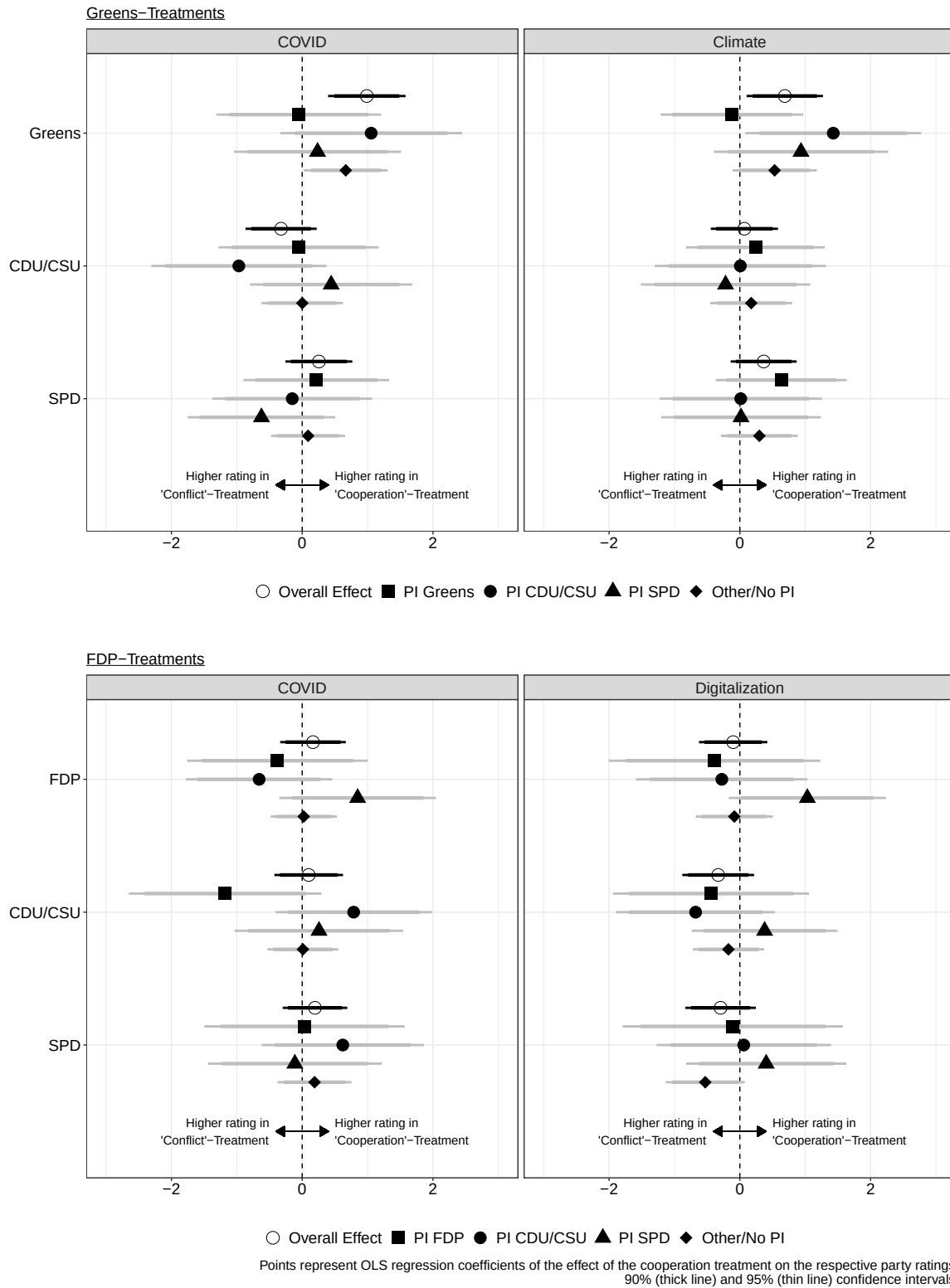


Figure 4: Treatment Effects on Party Ratings in Experiment 3

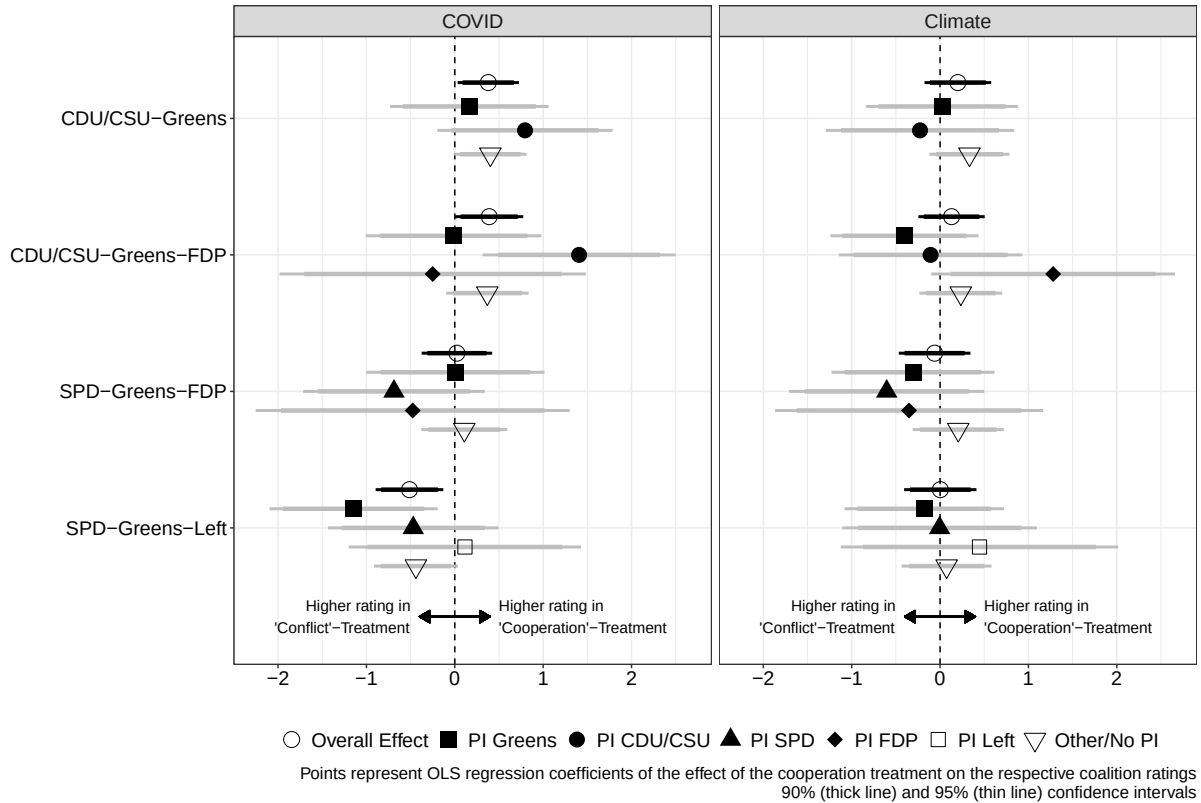


Figure 5: Treatment Effects on Coalition Ratings in Greens-Treatments in Experiment 3

These results suggest that a cooperative strategy of an opposition party may not only positively affect citizens' perceptions of the party itself but also their view of the coalitions that this party might join. In our concrete case, a cooperative strategy in which the Greens signaled their willingness to overcome the government and opposition divide to cooperate constructively, also affected citizens' assessments of possible coalitions. More specifically, coalitions including the Greens that are cross-cutting divides of traditional party alliances were rated higher when the Greens were presented as cooperative. But when the Greens criticized the government and took a more confrontational stance, a left-leaning coalition was rated higher.

In contrast, however, the upper right panel reveals no such effects for the treatments in which climate policies were the topic of the mock articles. This may suggest that cooperation between parties is especially relevant in a concrete crisis, where citizens may expect parties to work together for the greater *common good*. On the other hand, on a specific topic of more or less *everyday politics*, which is additionally a clear focus of the Greens, citizens might expect certain kinds of bargaining and discord, and cooperation might not be as important. Mirroring the insignificant results on the party ratings, no significant treatment effects for the FDP condition and no moderation of the party identification could be found for the coalition ratings.

Experiment 4

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 posed another moment of crisis, for which one might expect similar beneficial effects of cooperative opposition party strategies and therefore provide us with the opportunity to reexamine the findings of Experiment 1. We conducted our online survey for Experiment 4 in April and May 2022, about a month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Again, participants were recruited through Facebook and Instagram ads and an opt-in participant pool. Following a change in government after the 2021 Federal Election a new coalition of SPD, Greens, and FDP was in government. Therefore, we used the CDU/CSU as the biggest opposition party in Experiment 4. Again, our main manipulation was varying the statements of CDU/CSU politicians in mock newspaper articles, either with confrontational statements or with statements signaling cooperation with the new government.² The topic of the article was the Russian invasion of Ukraine and German defense expenditures. Table 4 presents an overview of the experimental conditions. As in Experiment 3, we asked respondents not only about their party ratings but also about their evaluations of possible coalitions.

Table 4: Overview of Conditions in Experiment 4

	Conflict	Cooperation
N	1,337	1,464

Party ratings

The findings of Experiment 4 generally support the conclusions drawn from Experiments 1 and 3. Figure 6 illustrates that even in a new configuration of government and opposition, the adoption of a cooperative strategy by the new opposition party CDU/CSU increased its likability in comparison with a confrontational approach. Again, following our previous findings, the ratings of the government parties are not affected by the opposition party strategy. The overall effects are not nearly as strong as in Experiment 1, though. Cooperative statements were much more beneficial to opposition parties in the COVID crisis than cooperative statements in the maybe less salient crisis of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Turning to partisan subgroups, the findings broadly align with those from Experiments 1 and 3. Supporters of the Christian Democrats remained relatively unaffected in the assessment of their party, while supporters of the SPD and Greens rated the CDU/CSU higher when it signaled a cooperative approach towards the government. Interestingly, supporters of the

²Additionally, we primed respondents either with an emotional framing or a cognitive framing of questions regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Given that this variation is not the primary focus of this paper and considering that respondents were once again randomly assigned for the treatments of opposition party strategy, we focus here on the conflict/cooperation dimension.

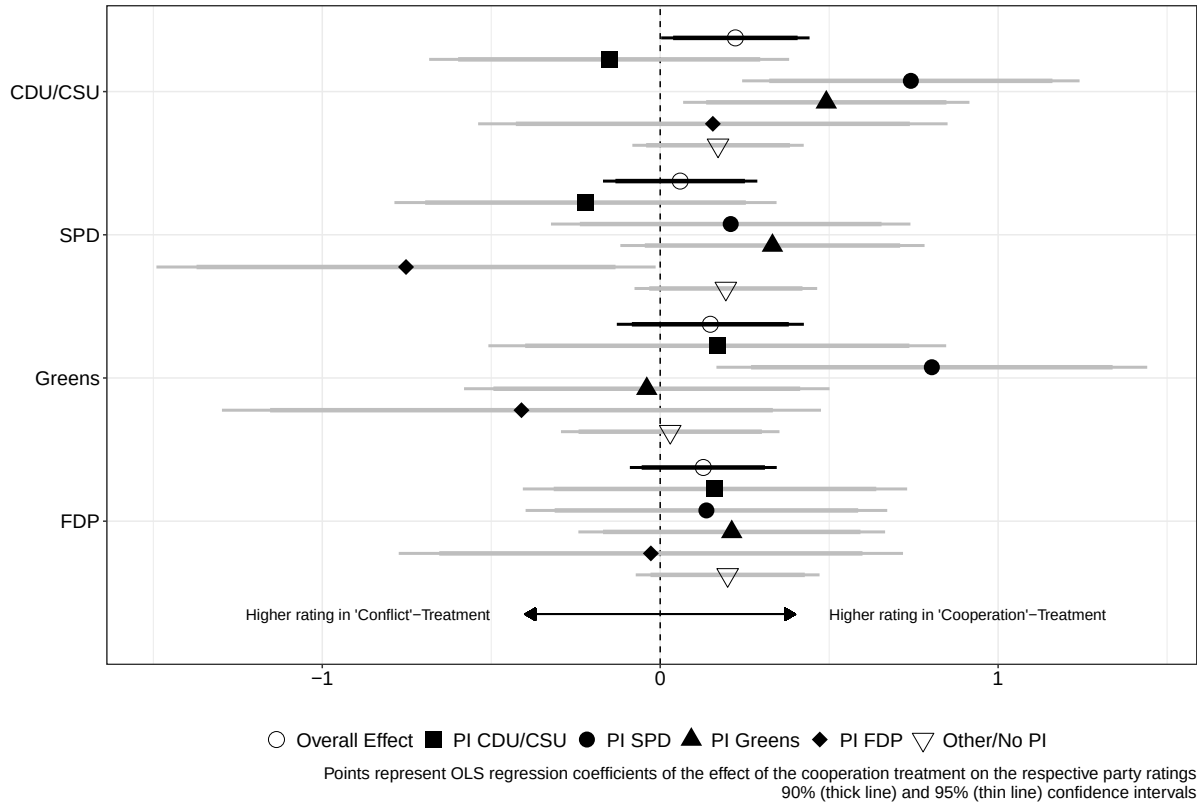


Figure 6: Treatment Effects on Party Ratings in Experiment 4

junior coalition partner FDP, rated the SPD of chancellor Scholz lower when the CDU/CSU signaled critique in the treatment. This suggests that an opposition party strategy may even create some divisions within the supporter base of such a cross-cutting coalition.

Coalition ratings

Other than party ratings, coalition evaluations have not been strongly affected by our treatment in Experiment 4. Figure 7 depicts the ratings of coalitions involving the CDU/CSU, as we expected that the strategic choices made by parties would exert an influence on the perceptions of their potential coalitions. Overall, we find no significant effects on coalition ratings. Interestingly, the strongest but still insignificant positive effects for cooperative statements show for supporters of the CDU/CSU. They rate coalitions with government parties higher when the CDU/CSU signals cooperation with those parties. It is worth noting that the survey was conducted in the spring of 2022, only shortly after the formation of the coalition between the Social Democrats, Greens, and Liberals. Respondents may have perceived government formation as a settled matter at that particular moment in time, leading to a limited impact on their assessments.

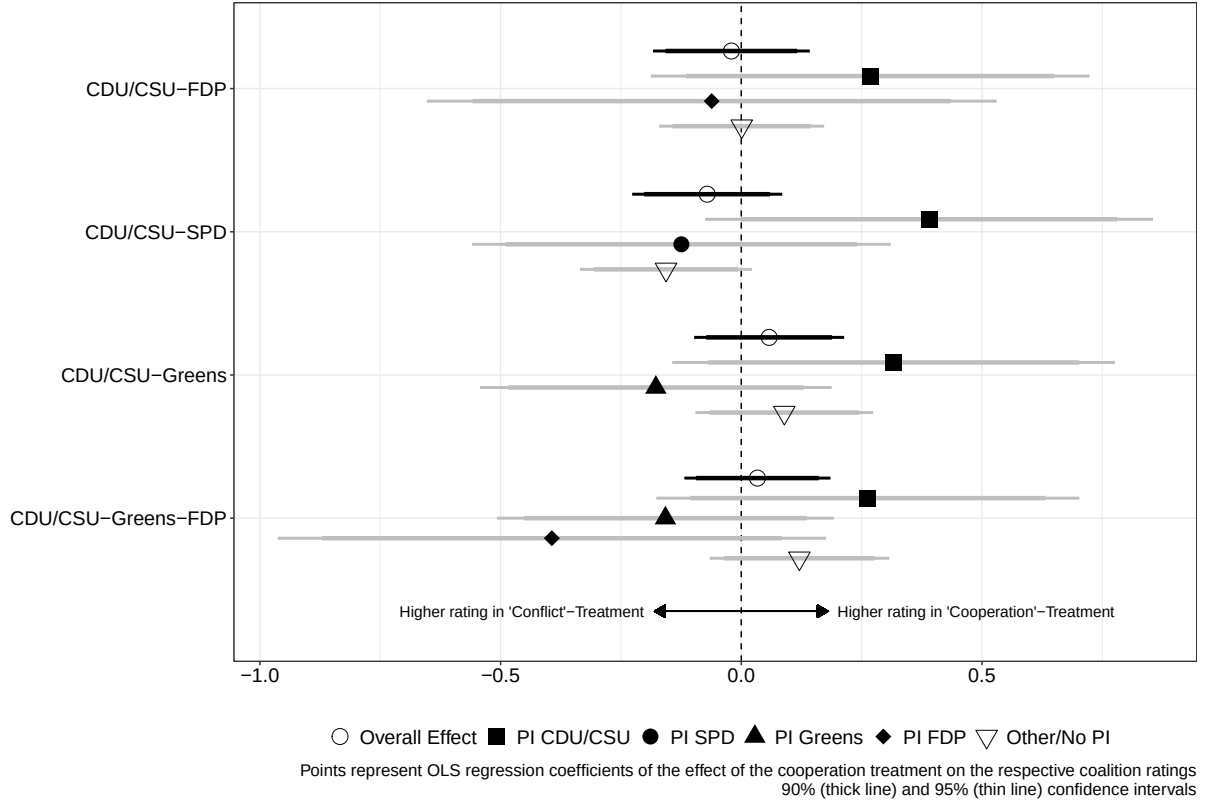


Figure 7: Treatment Effects on Coalition Ratings in Experiment 4

5. Discussion

Taken together, the results of our four studies show a relatively clear pattern. In three of our four experiments, adopting a cooperative strategy led to higher approval ratings for the opposition party in question. In none of our studies, across a variety of issues and contexts, was a confrontational approach by the opposition parties beneficial to the opposition parties. Thus, there is some evidence that voters prefer a constructive approach by opposition parties to a more adversarial approach. Moreover, we expected that a cooperative strategy would be particularly valued in times of crisis when there is a clear imperative to address a political and societal challenge collectively. Our results from Experiments 1 and 2 provide some circumstantial support for such reasoning, as we find strong positive effects of cooperation in Experiment 1, which was conducted in the first year of the COVID pandemic. However, neither cooperation nor conflict effects were found in Experiment 2, which was conducted in early 2021, when the (electoral) effects of the COVID pandemic were waning, leading respondents to perceive it as less of a pressing political issue.

Our results suggest that cooperation may be a promising avenue for opposition parties not only

in times of crisis but also during election campaigns. Experiment 3 shows that a cooperative Green Party received higher overall ratings compared to a confrontational approach when the topic of the experimental treatment focused on climate change, a key issue at the core of the party’s agenda. In contrast, no effects are found for the FDP, possibly reflecting patterns of responsibility attribution.

The subgroup analysis revealed that the influence of a cooperative strategy relative to a confrontational strategy is primarily observed among supporters of other parties or independent respondents. Interestingly, the treatments had negligible effects on individuals who identified with the respective opposition party. This may indicate that party loyalists have already formed strong opinions about their party, rendering them relatively unaffected by the strategic choices of conflict or cooperation. Conversely, those who did not identify with the opposition party were more susceptible to the treatments. Cooperative communication strategies offer opposition parties an opportunity to attract untapped segments of the electorate - without alienating existing supporters by being perceived as too compromising.

Contrary to our initial expectations, the strategies employed in our treatments had no discernible effect on government ratings. According to our findings, harsher criticism from opposition parties in a confrontational approach does not necessarily undermine the government’s reputation in the eyes of citizens, nor does a more cooperative approach by the opposition increase the popularity of ruling parties. This may suggest that an opposition party need not fear that a cooperative approach would inadvertently strengthen the government’s standing, thereby offsetting a possible positive effect of cooperation on its own reputation.

In addition to results on the evaluations of individual parties, our study also sheds light on how respondents’ evaluations of coalitions are influenced by the different strategies of the opposition parties. In Experiment 3, conducted in the run-up to the 2021 federal elections, we found particularly interesting results regarding the Green Party. We observed significant positive effects of a cooperative strategy of the Green Party on evaluations of coalitions together with the Christian Democrats, specifically the “Black-Green” coalition (CDU/CSU-Greens) and the so-called “Jamaica coalition” (CDU/CSU-Greens-FDP). These coalitions cut across traditional party alliances, with the CDU/CSU and FDP forming a conservative-liberal camp, while the Greens have traditionally allied with the SPD (and potentially the Left Party) in a more left-wing alliance. When the mock article in the treatment signaled a cooperative attitude of the Greens toward the government, they seem to be perceived by respondents as a more credible coalition partner, which increases the ratings of such *novel* coalitions. In contrast, the traditional left-wing coalition of SPD, Greens, and Left Party received higher ratings when the Greens signaled conflict with the government in the treatment. This suggests that the choice of strategy for opposition parties not only affects party ratings but may also shape their positioning as potential coalition partners. However, no such effects were observed for the FDP in Experiment 3 and for the CDU/CSU in Experiment 4, suggesting again that context and party specifics may play an important role in the effects of opposition party strategies.

6. Conclusion

This study examines citizens' yet understudied responses to opposition party strategies. While the importance of opposition parties in democracies has long been theorized, little research has focused on understanding citizens' preferences regarding opposition party behavior. Specifically, this paper aims to address two divergent expectations: first, whether citizens want opposition parties to adopt an adversarial approach in opposing the ruling party, or second, whether citizens prefer opposition parties to cooperate with the government in a broader sense of power-sharing. By exploring citizens' perspectives, this study seeks to identify which strategy might be more beneficial for opposition parties and to assess its impact on public support for both the opposition party and the governing parties.

We employ four experimental studies to examine the impact of opposition party behavior of cooperation or conflict. These studies were conducted in a variety of contexts, including periods of imminent crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as more stable periods, such as the beginning of an election campaign and during a legislative term. In addition, the studies examine different configurations of government and opposition. The results of our analysis indicate that opposition parties tend to receive higher ratings when they adopt a cooperative stance, both in times of crisis and in more everyday politics. Interestingly, the behavior of opposition parties in our experiments had no discernible effect on the ratings of government parties. Moreover, our results show an intriguing pattern: party supporters who align themselves with the respective opposition party are less susceptible to the influence of their party's strategies. Conversely, the adoption of cooperative strategies tends to attract and resonate with different segments of the electorate beyond core opposition supporters.

According to these findings, it may be beneficial for opposition parties in parliamentary systems to adopt a cooperative communication approach and thereby broaden their appeal to different segments of the electorate. Remarkably, our results suggest that this choice does not necessarily run the risk of simultaneously boosting the government's favorability ratings, which could offset the positive effects for the opposition party. Moreover, there appears to be little risk of alienating the party's existing base, ensuring a delicate balance between attracting new voters and maintaining the loyalty of its established constituency.

We believe that our study contributes to the political science literature in several ways. First, we address the understudied issue of citizens' perceptions of opposition parties, challenging the prevailing notion in popular discourse that opposition parties must use adversarial tactics to differentiate themselves. As little is known about how different opposition party strategies affect voters' views, our study provides some initial insights that point to the potential benefits of a constructive approach by opposition parties.

Second, our research contributes to the literature on the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon. We show that opposition parties can strategically exploit crisis contexts in which voters rally

around the government by demonstrating support for the government and thereby increasing their own standing with the electorate.

Third, we extend the existing literature on the formation of voters' coalition preferences, which are known to have a significant impact on voting decisions in parliamentary systems. Our findings contribute to the understanding that voters' coalition preferences are shaped by perceptions of party congruence and expectations of a productive working relationship within such alliances by showing that opposition party strategies can influence coalition preferences.

Fourth, our study underscores the contextual and temporal nature of political judgment. We find quite a bit of variance across settings and parties in our experiments, all of which used similar treatments of cooperation and confrontation. While there is an overall pattern that signals of cooperation tend to help voters, we found that these effects were not homogeneous across contexts, issues, and parties.

There are, of course, several limitations to our study. Although we tried to capture different contexts by running four experiments in different real-world settings at different times, we cannot fully attribute differences in our results to specific variations. First, there was often too much real-world variance (changing times of crisis, changing opposition parties, changing salient issues) that we had to adjust for in our experimental treatments. Second, although the pool of respondents for each experiment was similar, we did not have a panel structure and had to rely on cross-sectional results. Future research should therefore attempt to examine the contextual conditions of oppositional strategies more systematically, ideally with panel data and a more longitudinal perspective. Another obvious limitation is our focus on the German case of a 'consensus democracy', in which opposition parties have a significant influence on policymaking processes. Our finding that cooperative signals are overall beneficial for opposition parties may therefore be limited to the specifics of consensus democracies or the German case. Future research is therefore needed to examine whether cooperative signals may be beneficial in other institutional settings and whether different degrees of opposition party legislative power moderate the effects of party strategies on citizens' evaluations of opposition parties.

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Appendix

Translated Treatments from Experiment 4

Conflict

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, there has been much discussion about the measures taken by the German government. Articles on the parties' stance have also appeared in daily newspapers. Please read carefully the following text on the position of the CDU/CSU.

CDU/CSU criticizes the Government

In the discussion about rearming the Bundeswehr in response to the war in Ukraine, the CDU/CSU, the largest opposition faction, is opposing some of the proposals of the traffic light coalition. Friedrich Merz, chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, stressed in the Bundestag that the CDU/CSU would not easily agree to the German government's proposed amendment to the Grundgesetz on rearmament of the Bundeswehr. Addressing Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), Merz said, "In the future, you will need an independent majority for every law you want to pass in the German Bundestag. The CDU/CSU parliamentary group is not the substitute bench from which you can get substitutes on the field at will if you do not have your own majority. That applies to all projects."

On other issues arising from the war in Ukraine, there are also signs of conflict between the government and the opposition. For example, various CDU/CSU politicians have already criticized both the federal government's plans for dealing with the energy crisis and its handling of refugees from the war zone. They said the federal government had no convincing proposals and was acting chaotically.

So it looks like the CDU/CSU sees its role as an opposition party in the crisis primarily in criticizing the federal government and exposing shortcomings in government policy.

Cooperation

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, there has been much discussion about the measures taken by the German government. Articles on the parties' stance have also appeared in daily newspapers. Please read carefully the following text on the position of the CDU/CSU.

CDU/CSU cooperates with Government

In the discussion about rearming the Bundeswehr in response to the war in Ukraine, the CDU/CSU, the largest opposition faction, supports the proposals of the traffic light coalition. Friedrich Merz, chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, stressed in the Bundestag that the CDU/CSU stands behind the German government's proposed amendment to the Grundgesetz on rearmament of the Bundeswehr. Addressing Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD),

Merz said: “If you want a comprehensive upgrade of our armed forces - and as of today we quite obviously want it with you - then we will go down this road with you even against resistance.”

On other issues arising from the war in Ukraine, there are also signs of cooperation between the government and the opposition. For example, various CDU/CSU politicians have already announced their willingness to cooperate with the government in dealing with the energy crisis and with refugees from the war zone. The parties would have to work together here.

So it looks like the CDU/CSU sees its role as an opposition party in the crisis primarily in cooperation with the federal government and wants to tackle the challenges together.

Original Treatment Texts

Experiment 1

FDP unterstützt Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die FDP spielt in der Debatte um das Corona-Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung eine unterstützende Rolle. Der Fraktionsvorsitzende der FDP, Christian Lindner, betonte: „Regierung und Opposition tragen eine gemeinsame staatspolitische Verantwortung.“ Deshalb sei es auch der falsche Zeitpunkt für Kritik an der Bundesregierung. „Jetzt muss das Land doch erstmal diese Krise bewältigen. Deshalb verteilen wir keine Zensuren.“ Lindner sagte, die FDP wolle die Regierung auf Punkte hinweisen, die sie bislang noch nicht berücksichtigt habe, und diese dann gemeinsam in Gesetze einbringen. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als sehe die FDP sich in der Rolle des Krisenmanagers. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte der Bundesregierung auf wenige grundsätzliche Punkte beschränkt und versucht, in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags einen Konsens dazu zu erzielen. Diese Strategie der FDP könnte dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Partei unter Beweis zu stellen.

FDP kritisiert Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die FDP sieht ihre Aufgabe während der Corona-Krise in der Kontrolle der Regierung. Der Fraktionsvorsitzende der FDP, Christian Lindner, kündigte an: „Weil die Zweifel gewachsen sind, endet heute auch die große Einmütigkeit in der Frage des Krisenmanagements.“ Lindner habe den Eindruck die Bundesregierung sei wieder „in den Modus der Alternativlosigkeit zurückgefallen“. Die FDP wolle daher eigene Gesetzesinitiativen starten und im Bundestag darüber diskutieren. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als wolle die FDP die Aufmerksamkeit in der Krise auf das eigene Programm lenken. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung nicht scheut und versucht, Mängel im Krisenmanagement transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der FDP könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Grüne unterstützen Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die Grünen spielen in der Debatte um das Corona-Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung eine unterstützende Rolle. Der Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der Grünen, Anton Hofreiter, betonte, es komme jetzt darauf an, „dass wir diese Krise solidarisch überwinden“ – zusammen mit der Bundesregierung. Man müsse sich jetzt fragen: „Wie kann man da konstruktiv unterstützen?“. Hofreiter sagte, es seien schon „sinnvolle Dinge“ beschlossen worden. Die Grünen wollten die Regierung auf Punkte hinweisen, die sie bislang noch nicht berücksichtigt habe, und diese dann gemeinsam in Gesetze einbringen. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als sähen die Grünen sich in der Rolle des Krisenmanagers. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung auf wenige grundsätzliche Punkte beschränkt und versucht, in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags einen Konsens dazu zu erzielen. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Partei unter Beweis zu stellen.

Grüne kritisieren Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die Grünen sehen ihre Aufgabe während der Corona-Krise in der Kontrolle der Regierung. Der Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der Grünen, Anton Hofreiter, kritisierte, es gebe keinen größeren Plan und kein Ziel, wie die Maßnahmen sinnvoll zusammenwirken könnten. Die Bundesregierung ließe „Entschiedenheit und Tatkraft“ vermissen, die jetzt angebracht wäre. Die Grünen wollten daher eigene Gesetzesinitiativen starten und im Bundestag darüber diskutieren. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als wollten die Grünen die Aufmerksamkeit in der Krise auf das eigene Programm lenken. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung nicht scheut und versucht, Mängel im Krisenmanagement transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Linke unterstützt Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die Linke spielt in der Debatte um das Corona-Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung eine unterstützende Rolle. Die Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der Linken, Amira Mohamed Ali, betonte, dass das Krisenmanagement der Regierung „viele gute Regelungen“ enthalte, mit denen die Linke einverstanden sei. Die Gespräche mit der Bundesregierung seien sehr konstruktiv verlaufen und die Hilfsmaßnahmen vernünftig. Mohamed Ali sagte, die Linke wolle die Regierung auf Punkte hinweisen, die sie bislang noch nicht berücksichtigt habe, und diese dann gemeinsam in Gesetze einbringen. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als sehe die Linke sich in der Rolle des Krisenmanagers. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung auf wenige grundsätzliche Punkte beschränkt und versucht, in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags einen Konsens dazu zu erzielen. Diese Strategie der Linken könnte dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Partei unter Beweis zu stellen.

Linke kritisiert Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die Linke sieht ihre Aufgabe während der Corona-Krise in der Kontrolle der Regierung. Die Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der Linken, Amira Mohamed Ali, sagte, sie sehe die Maßnahmen als ineffektiv an. In der Krise würden sich die „fatale Folgen“ dessen zeigen, was die Bundesregierung versäumt habe. Die Linke wolle daher eigene Gesetzesinitiativen starten und im Bundestag darüber diskutieren. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als wolle die Linke die Aufmerk-

samkeit in der Krise auf das eigene Programm lenken. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung nicht scheut und versucht, Mängel im Krisenmanagement transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der Linken könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

AfD unterstützt Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die AfD spielt in der Debatte um das Corona-Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung eine unterstützende Rolle. Der Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der AfD, Alexander Gauland, sagte: „Die Regierungspolitik enthält viele Einsichten, die wir für richtig halten und die wir teilen.“ Es sei jetzt erste Bürgerpflicht zusammenzustehen und den Maßnahmen zuzustimmen. Die AfD wolle die Regierung auf Punkte hinweisen, die sie bislang noch nicht berücksichtigt habe, und diese dann gemeinsam in Gesetze einbringen. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als sähe die AfD sich in der Rolle des Krisenmanagers. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung auf wenige grundsätzliche Punkte beschränkt und versucht, in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags einen Konsens dazu zu erzielen. Diese Strategie der AfD könnte dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Partei unter Beweis zu stellen.

AfD kritisiert Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung

Die AfD sieht ihre Aufgabe während der Corona-Krise in der Kontrolle der Regierung. Der Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der AfD, Alexander Gauland, warf der Regierung vor, die Maßnahmen mit einer „Basta-Mentalität“ durchgesetzt zu haben. Das Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung sei ungenügend, daher brauche es jetzt Alternativen. Die AfD wolle daher eigene Gesetzesinitiativen starten und im Bundestag darüber diskutieren. Es sieht also ganz danach aus, als wolle die AfD die Aufmerksamkeit in der Krise auf das eigene Programm lenken. Erkennbar ist bereits jetzt, dass die Oppositionspartei Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung nicht scheut und versucht, Mängel im Krisenmanagement transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der AfD könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Experiment 2

Grüne kooperieren mit Regierung

In der Diskussion um die Bewältigung der wirtschaftlichen Folgen der Corona-Krise unterstützen die Grünen die Bundesregierung. Der Grünen-Bundestagsabgeordnete Sven-Christian Kindler sagte in einer Bundestagsdebatte, es sei verständlich und richtig, dass die Bundesregierung große Mengen Geld in die Hand nehme, um die wirtschaftliche Krise abzumildern. Die Fraktionsvorsitzende Katrin Göring-Eckardt erklärte, man werde bei der Schuldenbremse nicht gegen die Regierung stimmen: „Nicht weil es um Mehrheiten geht, sondern voller Überzeugung.“

Die Grünen wollen die Regierung auf Punkte in der Corona-Wirtschaftspolitik hinweisen, die sie bislang noch nicht berücksichtigt hat und diese dann gemeinsam in Gesetze einbringen. Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung – zum Beispiel bei Wirtschaftshilfen und bei der Schließung des Einzelhandels – als nicht sehr zielführend betrachtet. Stattdessen möchten sie strittige Fragen eher in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags mit der Regierung klären. Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Grünen unter Beweis zu stellen.

Grüne stellen sich gegen Regierung

In der Diskussion um die Bewältigung der wirtschaftlichen Folgen der Corona-Krise stellen sich die Grünen gegen die Bundesregierung. Der Grünen-Bundestagsabgeordnete Sven-Christian Kindler sagte in einer Bundestagsdebatte, die Regierung ließe viele Menschen mit der Wirtschaftskrise in der Pandemie alleine. In einem Parteipapier der Grünen wurde außerdem kritisiert, die Bundesregierung liefere “zu wenig, zu spät”. Deshalb schlage die Partei eigene kreative Alternativen zu den Wirtschaftshilfen der Regierung vor, um die Folgen der Krise abzumildern. Die Grünen wollten daher eigene Gesetzesinitiativen zur Bewältigung der Wirtschaftskrise in der Corona-Krise starten und im Bundestag weiter darüber diskutieren.

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei vermehrt Aufmerksamkeit auf eigene Inhalte lenken will. Außerdem zeigen die Debatten, dass die Grünen Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung – zum Beispiel bei Wirtschaftshilfen und bei der Schließung des Einzelhandels – nicht scheuen und versuchen, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Grüne kooperieren mit Regierung

In der Diskussion um den bestmöglichen gesundheitlichen Schutz der Bevölkerung in der Corona-Krise unterstützen die Grünen die Bundesregierung. Die Parteivorsitzende der Grünen, Annalena Baerbock sagte in einer Bundestagsdebatte: “Einfach nur zu sagen, was alles nicht läuft, ist doch nicht die Aufgabe der Opposition.” Die Grünen müssten zusammen mit der Regierung über Lösungen beim Gesundheitsschutz nachdenken. Die Partei habe deshalb vielen Maßnahmen der Regierungskoalition schon zugestimmt. Der Fraktionsvorsitzende Anton Hofreiter sagte in Richtung der Regierung zu weiteren Initiativen: “Beschließen wir es doch hier gemeinsam im Parlament.”

Die Grünen wollen die Regierung auf Punkte hinweisen, die sie bei der Eindämmung der Corona-Krise noch nicht berücksichtigt hat und diese dann gemeinsam mit ihr in Gesetzesform bringen. Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Oppositionspartei lassen vermuten, dass die Grünen den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung – zum Beispiel bei der Impfstrategie und bei einer Maskenpflicht auf öffentlichen Plätzen – als nicht sehr zielführend betrachtet. Stattdessen möchten sie strittige Fragen eher in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags mit der Regierung klären.

Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Grünen unter Beweis zu stellen.

Grüne stellen sich gegen Regierung

In der Diskussion um den bestmöglichen Schutz der Bevölkerung vor gesundheitlichen Folgen der Krise stellen sich die Grünen gegen die Bundesregierung. Die Fraktionsvorsitzende der Grünen, Katrin Göring Eckardt, kritisierte in einer Bundestagsdebatte, dass die Bundesregierung noch zu wenig für den Schutz der Menschen tue. Die Parteivorsitzende Annalena Baerbock sagte zu den gesundheitlichen Aspekten der Krise, die Grünen müssten als kritische Opposition mitdenken: “Deswegen hat unsere Fraktion einen Fünfstufenplan vorgelegt, wie wir besser durch die kommenden Monate kommen können.” Die Grünen wollten daher eigene Gesetzesinitiativen zum Gesundheitsschutz in der Corona-Krise starten und im Bundestag weiter darüber diskutieren.

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei vermehrt Aufmerksamkeit auf eigene Inhalte bei der Eindämmung der Corona-Pandemie lenken will. Außerdem zeigen die Debatten, dass die Grünen Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung – zum Beispiel bei der Impfstrategie und bei einer Maskenpflicht auf öffentlichen Plätzen – nicht scheuen und versuchen, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Grüne kooperieren mit Regierung

In der Diskussion um eine Reform des Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetzes (EEG) in Deutschland unterstützen die Grünen die Bundesregierung. “Wenn die Regierung etwas vorlegt, was wirklich hilft, die Klimaziele einzuhalten, dann sind wir bereit zu verhandeln”, sagte Katrin Göring-Eckardt, Fraktionsvorsitzende der Grünen, in einer Bundestagsdebatte. Der Grünen-Abgeordnete Tobias Lindner sagte, den Willen zur Zusammenarbeit habe die Grünen-Fraktion im Bundestag als Teil der Opposition in den vergangenen Monaten immer wieder gezeigt, indem sie in der Sache entschieden und nicht auf plumpe Opposition gesetzt hätte.

Die Grünen wollen die Regierung im Bundestag auf Punkte hinweisen, die sie beim Klimaschutz noch nicht berücksichtigt hat und diese dann gemeinsam mit ihr in Gesetzesform bringen. Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung als nicht sehr zielführend betrachtet und strittige Fragen – wie zum Beispiel bei Autofahrverboten in Innenstädten und bei der Erhöhung der CO₂-Steuer – eher in den Ausschüssen des Bundestags mit der Regierung klären möchte. Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Grünen unter Beweis zu stellen.

Grüne stellen sich gegen Regierung

In der Diskussion um eine Reform des Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetzes (EEG) in Deutschland positionieren sich die Grünen gegen die Bundesregierung. Der Fraktionsvorsitzende Anton Hofreiter kritisierte in einer Bundestagsdebatte, dass die Koalition an der “Menschheitsaufgabe

Klimaschutz gescheitert“ sei und die beschlossenen Maßnahmen zum Erreichen der Klimaziele „bestenfalls ungenügend“ seien. Hofreiter verwies auf die „blockierte, abgeschlaffte Große Koalition“. Die Grünen hätten einen eigenen umfassenden Gesetzentwurf zum Klimaschutz als Alternative zur Regierungspolitik erarbeitet, sagte der Grünen-Abgeordnete Sven-Christian Kindler. Dieser soll im Bundestag eingebracht und diskutiert werden. Kindler erklärte: „Wir bereiten dieses Konzept für eine neue Bundesregierung vor.“

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei vermehrt Aufmerksamkeit auf eigene Inhalte lenken will. Außerdem zeigen die Debatten, dass die Grünen Konflikte mit der Bundesregierung – wie zum Beispiel bei Autofahrverboten in Innenstädten und bei der Erhöhung der CO₂-Steuer – nicht scheuen und versuchen, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm transparent zu machen. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Experiment 3

Grüne unterstützten Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung in der Corona-Krise

Nach über einem Jahr Pandemie ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über das Krisenmanagement. Die Grünen haben die Corona-Politik der Bundesregierung im letzten Jahr weitreichend unterstützt und sehen sich nun darin bestätigt. Der Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der Grünen, Anton Hofreiter, sagte dazu, dass die Krise gemeinsam überwunden werden musste. Für die Grünen habe sich immer wieder die Frage gestellt: „Wie kann man da konstruktiv unterstützen?“, so Hofreiter und so seien „sinnvolle Maßnahmen“ beschlossen worden.

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung nicht als das beste Mittel betrachtet hat und stattdessen um Konsens bemüht war und gemeinsam mit der Regierung zusammenarbeiten wollte. Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl auch dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Grünen unter Beweis zu stellen.

Grüne kritisierten Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung in der Corona-Krise

Nach über einem Jahr Pandemie ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über das Krisenmanagement. Die Grünen haben sich in der Corona-Krise zur Aufgabe gemacht, die Regierung zu kontrollieren – darin sehen sie sich nun bestätigt. Der Co-Fraktionsvorsitzende der Grünen, Anton Hofreiter, kritisierte, dass es im vergangenen Jahr keinen größeren Plan und kein Ziel gegeben habe, sodass die Maßnahmen nicht sinnvoll zusammenwirken konnten. Die Bundesregierung habe „Entschiedenheit und Tatkraft“ vermissen lassen, die notwendig gewesen wären.

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Bundesregierung als ein sehr gutes Mittel angesehen hat und versucht hat, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm aufzudecken. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte auch

dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

FDP unterstützte Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung in der Corona-Krise

Nach über einem Jahr Pandemie ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über das Krisenmanagement. Die FDP hat die Corona-Politik der Bundesregierung im letzten Jahr weitreichend unterstützt und sieht sich nun darin bestätigt. Der Spitzenkandidat der FDP, Christian Lindner, betonte: „Regierung und Opposition tragen eine gemeinsame staatspolitische Verantwortung.“ Deshalb sei es auch der falsche Zeitpunkt für Kritik an der Bundesregierung gewesen. „Das Land musste zusammen die Krise bewältigen.“

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der FDP lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung nicht als das beste Mittel betrachtet hat und stattdessen um Konsens bemüht war und gemeinsam mit der Regierung zusammenarbeiten wollte. Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl auch dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der FDP unter Beweis zu stellen.

FDP kritisierte Krisenmanagement der Bundesregierung in der Corona-Krise

Nach einem Jahr Pandemie ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über das Krisenmanagement. Die FDP hat sich in der Corona-Krise zur Aufgabe gemacht, die Regierung zu kontrollieren – darin sieht sie sich nun bestätigt. Der Spitzenkandidat der FDP, Christian Lindner, erklärte: „Weil die Zweifel wuchsen, endete auch die große Einmütigkeit in der Frage des Krisenmanagements.“ Lindner habe den Eindruck gehabt, die Bundesregierung sei „in den Modus der Alternativlosigkeit gefallen“.

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der FDP lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Bundesregierung als ein sehr gutes Mittel angesehen hat und versucht hat, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm aufzudecken. Diese Strategie der FDP könnte auch dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Grüne unterstützen die Klimaschutz-Pläne der Bundesregierung

Gegen Ende der Legislaturperiode ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über den Klimaschutz. Die Grünen haben die Klimapolitik der Bundesregierung in den letzten Jahren an vielen Stellen unterstützt und sehen sich darin bestätigt. Die Spitzenkandidatin der Partei, Annalena Baerbock sagte dazu, dass der Austausch zu konkreten Klimaschutzmaßnahmen zwischen den Parteien notwendig war. „Es geht jetzt ums Ganze. Es geht jetzt darum, dass wir als Gesellschaft gemeinsam auf den 1,5-Grad-Pfad kommen.“

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung nicht als das beste Mittel betrachtet hat und stattdessen um Konsens bemüht war und gemeinsam mit der Regierung zusammenarbeiten wollte. Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl auch dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der Grünen unter Beweis zu stellen.

Grüne kritisieren die Klimaschutz-Pläne der Bundesregierung

Gegen Ende der Legislaturperiode ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über den Klimaschutz. Die Grünen haben sich in der Klimapolitik zur Aufgabe gemacht, die Regierung zu kontrollieren – darin sehen sie sich nun bestätigt. Die Spitzenkandidatin der Partei, Annalena Baerbock sagte dazu, dass man die Menschen erreiche, indem man deutlich sage, was getan werden müsse. Das habe die große Koalition versäumt. „Sie drücken sich davor zu sagen, dass wir zum Beispiel die erneuerbaren Energien, den Ausbau verdoppeln müssen.“

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der Grünen lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Bundesregierung als ein sehr gutes Mittel angesehen hat und versucht hat, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm aufzudecken. Diese Strategie der Grünen könnte auch dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

FDP unterstützte die Digitalisierungs-Pläne der Bundesregierung

Gegen Ende der Legislaturperiode ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über den Digitalausbau. Die FDP hat die Pläne zur Digitalisierung der Bundesregierung in den letzten Jahren an vielen Stellen unterstützt und sieht sich darin bestätigt. Der Spitzenkandidat der Partei, Christian Lindner, sagte dazu, dass der Ehrgeiz der Bundesregierung bei diesem Thema zu begrüßen sei. In Richtung der Bundesregierung sagte er: „Sie haben über die Digitalstrategie und in dem Zusammenhang auch über die Infrastruktur gesprochen. Wir sind in dieser Frage, was die Ziele angeht, an Ihrer Seite.“

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der FDP lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Regierung nicht als das beste Mittel betrachtet hat und stattdessen um Konsens bemüht war und gemeinsam mit der Regierung zusammenarbeiten wollte. Diese Strategie könnte mit Hinblick auf die anstehende Bundestagswahl auch dazu dienen, die potenzielle Regierungsfähigkeit der FDP unter Beweis zu stellen.

FDP kritisierte die Digitalisierungs-Pläne der Bundesregierung

Gegen Ende der Legislaturperiode ziehen die Parteien Bilanz über den Digitalausbau. Die FDP hat sich bei der Digitalisierung zur Aufgabe gemacht, die Regierung zu kontrollieren – darin sieht sie sich nun bestätigt. Der Spitzenkandidat der Partei, Christian Lindner, sagte dazu, dass die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit der Bundesrepublik in der Digitalisierung im internationalen Vergleich gefährdet sei. In Richtung der Bundesregierung sagt er: „Sie haben hier über künstliche Intelligenz und Digitalisierung gesprochen. Schauen wir in den Bundeshaushalt, stellen wir fest: Es gibt einen neuen Titel ‘Künstliche Intelligenz’; dieser ist aber mit null Euro angesetzt. Das ist keine künstliche Intelligenz; das ist keine Intelligenz.“

Die Äußerungen aus den Reihen der FDP lassen vermuten, dass die Oppositionspartei den offenen Konflikt mit der Bundesregierung als ein sehr gutes Mittel angesehen hat und versucht hat, Mängel im Regierungsprogramm aufzudecken. Diese Strategie der FDP könnte auch dazu dienen, die Regierung zu schwächen und sich selbst für die kommende Bundestagswahl in eine möglichst gute Position zu bringen.

Experiment 4

Union kooperiert mit Regierung

In der Diskussion um die Aufrüstung der Bundeswehr als Reaktion auf den Ukraine-Krieg unterstützt mit der CDU/CSU die größte Oppositionsfraktion die Vorschläge der Ampel-Koalition. Der Fraktionsvorsitzende der Union Friedrich Merz betonte im Bundestag, dass die CDU/CSU in dieser Frage hinter der Bundesregierung stehe und der von der Bundesregierung beabsichtigten Grundgesetzänderung zur Aufrüstung der Bundeswehr zustimmen werde. An Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz (SPD) gerichtet, sagte Merz: „Wenn Sie eine umfassende Ertüchtigung unserer Streitkräfte wollen – und wir wollen sie ab heute ganz offensichtlich mit Ihnen –, dann werden wir auch gegen Widerstände diesen Weg mit Ihnen gehen.“

Bei anderen Fragen, die sich aus dem Ukraine-Krieg ergeben, sind ebenfalls Übereinstimmungen zwischen Regierung und Opposition erkennbar. So kündigten bereits verschiedene Unionspolitiker ihre Bereitschaft zur Zusammenarbeit mit der Regierung bei der Bewältigung der Energiekrise und dem Umgang mit den Geflüchteten aus dem Kriegsgebiet an. Die Parteien müssten hier zusammenarbeiten.

Es sieht also danach aus, dass die CDU/CSU in der Krise ihre Rolle als Oppositionspartei vor allem in der Zusammenarbeit mit der Bundesregierung sieht und die Herausforderungen gemeinsam bewältigen will.

Union kritisiert die Regierung

In der Diskussion um die Aufrüstung der Bundeswehr als Reaktion auf den Ukraine-Krieg stellt sich mit der CDU/CSU die größte Oppositionsfraktion gegen einige der Vorschläge der Ampel-Koalition. Der Fraktionsvorsitzende der Union Friedrich Merz betonte im Bundestag, dass die CDU/CSU nicht ohne Weiteres der von der Bundesregierung beabsichtigten Grundgesetzänderung zur Aufrüstung der Bundeswehr zustimmen werde. An Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz (SPD) gerichtet, sagte Merz: „Sie werden in Zukunft für jedes Gesetz, das Sie im Deutschen Bundestag verabschieden wollen, eine eigenständige Mehrheit brauchen. Die CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion ist nicht die Ersatzbank, von der Sie sich beliebig Ersatzspieler aufs Spielfeld holen können, wenn Sie Ihre eigene Mehrheit nicht haben. Das gilt für alle Vorhaben.“

Bei anderen Fragen, die sich aus dem Ukraine-Krieg ergeben, sind ebenfalls Konflikte zwischen Regierung und Opposition erkennbar. So kritisierten bereits verschiedene Unionspolitiker sowohl die Pläne der Bundesregierung zur Bewältigung der Energiekrise als auch den Umgang mit den Geflüchteten aus dem Kriegsgebiet. Die Bundesregierung habe keine überzeugenden Vorschläge und handle chaotisch.

Es sieht also danach aus, dass die CDU/CSU auch in der Krise ihre Rolle als Oppositionspartei vor allem in der Kritik der Bundesregierung sieht und Mängel in der Regierungspolitik aufdecken will.