

News matters: Influences on the vote in the Danish 2000 euro referendum campaign

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Abstract. This study investigates how the information environment in the Danish 2000 euro referendum campaign served to crystallize opinion on the issue within the context of a number of other hypothesized influences on the vote, based on previous studies of referendum voting. Our data include a nationally representative two-wave panel survey and a content analysis of news coverage during the referendum campaign. We develop a weighted measure of exposure to news on public and private television channels, that takes into account the volume and tone of the coverage towards the YES and NO campaigns, and using this we find that exposure to public television news significantly influences vote choice when controlling for other predictors. We also find varied levels of support for hypotheses concerning the influence of other key variables such as ideology, economic evaluations, government approval and issue-specific contextual variables. The findings emphasize the importance of considering the information environment during referendum campaigns.

Introduction

Most research on electoral behaviour has been conducted in the context of presidential or parliamentary, national- and state-level legislative elections. Comparatively fewer studies have been carried out in the context of (national) referendum campaigns and citizen initiatives, even though this form of direct democracy is becoming increasingly common (Bowler & Donovan 1998; Bowler et al. 1998; Butler & Ranney 1994). Canadians, for example, have voted in referendum campaigns of major constitutional importance on more than one occasion in the past decade (Clarke et al. 2000; Johnston et al. 1996; LeDuc & Pammatt 1995; Pammatt & LeDuc 2001), and in the United States where there is no provision for national referendums, there have been hundreds of state-level citizen initiatives over the past century, and the number has been increasing in the past decade (Banducci 1995; Bowler & Donovan 1998).

Referendums play an especially important role in the process towards advanced European integration (Hug & Sciarini 2000). National referendums

in different European countries have determined membership in the European Community, such as Britain in 1975 (King 1977). Referendums in Denmark, France and Ireland, for example, have concerned ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s. In 2001 and 2002, the provisions of the Treaty of Nice were subject to ratification in Ireland. After initial rejection in 2001 by a 54 per cent majority and a low 33 per cent turnout, the Treaty was ratified in October 2002. Most recently, nine of the ten new Member States in the EU voted in favor of membership in national referendums.

Referendum campaigns are interesting not least because they are often characterized by close races, an undecided or volatile electorate, and greater importance attached to campaign events because the dynamics of traditional party politics are potentially less important in explaining turnout and voting behaviour (Denver 2002; LeDuc 2002). Despite the simplistic nature of the vote (YES or NO), the referendum issue is often multifaceted and different aspects may trigger different perceptions of the issue among voters. The information environment in a referendum campaign is thus potentially important for the vote because party attachments often mean less in these campaigns. The arguments, aspects or framing of the multifaceted issue by political actors and key information sources during a referendum campaign may therefore be unusually important to a referendum outcome, especially in a close race.

This study investigates campaign effects in the context of the national referendum in Denmark in September 2000 on the introduction of the euro – the common European currency that would replace the Danish ‘Krone’. Most of the political elites, including most parties in Parliament representing over 80 per cent of the electorate, as well as the incumbent Labour government and all the major newspapers were on the YES side and urged citizens to vote for the introduction of the euro. There were two visible anti-euro parties, however, and they benefited from the fact that public opinion was almost equally divided on this issue from the time the campaign officially began in March 2000. On 28 September 2000, after a very close race with a high turnout (87.5 per cent), a majority (53 per cent) voted NO. Denmark thus remains outside the euro zone.

Influences on the vote in a referendum

Theories of voting behaviour generally emphasize the importance of party support or attachment (Campbell et al. 1960; Budge & Farlie 1983), as well as contextual factors such as economic perceptions (Lewis-Beck 1997), perceptions of issues (Nie et al. 1979) and evaluations of leaders or the top candidates (Wattenburg 1992). Some of the hypotheses about what drives party or

candidate choice are also common in the literature on referendum voting (LeDuc 2002). We identified a number of hypotheses about influences on referendum voting in a review of the literature on referendums and citizen initiatives over the past two decades. Among the variables that explain support for a referendum measure are: ideology or party identification, evaluations of or feelings about political elites, government performance or government approval, perceptions of the economy, issue-related contextual evaluations, political cynicism, political efficacy, political knowledge and political interest, and demographic and regional characteristics. In the following sections we review the different explanations for voting behaviour in referendums. We then discuss the importance of the campaign, which we integrate into a comprehensive model of voting behaviour.

Partisanship and ideology

Studies of national elections repeatedly identify partisanship as a key factor for understanding voting behaviour, although its measurement and relevance has been questioned in Europe (Budge & Farlie 1983; Eijk & Franklin 1996). While partisanship is still important in referendum campaigns, as voters also turn to their political party and leaders for cues on the referendum issue, partisanship is only an important predictor of vote choice if the political parties take a clear stand on the issue in question (Franklin 2002; Pierce et al. 1983; Sinnott 2002). On the issue of European integration, however, there are numerous examples of disagreements between political elites within the same party. In a referendum campaign on a European issue, therefore, ideology and political leaning rather than political party affiliation can be a more useful predictor of the vote for two reasons. One is because a number of parties may be divided on the referendum issue and thus do not serve as a natural reference point (Pierce et al. 1983). Another reason is because a number of European party systems, including Denmark's, appears to be evolving in such a way that both the extreme left and right are opposed to advanced integration (although for very different reasons) and moderate left, centre and moderate right are in favour of integration (see Andersen (1998) and Jakobsen et al. (2001) for a discussion of the two most recent national referendums on European issues). Plotting left-right against anti- and pro-positions on furthering European integration would thus result in the party system resembling an inverted U shape.

Government approval, elite evaluations and economic evaluations

Most of the research on referendum voting also includes some combination of variables in the triangle involving: (1) evaluations of political elites, (2)

government approval and evaluations of government performance, and (3) economic assessments. This is a difficult web to untangle because government approval and evaluations of government performance are, to a certain extent, influenced by economic assessments and evaluations of the Prime Minister or other important politicians. In the words of Franklin et al. (1994: 102): 'referenda conducted in the context of national party politics, with the government of the day urging ratification of a treaty they have themselves negotiated, will inevitably be contaminated by popular feelings about the government'. Referendum studies have modelled this so-called 'triangle of variables' differently when predicting the vote, usually excluding one on methodological or theoretical grounds, or combining two of the three in some fashion (see, e.g., the arguments put forward in Clarke et al. (2000: Chapters 4, 6) modeling the vote in the Canadian 1992 Constitutional Referendum and 1995 Quebec Sovereignty Referendum; see also Clarke & Kornberg (1994)). Another approach has been to consider the indirect effects of one or another of these variables on a dependent variable that can be important for the vote. Research has explored the influence of national and personal economic assessments, social market position and campaign exposure on *assessments of the economic consequences of European Union (EU) membership*, for example, in the referendums in Norway, Sweden and Finland on the question of EU membership (Jenssen 1998: esp. 211; see also Hetherington 1996).⁵ Yet, taken as a whole, referendum voting studies have not addressed sufficiently the issue of the triangulated relationship mentioned above.

Although there is a distinction between government support and assessments of government performance, and these indicators are often used interchangeably with little consistency in terms of operationalization and question wording (see, e.g., Table 3 in Franklin et al. 1994), all empirical evidence on the importance of government support and/or performance for referendum outcomes seems to point in the same direction. Franklin et al. (1995, 1994) put the government performance hypothesis in the form of a probabilistic tendency. The proposition is that: 'While a popular government might expect to see its referendum proposals approved, an unpopular government will often see its proposals turned down' (Franklin et al. 1994: 106). In a later article, this thesis was modified to apply in particular to referendums on issues that are of low salience to the electorate (Franklin 2002).

Issues and arguments

The multifaceted nature of the issue in referendum campaigns means that the arguments put forward by those for and against often include related issues or topics that feature in one's reasoning on the referendum issue. Johnston et

al. (1996) therefore distinguish between 'general arguments' and 'specific elements' in their analysis of the vote in the 1992 Canadian sovereignty referendum, and measure specific elements with attitude questions that emerge as having an influence on support for the referendum. Clarke et al. (2000) also include issue-related contextual variables on the referendum provisions and referendum process to analyze the vote in the 1992 Canadian referendum. In the context of European referendum campaigns, issue-related contextual variables such as predispositions on the question of European integration, sometimes referred to as one's pre-existing level of EU scepticism or EU attitudes, also have been considered important variables in predicting the vote (Siune & Svensson 1993; Siune et al. 1994; Svensson 2002).

Political disaffection

Another set of predispositions that may influence support for a referendum concern political disaffection. Based on a cross-national comparative analysis of the referendums in Finland, Norway and Sweden on entering the EU, for example, Jenssen et al. (1998) suggest that voters displaying a higher level of trust in the political system and institutions are more likely to support a government-initiated proposal in a referendum. Political efficacy emerged in a multivariate model as the most important explanation of support for the California tax revolt in the late 1970s, and led Lowery and Sigelman (1981: 969) to conclude that 'the feeling that one is cut off from the political decision-making processes' was the best predictor of support for tax limitation. Support for property tax limitation was greatest among those who were most cynical about political leadership. That being said, measures of political disaffection have either not been included or have not featured prominently in the majority of studies on national referendum voting (which excludes the United States). Despite this, we might expect that political efficacy and political trust are potentially important to national referendum outcomes. Those who are politically disillusioned would probably be less inclined to support proposals in referendums, as well as less inclined to vote in referendums.

Political interest

Previous studies have also suggested that those more interested in the topic of the referendum are more likely to support the proposal (Siune et al. 1994). Neijens et al. (1998), for example, found that the politically interested orient themselves and know more than those who are less politically interested. This in turn suggests that interest is an antecedent of knowledge (Johnston et al. 1996), which is a condition for making informed decisions (Price & Neijens

1997) and for supporting candidates' proposals (Bartels 1986). Interest and knowledge, although acknowledged by most of the referendum studies as leading one to be more likely to vote, and to pay attention and learn over the course of the campaign, nevertheless often have not been integrated into the models of referendum voting, with rare exceptions (Jenssen et al. 1998; Johnston et al. 1996).

Sociodemographic influences

Another group of explanatory variables are sociodemographics and regional differences. In Canadian referendum studies, region and regional ethnicity play an important role in the referendum vote (Clarke et al. 2000; Johnston et al. 1996; LeDuc & Pammett 1995). However, in smaller European societies that are often more homogeneous, region within a country is of less importance. In previous referendums on European issues in Denmark, for example, a pattern has emerged suggesting that particularly women, persons born between 1955 and 1970, and those with less education vote NO (Andersen 1998). This influence of social structure on the vote was partly replicated in three national referendums in Norway, Finland and Sweden in 1994 on joining the EU. There it was found that men were more likely to vote YES than women, that the YES vote increased with education almost in a linear fashion, and that age in general was positively related to voting YES, though not consistently (Jenssen et al. 1998: 177–190). Longitudinal survey data suggest that the explanatory power of sociodemographics for understanding vote choice in referendums is decreasing, however, which is in line with evidence from national election studies (Franklin et al. 1992; see also Jakobsen et al. 2001).

Bringing it all together: The role of the campaign

One commonality across the referendum voting studies in Europe and Canada is that they say little about the ways in which the contents and uses of campaign information serve to crystallize opinion about the pros and cons of the key issue in the referendum, based on any analysis of media content or citizens' uses of information sources during the campaign. The exceptions to this have been studies that have asked respondents about the importance of various sources of information about the campaign (see Borg & Esaiasson 1998; Pesonen 1998; Jenssen 1998), but even in these studies the campaign information variables have not been integrated into a model of referendum voting. And this is despite the fact that media have been found to be inde-

pendent actors setting their own agenda and putting their own spin and definition on the referendum issue, a spin that may be distinct from that of the parties (Jensen et al. 1998; Siune & Svensson 1993).

While some evidence is available on the importance of the media during a referendum campaign, none of the studies of referendum voting behaviour in Europe or Canada has distinguished the differential effects that may emerge from exposure to specific contents in different media outlets. In Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, respondents named television as the most important source of information about referendum campaigns (Clarke et al. 2000; Jenssen et al. 1998), but no more has been said about how its contents and uses may have served to crystallize opinion on how to vote on the issue.

Our study was specifically designed to test campaign information effects in comparison with the aforementioned other hypothesized influences on the vote. The data allow us to test on the aggregate and individual levels, and to assess the relative contribution of campaign information effects in understanding the vote, in the context of these other possible influences.

Two types of campaign effects may be distinguished: effects of *direct and personal* campaign experiences and effects of *indirect and mediated* campaign experiences. Direct and personal campaign experiences include the extent to which voters engage in discussions with family, friends or colleagues about politics and the issue of the referendum. Previous research on European referenda suggests that: (a) direct/personal campaign engagement and involvement may affect turnout positively but does not give any particular direction to the vote; (b) that NO voters rely more on information from personal communication channels than YES voters; and (c) that firm YES and NO voters tend to engage more directly in the campaign by, for example, canvassing and attending a political meeting on the EU issue (Jenssen et al. 1998: 94–99). In terms of mediated campaign experiences, previous research suggests that exposure to news coverage may increase the level of awareness and knowledge about politics and election themes (see McLeod et al. 2002). Generally speaking, election studies have often provided either weak or mixed empirical support for media exposure and attention effects on turnout and vote choice (Zaller 2002).

The Danish referendum context

Public support for European integration varies considerably across the different Member States of the European Union. Denmark has traditionally been reluctant towards advanced economic and political integration.

Denmark joined the then European Economic Community after a national referendum in 1972. The political debate leading up to the referendum was intense and heated. Ever since, issues of European integration have caused tension between different social and political groups as well between political elites. The most notable reaction towards advanced European integration were the violent riots in the streets of Copenhagen in the immediate aftermath of the Danish referendum in May 1993 on the Treaty of Edinburgh.¹

Denmark's profile as a Europe-sceptic country is supported by longitudinal survey data collected in the Eurobarometer. The Danish approval rate of the European Community up until 1985 was about 30–35 per cent, which was approximately 20–25 per cent lower than the EU average (Eurobarometer 2000). By 1990, the overall European approval rate had increased to 68 per cent, with Denmark at around 60 per cent. Throughout the 1990s support for EU membership has fluctuated in most countries. Recent data suggest that both the average EU approval rate and the Danish approval rate are about 50 per cent, which suggests that the historically predominant low levels of public support for EU membership in Denmark has levelled off with the EU average (Eurobarometer 2000).

Prior to the 2000 euro referendum campaign, however, Danish support for the common European currency was the second lowest in the EU. Only the United Kingdom had a lower approval rate (Eurobarometer 2000). The referendum was called on 9 March 2000, at which point opinion polls showed a 50–50 split in the electorate on the issue. Opinion polls over the course of the campaign also showed an almost dead heat between the YES and the NO side. After the intense launch of the campaign, the race slowed down over the summer before peaking in weeks leading up to the 28 September election day. Support for the YES side fluctuated over this period: Most support for the YES side was found in the early phases of the campaign and again in the final days leading up to the referendum.

The Danish political elites broadly supported the introduction of the euro. The incumbent government and most opposition parties representing in total more than 80 per cent of the seats in parliament all supported the YES vote. Only the extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing parties, together with two popular movements against European integration, advocated a NO vote. The general information and opinion climate was dominated by news that supported the euro. Of the national daily newspapers, only one took an outspoken editorial stance against the euro, while the rest were either in favour or neutral. The Danish television landscape is dominated by a strong public service broadcasting ethos, which means that the campaign was very visible, and each political party was allocated time slots for information programmes. There were also televised debates between political leaders. While the opinion

climate may best be described in terms of saturation of information with an elite-driven YES bias, it is also evident that the extreme parties and especially the two popular movements campaigned vigorously and had no trouble making their positions heard during the campaign. This is the complex information backdrop against which the referendum vote took place.

Research questions and hypotheses

Given the mixed or general lack of empirical evidence for the effects of a referendum campaign on voting behaviour, we pose a general research question: What effect did the campaign have on vote choice? In the process of addressing this general research question, we have a number of specific hypotheses for the Danish 2000 euro referendum. Based on the review of the literature, we expect the following to have a positive effect on voting NO: ideological preference for the 'left'; government disapproval at the time of the referendum; pessimistic economic expectations; general scepticism towards European integration; and political disaffection in the form of political cynicism and political disinterest. The first and second expectations stem from the fact that the Social Democratic party in government was in fact split over the question of how to vote in the referendum even though its leaders and the incumbent Prime Minister were outspoken about their support for voting YES.

Opinion polls showed that about 20 per cent of the electorate was either undecided or did not hold a firm position on the issue one month prior to the referendum (Reuters News Agency 2000). This suggests that the campaign was the crucial period in which many voters made up their minds. Voters with a firm opinion on an issue have been found to be more likely to expose themselves to campaign information (Katz 1971), but the effects of exposure to (information about) the campaign are potentially larger for voters with a less firm opinion. Zaller (1992) argues that information effects are typically most prominent among 'the middle-awareness group', but also suggests that in the case of a saturated information environment, such as the Danish case, those in the low-awareness group may be influenced.

Data and method

The study draws on a two-wave panel survey, including a pre- and post-election wave, with a representative sample of the Danish electorate (n in both waves is approximately 1,100) and a content analysis of the most important national news media outlets during the final month of the campaign. The

surveys were fielded in the final days of August 2000, one month prior to the referendum, and again immediately after the referendum (29 September – 5 October). The response rate was 77 per cent in wave I, and 79 per cent in wave II with a net sample of 962 respondents participating in both waves.²

Our model of the vote choice is designed to test the effects of the hypothesized predictors of voting behaviour that have been identified in previous referendum studies, as well as the effects of the campaign.

For *EU scepticism*, we included a seven-item index of EU scepticism based on respondents' perception of the extent of future EU integration, which is a more elaborate measure than has been used in previous research. *Economic expectations*: Two scaled indicators of personal and national economic expectations, which are standard questions in most election studies, were included. *Government approval*: A scaled measure of government approval (recoded to express disapproval) was used. *Ideology*: we also included a scaled measure of ideology (in terms of left-right placement).³ *Political cynicism* about the campaign was measured by a six-item index.

As control variables, we included a series of *social and demographic characteristics*: gender (female), age (in years) and education (number of years in school). Two measures of *political interest* – one on politics in general and another on the issue of the euro in particular – are also included in the model. As a measure of *political efficacy*, we include a six-item index tapping onto both internal and external political efficacy. We use a lagged term for the intention to vote NO at wave I, and for the status of undecided at wave I (see Markus (1979) for discussion of the use of lagged specifications in panel data). This enables us to control for initial vote intention and to examine change over the course of the campaign.

We additionally included *campaign variables*: a number of measures of personal engagement in the campaign and exposure to mediated coverage of the campaign. *Personal engagement* in the campaign was measured by a three-item index tapping into activities and involvement in the campaign as well as the frequency of political discussion. *Exposure to the campaign* is measured by four variables of weighted news media exposure. These variables were constructed by bringing together data on exposure to specific news media outlets with a content analysis of the volume and tone of news about the referendum in each news outlet.⁴ Each variable indicates frequent exposure to a specific media outlet: public television news, commercial network news, YES press and NO press. We added a weight for the exposure to these outlets, incorporating the *amount* and *tone* of the news about the referendum. We are thus able to construct a more precise measure of the news content to which each voter was actually exposed. To derive this estimate for every respondent, we merged the panel survey and content analysis data: We combine exposure to a specific

news outlet with the relative amount of coverage of the referendum in each news outlet and the 'tone' of the news coverage. 'Tone' was derived from a measure of the evaluation of political actors in each news story, which is an important campaign indicator that can affect vote choice (Herr 2002).

If an actor in a news story is not portrayed in a neutral way (with no evaluations of an actor), then the way in which the actor is evaluated in the story may be favourable, unfavourable or a mixture of the two. For each news outlet, we identified the average evaluation for YES actors and for NO actors, and then estimated the *difference* between the two by subtracting the number of negative evaluations from the number of positive evaluations, divided by the total number of evaluations. We use this difference measure of tone for each television news outlet in our model. An example illustrates: The result for the tone measure for the public service television channel *DRTVI* was that YES actors were evaluated 0.03 more negative than NO actors. Respondent A watches *DRTVI* four days of week. *DRTVI* carried 76 news stories about the referendum in the final 30 days of the campaign. This respondent would be scored 1 (high exposure) \times 0.03 (difference in tone) \times $76/30$ (amount of news) $= 0.08$ as an indicator of exposure to news about the referendum on *DRTVI*. This is an individual-level measure that takes into account the exposure to specific news outlets, and the actual tone and volume of this content.⁵ The specific wording of all items can be found in the Appendix.

Results

Table 1 sets out the distribution of change in vote intention over the final weeks of the campaign. This shows that although most of those who were decided on how to vote at the first wave remained committed to their views over the final weeks, the not insubstantial portion of undecideds at the first

Table 1. Vote intention at the first wave and actual voting behaviour at the second wave (two-wave panel)

	Actual voting behavior		
	NO (n = 447)	YES (n = 494)	Did not vote (n = 21)
Vote intention wave I			
NO (n = 333)	96.4	3.0	0.6
YES (n = 380)	3.4	95.3	1.3
Undecided (n = 249)	45.4	49.0	5.6

Notes: Cell entries are percentages; data weighted with post-stratification weights on gender, age and education.

wave ultimately split fairly evenly between the YES and NO camps. The referendum campaign was aimed primarily at these undecideds, though the parties also sought to raise doubts in the minds of decided voters. Only a small portion of decided voters actually switched their vote intention from YES to NO or visa versa over the last few weeks of the campaign. In this referendum, however, in which there was a six percentage point spread between the YES and NO camps in the final vote, the undecideds and the small group of vote switchers could make the difference.

Turning to the news and information environment during the campaign, our content analysis of the news media coverage of the two most widely watched main evening television news programmes showed that more than 25 per cent of the news was devoted to the referendum in the final month of the campaign (see also Vreese & Semetko 2002). The news environment was saturated with information about the referendum.

Looking at the general tone of the coverage we found that the coverage of the actors in the news about the referendum was generally neutral or with a negative slant. This pattern is in line with other research on the tone of political news (e.g., Kepplinger 1998). However, there were differences between the news outlets and in the evaluation of YES and NO actors. Specifically we found that the public broadcasting news reported more negatively about YES actors ($m = -0.11$) than NO actors ($m = -0.08$) in our measure ranging from +1 to -1. We also found that there were more YES actors in public news ($n = 72$) than NO actors ($n = 34$). On private news, YES actors were evaluated more negatively ($m = -0.16$) than NO actors ($m = -0.08$). On *TV2* there were more NO actors ($n = 60$) in the news than YES actors ($n = 49$). The YES actors were evaluated twice as negatively as the NO actors on private *TV2* and more negatively than the YES actors on *TV1*.

Predicting the vote

Table 2 displays the full change model predicting voting NO at wave II, controlling for the expressed intention to vote NO at the beginning of the campaign. The model confirms the hypothesized effects of EU scepticism, government disapproval, economic expectations, ideology and political cynicism as important influences on the NO vote. They all had a positive and significant effect on voting NO, although political cynicism did not attain significance. Optimistic personal economic expectations were significantly negatively associated with voting NO; in other words, they contributed to voting YES. General political interest had a negative effect on the likelihood of NO vote, though not significantly. These findings confirm the direction of the expected effects in hypotheses 1 to 5.

Table 2. Influence of campaign effects on changes in likelihood of voting NO (logistic regression)

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Effect Exp (B)
Constant	-1.02	(2.43)	
<i>Sociodemographics:</i>			
Gender (female)	-0.01	(0.30)	0.99
Age	-0.10	(0.14)	0.91
Education (<16 years in school)	-0.19	(0.32)	0.83
Education (>19 years in school)	-0.07	(0.55)	0.93
<i>Predispositions:</i>			
Interest in euro issue	0.10	(0.20)	1.11
Interest in politics	-0.20	(0.18)	0.82
Efficacy	-0.39	(0.27)	0.68
EU-skepticism	1.06***	(0.29)	2.90
Government disapproval rating	0.36*	(0.15)	1.43
National economic expectations	-0.56	(0.43)	0.58
Personal economic expectations	-0.87**	(0.28)	0.41
Political leaning left	0.84*	(0.37)	2.30
Political leaning right	-0.44	(0.36)	0.64
<i>Campaign variables:</i>			
Interpersonal communication	0.07	(0.21)	1.07
Campaign involvement	0.28	(0.40)	1.32
High Exposure public television news	-1.70*	(0.38)	0.01
High Exposure private television news	0.94	(0.16)	2.55
High Exposure NO press	0.60	(0.60)	1.82
High Exposure YES press	-0.49**	(0.17)	0.61
Cynicism about campaign	0.21	(0.28)	1.24
Intention to vote NO wave I	3.78***	(0.41)	44.01
Undecided wave I	1.02***	(0.33)	2.78
-2 log likelihood	359.57		
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ²	0.80		
Cases correctly classified	91.50		
n	765		

Notes: Positive beta coefficient indicates positive association with voting NO; standard errors are in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Our model suggests the importance of mediated exposure to the campaign through the news media in the final weeks of the campaign. The results indicate that exposure to public television news and the YES press was significantly and negatively related to voting NO; in other words, it contributed to crystallizing opinion in the form of a YES vote. Exposure to private television and the NO press was positively associated with voting NO, but did not attain significance. Political discussion or direct involvement in the campaign had no significant effect on the vote.⁶

The analyses suggest that the model of the vote is both strong and stable. The model is very inclusive, with the correct classification percentage of 91.5 points to the full specification. The model accounts for 80 per cent of the explained variance, which is high for a model of voting behaviour testing competing variables (Lowery & Sigelman 1981).⁷

Discussion

Our findings point to the conclusion that information in the final weeks of the campaign mattered to how one voted in the referendum. This was a very close race, with a not insubstantial portion of the electorate still undecided in the final weeks. Mediated sources of information in the final weeks of the campaign exerted a significant influence on crystallizing individual opinion on the vote, even after controlling for all other possible influences. That being said, there was no uniform impact of information. Our study found that information effects were dependent upon the characteristics of news coverage in the various information outlets, and this varied between public and private television news and the YES and NO press.

We found that the electorate's attitudes on the issue of European integration, economic expectations, ideology and the popularity of the incumbent government were all of importance to the vote. The issue-related contextual variable in this study – EU scepticism – was in fact the most important predictor of the vote, and this is in line with previous research that emphasizes the important of issue-related contextual influences (Clarke et al. 2000; Johnston et al. 1996; Siune et al. 1994; Svensson 2002).

Previous research also emphasizes the importance of party support or ideology for the vote. We found that ideology closely followed EU scepticism in importance. Those on the left were more likely to vote NO, and those on the right were more likely to support the referendum. The effect of left ideology was stronger than the effect of right ideology, which we attribute to the stronger consensus among left-wing elites on this issue. This dovetails with Zaller's (1992) explanation of the consequences for public opinion of elite con-

sensus on an issue; in this case, though, the consensus was somewhat stronger within one camp. The right-wing elites were even more divided, with the moderate right fully supporting a YES vote and the extreme right supporting a NO vote. These findings are in line with research on the 1999 European elections that shows moderate right parties are more supportive of European integration compared to extreme right parties (Eijk & Franklin 2003).

Economic expectations were the third most important predictor of the Danish vote. Evaluations of the economy have also been found to play an important role in referendum voting, although indirectly by driving support for the government (Clarke et al. 2000). We found a direct effect of personal economic expectations, with optimistic expectations enhancing the likelihood of voting YES. Although national economic expectations were in the same direction, they did not attain significance. Disapproval of the government was the next most important predictor of the vote. Though the evaluation of the government was an important predictor, it was less important as an explanation. The effect size of the government disapproval rating was about half that of the effect size of the EU scepticism variable, for example. Government approval in the Danish case is primarily a function of feelings about the Prime Minister.

Last, but by no means least, were the campaign variables – specifically exposure to certain news outlets. These measures showed that news mattered in this campaign. Exposure to public television news and exposure to the YES press were significant YES vote predictors, even when controlling for the aforementioned variables along with sociodemographics and vote intention at the first wave. In close races, these apparently small campaign effects may be responsible for shaping razor-thin majorities, as Zaller (2002) has argued. In the Danish case, exposure to certain news outlets contributed to voting YES. Our study, moreover, revealed a difference between the public service channel (*DRTVI*) and the private channel (*TV2*), with exposure to public broadcast news contributing significantly to a YES vote and exposure to private broadcast news having a different sign and therefore potentially contributing to a NO vote. Why might this be the case? Our content analysis shows that the private channel's news programmes contained more negative evaluations of YES actors than the news on the public service channel. Moreover, the private channel's news gave much more room to NO actors than was the case on the public service channel. Both these observations may fuel NO sentiments. In addition, a closer inspection of the news agenda with respect to the referendum suggested that the public broadcast news also focused somewhat more on substantive issues compared to the commercial channel (see also Aarts & Smetko 2003).

Our study suggests that it is not only important to pay attention to campaign information sources in modelling the vote, but also to the actual content

and tone of the coverage. Some studies of national election campaigns have addressed this (see, e.g., Kleinnijenhuis & Fan. 1999; Kleinnijenhuis & De Ridder 1998). Other referendum studies to date, however, have either been descriptive in a discussion of news events and content, or acknowledged the importance of the information outlets in referendum campaigns but ignored these entirely both in terms of news content and modelling the vote. Yet in close races, these types of information effects can make the difference.

In light of the close race and small margin (53–47 per cent) by which the introduction of the euro was rejected in Denmark, what could have been done differently to change the outcome? If the Danish YES campaign, on the one hand, had been more successful in setting an economic agenda for the referendum, and the NO campaign had been less successful in broadening the thematic agenda of the referendum campaign to include issues of sovereignty, identity and the evolution of the EU, then the referendum outcome might have looked rather different. However, the NO camp *was* successful in broadening the scope of the issue, which mobilized anti-European integration sentiments in the political arena, and thus contributed to the NO vote. Our post-referendum survey wave substantiated this perception of the campaign. Almost 50 per cent of the NO voters cited the political argument ‘the development towards a more integrated union must be slowed down’ as the prime reason for voting NO, whereas only about 30 per cent of the NO voters cited the economic argument that ‘Denmark must maintain its right to determine its own financial policy’.

Public responses to the Danish Prime Minister may also have been crucial to the outcome of this referendum campaign (Qvortrup 2001). As we have seen, government support in this referendum is largely a function of feelings about the Prime Minister, and on more than one occasion during the campaign he evoked strong negative feelings among the public. Our panel data show that his mean approval rating went down from slightly positive in August to slightly negative immediately after the vote. In between, he is remembered for a major gaffe during a television interview in which he guaranteed the level of the Danish pension if the YES side won, only to retract this statement days later, shortly before the vote.

Sweden voted to the single currency in 2003 after a campaign that much resembled the Danish 2000 vote. Britain faces a national referendum to determine its policy on the single currency, and both long-time and new Member States will use referendums to determine national EU policy standpoints, including possibly on the EU Constitution. Our findings have potentially important implications for the timing of a referendum and the campaign strategies. First, our study reaffirms the obvious: to optimize the chances of a YES vote, a referendum should be called at a point in time where economic

expectations are optimistic and the incumbent government and Prime Minister are relatively popular. Second, the degree of consensus within the YES and NO camps affects the voter-party alignment and thus the chances for campaigning parties to win (Pierce et al. 1983; Sinnott 2002). Third, the campaign of the YES side should not be reduced to a simple 'its just the economy' message, since this argument proved to be too weak in Denmark to convince EU-sceptics about the value of joining the euro. A more fundamental ideological discussion, recognizing the intertwined nature of the euro issue as a borderline between domestic economic politics and foreign policy, seems to be a better strategy for a YES campaign.

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Appendix: Description of variables in Table 2 and item wording in questionnaire

Dependent variable:

NO vote: Voted NO = 1; voted YES = 0.

Independent variables:

Sociodemographics:

Gender: Female = 1; male 0.

Age: in years.

Education: <16 years: Primary school and high school = 1; otherwise = 0.

Education long: >19 years: University degree = 1; otherwise = 0.

Predispositions:

Interested in euro: A four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 = not at all interested in the euro and 4 = very interested.

Interest in politics: A four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 = not at all interested in politics and 4 = very interested.

Efficacy: Six-item index forming a scale of efficacy, Cronbach's alpha = 0.69.

Question wording: People have different opinions about politics. We would like to hear your opinion about politics in general. Please tick one box per statement. Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't know. [1] At times, politics can be so complex that people like me don't understand what is going on; [2] People like me don't have any say in what the government does; [3] I think that I am better informed about politics than others; [4] MPs want to keep in touch with the people; [5] Parties are only interested in people's vote, not their opinions; [6] There are so many similar parties that it does not matter who is in government.

EU skepticism: Seven-item index tapping general attitudes and opinions about (the extent of) European integration. The seven items form a scale of EU scepticism, Cronbach's alpha = 0.82. Question wording: We would like to know how you feel about European integration. Please tick one box per statement. Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree. [1] European integration is being pushed to fast; [2] I would be willing to make a sacrifice to help a less strong country; [3] Denmark should maintain its exceptions from the Treaty of Edinburgh; [4] The EU has more disadvantages than advantages for people like me; [5] The EU should be enlarged with former Eastern Bloc countries such as Lithuania and Poland; [6] The EU should be enlarged with southern European countries such as Cyprus and Turkey; [7] EU and the European integration is moving toward becoming a European 'super state'. All variables were recoded so that disagreement reflects higher scepticism.

Government Disapproval rating: A scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = very good, 3 = neither good nor bad and 5 = very bad.

National economic expectations: Scaled item measure of economic expectations. Question wording: If Denmark joins the common currency, how do you think this will affect the financial situation of Danish businesses? Will it become? Much better, Better, Neither better nor worse, Worse, Much Worse.

Personal economic expectations: Scaled item measure of economic expectations. Question wording: If Denmark joins the common currency, how do you think this will affect your own financial situation? Will it become? Much better, Better, Neither better nor worse, Worse, Much Worse.

Left political leaning: Self-placement on left-right scale, where 1 = left and 10 = right; between 1 and 3 = 1; otherwise = 0.

Right political leaning: Self-placement on left-right scale, where 1 = left and 10 = right; between 7 and 10 = 1; otherwise = 0.

Campaign variables:

Interpersonal communication: A four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 = never discussing the euro issue during the campaign and 4 = often discussing the euro issue.

Campaign involvement: A three-item index tapping the frequency of engaging in various campaign related activities, Cronbach's alpha = 0.65. Question wording: Within the last month how often did you – (please tick one box per statement) Often, Sometimes, Almost never, Never. [1] Take part in a public meeting about the euro; [2] Visit an Internet website about the euro; [3] See an advertisement or commercial about the euro.

High exposure to public television news: Watching *TV1* news regularly (4 or more days a week) = 1; otherwise = 0. This is linked to the amount and tone of the coverage. 'Amount' refers to the number of stories/the number of news programmes between the two waves. 'Tone' refers to the difference in tone between evaluations of YES actors and NO actors. The variable therefore consists of high exposure \times 76/30 (amount of news) \times 0.03 (difference in negative evaluations between YES and NO actors) = 0.08.

High exposure to private television news: Watching *TV2* news regularly (4 or more days a week) = 1; otherwise = 0. This is linked to the amount and tone of the coverage. 'Amount' refers to the number of stories/the number of news programmes between the two waves. 'Tone' refers to the difference in tone between evaluations of YES actors and NO actors. The variable therefore consists of high exposure \times 79/30 (amount of news) \times 0.08 (difference in negative evaluations between YES and NO actors) = 0.21.

High exposure to NO press: Reading *Ekstra Bladet* regularly (4 or more days a week) = 1; otherwise = 0.

High exposure to YES press: Index of reading one or more YES newspaper daily (YES newspapers are: *Politiken*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *JyllandsPosten*, and *BT*).

Political cynicism: Six-item index tapping cynical feelings about the campaign forming a scale of cynicism, Cronbach's alpha = 0.65. Question wording: People have different opinions about the campaign before the euro referendum. We would like to hear what you think. Please tick one box per question. Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree. [1] The campaign was more about strategy than content; [2] The campaign gave me sufficient information to make a qualified choice; [3] The candidates were straightforward and honest in their campaigning; [4] The campaign was about what is best for Denmark; [5] The campaign was too concerned with the YES and NO sides' standing in the polls; [6] The

candidates were too superficial in their argumentation. All variables were recoded so that disagreement reflects higher cynicism.

Intention to vote NO wave I: Firm intention to vote NO in wave I = 1; otherwise = 0.

Undecided wave I: Don't know and undecided with leaning but no firm opinion in wave I = 1; otherwise = 0.

Notes

1. The Danish electorate has voted directly on European issues on several occasions since the 1972 referendum. In 1986, the government called a referendum on the introduction of the so-called 'Single European Act', which implied adjustments of Danish legal practices and regulations to European standards. In 1992, in the referendum held to ratify the Treaty of the European Union as negotiated in Maastricht, a slim majority (51%) rejected the Treaty. The 1993 referendum on the Treaty of Edinburgh, which had been negotiated with the European Council to clarify the Danish position after the rejection of the Treaty of Maastricht, was ratified with a two-thirds majority. Finally, in 1998, a majority of 55% of the electorate voted in favour of the Treaty of Amsterdam.
2. Response rates of this magnitude are not unusual for survey research in Scandinavia, where actual turnout is also, comparatively speaking, high (Granberg & Holmberg 1991). The questionnaire was a postal self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaire.
3. Respondents with a left political leaning are classified as those who placed themselves as 1–3 on the scale; right political leaning are classified as those who placed themselves as 7–10. The effective reference category includes those in the political centre.
4. The content analysis included five dailies – *Politiken*, *JyllandsPosten*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *BT* and *Ekstra Bladet* – and the two most widely watched evening news programmes – *DRTV-Avisen* (9 pm) and *TV2 Nyhederne* (7 pm) – in the month prior to the referendum (28 August – 27 September 2000).
5. The other news outlets are discussed in the section entitled 'Results'. A comparable measure was not necessary for the press because all newspapers committed publicly to either the YES or NO standpoint in the campaign and are therefore classified accordingly in our analysis (see Curtice & Semetko (1994) for a similar example with the British partisan press).
6. In addition to our change model of the vote in Table 2, we also ran two separate logistic regression models predicting NO vote for undecided and decided voters. In these models, we excluded the lag term for vote intention that had been included in Table 2. Both models (for undecided and decided voters) produced similar effects and a consistent pattern in the direction of the effects (in terms of the sign of the beta coefficients). In both the decided and undecided models, EU-skepticism, government disapproval, pessimistic economic expectations, left political leaning and exposure to private television were positively and significantly associated with voting NO. Political leaning right, exposure to public television news and exposure to the YES press was positively and significantly associated with voting YES. By introducing the lag term (Markus 1979) in Table 2 to investigate *change* during the campaign, the models are replicated in terms of direction of effects and the explained variance is naturally increased.

7. Additional comparative analyses of the composition of voter groups revealed more similarities than differences between undecided voters and the group of voters holding a firm opinion on the euro issue. The distribution of undecided voters on key social demographic variables and predispositions was similar to that of the decided voters. An additional logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of being 'undecided' at the outset of the campaign using the sociodemographics and predispositions listed in Table 2 as explanatory variables resulted in only 75.2% correctly classified cases and a pseudo R^2 of 4%. Our analysis suggested that undecided and decided voters only differed marginally. Elderly voters, voters with less political interest, those who were less efficacious and persons with pessimistic personal economic expectations were somewhat more likely to be undecided at the outset of the final weeks of the campaign.

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