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‘Second Order’ Versus ‘Issue Voting’ Effects in EU Referendums: Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums

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Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums**

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Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums**

Abstract

Given the raft of upcoming referendums on the new EU constitution, the question of what determines voting in EU referendums is of considerable importance. Are referendums on EU treaties decided by voters' attitudes to Europe (the 'issue voting' explanation) or by voters' attitudes to their national political parties and incumbent national government (the 'second-order election model' explanation)? In one scenario, these referendums will approximate to deliberative processes that will be decided by people's views of the merits of European integration and of the new constitution. In the other scenario, they will be plebiscites on the performance of national governments. The implications of each scenario for democratic decision-making on EU issues are quite different and very far-reaching. We test the two competing explanations of the determinants of voting in EU referendums using evidence from the two Irish referendums on the Nice Treaty. We find that the issue-voting model outperforms the second-order model in both referendums. However, we also find that issue voting was particularly important in the more salient and more intense second referendum. Most strikingly, attitudes to EU enlargement were much stronger predictors of vote at Nice 2 than at Nice 1. This finding about the rise in importance of attitudes to the EU points to the importance of campaigning in EU referendums.

‘Second Order’ Versus ‘Issue Voting’ Effects in EU Referendums: Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums

Introduction

Are referendums on EU treaties decided by voters’ attitudes to Europe or by their attitudes to their national politics and to the incumbent national government? The political science literature is sharply divided on the matter. Given the raft of upcoming referendums on the EU constitution, the significance of this issue can hardly be overstated. Denmark, France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom are due to hold referendums on the new EU constitution in 2005 or 2006. Referendums are also very likely to occur in Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands and may occur in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia.¹ In one scenario, these referendums will approximate to deliberative processes that will be decided by people’s views of the merits of European integration and of the new constitution. In the other scenario, they will be plebiscites on the performance of national governments. In this paper we assess the relative strength of these two rival interpretations of voting in EU referendums: do people vote on the basis of their attitudes to the EU (what we call the ‘issue voting’ or ‘attitudes’ explanation) or on the basis of domestic political concerns (the ‘second-order election model’ explanation)? We also assess the impact of the salience of the referendum campaign on the relative strength of these two explanations.

We focus on the referendums on the Nice Treaty in the Republic of Ireland. This is a useful case for two reasons. First, Irish citizens were the only ones who were asked what they thought about ratification of the Treaty of Nice. Thus, Ireland is the only case we can draw on relating to the most recent EU treaty. Secondly, there were two referendums on the Nice Treaty in Ireland that yielded two different results. In a referendum in 2001, Irish citizens rejected the treaty, dealing a dramatic blow to the EU’s plans. The Nice Treaty could not be implemented unless, and until, all member states ratified it. The Irish government then held a second referendum on the Nice Treaty in 2002 and this time Irish voters endorsed the Treaty.² We

explore the extent to which the move from rejection to endorsement was a function of change in the relative weight of the ‘second order’ and ‘attitudes’ factors. The first Nice Treaty referendum campaign was a classic case of an ineffective campaign, with low levels of citizen interest in, and knowledge of, the treaty. After the shock of defeat in the first Nice referendum, a much more vigorous campaign was mounted at the second referendum with resultant increases in the salience of the issue and in citizens’ levels of information. We can thus investigate the issue we are concerned with – the relative strength of the different interpretations of voting – in two contexts that were more or less identical except for a variable of crucial interest, namely the intensity of campaigning.

Section 2 describes the two competing explanations of EU referendum voting in more detail. Section 3 specifies how the relative merits of these explanations can be assessed in the context of the referendum campaigns on the Nice Treaty in Ireland. Section 4 describes the data used in the analysis, Section 5 reports our results and Section 6 discusses the implications of our findings in the context of the impending EU referendums on the new EU constitution.

Conflicting interpretations of EU referendum voting

There are, as noted, two distinct schools of thought on why people vote the way they do in EU referendums. One school focuses on individuals’ attitudes, values and beliefs. People support or reject EU treaties, the argument goes, on the basis of their underlying broad attitudes towards the EU project. People who are generally positive towards European integration and the development of the EU will be likely to support an EU Treaty and vote Yes. People who are generally sceptical about integration and the EU ‘project’ will vote No. Of course, a person’s general outlook on the EU may take somewhat different forms. Some people may worry about losing political and economic independence, others may be concerned about the possible militarisation of Europe or still others may feel that the EU is big enough and should not take in a large number of additional states. Furthermore, views on the role of the government in the economy or one’s position on the social liberal-conservative dimension may influence attitudes to the EU. Whatever the particular nature of a person’s attitude to the EU, the *issue-voting approach* suggests that it is primarily

voters' views on the development of the EU that drives voting in a referendum on an EU treaty. (For example, on the Nordic Countries see: Aardal et al., 1998. On Denmark in particular see: Siune and Svensson, 1993; Siune et al., 1994; Svensson, 1994 and 2002. On the Baltic states – testing the hypothesis that authoritarian values lead people to reject membership of the EU in a referendum – see Ehin, 2001. On Norway and Britain – focusing on the relationship between economic left-right positions and support for membership – see Pierce et al., 1983). Overall, the 'attitudes' approach assumes that views on the EU and/or on the substance of the treaty are the main determinants of voting behaviour in EU referendums.

A different approach to explaining voting behaviour in EU referendums focuses on concerns quite separate from the EU. This explanation is associated with the theory that certain elections are best seen as '*second-order*' elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk et al., 1996; for a similar approach see Anderson, 1998). 'Second Order' elections are elections (or, generally, electoral contests) such as local, presidential and European Parliament elections, and referendums on EU and other matters that are not perceived by political actors – including voters – to be as important as national or general elections (which are 'first order' elections). According to the theory, voting behaviour in such second-order electoral contests is heavily influenced by first-order considerations. Following this logic, voters might be expected to use second-order contests as mechanisms for signalling their support, or lack of support, for their domestic political parties and government. (On the application of the second-order model to EU referendums see: Franklin, Marsh and Wlezien, 1994; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994; Franklin et al., 1995; Franklin, 2002; Svensson, 2002; Marsh, 1998, and Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004). Voters who, for whatever reasons, are not satisfied with the performance of the incumbent government may take the opportunity to punish the government by voting against the government's wishes in a 'second-order' election such as an EU referendum. Voters who are satisfied with the performance of the party (or parties) in government may vote in line with the government's wishes (supporting the governing party (or parties) in the local election, voting 'Yes' in an EU referendum, etc.). Thus, an EU referendum may, in fact, really be a general election by another name.

A key element of the second-order election theory relates to the notion of salience. Domestic considerations, the argument goes, will be a particularly powerful determinant of voting in situations where the election or referendum is perceived to be very unimportant. The more important the election or referendum in question is seen to be, the lower the role that will be played by domestic political (second-order) effects and the higher the role played by citizens' attitudes towards, or views on, the EU and the substantive content of the treaty in question.

Several authors have also argued that the institutional context affects how strong second-order factors are likely to be. In a development of Schneider and Weitsman's analysis (1996), Hug (2002) and Hug and Sciarini (2000) distinguish between a referendum that is constitutionally necessary and one that the government chooses to hold. Level of satisfaction with the incumbent government, and domestic party political factors, are likely to play a weaker role in the former compared to the latter. This is because much more damage can be inflicted on the government in a non-required referendum; losing a referendum that you did not have to hold in the first place makes the government look particularly silly. They also distinguish between a binding and a non-binding referendum. In relation to the former the result cannot be overturned whereas the parliament may possibly change the decision of a non-binding referendum. Second-order effects are likely to be stronger in non-binding than in binding referendums. This is because in a non-binding referendum, voters who wish to punish the incumbent government by voting against the referendum can hope that, if the referendum is rejected, the outcome may then be overturned by the parliament.

On balance, we would characterise both the Irish Nice referendums as necessary and binding (for a discussion of the institutional context and, in particular, of the initiation of referendums in Ireland see Sinnott, 2002: 811-14). It may seem odd to view the first referendum as 'binding' as it clearly was not so, in the sense that the government did not accept the decision as final and went on to hold a second referendum. However, it *was* binding in the sense that the only way to overturn the decision was by having another referendum. The first Nice referendum was also constitutionally 'necessary' in the sense that the government almost certainly would have been brought to the High Court and forced to have a referendum if it had tried to argue that

the Treaty did not have fundamental constitutional implications and thus that a referendum was not necessary. A successful judicial challenge of this sort had forced the government of the day to hold a referendum on the Single European Act and this set a precedent that would apply to any subsequent proposals for significant changes to EU treaties. The second Nice referendum was politically necessary for two further reasons. The first was that Irish political leaders have repeatedly committed themselves to holding referendums on any changes that even approach the magnitude of those contained in the Nice Treaty. Secondly, the government was under severe pressure to hold a second referendum because the result of the first referendum plunged both the accession process and Ireland's relationship with the EU into crisis. If Hug and Sciarina (2000) are right then we would expect second-order effects to be less evident in both the – necessary and binding – Irish Nice treaty referendums. Accordingly, the Irish Nice referendums present a tough test of the second-order election interpretation. However, given what we said above about the change in the salience of the campaign between Nice 1 and Nice 2, second-order effects are likely to be more evident at Nice 1 than at Nice 2.

The 'attitudes' and 'second-order' national election interpretations of voting behaviour in EU referendums are quite distinct from each other.³ The attitudes approach assumes a rational and reasoned calculation by the voter based on his or her views on EU matters. The second-order approach sees voting in EU referendums as simply a chance for voters to express their domestic political preferences and either vote in line with the governing parties' wishes or against the governing parties' wishes (a vote mainly reflecting their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the government/governing party(ies)). The question of which interpretation is most accurate – or has the greatest predictive power – has important implications for how we interpret the role of referendums and the part that referendums play in EU democracy. As Svensson puts it: Do voters 'really address [the] issues and involve themselves actively in the policy-making process on a vital issue or [do] they merely vote for or against the current government?' (2002: 733). If the latter is the case, then the upcoming referendums on the new EU constitution will be decided by a mishmash of extraneous factors that have little or nothing to do with European integration or with the painstakingly negotiated EU constitution. Likewise and more generally, if the second order

model is correct, we should beware of inferring, in the event of a ‘Yes’ vote on EU treaty changes, that the electorate was in favour of the substantive content of the treaty in question.

Two hypotheses follow from this discussion.

Hypothesis 1: Relative to second-order effects, issue-voting effects are stronger predictors of voting (yes/no) in EU referendums

Hypothesis 2: Relative to low salience EU referendums, high salience EU referendums are likely to show stronger issue-voting effects

The Nice referendums in Ireland

Three issues were particularly relevant in the referendum campaigns on the Nice Treaty in Ireland. First, citizens who were in favour of retaining as much independence and sovereignty in Ireland as possible were likely to have voted against the Nice Treaty. In contrast, citizens who were in favour of sharing (or pooling) sovereignty and decision making powers with other EU states were likely to have voted ‘Yes’ (in favour of the referendum). Secondly, citizens who favoured maintaining the Irish position of military ‘neutrality’ – in the sense of having nothing to do with a militarised EU – were likely to vote ‘No’ to Nice. People who favoured moves towards a strong European military capability were likely to vote ‘Yes’. Third, the expansion of the EU to include a large number of (relatively poor) countries was supported by some citizens and opposed by others. The latter perhaps regarded such an expansion as a threat to Ireland’s ability to continue securing large amounts of money from the EU. Ireland, in fact, was likely to become a net contributor to, rather than beneficiary of, the EU. (For more detailed descriptions of how divisions and debates in these areas played out in the Nice 1 and Nice 2 campaigns see O’Mahoney, 2001; Hayward, 2002 and 2003; Gilland, 2002 and 2003).

After the shock of defeat in the 2001 referendum, the pro-Nice camp sought to address what they perceived to be the concerns of the citizenry. The governing parties (Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats), the pro-EU Opposition parties (Fine Gael and Labour) and the rest of

what the anti-Nice camp regard as the pro-EU ‘establishment’ – including the major trade unions and business organisations – ran a very spirited and vigorous campaign emphasising the advantages of the European Union. The energetic pro-Nice campaign in 2002 contrasted starkly with the lax and lethargic campaign of the pro-Nice lobby in 2001. O’Brennan (2003), for example, states that a key reason for the success of the Yes side in Nice 2 was their ‘much more vigorous and visible campaign’. At Nice 1 their campaign had been ‘lacklustre and indifferent’ and lacked ‘energy, passion, intensity, and, crucially, a visible campaigning presence on the ground in individual constituencies. The No campaign in contrast was charged with conviction, well organised and gained in confidence as the campaign went on.’

One indication of the increased salience of the campaign at the second referendum compared to the first is the fact that citizens found the media a more useful source of information in relation to the referendum at Nice 2 than at Nice 1.⁴ At Nice 2, 64 percent of respondents found newspaper articles either very or somewhat useful (compared to 44 percent at Nice 1), 73 percent found television news and current affairs programmes very or somewhat useful (compared to 51 percent at Nice 1), and 68 percent found radio news and current affairs programmes very or somewhat useful (compared to 46 percent at Nice 1). There was also a marked increase in the proportion of citizens who found discussion with family, friends and colleagues very or somewhat useful (64 percent at Nice 2 compared to 48 percent at Nice 1). One consequence of the higher salience campaign at Nice 2 was the increase in citizens’ level of knowledge of the treaty and issues relating to the treaty. At Nice 1, 36 percent of respondents reported that they had either a good understanding of, or understood some of, the issues relating to the Nice Treaty. This figure had risen to 61 percent by the end of the Nice 2 campaign.⁵ Thus, there had been a significant increase in citizens’ comprehension of the treaty and issues relating to the treaty between Nice 1 and Nice 2, suggesting that the energetic and vigorous campaign that occurred at Nice 2 was indeed effective.

In the inter-referendum period, the pro-Nice camp sought to increase the importance of the substantive (European) issues relative to the troublesome issues of ‘party politics’ (aka second-order effects) and military neutrality. Specifically in relation to the issue of neutrality,

which was widely felt to have contributed to the rejection of the treaty at Nice 1, the government agreed – at the Seville Summit in June 2002 – two Declarations with its European partners which were then added to the Nice Treaty. The ‘National Declaration’ by Ireland states that ‘Ireland is not party to any mutual defence commitment’ and that ‘Ireland is not party to any plans to develop a European army’. The ‘Declaration of the European Council’ states that ‘Ireland’s policy of military neutrality is in full conformity with the Treaties, on which the European Union is based, including the Treaty of Nice and that there is no obligation arising from the Treaties which would or could oblige Ireland to depart from that policy’. Further, the government inserted a clause into the proposed constitutional referendum text guaranteeing that Ireland would not join any EU common defence.⁶ It is likely that these actions served to de-emphasise the importance of the pro- versus anti-military alliance dimension in the run up to Nice 2.

The pro-Nice camp also sought to de-couple issues relating to domestic party politics from the issue of the referendum. As noted earlier, all Irish parties, apart from the small Sinn Féin and Green parties, advocated a ‘Yes’ vote in Nice 1 and Nice 2. However, at Nice 2 the main Opposition parties (Labour and Fine Gael), in line with the government parties (Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats), emphasised the importance of detaching the referendum issue from the issue of support for the governing parties. This is nicely illustrated by a slogan used by the Opposition Labour Party which sought to persuade voters not to treat Nice 2 as a means of manifesting their opposition to the main government party, Fianna Fáil. The slogan was: ‘Hold Your Fire. Fianna Fáil Can Wait. Europe Can’t’. Labour thus urged voters to save their anti-Fianna Fáil ammunition for another day. In effect, the pro-Nice parties were implicitly subscribing to the ‘second-order election’ interpretation; to the extent that their countermeasures were successful, they will have served, in line with hypothesis two above, to weaken any potential second-order effects in the case of Nice 2.

Data

The data that we use to test our hypotheses come from two post-referendum nationally representative surveys commissioned by the EU and conducted by EOS Gallup (for an extensive

analysis of these two surveys, see Sinnott, 2001 and 2003).⁷ To tap attitudes to European integration, the 2001 and 2002 surveys asked respondents the following question:

As regards the European Union in general, which of the following comes closest to your views: Ireland should do all it can to unite fully with the European Union OR Ireland should do all it can to protect its independence from the European Union

Respondents choosing the first statement are labelled ‘pro-integrationists’, respondents choosing the second statement are labelled ‘anti-integrationists’, and respondents indicating that they either did not know or could not choose are labelled ‘neither pro- nor anti-integrationists’. To tap attitudes to EU enlargement, respondents were asked:

It is envisaged that, over the coming years, there will be further enlargement of the EU. The EU is at present negotiating with 12 candidate countries. Ten of these countries are in eastern and central Europe. The other two are Cyprus and Malta. We are interested in how people feel about further enlargement of the EU and what people see as the possible advantages and disadvantages of such enlargement. First of all, in general terms, are you in favour or against such enlargement of the EU?

Respondents choosing the response option ‘in favour’ are labelled ‘pro-enlargement’, respondents choosing the option ‘against’ are labelled ‘anti-enlargement’, and respondents indicating that they did not know are labelled ‘neither pro- nor anti-enlargement’. To tap attitudes to military neutrality, respondents were asked which of the following two statements they agreed with:

Ireland should do everything it can to strengthen its neutrality even if this means being less involved in EU co-operation on foreign and defence policy OR Ireland should be willing to accept limitations on its neutrality so that it can be more fully involved in EU co-operation on foreign and defence policy

Respondents were asked to place themselves on a nine point scale (1 = agree fully with first statement and 9 = agree fully with the second statement). To retain the same metric as the measures of integration and enlargement we trichotomise responses (1-4 = 'pro-neutrality'; 6-9 = 'anti-neutrality'; 5, 'no opinion' and 'don't know' = 'neither pro- nor anti-neutrality').

In order to operationalise 'second-order' effects, the party preferences of respondents were tapped in both surveys and respondents were assigned one or other of the following labels: supporter of a government party (Fianna Fáil or Progressive Democrats), supporter of a pro-Nice Treaty Opposition party (Fine Gael or Labour), supporter of one of the small anti-Nice Opposition parties (Sinn Féin or the Green party), or either a supporter of no party or a very minor party (other). Ideally, a question concerning how satisfied each respondent was with the government would also have been asked in both surveys. However, a 'satisfaction' question was only asked at Nice 2 and so we only used 'satisfaction' in our analysis of that particular referendum. (Age, social class and sex were also measured and are used in the analysis as demographic control variables.)⁸ The Appendix reports the frequencies for our main independent variables.

Results

Table 1 reports the results of three multivariate logistic regressions. Each regression includes issue-voting and second-order variables as predictors of 'Yes' voting in the referendum in question (controlling for demographic effects). Our issue-voting variables relate to attitudes to EU integration, EU enlargement and military neutrality. In columns 1 and 2 of Table 1, second-order effects are operationalised in terms of whether or not the respondent is a supporter of a governing party or of one of the Opposition parties. In column 3 we re-run the analysis for Nice 2 but this time we also include a 'satisfaction with government' variable (which we only have for Nice 2) as part of the operationalisation of the second-order model. All three regressions reported in Table 1 show that the issue-effect and second-order-effect variables are related to voting in the predicted direction. Respondents who are in favour of EU integration tend to vote 'Yes', as do

respondents who favour enlargement and also respondents who are in favour of limiting military neutrality. Also, those who support parties that are not in government are significantly less likely than respondents who support the governing parties to vote ‘Yes’. A similar pattern emerges when the explicit government satisfaction variable is included (column 3); respondents who are very dissatisfied with the incumbent government (the reference category) are less likely than those who are either less dissatisfied or those who are satisfied to vote ‘Yes’.

<TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

While these findings are interesting in themselves, their real value is that they enable us to test our two fundamental hypotheses regarding the relative strength of second-order factors and issues on how people vote in EU referendums. We can test the relative strength of the two interpretations of voting by assessing how much each approach contributes to an explanation of voting in the referendums. We begin by focusing on Nice 1. We run a model – see left hand columns of Table 2 – using only demographics to predict voting behaviour (log likelihood = -339.9). Adding second-order effects to this model – operationalised in terms of party support – improves the fit of the model by 6.0 percent (log likelihood declines to -319.7). However, the addition of ‘issue effects’ to this ‘demographics + second order’ model improves the model fit more substantially. The log likelihood declines from -319.7 to -267.6, representing an improvement of fit of 16.3 percent.⁹ When the same series of analyses are conducted for Nice 2 we also find that adding issues to a ‘demographics + second-order’ model increases the model fit. However, this time the increase in model fit is much larger, 26.2 percent.

<TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

The key importance of issue effects also holds when we use a more comprehensive operationalisation of second-order effects (see Table 3). For Nice 2, we run a model in which second-order effects are operationalised in terms of party support *and* level of satisfaction with

the government. As reported in Table 3, this more comprehensive operationalisation of second-order effects has little impact. The model improvement that results from the addition of ‘issue effects’ to a ‘demographics + “comprehensive” second-order model’ (99.5, or 23.7 percent) is still much larger than the model improvement that results from the addition of a comprehensive operationalisation of second-order effects to a demographics only model (64.6, or 13.3 percent).

<TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

These results confirm both our hypotheses. First, in both of the Irish referendums on the Nice treaty, *issues are stronger predictors of vote choice than are second-order effects*. Secondly, when we compare the predictive strength of issues across the two referendums, *issues turn out to be stronger predictors in the second, more salient referendum*.

We now focus our attention on the individual issues – EU integration, EU enlargement and military neutrality – and assess the relative impact of these issues at each referendum. To do this we display again – in Table 4 – the information presented in Table 1 but this time we report ‘conditional maximum effects’ instead of the raw coefficients (which don’t lend themselves to easy substantive interpretation). In terms of the impact of issues at Nice 1, the size of the effects of the three different subjects were quite similar to each other. Pro-integrationists were 33 percentage points more likely than anti-integrationists to vote ‘Yes’, pro-enlargement voters were 25 percentage points more likely than anti-enlargement voters to vote ‘Yes’, and voters who favoured limiting neutrality were 29 percentage points more likely than voters favouring a strengthening of neutrality to vote ‘Yes’. *However*, the relative size of these attitude effects changed quite dramatically between Nice 1 and Nice 2. The impact of attitudes to integration declined slightly and the impact of attitudes to neutrality also declined somewhat, yet the impact of these reductions was more than offset by the rise in importance of attitudes to enlargement. In 2002, pro-enlargement voters were 51 percentage points more likely than anti-enlargement voters to vote Yes (twice the size of the 2001 effect). ‘Centrists’ on enlargement were also much more likely than anti-enlargement voters to vote ‘Yes’ (+43 at Nice 2 compared to +7 at Nice 1).

Overall, anti-enlargement voters were 50 percentage points less likely than other voters to vote Yes (while they had only been 19 percentage points less likely at Nice 1). In the right hand column of Table 2, we see that a different operationalisation of second-order effects – using level of satisfaction with the incumbent government in addition to party support – alters the size of each of the attitude effects only very marginally.

<TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE>

Thus, there was a change in the *relative strength* of second-order and attitude factors between Nice 1 and Nice 2, driven mainly by an increase in the significance of the issue of EU enlargement. Does this increase in the impact of attitude factors explain why the result of the referendum was different at Nice 2 or do we need to take into account also changes in the distribution of opinions on the individual second-order and attitude factors? We address this question by running two counterfactual simulations. First, we can look at Nice 1 under the conditions that – the distributions of the variables relating to – party support and attitudes were as they became at Nice 2 but keeping the Nice 1 model estimates of the impact of those conditions. The predicted vote using that model would not have been much different to the actual outcome at Nice 1: 48 percent ‘Yes’ instead of 46 percent. Second, we can look at Nice 2 under the conditions that party support and attitudes were as they were at Nice 1 but keeping the Nice 2 model estimates of the impact of those conditions. The predicted vote is, again, only slightly different – 61 percent ‘Yes’ instead of 63 percent.¹⁰ We can conclude from this that the different referendum result the second time around was not a function of changing marginals – i.e. a change in the distributions on party support and the issue variables. Rather, the result of the referendum changed because of the greater impact of the attitudinal variables. Even so, what was vital here was the changing impact of the different attitude factors, most notably the increase in the strength of the relationship between attitudes to EU enlargement and voting behaviour (and also the somewhat diminished impact of the issue of neutrality).

<TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE>

Discussion and conclusion

Referendums on the issue of the new EU constitution are pending in a substantial number of EU member states. Is voting behaviour in these referendums likely to reflect citizens' thoughts on the future of the EU and on the new constitution or is it likely to simply reflect citizens' concerns about domestic party politics and their views on incumbent national governments? Our analysis of voting in the Irish Nice referendums suggests that, while the effect of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the incumbent government (i.e. the second-order effect) is detectable, it played a much smaller role in determining the outcome compared to the effect of attitudes to a range of European issues. In short, both Irish referendums on the Nice treaty were closer to being processes of deliberation on EU issues than to being plebiscites on the incumbent government.

The Irish experience with referendums on the Nice treaty also suggests that the more vigorous the campaign, the greater the effect of the key substantive issue relating to the referendum – in this case attitudes to EU enlargement – and the less the effect of second-order considerations. This is quite an unusual conclusion in that, in relation to general elections, campaigns are typically viewed as much less important than 'long term' determinants of voting such as social structure, party identification and ideology. It may be, however, that there is much more scope for a vigorous campaign to have an impact in referendums. All the main Irish parties – the pro-EU governing Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats and the pro-EU Opposition Labour and Fine Gael parties – were shaken *and* stirred by the 'No' at Nice 1. Only the small anti-EU Sinn Féin and Green parties were pleased with the result. Rejection of the Nice Treaty in the first referendum was a serious and unexpected blow to the Irish political establishment. Instead of the brief and limp campaign at Nice 1, the main parties, and particularly their civil society allies, delivered a vigorous, spirited and lengthy campaign at Nice 2. Strategically, they sought to 'decouple' two dangerous issues from the issue overtly at stake in the referendum. First, they sought – through the 'Declarations' and the constitutional provision mentioned above – to

convince ‘anti-military alliance’ voters that the Nice Treaty was not in fact anything to be afraid of. The pro-camp also sought to defuse and neutralize the issue of domestic party politics. Thus they campaigned vigorously to persuade citizens that the Treaty was about the future of Europe – and enlargement in particular – and not a referendum on the popularity of the Irish government. The pro-European Opposition parties (Labour and Fine Gael) were particularly important in attempting to limit the impact of second-order effects on voting behaviour in the referendum. The fact that satisfaction with the government was significantly lower at Nice 2 than at Nice 1 does not seem to have negatively impacted on the result. Crucially, the effective campaigning of the ‘Yes’ side made the issue of EU enlargement the key issue in the Nice 2 campaign.

The implications for member state governments facing referendums on the EU constitution can be briefly stated. Government satisfaction levels and support for the domestic political parties are likely to play some role in determining the outcome but this role is presumably much smaller than the role played by ‘issue effects’, that is by attitudes to European integration and to issues arising from the new constitution. However, the extent of the impact of such European attitudes on the outcome depends on the vigour and the effectiveness of the referendum campaign.

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Tables

Table 1 Summary of logistic regression analyses: ‘Yes’ voting in the 2001 and 2002 Nice Treaty referendums in the Republic of Ireland

	2001 Nice Treaty		2002 Nice Treaty			
	Coef	P > z	Coef	P > z	Coef	P > z
Second-order effects						
(Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrats=reference category)						
FG/Labour	-0.83	0.003	-0.72	0.008	-0.51	0.070
Sinn Féin/ Green Party	-2.20	0.000	-1.56	0.000	-1.50	0.000
Others	-0.91	0.001	-1.13	0.000	-1.16	0.000
(very unsatisfied with govt=reference category)						
quite unsatisfied with govt					0.84	0.002
quite/very satisfied with govt					0.81	0.003
Issue voting effects						
(Anti-Integration=reference category)						
Centrist	0.41	0.143	0.03	0.931	-0.01	0.948
Pro-Integration	1.37	0.000	1.36	0.000	1.36	0.000
(anti-enlargement=reference category)						
Centrist	0.32	0.382	1.83	0.000	1.81	0.000
Pro-Enlargement	1.06	0.001	2.27	0.000	2.16	0.000
(Strengthen neutrality=reference category)						
Centrist	0.62	0.016	0.71	0.008	0.61	0.032
Limit Neutrality	1.22	0.000	0.75	0.012	0.70	0.023
N	504		768		768	
McFadden’s pseudo R2 (adj)	0.18		0.30		0.31	
Log-likelihood	-267.6(18)	0.000	-338.0(18)	0.000	-319.99(20)	.000

Note: Sex, age and social class controlled for; coefficients not reported (or for the intercept); data are weighted to reflect the actual referendum results; reference categories are in parenthesis.

Source: Commission/EOS Gallup post-referendum surveys on Irish Nice referendums 2001 and 2002

Table 2 Contribution of ‘second-order’ and ‘issue-effect’ variables to the explanation of voting in the Nice referendums

	Nice1			Nice2		
	<i>Log-Likelihood (df)</i>			<i>Log-Likelihood (df)</i>		
(A) Intercept + demographics	-339.9(9)			-484.0(9)		
(B) Intercept + demographics + second-order effects (party support)	-319.7(12)			-457.1(12)		
(C) Intercept + demographics + second-order effects (party support) + issues (three issues)	-267.6(18)			-337.2(18)		

	Nice 1			Nice 2		
	<i>Change In log Likelihood (df)</i>	<i>statistical significance of change</i>	<i>% improvement in log likelihood</i>	<i>Change in log likelihood (df)</i>	<i>statistical significance of change</i>	<i>% improvement in log likelihood</i>
(B) compared to (A)	20.3(3)	.000	6.0	26.9(3)	.000	5.6
(C) compared to (B)	52.0(6)	.000	16.3	119.9(6)	.000	26.2

Table 3 Contribution of ‘second-order’ (including government satisfaction) and ‘issue-effect’ variables to the explanation of voting in the second Nice referendum

	<i>Log-Likelihood (df)</i>		
(A) Intercept + demographics			
(B) Intercept + demographics + second-order effects (party support)			
(C) Intercept + demographics + second-order effects (government satisfaction)			
(D) Intercept + demographics + second-order effects (party support and government satisfaction)			
(E) Intercept + demographics + second-order effects (party support and government satisfaction) + issue effects (three issues)			
	<i>Change in log likelihood (df)</i>	<i>statistical significance of change</i>	<i>% improvement in log likelihood</i>
(B) compared to (A)	26.9(3)	.000	5.6
(C) compared to (A)	44.5(2)	.000	9.2
(D) compared to (A)	64.6(5)	.000	13.3
(E) compared to (D)	99.5(6)	.000	23.7

Table 4 Conditional maximum effects of each variable with remaining dummies at zero and other variables at their mean

	2001	2002(a)	2002(b)
Second-Order Effects			
(Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrats)	(+25)	(+20)	(+19)
FG/Labour	-21	-13	-9
Sinn Féin/ Green Party	-44	-33	-32
Others	-22	-23	-24
(very unsatisfied with govt)			(-18)
quite unsatisfied with govt			+18
quite/very satisfied with govt			+17
Attitude Effects			
(Anti-Integration)	(-23)	(-20)	(-20)
Centrist	+9	+1	0
Pro-Integration	+33	+26	+26
(anti-enlargement)	(-19)	(-50)	(-47)
Centrist	+7	+43	+42
Pro-Enlargement	+25	+51	+48
(Strengthen neutrality)	(-20)	(-15)	(-13)
Centrist	+14	+14	+12
Limit Neutrality	+29	+15	+14

Note: Table entries indicate that in 2001, for example, FG/Labour voters were 21 percentage points less likely to vote yes than FF voters, other things being equal. In contrast, FF voters were 25percentage points more likely to vote Yes than non-FF voters. Percentages in italics are not significant at .05 level.

Appendix

Voting Behaviour, Attitudes and Party Support at Nice 2001 and Nice2002: Frequency Distributions

	Nice 2001		Nice 2002	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Voted Yes	46.1	204	63.0	570
Voted No	<u>53.9</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>37.0</u>	<u>198</u>
	100.0	504	100.0	768
Supporter of one of the governing parties (FF/PD)	45.5	222	45.9	372
Supporter of one of the pro-Nice Opposition parties (FG/Labour)	25.5	131	24.3	187
Supporter of one of the anti-Nice Opposition parties (SF/Greens)	7.4	40	9.7	65
Other	<u>21.7</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>20.0</u>	<u>144</u>
	100.1	504	99.9	768
very unsatisfied with government			27.5	184
quite unsatisfied with government			33.0	244
very/quite satisfied with government			<u>39.5</u>	<u>316</u>
			100.0	744
Pro-EU integration	34.1	161	45.1	385
Neither pro- nor anti-	26.2	134	13.0	97
Anti EU-integration	<u>39.7</u>	<u>209</u>	<u>41.9</u>	<u>286</u>
	100.0	504	100.0	768
Pro-Enlargement	54.5	267	68.6	567
Neither pro- nor anti-	26.4	135	10.4	75
Anti-Enlargement	<u>19.1</u>	<u>102</u>	<u>21.0</u>	<u>126</u>
	100.0	504	100.0	768
Limit neutrality	24.2	116	22.4	186
Neither limit nor strengthen	31.9	159	24.8	200
Strengthen neutrality	<u>43.9</u>	<u>229</u>	<u>52.8</u>	<u>382</u>
	100.0	504	100.0	768

note : only voters are included; data are weighted to replicate the referendum results; the percentages reported are weighted and the Ns reported are unweighted.

ENDNOTES

¹ Referendums are unlikely to be conducted in the Slovak Republic, Hungary or Finland but will almost certainly not be conducted in Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Cyprus, the Czech Republic or Malta. For an overview of the probable incidence of referendums, see: <http://www.euractiv.com/cgi-bin/cgint.exe?204&OIDN=500751&-tt=fucr>

² The main effect of the Treaty was to make changes in the institutional structures and procedures of the EU with a view to the impending enlargement of its membership. The voting proportions were 53.9 ‘No’ to 46.1 ‘Yes’ in the 7 June 2001 referendum on a turnout of 34.8 percent and 62.9 ‘Yes’ to 37.1 ‘No’ on a turnout of 49.5 in the 18 October 2002 referendum. In our 2001 survey, ‘Yes’ voters are under-represented (40.5 percent) and in our 2002 survey, ‘Yes’ voters are over-represented (74.2 percent). We thus weight our survey data so that it is representative of the actual results.

³ What we call the ‘issues’ and ‘second-order’ interpretations of voting in EU referenda cover two of the main schools of thought on the topic of voting in EU referendums. Ehin (2001) categorises existing explanations into a threefold typology: values (or ‘attitudes’), ‘domestic politics’ (or ‘second-order’ national election effects) and ‘utilitarian expectations’. The rational economic actor model (‘utilitarian expectations’ model) holds that EU integration differentially benefits certain segments of a national population and that individuals who believe they will economically benefit will vote ‘Yes’ in an EU referendum and people who believe they will not economically benefit will vote ‘No’ (Gabel and Palmer 1995, Anderson and Reichert 1996, Gabel 1998a and b). These studies use class, sex and education as proxies for individual competitiveness which they hypothesise is related to support for EU (richer, more educated men are better able to exploit economic opportunities in the liberal EU marketplace and thus support a pro-EU position in referendums).

⁴ The surveys used are those described in the ‘data’ section below. The question wording in the surveys was as follows: ‘There are many different ways in which people get information in relation to referendums. I have a list here of several possible sources of information. Please say

how useful, if at all, you found each of them in the lead up to the [...] referendum on the Nice Treaty [...] Using this card, would you say you found each of the sources mentioned very valuable, somewhat valuable, of little or no value or did you not notice or come across the source in question at all?’

⁵ The wording of the question was: ‘By the date of the referendum [state date] how good was your understanding of the issues involved?’ The response options were: I had a good understanding of what the Treaty was all about; I understood some of the issues but not all that was involved; I was only vaguely aware of the issues involved; I did not know what the Treaty was about at all.

⁶ See ‘The Nice Treaty: Explaining the Issues – Irish Neutrality and European Security’ Irish Institute of European Affairs <http://www.iiea.com/files/nice/nice8.pdf> (pages 3-4).

⁷ The surveys were carried out under the framework contract (Flash Eurobarometer) with EOS Gallup Europe on behalf of the Eurobarometer Unit in the Directorate General for Press and Communications of the European Commission. Fieldwork for the 2001 survey was conducted between 20 August and 10 September 2001 among a quota sample of 1245 adults. Fieldwork for the second survey was conducted between 15 November and 9 December 2002 among a quota sample of 1203 adults. For replication purposes, the survey data on which the analysis presented in this paper is based is available at: <http://issda.ucd.ie/nicepolls>

⁸ There were some slight differences in the question wordings between the Nice 1 and Nice 2 surveys. Because of the ongoing nature of the enlargement negotiations, it was necessary to change the wording of the question in 2002: ‘The European Union is at present finishing negotiations with 10 countries about joining the European Union in 2004. We are interested in how people feel about this enlargement of the EU. In general terms, are you in favour or against this enlargement of the EU?’ There is no reason to believe that this shortened introductory wording rendered the results of the enlargement questions in 2001 and 2002 non-comparable. The over time trends from the 2001 and 2002 surveys – reported in Section 3 – are very similar to those found by Eurobarometer 57 and Eurobarometer 58 from a standard enlargement question

(See Sinnott, 2003:8-9). The party preference question was also slightly different in the two surveys. In the Nice 1 survey respondents were asked which party they would vote for if there was a general election tomorrow and in Nice 2 respondents were asked to indicate the party that they ‘usually support’. The breakdown of responses to both questions is similar at both time points (see Table 1). Note that the wording of the ‘satisfaction’ question was: ‘Overall are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the government is running the country?’ The response options were: Very satisfied; quite satisfied; quite dissatisfied; very dissatisfied. Finally, In both surveys, the age of the respondent was assigned to one or the other of five categories and social class was measured using the usual market research AB, C1, C2, DE and F categories. The gender of the respondent was also categorised.

⁹ There is much discussion in the literature about the possible direction of the causal relationship between our two sets of independent variables, support for the incumbent government/ governing parties and attitudes to the EU. Anderson (1998), Gabel (1998c) and Ray (2003) argue that attitudes to the EU to some extent mediate the effect of attitudes to the incumbent government; in other words, that whether or not you support the incumbent government determines whether you have positive attitudes to the EU which in turn determines whether you support an EU Treaty in a referendum. Thus, in the analysis reported in Tables 2 and 3, we include our variables in that order – ‘second-order’ effects first followed by ‘issue’ effects. (However, when we ran a model regressing EU support on party and demographic variables, we found no significant association between party support and EU support. Also, when we ran a model regressing support for enlargement on party and demographic variables, we found no significant association between party support and enlargement support. Thus, there appear to be no significant endogeneity effects and it does not seem that attitude effects are mediating party support effects. This is in line with the general finding in Irish data that voters tend not to distinguish between the main parties on EU issues.)

¹⁰ We do not include the ‘government satisfaction’ variable in our operationalisation of second-order effects in either of the two simulations described in this paragraph. This is because, as

noted, the question concerning ‘government satisfaction’ was only asked in the 2002 survey. However, if we *were* to include this (2002) variable in our simulation of what the result would have been in 2001 if the conditions of 2002 had pertained at 2001, then almost certainly our simulated/ predicted result would have been lower than 48 percent. This is because contemporary opinion poll data suggests that government satisfaction levels were much lower in 2002 than they had been in 2001: satisfaction with the government dropped from 59 percent in May 2001 to 33 percent in October 2002. (See Table A at: <http://www.tnsmrbi.ie/MSWord/IRISH%20TIMES%20TNS%20MRBI%20POLL%20POLITICAL%20ISSUES.doc>). Thus, the anti-government side of the Nice debate would have benefited if the (low) satisfaction levels of 2002 had existed at 2001.