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INTRODUCTION

Setting the scene

Politicians and journalists alike firmly believe in the impact of election campaigns, spending ever-increasing budgets and time on what is believed to be a deciding factor in determining the vote. In contrast, scientific research for a long time suggested that campaigns do little more than reinforce already existing beliefs and are thus, frankly speaking, vastly overestimated in their assumed impact on changing attitudes and in affecting election outcomes. However, a shift in focus towards more specific and indirect effects, in line with recent advances in our understanding of how exposure to certain types of information can affect attitudes in ways that influence voting behaviour, has led to a renewed interest in studying campaign effects. Previous research has stressed the importance of the information environment during election campaigns. However, the role of the news media is often merely acknowledged. More systematic accounts that integrate the actual contents of news coverage into analyses of campaign effects, as well as investigations into their conditionality and underlying processes, are still emerging.

Referendums are increasingly used in an attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of political institutions and as a device to engage citizens in the political process. Referendum campaigns are considered unusually influential as the electoral context differs significantly from national elections and is characterized by a higher degree of electoral volatility. For example, voters are often unfamiliar with the concrete issue at stake and elite cues are usually more ambiguous in referendums. This attaches greater importance to the campaign and to the news media as the main source of information. For this reason, it is important to understand more about the dynamics of referendum campaigns. This dissertation focuses on the effects of the referendum campaign and in particular of the news media on three distinct aspects: public support for referendums as a means of direct democracy, vote choice, and the mobilization of the electorate.

Advanced European (EU) integration has been the focus of numerous national referendums and future EU political decisions are contingent upon referendums. The context for this dissertation is the Dutch EU Constitution referendum. In June 2005, the Dutch electorate rejected the EU constitutional treaty in what was the first national referendum in the Netherlands in recent history. The vast majority of the Dutch political elite, the governing coalition parties as well as the major opposition party and all major news media endorsed the proposal. However, 62% of citizens voted “Nee” (No), which effectively marked the end of the ratification process.

It is important to note that this is not mainly a dissertation *about* the Dutch referendum. The main objective is not to add to existing discussions on why the referendum failed, or what the implications are for Europe or for the Netherlands in particular. Rather, this dissertation is concerned with campaign effects and the role of the news media, and the Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum provides the context for this investigation. Nevertheless, after a general introduction to the central theme, we discuss the relevant contextual characteristics of this

particular referendum and the extent to which they matter to our investigation. Next, we introduce the overall research design of this study and then move on to four empirical articles in which we investigate specific campaign effects in greater detail.

Media effects in referendum campaigns

The intuitive claim that 'political campaigns matter' has been highly contested within political communication research for a long period of time (for an overview see Ansolabehere, 2006). Despite the prominent role election campaigns play in modern day politics and the attention devoted to them both by political actors as well as by the media and the public, the identification and exact measurement of campaign effects proved to be difficult to establish (Zaller, 1996, 2002). Furthermore, election outcomes are strongly predicted by factors outside of the campaign, such as personal or national economic conditions (e.g., Kramer, 1973; Lewis-Beck & Rice, 1992), evaluations of the incumbent party or president (e.g., Finkel, 1993), or party identification (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960), casting serious doubts about the actual impact of the campaign. However, with more advanced methods applied to assess campaign effects and greater importance attached to more indirect and short-term effects, the 'minimal effects hypothesis' has shifted to what can best be described as 'not so minimal effects' (Zaller, 1996). Over recent years, an increasing number of studies has documented campaign effects both on individual voting behaviour as well as on aggregate voting patterns within various electoral contexts (e.g., Bartels, 1988, 1993; Blais et al., 1999; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Herr, 2002; Holbrook, 1996; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 2000; Hobolt, 2006; Johnston et al., 1992, 1996; Just et al., 1996; Lachat & Sciarini, 2002; Mendelsohn, 1994; Sheafer, 2005; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004; Zaller, 1992).

In this dissertation, we focus on *political* campaigns. All political campaigns involve an organized communication effort by some actor or agency which is aimed at shaping public opinion in order to achieve influence over the outcome of processes of political decision-making (Schmitt-Beck & Farrell, 2002). In this context, political campaigns can try to attain different objectives, i.e. to create or strengthen support for a candidate or policy, to mobilize voters, or simply to inform the electorate. Given this array of motives, campaigns can have an impact on a wide range of different attitudes or behaviours and they can either reinforce or alter and change these (see e.g., Brady et al., 2006). Furthermore, political campaigns can exert their influence either in direct and personal ways or indirectly, i.e. via the media (de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). Finally, the extent to which campaigns can have an impact depends on the electoral context and the decision-making situation voters are confronted with. Thus, studying campaign effects can take very different directions and require very different approaches. In this dissertation, we specifically focus on the investigation of campaign effects in *referendums* and particularly the role of the *news media* in affecting individual attitudes and behaviour. In the following, we will discuss this choice and outline in what ways such an investigation can contribute to our understanding of the role and impact of campaigns in modern democracy.

Most research on the effects of election campaigns has been conducted in the context of presidential or parliamentary elections (see e.g., Blais et al., 1999; Holbrook, 1996; Johnston et al., 1996). However, referendum campaigns are considered to be especially influential since the electoral context is usually marked by a higher degree of volatility (LeDuc, 2002; Hobolt, 2005, 2007; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). Oftentimes, voters in a referendum do not hold firm attitudes towards the issue at stake (Franklin, 2002) and public involvement is normally far lower than in national elections (e.g., Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Franklin et al., 1994). Since less seems to be at stake in referendums (Schneider & Weitsman, 1996), voters usually feel less bound by party loyalties and the political parties themselves often send out more ambiguous cues and are more internally divided on the issue (e.g., LeDuc, 2002; Pierce et al., 1983). Previous referendum studies have counted a substantial number of voters taking their voting decision only very late during the campaign (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2004) which is a sign of greater volatility of the electorate (e.g., Chaffee & Rimal, 1996; Fournier et al., 2004). This higher degree of uncertainty makes voters more susceptible to campaign influences in a referendum (Magleby, 1989). Previous studies have indeed documented significant shifts in public opinion over the course of a referendum campaign (LeDuc, 2002; Neijens et al., 1998).

In a context marked by high volatility the media play a key role as the most important channel in providing new information (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2004; Bennett & Entman, 2001; Dalton, 2002; Jenssen et al., 1998). However, most past research has only just acknowledged the importance of assessing the information environment during the campaign and its potential impact on attitudes and voting behaviour (Lupia, 1992, 1994). The importance "[…] of systematically analyzing media content and formally modeling the exposure to different media outlets in order to advance our understanding of a referendum campaign" (de Vreese, 2004: 60) has been stressed, but has rarely been put into practice. Previous research concerned with the effect of news media content on voting behaviour has almost exclusively been conducted within the context of national elections (Bartels, 1993; Dobrzynska et al., 2003; Johnston et al., 1992; Joslyn & Ceccoli 1996; Just et al., 1996; Mendelsohn & Nadeau 1999; Kleinnijenhuis & Fan, 1999; Kleinnijenhuis & de Ridder, 1998). In referendum studies, the campaign is often only discussed in descriptive terms (e.g., Clarke et al., 2000; Siune et al., 1994) or by linking simple media exposure measures to vote intentions (Borg & Esaiasson, 1998). As a consequence, more formal studies on the effects of the actual content features of referendum campaigns on public opinion, or voting behaviour, are only just emerging.

The use of referendums as a means of direct democracy is becoming increasingly popular worldwide (Butler & Ranney, 1994). In this dissertation, we investigate campaign effects in the context of a referendum on a topic of advanced EU integration. A number of key political issues regarding further EU integration efforts have been decided upon by public vote, and the use of referendums in Europe is expanding (see e.g., Gallagher & Uleri, 1996). Referendums are believed to increase the political legitimacy of political institutions and effectively work against the "democratic deficit" for which the EU often has been blamed (e.g., Meyer, 1999; Scharpf,

1997). Furthermore, referendums are seen as an instrument to engage citizens (e.g., Fishkin, 1995; Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001) and to contribute to the creation of a common European identity (e.g., Hug, 2003). Given the increasing relevance of referendums in political decision-making in the EU and the importance of the news media in providing information and shaping opinions, previous studies have called for the study of the effects of campaign news coverage on the formation of public opinion in EU referendums (e.g., Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005).

This dissertation takes the contents, uses and effects of information in referendum campaigns as a focal point. We investigate the role of the news media in affecting different attitudes and behaviours over the course of the campaign. More in particular, we focus on three different spheres in which the campaign matters: first, by analyzing how campaign news coverage can influence public support for referendums as a means of direct democracy; second, by investigating the potential of the campaign to affect vote choice in a referendum; and third, by assessing how news coverage can mobilize certain parts of the electorate to turn out and vote in a referendum.

Public support for referendums

At the very beginning of our investigation of referendum campaign effects, one question is central: exactly *who* supports referendums as a means of direct democracy? Previous research is ambiguous about this basic question (e.g., Dalton et al., 2001; Donovan & Karp, 2006). Some studies support the notion that citizens at the margins of the political process embrace referendums as an alternative way of having a say and getting involved outside of the domain of traditional party politics (Dalton et al., 2001; Gilljam et al., 1998). Others claim the exact opposite. In this perspective, support for direct democratic means is linked to higher levels of interest and involvement in the political process (Donovan & Karp, 2006). "Persons who are interested in one form of election are also interested in the other; almost all of those who are very or somewhat interested in one type of election are very or somewhat interested in the other [...]" (Magleby, 1984; cited in Magleby, 1989: 99).

Thus, there is no consensus on one of the most pivotal questions with regard to direct democracy: namely *why* people support the use of referendums. In the first article of this dissertation (Chapter 1), we not only explore the motives behind support for referendums, but also investigate the potential of the referendum campaign to *change* individual referendum support. Maybe because public approval of referendums is generally high (see e.g., Bowler & Donovan, 1998; Dalton et al., 2001; Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001), previous research has treated support for referendums merely as a static concept or stable attitude. At this point, virtually nothing is known about how a referendum campaign can potentially alter support for direct democracy. This gap in existing research is surprising considering the increasing use of referendums worldwide (Butler & Ranney, 1994) and the extensive efforts devoted to theorizing about the potential benefits or threats of direct democracy (e.g., Budge, 1996; Christin et al., 2002; Dalton et al., 2001; LeDuc, 2003).

Moreover, we not only investigate the motives behind referendum support and to what extent media coverage can alter support, but also identify and specifically test *how* news coverage can affect referendum support, and, *for whom*. That is, we shed light on the underlying processes behind news effects on referendum support and uncover the mechanisms that can account for such effects as well as their dependency on individual characteristics. In doing so, the present study is the first to investigate campaign effects on support for referendums in a comprehensive way.

Vote choice

What people vote for in a referendum is the second focus of this dissertation. We propose a novel extension to looking at voting behaviour in EU referendums. Issue-related attitudes towards the EU, as well as more general political attitudes and domestic considerations have both been suggested to influence what people vote for in referendums on EU integration. However, there is lively debate as to whether domestic considerations, such as the evaluation of domestic government performance (Franklin et al., 1994; Franklin, 2002), or actual attitudes towards the issue at stake (Svensson, 2002) are more likely to predict the vote. Only recently, it was argued that both explanations are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary (e.g., Garry et al., 2005; Hobolt, 2006). These studies stress that the degree to which either one of these explanations serves better to explain the vote depends on the respective referendum context, i.e. if public involvement and general interest and awareness are high in a referendum. In such a context, voters are more likely to base their vote on existing attitudes regarding the issue at stake (Hobolt, 2005).

In the second article of this dissertation (Chapter 2), we follow up these research lines and integrate both approaches. More in particular, we assume that attitudes towards the EU have a direct effect on voting intention, and are themselves determined by more general political attitudes. Thus, we suggest a model in which general EU skepticism is the factor *through which* other political attitudes and predispositions – unrelated to the specific referendum issue – exert most, or parts of, their influence on vote choice in EU referendums.

Moreover, we are specifically interested in the impact of the campaign and of the news media on the final vote. In general, election campaigns have the potential to influence voting behaviour in referendums. However, not much attention has been devoted to the study of the effects of campaign news coverage on vote choice in EU referendums. The importance of the information environment during a campaign in affecting peoples' voting preferences is clearly acknowledged in existing research (e.g., Borg & Esaiasson, 1998; Denver, 2002; Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2004) but not formally modelled in order to predict the vote. This is surprising given the relevance of the news media in interpreting referendum issues (e.g., Siune & Svensson, 1993) and given the fact that the news media are the most important source of information people rely on during a referendum campaign (e.g., Jenssen et al., 1998). So far, there are very few systematic attempts to integrate the actual content characteristics of news media coverage into a

model for explaining voting behaviour in a referendum. These studies found significant effects of campaign coverage on vote choice and showed these effects to be dependent on the characteristics of news coverage (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2004).

Accordingly, this dissertation investigates the effect of the campaign and particularly of the news media on vote choice in a referendum, controlling for other relevant factors such as political predispositions and attitudes towards the issue at stake. For this purpose, we take actual content characteristics of media coverage into account when we assess the impact of campaign news on the vote, such as the tone and the amount of coverage (see e.g., Druckman & Parkin, 2005; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004).

In sum, the second article of this dissertation a) proposes a new way of looking at voting behaviour in EU referendums, and b) assesses actual content characteristics of campaign news coverage and builds them into a detailed measure of individual news exposure in order to explain news effect on the vote more elaborately.

Electoral mobilization

The final focus of this dissertation is on who becomes mobilized in a referendum campaign, and why? Referendums are meant to increase the legitimacy of political institutions such as the EU and are seen as an instrument to engage citizens (e.g., Fishkin, 1995; Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001). In light of the democratic deficit the EU often has been blamed for, the question of *who* votes in referendums on issues of EU integration, and *what* mobilizes citizens to participate in such elections, is of particularly high relevance. Prior research, studying turnout in referendums and the role of the campaign in mobilizing the electorate, has been mainly concerned with factors such as campaign spending or relied on proxies tapping the intensity of the campaign (Kriesi, 2005; for an overview see Geys, 2005), but has largely neglected the actual content of campaign coverage. For example, Szczerbiak and Taggart (2004) suggested a base model for explaining turnout in EU referendums in which the role of the campaign is only indirectly addressed through the 'overall level of resources' invested in the campaign. This conception focuses solely on campaign efforts undertaken by political actors and not on the actual content characteristics of campaign news coverage. The equation presented - more resources lead to more information and result in higher turnout - ignores the possibility of differential effects of campaign information on voter participation. However, campaign effects on participation might depend on information *content* and on individual differences between voters. So far, only a few studies have systematically analyzed news media content throughout a referendum campaign and formally modelled its effect on turnout (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2004; Kriesi, 2006).

Investigations of campaign effects on turnout in referendums miss more compelling links between the actual content of campaign news coverage and peoples' decision to participate in referendums. Here, we argue that in order to better understand the dynamics of mobilization in referendums it is important to take the *nature* of the decision-making situation into account as well as theory that explains *how* citizens decide on their own participation.

In the third and fourth article of this dissertation (Chapters 3 and 4), the focus is on *risk aversion* as a key motivation for voters to participate in a referendum. More specifically, we show how news coverage of a referendum campaign can contribute to higher risk perception among certain parts of the electorate and motivate voters to turn out and vote in order to prevent an unwanted scenario. Previous research has pointed to the importance of voters' *perceptions* of campaigns (e.g., Martin, 2008; Sigelman & Kugler, 2003). Depending on existing outcome preferences in a referendum, positive campaign messages, endorsing the proposal, can be perceived negatively by opponents. Previous research has also demonstrated that people are more strongly motivated to avoid costs rather than to achieve gains (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), and the ways in which perceived threat in an election can mobilize voters to turn out in order to prevent an unwanted outcome (Marcus et al., 2000; Martin, 2004).

In this dissertation, we introduce and provide empirical evidence of a new model in the study of electoral mobilization which we refer to as 'reversed mobilization': Positive news framing in a referendum campaign can generate a perception of risk among voters who oppose the proposal and thereby stimulate electoral participation in order for them to prevent an undesired outcome that would alter the status quo.

Conceiving news media influence

There is strong evidence that *content* matters for the explanation of news media effects on subsequent attitudes or behaviour in referendum campaigns (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). In this dissertation, we consider different content characteristics of campaign news coverage with the potential to affect either public support for referendums (Chapter 1), vote choice (Chapter 2), or the mobilization of parts of the electorate (Chapters 3 and 4).

Visibility

The visibility of an issue or topic in the news is a pre-requisite for the occurrence of media effects (e.g., Zaller, 1992). For example, previous research has shown how the effect of campaign news coverage on vote choice in an election is contingent on the visibility of the topic in the news (see e.g., Druckman & Parkin, 2005; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). With regard to the EU, it has been shown that the visibility of EU news contributes to knowledge acquisition about the EU and increases the intention to turn out in EU referendums (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). However, previous studies analyzing the visibility of EU news coverage have shown the EU to be only marginally represented during periods without key events (Peter & de Vreese, 2004; de Vreese, 2002). Machill et al. (2006) summarize 17 media content analyses from different European countries and come to the conclusion that there is only an extremely small share of EU news in national media (see also de Vreese, 2002). At key events, such as referendums on EU integration topics, visibility in the news is generally higher but can still vary across countries and media outlets. In this dissertation, we take the visibility of news about the referendum into account when assessing media induced campaign effects.

News reporting style

Previous research has attributed different kinds of effects to the content of more serious (i.e., broadsheet) as compared to more popular (i.e., tabloid) news outlets in regard to political involvement (e.g., Newton, 1999). Whereas broadsheet news reporting has been shown to be more informative and to contribute to higher levels of political knowledge (e.g., Aarts & Semetko, 2003), the higher emotional appeal of tabloid news coverage has the potential to enhance information processing and to increase readers' attention and interest in a topic (Grabe et al., 2000). More importantly, differences in styles of reporting between tabloid and broadsheet news can affect interpretations of a news story and result in different perceptions among readers (Jucker, 1992). In the first article of this dissertation (Chapter 1), we consider the impact of tabloid style news reporting (as opposed to broadsheet style news reporting) on subsequent evaluations and affective responses among parts of the electorate, as these can be expected, in turn, to affect other attitudes such as individual support for public referendums.

Tone

Previous research has looked at how different news outlets cover political campaigns and assumed that the tone of coverage affects voters (e.g., Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Niven, 2002). In a referendum campaign, the tone of news coverage indicates if there is a bias in either a more positive or a more negative direction regarding the referendum proposal. This bias in turn carries the potential to affect people's attitudes towards the proposal (Sheafer, 2005). Media effects in election campaigns are more likely to occur when there is a consistent evaluative bias in the news (e.g., Zaller, 1992). In the study by de Vreese and Semetko (2004), exposure to specific newspapers and public broadcasting television news had an effect on the Yes-vote in the Danish Euro referendum because these outlets covered the actors of the 'Yes' camp less negatively than the actors of the 'No' camp. Druckman and Parkin (2005) show how the tone of a newspaper's candidate coverage shaped candidate evaluations and vote choice in an election. In the second article of this dissertation (Chapter 2), we assume campaign news coverage to have an effect on vote choice contingent on the overall tone of the news towards the referendum proposal.

Framing

Framing refers to the observation that media can portray one and the same topic in very different ways, emphasizing certain evaluations or only parts of an issue at the expense of possible others (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Studies dealing with the impact of framing in an EU context demonstrated framing effects on either issue interpretation (Maier & Rittberger, 2008; de Vreese, 2004) or levels of support for the EU and further EU integration (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Much less is known about how news frames affect mobilization patterns during election campaigns. Previous research suggests that campaign news framed in terms of strategy can turn voters off (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), however, other studies have challenged these findings (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2002).

Framing research needs to pay more attention to the implicit qualities of media frames in order to better understand their effects (Shah et al., 2001). Valence frames evaluate political issues or situations in either positive or negative terms and "[…] are indicative of 'good and bad' and (implicitly) carry positive and/or negative elements" (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003: 363). Valenced news frames are not the same as the tone of a news story. A news frame is *more* than just an isolated argument or position on a topic – it represents a coherent construction of an issue (Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Pan & Kosicki, 1993), suggesting certain associations (see e.g., Berinsky & Kinder, 2006; Chong & Druckman, 2007) and providing an evaluative framework for individuals that can influence their thoughts (e.g., Domke et al., 1998; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Whereas frames in general have the potential to change attitudes or opinions (Slothuus, 2008), individuals can also resist the intrinsic valence of frames based on existing beliefs (e.g., Bizer & Petty, 2005), which can result in frames having unintended effects. As previous research has pointed out, models of framing effects have to pay more attention to the individual orientations and attitudes of media users that exist prior to the exposure to certain news frames (Scheufele, 2000). In the third and fourth article of this dissertation, we take existing outcome preferences and individual perceptions of news frames into account when we show how *positive* news framing can contribute to the mobilization of *opponents* of a referendum proposal (Chapter 3) and specify the underlying mechanisms behind such a frame induced mobilization effect (Chapter 4).

Summary

Despite the increasing use of referendums to decide on key policy issues and the high popularity of referendums among the public, little is known about the role of the campaign and the news media in affecting relevant attitudes and voting behaviour. Often, the importance of the information environment during a referendum campaign is merely acknowledged but more elaborate links between media content and public opinion or voting behaviour are still missing. This dissertation sets out to fill some of the gaps in the existing literature on referendum campaign effects. We are particularly interested in the effects of campaign news coverage on public support for referendums, vote choice, and the mobilization of the electorate.

This dissertation pays special attention to the *conditionality* of campaign effects as well as to the underlying processes and mechanisms, because we firmly believe that any analysis of media and news effects should do more than simply uncover *that* the media matter in some way or another. We attempt to make progress in terms of theoretical explanations as well as methodological approaches to studying the more challenging questions of *for whom* and *under what conditions* campaigns and news media can have an effect and, even more importantly, *how* they can affect attitudes or behaviour. Thus, we dedicate additional effort to identifying and formally testing the factors that *moderate* and/or *mediate* campaign effects.

Before we describe the details of the overall research design and explain how it is applied to serve our objectives, we first turn to the introduction of the specific referendum context in which the investigation takes place.

Introducing the context: The Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum

Advanced EU integration has become the focus of numerous national referendums over the past couple of years (Hobolt, 2005; Hug, 2003; Hug & Sciarini, 2000). Up until now, 34 national referendums on European integration related issues have been held in the various EU member states (see Taggart, 2006). Another seven referendums on EU matters have taken place in countries that are not currently members, such as Norway (1972, 1994), Switzerland, (1972, 1992, 2000, 2001) and Liechtenstein (1992). This makes EU integration the most voted-on political issue in the world. Currently, 19 out of the current 27 EU member states have held public referendums on EU integration related issues. Four countries held referendums on the EU Constitution: Spain, France, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands.

The institutional framework

In December 2001, the European Council, at its meeting in Laeken, established the European Convention, consisting of 105 representatives of national parliaments and governments, not only of EU member states but also of candidate countries, as well as members of the EU parliament and the EU Commission. The Convention was assigned with the task of creating a draft Constitution for the European Union, later to be finalized and adopted by the Council. The main aim of the Constitution was to "bring the Union closer to its citizens" (Laeken Declaration, December 15th, 2001) and promote democracy, transparency and efficiency within the EU. The Convention met for the first time in February 2002 and presented its final draft to the public in July 2003. On October 29th 2004, the "Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe" was signed in Rome. In order to become effective, the new Treaty had to be ratified by all EU member states. Although only a constitutional requirement in Ireland, a number of member states decided to hold public referendums on the draft Constitution before ratification. After Spanish citizens voted in favour of the treaty (77% 'Yes') and French citizens voted against (55% 'No'), the Netherlands were the third country to hold a national referendum on June 1st 2005.[1]

The 2005 EU Constitution referendum was the first national referendum in the Netherlands in recent history. At a local level, multiple 'popular' referendums, initiated by citizens, have been held on various topics (see e.g., Neijens & van Praag, 2006). One reason for the implementation of referendums at a local level was the observed very low turnout in local elections combined with the hope to get citizens more involved (van Holsteyn, 1996). Popular support for direct democracy in the Netherlands is generally high. In 1998, 80% of Dutch citizens (as opposed to 50% in 1971) supported referendums as a means to have a more direct say on matters of national importance (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1998).[2]

In the past, calls for holding national referendums on European issues in the Netherlands have been increasing. In 1991, members of the Green Party (GroenLinks) called for a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty; in 1998, the Green Party and the Socialist Party (SP) asked for a referendum on the introduction of the Euro; in 2002, the Dutch parliament asked the government to explore the option of holding a referendum on the enlargement of the EU by the introduction of 10 new Eastern member states. However, none of these pleas materialized. Around the same time, several organisations in various EU member states and also in the Netherlands (Referendum Platform) united in the European Referendum Campaign and began to promote the implementation of referendums, as a direct democratic instrument, into the draft European Constitutional Treaty (see Nijeboer, 2005). These joint efforts proved to be quite successful, as many individual members of the EU Convention signed a proposal to hold national referendums on the final treaty.

In November 2002, the Dutch parliament adopted an initiative brought in by EU Convention member Frans Timmermans, which called for a referendum on the EU Constitution in the Netherlands. However, in January 2003 national elections shifted the power balance in parliament, when the parties commonly in favour of referendums lost their majority (Social democrats [PvdA], Socialists [SP], Liberal Democrats [D66], Green Left [GroenLinks], and LPF [Lijst Pim Fortuijn]). Since the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the small Protestant parties in parliament are traditionally opposed to referendums, a crucial role fell to the liberal party (VVD) which showed to be divided on the issue. After long internal debates, the party finally decided, in September 2003, to endorse the idea of holding a consultative referendum on the EU Constitution, yielding a majority in parliament for a new bill brought in by politicians of Green Left, Liberal Democrats and Social Democrats.[3] The government parties still expressed their disagreement but provided assurance that they would respect parliaments' decision and also the outcome of the referendum. Since referendums are not mentioned in the Dutch Constitution they do not have a binding legal status and consultative referendums depend on the prior approval of public authority to accept and follow the outcome.

In November 2003 the bill passed the Dutch lower house, the Second Chamber (Tweede Kamer), and, together with an additional bill from May 2004[4], it passed the Senate (Eerste Kamer) on January 25th 2005.[5] An independent Referendum Commission was established and assigned with three tasks: to set a date for the referendum; to produce an objective summary of the EU Constitution to be distributed to all Dutch households before the referendum; and to allocate 1 million euros for the campaign. Finally, the Commission set the date for the referendum to be June 1st 2005 and decided to give 400,000 Euros to both the 'Yes' and the 'No' campaigns and another 200,000 Euros to neutral organisations aiming at stimulating public debate.

The campaign

During the Dutch referendum campaign public debate was intense, people showed unprecedented interest in European topics (Nijeboer, 2005), and the news media devoted a lot of attention to the topic in the final weeks leading up to the referendum (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2005; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008). Overall, European issues have never received more attention in public debate in the Netherlands (Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006) than at this time.[6]

The vast majority of the Dutch political elite, the governing parties (CDA, VVD, and D66) as well as the major opposition party (PvdA) and the Green party (GroenLinks) were all in support of the EU Constitution (see Crum, 2007). Only the smaller opposition parties campaigned against but most of them remained barely visible during the campaign. Noteworthy exceptions from this were the Socialist Party (SP); the Party for Freedom (PVV), a new party founded in 2004 by Geert Wilders, a former politician of the liberal party (VVD) in open opposition to a possible entry of Turkey to the EU; and to some extent the small Christian Union (CU). These parties and their respective leaders and representatives vigorously campaigned against the Constitution. In addition, independent citizen initiatives such as the Committee Against (Comité tegen) joined the 'No' camp.

At first, the campaign developed only slowly. During March and April 2005, the directive by former Dutch EU Commissioner Bolkestein, concerning the free movement of services received some attention in public debate. Related to this, the symbol of the "Polish plumber", representing the influx of cheap labour from new EU members, emerged in the French referendum debate and was also discussed in the Netherlands (see Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2005). Throughout the period of January to the first week of April 2005, public opinion surveys showed a majority of voters tending to vote in favour of the Constitution by a margin of 9% to 28% (MarketResponse, 2005a). However, by April at least every third voter remained undecided in what exactly to vote for. In this first phase of the campaign, speculations about what to expect if the referendum should fail substituted for a lack of real key topics or issues. This reached a climax when a news article appeared on April 18th, in which Justice Secretary Donner (CDA) claimed 'war' as a possible consequence of a failed referendum.

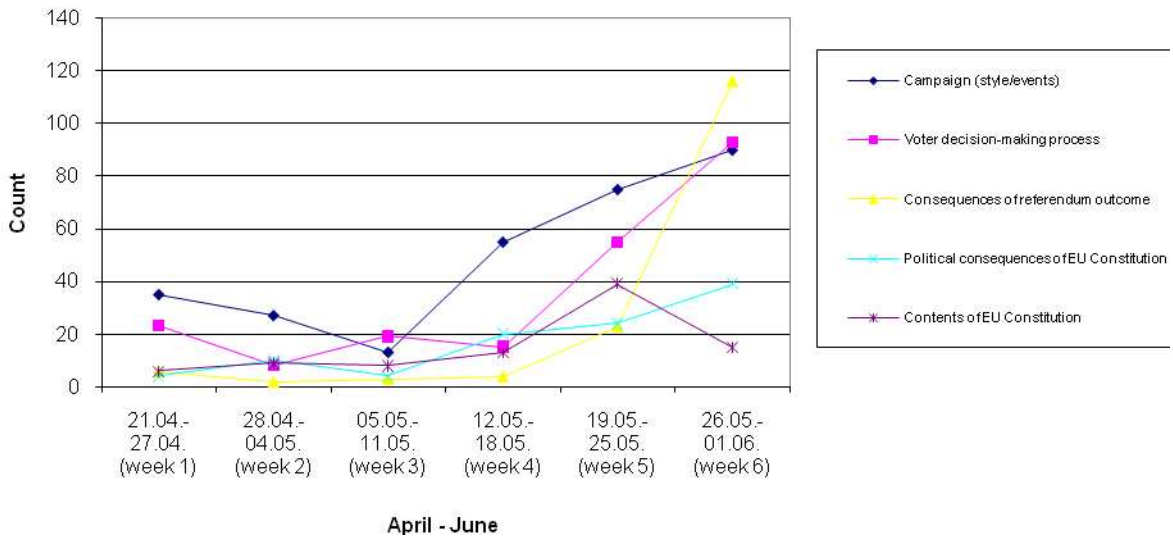
On April 21st the 'Referendumwijzer', an online tool to help citizens form a decision on what to vote for in the referendum, was launched and widely used by more than 900,000 visitors until the day of the referendum. Shortly thereafter, on April 23rd 2005, the folder composed by the independent Referendum Commission, containing a summary of the European Constitution, was delivered to all Dutch households and was widely criticized for not being very informative.

When the official campaign commenced in late April there were several issues resonating in public debate but no single issue dominated the agenda. On April 30th, primarily due to a lack of other topics, the Euro appeared on the campaign agenda when Henk Brouwer, member of the board of directors of the Dutch Central Bank, publicly stated that the exchange rate for the Dutch national currency had been disadvantageous for the Netherlands. The Socialist Party (SP), as the most pronounced force on the 'No' side, had commenced their campaign in advance and

vigorously campaigned against the Constitution. The Social Democrats (PvdA), as the first of those parties in favour of the Constitution, only commenced their campaign on May 1st. The other parties constituting the 'Yes' camp joined in the week thereafter and were only fully involved by mid-May. However, from the last week of April onwards public opinion surveys showed a majority of voters intending to vote against the Constitutional treaty (Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008). This majority remained largely stable on the macro level throughout the remaining weeks of the campaign while the number of undecided voters gradually decreased (see MarketResponse, 2005b).

In mid-May, the leader of the aforementioned Party for Freedom (PVV), Geert Wilders, started his campaign against Turkish integration and received considerable public attention. Around the same time the 'Yes' campaign suffered another drawback when the VVD was about to broadcast a TV spot in which party representatives in the European parliament established an indirect link between the potential failure of the referendum and the Holocaust. This resulted in public outcry. In general, the campaign gained a lot of speed during the last weeks leading up to the referendum. The news media devoted increasing attention to the referendum topic (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2005; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008), countless debates and public events were held, special websites were launched by interest groups, and prominent TV shows devoted special issues to the subject in which well-known commentators and national celebrities joined the debate (Nijeboer, 2005). As a consequence, the topic became widely visible in the weeks before the referendum took place.

Figure 0.1. Topical focus of referendum news coverage



Note: Time line shows total amount of referendum news stories with respective main topical focus published in Dutch national TV and newspaper coverage (Source: ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Study 2005; see de Vreese & Schuck, 2007).

In the analysis of television and newspaper campaign coverage conducted at The Amsterdam School of Communications Research *ASCoR* (2005), we find that the majority of

referendum news stories focused on either the campaign itself, the decision-making process of voters, or dealt with the question what effect a 'Yes' or 'No' outcome would possibly have (de Vreese & Schuck, 2007).[7] Less attention was devoted to the discussion of the political consequences of the EU Constitution or of the concrete contents of the EU Constitution.[8] Figure 0.1. above illustrates the development of the most relevant topical foci in referendum news coverage over the course of the campaign.

Thus, the coverage of the referendum campaign was, in general, highly visible and more about the campaign itself rather than about the actual contents of the Constitution. At the same time the proponents of the 'Yes' campaign dominated public debate. 'Yes' actors were three times more prominent than 'No' actors in referendum news coverage (de Vreese & Schuck, 2007). In particular, Premier Balkenende, Foreign Secretary Bot, PvdA party leader Bos, and several representatives of the VVD clearly received the most attention in referendum news coverage. However, they were evaluated as performing poorly and more negatively than the representatives of the 'No' campaign.[9] Furthermore, both 'Yes' and 'No' voters evaluated the 'Yes' campaign more negatively than the 'No' campaign.[10] There was a general consensus that the official 'Yes' campaign had started too late (Taggart, 2006), was internally divided (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2005; Nijeboer, 2005), and of poor quality (Baden & de Vreese, 2008; Harmsen, 2005; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008).

Given that this study is primarily interested in the effects of campaign news coverage, it is important to stress that the news media predominantly endorsed the referendum proposal despite their negative evaluation of the performance of the official 'Yes' campaign. Furthermore, the change in public opinion from a Yes to a No majority on the macro level occurred already before the panel survey data used in this study have been collected, thus, our vote choice analysis in Chapter 2 of this dissertation focuses on micro level migration patterns during the final weeks of the campaign specifically.

The outcome: The end of permissive consensus

On June 1st 2005 a majority of 62% rejected the European Constitution, effectively marking the end of the ratification process. This was a remarkable result, considering that the vast majority of the Dutch political elite, the governing parties as well as the major opposition party, the major trade unions and employers' organization, and all major news media were in support of the EU Constitution. Considering the overwhelming support for the EU Constitution in Dutch parliament (Tweede Kamer), the referendum outcome revealed a striking gap between the preferences of the political elite and those of the electorate (see e.g., Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006; Crum, 2007; Harmsen, 2005). Turnout was high at 63.3% compared to elections for the European Parliament in the Netherlands for which rates had dropped from 58% in 1979 to 30% in 1999 and 39% in 2004 and much higher than the 30% threshold informally agreed upon before the referendum by the main political parties in order for the referendum to be considered valid.

To many, the clarity of the result was a surprise (see e.g., Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006; Lubbers, 2008; Taggart, 2006). The pro-European Dutch - founding members of the EU - voiced, for the first time, public criticism of the EU. Support for the EU in the Netherlands has traditionally been strong among the political elite as well as among the public (see e.g., de Vreese & Schuck, 2007). The Netherlands are, for example, commonly seen as among the staunchest supporters of EU membership. In 2008, 75% of Dutch citizens regard EU membership as a good thing, which is the highest support rate all over Europe and 23 percentage points above the overall EU average (Eurobarometer 69). Also at the time before the referendum was held, general support for EU membership in the Netherlands was among the highest across all member states (76%), and 73% of Dutch citizens supported the idea of having a European Constitution as of autumn 2004 (Eurobarometer 62). At the same time, public interest in EU matters has always been comparably low in the Netherlands (Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006; Nijeboer, 2005). This parallel presence of widespread support for the EU on the one hand and low levels of public controversy on the other, had long suggested the existence of a 'permissive consensus' in the Netherlands, in which further EU integration could count on mass support.

However, the negative referendum outcome in 2005 did not come about unannounced (see e.g., de Vreese & Schuck, 2007) and there have been trends towards more pronounced skepticism towards the EU and specific aspects of EU integration already since the 1990s (see Harmsen, 2004; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008). Over recent years, there has been increasing concern in the Netherlands about a perceived discrepancy between national interests and the current trajectory of the European Union. The fact that the Netherlands is the largest net contributor per capita to the EU budget has fuelled additional skepticism (Taggart, 2006). As a result, the European elections in 2004 produced a significant vote share for Euroskeptic voices and saw an explicitly anti-European party, Europa Transparant (Europe Transparent), secure enough votes to enter the European parliament. Concerns regarding European issues did not necessarily decrease general support for EU membership in the Netherlands. However, they contributed to mounting skepticism regarding the direction the EU is taking. The referendum on the EU Constitution in 2005 provided the stage for these sentiments to emerge to the surface and to be publicly voiced on a national level for the first time.

In this context, issue considerations about Europe as well as attitudes towards further European integration mattered to voters in their decision-making process (see e.g., Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006). This is not to say that Dutch citizens primarily rejected the Constitution because of the contents of the treaty (see also Glencross & Trechsel, 2007), however, many seized the opportunity to vote on "Europe" based on a diverse assortment of feelings and attitudes towards the EU and further EU integration. As Lubbers (2008) reports, one of the strongest reasons for 'No' voters to go and vote in the referendum was a perceived threat to Dutch culture. Others stressed the role of widespread concerns regarding a perceived loss of national sovereignty and fears regarding a European 'superstate' (Harmsen, 2005). At the same time, to many voters the EU Constitution was a symbol of further and faster EU integration and opposition to this

development was at the core of the opposition of many Dutch voters to the Treaty (Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006; Baden & de Vreese, 2008; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008).[11]

In sum, the Dutch 'No' vote did not appear out of 'the blue'. Rather, it was the result of a growing anti-EU sentiment among Dutch people that included both general skepticism towards further EU integration as well as feelings of disappointment and disillusion about the direction the EU is taking. These sentiments were first visible in the 2004 EP elections and culminated in the 2005 referendum. This is the context in which we study the impact of the campaign and of the news media on attitudes towards referendums as a means of direct democracy (Chapter 1), vote choice in a referendum (Chapter 2), and the mobilization of parts of the electorate (Chapters 3 and 4).

Furthermore, this investigation develops beyond the existing context of the 2005 EU Constitution referendum. In December 2007 the EU heads of government met in Portugal to sign the Treaty of Lisbon. This treaty is meant to amend existing EU treaties and substitute for the former EU Constitution draft proposal. It was supposed to come into force in January 2009 after being ratified by all EU member states. Several EU member countries contemplated holding a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon and a referendum was held in Ireland which sparked discussions about the (il)legitimacy of not holding referendums in other countries as well. However, after the treaty was rejected in June 2008 in the Irish national referendum, the ratification process was put on hold.

We use the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2007 as a review situation in which to conduct an additional experiment and to test some of the underlying mechanisms behind the effects of news content on attitudes regarding individual support for referendums (Chapter 1), and on intentions to participate in a possible new referendum (Chapter 4). At the time this experiment was conducted (January 2008), the Treaty of Lisbon had just been signed by the heads of government and still needed to be approved by all EU member states and Ireland had not yet held a referendum.

Research design

This dissertation sets out to capture and explain campaign effects in a referendum. In doing so, it draws upon empirical evidence from a number of different data sources. The overall research design combines a media content analysis of campaign news coverage, two-wave panel surveys and laboratory experiments. In the following, we describe each of the components in greater detail and discuss their function and interconnectedness within the overall research design of this dissertation.

Multi-methodological research design

Different research designs have been employed in previous studies to assess the impact of campaigns on individual attitudes and behaviour. In this dissertation, we make use of a combination of different research methods to adequately assess campaign effects, thereby

capitalizing on the virtues of each one of them and minimizing their respective limitations. More specifically, we combine a media content analysis with panel survey and experimental data. Previous referendum studies, for example, have often neglected the actual content of campaign news coverage or relied on simple media exposure measures in their survey designs, making it virtually impossible to effectively link campaign effects to actual media coverage. In this study, we assess the information environment over the course of the campaign and build in actual content features of campaign news coverage into detailed media exposure measures in our survey. Furthermore, our survey findings are validated by additionally testing media effects in controlled experimental settings which allows for the investigation of the underlying mechanisms that account for such effects. This combination of different research methods provides a more elaborate account of detecting and explaining the processes behind media-driven campaign effects. Most of the methods reported on and introduced below have been specifically designed for the purpose of this study, giving us full control over the design and the operationalization of variables that are of substantive interest to our objective.

Media content analysis

Analyzing the content of campaign news coverage is of central importance to this study in order to link potential media-driven campaign effects to the actual characteristics of media coverage. The current study applies a quantitative approach to content analysis.[12] This implies a deductive approach and the *a priori* formulation of relevant features of the analysis based on theoretical considerations. Berelson states: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (1952: 5).[13] However, other methodological research has stressed the need to extend this definition and include another important function, namely to make "replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (e.g., Krippendorff, 1980: 13; see also Früh, 2001; Merten, 1995). Only under this condition, content analysis can be assumed to do more than just describe inherent text characteristics and instead allows it to arrive at meaningful observations about social reality. Key issues with regard to any deductive content analytical approach are the identification of a representative sample of material as well as the reliability of the measures that are employed in analysing the material (see e.g., Riffe et al., 1998).

The content analysis we report on was specifically designed for the purpose of this study and is referred to as the ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Study 2005 (see Chapters 2 and 3). Furthermore, we gratefully acknowledge support by the EU Commission (see van Praag et al., 2005). The content analysis was carried out on news articles from all major Dutch national newspapers (including *de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Algemeen Dagblad, Trouw* and *De Telegraaf*) and national TV news and current affairs programs (including *NOS Journaal, RTL4 Nieuws* and *NOVA den Haag/vandaag*). The focus is on television and newspapers in particular because EU citizens repeatedly reported them as their most important sources of political information (e.g., Eurobarometer 60, 61). The time period for our analysis includes the six weeks

prior to the referendum, between April 16th 2005 and June 1st 2005. In total, 6,643 news items were manually coded by six Dutch native speakers and 1,307 of these items specifically dealt with the referendum. Rather than relying on a sample, all news items about the referendum have been included in the analysis. This provides a complete picture of the overall information environment during the campaign in the media outlets included in the analysis. The reliability of all the content analysis measures was formally assessed by inter-coder reliability tests (reported in the subsequent chapters).

The content analysis in this dissertation serves to identify particular features and characteristics of news media coverage that are of theoretical relevance in explaining media-driven campaign effects (see discussion above). Previous research has stressed the importance of linking content analytic evidence to panel survey data (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis & Fan, 1999; Riffe et al., 1998; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). Specific content analytic features have been built into detailed measures of media exposure in our panel survey in an attempt to explain campaign effects more elaborately (Chapters 2 and 3). Furthermore, our content analysis also provides a context in which to interpret and assess the validity of our experimental findings (Chapter 3). More details on the design of the content analysis can be found in Chapters 2 and 3 and in the Appendix.

Two-wave panel survey

Analyzing and tapping dynamic relationships necessarily require longitudinal data (Solon, 1989). Capturing campaign effects with survey designs, for example, requires studying some phenomena at a minimum of two points in time in order to attribute changes over time to some sort of event (Kenski, 2006). Interviewing the same individuals at different points in time is central to panel survey designs (see e.g., Kasprzyk et al., 1989). Such designs are most useful in analysing behavioural dynamics or change over time (Lillard, 1989), and therefore are especially useful for studying campaign effects (see Bartels, 2006; Brady et al., 2006). Panel surveys, for example, allow tracking developments during a campaign both on the aggregate level as well as on the individual level (Markus, 1979). Due to this virtue, panel survey designs have been widely applied in previous studies that assess opinion change over the course of a campaign (see e.g., Bartels, 1993; Finkel, 1993; Just et al., 1996; Norris et al., 1999; Hillygus & Jackman, 2003). In combination with other methods, such as media content analysis, observed changes in the population or in individuals can be related to the characteristics of the events that have taken place in-between the panel waves.

This dissertation draws on two different panel surveys from representative samples of the Dutch electorate. In Chapter 1, we draw on data from a panel survey conducted by GfK Benelux on behalf of the University of Twente (The Netherlands) (for details see Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006). This survey consists of a pre- and post-referendum panel component and a net panel of n = 1,284. Respondents in the first panel wave were interviewed in five sub-groups at different points in time. The first sub-group was interviewed starting April 22nd, the second group starting

May 6th, the third starting May 13th, the fourth starting May 20th and the last group only on May 30th and May 31st. For the post-referendum panel wave all respondents were re-interviewed between June 2nd and June 12th. In Chapters 2 and 3 we utilize data from the 2005 ASCoR Referendum Survey, a two-wave panel survey which was specifically designed for the purpose of this study and conducted by CentERdata at the University of Tilburg (The Netherlands) (for details see Schuck & de Vreese, 2008). This survey also consists of a pre- and post-referendum panel component and a net panel of n = 1,379. Field dates for the first wave included the week between May 6th and May 11th and the second wave included the week right after the referendum, between June 3rd and June 8th. In both designs the variables of analytical interest are included in both panel waves in order to asses individual level changes over the course of the campaign.

The two panel surveys in this study serve to tap campaign effects on the individual level with regard to different outcome variables. However, when studying campaigns, we are most often not primarily interested in the mere occurrence of changes between panel waves but rather want to know what these can be attributed to. Given our particular interest in media induced campaign effects, the panel survey designs include detailed media exposure measures in order to link individual changes to the actual content of campaign news coverage (Chapters 2 and 3). Additional details on the designs of both surveys can be found in Chapter 1, in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, and in the Appendix.

Experimentation

Experimental research designs serve to test specific effects in a controlled environment and thus offer a valuable addition to non-experimental or observational research designs. "Experimental research is explanatory in nature: experiments are conducted primarily to test hypotheses, not to describe some large population or to explore previously uncharted social patterns" (Schutt, 1996: 220). Experimentation involves the manipulation of a stimulus, the treatment or independent variable, and the observation of a response, the dependent variable. In studies of campaign effects, experiments enable the researcher to create a specific stimulus, such as a news article, and then to examine its impact (see Brady et al., 2006). Advantages of experimental research especially concern the attribution of causality in the relationship between variables, which is more difficult to establish in non-experimental studies (Jackson, 1992). Due to the virtues of control and randomization in experimental research designs, potentially confounding factors can be removed from the study (see e.g., Ansolabehere, 2006; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Isaac & Michael, 1971; Kerlinger, 1973). Thus, pending successful randomization, differences in the outcome variables can be attributed to the treatment and differences between treatment groups constitute evidence that subjects responded differently to the respective experimental intervention (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). The potential disadvantages of experimental designs concern the often unnatural settings in which experiments take place, which has obvious implications for the appropriateness of generalising findings to the wider population. The latter is

generally more appropriate in observational studies. Thus, complementing survey designs with experimental designs offers a good way to capitalize on the inherent strengths of both approaches and to use one to corroborate the findings of the other.

This dissertation reports on two laboratory experiments which have both been specifically designed for the purpose of this study. The first experiment investigates the mobilizing function of differently valenced news frames for different parts of the electorate (Chapter 3). It was conducted in May 2005 by CentERdata at the University of Tilburg (The Netherlands) within the context of the Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum. For this first experiment, 687 respondents were sampled from an existing large household panel representative of the Dutch population.

The second experiment was conducted in January 2008 by The Dutch Institute for Public Opinion Research and Market Research TNS NIPO (Amsterdam/The Netherlands) within the context of the signing of the EU Treaty of Lisbon. In total, 743 individuals were sampled by TNS NIPO (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) from their database which is representative of the Dutch population. This second experiment complements the first and also looks at the mobilizing function of differently valenced news frames for different parts of the electorate (Chapter 4). Furthermore, it also tests the effects of different news formats (tabloid vs. broadsheet) on subsequent issue evaluations and affective responses (Chapter 1).

The two experiments in this study serve to further specify the findings of the panel surveys. On the one hand, experiments offer the opportunity to test causal relationships in a controlled environment and thus serve to corroborate previous survey-based findings. On the other hand, they allow for the investigation of the underlying mechanisms and processes behind established effects and thus add to and further qualify survey-based findings. In this way, the experiments in our study have an important function in complementing our panel survey analyses. The results and more details on the design of the first experiment are reported in Chapter 3. The results and details on the design of the second experiment are reported in Chapters 1 and 4.

Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation proceeds with four articles that are related in the following manner:

In Chapter 1, we turn to the question who supports public referendums as a means of direct democracy and why. Furthermore, we assess the role of the news media in changing individual support for referendums over the course of a campaign and specify the underlying mechanisms that can account for such effects.

In Chapter 2, we focus on vote choice and the campaign. In this chapter, we first investigate how existing attitudes towards the EU influence vote intentions ahead of the campaign and then analyze the impact of the news media on the final vote.

In Chapter 3, we address the question of who becomes mobilized to turn out to vote during a referendum campaign and why. In this chapter, we introduce the concept of a ‘reversed

mobilization' dynamic: Voters who are in opposition to a referendum proposal and who are confronted with positive news framing of this proposal become mobilized to turn out and vote against it.

In Chapter 4, we provide further evidence of such a mobilization dynamic. In this chapter, we specify the underlying mechanism behind the reversed mobilization effect and test its contingency on other factors.

The final chapter summarizes the key findings of this dissertation, discusses their implications within a wider theoretical framework and reflects on relevant shortcomings. The conclusion also presents a list of proposals for future research.

NOTES

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[1] Six more referendums in other EU member states were scheduled but, in light of the French and Dutch outcomes, postponed or cancelled: The Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom (UK).

[2] Among supporters of the Christian Democrats (CDA) 70% supported referendums; among supporters of the Social Democrats (PvdA) 83% supported referendums. Furthermore, 83% of VVD supporters and 86% of D66 supporters endorsed referendums as a means of direct democracy.

[3] "Initiatiefvoorstel-Karimi c.s. inzake een Wet raadplegend referendum Europese Grondwet" (28.885). It should be noted that the three members of parliament behind this initiative (Farah Karimi/Greenleft; Niesco Dubbelboer/Labour Party; Boris van der Ham/Liberal Democrats) anticipated a positive referendum outcome and thought it would enhance the legitimacy of this European project.

[4] "Novelle Wet raadplegend referendum Europese Grondwet" (29.608). In October 2004 the Second Chamber (Tweede Kamer) approved this revised bill which had become necessary due to intervention by the Senate.

[5] Christian Democrats (CDA), the Christian Union (CU), and the Reformed Political Party (SGP) voted against.

[6] Some have argued that the French referendum campaign was more intense than the Dutch campaign and described the latter as a 'non-event' from a comparative viewpoint (Qvortrup, 2006). However, whereas it is to be welcomed to compare campaign intensity across countries, it can lead to incorrect characterizations and conclusions, as in this case.

[7] 25% of all campaign news within the six weeks leading up to the referendum were concerned with "campaigning (style/events)" (n=295), 18% dealt with the "voter decision making process" (n= 213), and 13% dealt with the potential consequences of the referendum outcome" (n= 154) (ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Study 2005; see de Vreese & Schuck, 2007).

[8] 8% (n=101) of all referendum news items within the six weeks leading up to the referendum discussed the "political consequences of the EU Constitution", and another 8% (n=90) described, explained or introduced the concrete "contents of the EU Constitution" (ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Study 2005; see de Vreese & Schuck, 2007).

[9] The average tone of news coverage on a scale reaching from –1 (negative) to +1 (positive) towards actors of the YES camp was clearly more negative (*M*= -.20) than towards actors of the NO camp (*M*= -.12) (ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Study 2005; see de Vreese & Schuck, 2007).

[10] A remarkable 55% of the Yes voters and 69% of the No voters evaluated the YES campaign negatively, only 15% of the Yes voters and 6% of the No voters gave a positive evaluation. The NO campaign received negative evaluations from only 36% of the Yes voters and 24% of the No voters. 37% of the No voters and even 31% of the Yes voters evaluated the NO campaign positively (ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Survey 2005).

[11] The survey we conducted and report on later (in Chapters 2 and 3) indicates that 73% of Dutch 'No' voters attached high or very high importance to the consideration that due to EU integration too many things would change within the Netherlands. Furthermore, 74% attached high or very high importance to the perception that Dutch identity would be threatened and more than half (57%) considered it very

important or important to express the wish for “less Europe” with their vote (ASCoR EU Constitution Referendum Survey 2005).

[12] That said, we agree that any sharp distinction between ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ content analysis is of little theoretical or practical value and potentially misleading (see e.g., Früh, 2001). Any content analytical research design will most likely make use of both ‘qualitative’ as well as ‘quantitative’ strategies at different stages of the research process, only to a different extent (see also Rust, 1980). In this perspective, the former distinction between both approaches is reduced to a matter of emphasis.

[13] Other definitions stress the need for “systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to set rules” (Riffe et al., 1998: 2) or the “identification of specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969: 14).

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