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Referendum campaign dynamics : news media, campaign effects and direct democracy

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CHAPTER 1

ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR REFERENDUMS AND HOW THE MEDIA MATTER¹

Manuscript under review

Abstract

Previous research is unclear about which citizens support the use of referendums and how a referendum campaign can affect this support. In the present study we first investigate the factors that determine support for referendums and second the role of the campaign in *changing* support. This is done in the context of the Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum and based on panel survey data (n=1,284). Our results suggest that those who felt more politically disaffected were more supportive of referendums. Furthermore, we find that higher levels of exposure to tabloid style campaign news led to increased approval of referendums. In a second step, we tested the *mechanism* behind these effects in an experiment (n=580). Our findings show that opponents of a referendum proposal became more negative towards the proposal when exposed to tabloid style news. This increased their support for holding a referendum on the issue at stake as a means to prevent the proposal from taking effect. We conclude with a discussion about the conditions under which a dynamic like this is likely to unfold and when alternative explanations for referendum support apply.

Introduction

The use of referendums has become increasingly popular in recent years (e.g., Butler & Ranney, 1994; Scarrow, 2001; Setala, 1999). Referendums are believed to increase the legitimacy of political institutions and are seen as an instrument to create a greater sense of political efficacy (Bowler & Donovan, 2002) and to engage citizens (e.g., Fishkin, 1995; Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001). Stimulating citizen participation in political decision making is seen as an effective way to tackle contemporary problems such as increasing levels of political apathy (Budge, 1996). Some scholars argue that the periodic use of referendums could prevent the rise of anti-democratic movements (Resnick, 1997) and would serve well as a permanent instrument of civic education (Barber, 1984). Others warn that the use of referendums could open doors to populism (Dalton et al., 2001) and foster political intolerance (Sartori, 1987) because of the polarization of political discourse.

Whereas scholars disagree on the potential benefits and threats of direct democracy, referendums are generally popular among the public (Bowler & Donovan, 1998; Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001). Yet, there are different explanations for *why* citizens support referendums. Previous research has yielded mixed findings on whether the referendum opportunity is either more embraced by those who are already more politically involved (e.g., Donovan & Karp, 2006) or rather by those who feel disaffected with traditional party-based politics (e.g., Dalton et al., 2001).

Given the increasing use of referendums, it is important to learn more about the factors that determine public support for such direct democratic means. Furthermore, whereas public demand for more direct forms of political participation is increasing and politics is responding to this demand (LeDuc, 2003), referendum support is still most often seen as a static concept or stable attitude. Not much is known about the factors that account for *change* in referendum support on the individual level. No study so far has looked at, for example, the potential of the referendum campaign to increase or decrease individual referendum support. However, campaigns represent pivotal moments in the formation of public opinion and the individual referendum experience is very much tied to the campaign. During campaigns political issues are publicly discussed and receive extensive media attention. Attitudes can be influenced and opinions can be shaped not only with regard to the issue at stake but also with regard to the referendum instrument itself. Thus, understanding the dynamics of the campaign can add to our understanding of what shapes individual support for referendums and how stable or flexible such attitudes are over time.

We focus our attention on a referendum on a topic of European integration which has been the focus of numerous national referendums over the past decades (Hobolt, 2005; Hug, 2003; Hug & Sciarini, 2000). In this article we report on the findings of two complementary studies. In the first part, we investigate the factors that determine support for referendums in the context of the Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum and we examine the role of the news

media in *changing* individual level support over the course of the campaign. In the second part, we take our investigation one step further and explore the underlying mechanisms of *how* the news media can affect referendum support.

STUDY 1

Public support for referendums and the role of the campaign

Previous research has yielded inconclusive results on the motives behind individual referendum support (e.g., Dalton et al., 2001; Donovan & Karp, 2006). The present study not only sets out to answer the question of *who* supports referendums but also assesses the role of the campaign in *changing* support. We do this within the context of the Dutch 2005 EU Constitution referendum in which a majority of 62% of citizens voted against the proposal. The question, however, remains who embraced the referendum opportunity the most and how the campaign affected individual approval. Previous research has come up with two rival hypotheses in an attempt to explain public support for referendums. First, the *cognitive mobilization* hypothesis claims that people with greater cognitive resources, such as education or knowledge, are more likely to make use of the referendum opportunity since they arrive at more informed decisions and are more motivated to participate in the political process. This explanation is based on the observation that citizens are increasingly less willing to leave political decision-making solely up to political authorities and demand a more active role themselves (e.g., Dalton, 1984; Inglehart, 1990). In this perspective, the increasing demand for forms of direct democratic participation is linked to an increase in political skills among citizens. Thus, those citizens who are more interested in politics and more willing to participate are also seen as more likely to support referendums since they represent an additional opportunity for political expression.

On the contrary, the *political disaffection* hypothesis claims the exact opposite. In this perspective, referendums are expected to be embraced especially by those citizens who feel disconnected to traditional party politics and who are at the margins of the political process. For them a referendum offers an alternative way of political expression which can have a concrete and immediate impact on political processes. Some studies indeed suggest that the increasing demand for the use of direct democracy stems predominantly from citizens who hold a more critical or sometimes even cynical attitude towards politics while at the same time they remain committed to democratic principles (e.g., Inglehart, 1999; Norris, 1999). In this perspective, the driving force behind support for direct democratic means is dissatisfaction or disillusion with governments and the political process as a whole. Dalton et al. (2001), for example, argue that popular support for direct democracy is highest among those who are at the periphery of politics and who are less interested and less informed than other citizens. Thus, support for direct democracy is not primarily linked to a desire for more political participation or responsibility but rather to the dissatisfaction with traditional political representation (e.g., Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001).

Popular support for direct democracy is generally high (e.g., Bowler & Donovan, 1998; Dalton et al., 2001; Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001), however, previous research has yielded inconclusive results as to *who* is most supportive. Some studies support the political disaffection hypothesis (Dalton et al., 2001; Gilljam et al., 1998) and others support the cognitive mobilization hypothesis (Donovan & Karp, 2006) while some found no support for either explanation (Craig et al., 2001). Based on the mixed findings of previous research we test both the cognitive mobilization hypothesis as well as the political disaffection hypothesis as competing explanations for public support for direct democracy in the present study:

(H1): *Higher levels of cognitive mobilization contribute to higher levels of support for public referendums.* [cognitive mobilization hypothesis]

(H2): *Higher levels of political disaffection contribute to higher levels of support for public referendums.* [political disaffection hypothesis]

The role of the referendum campaign

No study so far has explained the factors that account for *change* in individual support for referendums and which role referendum campaigns can play in affecting approval of such direct democratic means. However, opinions are shaped and opposing views are publicly discussed during campaigns. Referendum campaigns have the potential to increase levels of political interest and knowledge (Mendelsohn & Cutler, 2000). Moreover, higher levels of media attention devoted to a referendum issue can foster public deliberation and contribute to feelings of higher political competence among citizens (Bowler & Donovan, 2002). A national referendum campaign is a key event and not only gives momentum to the issue at stake, but also to the referendum instrument as such. Within this context, the news media play a pivotal role in providing cues for the public on how to think of referendums. The media are of special importance for voters, being the main source of new information (Bennett & Entman, 2001; Dalton, 2002; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004a). In fact, EU citizens have repeatedly reported TV news and newspapers to be their most important source of information (e.g., Eurobarometer 60, 61), and also their most important information source during referendum campaigns (e.g., Janssen et al., 1998). Thus, the information environment that is provided by the news media is of key importance for the formation of opinions during a campaign.

We know from previous studies that news coverage during a campaign can influence attitudes towards the issue at stake (e.g., Druckman & Parkin, 2005). In an EU context, studies have shown how the framing of news coverage can affect voting behaviour in referendums (de Vreese & Semetko, 2004b) or citizens' support for further enlargement (e.g., Maier & Rittberger, 2008; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Schuck and de Vreese (2006), for example, demonstrated how news coverage portraying EU enlargement as a "risk" not only led to lower

levels of individual-level support for further enlargement but also to lower personal benefit expectations.

However, there is no previous research dealing with the question of how news coverage could potentially affect citizens' attitudes towards referendums as a means of direct democracy. News coverage of a referendum campaign could, on the one hand, contribute to making people more excited about the use of referendums, i.e. as a means to achieve a desired outcome or, exactly opposite, as a means to prevent an undesired outcome. On the other hand, news coverage could also contribute to making people less excited about the use of referendums, for example because an outcome is promoted which is opposite to one's own preference and people feel cynical rather than engaged by such coverage.

In general, we assume that people's evaluations of and their affective responses to news coverage of a referendum campaign can have the potential to affect individual levels of support for referendums. However, in absence of prior research on this topic we first aim to investigate the extent to which exposure to campaign news coverage matters for *changing* individual level support for referendums. Based on this analysis, we then take our investigation one step further, in the second part of this article, and explore the underlying mechanisms that can explain *how* the news media can affect referendum support. Since there is no previous research on media-driven campaign effects on support for referendums, we, at this point, formulate a research question rather than a formal hypothesis:

(RQ1): *How does exposure to news during a campaign affect public support for referendums?*

Method

In the present study, we employ a two-wave panel survey to investigate what factors determine public support for referendums and how the campaign affected *change* in referendum support on the individual level.

Two-Wave Panel Survey

Procedure. Our data stem from a two-wave panel survey conducted by GfK Benelux on behalf of the University of Twente, The Netherlands (for details see Aarts & van der Kolk, 2005). The survey consists of a pre- and post-referendum panel component.² The net response was 1,561 (pre-referendum, response rate 66%) and 1,284 (post-referendum, response rate 81%). The sample frame was formed by an existing large household panel. The interviews were conducted by means of computer-assisted web-based interviewing (2/3) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (1/3).

Sample characteristics. The sample consists of 47.4% males, the average age is 48.3 years ($SD=15.98$). Most respondents are household heads (59.8%), and the median net income is 1300-1500 Euro per month (14%). Compared to census data the sample is representative of the Dutch electorate.³

Measures

The specific wording of all items and the descriptives for the independent variables listed below can be found in Appendix A. To test both the cognitive mobilization hypothesis as well as the political disaffection hypothesis we specify OLS regression models in order to explain general approval of referendums. Furthermore, we specify one OLS regression model explaining *change* in general approval of referendums. In this last model we include media and campaign exposure measures as our key independent variables as well as several control measures in order to predict *change* in referendum approval over the course of the campaign.

Dependent variable

Approval of referendums. Respondents indicated their general approval of public referendums on a five-point Likert scale reaching from 1-strong disapproval of public referendums to 5-strong approval of public referendums both in wave 1 ($M=3.91$, $SD=1.19$) as well as in wave 2 ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.14$).⁴

Independent variables

Cognitive mobilization model. For the cognitive mobilization hypothesis, we assume that greater cognitive resources make it more likely that people support direct democratic means since they are more able to arrive at an informed decision and thus embrace the opportunity of getting more politically involved. In this model we control for socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and education. The assumption is that younger voters and those with higher education are more supportive of referendums. Findings on gender have been inconclusive in past research. Age is measured in years, gender was coded as a male dummy variable and education was measured in seven categories of obtainable Dutch education degrees (from low to high). Furthermore, in order to mirror individual motivation, we asked if respondents had participated in the last national election and included a measure combining both general political interest as well as specific interest in EU affairs.⁵ According to the cognitive mobilization hypothesis those who participated in the last general election and those with higher political interest should be more supportive of referendums.

Political disaffection model. The political disaffection hypothesis claims that those who are cynical about politics, disengaged and at the margins of the political process are more supportive of referendums as an alternative way of getting involved and having a say. Thus, in order to see if voters at the “periphery of politics” (Dalton et al., 2001) are more engaged by referendums we include two dummy variables representing right political and left political leaning as opposed to centrist views (see also Donovan & Karp, 2006). In addition, we also include a variable indicating if respondents have been voting for a losing party in the last general election and thus have to be considered as being in opposition to the incumbent government.⁶

Another factor indicating detachment from the political process was if someone had not voted in the last general election.⁷ Also, those feeling less politically efficacious and those less satisfied with democracy are expected to be more in support of the referendum opportunity, according to the political disaffection hypothesis. Political efficacy was measured as an index consisting of four items and we include measures both for satisfaction with domestic democracy as well as for satisfaction with EU democracy.⁸ Finally, we control for age and gender as measured in the first model.⁹

Campaign model. To look at *change* in approval we include the time 1 measure for referendum approval into the model. We also control for vote choice ('yes' or 'no') as well as a list of control variables.¹⁰ Furthermore, we include two measures for campaign evaluation, asking respondents as how 'informative' and how 'sincere' they perceived the campaign.¹¹ In addition, respondents were asked to indicate their frequency of interpersonal communication about the referendum and how often they visited websites on political subjects during the campaign. The key independent variable in the campaign model, however, is media use. For television news we distinguish between exposure to the main public TV news show *NOS Journaal*, the main private program *RTL Nieuws*, and the main current affairs program *NOVA/Den Haag vandaag*. For newspaper coverage we built two additive index scales, one for tabloid outlets (*Telegraaf*, *Algemeen Dagblad*, *Metro*) and one for broadsheet outlets (*NRC Handelsblad*, *Volkscrant*, *Trouw*) (see Appendix A). Previous research has shown that news exposure patterns vary along a dimension contrasting public and commercial television as well as broadsheet and tabloid newspapers (Aarts & Semetko, 2003) and has attributed different kinds of effects to them (Newton, 1999). These studies suggest that rather than the form (e.g., television vs. newspapers), the content of news (e.g., broadsheet vs. tabloid) matters with regard to effects on political involvement. Indeed, whereas broadsheet news have shown to be more informative and contribute to higher levels of political knowledge (e.g., Aarts & Semetko, 2003; Newton, 1999), 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 as well as to affect readers' interpretations and the meaning derived from a story (e.g., Grabe et al., 2000).

Results

Cognitive mobilization hypothesis

Model 1 in Table 1.1. yields no support for the cognitive mobilization hypothesis. On the contrary, most of the signs point into the opposite direction of what would have been expected. Moreover, lower levels of education are related to higher levels of referendum support. These findings yield indirect support for the political disaffection hypothesis.

Political disaffection hypothesis

Model 2 in Table 1.1. indeed supports the main assumptions of the political disaffection hypothesis. Almost all signs are in the expected directions and the explained variance for Model 2 is higher than for Model 1. Lower levels of political efficacy and dissatisfaction with domestic democracy are related to higher levels of referendum support. Model 3 in Table 1.1. shows the combined model, testing both hypotheses simultaneously.

Table 1.1.: OLS regression testing cognitive mobilization hypothesis and political disaffection hypothesis and explaining general approval of public referendums

	<i>Model 1</i> <i>Cognitive Mobilization</i> <i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Model 2</i> <i>Political Disaffection</i> <i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Model 3</i> <i>Combined model</i>
COGNITIVE MOBILIZATION			
GENDER (MALE)	.025 (.067)	--	-.004 (.078)
AGE	-.005* (.002)	--	-.005 (.003)
EDUCATION	-.109*** (.022)	--	-.068** (.026)
POLITICAL INTEREST	.061 (.065)	--	.031 (.078)
VOTED IN LAST ELECTION	-.139 (.125)	--	-.021 (.164)
POLITICAL DISAFFECTION			
GENDER (MALE)	--	-.024 (.078)	--
AGE	--	-.003 (.002)	--
NOT VOTED IN LAST ELECTION	--	.025 (.164)	--
POLITICAL ORIENTATION (LEFT)	--	.087 (.107)	.114 (.110)
POLITICAL ORIENTATION (RIGHT)	--	.021 (.095)	.017 (.095)
VOTED FOR LOSING PARTY	--	.147 (.086)	.125 (.087)
POLITICAL EFFICACY	--	-.854*** (.125)	-.805*** (.127)
SATISFACTION WITH DOMESTIC DEMOCRACY	--	-.146* (.067)	-.140* (.067)
SATISFACTION WITH EU DEMOCRACY	--	.069 (.068)	.059 (.068)
Adjusted R-Square	.02	.08	.08
R-Square change (incl. political disaffection variables)	--	--	***
N	1209	862	862

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).¹³

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed)

Adding the variables of the second model to those of the first model significantly increases the overall explained variance. Thus, the present study yields more support for the political disaffection hypothesis (H2) than for the cognitive mobilization hypothesis (H1).¹²

Campaign model

Looking at how referendum support changed between our two panel waves, we find that overall public support for referendums slightly increased over the course of the campaign. We see an average increase in support between the two panel waves ($M=+0.13$, $SD=1.19$).¹⁴ Although the net change seems negligible at first sight, there was considerable change in support ratings for referendums on the individual level. Almost half of the respondents changed in their degree of support, 26.5% got more supportive and 21.9% got more skeptical of public referendums over the course of the campaign.¹⁵

Table 1.2.: OLS regression explaining *change* in general approval of public referendums between before and after the campaign

	<i>General approval of public referendums (OLS regression)</i>
TIME 1 CONTROL	
APPROVAL AT TIME 1	.395*** (.037)
VOTE CHOICE	
VOTE CHOICE (NO)	.366*** (.099)
CAMPAIGN VARIABLES	
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION	.063 (.062)
CAMPAIGN EVALUATION 1 ('SINCERE')	.022 (.045)
CAMPAIGN EVALUATION 2 ('INFORMATIVE')	.050 (.047)
NEWS VARIABLES	
TABLOID NEWSPAPERS	.457* (.222)
PRIVATE TV NEWS (RTL NIEUWS)	.064 (.038)
BROADSHEET NEWSPAPERS	.507 (.319)
PUBLIC TV NEWS (NOS JOURNAAL)	-.042 (.061)
TV CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMS	-.021 (.047)
INTERNET USE	-.109* (.047)
Adjusted R-Square	.31
R-Square change (incl. news variables)	*
N	538

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).
* $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed)

Table 1.2. above shows that the campaign mattered for changes in referendum support. Adding the media variables to the model significantly increases the explanatory power of the overall model.¹⁶ More specifically, we find that higher levels of exposure to campaign news in *tabloid* newspapers are related to increases in support for referendums. Furthermore, higher frequency of internet use is related to a decline in support.

In a next step, we address the question *how* news affect support for referendums and investigate which underlying mechanisms can account for these effects.

STUDY 2

Explicating the underlying mechanisms of news effects on referendum support

In the first part of this article we have shown that higher levels of exposure to *tabloid* news during the EU Constitution referendum campaign increased referendum support. In the second part, we now investigate the underlying mechanisms behind these effects and explore *how* tabloid news can affect referendum support. We do this within the context of the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon by the EU heads of government in December 2007.¹⁷

A lot of scholarly debate has focused on the implications of increasing ‘tabloidization’ of news in recent years (see e.g., Brants, 1998; Blumler, 1999). This process implies an upgrading of scandal and infotainment at the expense of hard news and a spill-over of this trend from the popular to the quality press (Franklin, 1997; Langer, 1997). In an increasingly competitive market and under mounting commercial pressure news media have to attract large audiences. As a consequence of this process, tabloid newspapers are characterized by paying extra attention on the ‘saleability’ of information (Esser, 1999).

This market orientation is believed to result in the adaptation of tabloid news values such as entertainment, sensation, negativity, or human interest stories (Franklin, 1997; Harcup & O’Neill, 2000) in order to generate more involvement and attract more interest on the audience side. At the same time there is less space devoted to information (Rooney, 2000) such as more serious international or political news coverage (Connell, 1998; McLachlan & Golding, 2000; Uribe & Gunter, 2004; Winston, 2002). However, aside from the topical focus in tabloid news coverage there are also certain *formal features* which are characteristic for tabloid news. McLachlan and Golding (2000) identify the use of more pictures, bigger headlines and less text as typical for tabloid news coverage (see also Djupsund & Carlson, 1998). Furthermore, tabloid and broadsheet reporting differ in the choice of lexical items used (Jucker, 1992). The vocabulary of tabloid news consists of comparatively shorter expressions (Freeborn, 1996), more informal expressions (Jucker, 1992) and more use of emotional language such as expressions of extreme (positive or negative) evaluation, for example rhetorical questions, appeals or superlatives in headlines (Schönbach, 2000). Furthermore, not only is the coverage as such more

personalized (Sparks, 2000; Uribe & Gunter, 2004), presenting public figures as private persons, but there are also more attempts to approach the reader him/herself more personally as a way of getting him/her more involved. Also, with regard to layout and design tabloid news coverage shows more attempts to structure content in order to make it more easily accessible for readers, for example by emphasizing certain text parts using bold type or bigger fonts (Schönbach, 2000).

Most importantly, differences in style of reporting between tabloid and broadsheet news can result in different perceptions among readers (Jucker, 1992). Formal features of news coverage have been shown to affect readers' interpretations and the meaning derived from a story (Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2003). Tabloid style reporting increases arousal and attention while, at the same time, it is seen as less informative than broadsheet style reporting (Grabe et al., 2000). Feelings of arousal and increased attention can have important consequences for information processing. For example, non-arousing content (such as political news) packaged in tabloid style can lead to more active information-processing (see Grabe et al., 2000). In this way, tabloid style reporting is capable of increasing readers' attention and interest in the topic and enhancing the effect of political news on audience evaluations.

Mediation dynamics

Exposure to tabloid style news can lead to an exaggerated perception of both the importance of a topic as well as of the seriousness of a situation (Grabe et al., 2003). In the current study, we assume that tabloid style reporting of a non-arousing news story (such as the EU Treaty of Lisbon) will lead to greater attention and thus more thorough information processing than broadsheet style reporting. This means that respondents who are exposed to a tabloid style news story about the Treaty of Lisbon should arrive at the perception of greater importance of the topic and greater seriousness of the situation. We look specifically at *how* opponents of a policy proposal are affected in their approval of public referendums by exposure to tabloid style news, supporters showed to be unaffected in their approval of referendums by exposure to tabloid news (reported below).

A respondent who *opposes* the Treaty and is exposed to a tabloid style news story about the topic should attach greater importance to his/her negative evaluation of the situation. In turn, it can be expected that this results in greater support for holding a public referendum on the issue as a possible way to prevent the Treaty from coming into force. This dynamic can be expected to further depend on the valence of the news story. We expect, on the one hand, that *negative tabloid* news can make negative evaluations more salient among opponents than negative broadsheet news. On the other hand, we assume that opponents of a referendum proposal show stronger negative affective responses or negative emotions in opposition to *positive tabloid* news than to positive broadsheet news. In both cases, we expect these negative attitudes or emotions to increase referendum support among opponents as a means to prevent an undesired outcome. That said, in the present study, our approach has to remain largely explorative considering the lack of

previous research on the mediated effect of different news formats on subsequent attitudes or behavioural intentions.

Whereas previous research has shown how, for example, differently valenced news frames can affect the direction of subsequent evaluations and issue considerations (e.g., Maier & Rittberger, 2008; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003), research on the role of message-induced emotions in affecting subsequent attitudes or behavioural outcomes is scarce (see e.g., Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Nabi, 1999; Neuman et al., 2007). However, previous research has shown how peoples' existing attitudes and pre-dispositions can make them resistant towards the persuasive appeal of messages (see e.g., Bizer & Petty, 2005; Meffert et al., 2006). At the same time, we can expect that counter-attitudinal information can have opposite effects and foster certain negative affective responses or emotions in return. Such message-induced negative emotions can have an impact on subsequent attitudes or adaptive behaviour (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). 'Anger' is a key emotion with high mobilizing potential, which is elicited in response to perceived obstacles or offenses against oneself which are interfering with one's own goals or self-interest (see e.g., Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 1999). Previous research suggests that message-induced anger leads to more attention and more careful information processing (Nabi, 1999). Furthermore, anger is negatively related to attitude change (Dillard et al., 1996) and has the potential to mobilize people in an attempt to defend oneself and in order to correct the situation or event which is blamed for goal obstruction (Izard, 1977, 1993).

Bringing the above observations together, our first expectation is that opponents of a referendum proposal reading a *negative tabloid* article should perceive the potential consequences of the Treaty more negatively and support the idea of holding a referendum on the issue more strongly than opponents reading a negative broadsheet article. To test this claim, we rely on the approach by Tao and Bucy (2007), who recently proposed a mediation model to study the impact of media stimuli via a mediator (defined in terms of psychological states such as perceptions, evaluations or emotions elicited by media stimuli) on a dependent variable. In the current study we thus test 'negative future expectations' as a *mediator* for the effect of negative tabloid style news on referendum support among opponents of the Treaty:

(H3): Opponents exposed to a negative tabloid article about a policy proposal become more negative about the assumed future consequences of the proposal than opponents exposed to a negative broadsheet article. This makes them more supportive of holding a public referendum on the issue at stake.

Similarly, our complementary expectation is that opponents reading a *positive tabloid* article about a policy proposal should show stronger negative affective responses against it and support the idea of holding a public referendum on the issue more strongly compared to opponents reading a positive broadsheet article. In the current study we thus test 'anger' as a

mediator for the effect of positive tabloid style news on referendum support among opponents of the Treaty:

(H4): *Opponents exposed to a positive tabloid article about a policy proposal become more angry about the proposal than opponents exposed to a positive broadsheet article. This makes them more supportive of holding a public referendum on the issue at stake.*

Method

To test the effect of tabloid vs. broadsheet style news reporting on support for referendums we conducted an experiment. We investigate if the style of reporting (tabloid format vs. broadsheet format) affects referendum support in two different valence conditions, negative and positive. In a second step, we test potentially mediating factors for the effect of tabloid news on referendum support.

Experiment.

Design. To test the possible effects of positive and negative tabloid vs. broadsheet style reporting on support for referendums, we used a 2x2, between-subjects experimental design with random assignment to one of four conditions. Within this design, the first condition exposed respondents to a broadsheet style news story framed in positive terms towards the Treaty of Lisbon and the second condition exposed respondents to a broadsheet style news story framed in negative terms. The third condition is a positive tabloid style news story towards the Treaty and the final condition is a negative tabloid style news story.

Procedure. The experiment was conducted in January 2008 by The Dutch Institute for Public Opinion Research and Market Research TNS NIPO (Amsterdam/The Netherlands). Participants first completed a pre-test questionnaire asking for demographic details and a number of political predispositions. Next, participants were randomly exposed to a news article establishing the four alternative conditions. Finally, participants completed a post-test questionnaire which asked for their support for holding a public referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, their assessment of the perceived future consequences of the Treaty, and their affective response to the stimulus material.

Sample. A representative sample was drawn from the TNS NIPObase, a database representative of the Dutch population consisting of 200,000 respondents. Respondents filled in the questionnaire on their own computer (CASI). In total, 580 individuals participated in the experiment (52.9% percent females, age = 18-81 [$M = 46.9$, $SD = 16.47$]), 154 in the positive broadsheet condition, 137 in the negative broadsheet condition, 140 in the positive tabloid condition and 149 in the negative tabloid condition. The response rate was 72.7%.

Stimulus material. The experimental stimulus material consisted of a news article written either in tabloid or broadsheet style and framed either in positive or negative terms towards the

Treaty of Lisbon. The news articles were produced for the study rather than selected.¹⁸ This gives full control over the experimental manipulation, and it ensures that no respondent has been exposed to the article in advance. In both versions, tabloid and broadsheet, the storyline was identical, dealing with a general discussion of the assumed consequences of the EU Treaty of Lisbon, framed in either positive or negative terms. However, the tabloid articles were shorter than their broadsheet versions; the average number of words per sentence was shorter as well. More catchphrases, common everyday expressions as well as value-loaden expressions were used. More exclamation and question marks appeared in the tabloid versions, and two instead of one paragraph were printed in bold. Furthermore, the writing style was more personal and the headline was bigger and phrased in more emotional terms (see Appendix B for stimulus material).

Manipulation check. A manipulation check revealed successful manipulation. Respondents were asked if the article they just read had either been more negative or more positive towards the EU Treaty of Lisbon (1-very negative, 7-very positive). Respondents in the positive broadsheet version ($M=4.75$, $SD=1.49$) perceived the valence of the article as significantly more positive than respondents in the negative broadsheet condition ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.17$) ($t(289)=10.88$, $p<.001$). Also, respondents in the positive tabloid condition ($M=4.80$, $SD=1.68$) perceived the article as significantly more positive than respondents in the negative tabloid condition ($M=2.85$, $SD=1.27$) ($t(287)=11.14$, $p<.001$).

Measures

Dependent variable: Referendum support. Respondents were asked on a 7-point scale to what extent they would support the idea to hold a public referendum on the EU Treaty of Lisbon (1-strongly against, 7-strongly in support) ($M=4.32$, $SD=1.84$).

Moderating variable: EU support. In our analysis, we distinguish between respondents who are in support of the EU (supporters) and those who are skeptical towards the EU (opponents). The degree to which each respondent supports or opposes the EU was assessed as a pre-intervention measure with four questions on five-point Likert scales covering the following dimensions: (1) general EU support, (2) support for the Euro, (3) support for EU enlargement, and (4) support for Dutch EU membership.¹⁹ All four items together build a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = .71) on which higher scores represent higher levels of EU support ($M= 3.02$, $SD= .72$). For our analysis we built two groups above and below the mean and classify individuals as either being opponents ($n=225$) or supporters ($n=355$).

Mediation analysis. In order to explain the underlying mechanism behind the effect of tabloid vs. broadsheet style news reporting on referendum support we distinguish between different potential mediators within the positive and negative valence conditions. Since there was no effect of tabloid vs. broadsheet style news on referendum support among supporters of the proposal (reported below), we focus on possible mediation dynamics within the group of opponents of the proposal only. Furthermore, and in line with the survey findings from the first

part of our study, we specifically focus on mechanisms that can account for increases in referendum support rather than decreases.

Within the negative valence condition we test ‘negative future expectations’ regarding the assumed consequences of the Treaty as a possible mediator for the effect of negative tabloid news on referendum support. Negative future expectations are measured with three items as a post-intervention measure on five-point Likert scales (1-very low, 5-very high). We distinguish between different levels of psychological distance from the respondent (Perloff, 1993) and asked respondents, how likely they thought it was that the Treaty of Lisbon would have negative consequences with regard to (1-*personal level*) one’s own personal future ($M= 3.11, SD= .97$), (2-*group level*) the future of one’s friends and family ($M= 3.09, SD= .90$), and (3-*societal level*) the future of the country ($M= 3.20, SD= 1.00$). All three items together built a reliable scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha= .88$) on which higher scores stand for more negative future expectations ($M= 3.13, SD= .86$).

Within the positive valence condition we test ‘anger’ as a possible mediator for the effect of positive tabloid news on referendum support. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: “I got angry by reading the article and about the opinions expressed in it” (1-not at all, 7-very much) ($M=3.53, SD=1.57$).

Results

The experimental manipulation (tabloid vs. broadsheet) affected referendum support among opponents of the proposal. Taking both (positive and negative) tabloid and both broadsheet conditions together we find that opponents in the two tabloid conditions expressed significantly higher support for referendums ($M= 5.00, SD= 1.96$) than opponents in the two broadsheet conditions ($M= 4.44, SD= 1.95$) ($F(1,223)= 4.70, p < .05$). EU supporters showed to be generally less in favour of referendums than opponents and did not differ in support between the broadsheet ($M= 4.09, SD= 1.75$) and the tabloid ($M= 4.03, SD= 1.67$) conditions ($F(1,353)=.12, p > .05$).²⁰

In line with our hypotheses, we take a closer look at opponents of the proposal within the two different valence conditions (see Table 1.3.). Opponents in the negative tabloid condition are significantly more supportive ($M= 5.22, SD= 1.81$) of referendums than opponents in the negative broadsheet condition ($M= 4.43, SD= 1.93$) ($b=.79, SE=.36$) ($F(1,105)= 4.76, p < .05$).²¹

In the positive tabloid condition, opponents are also more supportive towards referendums ($M= 4.77, SD= 2.01$) than opponents in the positive broadsheet condition ($M= 4.44, SD= 1.98$), however, the difference is not significant ($b=n.s.$) ($F(1,116)= .77, p > .05$).²²

Table 1.3.: Referendum support of opponents and supporters in tabloid and broadsheet conditions (positive and negative conditions)

	Broadsheet condition <i>positive</i> (n=154)	Tabloid condition <i>positive</i> (n=140)	Broadsheet condition <i>negative</i> (n=137)	Tabloid condition <i>negative</i> (n=149)
Opponents (n=225)	4.44 (1.98) n=61	4.77 _d (2.01) n=57	4.43 _a (1.93) n=47	5.22 _b (1.81) n=60
Supporters (n=355)	3.95 (1.73) n=93	3.96 _e (1.80) n=83	4.24 (1.76) n=90	4.09 _c (1.54) n=89

Note: Different subscripts *a,b* indicate significant between-condition difference with $p < .05$. Different subscripts *d,e* indicate significant within-condition difference with $p < .05$. Different subscripts *b,c* indicate significant within-condition difference with $p < .001$ (all two-tailed).

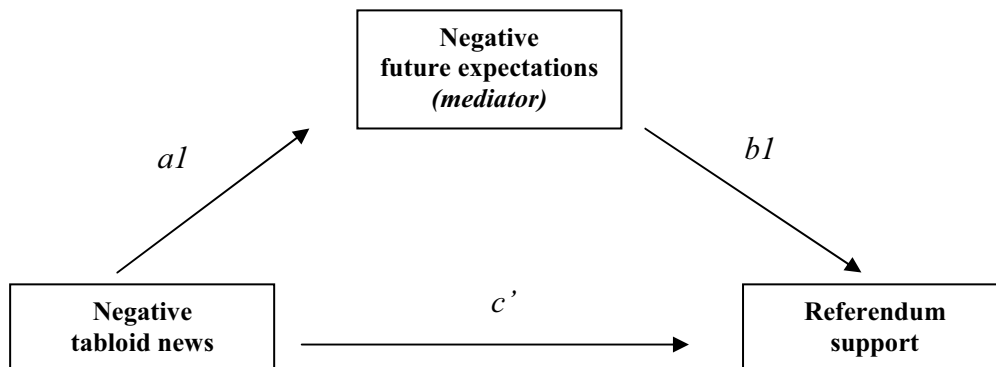
In a next step, we take a closer look at opponents within each valence condition in particular and formally assess two possible *mediation* mechanisms behind the impact of negative and positive tabloid news on referendum support.²³ More specifically, we have to distinguish between *mediated* effects and specific *indirect* effects in our analysis. Only when there is a significant direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (i.e. for negative tabloid news on referendum support), one can meaningfully speak of a *mediated* effect with regard to the potential influence of another factor. Otherwise, when the direct effect is not significant (i.e. for positive tabloid news on referendum support), but the independent variable still exerts a significant influence on the dependent variable via another factor, it is more appropriate to speak of an *indirect* effect (see Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

In our subsequent analysis, we first follow the causal steps approach introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986) and then present findings based on the bootstrapping method for mediation models as introduced by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008a, 2008b). Preacher and Hayes (2004) recommend the use of *bootstrapping* techniques, a nonparametric re-sampling procedure, when formally assessing mediation effects as the most powerful and reasonable method to obtain confidence limits for specific indirect effects (see also Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Williams & MacKinnon, 2008).²⁴ Previous research has pointed to the shortcomings of the causal-steps approach as lacking in power and suffering from high Type 1 error rates (e.g., MacKinnon et al.,

2002, 2004) and has called for more formal tests of the significance of specific indirect effects in mediation analyses (for a review, see Preacher & Hayes, 2004), which is why we provide such an additional test for our hypotheses.²⁵

Next, we first look at the negative valence condition specifically and test if the effect of negative tabloid news (vs. negative broadsheet news) on referendum support among opponents is mediated by more negative expectations regarding the assumed future consequences of the Treaty. The theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.1. below.

Figure 1.1.: Mediated effect of negative tabloid news (as opposed to negative broadsheet news) on referendum support among opponents



Note: c' is the direct effect of the independent variable (negative tabloid news) on the dependent variable (referendum support) or the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable when the mediator is controlled for. The specific indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable via the mediator is quantified as $a1 b1$. Since there only is one mediator variable, the specific indirect effect equals the total indirect effect (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008a).

Our findings show that opponents in the negative tabloid condition are significantly more negative about the assumed future consequences of the Treaty ($M= 3.79$, $SD= .60$) than opponents in the negative broadsheet condition ($M= 3.44$, $SD= .76$) ($b=.36$, $SE=.13$) ($F(1,105)= 7.35$, $p< .01$).²⁶ In a next step, we see that negative future expectations regarding the assumed consequences of the Treaty significantly increase referendum support among opponents, controlling for main effects ($b=.86$, $SE=.26$) ($F(2,104)= 8.20$, $p< .01$). At the same time, the direct effect of negative tabloid news is not significant anymore when the mediator is entered into the model. This gives a first indication of a mediated dynamic in which exposure to negative tabloid news (as opposed to negative broadsheet news) makes opponents of the proposal more critical towards the assumed future consequences of the Treaty which then results in a stronger urge to hold a public referendum on the issue at stake.

To validate these findings, we apply the bootstrapping method developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004) and formally assess if the effect of negative tabloid news on referendum support among opponents of a referendum is mediated by more negative assumptions regarding the future consequences of the Treaty. On the basis of 5,000 bootstrap samples, a 95% bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval (95% bca CI) was computed for the point estimate

of the specific indirect effect of the mediator (see Table 1.4.). If this interval does *not* include zero, the effect significantly differs from zero.

Table 1.4.: Mediation model with ‘negative future expectations’ as a mediator for the effect of negative tabloid news (as opposed to negative broadsheet news) on referendum support among opponents

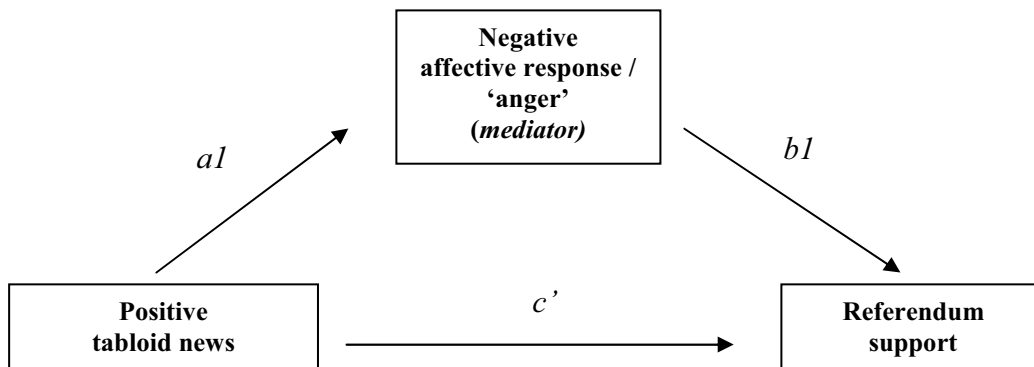
<i>Total effect of negative tabloid condition (IV) on referendum support (DV)</i>				
	Coeff	SE	t	P
condition	.79	.36	2.18	<.05
<i>Direct effect of negative tabloid condition (IV) on referendum support (DV)</i>				
	Coeff	SE	t	P
condition	.49	.36	1.35	>.05
BOOTSTRAP RESULTS FOR INDIRECT EFFECT				
<i>Indirect effect of IV on DV through proposed mediator</i>				
	Data	Boot	Bias	SE
negative expectations	.31	.30	-.01	.14
<i>Bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval for specific indirect effect</i>				
	Lower	Upper		
negative expectations	.0831	.6395		

Note: Level of confidence for confidence intervals = 95; Number of bootstrap re-samples: 5000; sample size: n = 107.

The bootstrap results for the *specific indirect effect*, and thus the indirect effect of negative tabloid news on referendum support via the mediator, is significant ($b=.30$, $SE=.14$) (95% bca CI: .0831; .6395).²⁷ At the same time, the *direct effect* of negative tabloid news on referendum support is not significant anymore after entering the mediator variable into the model ($b=.49$, $SE=.36$; $p>.05$). These results support our third hypothesis (H3), indicating that the effect of negative tabloid news on referendum support is *mediated* by negative future expectations regarding the consequences of the Treaty (for full model see Appendix C).²⁸

Next, we turn to opponents in the positive valence condition and test if there is an indirect effect of positive tabloid news on referendum support via an affective negative response (‘anger’) to the counter-attitudinal message content. The theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.2. below.

Figure 1.2.: Indirect effect of positive tabloid news (as opposed to positive broadsheet news) on referendum support among opponents



Note: c' is the direct effect of the independent variable (positive tabloid news) on the dependent variable (referendum support) or the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable when the mediator is controlled for. The specific indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable via the mediator is quantified as $a1 b1$. Since there only is one mediator variable, the specific indirect effect equals the total indirect effect (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008a).

Our findings show that opponents in the positive tabloid condition are significantly more angry towards the information they have been exposed to ($M= 4.67$, $SD= 1.56$) than opponents in the positive broadsheet condition ($M= 3.75$, $SD= .1.58$) ($b=.91$, $SE=.29$) ($F(1,116)= 9.95$, $p< .01$).²⁹ In a next step, we see that angry feelings towards a policy proposal increase support for holding a public referendum on the issue at stake among opponents, controlling for main effects ($b=.28$, $SE=.12$) ($F(2,115)= 3.23$, $p< .05$). Thus, exposure to positive tabloid news (as opposed to positive broadsheet news) causes a negative affective response among opponents of the proposal which then results in increased support for holding a public referendum on the issue at stake.

The bootstrap results for the *specific indirect effect*, and thus the indirect effect of positive tabloid news on referendum support via ‘anger’ yields a significant effect ($b=.25$, $SE=.13$) (95% bca CI: .0714; .5885), lending support to our final hypothesis (H4) (see Table 1.5. below).³⁰ However, since the *total* effect of positive tabloid news on referendum support overall is not significant ($b=.33$, $SE=.38$; $p>.05$), we cannot speak of a *mediated* effect but rather of a significant *indirect effect* of positive tabloid news on referendum support via ‘anger’ as a negative affective response (for full model see Appendix D).³¹ As Preacher and Hayes (2004) point out, substantial conclusions regarding the existence of causal mechanisms can be drawn from significant indirect effects also in the absence of a significant total effect.

Table 1.5.: Mediation model with ‘anger’ as a mediator for the effect of positive tabloid news (as opposed to positive broadsheet news) on referendum support among EU sceptics

<i>Total effect of positive tabloid condition (IV) on referendum support (DV)</i>				
	Coeff	SE	t	P
Condition	.33	.38	.88	>.05
<i>Direct effect of positive tabloid condition (IV) on referendum support (DV)</i>				
	Coeff	SE	t	P
Condition	.07	.38	.19	>.05
BOOTSTRAP RESULTS FOR INDIRECT EFFECT				
<i>Indirect effect of IV on DV through proposed mediator</i>				
	Data	Boot	Bias	SE
anger	.26	.25	-.01	.13
<i>Bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval for specific indirect effect</i>				
	Lower	Upper		
anger	.0714	.5885		

Note: Level of confidence for confidence intervals = 95; Number of bootstrap re-samples: 5000; sample size: n = 118.

General discussion

In this article, we first set out to test two rival hypotheses in order to answer the question of *who* is most supportive of referendums as a means of direct democracy. Furthermore, the present study is the first to not treat referendum support as a static concept and to assess the role of the campaign in *changing* referendum support on the individual level. Our findings indicate that the referendum opportunity is especially embraced by those who feel more politically disaffected rather than by those who display higher levels of political involvement. Furthermore, we show that higher levels of exposure to *tabloid* style campaign news increased support for referendums. In a second step, we investigated the underlying dynamics behind these effects and showed how both negative as well as positive tabloid style news about a policy proposal can lead opponents to become more critical and more affectively predisposed against the proposal. In turn, this increases support for holding a public referendum on the issue at stake as a way to prevent an unwanted scenario.

Based on our findings it seems that referendums are welcomed as an alternative way of political expression by skeptical citizens who see direct democratic means as an effective opportunity to veto political decisions which are otherwise just decided upon by the political elites. This is in line with previous research stressing the potential of direct democracy to tackle symptoms of political apathy (Budge, 1996) and engage the otherwise disengaged (Dalton et al.,

2001; Gilljam et al., 1998). The dynamic we show in the present study demonstrates how a referendum triggered by the political elites can backfire and engage especially those who are most critical. These citizens might hold critical views towards the political process but at the same time they stay committed to democratic principles and embrace the opportunity to have a say (Inglehart, 1999; Norris, 1999).

Our findings might apply in particular to a situation in which the referendum is initiated and supported by the political elites, involvement in the topic is high and the issue at stake is controversially discussed. This particular referendum context might function as a sort of condition specification for when the political disaffection model is superior over the cognitive mobilization model. The motives, then, behind support for referendums have to be seen as rather defensive (veto function) and issue-oriented. Outside of the context of government initiated referendums the question remains to what extent disaffected citizens would get involved in citizen initiatives organized to achieve a positive outcome and to change the status quo.

On the other hand, the cognitive mobilization hypothesis might yield more support in a context in which issue involvement and the level of public debate are rather low and the issue is less controversial. Previous studies, in line with our findings, have yielded stronger support for the political disaffection hypothesis in Europe (Dalton et al., 2001) and here especially for the Nordic countries (Gilljam et al., 1998) whereas the cognitive mobilization hypothesis received more support in countries with an established tradition in the use of referendums such as Canada, New Zealand, or Switzerland (Donovan & Karp, 2006). This could mean that in a context in which referendums are not seen as a special occasion and applied more often, those with higher cognitive resources remain more committed to the practice. The political disaffection hypothesis might be more applicable instead in contexts in which referendums are the exception rather than the norm.

One important contribution of the present study is to have shown *how* the news media have the potential to affect referendum support. Our findings are in line with previous research that has shown that the style of reporting can affect readers' interpretations of news (Grabe et al., 2000; Jucker, 1992). Tabloid style news reporting can lead individuals to perceive a situation as more serious (Grabe et al., 2003). In this way, opponents of a referendum proposal can become more negative towards a policy proposal and thus support public referendums as a means to prevent an unwanted outcome. Importantly, we have also shown how opponents of a referendum proposal can resist positive message appeals and become more affectively predisposed against the proposal. We believe that such underlying mediation dynamics and the affective responses to campaign messages in light of existing opinions merit further efforts in future research. Future studies should aim at identifying more of the cognitive and psychological processes that underlie the effects of news coverage on individual referendum support and expand such investigations to different referendum contexts.

We do generally prefer and advocate for weighing in concrete content characteristics into measures of news exposure in survey analyses that aim to assess the impact of news media

coverage on subsequent attitudes or behaviour (see Schuck & de Vreese, 2008; Schuck & de Vreese, 2009). However, due to a lack of prior research and given this was only a first explorative investigation into the role of the news media in affecting support for referendums, we had decided *not* to weigh in actual content features into our survey measure but focus on exposure only. This decision, in this particular context, becomes more compelling if we consider the findings of our experiment: As we have shown, *both* positive as well as negative tabloid news can lead to increasing support for referendums for certain segments of the electorate via *different* routes and based on different underlying processes. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation provide more of a context in which to further interpret the findings of the current study. They show that news coverage during the campaign carried both positive as well as negative evaluations of the referendum proposal but that positive evaluations were predominant. Thus, we can expect that both of the processes we identified in the current study might have been at work simultaneously and to different degrees. Importantly, positive tabloid news can increase referendum support among opponents through negative affective responses ('anger'). This also ties in with the other main finding of the current study, namely that referendums are especially embraced out of defensive motives and as an alternative means of having a say and veto political decisions by those with higher levels of political disaffection.

Finally, referendums play an important role for the involvement of citizens in EU democracy. Since the European Parliament is the only EU institution which is directly and democratically elected, national referendums are of special importance and one of the few opportunities for citizens to directly engage in EU politics themselves. Our findings show that the negative experience of seeing the Dutch 2005 referendum on the European constitutional treaty fail did not substantially decrease support for direct democracy among supporters of the proposal. At the same time it did increase support among opponents. This could mean that direct democracy becomes more popular the more citizens are exposed to it. Although the referendum formally "failed", it can be seen as a success in a more normative way, as an exercise in democracy: It engaged the least politically involved and those who are most skeptical about politics. The use of referendums in the EU may or may not help in the creation of a common European identity (Hug, 2003) but it can help to overcome the democratic deficit of the EU (e.g., Meyer, 1999; Scharpf, 1997; Schmitter, 2000).

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this article was awarded a Top Student Paper Award at the 2008 conference of the International Communication Association (ICA) by the Political Communication Division of the ICA.

² We are grateful to Kees Aarts and Henk van der Kolk for letting us use these data. 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. Since our campaign effects model is meant to explain *change* in referendum support over the course of the campaign we removed the respondents of the last sub-group from our analysis. However, an alternative model was tested (not reported here) including all sub-groups which yielded the same significant results. For the second panel wave all respondents were re-interviewed between June 2nd and June 12th.

³ Compared to CBS census data and with regard to gender, age, and education we report the following slight under- or over-representations. There is a slight under-representation of men in our net panel (47.7% versus 49.5%). Regarding age groups, 15-24 year olds are slightly under-represented (7.2% versus 11.9%), 45-54 year olds are slightly over-represented (20.1% versus 14%) as well as 65+ year olds who are also slightly over-represented (17.4% versus 13.7%).

⁴ When testing the cognitive mobilization hypothesis and the political disaffection hypothesis the time 2 measure is used as dependent variable. In the final campaign model the time 2 measure is the dependent variable and the time 1 measure is included as an independent variable in order to explain individual change in approval over the course of the campaign.

⁵ Of our respondents 91.2% reported to have voted in the last national election which reflects a well known bias in self-reported turnout (Granberg & Holmberg, 1991). However, actual turnout has been high in the last Dutch national election (2002) which preceded the referendum (79.1%).

⁶ 56.7% of our respondents reported voting for a party currently in the opposition.

⁷ 8.8% of our sample reported not having voted in the last general election.

⁸ Correlation analysis shows that both concepts are not entirely uni-dimensional ($r=0.51$) (see also Karp et al., 2003).

⁹ The variance inflation factors (VIF) for the independent variables in our overall model are all below the value of two and thus sufficiently low, indicating the absence of multi-collinearity in our data.

¹⁰ More specifically, we control for age, gender and education as socio-demographic factors as well as for political interest, satisfaction with democracy in the Netherlands and in Europe and political efficacy (all measured as in the previous models). Furthermore, the variance inflation factors (VIF) for the independent variables in our final campaign model are all sufficiently low and below the value of two, thus indicating the absence of multi-collinearity.

¹¹ Correlation analysis shows that both concepts are not entirely uni-dimensional ($r=0.22$) which is why we include both concepts as separate variables into our model.

¹² We also tested both models with the time 1 measure as dependent variable yielding the same general patterns as we report. The only differences are that education has no significant impact in the cognitive mobilization model and in the political disaffection model the effect of satisfaction with domestic democracy is not significant whereas left political ideology is positively related to referendum support.

¹³ The difference in the number of cases between Model 1 and Model 2 and 3 is due to item non-response (and “don’t know” answers) on a number of measures contained in the latter two models.

¹⁴ To assess changes in referendum support we subtract individual referendum support scores at wave 1 from individual referendum support scores at wave 2. Since referendum support was measured on 5-point Likert scales the resulting scale for change in referendum support reaches from -4 (maximum decrease in support) to +4 (maximum increase in support).

¹⁵ 51.6% (n=598) of all respondents remained stable in their general approval of referendums over the course of the campaign, 48.4% (n=561) changed in their support for referendums. Of those who have changed in their support for referendums 31.6% increased one scale-point, 17.8% increased two scale-points, 3% increased three scale-points and 2.3% increased four scale-points. 28.6% decreased one scale-point, 13.5% decreased two scale-points, 2.5% decreased three scale-points and 0.7% decreased four scale-points.

¹⁶ In this model we also controlled for age, gender, education, satisfaction with domestic and EU democracy, political efficacy and political interest. Since we focus on the influence of the campaign and the news media on explaining *change* over the two panel waves we do not report the results for each of these controls in the table. We find that less educated voters and voters who feel less efficacious increased in their support for referendums over the course of the campaign.

¹⁷ The Treaty of Lisbon is meant to amend the existing EU treaties and to substitute the old EU Constitution draft after the French and Dutch No votes in 2005. It was meant to come into force in January 2009 after being ratified by all EU member states. However, after the treaty got rejected in June 2008 in a national referendum in Ireland the ratification process is currently put on hold.

¹⁸ The different versions of our stimulus article mirror a realistic and factual discussion of the assumed consequences of the Treaty of Lisbon framed in either positive or negative terms. Thus, we regard the context of our study as still realistic although no actual referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon took place in the Netherlands. However, the treaty had just been signed by the time we conducted our experiment and it still needed to be approved by all EU member states and several countries considered holding a referendum and Ireland, later, did hold a public referendum on the treaty.

¹⁹ A randomization check revealed successful randomization with no between-group differences with regard to age, gender and education. There also was no between-group difference with regard to our pre-intervention measure of EU support ($F(3,576)=.978, p>.05$). The random selection of subjects means that there are no initial differences between the different groups and that between-group differences which are detected later on as part of the post-test constitute evidence that subjects responded differently to the respective experimental intervention.

²⁰ Whereas opponents and supporters in the broadsheet conditions did not differ significantly from each other in their support for referendums ($t(289)= 1.55, p>.05$), in the tabloid conditions opponents are significantly more supportive of referendums than supporters ($t(287)= 10.86, p<.001$).

²¹ As an alternative test of our expectation we tested a formal interaction model with an interaction term between the experimental condition (negative tabloid news vs. negative broadsheet news) and EU support (being an opponent vs. being a supporter) controlling for main effects which yielded the same significant result ($F(3, 282)= 5.59, p<.01$) and shows that the effect of negative tabloid news is moderated by EU support. The interaction term remains significant when both tabloid versions (positive and negative) and both broadsheet versions (positive and negative) are combined ($F(3, 576)= 8.10, p<.001$).

²² Furthermore, opponents in the positive tabloid condition ($M= 4.77$, $SD= 2.01$) are significantly more supportive of referendums than supporters in the same condition ($M= 3.96$, $SD= 1.80$) ($t(138)= -2.37$, $p<.05$) and opponents in the negative tabloid condition are also more supportive of referendums ($M= 5.22$, $SD= 1.81$) than supporters in the same condition ($M= 4.09$, $SD= 1.54$) ($t(147)= -4.08$, $p<.001$).

²³ Mediation occurs under the condition that (1) there is a significant main effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable when the presumed mediating variable is not controlled for, (2) the independent variable has a significant effect on the mediator variable (path $a1$ in Figure 1.1. and Figure 1.2.), and (3) the mediator variable has a significant effect on the dependent variable (path $b1$ in Figure 1.1. and Figure 1.2.) while at the same time the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable decreases (see e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986).

²⁴ Bootstrapping implies that each indirect effect is estimated multiple times by repeatedly sampling cases with replacement from the data and estimating the model in each resample.

²⁵ The same authors have also warned of the routine use of the most commonly applied formal mediation test, the Sobel test or product-of-coefficients approach (Sobel, 1982), since this test is only suitable for large sample sizes (as in our analysis in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). For smaller samples the assumption of multivariate normality, which the Sobel test is based upon, is usually violated, i.e. the assumption that the sampling distribution of the total and specific indirect effects is normal.

²⁶ Opponents in the positive tabloid condition ($M= 3.69$, $SD= .84$) also feel more negative about the assumed consequences of the Treaty than opponents in the positive broadsheet condition ($M= 3.60$, $SD= .77$), however, the difference is not significant ($F(1,116)= .36$, $p> .05$).

²⁷ This coefficient equals the product of $a1$ $b1$ as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

²⁸ This coefficient indicates the effect of the experimental condition on turnout intention when the mediator variable is controlled for (path c' in Figure 1.2.).

²⁹ Opponents in the negative tabloid condition ($M= 3.12$, $SD= 1.62$) do not feel more angry about the information they have been exposed to than opponents in the negative broadsheet condition ($M= 3.09$, $SD= 1.30$) ($F(1,105)= .01$, $p> .05$).

³⁰ This coefficient equals the product of $a1$ $b1$ as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

³¹ This coefficient indicates the effect of the experimental condition on turnout intention when the mediator variable is not controlled for.

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