Voting behaviour in the 2009 Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty

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#### Abstract:

Explaining turnout and voting behaviour in European referendums has lead to a vigorous academic debate, ranging from the argument that European referendums are nothing more than opinion polls on government popularity to viewing these referendums as fundamentally expressions of the attitudes of citizens towards the European integration project. The Irish referendums on the Lisbon Treaty provide new data with which to further test the various theories. While in 2008 the referendum was lost due to misperceptions of certain elements of the Treaty and inadequate political knowledge among the public (Sinnott and Elkink 2010), this article shows that in the 2009 referendum voted on the basis of their attitudes towards the European project rather than on the depth of their understanding of the issues.

#### Keywords:

Electoral behaviour, European Union, Lisbon Treaty, referendum, Ireland

#### 1. Introduction

Sequential pairs of referendums that that are essentially about the same issue are tantalizingly rare. They are tantalizing because they present a remarkable opportunity for examining the determinants of voter choice in the referendums in question.

Referendums of this sort are most likely to be found as part of the process of European integration. The train of events is as follows. Integration elites propose a further step forward in the European project. The proposal is endorsed and ratified by majority vote in parliament in a majority of the member states. However certain member states organise national referendums in order to assess support for the proposed changes. The changes are turned down in some of these states and pressure is brought to bear on the smaller states to hold a second referendum in order to obtain the desired result. The proposal put forward the second time around usually contains some concessions but these tend to be marginal otherwise they would have to be referred back to the states that had already ratified the original proposals.

The sequel of Irish referendums on the Nice Treaty (2001 and 2002) and on the Lisbon Treaty (2008 and 2009) are excellent examples of this scenario. In this article the determinants of voter choice are studied in the repeat referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland on the  $2^{nd}$  of October 2009.

Irish EU referendums differ substantially from one another. This heterogeneity might be seen as jeopardizing the generalizability of any findings derived from the Irish case. On the other hand, such heterogeneity presents a wide range of theoretical challenges and empirical opportunities relevant to understanding voting behaviour in EU referendums. Examples include the pros and cons of the second-order interpretation of voting in referendums as well as the impact of utilitarian versus affective orientations and how these play out in positive and negative economic circumstances. Then, there is the issue of the role of knowledge in referendum voting on EU issues. Low levels of knowledge hinder voter mobilization and may lead to either low turnout or to a no vote. Furthermore, low levels of knowledge may make voters more susceptible to potentially misleading campaign messages, thus affecting the connection between attitudes and the vote.

As just noted, an explanation of voting behaviour in the two Lisbon referendums in Ireland cannot ignore, of course, the impact of the economic and financial crisis that hit the country in the intervening period. While the full impact of the crisis on Ireland was initially only gradually becoming apparent, it had become the dominating issue by the time of the second referendum. The collapse of the Irish banking sector coupled with the recession which saw rising unemployment, higher taxes, substantial levies on public service salaries and wide ranging cuts in government expenditure made the economy a central issue, which, moreover, was inextricably linked with the European issue because of Ireland's membership of the Eurozone. Thus, economic expectations and individual economic calculus can be expected to have had a considerable impact on voting behaviour in the 2009 referendum.

In short, an analysis of the Irish Lisbon experience has a lot to say about referendums and referendum behaviour in the EU integration process. Taking the second Irish referendum in 2009 on the Lisbon Treaty, this paper sets out to examine what theoretical and empirical lessons with respect to EU referendum voting behaviour can be drawn from the Irish Lisbon experience. The data are from a post-referendum survey of registered Irish voters. Section 2 discusses in some detail the theoretical approaches in the literature on voting behaviour in EU referendums. The paper then provides an overview of the history of EU referendums in Ireland followed by a brief summary of the second Lisbon referendum campaign. Section 5 presents our statistical analysis, while section 6 concludes.

#### 2. Theoretical approaches to EU referendums

The debate on EU-referendums has spawned two distinct schools of thought, one based on the 'second-order' model and the other based on the 'issue-voting' model. The first of these asserts that voters' are motivated by national political considerations, specifically the popularity of the national government of the day and that it is these factors that are decisive in determining EU referendum outcomes (Franklin, Marsh & McLaren 1994; Franklin, Marsh & Wleizen 1994; Franklin 2002), an argument based on the second-order theory with regards local elections by Reif & Schmitt (1980). Referendums tend to be of lower saliency compared to a general election, in which a government is being chosen.<sup>1</sup> Thus voters approach referendums heavily influenced by concerns related to the national political context rather than to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The notable exception to this is Denmark where turnout in the four EU referendums held between 1992 and 2000 has been in excess of 75 percent (Svensson 2002).

the specific topic on which they are voting and the referendum becomes a contest about the government's performance rather than the issue at hand. If this is the case, a national government that is popular is likely to win a referendum on an issue that it supports, not on the basis of the proposal itself but rather on the coattails of voters' feelings toward the government. The opposite is also true – an unpopular government is unlikely to be able to win support for a proposal it supports in a referendum. With respect to the 2009 Lisbon referendum in Ireland, we could then expect, that, with the economy performing so poorly, the ruling coalition by the time of the second referendum was considered the most unpopular Irish government ever, which would have a difficult task in selling the Treaty. Accordingly, the first hypothesis we test is:

# H1: Voters who are dissatisfied with the current government coalition are less likely to vote 'yes'.

The 'second-order' perspective has been strongly and repeatedly challenged by those who argue that issues, attitudes and beliefs are the key determinants of voter behaviour in EU referendums. Proponents of the 'issue-voting' model take the view that EU referendums are driven by voters' underlying attitudes towards EU integration and specific Treaty proposals, with voters who are positively disposed to the idea of further EU integration tending to vote 'yes' in EU referendums whereas those who are more sceptical of such developments and the EU project in general tend to vote 'no' (Siune et al. 1994; Svensson 1994; Svensson 2002; Garry et al. 2005). The key point of the 'issue-voting' model in the context of EU referendums is that it is voters' views regarding the development of the EU that drive voter choice with national political considerations taking a back seat. The corresponding hypothesis is:

H2: Voters who have positive attitudes towards Irish membership of the European Union, towards European unification in general and positively evaluate the economic impact of European membership on Ireland, are more likely to vote 'yes'.

While the theoretical debate has been dominated by these two diametrically opposed views, two other approaches, which to date have not been considered as widely as perhaps they should have been may also contribute to our understanding of voter behaviour in these referendums. These other approaches are the 'utilitarian expectations' model and models emphasizing political knowledge. The 'utilitarian expectations' model, which is grounded in the rational-choice approach, argues that behaviour in EU referendums is shaped by voters' assessment of the economic opportunities created by the globalization of the European economy and whether citizens perceive they will gain or lose from this development. It can be assumed that the economic advantages or disadvantages of integration into the European Union will be different for different social groups, creating "winners" and "losers" as a result of international integration, who will respond accordingly in a referendum (Gabel 1998a; 1998b; O'Rourke & Sinnott 2006; van Apeldoorn 2009). For example, the benefits of economic globalization are more likely to be reaped by a young highly educated middle class professional who is in a better position to take advantage of market liberalization and the opportunities to travel, study abroad, etcetera, compared to a middle aged, low skilled labourer who faces stronger employment competition from cheaper labour in new member states. Kriesi et al. (2008) argues this is developing into a new dimension of contestation in European politics. In sum, the utilitarian explanations argue that economic self-interest determines the way a voter behaves in the referendum: those who expect to benefit as individuals from EU integration will vote 'yes' while who do not will vote 'no'. A respondent's current economic situation should be a good indicator of whether they consider the impact of future integration on their personal situation to be positive or negative with the less economically secure a voter personally feels now, the less of a buffer they have against future economic difficulties.

# H3: The less satisfied with one's own economic situation, the less likely a voter is to vote 'yes'.

The idea that knowledge affects voting behaviour is hardly new (see, e.g., Inglehart 1970; Carpini & Keeter 1996). Research has shown that voters' knowledge of the EU and of the specific proposals on which they are voting does have an effect in EU referendums – not only on vote choice but also on whether the potential voter decides to vote or abstain in the referendum (Sinnott 2002; Sinnott 2003; Hobolt 2005; Sinnott et al. 2009). But the effect of knowledge is not simple. In particular there are two types of political knowledge that may have different effects on voter behaviour: subjective knowledge – how knowledgeable a voter feels about a particular topic – and objective knowledge – how informed the voter actually is. The level of subjective knowledge.

Low levels of subjective knowledge of the EU or of the proposed Treaty changes can be expected to have a negative effect on both turnout and support for the proposition. In terms of deciding to vote in the first place, the cost of voting will be higher for voters with little knowledge of the issue at hand who will have to invest greater amounts of time to become informed. Furthermore, their lower levels of subjective knowledge might correlate with lower levels of interest in the referendum leading to further abstention. Low levels of subjective knowledge might also affect the vote choice itself, with voters less likely to support a change they do not fully understand: "If you don't know, vote no".

# H4: Voters with low levels of subjective knowledge of the European Union or the Treaty are less likely to vote and less likely to vote 'yes' when they do.

Objective levels of knowledge can also have a distinguishable effect in that they make voters more susceptible to campaign messages that are inconsistent with their political predispositions (see Zaller 1992, p. 44-48). Higher levels of knowledge and engagement increase the connection between attitudes towards the European Union and voting behaviour. With lower levels of political knowledge, voters are more likely to pick up potentially misleading campaign messages.

In a referendum, voters only decided between 'yes' or 'no' – they cannot make amendments and only limited information is required to be able to make the rationally optimal decision. However, behind this 'yes'/'no' choice there may be highly complex arguments. Voters will tend to use heuristics, for example by following the endorsement of a trusted informed actor. If a voter knows that, for example, the trade union normally represents his or her views well, then an endorsement of this union, or lack thereof, may be sufficient for the voter to make a decision on the referendum. "Once one has sufficient information to distinguish which of these two alternatives is 'better', it is impossible for additional information to be necessary to cast a competent vote" (Lupia 2006: 227). This susceptibility to campaign messages has the effect that also misleading messages have a greater impact on voters who lack substantial knowledge about the referendum issue.

This effect was clearly visible in the first Lisbon referendum (Sinnott and Elkink 2010). While the government was forced to defend the Treaty as a whole and emphasise the technical details of European Union procedures, various 'no' campaigners concentrated on specific elements of the Treaty and encouraged the

spread of misperceptions. For example, the idea that the Treaty would lead to compulsory conscription to a European army became widespread, although clearly not part of the Treaty contents (see Quinlan 2011). The campaign in favour of the Treaty saw less opportunity to establish such misperceptions that would support their cause. The susceptibility of less knowledgeable voters to misleading campaign messages therefore lead to a greater likelihood of a 'no' vote for those voters. In the 2009 campaign, a similar dynamic is expected, especially given the nature of the campaign.

# H5: Voters with less objective knowledge of the European Union are less likely to vote 'yes'.

A proper understanding of the voting behaviour in a specific referendum requires knowledge of the context in which the referendum takes place. The 2009 Lisbon Referendum in Ireland follows in a long sequence of European referendums in the country and follows on a failed referendum in 2008 on the same Treaty changes. We will first outline this context both in the long term and in terms of the campaign preceding the referendum, before turning to a statistical analysis of the hypotheses outlined in this section.

#### 2. EU referendums in Ireland and the 2009 Lisbon campaign

Ireland is the only member state that is required to hold a referendum on an EU Treaty, ever since the Irish supreme court ruled in 1987 that changes to the Irish Constitution that had implications for Irish sovereignty must be submitted to a vote of the people.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, Ireland has had more referendums on EU integration treaties than any other member state, eight in all from the accession referendum in 1972 to the second Lisbon referendum in 2009. Given all the referendums on the European issue, one might suppose that Europe is a prominent issue in Irish party politics. However, unlike member states such as Britain, Denmark and France, the issue of Europe has remained uncontentious, largely because the three main political parties, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour have all been broadly in favour of EU integration since the late 1980s.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Crotty v. An Taoiseach, IESC 4, IR 713 (9 April 1987), British and Irish Legal Information Institute and the University College Cork, Faculty of Law, Supreme Court of Ireland Decisions, http://www.bailii.org/ie/cases/IESC/1987/4.html, last accessed 12 November 2011.

This political consensus has had important repercussions for the dynamics of EU referendum campaigns including the second Lisbon campaign. The first is that voters are confronted with an unfamiliar political scenario in which parties that in the normal course of politics are in opposing camps find themselves on the same side. Consequently, the public are less likely to be guided by their political allegiances when it comes to deciding which way to vote and results in partisan cues being less effective in Irish EU referendums compared to EU referendums in other states (LeDuc 2002). The second Lisbon referendum was no different as not only did the governing coalition of Fianna Fáil and the Greens support a 'yes' vote but so too did the two main opposition parties, Fine Gael and Labour. Sinn Féin was the only party to campaign for a 'no' vote in 2009.

The political consensus on the issue of Europe in Ireland has resulted in referendum campaigns in the past being characterised by a distinct lack of passion and enthusiasm among political elites. The main political actors tend to withdraw from the debate (O'Mahony 2009, p.432), avoiding intensive engagement in the campaign, as evidenced by the Nice campaign of 2001 and the Lisbon campaign of 2008. This has resulted in civil society groups, comprised of activists not involved in the main political parties, playing a much more prominent role in the campaigns.

The 2009 campaign was fought against the backdrop of the greatest global economic recession since the late 1920s. The period between the first and second Lisbon referendums saw Ireland's economic landscape radically changed. Problems for the global economy emanated from the United States where the subprime mortgage crisis led to a global credit crunch with inter-bank lending seizing up in the summer of 2008. The Irish banking sector, already seriously exposed to a property market in decline consequently found itself in a solvency crisis. The government was forced to nationalise banks and take on bad debts accumulated by the banks (Honohan 2010). Coupled with this, unemployment rose sharply from 5.5 percent to 12.9 percent, GDP fell substantially and Ireland's debt to GDP ratio increased substantially in the space of twelve months (Central Statistics Office 2010a; 2010b).

The government struggled to deal with the crisis by implementing two austerity budgets. Its popularity plummeted to historic lows. The second-order theory would suggest that in such circumstances the chances of a government supported proposition passing are minimal. However, high levels of government satisfaction are not a prerequisite for successfully ratifying an EU treaty in Ireland as Figure 1 illustrates. This plot tracks satisfaction with the Irish government as well as popular support for EU referendums in the period 1997-2009. What is immediately clear is when governments are reasonably popular, referendums can be lost as Nice I and Lisbon I show but that equally as Nice II and Lisbon II demonstrate, European treaties can also be ratified in circumstances of low government popularity.

#### == FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE ==

While the aggregate level evidence would suggest government popularity is not a factor, 'no' campaigners certainly urged voters to use the referendum as an opportunity to punish the government for their handling of the economy. Those advocating a 'yes' vote linked Ireland's economic future success to membership of the EU. The 'no' side countered that supporters of the Treaty were playing on peoples' anxieties about the issue and maintained that the Treaty would do little for jobs or economic recovery. Other issues that played a role during the campaign, were the Treaty's effect on the Irish minimum wage, the Charter of Fundamental Right's effect on workers' rights and concern by some sectors of the farming community over succession rights and Turkish entry into the EU.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the Treaty in the June 2008 referendum, the government commissioned detailed research to understand why a majority of voters rejected the Treaty. A number of factors, ranging from attitudes to European integration, to lack of knowledge of the EU and the Treaty, specific concerns among voters about provisions in the Lisbon Treaty and domestic political factors explained the 'no' vote (Sinnott et al. 2009). In an attempt to allay some of these concerns, the Irish government secured legal guarantees from fellow member states in June 2009 that the Lisbon Treaty in no way affected Irish laws on abortion, neutrality or taxation. EU member states also decided to retain the size of the EU Commission at 27, meaning Ireland would retain a permanent Commission seat, which had become a bone of contention during the first campaign (for a more detailed summary of these events and the campaign see Quinlan 2011).

#### 4. Methodology and data

The statistical analysis is based on a post-referendum poll commissioned by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and conducted by the *Millward Brown/Lansdowne* polling agency. Fieldwork for the poll took place between 20 and

23 November 2009, six weeks after the 2 October referendum. The poll had a sample size of 1002 and was designed to be representative of all persons aged 18 and over who were eligible to vote. Quotas were set according to the 2006 Irish census based on region, sex, age and socio-economic group.

It is common in the analysis of voting behaviour in referendums to investigate separately, through logistic or probit regression, the decision to vote or abstain and the decision to vote yes or no. While we perform these analyses as robustness checks on our results, our main analysis is based on an integration of the two steps in one logistic regression model. The underlying assumption is that the two decisions are inter-dependent, that the decision to vote or not is in part determined by the utility gained from a "Yes" or "No" vote and that the outcome of the referendum cannot be fully understood without taking the turnout aspect into consideration. Our model follows Sattler & Urpelainen (2011), which is the referendum equivalent to the twocandidate election model in Sanders (1998). In these models, two (possibly overlapping) sets of independent variables enter the model, one set to explain the cost of voting (C) and another to explain the utility of voting a particular way, in our case "Yes"  $(U_y)$ . Where the utility is expected to be larger than the cost of voting  $(U_y > C)$ ), the voter is expected to vote "Yes"; where the utility is less than the negative cost of voting  $(U_y < -C)$ , the voter is expected to vote "No"; where the utility is in between these boundaries ( $-C < U_v < C$ ), the voter is expected to abstain.<sup>3</sup>

### == FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE ==

In addition to variables capturing the main theoretical perspectives outlined above, several demographic variables were added as control variables. The demographics added are age, level of education, social class and a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is a farmer or not. The discussion below focuses on the substantive interpretation of the regression results. The precise measurement of the various variables of interest is provided in Appendix B.

The full regression results are presented in tabular format in Appendix A, including a detailed description of the coding of the various variables. For the purpose of interpreting the results, however, it is useful to look at a graphical representation of the regression results (Kastellec and Leoni 2006). The logistic regression coefficients

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Sattler & Urpelainen (2011) for the technical details and the resulting log-likelihood function.

are presented in Figure 2, leaving those on the demographic variables out of the plot. The regression coefficients are represented by the dots with the horizontal lines representing the 95% confidence intervals around these coefficients, based on the estimated standard errors. Simply put, a line that does not cross the vertical line at zero can be said to be statistically significant, while points to the right indicate positive effects (increased probability to vote or to vote "Yes") and points to the left negative effects (increased probability to abstain or to vote "No"). Gray lines refer to the cost of voting component of the equation, black lines to the vote choice or utility component.

#### 4.2 Domestic politics and the 'second-order' interpretation

The first hypothesis refers to the 'second-order' theory, which holds that the more dissatisfied the voter with the government of the day, the more likely the voter is to vote against the side the government supported in the referendum in this case the 'yes' side. Perhaps the 'yes' vote would have been even higher had the referendum not occurred during a period of widespread dissatisfaction with the governing parties. In order to test these ideas we have included dissatisfaction with the way the government is running the country and a feeling of being close to an opposition party or to no party in the analysis. The results show that dissatisfaction with the way the government was running the country did increase the propensity to vote 'no', although the effect is not very distinctive in the data, with high uncertainty levels on this regression coefficient. Support for one of the opposition parties has a negligible effect on the propensity to vote 'no', perhaps not surprising given that both the two major opposition parties Fine Gael and Labour were both supporting a 'yes' vote. Respondents who do not feel a connection to any party have a slightly higher probability of voting 'no'. While the lack of government popularity thus has an effect on the 2009 Lisbon vote, and we can consider the first hypothesis to be confirmed by our data, it is certainly not the dominant factor suggested by the 'second-order' voting literature. Attitudes more directly related to the referendum choice at hand – both in terms of economic prospects and attitudes towards the European Union in general have had a more significant impact than domestic politics.

#### 4.3 Attitudes to the EU and identity

Inclusion of EU-related attitudes in the model shows that four attitudinal variables played a particularly important role in determining vote choice namely: (i) the perception of a link between a 'yes' vote on the Lisbon Treaty and an improvement in Ireland's economic prospects, (ii) the belief that Ireland's membership of the EU is a good thing, (iii) the belief that European Union unification has already gone too far, and (iv) the belief that Ireland should take care to protect its neutral position in international affairs. Positive expectations regarding improvement in Ireland's economic prospects as a result of the 'yes' vote played a vital role but overall positive evaluation of Ireland's membership of the EU was an even more distinct factor. Respondents who considered the unification of the European Union to already have gone too far were significantly more likely to vote 'no' in the referendum and the attitude towards the protection of Irish' neutrality played a similar role in the voter's decision-making.

The general belief that Irish membership to the European Union is a good thing not only affected the propensity to vote `yes', but also mobilized voters to participate in the first place. A positive feeling towards Irish membership had a statistically significant negative effect on the propensity to abstain.

In earlier research on Irish voting behaviour in European referendums, identity played an important role. Voters who identified more clearly as 'European' or 'Irish and European' were more likely to support the pro-European standpoint than those who identify as 'Irish only'. In this survey, respondents were again asked whether they lean more toward an Irish or more towards a European identity. Those who clearly indicated they consider themselves Irish only were, unsurprisingly, more likely to vote 'no', and also less likely to vote in the first place.

The final attitudinal variable taken into account in this analysis is the attitude towards immigrants into Ireland. While not a purely EU related attitude, the European integration project is closely intertwined with increased levels of immigration, particularly noticeable in the Irish context where expansion of the European Union has lead to a large influx of workers from the new member states. The effect of this attitude to immigration on the vote in the referendum is surprising. One might have expected that the tendency to vote 'no' would increase among those who agreed with the proposition that 'people from other countries coming to live here makes Ireland a worse place to live in'. It turns out that anti-immigration sentiment, insofar as it is measured by this question, is more associated with voting 'yes'. When we look at a bivariate analysis of only the attitude towards immigration and the vote choice, voters who feel immigration has made life in Ireland worse are more likely to vote 'no' but, when we take into account the full multivariate regression model and the other EU-related attitudes, this effect goes into reverse. It could be argued that the inclusion of attitude measures such as 'Irish membership of the European Union is a good thing' and 'European Union integration has gone too far' are in fact inappropriate controls when attempting to measure the impact of attitudes towards immigration – these are intermediate steps in the causal chain from immigration attitude to voting behaviour.

The investigation of the 'issue-voting' model, whereby it is attitudes towards European integration that are expected to be most important in determining voting behaviour, thus leads to a strong confirmation of the second hypothesis. Voters who feel more positive about the European Union and the effect of its membership on Ireland, were significantly more likely to vote 'yes' in the 2009 referendum.

#### 4.4 The Economy

Given the focus on the economy during the campaign, some commentators felt that there was a 'panic' factor at work, where individual's severe anxiety about their own economic situation was responsible for driving large numbers of voters into the 'yes' camp and was a major factor, if not indeed *the* major factor, affecting the referendum outcome.

In teasing out the impact of these economic factors, we can examine the evidence provided by two questions in the post-referendum survey. The first question looks at people's expectations regarding Ireland's economic prospects given a 'yes' vote.<sup>4</sup> This question addresses the campaign argument about the economic implications of a 'yes' vote and one would expect that those with positive expectations would have tended to vote 'yes' and those with negative expectations would have tended to vote 'no'. The second question seeks to measure people's evaluation of their personal economic situation.<sup>5</sup> According to the 'panic' interpretation of the outcome of the referendum, respondents who feel that their economic situation is fairly or very bad

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Respondents were asked: "Do you think that, as a result of the YES vote in the Lisbon Treaty referendum, Ireland's economic prospects have been improved or disimproved or remain unchanged?"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Respondents were asked: "What about your own economic situation these days? Would you say it is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad?" (listed as 'dissatisfaction economy' in the probit model).

should be more likely to have voted 'yes'. This variable is also considered to be most closely aligned with the utilitarian, self-interested perspective on economic voting as stated by Hypothesis 3.

Both these economic variables are included in the regression model. The results show that any anxieties respondents may have had about their own economic situation had no discernible effect on their vote. The variable measuring evaluation of one's own economic situation has a statistically insignificant, albeit positive effect. Voters who considered their economic situation to be bad were only slightly more likely to vote 'yes'. However, voters do appear to have been strongly influenced to vote 'yes' by our second economic variable, i.e. by the perception that there was a link between voting 'yes' and an improvement in Ireland's economic prospects. In short, there is no evidence that the 'yes' vote was driven by the negative personal economic circumstances in which many individuals found themselves. However, there is very firm evidence that the expectation that a 'yes' vote would lead to an improvement in the country's economic prospects substantially increased the propensity to vote 'yes'.

The two ways of looking at the impact of the economy represents a distinction between a more self-interested, utilitarian attitude towards the economy, whereby the respondent looks at his or her own economic situation, and a more general perception of the importance of the Treaty and the European Union in general, for the economy. The view that the EU is important for Irish' economic prospects is very closely aligned to the view that Irish membership of the EU is "a good thing". In other words, it is in part a more general evaluation that factors in the idea that EU membership is good for the Irish economy in general. While it is difficult to clearly distinguish believe the utilitarian, self-interested and the more general, affective evaluation of the European Union on the basis of these two questions as the question regarding the Irish economy incorporates elements of both, the fact that the economic prospects question is significant, while the evaluation of one's own economic situation appears to play no role, provides some support for the issue-voting model of European voting behaviour with voters perceiving a general benefit of EU membership to the Irish economy but not a personal utilitarian benefit to themselves personally. In sum, there is more support for the economy being an 'issue-voting' based effect rather than for hypothesis 3, which states that voters voted on the basis of self-interested motives.

#### 4.5 Political knowledge

In the analysis of the 2008 Lisbon referendum, a clear distinction could be made between political knowledge in general and the relation between particular campaign messages and voters' perceptions of the Treaty (Sinnott et al. 2009). The survey question used in 2008 measured the perceptions of voters with regards the precise contents of the referendum issue, whereby particular perceptions could be clearly aligned to particular campaign messages of the 'yes' and 'no' campaigns. Unfortunately, a similar measure of objective knowledge of the 2009 Treaty is not feasible. With the Irish government obtaining a number of guarantees from other member states in respect of particular policy areas, which did not alter the Treaty contents or whether it was the guarantees obtained that were being considered by respondents. The question was included in the survey, but it is clear from the response patterns of respondents that this question has been answered differently by different respondents thus rendering interpretation of these responses impossible.

The remaining survey questions measure the level of objective knowledge of the European Union in general and the more subjective evaluations of the level of knowledge of both the EU and the Treaty. The striking result from the regression is that, while political knowledge was a crucial variable in understanding the outcome of the 2008 referendum, in 2009 the effect is entirely negligible at least as far as more general knowledge of the European Union is concerned. Subjective levels of knowledge of the Treaty have a clear effect on turnout, however, with voters who feel knowledgeable significantly more likely to vote due to a lower cost of voting. It is interesting to note that in the 'naïve' logistic regression, ignoring turnout, high subjective levels of knowledge appear to lead to a higher propensity to vote 'yes', while the interaction with turnout is properly taken into account, this propensity can be entirely attributed to the cost of voting component of the model. We can thus conclude that we have insufficient evidence to confirm Hypothesis 5 and only limited support for Hypothesis 4, in that subjective knowledge does indeed affect the likelihood to turn out, but there is little indication that it also affects subsequent vote choice in 2009.

It should be pointed out, however, that this is only the case when the general

attitudes such as those discussed below are included in the model. Without these, knowledge has a significant and positive effect on the result (Sinnott and Elkink 2010). Since knowledge affects attitudes and lack of knowledge makes one more susceptible to campaign messages, which in turn affect attitudes, it is indeed reasonable not to control for attitudes when estimating the effect of knowledge. While knowledge thus has an effect on the vote through attitudes, this is quite different from the first Lisbon referendum, when knowledge was a major factor independent of attitudes (Sinnott *et al* 2009).

#### **5.** Conclusion

Given that the most prominent debate regarding EU referendums is between the 'second-order' and 'issue voting' schools of thought, we will first turn to this aspect of our findings. At the time of the 2009 referendum, Ireland was facing the greatest economic challenge in its history. Dissatisfaction with the national government was at an all time high. If the referendum were to be interpreted as a plebiscite on the popularity of the government, one would have expected a clear rejection of the Treaty. The fact that this did not happen shows that the 'second-order' interpretation is not the whole story. Dissatisfaction with "the way the government is running the country" certainly had a negative impact on the 'yes' vote in the referendum – voters who disliked the government were more likely to vote 'no'. However, our analysis shows that attitudes to the EU integration process were more important in determining vote choice compared to this 'second-order' variable. Thus, believing that EU membership was "a good thing" had a very strong positive effect on the 'yes' vote while believing that EU unification has "gone too far" had a clear negative effect on the 'yes' vote

In the 2008 referendum it was clear that knowledge of the European Union, knowledge of the Treaty, and subjective evaluation of the level of knowledge all had considerable effects on the vote. Less knowledgeable voters were less likely to vote, and when they did turn out, less likely to vote 'yes'. Less knowledgeable voters were also more likely to be affected by misleading campaign messages, such as the argument that implementation of the Treaty would lead to conscription to a European army or that it would be the end to Irish control over its abortion policy. In the 2009 referendum knowledge still played a role but in a different way. Also in this second referendum less knowledgeable voters were more likely to vote 'no' but this effect

was indirect. Levels of knowledge had an impact on attitudes towards the EU, which in turn affected the vote. A direct effect of knowledge on vote, as visible in 2008, was not evident in 2009.

A study of the 2009 referendum cannot ignore the huge impact of the economic crisis that started to unfold in the period between the two Lisbon referendums. We therefore asked two questions, one examining the respondent's expectation of the impact of the referendum outcome on the Irish economy as a whole and one asking the respondent to evaluate his or her current economic situation. The results show that, while the former had a major impact on voting behaviour, the effect of the latter was negligible. It is the more general attitude towards European integration, in this instance in terms of the economic benefits, that determine voting behaviour and not one's personal economic situation. The role of the economy thus appears to be in line with the issue-driven interpretation of EU referendums.

In summary, various common interpretations of voting behaviour in EU referendums are not borne out by the available survey data, including the idea that EU referendums are simply plebiscites on government popularity (second-order theory); that political knowledge has an independent impact on voting behaviour or that EU voting is determined by self-interested utilitarian behaviour or a conflict between "winners" and "losers" of globalization. Instead, attitudes towards European integration were more important than the evaluation of the national government; knowledge of politics was only important in its effect on attitudes towards European integration; and the economy was primarily important in the sense that this particular dimension of attitudes towards European integration was most prominent.

## Appendices

## A.1 Appendix A: Regression Tables

	Logistic random utility			Logistic		Ordered logistic		
Predictor variables	Cost		Utility (Yes)		Yes / No		Yes / Abstain / No	
Female			-0.12		0.05		-0.12	
			(0.19)		(0.28)		(0.18)	
Age	-0.44	**	0.28		0.04		0.29	
-	(0.16)		(0.20)		(0.32)		(0.19)	
Age (squared)	0.75	**						
	(0.33)							
Lower middle class	-0.33		-0.01		-0.23		0.04	
	(0.27)		(0.31)		(0.45)		(0.29)	
Skilled working class	-0.23		-0.32		-0.43		-0.28	
	(0.28)		(0.34)		(0.49)		(0.32)	
Unskilled working class	-0.37		-0.05		-0.38		-0.03	
	(0.29)		(0.35)		(0.49)		(0.33)	
Farmer Secondary education	-1.79	*	0.76		1.13		0.80	
	(1.00)		(0.57)		(0.80)		(0.52)	
	-0.45		0.02		-0.44		0.07	
	(0.29)		(0.39)		(0.64)		(0.37)	
Third level education	-0.39		0.29		-0.29		0.36	
	(0.34)		(0.2)		(0.70)		(0.41)	
Objective knowledge (EU)	0.09		0.15		0.33		0.09	
			(0.13)		(0.30)			
Subjective knowledge (EU)	(0.17) -0.07		0.21)		0.69		(0.20) 0.29	
Subjective knowledge (Treaty) Own economic situation bad	(0.22)	**	(0.26)		(0.38)	*	(0.25)	
	-1.00		-0.28		-1.03		-0.37	
	(0.22)		0.27		(0.41)		(0.25)	
			0.32		0.28		0.26	
Economic prospects			(0.20)	di di	(0.29)		(0.19)	
			1.60	**	2.38	* *	1.68	* *
			(0.22)		(0.33)	-	(0.21)	
Dissatisfaction with	-0.07		-0.51	*	-1.06	*	-0.55	* *
government	(0.23)		(0.29)		(0.47)		(0.28)	
Opposition party supporter No party supporter	-0.49	**	-0.21		-0.35		-0.17	
	(0.21)		(0.24)		(0.36)		(0.23)	
	0.12		-0.45	*	-0.73		-0.34	
	(0.18)		(0.24)		(0.38)		(0.23)	
Irish identity	-0.27	*	-0.47	**	-0.88	* *	-0.45	* *
	(0.16)		(0.20)		(0.29)		(0.19)	
Anti-immigration attitude EU membership is a good thing			0.61	**	0.59		0.57	* *
			(0.21)		(0.31)		(0.20)	
	-0.54	**	1.96	**	2.85	* *	1.70	* *
	(0.18)		(0.25)		(0.38)		(0.22)	
Unification gone too far	-0.01		-0.98	**	-1.15	* *	-0.96	* *
	(0.15)		(0.20)		(0.30)		(0.20)	
Pro-neutrality attitude	-0.17		-0.70	**	-0.75	* *	-0.63	* *
	(0.15)		(0.19)		(0.27)		(0.18)	
Intercept	0.74		-0.03		0.82		-	
moroopt	(0.46)		(0.62)		(0.93)			
Threshold (No   Abstain)	(0.10)		(0.02)		(0.25)		-0.87	
							(0.57)	
Threshold (Abstain   Yes)							0.50	
							(0.57)	

Standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p \le 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p \le 0.05$ 

Female	Dummy variable, whereby the coefficient is relative to the reference category: "Male".				
Age	Age in years, standardized.				
Lower middle class	Dummy variables, whereby the coefficients are				
Skilled working class	relative to the reference category: "Upper middle class".				
Unskilled working class	class .				
Large farmer					
Small farmer					
Secondary education	Dummy variables, whereby the coefficients are				
Third level education	relative to the reference category: "Primary education".				
Subjective knowledge (Treaty)	"By the date of the referendum (2 <sup>nd</sup> October), how good was your understanding of the issues involved? Please use this card to choose the phrase that applies best to you.", with categories: "I had a good understanding of what the Treaty was all about"; "I understood some of the issues but not all that was involved"; "I was only vaguely aware of the issues involved"; "I did not know what the Treaty was about at all". The scale has been reversed and standardized.				
Subjective knowledge (EU)	"And how about the European Union in general? Using this scale, how much do you feel you know about the European Union, its policies, its institutions?", with a scale ranging from "Nothing at all" (1) to "Know a great deal" (10). The scale has been standardized.				
Objective knowledge (EU)	"For each of the following statements about the European Union could you please tell me whether you think it is true or false?", with "The EU currently consists of fifteen Member States"; "Switzerland is a member of the European Union"; "The name of the President of the European Commission is Barroso"; "The members of the European Parliament are directly elected by the citizens of the EU". The scale has been standardized.				
Own economic situation bad	"What about your own economic situation these days? Would you say it is?" with a scale "Very good" (1) to "Very bad" (4). Recoded so that the coefficients represents the effect for "Fairly bad" or "Very bad", relative to those who answered				

## A.2 Appendix B: Variable descriptions

	"Fairly good" or "Very good"
Economic prospects	<ul><li>"Fairly good" or "Very good".</li><li>"Do you think that, as a result of the 'yes' vote in</li></ul>
Economic prospects	the Lisbon Treaty referendum, Ireland's economic
	prospects have been improved or disimproved or
	remain unchanged?", with a scale from "Very
	much improved" (1) to "Very much disimproved"
	(5). The scale has been standardized.
Dissatisfaction with government	"Overall are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied
Dissatistaction with government	with the way the government is running the
	country?", with a scale ranging from "Very
	satisfied" (1) to "Very dissatisfied" (4), and
	recoded such that the coefficients represent the
	"Very dissatisfied" or "Quite dissatisfied" relative
	to "Very satisfied" or "Quite satisfied".
Opposition party supporter	"Do you feel close to any of the political parties?"
No party supporter	and if no answer: "Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than the
	others?". Recoded such that the coefficient
	represents the effect for supporters of opposition
	parties relative to supporters for the government
	parties (Fianna Fáil, Greens and Progressive
	Democrats). For those that answer "Not close to
	any", a separate dummy variable was created to
Irigh identity	<ul><li>make the comparison reasonable.</li><li>"In the near future, do you see yourself as?",</li></ul>
Irish identity	with answer categories: "Irish only"; "Irish and
	European"; "European and Irish"; "European
	Only". The coefficients represent the effect of
	"Irish only" relative to the average effect of the
	other categories.
Anti-immigration attitude	Scale from "People coming to live here from other
	countries has made Ireland a much worse place to
	live" (1) to "() better place to live" (9), reversed
	and standardized.
EU membership is a good thing	"Generally speaking, do you think that Ireland's
Lo memoership is a good uning	membership of the European Union is?" with
	answer categories: "A good thing"; "A bad thing";
	"Neither good nor bad", with the coefficient
	representing the effect of those who said "A good
	thing" relative to the rest.
Unification gone too far	Scale from "European unification has already gone
Similarion Sone too hu	too far" (1) to "European unification should be
	pushed further" (9), reversed and standardized.
Pro-neutrality attitude	Scale from "Ireland should do everything it can to
To neurancy autitude	strengthen its neutrality" (1) to "Ireland should be
	willing to accept limitations on its neutrality" (9),
	reversed and standardized.
	rereised und sumduranzed.

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Figure 1 Percentage of 'yes' voters in EU referendums and levels of government satisfaction (%).

Source: Sinnott & Elkink (2010)



Figure 2 Graphical representations of the logistic regression coefficients (dots) and their 95% confidence intervals (lines). The plot concentrates on the variables of interest, leaving out the intercept and demographic control variables. The full models are available in the appendix. Black dots represent the utility of voting component of the model. Grey dots represent the cost of voting component.