

The European Union and  
the Politicization of Europe



**The Legitimacy of Governments'  
EU Referendum Campaigns in  
Question: the Case of Ireland**



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*“Referendums on European integration can serve to enhance the legitimacy of the integration process, but only if voters are capable of expressing their preferences concerning European integration and if politicians are responsive to their preferences...Competent voting [–] crucially depends on information and cues provided to citizens by political elites”*

(Hobolt 2007, 177)

# Outline

## I. Theoretical concepts

- Democracy
- Legitimacy

## II. The referendum

- Campaigns
- Voter competence
- Second order elections

## III. Case: Irish referendums on Nice and Lisbon Treaties

## IV. Conclusion

An Bille um an Ochtú Leasú is Fíche ar an mBunreacht 2008  
Twenty-Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2008

Ná cuir marc ACH SANAON CHEARNÓG AMHÁIN  
Place a mark in ONE SQUARE ONLY

MÁ THOILÍONN TÚ, cuir X sa chearnóg seo  
IF YOU APPROVE, mark X in this square

|                          |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | TÁ<br>YES |
|--------------------------|-----------|

MURA DTOILÍONN TÚ, cuir X sa chearnóg seo  
IF YOU DO NOT APPROVE, mark X in this square

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NÍL<br>NO |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|

# I. Democracy and Legitimacy

*Of, by or for the people? Input and output?*

1. *Of*: identification
  2. *By*: accountability and representation (*input*): campaigns?
  3. *For*: performance (*output*)
- *Throughput*? Interactive constructed process of consultation with the people: campaigns?
  - Information gap → rely on others' information?
  - Input deficit no longer concealed by output

# II. Referendum campaigns

- When do voters need campaign information?
  1. When parties are internally divided
  2. When ideological alignments are unclear
  3. When the issue is unfamiliar

*Should the government fill the gap?*

- Voters evaluate:
  - the treaty: binding?
  - the government's performance: initiator?
- Opinion formation, reversal and uphill struggle

# Voter competence

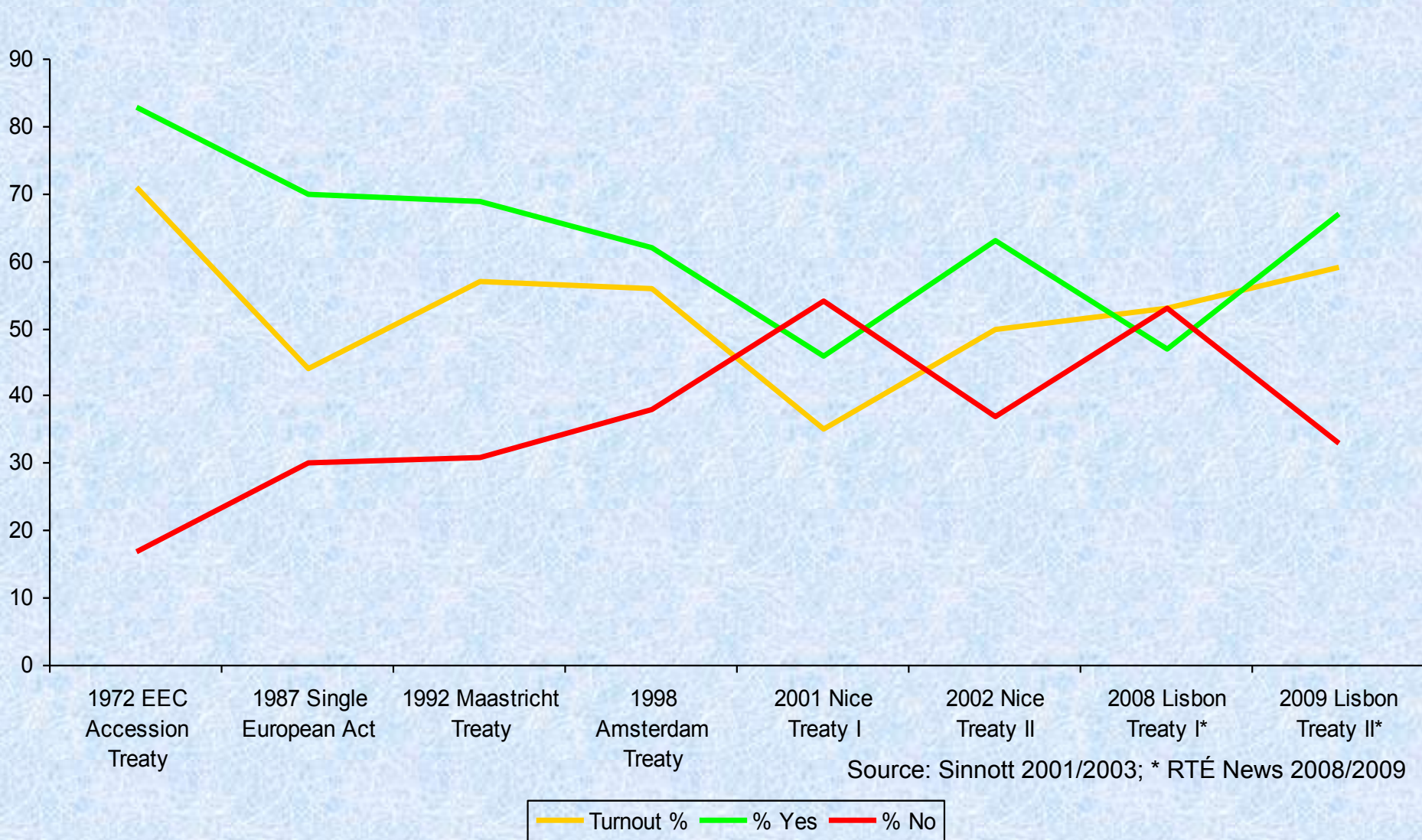
- Rational but not always normatively desirable
- ‘Accomplishment of specific task based on preferences = if full information were available’
- Voters rely on shortcuts such as elite cues
- Party endorsements may mislead citizens

# Second-order voting

- Satisfaction with the national government
- Party endorsements have different effects
- Based on formal sources, filtered by media

*Is it up to the government to provide 'lacking, objective' information?*

# III. The Irish referendum landscape between Nice and Lisbon





# The Yes campaign...



davewalshphoto.com



GREEN INK



YOUNG FINE GAEL YFG

# The No campaign

**IRELAND  
DESERVES  
BETTER**

**NO!**

VOTE  
to Lisbon Treaty

**SF Sinn Féin**

www.no2lisbon.ie

**THE NEW EU**

**WON'T  
SEE YOU**

**WON'T  
HEAR YOU**

**WON'T  
SPEAK  
FOR YOU**

**VOTE NO**

**NO TO EU BATTLEGROUPS**

**VOTE NO IN THE  
REFERENDUM**

**Democracy Denied!**  
How does the Lisbon Treaty affect you?



I want YOU for a  
United States of Europe

**Vote NO to Lisbon**

www.eirigi.org

POBLAČHT NA H ÉIREANN  
THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
IRISH REPUBLIC  
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

**PEOPLE  
DIED FOR  
YOUR  
FREEDOM**

DON'T THROW IT AWAY

**VOTE NO**

**Public Meeting - June 9th, 7pm, Conway Mill**  
**Main Speakers**

|                  |                         |                 |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Sinn Féin</b> | <b>éirigi</b>           | <b>SDLP</b>     |
| Bairbre de Brún  | Daithí Mac An Mhaistíir | Alban Maginness |

The meeting will be chaired by Roger Cole of the CAEUC  
The Lisbon Treaty will be enforced in the six counties by the British government without consulting the people. Come along to the meeting in the Conway Mill Education Centre at 7 pm on June 9th to find out what this will mean for Irish citizens living here. Organised by the Campaign Against the EU Constitution

# Referendum issues of voting No, abstention and information

|  | % | Nice I<br>(No) | Nice II<br>(Yes) | Lisbon I<br>(No) | Lisbon<br>II (Yes) |
|--|---|----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Voting No because of lack of information                                   |   | 49 / 39        | 14               | 22 / 45 *        | 4                  |
| Voting No because protest against government's policies                    |   | -              | 10               | 4 / 9 *          | 5                  |
| Voting No because of distrust in politicians                               |   | -              | -                | 6                | 10                 |
| Abstention because of lack of information                                  |   | 44             | 26               | 42               | 32                 |
| Abstention because of non-understanding                                    |   | 44             | 26               | 52               | 39                 |
| EC Information Office as primary source of information                     |   | 14             | 15               | 26 **            | 10                 |
| Irish government as primary source of information<br>(White paper/summary) |   | 24             | 40               | 54 **            | 37                 |
| Referendum Commission as (valuable) primary source of information          |   | 30             | 45               | NA               | 24                 |

\* Eurobarometer surveys of June and October 2008 resulted in different outcomes. Millward Brown IMS research tops at 42%.

\*\* This means that these percentage non-voters would have preferred more information. Source: Sinnott 2003; Eurobarometer 2008/2009

# Why citizens changed their mind between Lisbon I and Lisbon II

| %   | Yes-voters<br>(previous No-voters) | Yes-voters<br>(previous non-<br>voters)* |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Information was provided and<br>communication satisfactory                                  | 22                                 | 4  |
| Helps the Irish economy in recession  | 19                                 | 4  |
| The public was more included and<br>efforts were made to help to make<br>informed decisions | 16                                 | 9  |

\* The most important reason to vote yes for this category was simply because they did not take the opportunity to vote (and did not change their opinion). Source: Eurobarometer 2009.

# IV. Conclusion

- People vote No due to lack of information
  - No source of information of value >50%
  - Government and Referendum Commission underperform
  - Quantity of information has impact on advancing the issue and turnout, but no guaranteed outcome!
- Lack of information does not mean that government has to inform citizens
- Relatively few No-votes due to distrust in government and politicians

- Nice I and Lisbon I revealed low Yes campaigns and failing opinion formation: should this put responsibility on the government?
- Nice II and Lisbon II were high Yes campaigns and successful uphill struggles, due to effective framing by the government
- Is purpose of referendum ‘let the people decide?’ or a goal of the government?
- Questionable:
  - objectivity,
  - inability to complete, to understand information
  - failure to trust
- More in depth case study necessary