

# 4

## Referendum Campaigns: Changing What People Think or Changing What They Think About?<sup>1</sup>

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Cohen (1963: 13) made the well-known observation that the media do not so much tell people what to think as tell them what to think *about*. The same argument is often made with respect to parties in election campaigns as they try to ensure that the focus of the campaign will be on issues that are positive ones for them, or which they own (Schattschneider, 1960; Riker, 1986; Petrocik, 1996; Budge *et al.*, 2001). Less common is to suggest that the same should be true of referendums. This argument can be found in Magelby (1989) and Darcy and Laver (1990) while de Vreese and Semetko (2004) provide an intensive empirical study of the Danish vote on the euro to show how far this happens. The pro-referendum side will try to persuade the public that the referendum is about something the public feels positive about while the anti-referendum side will explain the referendum in terms they think will provoke negative feelings. A successful redefinition of the issue may well provoke considerable volatility in the campaign, and this is much more likely to happen in a referendum (LeDuc, 2002a, 2002b). Of course, the extent to which either side can do this will depend in part on the strength of the respective campaigns. Overall, a weak campaign may leave the electorate simply confused; a strong one should bring more clarity, and an unbalanced one should see voters' perceptions reflecting the weight of the stronger campaign.

Interest in referendums is growing. Over the last decade or so there has been a major debate about how the electorate make decisions on such votes: whether people follow simple cues, by following their party's lead, or by making the vote into one on the record of the government, or whether voters really do respond to the issue itself and vote accordingly (contrast Franklin *et al.*, 1994 with Siune *et al.*, 1994; see also Svensson, 2002 and Franklin, 2002; see also Pierce *et al.*, 1983; Schneider and

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Weitsman, 1996). The first implies that the question of the referendum itself is irrelevant while the latter sees it as central and dominant. Both alternatives are obviously too simplistic. The first, sometimes known as the 'second-order' interpretation – because the referendum is seen as akin to a minor national election (Reif and Schmitt, 1980) – implies that the same result would occur no matter what the issue, while the latter argument, that decisions are made on the basis of the issues, begs the vital question of what actually are the issues and so what attitudes should guide the voter in making a decision.

Several recent studies have argued that a black and white approach to this debate is unhelpful and that a more interesting question is to consider under what conditions second-order or issue-based considerations might be maximized (Franklin, 2002; see also Hobolt, 2005a). One possible answer might be the intensity of the campaign. Simple political cues might be used more widely in the absence of other ones. A low-intensity campaign that leaves most voters in the dark about what the referendum is about might well be expected to result in a reliance on political cues by – although party messages themselves may also fail to get through to voters if the campaign is very weak. On the other hand a high-intensity campaign should give people the ability to decide on the basis of the information that the campaign has brought to public attention. There is some evidence that 'issues' are more important when the campaign is more intense (Hobolt, 2005b). This very sensible argument leaves out, however, the question of the nature of the campaign and how it might influence which issues become important.

This chapter takes up these questions, and in particular the question of which issues are important. It does so through a study of two votes in Ireland on the Nice Treaty. It was the same treaty on both occasions, but the first time it was rejected by 52 per cent of Irish voters while on the second occasion it was approved by 63 per cent. What accounts for this difference in outcome? There are two extreme possibilities, and of course the truth may lie between these two. The first is that the distribution of public opinion changed in ways favourable to a different outcome – for instance, by becoming more supportive of the pro-Nice government and pro-Nice parties, or by warming to the EU itself. The second is that the distribution of opinion did not change, but that voters weighted these things differently in making their decision on how to vote. This chapter explores these two possibilities and asks how far differences in the nature of the two campaigns can account for changes either in the distribution of attitudes or the ways in which these attitudes were brought to bear in the judgement on the Nice Treaty.

#### 4.1 Site for study

The Nice episode in Irish politics provides a good site for the study of how the campaigns matter for referendum voting. First of all, these two referendums concerned the same Treaty, so the subject of the referendum is the same on both occasions. It is rare for a referendum to be re-run in quite this fashion. More typically, the question differs. In Ireland, for instance, there has been more than one vote on abortion and more than one on divorce in the last twenty years or so, but the wordings differed each time. Across the EU several countries have had more than one vote on 'the EU' but, with the exception on the Danish experience on Maastricht, these have been different treaties. Moreover, the votes have been separated by substantial periods of time. The Nice votes, in contrast, were only 17 months apart, taking place in June 2001 and October 2002. These two votes thus come close to giving us an ideal counterfactual: what would have happened if the Nice vote had been preceded by a more intense campaign?

Fortunately, the second feature of this case is the existence of a reasonable degree of variation in the main independent variable of interest, the campaign over the two votes. The first campaign was quiet, with most of the responsibility for informing voters left to a neutral Referendum Commission. The pro-Nice forces, in particular, were conspicuous by their absence. The second time the Commission was sidelined, given the job merely of increasing turnout, while the pro-Nice forces, including the major parties, were much more active.

A third feature is that the outcome was different, in two respects. The first, already alluded to, was that the 'Yes' vote rose from 48 per cent to 63 per cent. The second is that turnout also rose, from 35 per cent in June 2001 to 50 per cent in October 2002. In fact the 'No' vote was almost unchanged in October, up only 5,000 while the 'yes' vote rose by 450,000. In itself this is perhaps unimportant. The focus here is less on the outcome than understanding the decision-making process of voters and observing the differences in this respect between the two referendums. As argued already, they may not have changed at all, or they may have changed a lot. What does follow from the fact that the outcome varied is that something changed, and that what this was deserves investigation.

A fourth feature is that there is a reasonable amount of survey data available on each of the two votes, and that this survey data includes a number of items relevant to our purpose here. None of the surveys were academic surveys designed for the purpose of explaining the vote and all of the surveys have individual disadvantages. However, these are particularly

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valuable as a set. EOS Gallup for the European Commission who was naturally concerned to understand the implications of each of these votes did a large-scale survey of around 1,200 respondents. Millward Brown IMS carried out another survey for the Commission after the second Nice vote.<sup>2</sup> The first was not fielded until three to four months after Nice I, but the second was carried out shortly after Nice II. Several surveys of 1,000 respondents each were also undertaken for the Irish media and three are available for use here, all carried out for by TNS-MRBI for the *Irish Times*. Two were completed before Nice I, one in mid-May and one in late May, just a couple of days before the vote. The third was done 4–5 days before Nice II. This set offers evidence on public opinion not just at the end of each campaign and before the vote was known, but also observations from the early part of the first campaign. Finally, we have a small pair of surveys of Dublin opinion, carried out initially as part of the pilot work for the 2002 Irish election study. The first wave was fielded largely in the final week of campaigning on the first referendum, with a few interviews not completed until a few days after the vote, and the second wave of interviews took place after the second referendum. This is a very small sample with only 230 initial respondents, but it is relatively rich in variables available for analysis.

#### 4.2 The campaigns: Nice I and Nice II

Responding to its failure to secure a 'Yes' vote on the first occasion the government identified a number of things that might have been to blame and sought to address them.<sup>3</sup> The major ones were: the low turnout, a complaint from voters that they did not know what they were voting on and concerns about the implications of the Nice Treaty for Ireland's ostensible neutrality. An effort was made to push up turnout by holding the vote on a Saturday and by employing the canvassing techniques typically employed in elections. There was a theory that the 'Yes' voters, those who had carried previous EU referendums, stayed home in 2001. All EU referendums had been carried in the past, but turnout had been falling and along with it, the 'yes' margin had been narrowing: *ergo*, turnout is crucial. It was also recognized the Eurobarometer polls had continually shown that the Irish voters were consistently supportive of the EU, with huge numbers saying Ireland's membership had been beneficial. Polls had also showed strong support for enlargement (TNS/MRBI 14–15 May). If these supporters could be persuaded to vote, to convert their support for the EU project into a 'Yes', then the referendum would be carried. The government treated the referendum as they would an

election campaign and even if activists on the ground were fewer than they had been in the election the previous May, an organization was put in place to carry the campaign into every constituency and district electoral division.

Voters certainly felt uninformed about the Nice Treaty the first time, a situation that the 'No' camp exploited with its exhortation: 'If you don't know, vote no'. The eve of referendum poll in the *Irish Times* recorded that only 15 per cent of voters felt they had a good understanding of the issues with a majority feeling at best vague about the Treaty and at worst knowing nothing at all about it (TNS MRBI, 29–30 May). One reason for this was the fact that the campaign, like all others since 1996, had been effectively subcontracted to the Referendum Commission. The courts had found that the government could not spend public money campaigning for a 'Yes' (or 'No') vote and the solution to this had been to set up a body, the Referendum Commission, that would be responsible for a general campaign of public information. After consultation with interested parties, this body organized advertisements on radio and television and in the press and distributed leaflets through the mail, putting the arguments for and against. This is a solution that seems to owe more to the 'issues' argument mentioned above than the 'simple political cues' argument since it divorces arguments from their sources.

A second reason is that the Commission was given an impossible task.<sup>4</sup> It was given very little time to do its work because the government decided only very late in the day to hold the vote when it did and also had two other referendums to deal with at the same time. A third reason is that the pro-Nice political parties did little to help. With a general election perceived to be imminent (in fact, it did not take place for another 12 months), parties preferred to keep their own funds for those purposes, or at least use them to promote their candidates as well as a pro-Nice message. Fine Gael, for instance, still arguably the most pro-EU party, ran posters saying things like 'Nora Owen [local FG member of parliament] says vote yes to Europe'. The anti-Nice parties and groups were not particularly active either, but the sort of resource advantage held by the pro-Nice grouping was not exploited and so in a quiet campaign the 'no' message was trumpeted as loudly as the 'yes' one. Immediately after the first referendum the government established a travelling forum to take the debate around the country. In addition, for the second referendum it restricted the role of the Commission to promoting turnout. The Commission's key message was: 'It's 'no' good giving out afterwards', and it provided voters with a simple and straightforward booklet explaining the meaning of the treaty. The government parties used their own

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resources to promote a 'Yes' vote. The main opposition parties were also far more active on this occasion. The election was now in the past and the possible cost of being free riders once again looked too severe. A 'Yes' umbrella group, which had a broadly non-partisan image, played a major role in promoting the Treaty and made use of substantial private funding for that purpose. Business wanted a 'Yes', and coughed up. IBEC, an employers' group, spent at least €400,000 and the Business Alliance for a 'yes' campaign received and spent €500,000; the major 'No' groups outside the parties spent more like €50,000 between them. The 'Yes' side outspent the 'no' side by a huge margin, largely on posters and leaflets.

A third factor was Irish neutrality. Concerns about the implications for Ireland's neutrality had featured as a reported reason to vote 'No' in all previous Irish referendums on EU matters, whether or not this was justified by anything in those Treaties. The government tried to uncouple neutrality from Nice. It agreed – at the Seville Summit in June 2002 – two Declarations with its European partners. These were then added to the Nice Treaty. The 'National Declaration' by Ireland states that 'Ireland is not party to any mutual defence commitment' and that 'Ireland is not party to any plans to develop a European army'. The 'Declaration of the European Council' states that 'Ireland's policy of military neutrality is in full conformity with the Treaties, on which the European Union is based, including the Treaty of Nice and that there is "no" obligation arising from the Treaties which would or could oblige Ireland to depart from that policy'. Further, and most significantly, the government inserted a clause into the proposed constitutional referendum text guaranteeing that Ireland would not join any EU common defence.

More generally, the 'Yes' campaign also made a much stronger effort to identify the key issue as one of enlargement, which most voters apparently favoured, and no little use was made of visiting dignitaries from Eastern Europe to boost that case. Opposition parties also sought to limit possible damage to the 'Yes' campaign from the fact that the government, far from enjoying a post-election honeymoon, was deeply unpopular, following severe cutbacks in the summer in various programmes to meet a financial shortfall. It was perceived to have misled the electorate about the state of the economy during the recent general election campaign. A senior *Fianna Fáil* figure also resigned just before the vote having been the subject of adverse criticism in the report of a Tribunal of Inquiry into political corruption. Fearing a backlash, opposition parties warned, for instance, that '*Fianna Fáil* can wait: Europe can't', a message to the electorate to voice their discontent with the main governing party at EP and local elections in 2004, not in the 2002 referendum.

The anti-Nice forces continued to stress the threats posed by Nice to Ireland's neutrality ('Goodbye UN, Hello NATO' declared one poster) and sought to deflect the pro-enlargement argument, claiming that that enlargement could take place without Nice, and on conditions more favourable to the applicant states. Parts of the 'no' camp were against enlargement *per se*, arguing strongly against immigration. This caused no little embarrassment to the Greens and SF, made worse by publicity about links between some such elements and neo-Nazi movements in Europe. The 'No to Nice' campaign also reiterated criticism of the Nice Treaty for surrendering too much of Ireland's sovereignty, with Ireland having fewer votes in the Council, a smaller share in the parliament and in time its right to nominate a Commissioner. Integration was going too far. There were other issues, such as that the EU could bring in abortion, but these remained peripheral in the campaign.

The media certainly reflected the fact that Nice II was a more vibrant campaign. One study suggested an increase in intensity of 50 per cent, using a scale based on polarization, perceived closeness and new coverage. News coverage was up by 100 per cent, although both Nice referendums were relatively invisible in the national media when set against the Danish referendum on the Euro or Norway's two accession votes (Hobolt, 2005a: Table 5.1; see also Table 3.3). A separate content analysis has also suggested there was a more interested media in 2002, and also that attention was given to different issues with neutrality getting less coverage and enlargement more, as we might expect given other developments (Zalinski, 2005).

### 4.3 Theoretical expectations

Given this more active campaign, and the relatively greater weight of the 'Yes' side within that campaign, what expectations should we have about the attitudes and behaviour of the voters at Nice II as compared with Nice I? For a start, given the campaign and knowing the results, we might expect that there would be change in the distributions of underlying variables favourable to a 'yes' vote. The variables we include and our expectations are as follows:

- Support for government – up
- Support for pro-Nice parties – up
- Support for the EU – up
- Support for neutrality – down
- Support for enlargement – up
- Support for immigration – up

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We have already alluded to the fact that government popularity was actually down, but we will examine all of these below.

A second set of expectations is linked to the greater level of activity in the campaign as a whole. We would expect voters to feel better informed and we would expect this additional information would make voting less idiosyncratic. Even though voters might successfully use information shortcuts or cues, they will not behave as if they were fully informed (Bartels, 1996) and higher levels of information will increase predictability (Andersen *et al.*, 2005). Hence:

Information levels will be up  
Vote choice will be more predictable

Finally, we have a number of expectations based on the content of the campaign itself. It can be suggested that government popularity would be less important on the second occasion. This is because the major opposition parties tried to uncouple government satisfaction from the vote.<sup>5</sup> However, it can also be expected that support for pro-anti-Nice parties would be more important as the parties themselves did a lot more to persuade their supporters which way to vote. The cues they gave to their voters were stronger. We would also expect that the stronger campaign from the 'Yes' side (in both relative and absolute terms) would show up in the weighting given by voters to particular attitudes they might hold. Support for the EU and support for enlargement should become more closely linked to the vote on Nice II while attitudes to neutrality should become less relevant.

The link between the vote and government satisfaction will be weaker  
The link between the vote and party support will be stronger  
The link between the vote and support for the EU and for Enlargement will be stronger  
The link between the vote and views on neutrality will be weaker

### 4.4 The data

As indicated above, we have several sets of surveys to analyse here: surveys carried out for the *Irish Times*, those carried out as part of the Irish election study and, finally, those carried out for the European Commission. Each contains some unique questions, but there are also similar or identical measures across all three. The similarities and differences are shown in Table 4.1. We have included only those variables that are constant across



Table 4.1 Available attitudinal variables in Nice I and Nice II survey sets

<i>Irish Times 3 polls (MRBI)</i>	<i>Irish Election Study two polls (INES)</i>	<i>European Commission two polls (EC)</i>
Pro-EU	Pro-EU	Pro-EU
Pro-Nice party	Pro-Nice party	Pro-Nice party
Satisfaction with govt	Satisfaction with govt	Information
Information	Pro-neutrality	Pro-neutrality
	Anti-immigration	Pro-enlargement

a particular set. There were neutrality and enlargement questions asked in some of the *Irish Times* polls, but not in both of its final Nice I and Nice II surveys, while the EC asked about government satisfaction only in its Nice II poll.

The specific questions are as follows:

#### **Pro-EU**

*As regards the European Union in general, which of the following comes closest to your views:*

*Ireland should do all it can to unite fully with the European Union/Ireland should do all it can to protect its independence from the European Union (Irish Times)*

And

*The big countries in the EU have far too much power/The small countries in the EU are well able to defend their own interest*

And

*I am quite satisfied with the ways in which policies and decisions are made in the EU/ I am quite dissatisfied with the ways in which policies and decisions are made in the EU.* (European Commission: combined into single scales: alpha indexes 0.49/0.52)

*On matters relating to the economy, Ireland should not give any more of its powers away to the EU.* (5-point agree/disagree scale)

and

*Ireland should do all it can to protect its independence from the European Union.* (5-point agree/disagree scale) (Election study: Combined into single scale: alpha indexes 0.59/0.64).

There is a similar question in all three surveys, although it is assessed differently in the Election study and is combined with two others in the EC survey. This question, *Ireland should do all it can to unite fully with the*

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*European Union / Ireland should do all it can to protect its independence from the European Union*, when used as a bipolar 11-point scale, forms an alpha index of 0.54 with another, more traditional but similarly scaled measure of EU attitudes in the Election study proper: *Has Ireland's membership of the EU been a good thing / bad thing?*

**Pro-Nice party**

For the *Irish Times* surveys this is simply vote intention with separate dummy variables for FG/Labour, SF/Greens and Others (including don't knows). FF/PD, the amalgamation of the two government parties, is the reference category. For the election study the question is *Which, if any, of the following parties do you usually support?* (but the coding is the same as above). For the Election study survey respondents were asked for each party how likely it was that they would ever vote for this party, using a 1–10 scale. The highest score for an anti-Nice party was then subtracted from the highest score for a pro-Nice party, giving a scale running from –10 to +10.

**Satisfaction with government**

*Would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the manner in which the government is running the country?* (Irish Times)

*How satisfied are you with the way the government is doing its job: very satisfied, fairly satisfied, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied?* (Election study)

**Information**

*By the date of the referendum how good was your understanding of the issues involved? [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 all about; Don't Know]* (EC)

*How well did you understand the issues involved in the Nice Treaty? [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 all about; Don't Know]* (Irish Times)

**Pro-Neutrality**

*Rather than having its own foreign and security policy, Ireland should work towards a common European position (5-point agree/disagree scale)* (Election study)

*Ireland should do everything it can to strengthen its neutrality even if this means being less involved in EU co-operation on foreign and defence policy/Ireland*

*should be willing to accept limitations on its neutrality so that it can be more fully involved in EU co-operation on foreign and defence policy* (9-point bipolar scale) (European Commission)

Only one of these two questions taps into attitudes towards to the EU and implications for foreign and defence policy or makes any explicit mention of neutrality, a mention that almost certainly changes the underlying distributions in Table 4.2 below (see also Marsh, 1992 for

Table 4.2 Distributions of variables

<i>Mrbi</i>	Mean: May 14–15 2001	Mean May 29–30 2001	Mean Oct 14–15	Difference 2-1
'Yes' Nice	0.70	0.62	0.59	-0.03
Pro-Govt	0.62	0.65	0.37	-0.28
Pro-EU	0.54	0.50	0.53	0.03
Information	0.41	0.56	0.67	0.11
FF/PD	0.43	0.43	0.38	-0.05
FG/Lab	0.28	0.28	0.25	-0.04
Other/None	0.21	0.20	0.22	0.02
SF/Grn	0.08	0.09	0.15	0.06
<i>EC</i>		Mean Nice I	Mean Nice II	Difference 2-1
'Yes' Nice		0.40	0.74	0.34
Pro-EU		0.44	0.50	0.06
Pro-Neu		0.60	0.60	0.00
Pro-Enl		0.66	0.79	0.13
Information		0.56	0.66	0.10
FF/PD		0.44	0.48	0.04
FG/Lab		0.26	0.24	-0.02
Other/None		0.22	0.19	-0.03
SF/Grn		0.08	0.08	0.01
<i>Ines</i>		Mean Nice I	Mean Nice II	Difference 2-1
'Yes' Nice		0.47	0.73	0.26
Pro-Govt		0.72	0.52	-0.20
Pro-EU		0.52	0.50	-0.02
Pro-Neu		0.44	0.37	-0.07
Pro-Immigr		0.32	0.23	-0.09
Pro-Nice Party		0.64	0.70	0.06

Note: all variables have a theoretical range of 0,1.

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many examples). An *Irish Times* poll during the first Nice referendum found 73 per cent committed to Irish neutrality when asked a direct and explicit question. Nevertheless, these questions do have some face validity as measures of support for neutrality.

##### **Anti-immigration scale**

*There should be stricter limits on immigrants coming into this country. (5-point agree/disagree scale)*

##### **Pro-Enlargement**

*It is envisaged that, over the coming years, there will be further enlargement of the EU. The EU is at present negotiating with 12 candidate countries. Ten of these countries are in eastern and central Europe. The other two are Cyprus and Malta. We are interested in how people feel about further enlargement of the EU and what people see as the possible advantages and disadvantages of such enlargement. First of all, in general terms, are you in favour or against such enlargement of the EU? (European Commission 1)*

*The EU is at present negotiating with 10 candidate countries about them joining the European Union. In general terms, are you in favour or against such enlargement of the EU? (European Commission 2)*

The wording of these two is obviously slightly different in as much as the first item makes clearer the geographical location of the applicant countries. It also implies there may be advantages and disadvantages. However, the distribution of responses in each case was very similar and we feel justified in treating the questions as directly comparable.

##### **Anti-immigration scale**

*There should be stricter limits on immigrants coming into this country (5-point agree/disagree scale)*

#### **4.5 The analysis**

We will start by looking at the distributions of the relevant variables in the three sets of surveys.

All measures have been standardized to run from 0 to 1 so as to make changes in distributions easier to compare. These tables show little sign that public opinion moved in ways favourable to the Treaty between the first and second vote. Note that the MRBI data is flawed, in as much as the last poll before Nice I gave no indication that the referendum would be lost, since 62 per cent indicated support for Nice! Nevertheless, the other features of this poll are broadly in accordance with the rest of the

survey evidence. The MRBI poll shows a big decline in government popularity between the two votes.<sup>6</sup> There is less change in patterns of party support, with MRBI and EC surveys recording no real change, although MRBI does indicate an increase in the (still low levels of) support for the anti-Nice SF/Green parties on the eve of Nice II. The Election study poll – which is only Dublin – shows a small increase in the inclination to favour a pro-Nice party, but a large decline in government satisfaction. There is little change on the various issue dimensions. MRBI shows a tiny increase in pro-EU feeling. The Election study shows no change. A larger increase is in evidence in the EC poll, perhaps because the first EC poll was taken well after Nice I at a time when support for the EU seems to have plummeted for a short time. The EC polls also suggest a more favourable outlook on enlargement, but show no change with respect to neutrality; the INES poll suggests a more favourable distribution of views on neutrality, but a hardening of views against immigration. Finally, the *Irish Times* and EC surveys indicate a clear increase in subjective levels of information. While some patterns are a little mixed, what is very clear is that there is no consistent sign of the sort of big change in underlying conditions that would be much more favourable to Nice and would also account for the large increase in support that took place. Rather, the general picture seems to be that the underlying conditions for Nice II were less favourable, if anything, than for Nice I. The government was much more unpopular and attitudinal changes were generally running in a negative direction or standing still. Only levels of subjective information were markedly up.

If there was no favourable change in the distribution of underlying opinion, what is the evidence that voters weighted matters differently when it came to the second vote? We shall take each set of surveys separately. First, we will look at the *Irish Times* polls. If we cannot account for the difference in outcome by pointing to a change in the distribution attitudes that would make people favourable to the Treaty, then we must look at the determinants of voting themselves and explore whether these changed. We do this by estimating the effects of each variable at Nice I and Nice II within a multivariate model and comparing those estimates. Given the dichotomous nature of the decision we use a logit estimation. The resultant coefficients are not easily interpreted and so we have indicated their maximal effect on the 'Yes' percentage of the vote – holding all other things equal – in a separate column.<sup>7</sup>

The first thing to note in Table 4.3 is that the predictability of the vote increases steadily from the first campaign poll in 2001 to the final poll in 2002. Pseudo  $R^2$  rises from .09 to .28.<sup>8</sup> More information – at least at

76 *The Importance of Context and Political Systems*Table 4.3 Determinants of the 'Yes' vote, Nice I and Nice II: *Irish Times* polls

MRBI Surveys	Nice I Early	Max Effect on yes % vote	Nice I Late	Max Effect on yes % vote	Nice II	Max Effect on yes % vote
Satisfaction with Govt	-0.01 (0.18)	0	0.52** (0.2)	+13	0.91** (0.22)	+20
Pro EU	1.48** (0.17)	+10	1.76** (0.19)	+39	2.89** (0.34)	+50
Information	0.01 (0.24)	0	-0.29 (0.10)	-1	0.93** (0.33)	+22
FG/Lab	-0.41* (0.2)	-9	-0.50* (0.22)	-12	-0.4 (0.25)	-9
Other	-0.25 (0.22)	-6	-0.52* (0.24)	-12	-0.70** (0.25)	-17
SF/Greens	-0.58 (0.3)	-13	-0.13 (0.32)	-3	-1.75** (0.31)	-41
Constant	0.36 (0.22)		-0.33 (0.27)		-1.12** (0.30)	
McFadden's Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.09		0.13		0.28	
N	838		723		713	

Note: \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.

aggregate level<sup>9</sup> – seems to have increased the importance of several variables. Party support was more important on the second occasion with supporters of pro-Nice parties – FF, FG, Labour and the PDs – more likely to support Nice and those of anti-Nice parties and 'no' party less likely to do so. At Nice I, FG/Labour supporters were significantly more lukewarm than those of FF/PDs. Not so the following year. At the same time the difference between FF/PD voters and those for SF/Greens was much more marked. Sharper cues seem to have produced clearer results. Being dissatisfied with the government was a significant factor on both occasions and, despite opposition pleas, seems to have had more impact on the second occasion. A more intensive campaign did not weaken the importance of this cue. Finally, when it came to the second vote, voters seemed to weigh their support for the EU more heavily than they did the first time, with the full impact of this variable suggesting a 50 point increase in the percentage voting 'yes', as opposed to a 39 per cent increase at Nice I and 10 in the pre-Nice I poll.

Results from the polls carried out for the European Commission are shown in Table 4.4. Again, many of the major findings from earlier analyses

Table 4.4 Determinants of the 'Yes' vote, Nice I and Nice II: European Commission polls

<i>EC Surveys</i>	<i>Nice I</i>	<i>Max Effect on yes % vote</i>	<i>Nice II</i>	<i>Max Effect on yes % vote</i>
Pro-EU	4.93** (0.63)	84	4.98** (0.63)	70
Pro-neutrality	1.97** (0.43)	-44	0.78 (0.41)	-11
Pro-enlargement	1.08** (0.32)	23	1.97** (0.27)	38
Information	0.83* (0.40)	+18	0.55 (0.38)	+8
FG/Lab	-0.89** (0.28)	-19	-0.52 (0.27)	-8
Other	-1.08** (0.29)	-22	-0.94** (0.28)	-16
SF/Greens	-1.99** (0.59)	-31	-1.21** (0.36)	-23
Constant	-4.12** (0.49)		-2.51** (0.35)	
McFadden's Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.31		0.35	
Observations	504		768	

Note: \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.

are replicated here. The second vote is more predictable; but neutrality is less important, and the gap between the government and main opposition parties is narrower. There are also slight differences: attitudes to the EU are not more important the second time while the gap between the supporters of the government and those of the most anti-EU parties is no greater. These surveys are particularly useful, and different, because they include an item on enlargement. This is statistically significant on each occasion, but more important for the second vote than for the first: the maximum impact is +38 on a 'yes' Nice II as opposed to +23 on Nice I. The enlargement variable is also responsible for the apparent decline in the variable measuring attitude to the EU. Excluding the enlargement variable leaves attitude to the EU having much the same maximum impact on both occasions: +86 on Nice I and +81 on Nice II.

The Election study pilot panel confirms some major findings. First, the second vote is more predictable and neutrality has a weaker effect on the vote in Nice II than in Nice I (Table 4.5). Along with the *Irish Times* polls, but unlike the EC polls, analysis of this dataset also suggests that attitudes

78 *The Importance of Context and Political Systems***Table 4.5** Determinants of the 'Yes' vote, Nice I and Nice II: Irish Election Study polls

<i>Election study pilot panel</i>	<i>Nice I</i>	<i>Max effect on yes % vote</i>	<i>Nice II</i>	<i>Max effect on yes % vote</i>
Pro-govt	1.07* (0.48)	+25	0.90 (0.54)	+15
Pro-EU Scale	2.51* (1.09)	+56	5.10** (1.38)	+63
Pro-neutrality scale	-2.58* (0.92)	-56	-0.94 (1.04)	-16
Pro-immigration scale	-0.38 (0.86)	-9	0.64 (1.05)	+11
Support for pro-Nice party	1.95* (0.89)	+41	2.72* (1.35)	+53
Constant	-1.08 (0.89)		-1.57 (1.21)	
McFadden's Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.17		0.25	
Observations	129		101	

Note: \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.

to the EU are more important for Nice II votes than for Nice I. Support for pro-Nice parties is also a little more important the second time around.<sup>10</sup> This study also contains items on immigration, not available in other surveys. It is not significant here in relation to either vote but at least the sign is as expected at Nice II.

#### 4.6 Summary and discussion

This chapter set out to see how far a change in the *content* and *intensity* of a referendum campaign has an impact on the bases of popular choice. The two Nice referendums in Ireland provides a particularly appropriate site for such an investigation given that it saw two votes on essentially the same question within a short space of time, with two very different outcomes following two discernibly different campaigns. In particular, we wanted to see whether the more intensive campaign might have shifted the emphasis to issues and, to the extent that people voted on the issues, and the campaign on the pro side was much more extensive, were those issues on the second occasion different ones, and ones which favoured the pro side more. We also examined whether a more intensive campaign would produce a more predictable election where issues and



political cue givers had a greater impact on the vote. Finally, we wanted to know how far the campaign seemed simply to create – or coincide with – a much more favourable basis for the Nice vote, with a set of distributions on potentially critical allegiances and opinions that strengthened the chances of a yes vote. We started our analysis by looking for evidence that would suggest that this more favourable climate. Essentially, there was little evidence of such a shift. Indeed, in as much as satisfaction with the government dropped sharply the climate was less favourable, and there were no clear shifts in other opinions that might outweigh that change, although voters did feel more informed about Nice.

It is apparent that vote choice was more predictable, with pseudo  $R^2$  increasing by between eight and 15 points between the two votes. A similar shift is in evidence within the Nice I campaign. As the electorate becomes more informed, both about the issues and where parties and governments stand on these issues, it is easier to understand how people vote.

This change between Nice I and II seems to have been due to a greater weight of issue considerations, but there is also clear evidence that the issues that were important at the two votes were not always the same ones. This is most evident in the case of neutrality, the impact of which was much lower in Nice II than Nice I in the two analyses that were able to tap this question. It might be argued that this was due more to the change in the wording of the referendum question itself than to the campaign but, even with the change in wording, the No camp continued to argue that a Yes vote would undermine neutrality and bring NATO and a European Army closer. It would appear that the 'Yes' camp won the argument the second time around. In all three analyses opinion on the EU itself mattered a lot. Those who wanted more integration tended to vote 'Yes' and those suspicious of it tended to vote 'No'. The evidence actually points to a slight strengthening of that trend the second time, particularly if alternative issues – such as enlargement – are excluded. Again, this is consistent with expectations that a stronger campaign would focus more attention on issues, with the issue of integration an obvious one for a vote on a European Treaty. We also expected that other issues might have become more important on the second occasion, notably enlargement but also immigration, since the impact of Nice would be almost certainly to raise levels of immigration. Only one test was possible on each of these expectations. Enlargement was much more important at Nice II, having more than twice the potential impact on the Nice II 'Yes' vote as compared to its effect on Nice I, increasing from +23 to +38 points. Immigration had a smaller effect, but moved from an

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unexpected -9 to a small but positive - as expected, - impact of +11. All of these changed in accord with expectations, in terms of both the (greater) importance of issue dimensions but also the change in what issues would be important.

The impact of political cues did not change a lot, however: party cues may also have been clarified. The evidence was mixed on government satisfaction, although in both instances the change was small, although the effect on both votes in all surveys was positive. On party support, the actual change was also small when all parties are considered but all analyses suggested parties were significant cue-givers and the two containing a specific vote choice variable suggested a slight narrowing in the FF/PD-FG/Labour gap in the effectiveness of their 'yes' campaign, while the more nuanced Election Study measure did point to a slight increase in the effect of party loyalties.

It must be admitted here that most of the changes are not in themselves statistically significant. What is persuasive is that similar patterns are demonstrated across more than one survey. However, differences across time, and hence the likely effects of the campaign, remain small. One explanation for this is that the differences between the two campaigns were not so large. As we noted, both campaigns were of low intensity in comparison with those in Denmark on Maastricht or the Euro, or in Norway on EU entry. The contrast between Nice I and Nice II is between two campaigns of different intensity, but not between two campaigns at different extremes of intensity. Yet even at this relatively low degree of differentiation, we still observe difference in outcomes in terms of voters' decision-making. A better research design would be to obtain a greater of differentiation on the campaign variable. Ideally too, we would have more sophisticated measures of emphases in the campaigns themselves and a much wider set of measures of voters' sensitivity to these features. This is certainly not now available with respect to Nice I and Nice II, but enough has been shown here to suggest that the second campaign made a difference by linking the vote more clearly to enlargement and to the EU, and decoupling Nice from neutrality. For many people, Nice II was about something different.

Looking further than the Nice referendums this study suggests that future research on referendums should move beyond asking whether people use party or issue cues to explore the nature of issue-related cues in much more detail, asking how the referendum question itself was framed by the different sides in the campaign and how far voters responded to particular frames. This implies a closer link between studies of the content of campaigns and studies of voter choice. To understand why people vote

as they do, this chapter suggests it is vital to understand what people think they are voting about.

## Notes

- 1 I am indebted to discussions on the Nice referendums with my colleagues on the Irish election study, John Garry, Fiachra Kennedy and Richard Sinnott, and to Sara Hobolt and the editor for advice on previous drafts of this chapter but for any fault found here the blame is all mine.
- 2 The surveys were carried out under the framework contract (Flash Eurobarometer) with EOS Gallup Europe on behalf of the Eurobarometer Unit in the Directorate General for Press and Communications of the European Commission. Fieldwork for the 2001 survey was conducted between 20 August and 10 September 2001 among a quota sample of 1245 adults. Fieldwork for the second survey was conducted between 15 November and 9 December 2002 among a quota sample of 1203 adults. For an extensive analysis of each of these two surveys, see Sinnott, 2001 and 2003 and for an analysis using both surveys to explore the relative importance of party and issue cues see Garry *et al.* (2005).
- 3 This draws on a number of reviews on the two campaigns: Gilland (2002, 2003); O'Mahony (2001); O'Brennan (2003); Hayward (2002, 2003); Doyle (2002).
- 4 Peter Doyle (2002) also argued that the Commission did a poor job in any event by taking an overly broad view of the Treaty.
- 5 It might also be argued that because the vote was just after, rather than just before a general election, the protest message would not be so worthwhile as the government would care less (Oppenhuis *et al.* 1996). However, in this case it is likely that the government would have been very embarrassed and damaged by a 'No' vote.
- 6 We also see that the government was unpopular with a majority of voters in other polls not analysed here: an MRBI poll in mid-September 2002 and a Lansdowne poll in October 2002.
- 7 Estimations were done using the logit feature in Stata 9 and effects calculated using *spost*. These effects represent the difference between the expected outcomes at both extremes of the independent variable scale. Care should be taken in comparing effects across different independent variables, or the same variable measured in different ways. Other things being equal we would expect an attitude measured on a 10-point scale to have a larger maximum effect than the same one measured on a 2-point scale.
- 8 Underlying distributions all much the same.
- 9 There is no support for an expectation that more informed people make more predictable choices as the pseudo  $R^2$  is much the same more the more informed voters, However, the measure used here is one of subjective knowledge, not actual knowledge.
- 10 Government satisfaction is marginally less important. The party support scale, being more nuanced, might be thought to be picking up some of this effect but even after leaving out this variable the impact of government satisfaction declines for Nice II.

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