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Abstract

The process of establishing a constitution for Europe came to an end when voters in France and the Netherlands rejected the proposal. Analyzing both media coverage and survey data, this article seeks to disentangle the reasons why a majority of voters rejected the European Constitution. The authors' findings suggest that the campaign played an important role in priming certain attitudes and that vote choices, in turn, were driven by specific issue concerns rather than general dissatisfaction with the European Union or national governments. These findings have implications not only for our understanding of direct democracy in Europe but also for the study of campaign effects.

Keywords

campaign, constitutional treaty, European Union, referendum, voting behavior

The no votes in referendums in France and the Netherlands in the spring of 2005 heralded the end of the European Constitution. Since treaty changes in the European Union (EU) require unanimous consent by all member states, European leaders decided to transform the Constitution into the more modest Lisbon Treaty. This treaty, however, was subsequently rejected by Irish voters in their first ballot in June 2008 and only came into force after the Irish approved the Treaty in a second vote in October 2009.¹ Paradoxically, the constitutional process was thus halted by citizens of member states traditionally seen as among the most pro-European. This raises the question of whether these votes reflected a tide of Euroskepticism or whether we should look for the answer elsewhere: in domestic politics or in the specific context of the campaign. This article examines why French and Dutch voters rejected the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT) and specifically how the two referendum campaigns influenced attitudes and vote choices.

The French and the Dutch referendums are significant not only because of their impact on the constitutional process in the EU but also because they provide an apposite case study of campaign effects in direct democracy, since the exact same question was put to the electorates in two quite different campaign settings. Whereas most research on the effect of campaigns has been conducted in the context of U.S. elections (see Abramowitz 1988; Alvarez 1997; Hillygus 2005; Iyengar and Simon 2000; Shaw 1999), referendum campaigns should be more influential given

the higher degree of electoral volatility. Voters in referendums usually have less firm opinions about the issue at stake and feel less bound by partisan loyalties than they do in elections (see de Vreese 2007; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002; LeDuc 2002). Campaigns may affect vote choices in a number of different ways, and importantly, campaigns can prime certain attitudes, that is, make aspects of the issue at stake seem more relevant to the vote choice. This is particularly relevant when voters are faced with a complex and multifaceted proposal, such as a new constitution. Whereas the conventional account of contestation in Europe sees vote choices in terms of more or less Europe, we argue that these no votes were a signal of voters wanting not *less* Europe but rather a different Europe and that the campaigns played an important role in priming which aspects of the European project were salient to the vote decision.

This article proceeds as follows. First, the existing literature on European referendums and our theoretical expectations concerning campaign effects and priming are introduced. Second, we examine the nature of the two referendum campaigns, using data from a content

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analysis of the media coverage. Thereafter, we use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of survey data to analyze the key dimensions of attitudes toward European integration. Finally, we test the competing explanations of voting behavior in the two referendums. Our findings suggest that attitudes toward the Constitution were multifaceted and that the no votes reflected concerns over specific aspects of the European project that were primed in the two campaigns rather than simply anti-EU sentiments and protest voting. This has implications not only for our understanding of these referendums but also for the study of campaign effects in direct democracy.

Referendum Behavior and Campaign Effects

Referendums on European integration are often described as “second-order national elections.” This term was first coined by Reif and Schmitt (1980) to describe European Parliament elections but has later been applied to referendums on European issues. According to this theory, such referendums are *second order* because they are low salience, and first-order issues of national politics tend to dominate the campaigns. Consequently, voters are expected to use their votes as a means of signaling their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the government (Franklin, Marsh, and McLaren 1994; Franklin, van der Eijk, Marsh 1995; Garry, Marsh, and Sinnott 2005). The same logic has also been widely adopted by commentators and academics alike to explain the outcomes in the two failed constitutional referendums (see, e.g., Duhamel 2005; Ivaldi 2006; Jérôme and Vaillant 2005; Marthaler 2005). If the ECT referendums were truly second-order national elections, we would expect that vote choices were based on the recommendations by national elites, such as party leaders, and feelings toward the government of the day rather than on attitudes toward the Constitution itself.

An alternative explanation of the outcomes has potentially more severe implications for the European project: it has been suggested that the no votes were a symptom of the increasing Euroskepticism among European citizens. Opposition to European integration can stem from many different sources, but a fundamental concern is the threat that the EU poses to long-established national identities (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2004; McLaren 2002). This explanation echoes the so-called issue-voting approach, which argues that voting behavior in EU referendums reflects people’s underlying, broad attitudes toward European integration (Garry, Marsh, and Sinnott 2005; Hobolt 2005; Siune, Svensson, and Tonsgaard 1994; Svensson 2002). Following this approach, we would expect that an underlying Euroskepticism, related to concerns about national sovereignty and culture, has shaped the outcomes in the two referendums.

Conventionally, the issue-voting approach has considered attitudes toward the EU mainly in terms of citizens wanting more or less Europe. Yet, it is plausible that these “no” verdicts in fact cover over a mix of disparate considerations that cannot easily be captured by a single dimension or a binary vote choice. Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson (2002) have shown that party positions on Europe are structured both by the traditional left-right dimension (contestation about political control of the economy) and the “new politics” dimension (contestation about socially liberal vs. authoritarian values), depending on the aspect of European integration in question. Equally, voters’ views on the Constitution may be conditional on which aspect of the European project is salient. If the key issue is liberalization of the labor market, the vote may be decided on the basis of left-right ideology, whereas a broader question of the future of Europe may relate to people’s views on culture and identity. Which of these considerations carries the greatest weight to voters will depend, at least partly, on the agenda-setting nature of the campaign. This brings us to the question of campaign effects in referendums.

Political campaigns involve an organized effort by actors to shape public opinion and achieve a desired outcome (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002). The claim that political campaigns matter has been highly contested in the political science literature (see Abramowitz 1988; Gelman and King 1993), but over recent years the focus has shifted from whether they matter to *how* they matter. The conclusion of many recent studies has been that while campaigns may have only a limited ability to change people’s minds, they are powerful when it comes to setting the agenda and altering the criteria by which candidates or issues are judged (see Hillygus 2005; Iyengar and Simon 2000; Shaw 1999). This article focuses on how the campaign environment can mediate the extent to which different issues become salient in the minds of voters.

Campaigns are likely to matter more in referendums than they do in elections (de Vreese and Semetko 2004; Hobolt 2007; LeDuc 2002; Lupia 1994; Schuck and de Vreese 2008, 2009). Referendums present a different choice to elections, since no political parties or candidate names appear on the ballot and voters must choose among alternatives that are sometimes unfamiliar. If voters know little about the specific ballot proposal, it is mainly the various information sources available to them over the course of a campaign that decide which issues are salient when voters come to cast their verdict. Campaigns thus have a *priming effect*. In this article, we use the notion of priming to refer to the process by which campaigns influence the perceived saliency of aspects of an issue by making information about that issue available in people’s memories, *accessibility* (Iyengar and Kinder 1987), and by calling attention to certain matters while ignoring others, *agenda setting* (Miller and Krosnick 2000; Chong and Druckman

2007). As Chong and Druckman have noted, “When a mass communication places attention on an issue, we expect that issue to receive greater weight via changes in its accessibility and applicability” (p. 115).

The degree of priming taking place during a campaign will depend on the intensity of the campaign (Alvarez 1997; Kahn and Kenney 1997; Westlye 1991). We would expect that electorates that are given extensive information about the ballot proposal during the campaign behave differently from electorates deciding in campaign settings where very little information is provided. More information is likely to increase the salience of the ballot issue and thus make attitudes toward the issue at stake more relevant. In his celebrated book on mass opinion, John Zaller (1992) noted that “the impact of people’s value predispositions always depends on whether citizens possess the contextual information needed to translate their values into support for particular policies or candidates” (p. 25). Equally, studies in political psychology have shown that information affects the attitude–behavior relation, because attitudes tend to be consistent with behavior to the extent that those attitudes are readily accessible in behavioral situations (Alvarez and Brehm 2002; Lavine et al. 1996). Yet, not all persons are equally affected by the information provided by the campaign. Indeed, Zaller has shown that people with higher levels of political awareness receive more information about politics. We would thus expect the effect of campaign priming to be moderated by individuals’ level of political awareness. As Miller and Krosnick (2000) note, “In order to cull from a news story the implication that its focus is nationally important, a person must have enough cognitive resources available to think beyond the explicit content of the story. And people who know a lot about politics are likely to find it easiest to do this” (p. 303).

Building on this research, we can thus formulate specific expectations concerning the priming effect of campaigns in referendums:

Hypothesis 1: Since information provided during a campaign makes individuals more capable of linking attitudes with specific policies, we expect that more intense campaigns make voters more likely to vote on the basis of their attitudes towards the ballot issue (“issue voting”).

Hypothesis 2: Since campaigns call attention to certain aspects of a ballot proposal (“priming”), we expect that the issues that feature most prominently in the news media during the campaign will matter more to vote choices.

Hypothesis 3: Campaigns are not expected to have a uniform effect across the electorate, since certain individuals pay more attention to campaign information. We expect that priming will have a

greater effect on individuals who are more interested in politics and that, consequently, issue voting is more pronounced among “political sophisticates.”

We test these propositions in a comparative analysis of the French and the Dutch referendums. First, we examine the content and intensity of the two campaigns. Thereafter, we analyze the dimensionality of attitudes toward Europe in the campaigns, and finally, we examine the impact of attitudes and second-order concerns on vote choices and the moderating effect of political interest.

The Referendum Campaigns

After the adoption of the ECT by the European Council in June of 2004, the ratification process began in individual member states. The French and the Dutch referendums on the Constitution were held within days of each other on May 29 and June 1, 2005.² In both countries, the ratification of the ECT was backed by the center-right coalition government as well as the major center-left opposition party. This elite consensus in the two founding member states was also reflected in high levels of public support for the European Constitution in the autumn of 2004: 73 percent of the Dutch and 70 percent of the French said that they were in favor of the idea of a European Constitution.³ Yet, despite these similarities, the campaigns leading up to the two referendums were very different. Whereas the Dutch campaign really began only less than a month before the vote, the French campaign was drawn out and very intense.

The comparison of the two campaigns in this article is based on a systematic content analysis of two national print media: *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in France and *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf* in the Netherlands. Every single referendum-related article in these newspapers in the 12 weeks leading up to the vote was coded using a coding scheme. This content analysis focuses on two main aspects of the campaign: the intensity of the campaign, measured as the average amount of daily coverage of the referendum, and the content of the campaign, measured by counting the issues addressed in each article.⁴

The first important difference between the two campaigns concerns the sheer volume of information: the intensity of the campaign. Figure 1 shows that the coverage of the referendum issue varied greatly between the two campaigns. While the referendum issue was visible in the news in both countries, the issue only began to dominate the Dutch news agenda in the last weeks before the vote and to a lesser extent than the French campaign.⁵

The French campaign began soon after the ECT was signed in June 2004, and it was therefore well under way

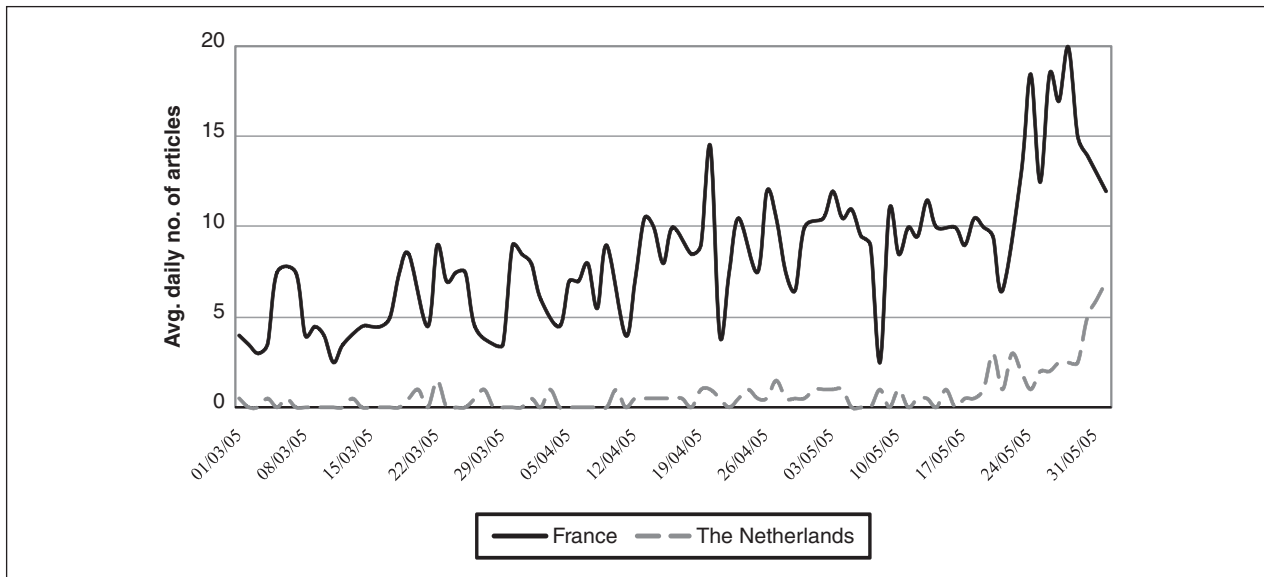


Figure 1. Intensity of campaign coverage

Source: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *De Volkskrant*, and *De Telegraaf*.

on December 31, 2004, when President Chirac confirmed he would call a referendum on the ECT. The polls suggested a solid majority of more than 60 percent in favor of the Constitution in the period leading up to the announcement. Yet, the campaign was not as smooth as Chirac and his government had hoped for. While the main newspapers and the mainstream parties—including the government parties, the leadership of the Socialist Party, and the Green Party—recommended a yes vote, there was substantial tension internally in these parties. The major opposition party, the Socialist Party, in particular, was deeply divided on this issue. In spite of an internal referendum held in December 2004 with 59 percent in favor of the Constitution, the left-wing faction of the Socialist Party, led by former French Prime Minister Fabius, campaigned on the no side. Hence, the no side, consisting of some trade unions, a sizeable minority of the Socialist Party and the Green Party,⁶ the Communist Party, and other groups on the far left in French politics, as well as the National Front on the far right, managed to set the agenda with a number of issues, including the threat of the “neoliberal” EU to the French social model and the negative economic and social consequences brought by enlargement and the future admission of Turkey (Brouard and Tiberj 2006; Marthaler 2005). Unlike the far right campaign, the left-wing “no” message was not anti-EU but rather a condemnation of a particular kind of Europe: a Bolkestein’s Europe (named after the former EU commissioner who proposed an increased liberalization of services), which threatened French workers and the social model. By rejecting the ECT, voters were also calling for a more social Europe.

Table 1. Issues in the Campaign

| Percentage of total referendum coverage | France | Netherlands |
|---|--------|-------------|
| Government/procedural issues | 24 | 30 |
| Economy/social model | 37 | 10 |
| Other referendums | 12 | 29 |
| Constitutional treaty | 11 | 17 |
| EU enlargement | 9 | 6 |
| Cultural threat | 5 | 9 |
| Immigration | 1 | 0 |

Source: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *De Volkskrant*, and *De Telegraaf*.

In other words, while the far right framed the Constitution as a “cultural threat,” the naysayers on the left framed it primarily as a “social threat.”

Table 1 shows the main issues of the debate in both France and the Netherlands (as a proportion of overall referendum coverage). The key issues in the French campaign were the performance of the national government and president, the domestic economy, and the effect of the EU on the economy.⁷ Domestic themes thus played an important role, as the second-order election theory has suggested, but in this campaign the troubles of the French economy and welfare state were linked to the liberal economic model promoted by the EU.

Unlike the French voters, who had voted on aspects of European integration twice previously, the Dutch voters had their first say on the European project in the ECT referendum held only three days after the French “no.” The campaign in the Netherlands began much later than

the French campaign and was less intense, as Figure 1 shows. There was a broad consensus in favor of the Constitution among the political establishment, stretching from the parties constituting the center-right governing coalition—the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the liberal parties (VVD and D66)—to the opposition center-left Labor Party (PvdA), the Greens, the trade unions and business federations, and practically every newspaper in the country. The no camp in comparison consisted of a mix of small parties: most importantly the Socialist Party but also populist right-wing groups such as List Pim Fortuyn and the small Orthodox-Calvinist ChristenUnie. Despite its size and ideological diversity, the no campaign managed to set the agenda during much of the campaign, and the government was forced to play catch-up (Harmsen 2005; Nijeboer 2005). Much of the campaign focused on procedural issues, such as whether or not the government would respect a marginal no vote (the referendum was nonbinding). As Table 1 shows, a great deal of attention was also paid to the French referendum campaign (29 percent of all referendum coverage). The no side dominated the agenda with a mix of arguments against the ECT, whereas the yes side was largely on the defensive. On the far right, the parties emphasized that the Constitution posed a threat to national sovereignty and culture. The high-profile populist politician Geert Wilders⁸ linked his opposition to the ECT to the threat of Turkish membership in the Union and the erosion of Dutch culture and sovereignty, under the slogan “The Netherlands must remain!” (Aarts and van der Kolk, 2006). Interestingly, the left no campaign, led by the Socialist Party, also focused on the dangers to Dutch liberal culture and identity. Hence, whereas the French campaign was dominated by economic and social issues, concerns over threats to sovereignty and culture were more central to the Dutch campaign. However, in general, coverage of the referendum issue was less intense and more sporadic than in neighboring France.

Given the elite consensus in favor of the ECT and the prominent position of these arguments in the media, the development in vote intention during the campaigns came as a surprise to most commentators. In France, the majority in favor was around 60 percent until late March, when the no vote sharply increased. In the Netherlands, poll numbers were highly unstable until the campaign began in earnest about a month before the vote (partly due to the high number of undecided voters), and by then the intended yes votes had plummeted to around 45 percent.

Why did voters turn against the ECT during the course of the two campaigns? We argued above that the information provided during the campaigns may have served to prime certain attitudes toward the ECT and the EU and, in turn, influence vote choices. Given the intensity and polarization of the French campaign, we would particularly expect this campaign to have activated issue

preferences. To a lesser extent, we would also expect attitudes to matter to Dutch vote choices, in conjunction with second-order factors such as partisanship and feelings about the government. Recall that while we argued that the intensity of campaign information will activate issue preferences, we also hypothesized that campaigns prime voters by highlighting certain aspects of the ballot issue while relegating others to the background. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of attitudes toward European integration in determining vote choice in EU referendums, but these studies have treated EU attitudes as one-dimensional, that is, diffuse support for European integration (see, e.g., Hobolt 2005; Schuck and de Vreese 2008). However, the analysis of the referendum coverage emphasizes the many themes that were debated in the campaign and suggests that primed attitudes may relate to specific aspects of the integration process. Hence, before proceeding to the analysis of vote choices in the two referendums, the next section explores the dimensionality of attitudes toward European integration in France and the Netherlands.

Multidimensionality of European Attitudes

Most studies of attitudes toward European integration and the EU have analyzed these as a simple unidimensional scale, ranging from Euroskepticism to support for further integration. Many studies even conflate generic feelings about the European integration project with specific attitudes toward the EU. For example, Gabel (1998) constructs a two-item scale of a question on membership and a question on European unification, while McLaren (2002) uses two questions on EU membership to construct a similar scale, and Hooghe and Marks (2004) employ a scale constructed by three questions—one on membership in the EU and two on the desired speed and direction of European integration (all of these studies use Eurobarometer survey data). These scales may be appropriate for the purpose of examining diffuse support for European integration, but in this article we want to explore how different aspects of people’s feelings about the European integration may influence their vote choices in referendums, and we therefore do not want to deliberately reduce attitudes to a simple scale of diffuse support. We thus adopt an inductive approach to uncovering the dimensionality in people’s attitudes toward the EU and the Constitution.

To analyze the attitudes and vote choices of French and Dutch voters, we use two national referendum surveys⁹ that contain a wide range of attitude questions on different aspects of European and national politics. These survey items tap into different aspects of attitudes toward European integration, including concerns about identity loss, enlargement, the environment, economics, welfare, institutions, and the

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Attitude Indicators in France

| Items | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 |
|--|---------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|
| | Social threat | Cultural threat | Enlargement | Plan B |
| The Constitution gives more power to the European Parliament and the citizens | .75 | – | – | – |
| The Constitution is a threat to French secularism | – | – | – | – |
| The Constitution strengthens Europe's role in the world | .79 | – | – | – |
| A rejection of the Constitution would isolate France | .67 | – | – | – |
| The Constitution guarantees the social rights of citizens | .82 | – | – | – |
| Enlargement with Romania | – | – | .70 | – |
| Enlargement with Turkey | – | – | .83 | – |
| France pays for other countries | – | – | – | – |
| Loss of social protection in France | .70 | .56 | – | – |
| Loss of identity and culture | – | .70 | – | – |
| France will play a less important role in the world | – | .81 | – | – |
| Increase in the number of immigrants? | – | .52 | .65 | – |
| Increase in unemployment? | – | .59 | – | – |
| Leave the EU? | .62 | – | – | – |
| Are 25 member states too many? | – | – | .70 | – |
| Attachment to the European project | – | – | – | – |
| Has France benefited from European integration? | – | – | – | – |
| National sovereignty versus European integration | – | – | – | – |
| A rejection of the Constitution would pave the way for another, less liberal, Europe | – | – | – | .87 |
| Eigenvalue | 5.71 | 1.61 | 1.31 | 1.05 |
| Proportion of variance explained | 30% | 8% | 7% | 6% |

Note: Principal factor analysis with oblique rotation. Only factor loadings above .5 are shown. $N = 1,009$.

Source: French Referendum Study (2005).

pace of integration more generally. To investigate the structure of EU attitudes and identify specific dimensions, we use exploratory factor analysis (EFA). EFA enables us to assess whether the item taps into one or more underlying dimension, as well as the degree to which particular items relate to the same dimension. For the analysis, we have chosen a range of interval or ordinal EU attitude items included in the referendums surveys.¹⁰ In both the French and the Dutch cases, the factor solution extracts four factors with standardized eigenvalues greater than 1. This suggests that attitudes toward European integration are multidimensional. We then perform a constrained four-factor factor analysis with oblique rotation.¹¹ The results for France are shown in Table 2.

The first factor in the French study reflects attitudes toward the ECT, but it is interesting to note that the item that load highest on this dimension is the question on whether the Constitution guarantees the social rights of citizens (.82); concerns over potential loss of social protection (.70) also loads very highly. This suggests that concerns about “social threats” to the French welfare model are driving attitudes toward the Constitution in this

dimension. Moreover, it is noteworthy that none of the generic “attitudes toward the EU” questions load highly on this dimension. The second dimension taps into concerns about loss of national sovereignty and culture, which we have referred to as “cultural threat.” The items on a weakened role for France in the world (.81) and loss of identity and culture (.70) load highest on this dimension. The framing of cultural threat is also linked to immigration, social issues, and economic issues. In this dimension, European integration appears as a threat to the sovereignty and culture of the nation itself. The third factor clearly represents enlargement concerns, as only questions on the size of the EU and on enlargement with Turkey (.83) and Romania (.70), as well as concerns over immigration (.65), load highly. Interestingly, the last dimension is represented by a single-question item on whether a rejection of the Constitution would pave the way for another, less liberal, EU. This dimension thus appears to represent the opinion on what will happen to the EU if the ECT is rejected by the French. Hence, we have labeled the four factors *social threat & ECT*, *cultural threat*, *enlargement*, and *Plan B*.

Table 3. Factor Analysis of Attitude Indicators in the Netherlands

| Items | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------|----------------------|
| | Cultural threat | Postmaterialism | Euro | Enlargement (Turkey) |
| Democratic consequences of adopting the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT) | – | – | – | – |
| Economic consequences of adopting ECT | – | – | – | – |
| Consequences for collaboration of adopting ECT | – | – | – | – |
| Consequences for social security system of adopting ECT | – | – | – | – |
| Consequences for enlargement with Turkey | – | – | – | .81 |
| Transition from the guilder to the euro caused serious damage | – | – | .80 | – |
| The introduction of the euro is beneficial to the Dutch economy | – | – | .73 | – |
| Prices in the Netherlands have risen because of the euro | – | – | .90 | – |
| Euro introduction made foreign payments easier | – | – | – | – |
| Smaller member states will lose influence | .65 | – | – | – |
| Welfare will increase | – | .55 | – | – |
| Our language will be less used | .76 | – | – | – |
| Wealthier countries will be obligated to pay more | .54 | – | – | – |
| Environment will be better preserved | – | .65 | – | – |
| Social security will disappear | .57 | – | – | – |
| Our national identity and our national culture will disappear | .76 | – | – | – |
| Employment will move to other countries where production is cheaper | .73 | – | – | – |
| Farmers in the Netherlands will have more trouble | .73 | – | – | – |
| Europe will try harder to achieve worldwide peace and stability | – | .80 | – | – |
| Opinion on European unification | – | – | – | – |
| Eigenvalue | 5.92 | 1.66 | 1.34 | 1.02 |
| Proportion of variance explained | 30% | 8% | 7% | 5% |

Note: Principal factor analysis with oblique rotation. Only factor loadings above .5 are shown. $N = 1,277$.
Source: Dutch Referendum Study (2005).

The analysis of the Dutch survey data also results in a four-factor solution (see Table 3). In contrast to France, the more specific attitudes toward the ECT do not load highly on any of the factors. In the Netherlands, the first factor seems to represent a “cultural threat” dimension: concerns over loss of language (.76) and culture and identity (.76), as well as threats to employment (.73) and farmers (.73). The second dimension is more curious as it taps into postmaterialist (or “new politics”) feelings toward the EU (see Inglehart 1977) about promotion of worldwide peace (.80) and protection of the environment (.65). The third dimension clearly represents concerns about the single European currency, the euro, while the last dimension taps into feelings about Turkish accession. We have thus labeled the four dimensions *cultural threat*, *postmaterialism*, *euro*, and *enlargement* (Turkey).

It is not surprising that issues concerning social threat drive attitudes toward Europe in the French case, given

the role such issues played in the campaign (37 percent of all referendum coverage was concerned with economic policies; see Table 1). In contrast, we find that concerns over threats to national identity and influence represent the dominant dimension of Dutch EU attitudes. This may seem surprising given that cultural threats were not the most important aspect of referendum coverage (see Table 1); yet, the debate surrounding the populist right-wing List Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders and the murder of the controversial filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim radical in November 2004 had already made issues of Dutch identity and culture highly salient in the public sphere (see Breeman et al. 2009), and this may also have influenced people’s perception of the ECT. More generally, we would expect that the Dutch campaign did less to activate attitudes (compared with France), given the lower intensity of the campaign. Next we examine the impact of these attitudes and other factors on vote choices.

Explaining the No Votes

This section tests competing explanations of why the French and the Dutch voters rejected the Constitutional Treaty. We use the same national survey data as described above.¹² Our dependent variable in both models is the vote choice in the referendums (no is coded as 1; all nonvoters were excluded from the analysis). Our key independent variables are the four attitudes dimensions (factor scores) derived from the factor analyses described in the previous section. To test the “second-order national election” hypothesis, we include two variables that tap into domestic politics. First, we include a variable of partisan identification,¹³ since we expect that voters are more likely to vote in favor of the ECT if they support a party that recommends a yes vote. Second, we include a variable that captures satisfaction with the government. In the French model, we include a question on satisfaction with President Jacques Chirac. In the Netherlands, the question concerns general government satisfaction. Following the second-order election literature, we would expect that people are more likely to reject the ECT if they are dissatisfied with the performance of the national government. We also include additional controls in the model that have been shown to be related to vote choices in EU referendums: perceptions of the economy and attitudes toward immigration (in France) and left-right self-placement (in the Netherlands).¹⁴ Finally, we include a set of demographic control variables: age, gender, income/class. To test our third hypothesis concerning the moderating impact of political awareness, we also include a variable that taps into the respondent’s level of interest in European politics (the Netherlands) and in the campaign (France).¹⁵ Our expectation is that political interest will facilitate priming during the campaign, and consequently the salient issue dimension (the first factor in our analyses) will have a greater impact on vote choice for those voters with higher levels of political interest. We test this proposition in a second model by including an interaction between the attitude factor scores and political interest. As our dependent variables are binary, we estimate both models using logistic regression. The results are shown in Table 4.

As expected, Table 4 shows that in France each of the four attitude dimensions is significant, and in particular concerns over social threats have a very substantive impact on vote choices. Interestingly, partisanship seems to make very little difference. Only National Front voters were swayed by their party, when we control for attitudes. This corroborates our expectation that party cues matter less when the campaign environment is very intense. Conversely, satisfaction with Chirac does have a significant impact on vote choices, in accordance with the second-order national election explanation. Women are also less

likely to vote no, as are older voters. Overall, the fit of Model 1 is excellent with a pseudo *R*-squared of almost .70 and 92 percent correctly predicted outcomes.

In a similar model applied to Dutch data, all attitude factors are significant, except attitudes toward enlargement. However, in contrast to France, party attachment appears to play a significant role in the Netherlands, even after controlling for EU attitudes. Supporters of the governing parties are significantly more likely to vote yes, whereas supporters of Wilders and the Socialist Party are more likely to vote no. Note that there is no significant relationship between supporting the main opposition party, the Labor Party (PvdA), and vote choice. In the Netherlands, satisfaction with the government also reduces the likelihood of voting no. Again, we see that women and older voters are more likely to vote yes.

We are not interested only in the direction and the significance of these effects but also in their relative magnitude. The coefficients in logit models (log odds) are difficult to interpret, let alone compare across models. To facilitate interpretation and comparison, we have calculated the marginal effects of each of the statistically significant variables. These have been calculated by increasing each of the variables by half a standard deviation from the mean (or in the case of binary variables, from 0 to 1), holding all the other variables at their mean, and calculating the change in the probability of voting no. The marginal effects are shown in Figures 2A (France) and 2B (the Netherlands).

Figure 2A illustrates that concerns over social threats are by far the most powerful predictor of vote choices in the French referendum. Half a standard deviation increase in concern about social threats increases the likelihood of voting no by 34 percentage points. In comparison, the other attitude dimensions only have a minor effect on vote choices with marginal effects of less than 10 percent. Supporters of the National Front have a 30 percent higher likelihood of voting no, all other things being equal. Moreover, an increase in satisfaction with Chirac by half a standard deviation decreases the probability of voting no by only 6 points.

In the Dutch case, the best predictor of vote choice is partisanship (see Figure 2B). Supporting one of the governing parties increases the likelihood of a yes vote by between 22 and 29 percentage points, while it is reduced by around 22 points if the voter is a supporter of the Socialist Party or Wilders’ party. In contrast, attitudes matter less in the Dutch case. The most important attitude dimensions are postmaterialism and cultural threat, with marginal effects of around 15 percent, all other things being equal. In the Netherlands, an increase in satisfaction with the government by half a standard deviation decreases the probability of voting no by 9 percentage points. Given the high level of campaign intensity in the French case and the ambiguous messages sent by some parties

Table 4. Predicting the No Vote in France and the Netherlands

| Independent variables | France | | | | Independent variables | The Netherlands | | | |
|--|----------|------|----------|------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
| | Log odds | SE | Log odds | SE | | Log odds | SE | Log odds | SE |
| EU attitudes | | | | | EU attitudes | | | | |
| Social threat & the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT) | -2.86*** | 0.28 | -1.56* | 0.87 | National threat | -1.17*** | 0.12 | -0.62* | 0.36 |
| Cultural threat | -0.35* | 0.19 | -1.13 | 0.69 | Postmaterialism | -1.28*** | 0.12 | -1.86*** | 0.41 |
| Enlargement | -0.53*** | 0.20 | 0.28 | 0.64 | Euro | -0.46*** | 0.12 | -0.81** | 0.37 |
| Plan B | -0.51*** | 0.16 | -0.12 | 0.61 | Enlargement (Turkey) | -0.14 | 0.09 | -0.27 | 0.30 |
| Party (No Party as baseline) | | | | | Party (No Party as baseline) | | | | |
| Extreme left | -1.55 | 1.07 | -1.79 | 1.11 | CDA | -0.87*** | 0.30 | -0.83** | 0.31 |
| Communist party | 0.97 | 1.12 | 1.01 | 1.15 | PvdA | -0.43 | 0.27 | -0.45 | 0.28 |
| Socialist Party | -0.20 | 0.51 | -0.29 | 0.51 | VVD | -1.00*** | 0.33 | -0.98*** | 0.34 |
| Greens | 0.45 | 0.59 | 0.37 | 0.59 | Greens | -0.72 | 0.41 | -0.76* | 0.42 |
| UDF | -0.49 | 0.71 | -0.61 | 0.71 | Socialist Party | 1.21** | 0.48 | 1.21** | 0.48 |
| UMP | -0.54 | 0.59 | -0.66 | 0.59 | Wilders | 1.49* | 0.79 | 1.41* | 0.78 |
| National Front | 1.87** | 0.90 | 1.73* | 0.92 | ChristenUnie | 0.62 | 0.43 | 0.64 | 0.43 |
| Satisfaction with Chirac | -0.58*** | 0.20 | -0.57*** | 0.21 | List Pim Fortuyn | 1.37 | 1.26 | 1.15 | 1.20 |
| Economic evaluation | -0.20 | 0.22 | -0.15 | 0.21 | D66 | -1.34** | 0.62 | -1.31** | 0.63 |
| Immigration attitudes | -0.02 | 0.19 | 0.03 | 0.21 | Government satisfaction | -0.10** | 0.05 | -0.10** | 0.05 |
| Interest in ECT | 0.33 | 0.21 | 0.47** | 0.23 | Left-right self-placement | -0.01 | 0.07 | -0.01 | 0.07 |
| Female | -0.80** | 0.31 | -0.82** | 0.32 | Knowledge of ECT | -0.28 | 0.17 | -0.31* | 0.18 |
| Age | -0.02** | 0.01 | -0.02** | 0.01 | Female | -0.37* | 0.20 | -0.34* | 0.20 |
| Education | -0.10 | 0.08 | -0.11 | 0.08 | Age | 0.03*** | 0.01 | 0.02*** | 0.01 |
| Income | -0.12 | 0.09 | -0.10 | 0.09 | Class | -0.12 | 0.10 | -0.11 | 0.10 |
| Interest × Social Threat | - | - | -0.47** | 0.19 | Interest × Cultural Threat | - | - | -0.32* | 0.17 |
| Interest × Cultural Threat | - | - | 0.27* | 0.16 | Interest × Postmaterialism | - | - | 0.31 | 0.22 |
| Interest × Enlargement | - | - | -0.30 | 0.21 | Interest × Euro | - | - | 0.20 | 0.20 |
| Interest × Plan B | - | - | -0.13 | 0.20 | Interest × Enlargement | - | - | 0.07 | 0.16 |
| Constant | 4.52*** | 1.33 | 4.07*** | 1.34 | Constant | -53.37*** | 12.23 | -55.37*** | 12.37 |
| Pseudo R ² | .69 | | .70 | | Pseudo R ² | .51 | | .52 | |
| Percentage correctly classified | 92 | | 93 | | Percentage correctly classified | 85 | | 86 | |
| N | 730 | | 730 | | N | 1,120 | | 1,120 | |

Source: French Referendum Study (2005) and Dutch Referendum Study (2005).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

(especially the Socialist Party), it is not surprising that party cues are of limited importance, while preferences play a large role. It is particularly interesting to note that attitudes relating to fears of a liberal market economy dominate vote decisions in France. Such concerns outweigh both second-order factors, such as government satisfaction, and cultural threat considerations. Party cues play a far more important role in the Dutch referendum, as we would expect given the short, low-intensity campaign.

As outlined in the theoretical section, however, we would not expect the priming effect of the campaign to be uniform across the electorate. People who are interested in politics and pay greater attention to the campaign are also more likely to “be primed” by campaign messages. The results shown in Model 2 (Table 4) corroborate this hypothesis, as we find a significant interaction between political interest and the most salient issue dimension: social threat in France and cultural threat in the Netherlands. In contrast, the issues that were not primed by the

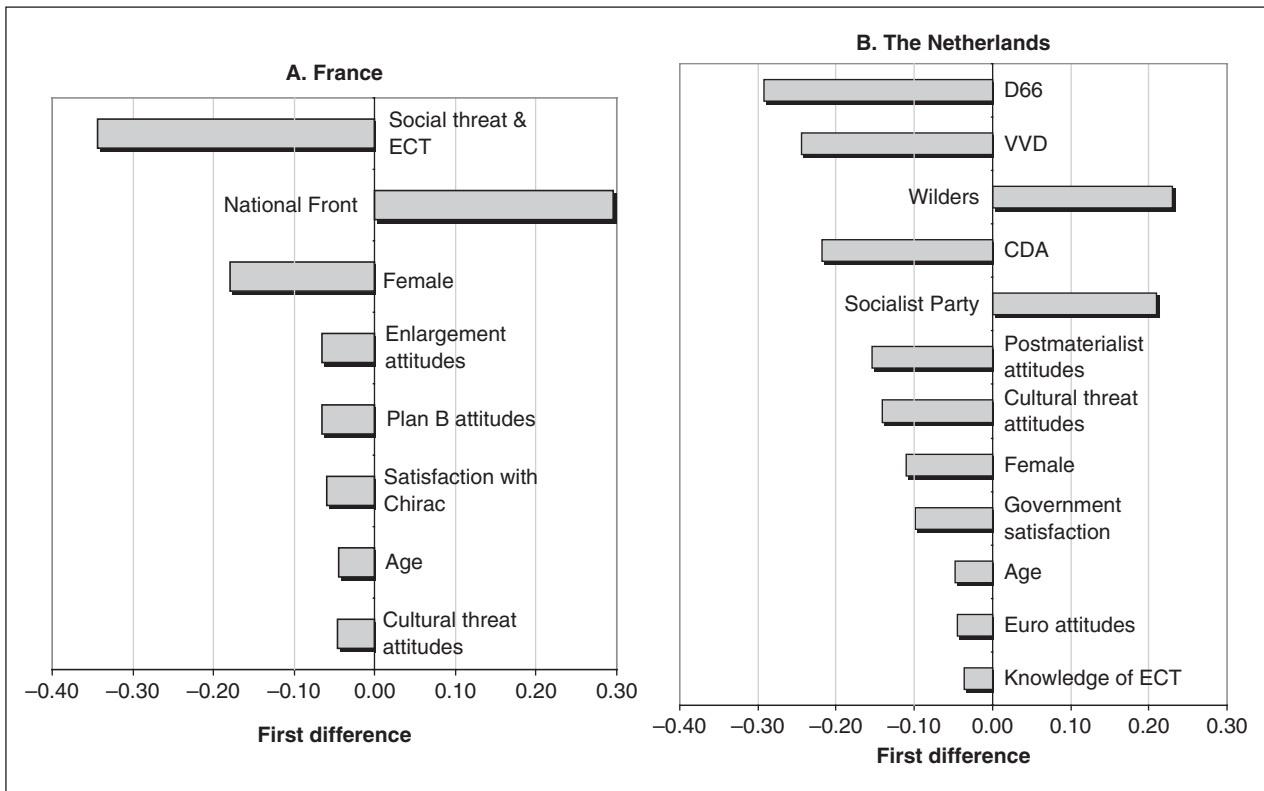


Figure 2. Marginal effects on vote choice in France and the Netherlands

Note: This figure indicates the marginal effect of half a standard deviation increase from the mean in each of the variables on the probability of voting no (keeping all other variables at their mean).

campaign are not significantly moderated by political interest, with the exception of cultural threat concerns in France, where we find that voters who paid *less* attention to the campaign were more likely to vote on the basis of these attitudes. The substantive moderating effect of political interest on the most salient issue dimension is illustrated in Figure 3. The marginal effects of issue attitudes shown in this figure have been calculated in the same way as in Figure 2, by subgroups of high political interest and low political interest. Figure 3 clearly illustrates that issue attitudes have a greater effect on vote choices for those who are more interested in politics, as priming theory would predict (Miller and Krosnick 2000; Chong and Druckman 2007).

Conclusions

When referendum proposals are rejected, it is often very difficult for political leaders to translate the “no” into a workable political solution. Even when citizens base their vote choices on issue preferences, they will be responding to different elements of the treaty in question. A “no” verdict can summarize a mix of considerations, but it cannot convey the considerations themselves. The aim

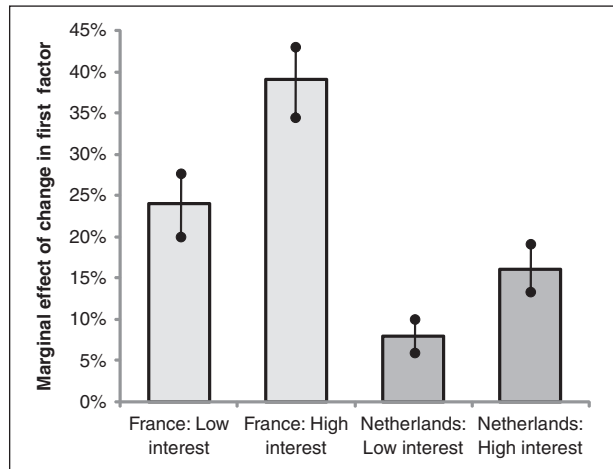


Figure 3. Moderating effect of political interest

Note: Estimates are based on Model 2 in Table 4. They show the marginal effect of a half a standard deviation change in the first factor score, ceteris paribus, for voters with low interest (bottom 25%) and high interest (top 25%). The black lines indicate 95% confidence intervals for these estimates.

of this article has been to disentangle the reasons why a majority of French and Dutch voters rejected the ECT in 2005. Our key argument is that campaigns influence vote

choices by priming attitudes toward certain aspects of the ballot issue. Intense campaigns will not only generate more issue voting but also affect which particular concerns are salient to voters.

Our analysis of campaign coverage painted a picture of two distinctly different campaigns: the French campaign was long and impassioned, while the Dutch was shorter and less intense. The campaign issues also differed: the French campaign focused on economic and social issues both in France and in the EU, while the Dutch campaign was more preoccupied with procedural issues and with the French campaign. An EFA revealed that these differences in the campaigns were also reflected in people's attitudes toward Europe: the dominant dimension in French EU attitudes was not diffuse support for European integration but, rather, concerns over the liberal market economy and loss of the French social model. Conversely, in the Netherlands, traditional concerns over loss of a national cultural identity and cost of membership were more prevalent. Both of these analyses challenged the conventional view of attitudes toward Europe as preferences that can be neatly ordered on a single scale from anti- to pro-European. Instead, they suggested that voters' attitudes toward the Constitution are multidimensional. Some voters may be pro-European yet still distance themselves from certain aspects of the integration project.

Equally, the analysis of voting behavior demonstrated that these attitude dimensions were important determinants of vote choices, in particular for politically interested voters who were more likely to pay attention to the campaign. The findings suggest that many French voters saw the referendum as an opportunity not to express their diffuse support for the European project but, rather, to communicate how they wanted the European project to evolve. In the Netherlands, the no votes seem to have been influenced by concerns, such as multiculturalism and loss of national identity, that the populist right had also made salient. These results thus challenge the traditional "second-order national election" approach to referendums, which holds that vote choices are mainly about domestic politics. While satisfaction with the government is not insignificant, the results suggest that attitudes toward the European project matter more. Yet, these European attitudes have also become intertwined with traditional domestic concerns, such as French voters' concerns over the liberal Europe that were linked with dissatisfaction with the policies of the incumbent center-right government. Hence, while the European dimension has traditionally been seen as orthogonal to the domestic left-right dimension (see Hix 1999), these referendums are good examples of how both left-right contestation and "new politics" can affect attitudes toward aspects of the integration project (see Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002).

This article suggests that the campaigns played an important role in priming certain sets of attitudes that ultimately became important to the vote choice. Of course, it is limited how much we can generalize to other referendums on the basis of just two campaigns. Moreover, to fully explore the effects of campaigns, we would need better data linking the campaign messages to individual-level change in attitudes. Despite these limitations, this study highlights the importance of the campaign context to vote choices in EU referendums. It illustrates that the European issue is not firmly fixed within the existing policy space, and depending on which aspects of the issue are emphasized during a campaign, the position of voters may change accordingly. These findings thus have wider implications for the study of public opinion and voting behavior. They suggest that when new issues, such as European integration, enter the electoral arena, it is important to explore the context within which they are debated and how issue alignments are formed.

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Notes

1. Ireland was the only country to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty; all other member states chose to ratify the treaty in their national parliaments. On June 12, 2008, 53 percent of Irish voters said no to the Lisbon Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty was approved by 67% of Irish voters in a second referendum held on October 2, 2009, and finally came into force on December 1, 2009.
2. Previously, 77 percent of Spanish voters had voted in favor of the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT) in a referendum on February 20, 2005. Originally, ten member states had announced that they would hold referendums on the

- Constitutional Treaty, but after the negative votes in France and the Netherlands, it was decided to put these referendums on hold, except in Luxembourg where the treaty was passed by a majority of 57 percent of voters on July 10, 2005.
3. See Eurobarometer 62. Fieldwork was carried out in the autumn of 2004.
 4. Intercoder reliability was assessed on a subsample of articles and was above .85 for each of the key indicators (using the percent agreement calculation).
 5. Scholars focusing on the Dutch campaign have found that the referendum was a highly visible topic in the Dutch news during the last weeks leading up to the referendum (see Kleinnijenhuis, Takens, and van Atteveldt 2005; Schuck and de Vreese 2008: 113-14). Their findings broadly correspond with the data in Figure 1, which show that the referendum topic was visible in the Dutch media, especially during the last three weeks of the campaign. Yet our comparison with France also highlights that the visibility of the referendum in the French media was significantly higher, both in terms of absolute coverage and the relative share of referendum stories compared to other news stories.
 6. When a joint session of both chambers (*le Congrès*) voted to allow a law that would adopt the ECT on February 28, 2005, only 155 out of 246 Socialist MPs voted in favor (3 voted no, 88 abstained). The Green parliamentary party was also split: 4 MPs voted yes and 3 voted no.
 7. Using other media sources, the study by Piar and Gerstlé (2005) draws similar conclusions about the patterns of the French campaigns (two main television news programs; see also Gerstlé 2006).
 8. Geert Wilders left the liberal party VVD in 2004 precisely over the issue of Turkish membership of the EU, which he opposes. Wilders founded a new party—the Freedom Party (PVV)—in 2006, which has subsequently enjoyed considerable electoral success with its radical anti-immigration message: PVV won 9 seats in the 2006 general election and came second at the 2009 European Parliament election, winning 4 out of 25 seats.
 9. These surveys are the Dutch Referendum Study (2005) and the French Referendum Study (2005).
 10. When exploring dimensionality using exploratory factor analysis, we are of course constrained by the number and character of items included in the survey. In other words, we will only be able to extract dimensions on the basis of the questions asked in the survey. Fortunately, both surveys contain more than 20 survey items relating to attitudes toward different aspects of the ECT and European integration, and all of the key issues identified in the campaign coverage analysis (economic issues, cultural and identity issues, enlargement, etc.) were captured by questions in both surveys. Hence, this gives us some confidence in the significance of the dimensions extracted.
 11. We use oblique rotations rather than orthogonal solutions, since it is unreasonable to assume that the different dimensions of attitudes toward European integration and the Constitution would be entirely orthogonal. If the latent variables are correlated, as we assume, then an oblique rotation will produce a better estimate of the true factors and a better structure than an orthogonal rotation will. However, all of the main conclusions in the analysis of vote choices reported in the article remain the same if we use orthogonal rotation instead. In both France and the Netherlands, Factors 1, 2, and 3 are all correlated at around .4, whereas Factor 4 (Plan B in France and Enlargement in the Netherlands) is not significantly correlated with the other factors.
 12. The Dutch study is a two-wave panel study. This article uses data from the second wave of the panel. The French study was conducted just before the French vote. It would have been preferable to use a postreferendum study, but this was the only study with sufficient question items to conduct the analysis. The Flash Eurobarometer (postreferendum) study of the French vote does not contain all of the same question items, and hence we cannot replicate the model, yet this survey does corroborate the key findings of this article: concerns over social threats played a prominent role in the decision of no voters in France.
 13. The party identification of voters was determined on the basis of a question of which party they felt closest to (in France) and hypothetical vote choice (in the Netherlands).
 14. Question items capturing economic evaluations and attitudes toward immigration were not included in the Dutch survey, so left-right self-placement was included as an alternative control variable (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005).
 15. Unfortunately, we were not able to test political awareness using objective political knowledge questions, as Zaller (1992) recommends, but political interest is a good proxy, as we are interested in the extent to which priming effect depends on how much attention individuals pay to the campaign.

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