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## **The Irish Lisbon Treaty Referendums 2008 and 2009: Which themes were present in the debate?**

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**The Irish Lisbon Treaty Referendums 2008 and 2009:  
Which themes were present in the debate?**

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

*“Here are Irish people who are the most enthusiastic Europeans, yet we voted No. Why is that? Because the message is not properly carried to the people.”*

(Dick Roche 2011, cited in Atikcan 2015 p. 204)

#### 1.1 Background

On 12 June 2008, the people of Ireland went to the polls to vote on the proposal of the ‘Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2008’ to amend the constitution of Ireland and enable the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, streamlining governance, policies and practices with the European Union (EU). The expectation in both Brussels and Dublin was that the treaty would pass with great ease (O’Brennan, 2009). However, there was a shock result, and the treaty was rejected with a 53.4% ‘no’ against a 46.6% ‘yes’ vote.

The Irish people's rejection of Lisbon came as a huge surprise to both the European and Irish political classes. European elites were confident that Ireland would ratify the treaty without problems and that the referendum would be no obstacle to further integration. Surveys had shown consistent support for EU membership (Eurobarometer Standard Report, 2008 cited in Quinlan 2012). Ireland had widely been touted as one of the success stories of the European project. However, Irish levels of understanding of the EU as an institution were relatively low in comparison to other member states (Eurobarometer Standard Report, 2010). The complicated nature of the treaty made it difficult for the decision-makers and the media to present a concise and positive argument to sell to the Irish public.

This was not the first time that Ireland had broken with the European project. The Nice Treaty, designed to extend the powers of the EU, was rejected by the Irish electorate in June 2001 only to be reversed with the second Nice referendum in November 2002. The Lisbon Treaty of 2008 experienced a relatively strong turnout for European referendums (53%) leaving the Irish government in a conundrum as to how to proceed. It became evident that there was no appetite in Brussels to abandon or reopen the treaty, in particular having experienced lengthy and complex negotiations with France and the Netherlands over the Constitutional Treaty (Tonra, 2009). The reaction of EU leaders to the Irish ‘no’ vote differed starkly from the reaction to the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch in 2005. France and the Netherlands' rejection

resulted in the recognition of an EU-wide crisis that would require an EU-wide response. A period of reflection took place, suggesting that all member states, even those who had already ratified the treaty, would have to reconsider how to progress. Ireland's 'no vote' met no such response, with much more of a blame game than with the Dutch and French. De Búrca (2009) believes that the EU saw the treaty's rejection as an Irish problem and it was, therefore, Ireland's responsibility to find a solution. It was seen as politically unacceptable that Ireland would not ratify the treaty and the European Council made clear that it was a priority for Ireland to do so.

In the intervening period, politicians in Ireland and Brussels sought to make sense of the referendum decision. It also became immediately clear from Brussels that the Irish would have to 'vote again' on the treaty. The main reasons cited for the Irish public's rejection of the treaty were concerns related to the potential loss of an Irish seat at the Commission, taxation policy, workers' rights, Irish neutrality and social policy, in particular, abortion (Quinlan, 2012). Ireland's reversal of the Nice Treaty (2001) had set a precedent and suggestions of a second referendum came soon after the 2008 result. Acceptance of this was reinforced in July 2008 when French President Nicolas Sarkozy stated that 'the Irish will have to vote again' (Quinlan, 2012 p 142). However, the Irish government was wary that a quick second referendum would result in an even more resounding 'no' vote. Diplomatic negotiations commenced with other member states in the Autumn of 2008 and a strategy of designing opt-outs was chosen to alleviate the concerns of the Irish voters. This was not an entirely new strategy for the EU, with a similar approach giving Denmark concessions after it rejected the Maastricht Treaty in 1994. Jean Claude Piris (Director General of the Legal Service of the Council of Europe) was at the heart of those negotiations and was again central in discussions with the Irish. An initial deal was reached at the December 2008 EU Brussels summit. Member states agreed that they would each retain an EU Commissioner and supported Ireland's wish for legal guarantees related to its neutrality, abortion and taxation and in exchange Ireland would hold a second referendum. A number of member states led by the British were wary of gifting Ireland these guarantees, anxious that this would re-open concessions for other member states. However, the threat of a second failed referendum and the potential failure of the treaty was sufficient enough to conclude negotiations in June 2009. These guarantees would initially act as an International Agreement before becoming a Protocol, asserting that Ireland's abortion, tax laws or neutrality would not be affected by the Lisbon Treaty. An additional declaration was also made on workers' rights to calm the concerns expressed during the first referendum. Ireland's main political parties were satisfied with the guarantees, however, not all were in favour, with Social Party MEP Joe Higgins branding them as 'an elaborate charade' (Quinlan p 142, 2012).

On 2 October 2009, a second vote was held in Ireland and this time the result was very different, with the Irish public ratifying the same Lisbon Treaty by 67.1% to 32.9%. Sixteen months after the previous Lisbon Treaty referendum, one in five voters changed their mind from ‘no’ to ‘yes’. The ‘yes’ vote was highest in Leinster and Dublin but was supported in the majority of regions. In 2009 only Donegal North-East and Donegal South-West rejected the treaty compared to 33 other constituencies. The ‘yes’ camp was jubilant in victory with Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD (Irish Member of Parliament) saying it was “a good day for Ireland” as the country had shown “to the other countries of Europe that we stand with them” (Pope, 2009). Brigid Laffan, Chair of ‘Ireland for Europe’ stated that the electorate had rejected ‘the zealots’ of the right and the left and in the process had ‘saved the European ideal’ (Pope, 2009).

## **1.2 Scope and focus of the research**

The overall aim of this research is to explore the themes debated during both Irish Lisbon Treaty referendums. As the literature will expose, much has been written on the reasons why the result moved so emphatically from a ‘no’ to a ‘yes’ vote. We know that the referendums had different results, however, we may have lost sight of the campaigns themselves and the public discussions as independent phenomena.

As this thesis will demonstrate, EU integration is not an easy phenomenon to describe, with citizens often feeling no direct interaction with the EU institutions. National politicians and the media, therefore, serve as mediators and have an important role in helping citizens to make sense of European integration. It is therefore worthwhile analysing the key themes that arose during both Irish referendums within the context of Irish political and economic concerns of the time, and investigating how issues of European integration were framed by the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ campaigns and reflected in the broadsheet media to achieve cut through to Irish citizens.

As previously mentioned, the result of the first referendum came as a considerable shock to Ireland’s decision-makers. So, in the 16 months between the two referendum campaigns, what changed in political and media discourse to influence public debate? This research provides a rich description of the themes that sparked public debate during both periods and investigates two Irish



newspapers - The Irish Times and the Irish Independent - to explore how they framed arguments in the weeks approaching the voting deadline for both Lisbon Treaty referendums.

It is clear from other referendums, within Ireland and the wider EU, that the way that issues are portrayed during 'yes' and 'no' campaigns have a significant impact on the way that people vote, and as such, play a significant role in guiding the future of European Integration. Having identified the key themes that emerged during the Lisbon Treaty campaigns, this research then compares and contrasts these with issues that arose for public debate in other EU referendums. Were the issues discussed during Ireland's two referendums on the Nice Treaty (2001 and 2002) the same as those that arose at the time of the Lisbon Treaty? Which issues took precedence during the Lisbon Treaty campaigns? Were the most prominent arguments for and against Lisbon framed from a domestic viewpoint, or a wider European integration perspective? How did the issues of the Lisbon Treaty evolve between both campaigns? This thesis aims to answer these questions.

### **1.3. Research question**

*How were the 2008 and 2009 Irish Lisbon Treaty campaigns framed within the Irish broadsheet media?*

### **1.4. Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) presents an overview of existing scholarly works on European integration referendums. This process helped to identify what was already known in this area of research about the context and content of EU referendums, but it also revealed gaps in current thinking in that there was little evidence or research about how referendum campaign messages were communicated to influence the outcomes of the debate. By explaining the nature of EU treaties and using three referendum case studies as examples, the literature review outlines the importance of understanding the themes that commonly emerge during EU referendum campaigns, to strengthen the analysis of the extent to which these issues related to debates during the Lisbon Treaty referendums in Ireland.

Chapter 3 (Methodology) gives a detailed outline of the research approach and methodology chosen for this study. It will begin by explaining the reasons for choosing a content analysis approach and will continue with an account of the researcher's sampling approach. The chapter's main focus will be a detailed description of the data collection instruments and a discussion of the data analysis techniques used.

Chapter 4 (Findings) offers a detailed analysis of the findings of the research. It will begin by presenting the frequency of the themes discussed in both campaign debates as demonstrated in the broadsheets under review. Once the themes are established, it then provides a rich description of the contours of the debate on the treaty, presenting both 'yes' and 'no' arguments from the 2008 and 2009 referendums. It will conclude with a brief summary of the findings by comparing and contrasting the themes arising in the Nice, Constitutional and Lisbon referendums.

Chapter 5 (Conclusion) presents an overview of the research findings, pulling together key arguments within the parameters of the scope of this thesis, and makes recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This thesis will focus on the issues discussed and messaging shared with the Irish public during Ireland's two Lisbon Treaty referendums (2008 and 2009). A wealth of information already exists on the wider context within which EU referendums usually take place, and on the arguments that were made in support of and against greater EU integration over this period. However, what is lacking is a deeper analysis of how these arguments were packaged and shared with the Irish public relating to the Lisbon Treaty and the themes that arose to influence the Irish vote.

The review will begin by briefly explaining the nature and complexity of EU treaties to provide the wider context within which the referendums on the Lisbon Treaty were conducted. In doing so, it will outline key terms, such as the split in scholarship regarding "second-order" theory and "attitude/issue-voting" theory on EU referendums, whilst also defining double EU referendums. Literature related to the Irish Nice Treaty referendums (2001 and 2002) and the French and Dutch Constitutional Treaty referendums (2005) will be drawn on to provide context for comparison with the Irish Lisbon Treaty referendums.

To understand why it took two referendums for the Irish public to vote in favour of the Lisbon Treaty, it is important to understand what came before it. A precedent has already been set in 2001 and 2002 when two referendums were needed for the Irish to support the Nice Treaty. Researchers (Ziller, 2019) have argued that the Lisbon Treaty was in many ways a re-dressed version of the failed Constitutional Treaty (2005). It will be interesting to investigate if there are similarities in the issues discussed in all three treaties and the extent to which the messaging changed over time and to achieve a positive referendum result in the second time around. Previous literature on the Irish Lisbon Treaty has mainly focused on the reasons for the shift in public support to a 'yes' vote for the treaty. Scholars (Atikcan, 2015; Elkink and Sinnott, 2015; Quinlan, 2012; Tonra, 2009) emphasise the change in the effectiveness of the 'yes' campaign and the deterioration of the economy as the primary reasons for the change in result. Other EU referendums, such as the Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) were also considered but have not been used for comparison purposes due to limitations on the size of this study, and the two cases chosen were most relevant for this research.

As this review will outline, sufficient literature exists on the issues discussed during the Nice and Constitutional Treaty referendums, however, literature on the Irish Lisbon Treaty is narrow and primarily focuses on the reasons for the change in vote. This thesis complements and broadens research on the reasons for the U-turn on Lisbon by providing a fresh insight into how each of the Irish campaigns were framed and the themes that emerged in public discourse.

## **2.2 EU Treaties & the Lisbon Treaty**

EU treaties are long, dense and packed full of complicated jargon (Atikcan, 2015). This, coupled with decision-making processes involving multiple institutions and legislative procedures, can make the EU confusing to its citizens. With little direct interaction between citizens and European institutions, it is the role of national politicians to help articulate the main arguments of European treaties, particularly when treaties are to be voted on during referendums. This is not a simple task. Atikcan (2015) uses the example that it is much harder to explain the benefits of extended qualified majority voting via the new procedure of double-majority in the EU Council than to make the argument that the EU destroys national sovereignty. This makes holding referendums on European integration even more complicated.

The Lisbon Treaty is an international agreement that amends and overrides previous documents and treaties, such as the Maastricht Treaty (1993) and the Treaties of Rome (1957). It was designed to streamline and simplify the institutions that govern the European Union (Ziller, 2019). The Lisbon Treaty was formally signed on 13 December 2007, containing seven articles. Ireland was the only member state to put the treaty to a public vote as required by their constitution. Every other member state could ratify the treaty by a vote in their national parliament. The entire treaty was jeopardised by the Irish decision to reject it in 2008. Ireland was not the only country to express reservations about the treaty. The Polish government waited until after the Irish referendum had passed to ratify the treaty (Craig, 2010) and eventually would receive opt-outs from EU policy on some social issues such as abortion. The Czech Republic was the last country to ratify the treaty. Although its parliament had earlier ratified Lisbon, the Eurosceptic Czech president Václav Klaus withheld his signature. However, Klaus eventually signed on 3 November 2009 when Czech courts ruled that the Lisbon Treaty did not breach the country's constitution. As all 27 member states had ratified the treaty it was entered into force on 1 December 2009.

Historians (Ziller, 2019) have remarked that the Lisbon Treaty was to some extent a remake of the failed EU Draft Constitutional Treaty (discussed in section 2.5) of 2004. Although similar, the Lisbon Treaty was never specifically named a European constitution, perhaps deliberately so as to avoid the mistakes made in France and the Netherlands. It did however tackle many of the themes of the 2004 EU Draft Constitution. The Lisbon Treaty would dissolve the previous economic framework of the European Community, and its powers and structure were integrated into the EU. The new role of permanent President of the European Council was created, replacing a role that had previously been rotated between member states, to provide a “face” of the EU with regard to matters of Union policy (Ziller, 2019). The successful candidate would be a politician chosen by the leaders of the member states, who would hold a two-and-a-half-year term. The six months rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union between member states was retained but with a more limited mandate. The treaty also saw the creation of a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This new position combined the roles of the EU foreign policy chief and the external affairs Commissioner to provide a more robust and unified European foreign policy. The European Parliament's powers were enhanced and joint law-making between the parliament and the Council of Ministers increased to virtually all areas of EU policy-making. The treaty would see the number of MEPs made degressively proportional to the number of citizens of each member state.

Although we have a clear idea of what the Lisbon Treaty is, literature so far has failed to provide insight into how the contents of this treaty were used by both sides to argue their point.

### **2.3 Understanding EU referendums: the literature**

Studies of EU referendums tend to focus on two key areas when considering voter preferences. One connects the results of referendums to topical domestic issues, this is known as “second-order” theory. The other takes into account European integration factors that might motivate people to vote a certain way, known as “attitude/issue-voting” theory.

Advocates of the “second-order” approach believe that the campaign agenda is dominated by national issues. EU issues are downgraded to second place behind domestic issues, and the referendum result does not reflect the actual opinions of voters on European integration (Reif and Schmit, 1980). The popularity of national governments and voter identification with the parties holding office tend to be decisive (Atikcan, 2015). A positive vote is therefore an expression of

approval of a government and a negative vote is an intention to punish those in power. Conversely, the “attitude/issue-voting” model suggests that voters will cast their ballot in accordance with their broad attitudes toward European integration (Siune et al.,1994). It believes that voters understand and are able to form their own opinions on low salience issues like EU treaties. The less European integration is wanted by voters, the higher the ‘no’ vote will be. De Vreese (2007) argues that for most referendums it is likely to be a combination of both these factors.

In order to understand the issues citizens are voting on, it is important to look at referendum campaigns closely. Research (Hobolt, 2009) indicates that the nature of campaigns has a large influence on how people vote in EU referendums. If campaigns just offer simplistic and one-sided messages, it is likely that citizens will be persuaded to vote that way. However, a more sophisticated campaign that presents different sides of both arguments, and with sometimes conflicting messages, will leave voters with more difficult decisions to make, both about EU integration and whether they trust the views of the political elites that are conveying these messages. In this respect, it could be said that domestic factors are therefore more likely to influence the outcome of a referendum, especially when voters are not engaged with the debate and lack knowledge of EU matters and the treaty itself. On the contrary, the more campaign material voters are exposed to, the more likely they are to vote in accordance with their underlying attitudes towards European integration. Despite the Irish population being broadly pro-European and supportive of integration, Irish levels of understanding of the EU were relatively low during the 2008 Lisbon Treaty referendum compared to other Member States (Eurobarometer Standard Report, 2009, cited in Quinlan 2012). It is therefore interesting to explore the extent to which the messaging changed during the Irish Lisbon referendums and whether there was more of a shift to a discussion of EU issues in the second referendum campaign.

Double referendums are when voters initially reject an EU treaty but then reverse this decision and ratify it in a second vote. Lisbon is not the EU’s only experience of a double referendum, in both 1992 and 1993 the Danish voted on the Maastricht Treaty and the Irish voted twice on the Nice Treaty in 2001 and 2002. In both cases, it is argued (Garry et al., 2005; Worre, 1995) that the reversal in the electorate's choice was due to a change in the level of government popularity and therefore that the more popular governments obtained favourable votes in the second referendum. However, in the case of the Irish Lisbon double referendum, the government was far less popular in the successful second referendum than it had been in the first, which underlies the importance of exploring the themes discussed in the periods leading up to each referendum in more detail.

Campaign intensity is also important in second referendums. Hobolts' (2009) analysis of the Danish Maastricht and Irish Nice votes demonstrates that both the quantity and content in the messaging shared with the public in the second referendum differed from the first, with both being ratified.

Referendum campaigns tend to be more volatile than elections (LeDuc, 2003) and political parties may align themselves in non-traditional ways, making the result of the election less predictable. This often leaves voters badly informed about the treaty in question, which is especially true in referendums on complex issues such as European integration or constitutional matters (Johnston et al, 1992). During the referendums on the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty government and opposition parties, both advocated a 'yes' vote and the political extremes promoted a 'no' vote. Atikcan (2015) argues that voters were particularly sensitive in these cases to campaign argumentation due to their unfamiliarity and the complexity of the content of the referendum. The difference between abstract and tangible arguments in political campaigns is another important factor in EU referendums. There is a distinction between complex and simple arguments. Easy arguments are brief, symbolic, and well-known, in contrast to hard arguments, which are lengthy, complex, and more technical (Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997). Easy arguments tend to gain the average voter's attention more easily, particularly when campaign issues are presented in a non-technical form. Campaigners can readily capitalise on voter uncertainty by portraying the crises that would ensue in society if the referendum were to pass.

#### **2.4 The Nice Treaty referendums: Ireland 2001 and 2002**

Ireland is no stranger to referendums about EU integration having participated in nine since joining the European Communities in 1972 (Uleri and Gallagher, 2016). Prior to the Nice Treaty (2001), votes in favour of EU treaties had passed with ease: the referendum to join the EEC achieved 83.1% of the vote, Maastricht passed with 69% and Amsterdam 61% (Costello, 2005). Unlike Maastricht and Amsterdam, the Nice Treaty did not provide the EU with any substantial new competencies and was seen by many as the 'Amsterdam leftovers'. It was even debated whether a referendum was constitutionally required. The Irish government had hoped that Ireland would be the first country in the EU to ratify the treaty so as to clear the agenda for the 2002 general election. In consideration of the ease by which the previous more contentious treaties had passed the government did not anticipate any difficulties. They would be proven wrong.

On 7 June 2001, the Irish voters chose to reject the Nice Treaty with 46.1% 'yes' votes to 53.9% 'no' votes and a low turnout of 34% (Garry et al, 2005). The result was a crushing blow to Brussels as the treaty could not be implemented until all member states had ratified it. It was quickly decided by the Irish government that a second referendum on the Nice Treaty would be held the following year. Ireland's history of repeat referendums on non-EU issues (Single Transferable Vote, divorce and abortion) helped to disprove the criticism that rejecting the initial result was undemocratic. On 19 October 2002, the Irish public passed the treaty with 62.9% 'yes' votes to 37.1% 'no' votes with an increased turnout of 49.5% (Garry et al, 2005).

Scholars (Garry et al, 2005; Gilland, 2002) have argued that the failure of the 2008 Nice referendum was due in large part to an ineffective campaign, with little knowledge nor interest in the treaty from citizens. After the shock of 2001 Nice's rejection, a far more aggressive campaign was undertaken for the second referendum in 2002. Both Nice referendums largely shared the same themes in public discourse. The vote 'yes' campaign was largely driven by the Irish political establishment, with the 'no' campaign consisting of groups considered to be on the peripheries of Irish politics (with the possible exception of the Green party). The vote 'yes' campaign was supported by the two government parties, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats, which negotiated the treaty in Nice on Ireland's behalf, as well as the largest opposition parties Fine Gael and Labour. Two main reasons were given by the 'yes' side in advocating for the treaty. Firstly, the Nice Treaty was presented as a historic opportunity to 'unite Europe' (Gilland, 2002) and Ireland had a moral obligation to provide the same opportunity that it had benefited from to Europe's new members. It was argued that many of the applicant countries would seek to emulate Ireland's experience and that Ireland should not stand in their way by rejecting the treaty. The reasoning was that with Ireland's place at the decision-making table of now 15, 20, 27 or more countries, it could shape Europe's future better by strengthening the Union. Although expansion meant that Ireland would become a net contributor to the Union's budget from a financial perspective, it was argued that Ireland would benefit greatly economically from having access to an enlarged market (Ibid).

The vote 'no' campaign included political parties such as the Green Party, Sinn Féin and the Socialist Party along with anti-European integration campaigners such as the Eurosceptic National Platform, the group 'No to Nice' and the pro-neutrality umbrella organization, the Peace and Neutrality Alliance. The campaign focused on common themes of Irish political culture, which can be seen in all Irish referendums on European integration (Quinlan, 2012). The two most common themes are that further integration would force Ireland to enact liberal abortion laws and that



Ireland's long history of military neutrality would be affected. The 'no' campaign took full advantage of these perceptions with the slogan 'No to Nato, No to Nice', suggesting Ireland's future participation in the EU Rapid Reaction Force and an end to military neutrality. Neutrality is a common theme for Irish voters voting against EU integration, also occurring in the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution Act in 1987 (Single European Act), the Maastricht Treaty and the Amsterdam Treaty (Devine, 2009). Fears surrounding the legalisation of abortion arose from the recent signing of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, despite the fact that this Charter was not legally binding on its signatories (Gilland, 2002). The Nice Treaty also stated that once the Union reached 27 Member States, there would be fewer Commissioners than there were Member States. This was criticised as being a 'serious flaw' (Lang and Gallagher, 2005) and was discussed during the campaign.

Opposition to the treaty was also framed in terms of Ireland's national interest, arguing that Ireland would lose power, money and influence and that the treaty would favour larger Member States. The 'no' campaign was careful to not present itself as insular, against enlargement or anti-European, but merely critical of EU integration. Due to the frequency of EU referendums in Ireland, the question of EU membership itself is not typically viewed as being open for discussion. Instead, the campaign effectively spread 'euro-anxiety', tapping into concern about the pace and the complexity of EU developments (Gilland, 2002). A common theme discussed was that the Irish electorate has insufficient time and information to make a decision on the treaty, encapsulated in the slogan "If you don't know, vote no" (Ibid). The deadline for the referendum was not until the end of 2002 and it was felt that the government had unnecessarily rushed the process (Costello, 2005). In addition, there were few opportunities for media coverage of the treaty as it competed for time with the UK general election and foot and mouth disease. Ultimately, the 2001 Nice 'yes' campaign failed to cut through to the public, with 39% of 'no' voters citing a 'lack of information as the main reason for their decision (European Commission, cited in Sinnott, 2001).

Hayward (2003) describes the 2001 Nice rejection as a turning point for the European Union. It was not that Europeans had become opposed to further European integration but that national politicians in both Ireland and across Europe had failed to achieve a democratic mandate for this integration. The substance of the treaty changed very little between the two Nice referendums and therefore the second referendum was less about the issues it addressed but rather a change of approach by politicians towards disaffected voters. The 2001 Nice referendum demonstrated a lack of interest by Irish citizens towards European issues and this lack of relevance had a direct political impact on the

EU. Democratic procedures such as the Nice referendums reflect the credibility of national politicians as mediators between ‘Brussels’ and voters. Although the Irish government were quick to blame the defeat on a ‘widespread sense of disconnection between the institutions of the union and its citizens’ (Ahern statement to European Council in Gotenberg, 2001), Brussels was quick to point to the Irish failure to mount a credible ‘yes’ campaign (Hayward, 2003).

To help quash voter concerns about military neutrality, Ireland obtained concessions through the Seville Declaration from the European Council. This included two significant qualifications. Firstly, any enhanced cooperation would now require the consent of the Dáil (the Irish parliament), and secondly, Ireland could opt out of joining any EU common defence policy. The 2002 Nice referendum saw a significant increase in campaigning by the ‘yes’ side in all forms of media by the main parties, civil society and pro-European figures, such as then European Parliament President Pat Cox, former Czech president Václav Havel, and former President of Ireland, Patrick Hillery (Gilland, 2002). There was also a widespread sense of urgency that a second rejection would cause deep harm to Ireland's reputation within Europe. The second referendum saw a change in approach with the ‘yes’ side targeting the ‘silent majority’ (Ibid). Whilst the issues raised by the ‘no’ campaign remained the same as in 2001, the ‘yes’ campaign successfully added a sense of risk to the debate, stating that there was ‘No Plan B’ (Costello, 2005). Empirical research suggests that the second referendum campaign engaged more with EU issues than second-order national issues, with views on European enlargement being the strongest predictor of the vote (Garry et al, 2005). The Labour Party’s slogan “Hold Your Fire. Fianna Fáil Can Wait. Europe Can’t.” shows how the urgency of the second vote altered party politics (Costello, 2005).

It is therefore clear that second-order and attitude/issue voting were present in the Nice referendums. 2001 saw the media focus on issues related to the domestic government and the perceived consequences of the treaty. In 2002, the ‘yes’ side decoupled campaign messages from unambiguous issues and successfully framed the treaty as an issue on the enlargement of Europe (Gary et al, 2005). It is, however, less evident whether issues discussed during both Nice referendums were resolved in its aftermath or continued to fester within the EU, with similar tensions re-emerging in Lisbon Treaty six years later.

## **2.5 The Constitutional Treaty Referendums: France (2005) and the Netherlands (2005)**

The Draft Treaty on a Constitution for Europe (ECT) was intended to unify and simplify the European Union but resulted in division and further confusion. The European Council adopted the ECT in June 2004, which started the ratification procedure in each of the Member States. The first nation to have a referendum on the Constitution was Spain with 76% of voters backing the treaty with a 43% turnout. The French and Dutch followed, both holding referendums on the Constitution within days of each other on May 29 and June 1 2005 respectively (Hobolt and Brouard, 2011). The Constitution received broad support from centre-right governments and centre-left opposition parties in both countries. The expectation was that both referendums would pass easily, with 70% of the French and 73% of the Dutch supporting the Constitution in Autumn 2004 (Eurobarometer, 2004) opinion polls. However, that did not prove to be the case.

The Constitution was rejected by the French with 55% ‘no’ votes to 45% ‘yes’ and a turnout of 69% (Atikcan, 2015). The French experienced an intense and thorough campaign with President Chirac confirming on New Year’s Eve 2004 that he would call a referendum on the ECT. The majority of mainstream newspapers and parties supported the Constitution (Ibid). The ‘yes’ side encompassed the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Union for French Democracy (UDF), the Socialist Party (PS), and The Greens (Les Verts). There was, however, considerable disagreement within these parties, in particular within the French Socialist Party. Those against the Constitution were the political parties of the far left and right; The National Front (FN), the Movement for France (MPF), the French Communist Party (PCF), and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) (Ibid). The ‘no’ side effectively set the agenda of the campaign, raising issues like the threat of a “neoliberal” EU to the French Social model and the social consequences of European enlargement to countries such as Turkey (Brouard and Tiberj 2006). Unlike the Nice Treaty in Ireland, the French far-right campaign did promote anti-EU messaging, however, the left-wing ‘no’ was not anti-EU but rather a condemnation of a particular kind of Europe. Simply put, the left ‘no’ side framed the Constitution as a “social threat” while the far-right viewed it as a “cultural threat”. The issue of the liberal economic model promoted by the EU was often linked to problems within the French economy and welfare state, suggesting that second-order theory was prevalent during the referendum (Hobolt and Brouard, 2005).

While French voters were well acquainted with referendums on European integration, the ECT marked the first time Dutch voters could express their opinion on the European project. Three days

after France's rejection of the ECT, the Dutch followed suit by rejecting the ECT by 61% to 39% with a turnout of 62% (Ibid). The campaign in the Netherlands was far less intense than in France, receiving little media coverage until the weeks coming up to the vote (Ibid). The ECT enjoyed broad approval among the political establishment, including the parties the Christian Democrat Appeal (CDA), the Labour Party (PvdA), GroenLinks (GL), De Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), and the Democrats 66 (D66). The 'yes' campaign also enjoyed support from the business community and the vast majority of the Dutch media. The 'no' campaign was composed of a mix of smaller parties, notably the Socialist Party but also Lis Pim Fortuyn, a populist right-wing group. Like in France, those against the treaty controlled the narrative of the campaign, concentrating on procedural issues, such as whether or not the Dutch government would respect a marginal 'no' vote seeing as the referendum was non-binding. The 'no' campaign also had the benefit of pointing to France's rejection of the ECT, with the French campaign encompassing 29% of all Dutch referendum coverage (Hobolt and Brouard, 2005). This shows how themes can be recycled in different referendums. Like in France, Dutch far-right parties stressed that the Constitution harmed Dutch sovereignty and culture, with particular emphasis being put on Turkey's potential membership of the Union. Geert Wilders's slogan "The Netherlands must remain!" demonstrates this approach (Wilders cited in Aarts and van der Kolk, 2006). Unlike in France however, the left also pursued a campaign approach that centred on culture and identity resulting in these issues dominating the media coverage of the referendum.

We can therefore see that despite voting on the same treaty at the same time, the French and Dutch experienced different campaigns. While the French campaign was long and intense, the Dutch was shorter with less frequent coverage. Most notably campaign issues differed. France's voters focused their attention on economic and social issues both in France and the EU. In the Netherlands, voters were more preoccupied with procedural issues and with the French campaign (Hobolt and Brouard, 2005).

We know the about issues discussed during the ECT referendums, but we don't know how they compare to the Lisbon Treaty referendums in Ireland.

## **2.6 The Lisbon Treaty Referendums: Ireland 2008 and 2009**

The vast majority of the literature on the Irish Lisbon Treaty has focused on the reasons why the public changed their view from 'no' to 'yes', however very little is written on how the issues of the campaign were discussed. The two main reasons given for the reversal have been 1) a change in campaigning by the 'yes' side and 2) the change in the Irish economy.

### ***2.6.1 The campaigns***

The ineffectiveness of the 2008 'yes' campaign is evidenced in a Eurobarometer survey indicating a direct correlation between the 'no' campaign and the way people voted, with 67% of 2008 voters believing the 'no' campaign had been more effective (Eurobarometer, 2008). During both the 2008 and 2009 campaigns the main political parties supported the ratification of the treaty (De Bruyn, 2012). However, in 2008 a substantial number of supporters did not stick to the party line. Despite their parties supporting the treaty, some supporters of Fianna Fáil (40%), Fine Gael (49%), the Labour Party (55%) and the Green Party (57%) voted against Lisbon. This lack of party unity reflects the level of disinterest of the political elite during the campaign which researchers (LeDuc, 2002) argue can leave a vacuum for voters to receive opinions from other sources. Conversely, 95% of Sinn Féin supporters voted with their party in rejecting the treaty (Eurobarometer, 2008, p, cited in De Bruyn, 2012). The 'no' campaign was run by an anti-Lisbon interest group called Libertas, established by businessman Declan Ganley. Atikcan's (2015) research on referendum poster slogans indicates that the 'no' campaign used sensitive topics such as military neutrality, abortion and Ireland's loss of tax sovereignty. She argues that these more emotive slogans were far more effective than the slogans backing the treaty, resulting in its rejection. The 'yes' campaign struggled to get off the ground, marred by the resignation of Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern after corruption charges. In contrast, Libertas had launched its 'Facts, Not Politics' campaign weeks before 'vote yes' campaigning had even begun (De Bruyn, 2012). The effectiveness of the campaign is demonstrated by a Eurobarometer survey showing a majority of those who voted against the treaty believed it would jeopardize Ireland's neutrality, affect its tax and abortion policies, lessen Ireland's influence in the EU, and result in unemployment (Gora, 2009).

Brugha (2008) argues that the 'yes' side failed to justify the need for the strengthening of European powers to the Irish electorate during the 2008 Lisbon campaign. This thesis will research which benefits, if any, of the treaty were outlined during the referendum. Research (Ibid) shows that when

voters are offered a choice between the status quo or something they do not understand they will go with the former due to a fear of the potential and uncertain consequences. This is backed up by survey results on the 2008 referendum, which indicated that the greatest reason for voting ‘no’ was an inadequate understanding of the treaty, with voters not wanting to vote for something they did not understand. However, this level of understanding changed in 2009 when only 5% of the voters rejected the treaty due to a lack of understanding. This compares with 20% in 2008 (Eurobarometer, 2008).

In 2009, the vote ‘yes’ campaign was more organised and took the initiative by using the guarantees and opt-out clauses from the EU to crush previously held assumptions about the treaty. Controversial issues related to tax sovereignty, military neutrality and abortion in respect of Ireland had also been clarified. The impact of these guarantees is exhibited in a Department of Foreign Affairs study (2008) that found that ‘no’ voters who were concerned about the loss of Irish neutrality were more likely to switch to voting ‘yes’ in 2009. Political differences among the major vote ‘yes’ parties were shelved and together they endorsed the treaty, including the Green Party for the first time on a European treaty. In 2009 a large number of civil society groups also became active in supporting the ‘yes’ vote. Former president of the European Parliament Pat Cox and academic Brigid Laffan established the campaign ‘Ireland for Europe’ and used popular celebrities such as film director Jim Sheridan (Quinlan, 2012) as a spokesperson. Pro-treaty campaigning also saw the involvement of business organisations, with high-profile business people such as Bill Cullen and Michael O’Leary endorsing Lisbon in 2009. SIPTU, Ireland's largest trade union, moved from being neutral in 2008 to supporting the treaty in 2009. To address the public lack of knowledge of the treaty, the High Court’s Mr Justice Frank Clarke, took an active media role in explaining the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and addressing issues of fact as they arose in the debate (Tonra, 2009). Despite criticism from the ‘no’ campaign, this worked to great effect with an independent figure seen as an impartial source of information. The media and communications budget for the referendum was increased to nearly 3 million euros to provide impartial and factual information on the treaty but also to encourage people to vote.

Atikcan (2015) argues that the key to the success of the ‘yes’ campaign in 2009 was the change in the narrative of their campaign slogans, which moved from abstract and technical statements to emotive and clear arguments outlining the EU's benefits. In 2009 the ‘yes’ campaign was able to attack the ‘no’ campaign with more vigour, outlining the risks of a second ‘no’ vote. During referendum campaigns, the ‘no’ side tends to have a structural advantage, as it only needs to raise

doubts among voters and campaign strategies often include attacking the proposal with unpopular themes to drive down support. However, this strategy is only likely to work once, becoming less effective if there is a second referendum. In Ireland, the result was a deflated 2009 'no' campaign that saw a 50% reduction in the number of people who reported that the no-campaign was more convincing (Euroaromter, 2010, p. 24).

It will be interesting to see if these findings are reflected in my own research of the media's representation of the key issues.

### ***2.6.2 The economy***

The 2009 referendum took place in the middle of the global financial crisis that saw unprecedented levels of dissatisfaction with the Irish government. The Irish economy was hit hard as its property bubble burst, with the value of house prices collapsing by up to 45%. GNP fell by nearly 12% in the time between the referendums and the government's finances were torn apart (Tonra, 2009). A series of austerity budgets with the addition of a €54 billion loan to stabilise the banking sector resulted in an 85% dissatisfaction rate with the government's performance (Irish Times/MRBI, 2009).

Economics is one of the most studied aspects of electoral behaviour. Elkink (et al. 2019) found that economics was crucial in both referendums and that different economic motivations influenced both vote choices. They concluded that the global financial crisis brought economics to the centre of the political agenda, with studies showing that economics became a significant predictor of vote choices in elections (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014). The Irish government's 'Communicating Europe' strategy also found that the reason for the swing in support of the treaty was down to the economy (Sinnott & Elkink, 2010). The research found that those who voted 'yes' were very likely to believe the ratification of the treaty would result in an improvement for the Irish economy. However, their research also found that the role of economics in voter behaviour was limited to certain groups. Negative voter assessments of voters' own personal economic situation did not have a significant effect on voters' choices (Sinnott and Elkink, 2010).

De Bruyn (2012) uses statistics to argue that the concerns of the Irish public shifted towards the economy during the second referendum. He outlines that 10% of the Irish electorate voted 'yes' because they believed it would benefit the economy in 2008. However, 16 months later during the

2009 referendum, this figure rose to 25%. Having had its economy transformed by European integration, the Celtic Tiger had seen Ireland become one of Europe's richest countries (Ibid). Despite there being clear signs of a recession in 2008, the unemployment rate remained low at 5.5% and inflation was under control. In 2009 unemployment had risen to 13% and the economy experienced deflation of 21.7% (ESRI, 2010). De Bruyn argues that 'yes' voters believed the EU's economic recovery could be accelerated by the ratification of the treaty. Ireland was dependent on EU aid for its economic recovery and in a Eurobarometer study in which areas Irish voters (yes and no) wanted help from the EU, the top two issues were jobs and the economy (Eurobarometer, 2009). A gap in the literature, therefore, exists on the extent to which the economy grew to become an issue during the second campaign. This thesis aims to address that gap. Which issues emerged and what did they include?

Literature (Quinlan 2012, Tonra 2009, Elkin and Sinnott 2015) points to the unpopularity of the government during the referendum campaign. Therefore "second-order" theory was of grave concern for the 'yes' campaign, as in 2009 Fianna Fáil, the primary government party, had an approval rating of just 17% (Irish Times/MRBI, 2009). However, what happened was the opposite, and the greatest reason given by scholars for the swing in support of Lisbon in 2009 is the changes to the Irish economy. It is therefore of interest to investigate to what extent the unpopularity of the government was discussed during the campaigns (notably the second campaign).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The literature drawn upon for this review is a synthesis of published studies on EU integration referendums. It highlights the complexities and nature of EU treaties and the challenges that governments face in explaining the technicalities to citizens. More specifically, it has summarised the contents of the Lisbon Treaty itself, such as the inclusion of a permanent President of the EU Council, a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the changes to the European Parliaments' powers. The review has also explored the extent to which referendums have been won and lost on campaign themes that have resonated with the public, whether this is because of a focus on the domestic agenda, or because issues of EU integration have cut through, particularly during Ireland's recession in 2009. It will be interesting to see the extent to which the Lisbon Treaty debates in both referendums were more or less focused on domestic issues or the detail of the treaty itself.



The theories outlined in this review can be seen in both the Nice and Constitutional Treaty referendums. Both second-order and attitude/issue voting were present in the Nice referendums. The 2001 Nice referendum saw the media focus on issues related to the domestic government and the perceived consequences of the treaty. However, in 2002, the 'yes' side moved away from unambiguous issues and successfully framed the treaty as an issue on the enlargement of Europe (Gary et al, 2005). Despite voting on the same treaty at nearly the same time, the Dutch and French experienced different campaign framings. France's campaign focused on economic and social issues both in France and the EU. In the Netherlands, media coverage was more preoccupied with procedural issues and with the French campaign (Hobolt and Brouard, 2005). As the Lisbon Treaty is believed to be very similar in content to the Constitutional Treaty, it is of interest to see which issues were discussed during the Irish campaign. Finally, literature on the Lisbon Treaty has a narrow focus on the reasons why voters changed from 'no' to 'yes'. We have a clear understanding that the 'yes' side changed to a more aggressive and emotive campaign during the 2009 Lisbon referendum and that Ireland's economic downfall resulted in an increase in the concern of voters about Ireland's economic decline. What is not known is how these issues were discussed at the time. The next chapter will explain which methods were used to address these gaps in the literature.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the approach and methodology used to tackle the research question. It will begin by explaining the reasons for choosing a content analysis approach and will continue by giving an account of the researcher's sampling approach. The chapter's main focus will be a detailed description of the data collection instruments and a discussion of the data analysis techniques used.

#### **3.2 Content analysis**

This thesis used content analysis to investigate the issues that were discussed during the 2008 and 2009 Lisbon Treaty referendums in Ireland. Content analysis is an effective tool for determining the presence of certain words, themes or concepts within qualitative data. Researchers can quantify and analyse the occurrence, significance, and connections of specific themes, or concepts using content analysis. This research will investigate newspaper articles to understand what the broad themes of both campaigns were. Content analysis can be defined as 'an approach to the analysis of documents and texts (which may be printed or visual) that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner' (Bryman, 2001: 177). Content analysis is particularly useful when investigating printed texts and communication media. This has made it a popular method for assessing political campaigns, with a concentration on editorials, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor. To determine which issues dominated the campaigns, a conceptual content analysis approach was chosen. Conceptual analysis determines the existence and frequency of concepts in a text. This has allowed researchers to determine the occurrence of explicit themes within the data. For this research conceptual analysis was used to first see which themes were discussed but also how often each theme was discussed (see findings section) so as to understand which issues were most prominent during the campaigns.

A thematic analysis approach was also considered however, thematic analysis expects the researcher will provide a rich but also complex nuanced interpretation as a theme. The aim of this research is not to interpret the meaning of the themes discussed but to provide a rich description of

each theme was discussed. Thus it was decided to use qualitative content analysis to provides simple, but in-depth reporting of commonalities and differences in the data.

### **3.3 Source selection**

It is important to clarify that this study is not an investigation of newspapers as actors but rather as a source. The two broadsheet newspapers used for this investigation will be used as a means of understanding which issues surfaced and were prevalent during the 2008 and 2009 debates.

Daily newspapers were chosen for this research as they provide a snapshot of the main issues debated at the time of the referendum campaigns. One of the major advantages of using print media is its accessibility and readership by large portions of the public. It is reasonable to assume that Irish voters relied on national media outlets and their coverage of these campaigns to help them make decisions about whether to approval the Lisbon Treaty. While political parties and other major stakeholders tend to be the key actors in the debate, it is widely recognised that the context of the debate is "*framed by the media mainly by referring to the arguments provided by different [actors]*" (Hobolt, 2009, p.144). Regular people and voters will generally pay little attention to speeches given by influential stakeholders or lobbyists and are unlikely to focus on the detailed content of the treaties. Instead, the public relies on newspapers and other media for commentary and in-depth analysis of issues covered during the referendum debate. Other broadcast media, such as television and radio, were considered as sources for this research; however, it made more sense to focus on print media because of its accessibility in respect of in-depth text analysis. This thesis, therefore, represents only a segment of Ireland's broad media landscape. As complete collections are categorised and made available online for user access, print media is becoming more readily available for scholarly investigation. Now, access is frequently immediate. For the most recent content, users can visit the websites of almost any media company. We can assume that the framing of EU news coverage by the 'yes' and 'no' campaigns was intended to influence Irish voters' decisions on the referendum.

Due to time constraints limiting this study, this analysis has been restricted to a focus on two of Ireland's most read and respected newspapers, "The Irish Times" and "Irish Independent". The "Irish Independent", launched in 1905, is Ireland's highest-selling national daily newspaper with a daily circulation of 159,363 in June 2004 (Corcoran, 2004). The paper is traditionally conservative

and held close ties to the Catholic Church (Ibid). As of June 2004, “the Irish Times” was Ireland's second most influential national daily newspaper with a daily circulation of 116,009 (Ibid). In contrast to the Irish Independent, the Irish Times has been classified as Ireland's only “*liberal organ*” (Ibid). The aim of this research is to achieve an objective overview of campaign messaging in the period before both Irish referendums and the selection of both of these broadsheets has been an important precondition for achieving this. A qualitative content analysis of these two most important daily Irish newspapers, one of which is conservative and the other liberal, should give an accurate representation of how the issues were framed for their readership in both Lisbon Treaty campaigns. Future research might focus on the extent to which issues arising in broadsheet media were also reflected in tabloid media of different political persuasions. However, within the limitations of this thesis, it made sense to confine the research to broadsheets. Alba-Juez (2017) found that broadsheet media sources provide a more reliable and balanced representation of debate during electoral campaigns.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Research using content analysis begins with the construction of a dataset. This was achieved using two distinct steps:

1. Headlines were analysed to identify which articles contained frames relevant to the debate of both campaigns. Irrelevant headlines were discarded and 304 articles remained.
2. Conceptual and qualitative content analysis of each article provided a rich description of how the issues of both campaigns were covered, as well as a calculation of the frequency by which each topic was covered. With insufficient time to study each of the 304 articles, the researcher instead chose to investigate 25% of the articles in depth, or 76 in total.

The Leiden University Library provides access to a large collection of contemporary digital newspapers. Access to the Irish Independent was available online at the Irish Newspaper Archives ([archive-irishnewsarchive-com](http://archive-irishnewsarchive-com).) and the Irish Times through Pro Quest ([proquest.com](http://proquest.com)). All of the articles investigated were published during a time period of 31 days before each of the referendum votes. For the first referendum, the time period was from 12 May 2008 to 12 June 2008, and for the 2009 referendum, the time period was 1 September 2009 to 2 October 2009. The time period chosen for this research reflects a common assumption (Blais, 2004) that the majority of undecided

voters will give little thought to referendum campaigns until the last month. Campaigners recognise this, which in turn is reflected in the focus of the campaigning issues being discussed during this time period. As there are 30 days in the month of May but 31 in the month of September, a time period of 31 days, rather than a month, was chosen in order to give balanced coverage to both campaigns. The selection criteria for articles in both newspapers and time periods were exactly the same. All types of articles, regardless of their nature (opinions, letters, interviews, etc), position in the newspaper (page number, front page, last page...) or copy length were included in the study.

- **Step 1**

**The first step** involved conducting searches on both websites and using filters to identify articles related to the “Lisbon Treaty” over both of the 31-day time periods. The inclusion of quotation marks (“”) in the search algorithm detected all articles in which the words “Lisbon” and “Treaty” were found close together.

At this initial stage, the research focussed only on the headlines of each article to understand which themes were present during each campaign. Using the Irish Independent during the 2008 referendum (time period: 12 May 2008 - 12 June 2008) as an example, the online search indicated 308 results. However, not all headlines were relevant for inclusion in the study. In order to guarantee the highest possible level of objectivity and reproducibility, headlines that did not relate to a specific referendum campaign issue were not included in the research data. The only headlines that were included were themes directly connected to the treaty debate. These included specific words and phrases relevant to the treaty's content, such as framing of a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote, or the consequences of a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote. Articles that did not fulfil these criteria were excluded. For example, *“Cowen states he will take full responsibility if voters reject the treaty”* (Sheahan, Irish Independent, June 07, 2008) was not included as this headline did not represent a common referendum theme. Many other articles were disregarded as they only mentioned the Lisbon Treaty in passing when discussing separate issues. Once a headline was determined as relevant, the ‘save this article’ tool was used to build a collection of relevant headlines and articles that were saved on a dedicated account on the archive-irishnewsarchive.com and proquest.com websites.

Once non-relevant articles were discarded from the online search of the Irish Independent for 2008, 86 articles remained within the dataset. This process was then repeated for each newspaper in both the 2008 and 2009 referendums. During the 2008 referendum campaign, the Irish Times yielded

337 results, however, this was reduced to 77 articles that focussed directly on campaign issues. Out of the initial 645 results only 163 headlines were considered relevant for the 2008 referendum.

During the 2009 referendum campaign (time period: 1 September 2009 - 2 October 2009) the Irish Independent yielded 208 results, which was then reduced to 72 relevant headlines. The Irish Times had 307 results, which was then reduced to 69 relevant headlines. The breakdown of the results can be found in the introduction to the findings section. Out of the initial 515 results only 141 headlines were considered relevant for investigation during the 2009 referendum. Therefore, for both referendums, 304 articles were considered relevant for research out of 1,160 search results from both newspapers.

- **Step 2**

**The second step** used the 304 headlines within the dataset to begin the process of qualitative content analysis. With insufficient time to study each of the 304 articles, the researcher instead chose to investigate 25% of the articles in depth, or 76 in total. Each fourth relevant article was studied, therefore 86 became 22 (Irish Independent 2008), 77 became 19 (The Irish Times 2008), 72 became 18 (Irish Independent 2009) and 69 became 17 (The Irish Times 2009). In total 76 articles were studied (see Appendix A).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Having established the research question and data sample, the 76 articles were then grouped into manageable content categories. The researcher began the analysis by reading and re-reading each article to become familiar with the data set. Whilst reading the articles several notes were taken. These comprised rough notes and comments in response to the data, which were then refined to give a richer description of how each theme was covered in both newspapers. This is essentially a process of selective reduction. Once the articles had been grouped into specific categories, it was then possible to focus on the specific words and patterns that would inform the research question.

Firstly, themes were chosen as the level of analysis using a flexible and interactive approach. This enabled the researcher to identify and categorise different themes in a way that allowed for the introduction and analysis of new and important material throughout the process. The researcher then counted the number of times a theme appeared in the data. The flexible nature of the analysis process allowed for themes to appear in different forms. For example, “*rejection will harm inward*

*foreign direct investment*” and “*Ireland's economy has grown due to EU membership*”, were both included in the ‘economy’ theme section as both sentences implied the theme. The two segments did not merit separate categories due to the implicit theme of the ‘economy’.

Initially, sub-themes were created before being grouped together to form a broader theme. A bottom-up approach was used to do this. The newspaper data was analysed, then grouped into topic areas and organised into subthemes. These were, then merged into your overarching themes. For example, whilst reading articles the subtheme of ‘job creation’ appeared several times and all relevant notes and quotes were grouped together. Similarly, a subtheme of ‘foreign direct investment’ also emerged. Once satisfied that all relevant subthemes had been categorised, the researcher then merged the subthemes together to make a broader and more complete theme. In this case, ‘job creation’ and ‘foreign direct investment’ merged to create the ‘economy’ theme. This process was repeated for each theme.

For the purpose of this study, the following themes appeared:

- The economy
- Democracy and sovereignty
- Ireland’s place in Europe
- Element of risk
- Neutrality
- Abortion and the Church
- Taxation
- Unpopularity of the government
- World Trade Organization

Once these broad themes had been identified, the quantifying of each theme could begin. Some articles contained multiple themes, which meant that the number of themes was greater than the number of articles. Irrelevant information that did not touch on a theme of the debate was ignored. Throughout the research, the frequency of each subtheme was noted, which when merged into broader themes revealed the frequency of each theme during both referendums (see findings, tables 1-6). In total 22 sub-themes were found, which was then reduced to 9 themes.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Findings**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This section of the thesis will objectively present the findings of the analysis. This thesis aims to understand the contours of debate during the 2008 and 2009 Irish Lisbon Treaty referendums. To do this two of Ireland's best-selling and most respected newspapers were analysed, the Irish Times and the Irish Independent.

It begins by establishing the key themes that emerged through data analysis and then outlines the frequency by which each theme occurred in advance of each referendum. It then continues by giving a richly descriptive account of how each theme was framed in both broadsheets during the two periods of review.

Thought was put into how best to present the findings. Prior to the research phase, it was anticipated that due to the difference in the referendum results, there would also be a difference in the themes discussed. The original intention was to explore the findings focusing on 2008 and 2009 separately. However, after reviewing the data, and because of the recurrence of similar themes during both referendums, it no longer made sense to organise the findings in this way. A better approach would be to present the findings by themes included each year that were pro and anti-treaty framings.

Themes will be discussed in detail starting from the most frequent (the economy) to the least frequently discussed theme (World Trade Organisation). It will conclude with a brief summary of the key findings by comparing and contrasting themes arising in the Nice, Constitutional and Lisbon referendums

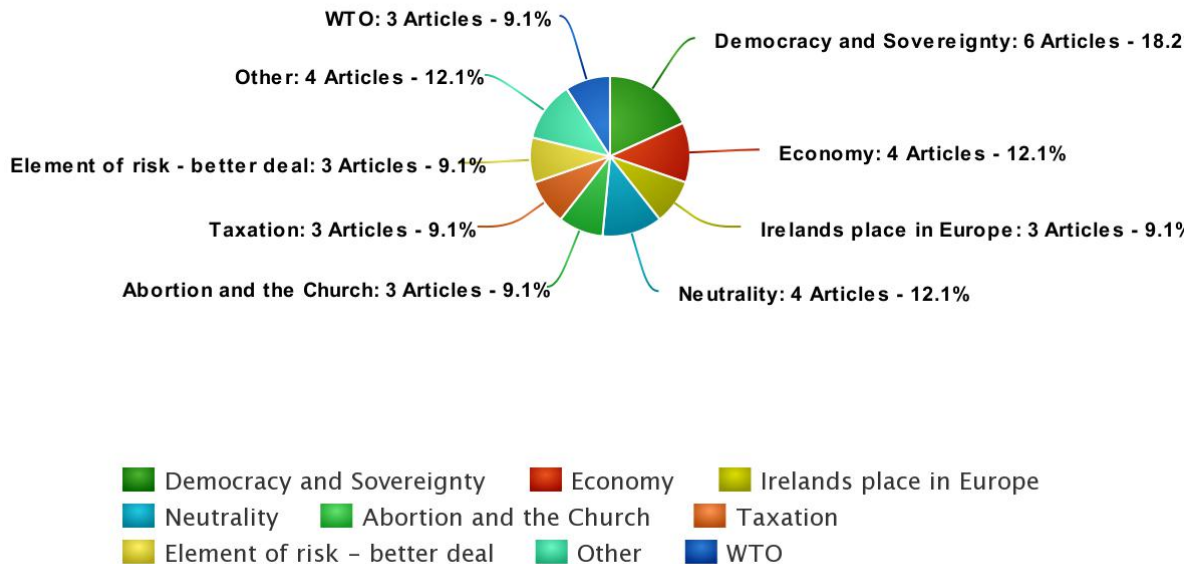
#### **4.2 Key themes emerging during both referendums**

This section includes pie charts indicating the key themes that emerged in both broadsheets during the 2008 and 2009 referendums.



- **The 2008 referendum themes**

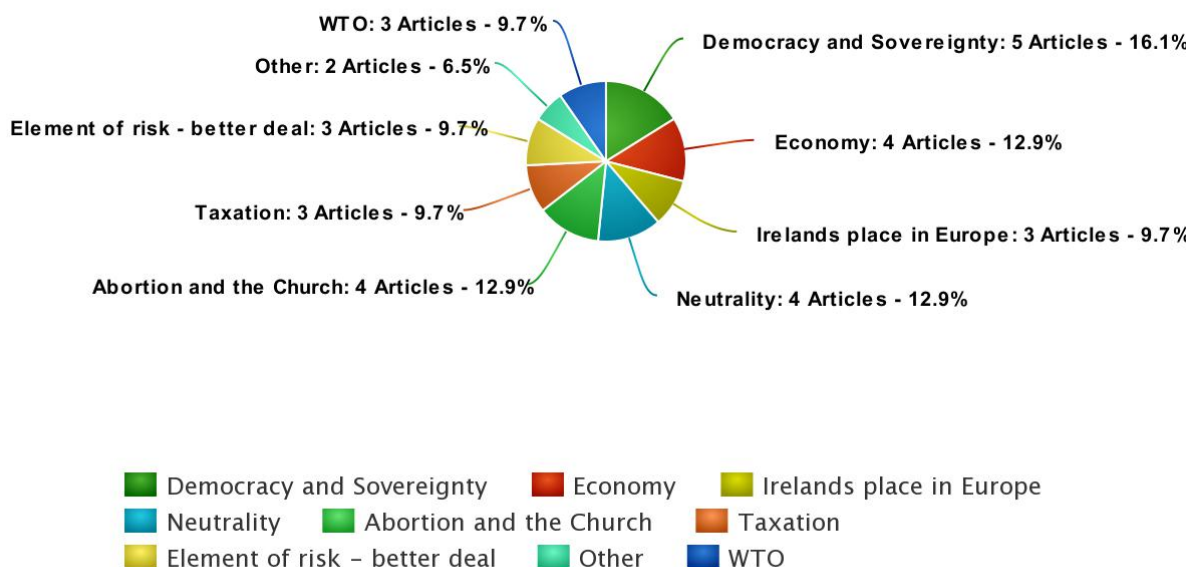
Irish Independent 2008



meta-chart.com

**Figure 1.** Pie chart of the Irish Independent 2008 themes (22 articles investigated)

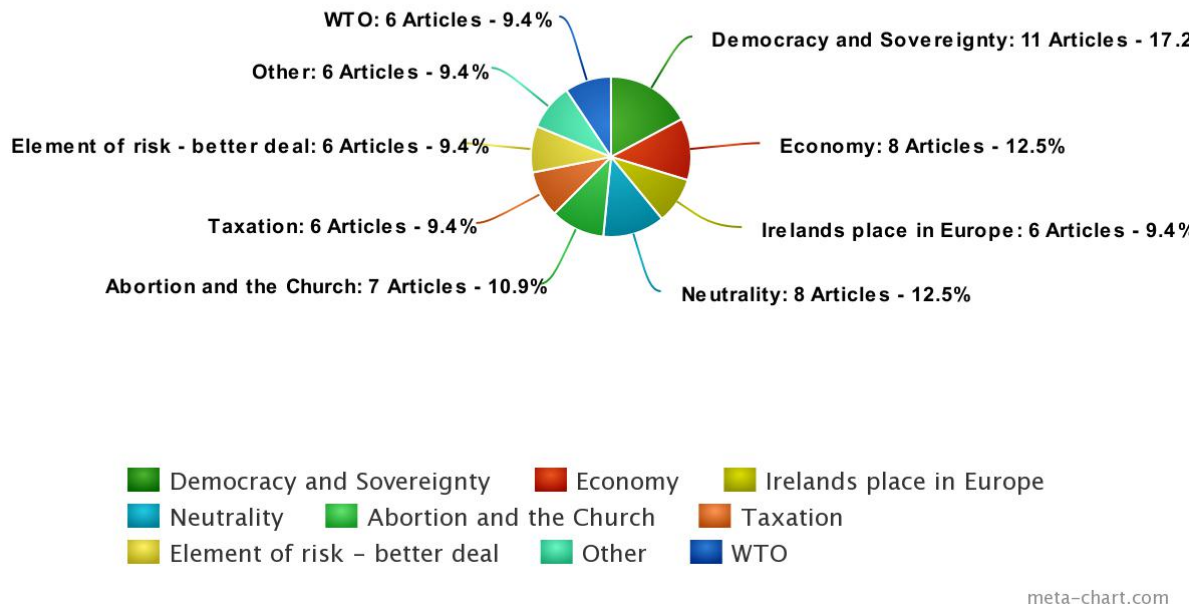
Irish Times 2008



meta-chart.com

**Figure 2.** Pie chart of the Irish Times 2008 themes (19 articles investigated)

Total themes discussed in 2008



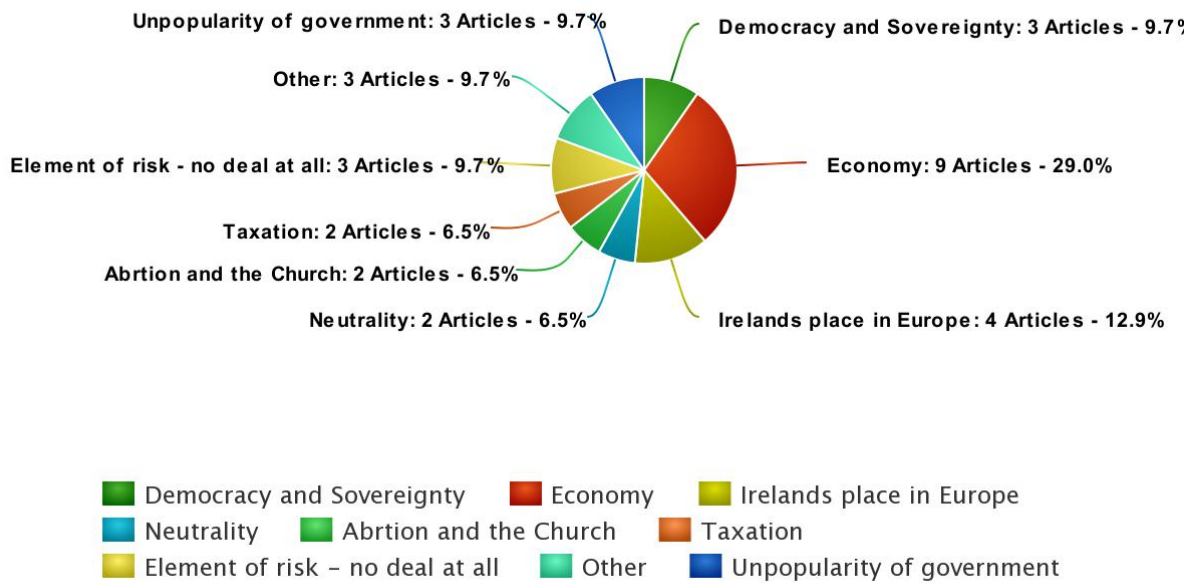
**Figure 3.** Pie chart of total themes discussed in 2008 (41 articles investigated)

The 2008 referendum saw a relatively even spread of themes discussed in both broadsheets to frame their coverage during the campaign debate. The ‘democracy and sovereignty’ theme was the most discussed, appearing in 11 of the investigated articles, translating to 17.2% of the coverage. The joint second most discussed themes were ‘neutrality’ and the ‘economy’, each appearing in 8 articles (12.5%). This was followed by ‘abortion and the Church’ appearing in 7 articles (10.9%) and the ‘element of risk’, ‘taxation’ and ‘Ireland's place in Europe’ all appearing in 6 articles (9.4%).

There was little difference in the coverage between the two newspapers. Both covered issues relating to the referendum a similar amount of times (86 in the Irish Independent and 77 in the Irish Times) with each including a similar proportion of issue coverage.

- **The 2009 referendum themes**

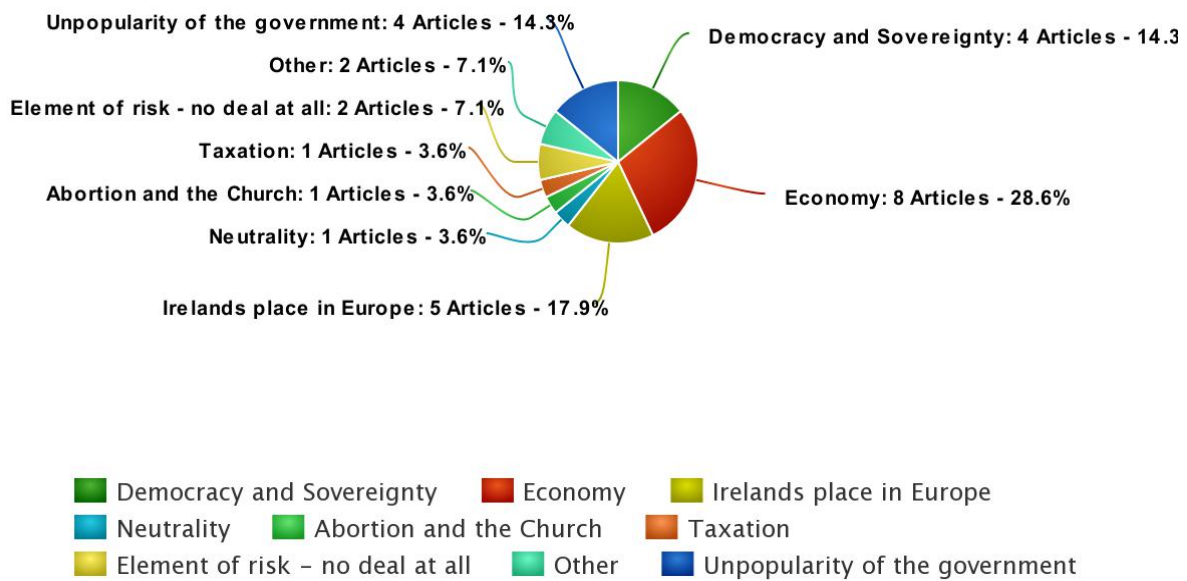
Irish Independent 2009



meta-chart.com

**Figure 4.** Pie chart of the Irish Independent 2009 themes (18 articles investigated)

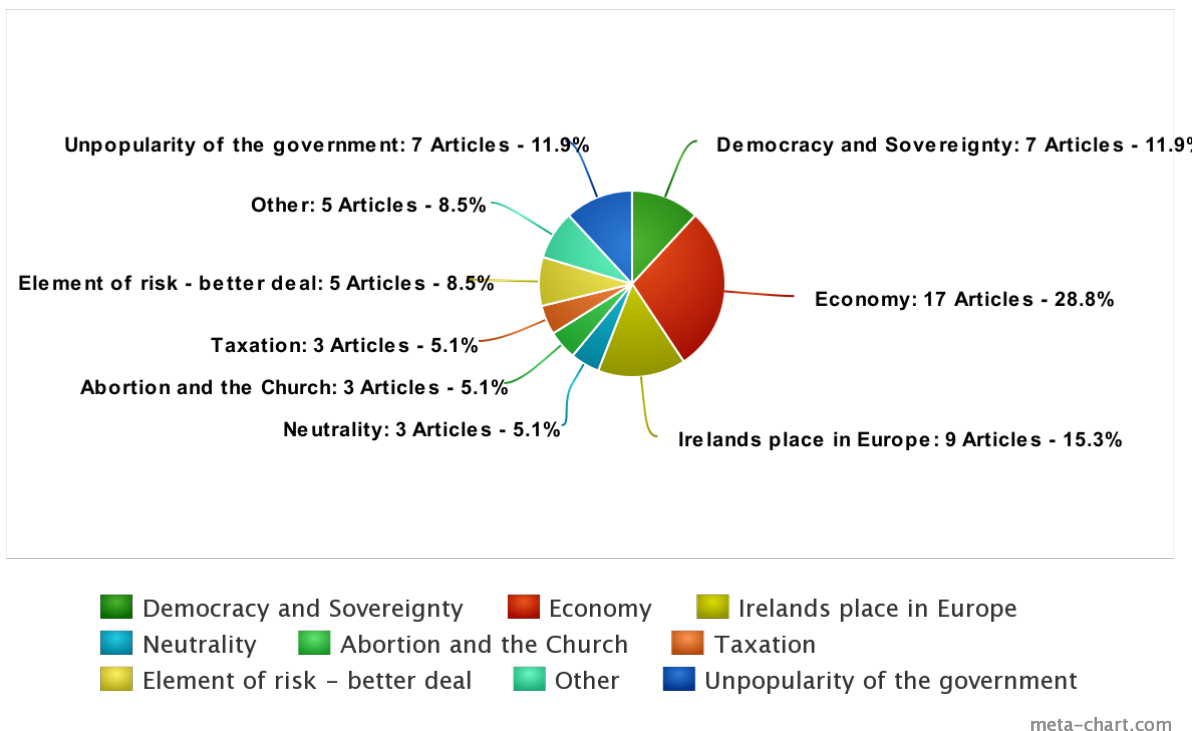
Irish Times 2009



meta-chart.com

**Figure 5.** Pie chart of the Irish Times 2009 themes (17 articles investigated)

Total themes discussed in 2009



**Figure 6.** Pie chart of total themes discussed in 2009 (35 articles investigated)

The 2009 referendum saw a less even spread of themes during the campaign. Unlike the 2008 referendum, issues related to ‘the economy’ dominated the debate in both broadsheets, with over a quarter (28.8%) of articles investigated using this theme. The only other theme that saw an increase in its coverage was ‘Ireland’s place in Europe’ (15.3%). We can therefore say that themes coalesced into more concentrated frames in 2009 campaign when compared with 2008, with the three largest themes (‘the economy’, ‘Ireland’s place in Europe’ and ‘democracy and sovereignty’) being present in 56% of the broadsheet coverage. This compares with 42.2% in 2008. The 2009 campaign also saw the removal of the ‘WTO’ frame in both broadsheets and the addition of a new theme, ‘unpopularity of the government’. The results also indicate that there were fewer articles in both broadsheets on the themes of ‘abortion’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘taxation’. As in 2008, there was little difference in the two newspapers’ coverage of the campaign debate. The Irish Times put more emphasis on the ‘Ireland’s place in Europe’ and ‘democracy and sovereignty’ frames, however, this is only a minor difference.

### 4.3 The economy

Despite the full effects of the global financial crisis not being felt in 2008, both the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ referendum campaigns cited Ireland’s future economic concerns as a reason for accepting or rejecting the Lisbon Treaty. However, economic framing by the ‘yes’ side in 2008 did not carry as much emotional content as it would in the 2009 campaign. Both sides of the campaign positioned themselves as fiscally competent, arguing that accepting or rejecting the treaty would harm Ireland's economy. As Fionnan Sheehan (Irish Independent, June 07, 2008) put it *“It's the economy stupid - except it's not quite clear who is being accused of being stupid in this case”*.

Sinn Féin MEP Mary Lou McDonald (O’Connor, Irish Independent, September 08, 2009) said it was *“irresponsible”* for the Government to sign up to a proposition which allowed for the *“removal of the tax veto by the back door”*. The ‘no’ campaign alleged that larger European states were seeking to undermine Irish economic success by removing Ireland's right to a permanent commissioner, a frame that re-appeared throughout the 2008 campaign. Sinn Féin argued that the treaty would change the laws of foreign direct investment, state aid and open the door to tax harmonisation, each bringing *“catastrophic”* consequences for the Irish economy (Ibid). Declan Ganley, leader of the Libertas Treaty opposition interest group, was particularly effective for the ‘yes’ side as he was a successful businessman, giving credibility to the ‘no’ campaigns framing on the economy. Fionnan Sheehan (Irish Independent, June 11, 2008) described Ganley’s *“freshness”* as an unusual voice for ‘no’ campaigners on EU referendums. Ganley felt that the treaty would increase market regulations and aggravate bureaucratic red tape for Irish businesses. *“There is nothing in Lisbon that benefits you as a person in business, there is a lot that threatens you”* (Ganley, Irish Times, Jun 06, 2008). Joe Higgins (cited in O’Connor, September 08, 2009), a socialist MEP advocating against the treaty, wrote that the treaty was too market-friendly and would signal *“a race to the bottom”* for workers. Higgins claimed ratification would see the liberalisation of public services, like education, health, and social security. In particular, Higgins expressed concern that businesses would be able to import cheap labour from low-income countries and that this would result in a reduction in the Irish minimum wage to below 2 euros (Ibid).

The detailed contents of the economic aspects of the Lisbon Treaty were rarely discussed by the ‘yes’ campaign, with coverage in both broadsheets more often framed in a context of Ireland's economic prosperity since joining the European Community in 1973. Detailed benefits were given on previous European integration. Voters were told how members of the European Economic and

Monetary Union (EMU) had eliminated exchange-rate risk in trade between EMU states, encouraged price transparency, facilitated cross-border trade and supported the achievement of a stable domestic macroeconomic environment (Quinn, Irish Independent, May 27, 2008). It was argued that this had all been beneficial to Ireland. Irish businessman Maurice Pratt (Irish Times, Jun 06, 2008) argued that by safeguarding Irish jobs and the economy, the treaty ensured Ireland's economic interests were protected and would help weather the coming recession. This article positioned Lisbon as being in the interest of small open economies and therefore Ireland stood to benefit most economically (Ibid). The 'yes' campaign also benefited from being able to point to business leaders who demonstrated Ireland's economic growth and societal benefits since joining the EU. John Dunne (Irish Times, May 23, 2008), chairman of the IDA (Industrial Development Agency) stated that *"the single market was vital to attracting future direct investment for Ireland"*. Research (Schlaufer et al, 2018) has shown that the use of experts and statistical evidence can contribute to democratic discourse by increasing the focus on policy content. The IDA is the agency responsible for the attraction and retention of inward foreign direct investment into Ireland, and therefore their stance carried weight when discussing issues on the treaty. The Irish Business and Employers Confederation (Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group) stated that vote 'no' campaigners, in particular Sinn Féin, had *"zero credibility"* on the economy (Fitzgerald, Irish Times, May 27, 2008). As the literature demonstrated, issue voting theory states that when voters engage more with the policy, they are more likely to vote on their views on European integration, not domestic issues. As the Irish held EU membership in high regard (Eurobarometer Standard Report, 2008), we can assume that the 'yes' campaign chose this strategy to engage voters with the policies, and, therefore, would tend to vote based on their opinion on the EU. Dunne (Irish Times, May 23, 2008) cited that Ireland had witnessed both growth and diversification of trade and investments thanks to EU membership. Using statistics, Dunne outlined that Irish GDP per capita had increased from 59 per cent of the EU average in 1973 to almost 125 per cent in 2006 (Ibid). Despite the impressive nature of these statistics, the themes raised by the 'yes' campaign, in reality, included very few references to the content of the treaty itself.

One of the only economic points of the 'yes' campaign linked to the treaty's content was that Lisbon would benefit the single market and that this had been the single biggest driver in Ireland's economic development since the 1970s. *"At the heart of this matter is the efficient functioning of the single market - and this is also what is at the core of the Lisbon Treaty and why we support it"* (Dunne, Irish Times, May 23, 2008). The argument went that the Lisbon treaty would make the single market more efficient, and therefore beneficial to Ireland. *"The efficient functioning of the*

*single market and its extension into new areas of financial and traded services is vital if IDA (Industrial Development Agency) Ireland is to continue being successful in winning future valued-added investments and highly paid jobs for Ireland” (Ibid). However little detail was given on how exactly the single market would benefit from the treaty. Rejection of the treaty was framed as a threat to Ireland's foreign direct investment and multinational companies had invested in Ireland on the basis that it was at the heart of a vibrant and efficient single European market.*

As the first referendum drew nearer, the economic outlook for Ireland began to darken. Irish Independent editor Fionan Sheehan (Irish Independent, June 07, 2008) described the figures demonstrating the weakness in the economy as a *“real eye-opener”* for what was to come. However, it was unsure how much of an impact it would have on the final result, *“rallying cry on the economy may be too little, too late”* (Ibid). In the weeks approaching the vote, Irish dole queues were growing by nearly 1000 people a week and the unemployment rate broke the 200,000 mark for the first time in a decade (Ibid). Proponents of the treaty framed this as a warning that the worst was yet to come if the treaty were to be rejected. Leo Varadkar, a Fine Gael TD, affirmed that ratification would *“send out a message to multinationals that Ireland is uncertain and unsure about its place in Europe”* (Sheehan, Irish Independent, June 11, 2008). Brian Cowen, the Taoiseach at the time, described those considering voting against the treaty as *“self-indulgent”* (McGee, Irish Times, Jun 03. 2008), stating that rejecting the treaty would harm Ireland's international reputation as *“a positive, forward-looking European country.”*

By the time of the 2009 referendum, the economic crisis was in full swing, allowing the ‘yes’ campaign to underline their argument that Lisbon was needed to save the economy. In addition to the guarantees (Michael, Irish Times, Sep 12, 2009) and opt-out clauses gained by the Irish government, Ireland also stood to benefit significantly from the EU’s 5 billion euros economic recovery plan designed to stimulate growth. The framing here was that Ireland's international reputation was on the line and securing access to liquidity from the European Central Bank would be essential for the growth of the Irish economy. This was reinforced with the backing of experts: *“Just under 91% of the economists expressed the belief a Yes vote best-served the economic interests of the State. 65% said passing the treaty was likely to facilitate foreign direct investment, while 31 per cent felt it would have no impact. 82 per cent said a yes vote was likely to help develop international confidence in the Irish economy. 75 per cent also saying a Yes would significantly enhance Ireland's reputation.” (Ibid).*

Arguments such as this with the addition of the guarantees made by the European Council weakened the ‘no’ side's frame that Lisbon would harm the economy in 2009.

#### 4.4 The democracy and sovereignty frame

Democracy and the potential threat to Ireland’s sovereignty were principal arguments made for rejecting the treaty. Those in opposition effectively framed this as the democratic deficit of the treaty. The ‘no’ campaign contended that Lisbon would dilute Ireland's voting rights and therefore reduce its voice in Brussels. Citing the contents of the reality, it was argued that the introduction of the “*passerelle*” or “*passageway*” mechanism would allow the EU to annex new areas of policy by a simple decision of the Council of Ministers (Ganley, Irish Times, Sep 24, 2009) with no need to refer back to the national parliaments or get a treaty change. Opponents of the treaty framed this as “*writing a blank cheque*” (Ibid) to chip away at Ireland's democratic system.

One of the key themes of the ‘no’ campaign was the potential loss of a permanent Irish Commissioner. Although this had been previously agreed upon in the Nice Treaty, opponents of Lisbon effectively re-used this frame again 6 years later to emphasise a loss of Irish power in Brussels. The ‘no’ side also highlighted how the Lisbon Treaty would change the voting balance of the Union. Finian McGrath TD (cited in Bonde, Irish Times, Jun 10, 2008), the only government side calling for a no vote, expressed that the new arrangement would favour the bigger Member States by putting EU’s decision-making on a pure population size basis. The new approach would double Germany’s voting power in making EU laws and increase the UK’s, France’s, and Italy’s whilst Ireland’s voting power would be halved. McGrath (Ibid) described the move as a “*power-grab*” by the big states by basing EU law-making primarily on population size. The ‘no’ campaign argued that this would turn the EU from an economic union of equals to a federal super-state (Ibid). These changes, coupled with the democratic deficit already outlined by the ‘no’ side, equated to a powerful and recurring argument designed to turn the public against the treaty. As Sinnott (Irish Times, June 03, 2008) said, “*You cannot give the kind of power we are giving to the EU under Lisbon with only a token nod to democracy*”. During the second referendum, the ‘no’ campaign doubled down on their frame that the treaty was undemocratic. This was aided greatly due to the fact that Ireland's initial 2008 rejection was seen as being ignored by the EU. The 2009 referendum was framed as undemocratic by stating that the Irish people were being asked to vote twice on the exact same treaty. Gerry Adams (Irish Times, Sep 28 2009), then leader of Sinn Féin, outlined that the European Council clearly stated that the guarantees “*clarify but not change either the content or*



*the application of the treaty*". He argued that if the contents of the treaty had not changed there was no reason to have a second vote. The campaign often made reference to the "*Brussels elite*" with Declan Ganley (Irish Times, Sep 24, 2009) describing a "*Brussels elite that advances by stealth, that swats aside dissent, that resents the electorate, that ignores referendums when they go the wrong way.*" Although the 'no' campaign was careful to not appear overtly Eurosceptic, during both referendums Brussels was framed by the 'no' side as "*anti-democratic*" and "*out of touch*".

The 'sovereignty' frame was primarily used by the 'no' campaign arguing that the EU was taking too much of Ireland's sovereignty. The 'no' campaign outlined that Ireland would be transferring over 60 key areas of decision-making power to Brussels (Ibid). The creation of an "*unelected European president*" was mentioned, framing the Lisbon Treaty as a major step toward a "*United States of Europe but with unelected officials*" (Ibid). Sinnott (Irish Times, 2008, Jun 03) argued that once large powers were given to the larger European countries they would be near impossible to reclaim. One fear raised frequently was that the treaty would open the door to issues such as neutrality, euthanasia and abortion for the European Court of Justice to rule on. In particular, opposition to the treaty played on Ireland's sense of identity and its gaining of independence from the British. One particularly controversial poster used by the vote 'no' campaign stated "*People died for your freedom - Don't throw it away*", which was superimposed on a copy of the Irish 1916 Proclamation of Independence (O'Regan, Irish Times, May 20, 2008). The 'yes' campaign strongly rebutted this frame, with Eamonn Gilmore, Leader of the Labour Party, describing the poster as a "*totally false proposition*" and that Ireland was not "*being asked to 'throw' its freedom away any more than Britain or France*" (Ibid). By spreading fears of an EU super-state and framing the Lisbon Treaty as an EU Constitution, the 'no' side aimed to convince Irish citizens that their rights could be overruled. This theme is particularly important due to Ireland's colonial history and thus represents a particularly emotive and effective frame. Sinnott (Irish Times, June 03, 2008) "*the tragedy of giving power over Ireland to Brussels within living memory of our forefathers' great sacrifices in gaining our independence*".

Interestingly, pro-ratification campaigners also chose to link a 'yes' vote to Ireland's independence, again pointing to Ireland's development since joining the EU. "*A second vote against Lisbon would be a vote of no confidence in ourselves. It would also be, whether consciously or otherwise, a vote to return to the days of submissive dependence on Britain, with all that entailed, as in the Ireland of the 1950s, in terms of humiliation, poverty, emigration and authoritarian hopelessness. It would be throwing away the freedom we have won since 1973, the first real freedom we have enjoyed since*

*independence*” (Lillis, Irish Independent, September 15, 2009). During the 2008 referendum campaign, advocates of the treaty argued that Lisbon would cement Ireland's seat at the top table by maintaining a balance between the smaller and bigger states. Maurice Pratt (Irish Times, Jun 06, 2008) argued that the treaty made the union more democratic and a more effective institutional framework, ensuring a balance between the six large and 21 small member states.

Pat Cox (Irish Times, June 04, 2008) argued that Lisbon would enable the European institutions to work more efficiently and effectively, by giving citizens a greater say and speeding up decision-making. *“It will give the national parliaments a greater role and establish the new citizens’ initiative. Moreover, it would introduce the Charter of Fundamental Rights.”* MEP Gay Mitchel (Irish Independent, May 21, 2008) believed that the EU gave Ireland the table and tools to exercise more sovereignty not less. He argued that a small country like Ireland needed the EU to act on the world stage and that with EU membership *“when decisions are being taken about trade, about social policy or about foreign relations Ireland's voice will be listened to”*. Proponents of the treaty framed Ireland's membership as a reminder that *“Ireland has always chosen to be part of this club, we are not abiding by anyone else's rules”* (Cowen, Irish Times, Oct 01, 2009). Laws at the European level were not made by *“faceless bureaucrats”* but by elected ministers (Laffan cited in Minihan, Sep 15, 2009).

#### **4.5 Ireland's place in Europe**

The theme of ‘Ireland's place in Europe’ became increasingly important to the pro-Lisbon campaign in the 2009 referendum. During the 2008 referendum campaign, the ‘yes’ side argued that the treaty served Ireland's best interests. The campaign stated that it had *“been skillfully negotiated”* and that *“no international treaty has borne the marks of Irish involvement as this one has”*, and that *“all our interests are protected”* (Cowen cited in Hennessy, Irish Times, May 13, 2008). The ‘yes’ side outlined that the Union would be given more powers in limited but important areas. Competence would now be shared in areas such as cross-border crime and energy security so that Member States could respond to the *“new and very different challenges”* facing the Union (O’Neachtain, Irish Independent, June 03, 2008). At the time it was felt that great power politics was returning and that unless Europe acted in unison, it would be outmanoeuvred by actors such as the USA and China. Particularly in larger member states, this need to increase the power of the Union and its bargaining power was acutely felt (Pratt, Irish Times, Jun 06, 2008). Energy security in particular was a key argument used to frame the campaign. The 2008 referendum took place

during a period of rising oil prices and the Lisbon Treaty would see the promotion of interconnection between energy networks across the continent. The treaty was framed as the best way to improve the EU's effectiveness in an increasingly turbulent and interdependent world.

During the 2009 referendum, the 'yes' campaign became more aggressive in its messaging, with the argument focussing on it being naive to think there would be no adverse consequences for Ireland if it rejected the treaty again. Professor Brigid Laffan, Chairperson of 'Ireland for Europe', argued that a second rejection would lead to frustration towards Ireland on the continent and could result in a two-speed or a two-tier Europe. This could mean countries would proceed with further policy cooperation, leaving Ireland "*out in the cold*" (Laffan cited in Mac Cormaic, Sep 7, 2009). This increased the element of risk in rejecting the treaty, with Laffan arguing that Lisbon was "*an absolutely vital vote for our future, and the only way we can guarantee our control over our future in the EU is by voting Yes*" (Ibid). The fact that Ireland would be moving from a net beneficiary to a net contributor was also mentioned during both campaigns (O'Connor, Irish Independent, September 08, 2009). The 'yes' side argued that it would reflect badly on Ireland to reject the treaty just as Ireland became a net contributor to the budget. It was believed that this would harm Ireland's international reputation and would diminish its ability to negotiate in Europe. This in turn would result in a negative impact on trading, investments and employment prospects. It was believed that Ireland would lose the goodwill and respect of Europe by plunging the continent into political and economic shock. The 'yes' campaign managed to effectively frame the second referendum on Ireland's position in the EU and the negative consequences of a no vote.

In contrast to the 'yes' campaign's position that rejection would harm Ireland's international reputation, Ganley (Irish Times, Sep 24, 2009) cited that rejection had in fact improved Ireland's standing abroad. He claimed that the Irish were "*cheered across the continent*" for rejecting the treaty, and that "*bouquets of flowers were handed into startled receptionists in our embassies*". Ireland was the only country in the EU to put the Lisbon Treaty to a referendum, with Ganley (Ibid) arguing that when Ireland rejected the treaty, they were in fact rejecting it for all of Europe, "*Europeans felt that we had cast proxy ballots for them*". Ganley frames Ireland's rejection of the treaty as a reason for great Irish pride and that the country should not be ashamed of its choice. "*Do you want Ireland to roll over and reverse its democratic decision? We made our choice last year, we made the right choice and we made it on behalf of every European who believes in democracy and freedom.*" (Ibid).

#### 4.6 The element of risk

The ‘element of risk’ theme was used during both referendums. In 2008, it was more commonly used by the ‘no’ campaign, and in 2009, by the ‘yes’ campaign. Both sides used scaremongering as a technique to escalate their arguments, using extreme statements designed to elicit a response and which bore little relation to the actual contents or consequences of the ratification of the treaty itself.

In 2008, opposition to the treaty effectively framed rejection as being a choice between maintaining the status quo versus taking unknown potential risks. The ‘no’ campaign also benefited from the previous French and Dutch Constitutional referendums, which set a precedent within the EU for not expelling a country for not ratifying a treaty. For the ‘no’ campaign, this also meant that rejecting the treaty could be framed in a positive manner as it would help strengthen Ireland's negotiations and bargaining power in renegotiating the treaty. Sinnott (Irish Times, June 03, 2008) framed it as *“In the event of a No vote, we have minimal risk but maximum benefit. In the event of a Yes vote, we have maximum risk and very little if any benefit”*. The ‘better deal’ frame was used by the ‘no’ campaign, arguing for a negotiated and more preferential deal for Ireland. Sinnott (Ibid) stated *“If we vote No, Europe will have to offer us serious incentives to pass the treaty.”* By contrast, the ‘yes’ campaign stated that the treaty had been expertly written and was the *“best possible deal for Ireland”* (Hennessey, Irish Times, May 23, 2008).

A clear divide emerged between both sides of the campaign as to whether Ireland owed the EU, or whether the EU owed Ireland. The ‘yes’ side felt that Ireland owed ratification of the treaty to the European Union, they outlined how Ireland had benefited from the Union and that further integration best suited both European and Irish interests. Brian Cowen argued that Ireland needed to be seen as *“honest brokers, who do not ignore the needs of others in seeking to have our own met”* (O’Connor, Irish Independent, September 08, 2009). Conversely, the ‘no’ side strongly felt that Ireland was donating national sovereignty without receiving any benefits. Declan Ganley (Irish Times, Sep 24, 2009) stated that in *“return, we get nothing we don’t already have”*. This split was exacerbated by comments by the members of the European elite of the *“ungrateful Irish”* (Ibid). France, in particular President Nicolas Sarkozy, was often portrayed as the villain of the treaty. The ‘no’ campaign used examples of Nicolas Sarkozy, exploding with anger, declaring that the Irish were *“bloody fools”* who had been *“filling their faces at our expense for years”* (Ibid).

However, during the second referendum, the frame of 'risk' was turned on its head to the advantage of the 'yes' campaign. In 2009, pro-treaty campaigners effectively framed the huge risk to Ireland of not ratifying the treaty. It was made clear to the Irish public that no further guarantees would be made to soften the treaty for the Irish again. The day before the vote, Irish Independent political editor Fionan Sheahan (Irish Independent, October 02, 2009) compared rejecting the treaty to *"Taking a gamble at a time when your hand is weak is brave- but it can also be extremely foolish."*

As the 2009 campaign progressed it emerged that Ireland could potentially lose its right to nominate an EU commissioner if it rejected the Lisbon Treaty for a second time. *"The only way to ensure that Ireland will always have a commissioner is to vote yes to Lisbon. If not, of course, we have to reduce the number of commissioners. This is in the current treaties and we are legally obliged to do it"* (Barroso cited in Smyth, Irish Times, Sep 19, 2009). European Commission President José Manuel Barroso warned *"Honestly, there are some doubts now about the future situation of Ireland. Some people have asked me: Is Ireland going to leave the EU? For investor confidence, it is important that there is certainty about the future of Ireland in the EU"* (Ibid). The Commission president underscored previous arguments made by the 'yes' campaign, in particular by expressing concerns for Ireland's reputation and the potential economic consequences. *"Perceptions count in politics... I tell you this very frankly. I believe confidence is part of the economy, as we have been seeing recently"* he said. (Ibid). The Commission President's remarks were interpreted by those opposing the treaty as *"unwelcome threats"* (O'Regan, Irish Times, Sep 22, 2009). *"Commissioner Barroso knows perfectly well that Ireland has no intention of leaving the EU. He also knows that rejecting the Lisbon Treaty will have no negative impact on inward investment or job creation. Despite this fact, he repeated many of the scaremongering claims of the yes side"* said Mary Lou McDonald (Ibid). However, Barroso countered this by saying *"We respect the vote of the Irish people. It has to be very clear that we are making no threats at all."* Opponents of the treaty criticised Barroso's intervention, stating that he was interfering in a national debate. However, Barroso refuted this by stating *"The European Commission has not only the right but a duty to inform, as any public authority"* (Smyth, Irish Times, Sep 19, 2009).

## 4.7 Neutrality

Concern about the threat to Ireland's neutrality was a more prominent theme during the 2008 referendum, mainly by the 'no' campaign to frame the debate. It would appear that the guarantees and opt-out clauses agreed with the EU in the intervening period neutralised this as an emotive campaigning message during the 2009 referendum.

As the literature review showed, campaign messaging on the theme of Irish neutrality is nothing new to discussions on European integration. Neutrality was one of the most significant reasons for Irish voters voting against the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty and the Nice Treaty. It re-emerged during the Lisbon Treaty referendum in 2008 and was listed as the second most important reason for voting no after a lack of understanding of the treaty (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2008). Devine (Irish Independent, September 30, 2009) argued that the Lisbon Treaty further exposed the purposeful ambiguity and pragmatic nature of Ireland's neutral policy. For this reason, she argued that many Irish voters feel that the country's neutrality is incompatible with further integration within EU foreign, security and defence policy. At the time of the 2008 referendum, Irish attitudes towards the EU were more positive than negative. However, when it came to security and defence matters, there were serious concerns, and the 'yes' campaign was more likely to mention positive economic aspects in their messaging. The 'no' campaign recognised this and aimed to frame the treaty as a referendum on neutrality. Roger Cole (Irish Times, Sep 30, 2009), of the Peace and Neutrality Alliance, stated that the treaty would undermine Ireland's neutrality by further militarising the EU and increasing member states' military spending. Readers of both broadsheets during both referendum campaigns put forward the argument that a military alliance of EU member states with NATO would pull Ireland into an EU army. This argument then became linked to the conscription within an EU army (Ibid). Devine (Irish Independent, September 30, 2009) stated that impartiality and maintaining Ireland's identity and independence in foreign policy decision-making would come under threat if Lisbon were to pass. Storey (Irish Times, June 02, 2008) cited Ireland's strong sense of national identity, foreign policy goals and peace promotion as the main reasons for the public's support for Irish neutrality. He outlines that Ireland's non-aggression, the primacy of the UN and the confinement of state military activity to UN peacekeeping allows Ireland to promote its values of "*active neutrality*"(Ibid).

The profound nature of Irish national identity and desire for neutrality have roots that go back beyond the First World War. "*The banner draped over Liberty Hall by James Connolly at the*

outset of the first World War, which proclaimed “Neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland”, was a powerful statement against the military imperialism and military aggression which engulfed most of Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.” (Costello, Irish Times, May 21, 2008). Doherty (cited in Devine, Irish Independent, September 30, 2009) describes neutrality as the “leitmotif of Irish independence and sovereignty”, namely as an endeavour to strengthen its sense of independence from the UK. Neutrality satisfies an Irish need to exert independence or sovereignty on the world stage and is not uncommon in a newly independent state (Ibid). Tonra (Irish Times, Sep 30, 2009), asserted that Ireland’s support for neutrality stemmed from a “psychological need for a dramatic manifestation of independence”. Those in favour of neutrality have profited from Ireland’s strong sense of national identity. Devine (Irish Independent, September 30, 2009) found that the strength of Irish national identity positively predicted support for neutrality. She stated that “the concept of Irish neutrality as understood by the Irish people is a reflection of their values and a projection of their national identity in international affairs” (Ibid). It is therefore understandable that neutrality would play such a significant role in referendums.

Neutrality is a contested term with multiple different definitions being used within the referendum debates and it is worth noting how support for Irish neutrality has been implemented in practice. The opaque nature of Ireland's neutrality policy is reflected in governing parties’ shifting their opinion on neutrality over nearly 5 decades of EC/EU membership. In 2003 the Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrat coalition re-worded its definition of the military-neutrality concept as “non-membership of a military alliance, and specifically, non-membership of an alliance with a mutual defence commitment” (Cowen, Dáil Éireann, 20 March, 2003). However, this definition of neutrality from an Irish context has no real similarity with the legal concept of neutrality. This argument surfaced during the referendum campaign. “The government defines Irish neutrality as not being a member of a military alliance and is unaffected by the Lisbon Treaty. But membership in a military alliance is not a comprehensive measure of neutrality” (Storey, Irish Times, June 02, 2008). Tonra (Irish Times, Sep 30, 2009) argues that this definition in effect sets the bar especially high for Ireland to violate its ‘traditional neutrality policy’.

The ‘no’ side argued that Irish neutrality had already been compromised by membership of the EU. Storey (Ibid) cited that Irish officers were already working with EU military staff in Brussels, overseeing EU military capabilities, including the EU “battle groups” to which Ireland had committed troops. He claimed that the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty would “expand the range of tasks that EU forces may engage in overseas”. The new tasks include “military advice and

*assistance tasks*” and *“supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories”* (Ibid). The ‘yes’ side pointed to a *“triple lock clause”* that would guarantee Ireland's neutrality and maintain its prominence in peacekeeping missions. During the 2008 campaign, Irish Defense Minister Wille O’Dea used Ireland's pride in its peacekeeping missions to help promote the treaty. *“We should be proud of being involved in EU peacekeeping activities. Our neutrality is secured by a triple-lock if we vote ‘yes’.”* (O’Dea cited in McGee, Irish Times, June 03, 2008). The *“triple lock clause”* dictates that for Ireland to take part in any combat mission it requires further restrictive criteria than other EU member states. The mission must be mandated by the UN Security Council or the UN General Assembly; it must also be approved by the Government and voted on by the Dail (Irish Parliament). The ‘yes’ side claimed that Irish neutrality would be enhanced by the ratification of the treaty. It was argued that *“the majority of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and Common Security and Foreign Policy (CSFP) provisions contained within the Lisbon Treaty are simply clarifications and revisions to articles already contained in previously ratified EU treaties and summits”* (Clonan, Irish Times, June 09, 2008). Proponents of the treaty consistently outlined that within the treaty it stated that Ireland would have the power of vetoing over *“any and all future ESDP and CSFP decisions of the EU”* and the *“treaty does so by explicitly excluding such decisions from the proposed qualified majority voting structures envisaged for the EU”* (Ibid).

Both sides of the debate made reference to the inclusion (Article 188R) of a *“Solidarity Clause”* which states that *“the union and its member states shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a member state is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster”* (Lisbon Treaty, 2007). The ‘no’ campaign argued that was in effect tying Ireland into a military union. However, ‘yes’ campaigners argued that the clause was only based on the notion of *“voluntary offers of civil and military assistance in the event of a crisis and does not represent the basis of a pan-European military alliance”* (Clonan, Irish Times, June 09, 2008). In addition, Article 3a states that *“in particular, national security remains the sole responsibility of each member state”* and does not, therefore, commit Irish troops to any military alliance.

#### **4.8 Abortion - the Church**

During the 2008 campaign the theme of abortion gained media attention, in particular as the Catholic Church was dragged into the debate with both sides of the campaign seeking its endorsement.



The issue of abortion arose because of the attachment of the Charter of Fundamental Rights to the Lisbon Treaty. A social Catholic and Eurosceptic lobby group called C oir was established to campaign against the treaty. Richard Greene (Irish Times, May 26, 2008), C oirs spokesperson, argued that making the Charter of Fundamental Rights legally binding for all EU member states would lead to a basis for a legal challenge of Ireland's abortion laws in the European Court of Justice. This, he argued, would leave socially important issues such as abortion out of the hands of the Irish people (Ibid). The aim was to frame the treaty as an endorsement of abortion, as Greene (ibid) put it, *“If you are against abortion, you should reject the treaty”*.

Greene (Ibid) argued that proponents of the treaty had attempted to *“brazenly dress up a political promise as a legal certainty”*. He claimed that the guarantees had no legal effect as they did not alter the actual content of the Lisbon Treaty. The salience of the abortion issue is linked to Ireland's strong identity as a Catholic country. The ‘no’ side framed the treaty as having anti-Catholic values and, in response, the ‘yes’ side put pressure on the Church to clarify that the treaty would not legalise abortion. Cecilia Keaveney (a pro-treaty Fianna F ail politician) stated that it would be *“benevolent of the Catholic hierarchy to issue a statement that abortion would not be brought in by the treaty”* (Walsh, Irish Times, May 14, 2008). On May 30th, ‘yes’ campaign received a boost after the Catholic Church’s declared that the treaty would not weaken Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion, contradicting a claim often made by some in the ‘no’ lobby. The Irish Bishops’ Conference, did not advocate a ‘yes’ vote (Hennessy et al, Irish Times, May 30, 2008), however, the Archbishop left the door open to interpretation: *“In today’s world of legal positivism, courts and judicial interpretations can bring many surprises and we appeal to our political leaders and public representatives to be attentive in their responsibility to defend the position which represents the Irish Constitution for the future”* (Ibid).

#### **4.9 Taxation**

At the time of the 2008 referendum, L aszl  Kov acs, the Commissioner responsible for Taxation and Customs Union, had advocated the creation of a single system for calculating corporation tax, arguing it would cut red tape and improve efficiency (McEnaney, Irish Independent, June 09, 2008). In addition, the French presidency of the European Council was proposing to make the creation of a Common Consolidated Corporate Taxation Base (CCCTB) one of its top priorities and would seek to proceed with implementation on the basis of enhanced cooperation. This would mean a *“taxation*

*by sales destination*”, which would be to the detriment of the Irish (Fitzgerald, Irish Times, May 27, 2008). Ireland had benefited massively from its low tax rate of 12.5%, resulting in large swathes of inward investment (Mahony et al, Irish Times, May 15, 2008). If passed, CCCTB regulations would result in taxes being levied on goods and services in the EU countries in which they were consumed and, as such, taxation would become a key talking point during the campaign.

During the first referendum, the ‘no’ side framed their argument on the basis that Ireland would lose the ability to set its own tax rates - namely corporation tax, which had long been criticised by the French government. As Ireland's low rate of corporation tax had resulted in increased employment opportunities, those in opposition to the treaty could effectively frame ratification as a threat to Irish jobs. The ‘no’ side pointed to the inclusion of “*enhanced cooperation*” on tax affairs within the treaty. However, Finance Minister Brian Lenihan (Mahony et al, Irish Times, May 15, 2008) described such concerns as “*scaremongering*” and “*fanciful*”, adding that Ireland’s veto over any EU proposals in the taxation area remained. Lenihan said the EU’s court could not force changes to Ireland’s corporate tax regime on the grounds of distorting competition because the relevant article in the treaty applied only to indirect tax mechanisms and that member states had to act unanimously “*even in this specific area*” (Ibid). The ‘yes’ campaign stressed that the likelihood of the CCCTB taking place was slim, as “*a very significant number of member states oppose the introduction of a common consolidated corporate tax base*” (Ibid). Despite the ‘yes’ side using statements from the likes of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso refuting a loss of Irish tax sovereignty (Donoghue, Irish Independent, May 28, 2008), the ‘no’ side argued that the veto was not a sufficient guarantee.

During the second referendum, the ‘taxation’ frame was replaced by a narrative that focussed on the guarantees and opt-out clauses negotiated by the Irish government, and this argument became the frame of the 'yes' campaign. These ‘guarantees’ did much to neutralise the arguments of the 'no' side on topics related to sovereignty, tax autonomy and the legislation of abortion (Atikcan, 2015).

#### **4.10 The unpopularity of the government**

As mentioned in the literature review, the second-order theory is one of the key topics of debate in European integration referendums. It was of particular importance during the second Lisbon referendum due to the government's growing unpopularity (Irish Social Science Data Archive,

2009). The ‘no’ campaign seized this opportunity, framing their discourse as a convenient way to punish the government. While outlining his view that the treaty provided nothing for job creation, Declan Ganley (Irish Times, Sep 24, 2009) stated that “*the only job that the Lisbon Treaty will save is Brian Cowen’s*”, implying that Cowen was exploiting the fear of unemployment to deceive the public into passing the same referendum. In response, Eamon Gilmore the Labour Party leader urged voters “*not to use the poll to punish coalition*” (Hennessy, Irish Independent, May 29, 2008) despite being in opposition at the time.

Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin linked the content of the treaty to the poor performance of the government of the time. “*The treaty was negotiated by Fianna Fáil. It was cut from the same right-wing policy cloth that underpinned the last 15 years of government economic policy in this country. These same policies caused the banking crisis, the property crash, the doubling of unemployment in 12 months to 400,000, and the massive public finances deficit. If the Government has got it so wrong on the economy, how can it be trusted on the Lisbon Treaty?*” (O’Connor, Irish Independent, September 08, 2009).

#### **4.11 The World Trade Organisation (WTO)**

The research sample indicates that the WTO frame appeared only in the first referendum and not in the second. Although not directly related to the EU, the multilateral trade agreements and restrictions under the auspices of the WTO were being negotiated in 2008 during the same time period as the first referendum campaign. Opponents of the treaty argued that the proposed strengthening of the power of the EU Trade Commissioner would effectively end the Irish Government’s veto on mixed international trade deals. The issue was seized upon by the Irish Farmers’ Association (IFA), who linked their voting recommendation to the government's position on the WTO deals. Séamus O'Brien (cited in Hennessy, Irish Times, May 23, 2008): “*if you want Irish farmers to support the Lisbon Treaty on June 12th you will have to give the same assurances to agriculture in relation to WTO.*” The IFA demanded guarantees should be sought by the Government in their discussions with the WTO that would protect Irish agriculture in return for their support for the treaty. The ‘no’ campaign linked reckless European integration and “*globalisation*” to negative consequences for Irish agriculture, namely the loss of the Irish sugar industry. Advocates of the treaty described this threat as “*reckless*”, and specifically because rejection would make it “*difficult for the government to effectively address key concerns of Irish*

*farmers in the context of the CAP review 2008-2013*” (O’Neachtain, Irish Independent, June 03, 2008).

#### **4.12 Discussion**

Having identified the key themes that emerged during the Lisbon Treaty referendums, the research findings can now be used for comparison with issues that arose for public debate in other EU referendums. As the above findings have demonstrated, there was nothing new in many of the themes discussed. The similarities can be most clearly seen when comparing discourse on Lisbon with the double Nice referendums (2001 and 2002).

Emotive themes, such as ‘neutrality’, ‘abortion’ and ‘loss of sovereignty’, namely the sub-theme of ‘loss of Commissioner’, were present in both referendum campaigns, though there was less of a focus on these themes in 2009. This points to the fact that the issues discussed during the Nice referendums were not fully resolved after the treaty had been signed and continued to fester with similar tensions re-emerging during the Lisbon Treaty referendums six years later. The theme of ‘neutrality’ in particular has appeared in almost every Irish EU integration referendum campaign (Devine, 2009). The re-emergence of these themes indicates that many of the issues discussed were not directly related to the content of the Lisbon Treaty, but rather played on common Irish fears associated with EU integration more generally.

One of the critical factors that influenced the change from a ‘no’ to a ‘yes’ vote in 16 short months, was the ‘yes’ campaign’s use of the guarantees and opt-out clauses that had been secured by the Irish government in previous EU referendums. During the second Nice referendum, Ireland obtained guarantees secured through the Seville doctrine. In 2009 advocates of the Lisbon Treaty effectively used similar opt-out clauses to suppress concerns about further integration and, to some extent, neutralise the more emotive arguments of the ‘no’ campaign. This was reflected in the frequency ‘neutrality’ and ‘abortion’ were discussed in the media during the second referendum campaigns. ‘Neutrality’ appeared in eight articles in 2008 and just three in 2009 and articles on ‘abortion’ reduced from seven articles in 2008 to just to three in 2009. This complements similar findings by Atikcan (2015) and Quinlan (2012) both of whom argue that the guarantees changed the framing of the 2009 campaign.

It is also important to view the shift in public opinion from ‘no’ to ‘yes’ in the period between the Lisbon referendums within a context of significant economic decline. Both sides used the “risk” theme to frame their arguments in 2008 and 2009. As with “*No Plan B*” (Costello, 2005), a frame for the ‘yes’ campaign in the Nice referendum (2002), rejecting Lisbon in 2009 was labelled a “*gamble*” and “*foolish*” (Sheahan, Irish Independent, October 02, 2009). The increase in the ‘yes’ campaigns’ use of the ‘risk’ frame also compliments work by Atikcan (2015). The findings display a move from abstract statements to more concrete threats regarding the consequences of a second rejection of the treaty.

Both the first referendums for the Nice (2001) and Lisbon (2008) treaties focused on domestic themes (second-order) in their campaigns. During both referendums, Labour Party leader Eamon Gilmore urged the public not to punish the Fianna Fáil governments - “*Hold Your Fire. Fianna Fáil Can Wait. Europe Can’t*” in 2002 (Garry et al, 2005) and “*do not to use the poll to punish coalition*” in 2008 (Hennessy, Irish Independent, May 29, 2008). However, unlike Nice 2002, the Lisbon 2009 referendum did not focus on the theme of EU enlargement. The research findings indicate (figure 6) that the ‘economy’ dominated the narrative of the debate in Ireland in 2009, and that the ‘yes’ side saw this issue as the most effective frame in promoting the treaty.

Overall, media discourse and public debate in the period leading up to the second Lisbon vote indicates an increasing focus on domestic issues, rather than a more informed and complex discussion of EU integration and the treaty itself. This supports arguments that have been previously made, for example (De Bruyn, 2012) that the “*recession saved Lisbon*”.

The French and Dutch when opposing the Constitutional Treaty (ECT) focused on ‘cultural’ and ‘social’ threats to their societies, which were not as prevalent in the Irish Lisbon debates. Also, while the theme of the ‘economy’ was a feature of the ECT referendum debates, the focus was more on concerns about the ‘neo-liberal’ nature of the EU (Brouard and Tiberj 2006) and not on how integration would harm or benefit the economy, which certainly captured public debate in Ireland.

These findings indicate that domestic and non-treaty-specific factors played a greater role in the Lisbon Treaty debate and the most prominent arguments for and against Lisbon were framed from a domestic viewpoint, not a wider European integration perspective. Therefore, second order issues were more prominent than attitude voting issues.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings in relation to the research aims and questions. It then presents this research in a wider context of previous scholarly research on EU referendums and considers the extent to which it adds value and contributes to greater analysis of the subject. It concludes with a review of the limitations of the study and proposes opportunities for future research.

#### **5.2 Summary of key findings**

This thesis aimed to investigate how the themes of the 2008 and 2009 Irish Lisbon Treaty campaigns were framed in two Irish broadsheet newspapers (Irish Independent and the Irish Times) in the period of 31 days before the votes were cast. It has provided a detailed analysis of the key themes emerging in public debate during both campaigns and includes pie charts that summarise the focus and frequency with which thematic issues were discussed.

By focussing on the themes that emerged in broadsheet articles of the time, it has been possible to gain insight into how public discourse and the issues of the Lisbon Treaty evolved in the period between both campaigns. The results indicate that despite a large swing from a 'no' result in 2008 to the 'yes' result in 2009, the themes discussed in both Lisbon Treaty referendums were largely the same. The greatest difference was not in the actual themes that were discussed but, in the volume, or number of times, that each theme appeared in the broadsheets of the time. For example, in the Irish Times and Irish Independent (2008) there is an even spread of articles on the key themes emerging during the campaign, and a focus on democracy and sovereignty was marginally higher in both broadsheets.

In 2009, as the recession in Ireland had started to bite, it is clear that the 'economy' had become the dominant theme (28.8%) in both broadsheets, with articles appearing nearly twice as often as the second most discussed theme, Ireland's place in Europe (15.3%).

The thesis has provided a rich description of the themes discussed in both broadsheets:

Both sides of the debate tried to use the ‘economy’ frame to their advantage. In 2008 the ‘yes’ side chose to frame their argument by showing how Ireland had benefited financially since joining the EU and that the treaty would benefit the single market. Conversely, the findings also show how treaty opponent Declan Ganley injected “*freshness*” (Sheehan, Irish Independent, June 11, 2008) into the ‘no’ campaign by giving a compelling business case for not supporting the treaty. In 2009, the ‘yes’ campaign took a different approach, framing the ratification of the treaty as vital for Ireland in weathering the incoming recession and that rejection would send a negative signal to investors and the rest of Europe. Brian Cowen, the Taoiseach at the time, described those considering voting against the treaty as “*self-indulgent*” (McGee, Irish Times, Jun 03, 2008), stating that rejecting the treaty would harm Ireland's international reputation as “*a positive, forward-looking European country*”.

The theme of ‘democracy and sovereignty’ was most used by the opponents of the treaty in both referendums. The ‘no’ side argued that Lisbon would dilute Irish voting rights while increasing the powers of larger member states. Of particular concern was the potential loss of a permanent Irish Commissioner, which was also a theme of the Nice 2001 referendum. This is a good example of how themes are often recycled during referendums on European integration. The ‘no’ side doubled down on this theme in 2009, asserting that the Irish were being asked to vote twice on effectively the same treaty by the “*Brussels elite*” (Ganley, Irish Times, Sep 24, 2009). Again, the ‘yes’ side responded by pointing to how Ireland had benefited since joining the EU and had “*always chosen to be part of this club*” (Cowen, Irish Times, Oct 01, 2009).

The theme of ‘Ireland’s place in Europe’ was used by the ‘yes’ campaign to present the ratification of the treaty as an answer to the challenges facing Europe in the 21st century. It was argued that Ireland should be at the heart of this process and it would be a sign of bad faith to reject the treaty. This argument was accelerated in the 2009 debate, with threats that Ireland would be “*left out in the cold*” (Laffan cited in Mac Cormaic, Sep 7, 2009) within a two-speed Europe. Conversely, the treaty’s opponents stated that Ireland's rejection of Lisbon had been celebrated across Europe and that the country's reputation had been enhanced. In 2008 the ‘no’ side used the ‘element of risk’ theme to frame the treaty as the status quo versus the unknown, describing ratification as “*maximum risk and very little if any benefit*” (Sinnott, Irish Times, June 03, 2008). However, in 2009 the ‘yes’ side framed rejection as a risk to Ireland's reputation and economic growth.

Both the ‘abortion’ and ‘neutrality’ themes were covered in the Irish Nice and Lisbon referendum debates. The issue of abortion was linked to the attachment of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, with the ‘no’ side arguing it would lead to a basis for a legal challenge of Ireland's abortion laws in the European Court of Justice. In response, the ‘yes’ side sought assurances from the Catholic Church and the EU to dispel the idea. On the theme of ‘neutrality’, the ‘no’ side argued that the Lisbon Treaty would pave the way to a European military alliance that would directly threaten Ireland's identity as a neutral country. The treaty proponents pointed to Ireland's “*triple lock cause*” and the fact that Ireland held a veto on any and all future ESDP and CSFP decisions of the EU. The fact that both of these themes were hot topics of debate during the Nice and Lisbon referendums is an indication that such emotive issue themes may continue in future referendums on Irish EU integration.

In 2008, the ‘no’ side argued that ratification of the treaty would lead to the removal of Ireland's ability to set its own taxes. The ‘yes’ side refuted this with statements and guarantees from European elites to reduce fears and effectively reduce the impact of negative themes used in the 2009 referendum coverage. 2009 saw the emergence of the ‘unpopularity of the government’ theme. Second-order theory dictates that the public can choose to punish a government by voting against them in a referendum (Reif and Schmit, 1980). The ‘no’ side used this to try and frame Lisbon as a referendum on the government's performance, with the ‘yes’ side urging voters to look at the treaty as a separate issue. Similarly, in 2008, the findings show how the IFA framed the treaty as a referendum on the WTO negotiations, linking their support for ratification to their non-EU but WTO needs.

### **5.3 Contribution to research**

This thesis contributes to the wealth of previous literature on European integration referendums because it provides a unique overview of the themes that arose in public discourse in the short period before each referendum vote. These themes were communicated by the two leading Irish broadsheets, one with a conservative-leaning perspective (Irish Independent) and the other with more liberal values (the Irish Times). Taken together, the articles in both newspapers provide a snapshot of how the issues were framed by the broadsheets and the resulting analysis helpful data that complements further research on how referendums are won and lost.



More specifically, this research found similarities in the issues that arose during the Nice and Lisbon referendums, and that the themes in public discourse, which were often emotive, were largely not related to the content of the treaties themselves. The themes of ‘neutrality’, ‘abortion’ and ‘loss of sovereignty’, namely the sub-theme of ‘loss of Commissioner’ were present in both referendum campaigns and tended to play on common fears about what EU integration would mean for Ireland as an independent country. There were also similarities between Nice and Lisbon in the framing of arguments based on the ‘unpopularity of the government’, with Eamon Gilmore urging voters to not use the treaty to punish the government during both campaigns. However, unlike the Nice Treaty, the Irish Lisbon Treaty debates paid much more attention to the discussion about the ‘economy’. This indicates that domestic and external factors played a greater role in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty debate than they had in other previous referendums.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the Research**

A number of challenges and limitations impacted on the research for this thesis.

The intention of this thesis was to research how the 2008 and 2009 Lisbon Treaty Campaigns were framed within the Irish broadsheet media. One of the limitations of this study is that the research only drew on the headlines and articles of Ireland’s two most popular broadsheets - the Irish Independent and the Irish Times. This was mainly due to time constraints and had the sample been widened to include other broadsheets, or tabloid media, research findings may have been different. However, the choice of a right-leaning and more liberal broadsheet as sources hoped to mitigate this.

Another shortcoming was the sample size, which was also largely due to the time limitation for reading articles in depth. From 304 relevant articles overall, this research only investigated 25% of those. It is likely therefore that some articles would have included data that may have influenced the findings, and more specifically, the number of times each of the themes arose in the weeks before the referendum vote.

The researcher also worked alone and it may have been beneficial to have built-in time for an external opinion on whether the data collected matched the subthemes and themes identified for this research.

## **5.4 Future research**

It would be worth researching whether the themes of concern from previous EU integration referendums are still pertinent today. Do Irish people still fear further EU integration will lead to the militarisation of Europe?

That research found there was little difference between a conservative and a liberal broadsheet. However, it would be worth investigating whether the themes differed amongst tabloids and/or more regional papers.

This study's primary focus was on the broadsheet media coverage of the Irish Lisbon Treaty; however, it became clear that many thematic similarities emerged between different referendums. A study dedicated to comparing and contrasting the themes present in European integration referendums could have merit.

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