

Europe in Question: Referendums on European Integration

Sara Binzer Hobolt



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Direct democracy has become an increasingly common feature of European politics with important implications for policy making in the European Union. The no-votes in referendums in France and the Netherlands put an end to the Constitutional Treaty, and the Irish electorate has caused another political crisis in Europe by rejecting the Lisbon Treaty. Europe in Question explains how voters decide in referendums on European integration. It presents a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding voting behavior in referendums and a thorough comparative analysis of EU referendums from 1972 to 2008. To examine why people vote the way they do, the role of political elites and the impact of the campaign dynamics, this books relies on a variety of sources including survey data, content analysis of media coverage, experimental studies, and elite interviews. The book illustrates the importance of campaign dynamics and elite endorsements in shaping public opinion, electoral mobilization and vote choices. Referendums are often criticized for presenting citizens with choices that are too complex and thereby generating outcomes that have little or no connection with the ballot proposal. Importantly this book shows that voters are smarter than they are often given credit for. They may not be fully informed about European politics, but they do consider the issues at stake before they go to the ballot box and they make use of the information provided by parties and the campaign environment. Direct democracy may not always produce the outcomes that are desired by politicians. But voters are far more competent than commonly perceived.



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