BRINKMANSHIP AND BACKSLIDING

How governments deal with referendum decisions

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Introduction

Only 16 out of 62 referendums that were held between 1972 and 2016 on European Union (EU) matters ended with a defeat of the government.[1] Two heads of government, prime ministers Trygve Bratteli (Norway 1972) and David Cameron (United Kingdom 2016), resigned as a direct consequence of the setback at the ballot box. Three negative decisions were used as a tool to obtain concessions from the EU so that the voters decided positively in the aftermath. In the other cases, the governments survived these negative outcomes despite the wounds the electoral defeat had inflicted on them.

This article asks, in light of this broad variety of outcomes, two interrelated questions. First, why have so many governments been so successful with their referendum platforms so that less than one quarter of all referendums ended in defeats? This effectiveness is especially puzzling in light of the second-order logic that referendums on the ratification of an international treaty possess. Such contests inevitably link the performance of the government to the evaluation of the agreement that a government has brought back home from international negotiations (Schneider and Weitsman, 1995). Second, why are only some of the defeated governments forced out of office after the voters had crushed the integration treaty at the ballot box? Adopting a Downsian logic of policy-making, this chapter argues that the use of two strategies, brinkmanship and backsliding, allows governments to partly reduce the political fallout that negative integration referendums create.

The strategy of brinkmanship is based on Schelling's (1960) ground-breaking work on deterrence theory. It involves governments forcefully committing themselves to the negotiation outcome in a referendum campaign, claiming to an uncertain electorate that the treaty that they have concluded is an improvement over the status quo. Although the contest in popularity of integration referendum contests creates a "punishment trap" in this way (Schneider and Weitsman, 1995), governments can exploit institutional advantages in setting the political agenda, buy off potential opposition and rely on a forceful campaign to increase their chances at the ballot box. Relying on a brinkmanship strategy is nevertheless a

gamble. This is why some of them need to resort to backsliding after a defeat if they are not immediately forced to resign. This diversionary strategy amounts, like the famous dance step, to attempt to take a step back while still giving the impression of moving forward. Politicians thus try to limit the reputational loss after a failed campaign; they are still committed to the issue of European integration, but secretly try to turn public attention from the divisive question of how far the cooperation with the other European states should go.

To understand the strategies of brinkmanship and backsliding, I sketch the ground-breaking Romer–Rosenthal (1978, 1979) model on agenda setting and the formal work on legislative pandering (Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts, 2001). Both contributions are important for understanding the double puzzle of why governments are frequently successful with EU referendums and why defeats seldom have dramatic consequences for the political careers of the defeated incumbent. As the risk of an electoral defeat in referendums has been growing since the French referendum of April 1972 on the enlargement of the European Economic Community, I will also discuss how even higher levels of Euroscepticism will affect the way in which governments deal with potential and realized setbacks by their electorates.

Why "yes" campaigns are often successful

It has become almost a customary experience in Europe that pro-integration elites express their dismay and frustration after negative referendum outcomes. "We have put ourselves in an extremely difficult situation and we must limit the damage, but I don't see how. As a Danish citizen, I'm shattered", commented the vice-president of the European Commission, Henning Christopherson, after the initial rejection of the Maastricht Treaty by the electorate in the small Scandinavian member state (Gélie, 1992: 3). British prime minister Cameron took the decision of the British electorate to leave the European Union in his alleged initial reaction almost a quarter of a decade later as a personal defeat. He is reported to have said that "All political lives end in failure" (Foster, 2016).

Figure 24.1 shows that the risk of such dramatic ends has seemingly grown over time. It shows that the average support for the pro-integration stance in the 62 examined EEC/EU referendums has declined over time. This has been linked, as Figure 24.2 demonstrates, to a declining chance that the citizens accept the government position at the ballot box. Note in this context that governments might not always adopt a pro-integration stance. A case in point is the referendum in 1982 that led to the exit of Greenland from the European Economic Community. The Home Rule Government of the semi-sovereign island had proposed, after coming to power in 1979, the withdrawal from the organization that it had joined as part of Denmark some years earlier. This first exit from the organization was motivated by the wish to protect the territory's fishing industry and to minimize the outside interference from its former Scandinavian ruler and the EEC. Greek Prime Minister Tsipras and his ruling Syriza party similarly recommended a "no" vote to the bailout package that the rest of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund had proposed after dramatic negotiations. As a majority of the voters followed this recommendation, I consider it as a "yes" in support of the government position.[2]

While the mean support for integration was well above 50 per cent in the referendums of the 1970s up to the 2000s, it declined to 46 per cent in the referendums that were so far held in the 2010s. This drop is largely due to massive support for Hungarian prime minister Orban's anti-integrationist migrant quota proposal which was supported by more than 98 per cent of the participating voters in a referendum in October 2016. As the turnout was, however, below the required threshold, the government campaign was ultimately unsuccessful. An
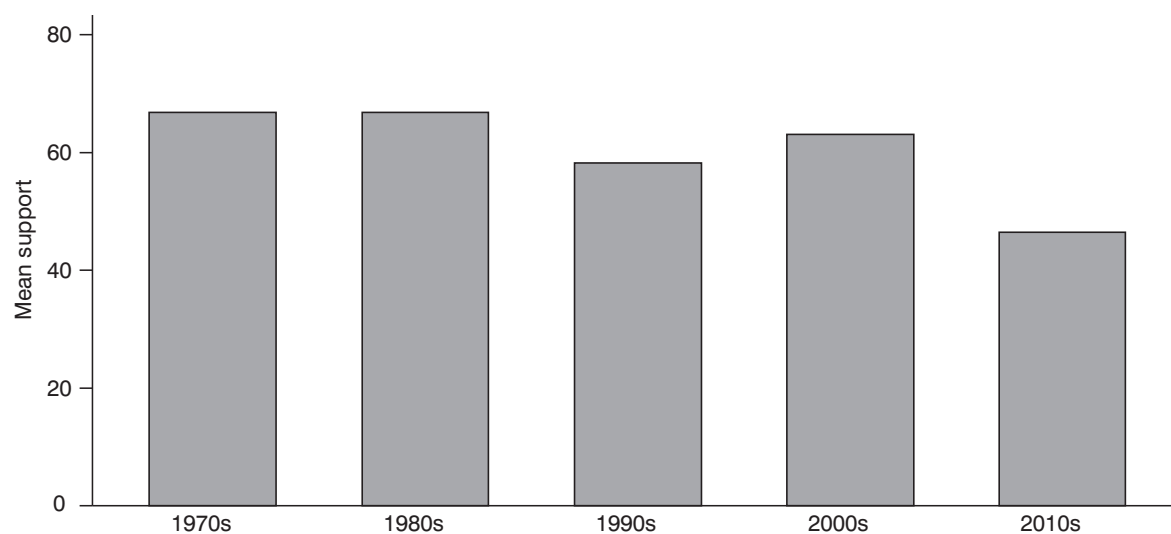
Figure 24.1 The dynamics of support for European integration: support for integration stance

Note: Own calculations based on the dataset of the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (c2d) and the referendum lists of Wikipedia
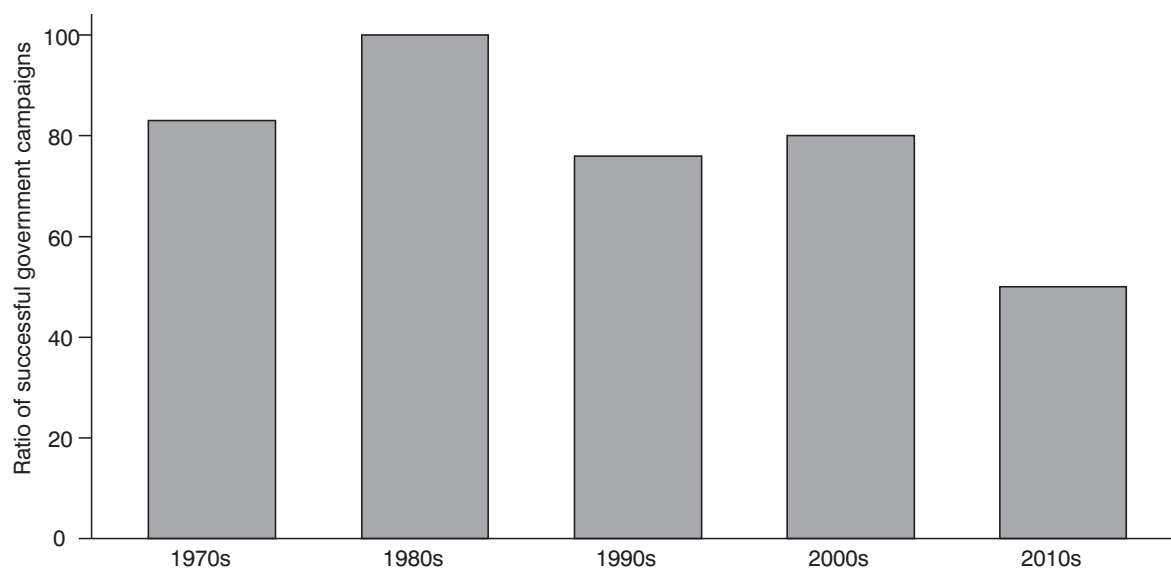

Figure 24.2 Ratio of government successes

Note: Own calculations based on the dataset of the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (c2d) and the referendum lists of Wikipedia

opposite case is the referendum in tiny San Marino in 2013. While a majority of the voters supported EU membership, I consider the outcome as a "no" vote because the quorum of 32 per cent of registered voters was not reached. Note that participation in the integration referendums has declined, too, over the years. While it peaked in the 1990s with more than 70 per cent of the electorate casting a vote, it has dropped in 2010s to a bit more than 50 per cent in an average referendum.

Only one out of six governments experienced a defeat in an integration referendum in the 1970s (Norway 1972), and all four government campaigns were successful in the next

decade. The so-called post-Maastricht blues (Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007) set in with the negative decisions by Denmark (1992), Switzerland (1992) and Norway (1994). Yet, 13 other governments received the support of their voters in the same decade. The success ratio of the government campaigns was even a little more pronounced in the 2000s. While the electorates supported their governments 20 times, five pro-integration campaigns ended with a "no" vote: Denmark (2000), Sweden (2003), France (2005), Netherlands (2005) and Ireland (2008). The six negative decisions of the 2010s were made in San Marino (2013), Switzerland (2014), Denmark (2015), Netherlands (2016), United Kingdom (2016) and Hungary (2016).[3]

It is not surprising in light of these statistics that government leaders have an increasing interest in avoiding the risk of a negative outcome or in reducing the political costs of a failed referendum campaign. Forceful campaigning and the exploitation of institutional advantages help them to make their referendum campaigns successful. The most important prerequisite at the ballot box is that they commit themselves strongly to the cause. According to Thomas C. Schelling (1960: 22), the reliance on a tied-hands strategy or the use of another commitment device strengthens the bargaining position of a negotiator: "…in bargaining, weakness is often strength, freedom may be freedom to capitulate, and to burn bridges behind one may suffice to undo an opponent." According to his "paradox of weakness", heads of government, whose hands are tied due to the necessities of ratification, might possess an advantage in interstate negotiations as long as the ratifying institution is more demanding than they are themselves. Negotiators have, in this perspective, an increased chance of succeeding with a disproportional division of the outcome if they commit themselves forcefully to the conservative bargaining position and if they can convincingly argue that the ratifying institution is less integration-minded than they are themselves. The goal of all these efforts is, in the context of treaty ratifications, to increase the trust voters have in the government and its core message that widening or deepening interstate cooperation is beneficial. If the government and the median voter's preferences on integration do not lie far apart from each other, negotiating heads of government might use a more reluctant position to their advantage and bring home a treaty close to the interest of voters.

Putnam (1988) has popularized this logic,[4] drawing on Schelling's paradox of weakness (1960), through his metaphorical "two-level games" approach, and Fearon (1994) and Schneider and Cederman (1994) have explored the conditions under which raising domestic "audience costs" benefits the constrained negotiator. However, such an exploitation of a domestic referendum hurdle is risky as the other side might not give in. This leads to inefficient outcomes – war after a crisis-bargaining situation (Fearon, 1994) or the exit or partial exit from an international collaborative framework (Schneider and Cederman, 1994) despite the shared wish to avoid such outcomes. In other words, the disproportionate number of successes of governments at the ballot box with integration treaties can be partly explained by their negotiation behaviour and their opportunity to exploit the commitment advantages direct democracy creates.

Referendum campaigns offer governments additional commitment possibilities, especially if the leader of the government is able to link their personal fate as an elected politician to the anticipated outcome. Personalized political systems make such seemingly irrevocable commitments easier. Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi´s pledge in 2016 to end his political career is an illustration of how risky such strategy is.[5] He had stated months earlier, quite optimistically, that he would retire if the Italian electorate rejected the project to reform the constitution strongly advanced by him. As a large majority of the voters was not convinced by the proposed project, Renzi was at least partly forced to live up to his campaign promise. He handed over his job to a trusted ally, but continued his political career. Prime

minister Cameron similarly tied his hands in the referendum campaign by finally agreeing to let the voters decide about British membership in the EU.

A strategy that is less personalized and leaves a certain freedom of manoeuvre is to simply invoke that the integration outcome is favourable to a country. To increase the credibility of such a claim, governments need to commit themselves strongly to this central message through interviews, advertising and public speeches. Negotiation theorists have argued for decades that the manipulation of public opinion is key in this respect. According to Schelling's (1960: 28), "If a binding public opinion can be cultivated and made evident to the other side, the initial position can thereby be made visibly final." As several studies have shown, political campaigns and the media reports about them strongly influence public opinion (e.g. de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006). However, the success of increased signalling strongly depends on how consistent the message is and how strongly European integration is contested domestically.

Institutional factors also play into the hands of the governments which need the support of the electorate for an integration project. Most importantly, the government has a first-mover advantage over the opposition during a referendum campaign. The agenda-setting power of governments has played an important role in the literature on direct democracy at least since Romer and Rosenthal (1978, 1979) introduced the so-called setter model. In this ground-breaking contribution to the formal theory of politics, a government has the possibility to introduce an integration treaty in which the level of integration is higher (or deeper) than the one of the median voter. The pivotal voter will approve of a treaty that provides at least as much utility to the median voter as the status quo. The solution that fulfils this requirement is typically called the reversion point. If the level of integration pertains to a single dimension and the reversion point is to the right of the status quo, the government will try to negotiate an outcome that is in the policy interval between the status quo and the reversion point.

To change the status quo, the consent of the agenda setter and the population is therefore, at the minimum, necessary at the ratification stage. The last decision-making stage boils down to a binary decision between a "yes" or a "no" to the government to approve a proposal by the government to widen the geographical domain of the European Union, to deepen the level of collaboration or to take one step back. "Disintegration" decisions follow the same take-it-or-leave-it logic as "integration" decisions – the voter faces a choice between the status quo and a less internationalized outcome. Independent of the nature of the proposed project, the binary nature of a referendum proposal to advance or reduce the level of integration forces the electorate to accept an outcome which may not entirely reflect its interests.

Studies in the footsteps of Romer and Rosenthal (1978, 1979) have relaxed some of the key assumptions of the setter model. One of the key roles in these refinements is played by asymmetric information when either the head of government does not know the preferences of the electorate or when the voters cannot properly locate the status quo or the outcome which would become reality if the agenda-setter's proposal is accepted. The latter kind of uncertainty yields an incentive to the government to portray the status quo as more damaging than it actually is (Banks, 1990). The uncertainty of the government over the preferences of the electorate, in return, constrains the power of a monopoly agenda setter (Banks, 1993). Iida (1996) conceives such a constellation as risky as it might lead to "involuntary defection" from an international agreement.

The public debates on whether or not a treaty is beneficial to constrain the government further. In a democratic setting, referendums offer a chance to opposition parties and other social groups to challenge the executive. This is, of course, most often only feasible if they can with some credibility advance a counterclaim that joining an integration project or deepening

the level of cooperation within it is not beneficial to a majority of the population. As countries quite often apply for membership to a regional organization after an economic crisis or in order to join a club of richer nations, it is not surprising that enlargement referendums in poorer or crisis-ridden applicant states have been most often successful.

Integration is, for the median voter of these states, so beneficial in comparison to the status quo that the domestic disagreement about the exact level of integration does not much affect the decision to cast a positive vote (Mattli, 1999). As Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) has shown in a pioneering study, the wish for an increased speed of integration is closely associated with the level of satisfaction with the national governments: it increases with the level of corruption and it decreases with the level of social protection.

We would therefore experience close referendum outcomes in states in which the population is generally satisfied with the status quo and where an opposition group can raise reasonable doubts about the promised benefits of a new or amended integration project. The possibility of the opposition to influence the median voter with a more or less credible countercampaign limits the agenda-setting power of the government and transforms the setter model into three-actor games. Given the institutional advantages of the government and the anticipated success of many referendums, it is unsurprising that mainly small parties are in opposition to integration treaties (Dür and Mateo, 2011).

Schneider and Weitsman (1995) develop a model of a competitive campaign in which the median voter has the final say over accepting or rejecting the treaty after receiving messages that the treaty is beneficial or detrimental. The formal analysis establishes that referendum campaigns are only contested if the electorate is unable to locate the treaty precisely. This, in return, renders the trust voters have in either the government or the opposition the crucial element for understanding the outcome of a contested and close integration. They employ the recommendations of the competing political groups as a political heuristic on how beneficial an integration project is (Hobolt, 2007, 2009). Second, ill-informed voters will always assess the treaty to some extent based on the domestic achievements of the government and the opposition. However, the referendum choices will not be completely subject to domestic politics. The inevitable issue linkage nevertheless implies that integration referendums are a "punishment trap" with the competing risks that the electorate rewards an unpopular government or punishes a popular one. Referendums with uninformed median voters are thus problematic and might result in suboptimal public choices. A strong commitment by the government to the treaty or, to use Schelling's words, a convincing brinkmanship strategy reduces these risks, but does not completely eradicate them.

Schneider and Weitsman (1995) illustrated the hypotheses on the importance of the rewards or punishment governments might face at the ballot box through a number of case studies. Their key proposition – that trust in the government is a key explanatory factor – received empirical support from Hug and Sciarini (2000). Their pooling of empirical material from 14 referendums shows that partisanship exerts a very strong influence on the decision of voters. Ray (2003) similarly demonstrates with the help of pooled Eurobarometer surveys that support for the incumbent government is a key factor for explaining pro-EU preferences. Hobolt (2007: 176; see also Hobolt, 2009: 158) optimistically concludes in her analysis of the 1994 Norwegian referendum that "party endorsements provide reliable information shortcuts, provided that voters have basic knowledge of party positions."

The nexus between partisanship and referendum voting is mediated by the rules through which referendums become possible. Hug (2002, 2004) distinguishes between binding and non-binding referendums on the one hand and required and non-required ones. The non-required category can be further divided into those in which the opposition plays an active

(the opposition demands the referendum) or a passive role (the government calls it).[6] Most integration referendums fall into three categories: binding/required (all Irish and Swiss referendums), non-binding/non-required (many accession and disintegration referendums like the Brexit vote) and binding/non-required (most Danish EU referendums and some Swiss cases).[7]

Hug (2002; see also Hug and Sciarini, 2000) develops a game-theoretic model with incomplete information. The empirical analysis provides support for the key hypotheses derived from the formal framework, showing that government supporters are more likely to defect from the recommendation of the ruling party if a vote is non-required and non-binding. Obviously, such effects are further mitigated through campaign effects and the commitment to the international treaty. We could easily expect that the campaign effort of a government increases when the voter verdict is binding and when the opposition was able to call for a referendum. The very timid campaign of the Dutch government in 2016 for the Ukraine–European Union association agreement and the late, but strong commitment of the Cameron government to the "Remain" campaign support this proposition, although the Brexit vote was only quasi-binding.

Certain integration topics play more easily into the hands of the opposition rather than the government. This was for instance the case in the referendum campaigns over the adoption of the euro in Denmark and in Sweden where the opposition could easily exploit the symbolic role of the national currency. As Jupille and Leblang (2007), however, show, not only such "community" aspects, but also the economic calculations of the voters play a big role. As governments cannot easily fight the scaremongering tactics of the opposition against the alleged selling out of national sovereignty, their campaigns frequently focus on the economic benefits that an integration treaty offers. Numerous studies exhibit how these cost–benefit calculations influence voting at the ballot box inside and outside the European Union.[8]

The increasing number of mandatory referendums identified by Morel (2007) and others yields constrained governments in their campaigns an advantage vis-à-vis the opposition in light of the setter models. However, institutions are only one factor that influences the calculus of voters at the ballot box. As the literature on economic voting suggests, the electorate also uses the performance of the government as a proxy for the evaluation of a particular project. If governments are unpopular, they have to invest even more in their campaign to convince the electorate that the treaty is beneficial for the country. Yet, highly unsuccessful governments will be so mistrusted that the median voter will largely listen to the opposition message. Schneider and Weitsman (1995) show formally that the median will always reject the treaty if they are convinced by the message of the opposition that the country should not ratify the treaty in the first place. If this message is not sufficiently convincing, the voter makes a probabilistic choice between accepting and rejecting, which limits the campaign efforts of the opposition groups with an unconvincing message about the possible benefits and costs of a treaty. They have, in return, to rely on a mixed strategy.[9] A case that fits this pattern is the behaviour of the unpopular Danish government in the first Maastricht referendum. Prime minister Schlüter made only few campaign appearances so that the opposition had it quite easy to convince the median voter that the new treaty would harm the interests of the Scandinavian country.

A further advantage of the government in integration negotiations is its gate-keeping power in political systems in which a referendum on a new integration project is not mandatory. As the British example shows, governments could shield themselves for a long time against the demand from factions within the Conservative and the Labour parties to hold a popular referendum on EU membership. Bicquelet and Addison (2017: 2158) show in a careful

analysis of the arguments made in the House of Commons that British governments could keep the gates closed for a long time based on institutional arguments: "…MPs perceive their role as one of making decisions on behalf of the people and are deeply influenced by the view that politics is a division of labour."

There are not yet any formal models that explore how governments keep the gates closed and the conditions under which they are nevertheless forced to give in to the pressure and to allow a referendum to take place. Formally, gate-keeping is "a collective choice process in which the first-stage player has a procedural right to implement unilaterally an exogenous status quo policy, in which case the second-stage player is denied the opportunity to participate in collective choice" (Crombez, Groseclose and Krehbiehl, 2006: 322). The different calls for independence referendums in Catalonia and Scotland, which might lead to membership applications in the EU at a later stage, show that central governments are not always able to close the gates in democracies. We know, however, very little about the circumstances in which central governments give in to such demands and in which they are able to postpone the discussion over the sovereignty issue or to abort it completely. The comparative study of referendums shows that referendums are more likely if the opposition is allowed to call for them (Hug, 2004). However, if the opposition is of territorial nature and the existence of a federation or union is at stake, the legal possibilities to call for a sovereignty referendum are confined in most states.

A further instrument that governments possess to limit the risk of a defeat is the careful timing of the referendum. According to Prosser (2016), the second-order election of integration referendums plays a crucial role in this context. He particularly finds support for this theoretical expectation that governments hold integration referendums when support for the EU is low, when the election date is close and when both of these conditions hold simultaneously. Prosser (2016: 161) recognizes that only the first hypothesis is in clear support of the thesis that governments go for the referendum option if they face being punished for European integration at the next election. The second finding that "referendums are also likely when European integration is popular and elections are far away" can, in his view, however, be explained through the possibility that a successful referendum boosts government popularity: "…are risk-averse and will only call referendums when they are sure that a referendum will pass (high public support) and when they have a time buffer in case things do not go to plan (elections are far away)". Dür and Mateo (2011) similarly support the thesis that government parties play the referendum card for quite opportunistic reasons. They find evidence for the referendums on the constitutional treaty that the government parties support the consultation of the voters if the domestic opposition among the voters is large and the closer the next elections are.[10]

To sum up, the disproportionate number of government successes with integration treaties so far has largely to do with a number of institutional advantages that the governments possess over the opposition, and the role of brinkmanship in narrow referendum races. First, governments were able to shape the integration outcome at the negotiation table and to possibly move it into their preferred direction by issuing referendum threats. Second, they act as agenda-setters in the domestic realm and can time the date of the referendum to their own benefit. Third, they possess the means to commit themselves strongly to the treaty. One of the structural disadvantages a government, however, faces is to communicate strongly that international cooperation is beneficial after all. While the costs of sharing sovereignty and of increased economic openness are easy to portray, convincing an audience about public goods like free trade and open borders is a daunting task. If a country is quite well-off and the integration project sufficiently important, only risk-taking brinkmanship is an option. Such a gamble can, but most not, end political careers.

Resignation, renegotiations and backsliding

The rise of Euroscepticism has made the integration project highly unpopular. It is therefore not surprising that governments have tried to avoid exposing key EU developments such as the ratification of the Lisbon treaty (Oppermann, 2013) or the management in the Eurozone crisis to a popular vote. As I claim in this chapter, a defeat at the ballot box is, nevertheless, not necessarily fatal for the political life of the prime minister or president who was responsible for the government campaign. This is, as outlined above, even the case for those politicians who have tied their political career like prime minister Renzi to the referendum outcome. The resignation of prime minister Cameron is thus the exception rather than the rule. The survival skills of politicians whose proposal was rejected at the ballot box are most pronounced in Switzerland. Only one federal councillor, Social Democrat Max Weber, ever resigned from office after experiencing in 1954 a defeat with a referendum for fiscal reform.[11] No major political force called for the resignation of the responsible councillor or the collective government after the Swiss population had narrowly rejected the country's entry into the European Economic Area in 1992 (Schneider and Weitsman, 1995).

The lack of accountability mechanisms in the Swiss political system also extends to the opposition which is sometimes successful in its campaign of rejecting government proposals or popular initiatives. This dysfunctional aspect of Swiss direct democracy manifested itself for instance in 2014 when a bare majority of the electorate accepted the popular initiative of the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) "against mass migration".[12] This vote jeopardized the bilateral relationship between the Alpine republic and the EU and especially the access of Switzerland to the single market. It was, however, no federal councillor from the SVP which had to start the arduous negotiations with the European Commission over the compatibility of the referendum outcome with the rules of the EU. The execution of the popular will was rather transferred to the entire government which allowed the SVP to continue its anti-integration campaign.

The refusal to take full responsibility for a failure at the ballot box obviously reduces the intensity of the government campaign (Schneider and Weitsman, 1995). However, government can also actively divert attention from their role in the referendum campaign by actively downplaying the role they have played in the campaign, but by still adhering to the goal of further integration. I call such diversion strategies "backsliding". Such behaviour is similar to what game theorists have called "pandering" (Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts, 2001: 533). It represents the leader's strategy to pretend "following popular opinion despite what he believes." The formal analysis suggests that the use of diversionary strategies is more likely before elections or, more generally, when the political career of the incumbent is at stake. Colaresi (2007) develops an informational argument to show that the presence of possible punishment and public debates about a specific issue fosters the credibility of the actions that a government makes.

This incentive structure suggests that leaders have an incentive to downplay the integration policy after a defeat and to move less divisive issues up on the agenda. Referendums typically increase the salience of the European issue (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993), but this attention quickly moves away to other topics after a referendum. This helps to explain why governments after failed referendum campaigns like Denmark were able to table basically the same integration project after the initial failure. The Schlüter government managed, after the first failed Danish referendum, to obtain a number of insignificant opt-outs from the Maastricht Treaty that a new government led by Social Democrat Poul Nyrup Rasmussen

used to rally 69 per cent of the voters behind the integration treaty. The campaign also profited from the promise to link the referendum issue to the promise to reform tax policies (Schneider and Weitsman, 1995).

The Irish political elite pursued similar tactics to convince their electorate to ratify the Nice and the Lisbon treaties in 2002 and 2009, respectively, after the voters had initially rejected these projects to deepen the level of integration in the preceding years. Atikcan (2015) shows that the second-round "yes" campaigns stressed the membership issue as well as the economic consequences much more in Ireland as well as in Denmark. The financial crisis, which was in full effect by 2009, offered the Irish government the possibility to divert the attention away from the Lisbon treaty towards the existential question of how to restart the economy of the "Celtic Tiger". This prompted the angry response by the opposition that the ratification of the treaty was not a question of jobs.[13]

Obviously, and in line with the formal theory of diversionary tactics, incumbent governments have a better chance of politically surviving the electoral fallout from a referendum defeat if the next election date is far in the future and if the population is generally satisfied with the performance outside the integration arena. It was in this light not surprising that David Cameron scheduled the Brexit referendum relatively shortly after the British elections of May 2015. A positive outcome would have allowed him to downplay the integration issue and seek re-election on a purely domestic agenda.

Conclusion

Governments use a myriad of ploys to move the integration process into their preferred direction. State leaders exploit, for instance, information asymmetries in international negotiations and in subsequent ratification debates, profiting from their privileged knowledge about their polity and international agreements. This chapter has addressed two major interlinked puzzles that referendums on integration treaties pose, namely the considerable success that governments have had in the past in convincing the population that increased cooperation with other states is beneficial to them, and in saving their political careers after a negative vote on the proposed treaty.

Governments can generally profit from the institutional advantages that they have over the opposition before and after the referendum. If the outcome of a referendum is projected to be close, they can typically employ a brinkmanship strategy and commit themselves strongly to the outcome of the referendum. Such tactics involve, in personalized systems, quite often the attempt to tie their personal career to the ballot to boost the chance of a positive outcome. Yet, even if the electorate rejects the integration project, their political careers are not necessarily over. The good timing of the referendum might help them to survive the political fallout that a "no" vote necessarily creates. Moreover, they can try to downgrade the importance of the integration issue after the referendum and try to achieve some concessions from their European partners to save face and to confront the voters with a "new" treaty. This pandering amounts to what I have called political backsliding. Obviously, more intensive campaigns help in the attempt to convince the resistant electorate in the second round.

The second-order nature of integration referendums and the lack of accountability after failed integration campaigns pose important normative question. The most important consideration from a European perspective is, however, that the use of referendums by a single member state creates a status quo bias in the integration process. It also provides this country with the ability to hold the other member states as hostages. This *cavalier seul* logic

of direct democracy in the European Union might explain why the majority of the member states has not shed many tears over the exit of the UK from the supranational project.

This chapter has generally tried to show that the study of integration research should take the strategic context under which referendums take place, or under which they are avoided, more fully into account; the simple threat of a referendum is sometimes sufficient to change the course of politics (Le Bihan, 2017). Politicians employ referendums, in the rational choice perspective employed in this study, as instruments to advance their own careers. While their electorates might be guided partly by emotions (Garry, 2014) or informational shortcuts provided by parties (Schneider and Weitsman, 1995; Ray, 2003; Hobolt, 2007, 2009), politicians do not hesitate to exploit their superior knowledge. Obviously, any rational choice contribution cannot escape the perennial problem of striking a convincing balance between the simplicity of a model and the realism of its assumptions and implications. However, I have shown that the strategic choices governments and the opposition make about integration referendums are an interesting field of research.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1　The list was obtained from the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (c2d) (http://www. c2d.ch/votes.php?table=votes, August 4, 2016). It has been updated with additional cases until December 2016 based on various sources. Note that my list also includes, in contrast to Qvortrup (2016), Swiss cases, the Italian advisory referendum on the Maastricht treaty (1989), a referendum in San Marino in 2013, and the three referendums taking place in 2016 (the Dutch Ukraine–EU association agreement, the Brexit referendum, and the Hungarian migrant quota referendums).

2　Tsipras probably did not forecast that his government would be forced to accept a new deal from the international negotiation partners that was worse for the median voter than the original proposal (Walter *et al.,* 2016).

3　The list does not include, in contrast to Qvortrup (2016), Greenland (1982) and Greece (2015).

4　Iida (1993) and Milner (1997) qualify Putnam's (1988) two-level game framework. Hammond and Prins (2006) offer spatial models that seemingly contradict the so-called Schelling conjecture. They are, however, based on informational assumptions that are not very likely to be met in reality.

5　Renzi stated in July 2016 that: "If I lose the referendum it is not only that I go home, but I stop playing politics" (own translation, Liguriaoggi.it, 2016).

6　Hug (2004) further differentiates for the non-required/active category whether the voters decide between the status quo and the government policy or between the government proposal and that of the opposition. For votes on international treaties, this distinction is irrelevant as the distinction is between the status quo and a new level of cooperation between the states of an organization.

7　The Maastricht referendum in France (1992) is a case of a binding referendum in which the governments called for the vote (non-required/passive) (Hug, 2002: 44).

8　Most of these studies refer, like Jupille and Leblang (2007), to surveys which include rough measures about the employment of a respondent. Doyle and Fidrmuc (2003) employ country-level information and individual characteristics to conclude that economic aspiration and the wish to move away from the communist legacy enabled the Eastern European candidate members to embrace membership of the European Union. Similarly, Urbatsch (2013) shows with aggregate information how economic interests have influenced the narrow decision of the Costa Rican population in 2007 to join the Central American Free Trade Area (CAFTA),

while Brunetti, Jaggi and Weder (1998) provide similar evidence for the Swiss rejection of membership in the European Economic Area (see also Armingeon 2000). Glaurdić and Vuković (2015) show in line with the literature on security communities (Deutsch 1957) for the successful Croatian accession referendum that the severity of the war experience at the municipal level has increased support for EU membership.

9   A mixed strategy is a game-theoretic concept that actors use to make an opponent indifferent between two options. Mixed strategies consist of a probabilistic choice between two actions.

10 Dür and Konstantinidis (2013) develop a game-theoretic model and provide further empirical evidence in support of similar claims.

11 I owe this observation to Uwe Serdült.

12 The SVP is not an opposition party, as it has been represented since the interwar years with one or two councillors in the Swiss government. Yet, the governmental responsibility does not prevent any party from proposing or supporting popular initiatives or referendum stances that contradict the position of the Federal Council.

13 Fear is typically an emotion that the opposition can exploit to further integration. Garry's (2014) survey of Irish voters after the Fiscal Compact referendum demonstrates that fearful respondents were negatively disposed towards the Eurozone crisis management package, but that a favourable prior attitude towards the integration project can turn this relationship around.

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