PARTISANSHIP OR COGNITIVE MOBILISATION? -
A CASE STUDY OF THE 2003 CZECH EU ACCESSION REFERENDUM
Partisanship or cognitive mobilisation?
A Case Study of the 2003 Czech EU Accession Referendum

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Abstract

The literature which explores public opinion formation processes in the newly democratised EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe is divided into competing schools of thought; one, which presumes that the inexperienced electorates in the newly democratised states would adopt the views of their preferred political elites in political debates, and one opposing view, which argues that despite being fresh in the experience as political actors, voters employ cognitive resources when making political choices without depending on elite recommendations. While research on demographic characteristics and party affiliations’ importance on people’s political choices have been conducted, and also drawn various conclusions, there is still a lack of research which conducts analyses of multiple voter proxies to ad-hoc issues. This paper wishes to contribute to this field of research by testing a model which poses that the message environment and direction of elite cues will trigger voters to either rely on their awareness of the issue or political predispositions when they make up their minds of how to vote, depending on whether they are being exposed to one or two competing elite messages, and apply this model to explore whether this was the case in the Czech 2003 EU accession referendum. The paper concludes that Czech voters employed a range of proxies in the opinion formation process, and that assumptions that the elite dictated the public vote can be questioned.

Introduction

The referendums which preceded the accession of eight former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to the EU in 2004 were largely regarded as predictable competitions. Given the high consensus in the former Communist states that they were ready to leave authoritarian legacies behind and turn towards the West, where most electorates felt they historically belonged, the high endorsements of EU membership came by no means as surprises. This paper investigates the 2003 accession referendum in the Czech Republic, and applies a deduction of Zaller’s model of opinion formation (Zaller 1992), in order to explore whether voters relied on elite cues or endogenous factors when they made up their minds on how to vote on the referendum day. In addition to the fact that Zaller’s model rarely has been tested on accession referendums - which will be more thoroughly explained in the theory section - the model helps to shed light on voter proxies in the Czech Republic, which still are to be thoroughly explored. Moreover, it tests the popular assumption that European integration was an elite-led process.
with only passive consensus from the public, or whether voters actively applied cognitive skills when they chose how to vote in the referendum. The paper uses data from the Candidate Countries Eurobarometers merged with the Comparative Manifesto Project II data set to test the validity of Zaller’s hypotheses. An account of the theory, elite positions on European integration, methodology, results and discussion will follow.

**Zaller’s model of opinion formation**

Zaller’s model of opinion formation reasons that public responses to a political issue will primarily depend on whether the elites convey one unified recommendation or two (or more) competing messages to the public, and further posits that political awareness and predispositions will dominate the opinion formation process. Zaller distinguishes between two scenarios; first, when the elites are unified on the issue, voters will be exposed to only one policy recommendation; which will cause a mainstream effect to be generated since there is a lack of opposing messages. The argument sounds that if this is the case, acceptance of this political communication will depend on the voters’ awareness, since only politically aware voters will be able to receive and understand the conveyed message. The logic is that the more informed and politically aware the voter is, the more likely s/he is to embrace the opinion communicated. If this logic is applied to EU referendums, we would be able to argue that the higher awareness an individual demonstrates, the more likely the s/he will be to support European integration. However, a different scenario takes place when elites do not reach consensus. When elites diverge, they will send out two (or more) mutually excluding messages to the public. The presence of competing flows of communication will create a polarisation effect, and will enable the voter to be ‘reminded’ that there are two (or more) policy alternatives which can be chosen, and most importantly, they will be made aware that the dominant message may not be compatible with her/his political predispositions. This, in turn, will generate a different cognitive process than when elites are in agreement. In cases of elite division, the acceptance of the dominant message - normally the (official) position of the government - may fail, either because it is not received due to insufficient political awareness, or because it is rejected due to incompatibility with political predispositions. Applying this logic to the accession referendums in the Czech Republic, it will follow that support for the government position - a ‘yes’ vote - is expected to weaken if the message environment is polarised, and political predispositions will determine whether voters support the dominant message or not.
Zaller’s model has not been subject to extensive research in general and has not at all been applied to the new member states. It was proved by Marquis and Sciarini to be a consistent predictor of opinion formation in Swiss foreign policy referendums (Marquis and Sciarini 1999), by Kriesi and Sciarini (2003) on a selection of issues of foreign policy in Switzerland, by Saglie (2000) in the case of the Norwegian 1994 EU referendum, and by Gabel and Scheve (2007) on the EU15. The main reason that the model is interesting is that it studies the difference in message environments and whether and how and it matters if people are being exposed to one or two (or more) recommendations from elites. The theoretical reasoning behind the model addresses a relevant question; one whether elites’ communications have such strong effects that agreement with the conveyed message will simply depend on whether people understand the matter, or, to put it differently, are sufficiently aware to respond to the message. This excludes the possibility that people can cognitively mobilise themselves on grounds of, e.g. political orientations and/or values, and critically examine the matter unless there is a competing message which ‘reminds’ them to filter the message, which they only will do if messages are competing for acceptance, following Zaller’s logic. Such a claim can certainly be criticised on a theoretical and empirical basis, given that there is an abundance of public opinion literature which argues that values and political orientations influence the public opinion formation process. However, it still poses an interesting model to test for case-studies in new democracies, given people’s short experience as political actors. Following the claim of among others, Taggart and Szczerbiak, who argue that the strongest determinant of voters’ choices in the Central and Eastern European referendums on EU membership was the direction, strength and clarity of elite cues, next to mass attitudes (with the former having the strongest effect) (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004), and the discussion on whether Central and Eastern European electorates will greatly depend upon political elites in the opinion formation process, the model may be able to illuminate whether this is was the case or not. Before the paper moves on to test the model, a short account of elite positions on European integration in the Czech Republic will be provided.

**Elites, citizens and Europe in the Czech Republic**

‘It is not the EU which wants to get into the Czech Republic!’

Soon after the Velvet Revolution and the subsequent division of Czechoslovakia, the European issue entered the arena in the newly created Republic. Playwright

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2 One of these was EU membership.
The dominant party which emerged after the Velvet revolution, the right-of-centre Civic Democratic Party (ODS), was quick to advocate pro-European policies in its declarations after the division of the Czechoslovak federation, and it was an ODS-led government which applied for EU membership in January 1996. The party officially held the view that the Czech Republic, being a small economy, never had an alternative to joining the EU, and Prime Minister and party leader – now president – Václav Klaus argued already in 1998 that it would be ‘essential’ for the country to join the EMU (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, Kopecky and Učen 2003). However, the party took on more Eurosceptic positions as negotiations progressed, at least as far as its leader was concerned. Klaus adopted a self-declared ‘Thatcherite’ position on the issue, which led to several clashes between the Prime Minister and President Havel, who embraced EU membership as an expression of shared European values (Hanley 2004). Claiming to be ‘not a pessimist, but a ‘Eurorealist,’ Klaus was – and still is – anything but shy in expressing concerns about the projected negative effects EU membership would and will have on Czech politics (Strong 2005), and early portrayed himself as the one politician who would seek to protect Czech sovereignty from dissolving in the EU like a ‘lump of sugar in a cup of coffee’ (Nagengast 2003). Some of his statements reflected a more populist than ‘realist’ stance to the EU, as his many controversial comparisons between the EU and the Soviet Union as well as his famous statement that ‘the former dominance from the Soviet Bloc now has been replaced by that of the EU.’ Neither did Klaus regard all accession criteria acceptable when he re-engaged with the contentious Beneš decrees issue in the 2002 controversy about the case of the

4 The Czechoslovak federation was democratic until the Communist take-over in 1948, and had previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Czech Republic had been ruled from Vienna and Slovakia from Budapest, which explains Havel’s view of the Republic ‘belonging to the West, not the East.’
expelled Sudeten Germans, arguing that the decrees were unacceptable from today's view, but also was unwilling to allow for compensations to be given to former expellees. Arguing that unless the Commission inserted a separate clause in the Accession Treaty which guaranteed that the decrees never were to be annulled or revised, Klaus expressed that unless such a guarantee was given, he was unsure whether he could ‘call on citizen to vote yes to the EU in a referendum.’ Manifestos which were circulated before the EU referendum confirmed that the party backed Klaus’ ‘Euro-realist’-stance, affirming its preference for strong trans-Atlantic ties, as well as rejection of a federal Europe and suggested extension of qualified majority voting (Baun et al. 2006). Klaus, then having become President, even decided not to join in the May 2004 celebrations which marked the accession to the EU, which was interpreted as a ‘gesture which was widely understood as a polite and historically resonant way in telling the Euro-elite where to go’ (Laughland 2004).

Neither did the Communist Party (KSČM), which has traditionally been the most critical party to European integration, rejoice the path towards accession without reservations. The - until recently - unreformed and hard-line communists argued that the Czech Republic would not be able to influence the development of the EU on an equal basis, and also expressed concerns about the ‘democratic deficit’ of the EU system, claiming that reform processes were necessary (Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Kopecky and Učeň 2003). The party’s expressed criticism of the EU took on nationalistic undertones at times, as their recurring claims that the integration process is ‘dominated by German interests’ (Hough and Handl 2004). Party leader Vojtech Filip (as of June 2008) also criticized the EU’s regional dimensions, claiming that the ‘Europe of the Regions’ is a threat to each country’s sovereignty. However, despite having criticised of the EU of being a tool for multinational capital to further exploitative policies, as well as their expressed concern over loss of sovereignty, the party still never recommended that the Republic never joined, but emphasised that this accession should happen only if the country joined with the ability to influence in an enlarged EU (Kopecky and Učeň 2003). The issue has since then been one of contention between the hard-liners and neo-communist strands of the party, hence, this ‘soft no’ to European integration came out as a result of a compromise between the conflicting factions within the party (Handl 2003).

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5 The Beneš decrees led to renewed disputes in 2002 when some German and Austrian politicians were threatening to veto Czech EU membership unless the Czech Republic annulled the decrees which expelled all Sudeten Germans and Magyars from Czechoslovakia in 1945. The debate whether the Czech Republic could accede to the EU without a revision of the decrees also involved members of the European Parliament as well as the Hungarian government. Klaus’ claim of a separate clause in the Accession treaty which guaranteed that the issue would not be revised, was met with dismissal from the then Commissioner of enlargement, Günther Verheugen. See Nagengast (2003), p. 340ff.
More unconditional support for EU membership was expressed by the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the dominant party left-of-centre, which argued that the EU had potential to become a venue for a ‘European social democratic project.’ Being keen to frame itself as an alternative to the perceived Eurosceptic image of the ODS, the party seized the opportunity after its victory in the 1998 elections to speed up reforms and legislation anticipating EU accession (Kopecky and Mudde 2002). Moreover, the ČSSD-led government after the 2002 election emphasised conducting policies which held meeting the criteria of the Lisbon strategy and preparing for EMU as key priorities, and aimed to speed up the privatisation process, increase economic growth and uphold the budget balance. The successes of the policies were varied, but it was apparent that the Social Democrats were aiming for accession as early as possible (Myant 2005).

However, as is common practice in Czech politics, party leaders do not strictly adhere to party platforms; in 2002, the then Prime Minister Miloš Zeman of the ČSSD sided with ODS’ Klaus in his staunchly non-conciliatory response to external political forces who claimed that the Beneš decrees needed to be repealed in order to allow for Czech accession. Labelling the Sudeten Germans as ‘Hitler’s fifth column,’ Zeman used the issue to tap into anti-German sentiments in order to gain votes at the 2002 national election (Nagengast 2003), which revealed that old hostile sentiments against its largest neighbour were still present within the elites of the party.

The smaller parties in the centre never took on notable positions in the debate on Czech European integration, and also did not very actively take part in the referendum campaign. The Christian Democrats-Czechoslovak People’s Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Freedom Union-European Democrats (US-DEU) expressed clear support for full integration into the EU, as well as for further enlargement, views that seemed to have been produced more as responses to the sceptical profile of the ODS than as results of ideological reasoning (Kopecky and Učeň 2003). The US-DEU emphasised the opportunities which joining the single market would provide for the Czech Republic, and also how EU membership would constitute its own security identity. The centre parties decided to run together in a coalition (Štyrcoalice) for the 2002 election, and their joint election program emphasised the need for Czech participation in the EU, support for a federal Europe as well as Schengen and EMU, and even went so far to express hopes that the Commission in time would transform into a European government (Baun et al 2006).

As far as the public was concerned, a survey as early as May 1994 established that attitudes were generally positive towards Western involvement and economic liberalism, and what is more, were strongly correlated with choice of party (Evans and Whitefield 1998), which echoed the views of the elites that opening towards
Europe was a prioritised issue on the agenda for the newly independent state. However, the initial excitement for the European project was followed with declining support as accession became a reality, which in comparison with the other accession countries along with Hungary and Estonia was comparatively low; in 1997, only 49 percent of Czechs said they were going to vote for membership (Central and Eastern Eurobarometers 8), compared to 50 percent in 2002 (Candidate Countries Eurobarometers 2002.2), which created the necessity for a well-organised and convincing yes-campaign.

The campaign

By mid-February 2003, four months before the referendum, the topic of EU accession and the upcoming referendum overshadowed other issues on the political agenda, and elites and citizens alike had begun to mobilise for their respective campaigns. The official yes-campaign, led by the Foreign Ministry, had a budget of 200 million crowns (approx. 6.25 Million Euro), and was largely based upon conventional advertising on television, the printed press and on billboards. It also set up an information line and an online information source which recommended citizens to vote for accession. Other civil organisations and political parties such as the Catholic Church and the Trade Union Confederation (ČMKOS) joined the campaign, as well as pro-NGOs at local and regional levels. Former president Havel figured prominently in the media campaigning for accession, as well as the ČSSD, the KDU-ČSL and the US-DEU, though the latter two were less active. The ODS, not unexpected, took on a more ambiguous view, first of all claiming that a pro-EU campaign was not necessary, since most of its members supported membership anyway, however, Klaus, who assumed office as President in March, continually reminded the public about the need to be ‘realistic’ about the expectations of the projected advantages of EU membership, sticking to his ‘Eurorealist’ view (Hanley 2004). He also clearly expressed his reservations by the statement: ‘5.1 to 4.9. This is the strength and weakness, respectively, of my yes.’ Still, the ODS released a statement at the eve of the referendum in which it urged people to vote for accession, along with the centre parties and the ČSSD (Baun et al. 2006, p. 262).

The no-campaigns were fronted by loose alliances of various right-wing groupings, some of which with neo-conservative and anti-German outlooks. Due to limited funding, the strategy was to develop local grass-root networks of different groups and intellectuals, who largely argued that the EU was too bureaucratic, and aimed to draw on nationalist and anti-foreign-domination sentiments. The KSČM was more divided and ambivalent, however, campaigning against the EU was not a priority on central party level, but was mainly led by local party branches (Hanley 2004). The party grass-root released a statement before the referendum in which it stated that it ‘could not recommend people to vote for EU membership,’ which was
rejected by several officials at party elite level, which reflected the internal split on
the issue. However, none of the anti-campaigns drew strong support (Baun et al.
2006).

The final count of votes showed that 77.33 percent of the voters who had
participated in the referendum supported accession, however, the low turnout of
55.21 percent, which was slightly lower than that of the preceding 2002 general
election, in fact showed that yes-voters represented only 41.73 percent of the total
electorate, which displayed the lowest yes-vote in any accession referendum in CEE
except Hungary (Hanley 2004). There was little variation between the various
demographic groups of the population; support was highest in Prague and lowest
in the Liberec region in Northern Bohemia, a region with several economic and
social problems, which is dominated by support for the radical left and extreme
right. Urban-rural differences were marginal, and support was unsurprisingly
highest among the young, and more surprisingly, among the over 60s. The higher
educated were more likely to vote for than those with only primary education
(Hanley 2004). Party alignment seemed a stronger determinant of support or
rejection; while supporters of both the ODS, ČSSD and the centre parties had
overwhelmingly supported membership, only 37 percent of Communist voters had
voted yes (Baun et al. 2006.)

Testing Zaller’s model

Following the descriptions of the stands taken by political parties in the Czech
Republic and the direction of the campaign, it appears evident that there was elite
division on the issue, though it took on ambiguous forms, but what needs to be
investigated is the extent to which the competing messages of the campaign
impacted in voter’s choices. The knowledge that the message environment was two-
way and polarised should imply, according to Zaller’s logic, that political
predispositions should display stronger effects than factors of awareness, given the
fact that people were ‘cognitively mobilised’ to filter the two competing messages
through a schemata of predispositions. Hence, three hypotheses can be suggested
for analysis:

1) Factors of awareness should have less impact on vote than political
predispositions, and of present, should be of lower importance

2) If factors or awareness should constitute factors in the opinion formation
process, they may not necessarily predict the direction of vote, since the

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6 For comparison, the yes votes were in percentages as follows: 93.71 Slovakia, in Hungary,
77.45 in Poland, in Estonia, 89.6 in Slovenia, 67 in Latvia and 91 Lithuania.
highly aware may be expected to be aware of both messages and therefore would make a conscious choice between the two messages.

3) Political predispositions should be the strongest determinant of vote, but neither this coefficient may not predict direction of vote, since Euroscepticism was to be found both on the left and the right of the scale. Hence, we cannot expect that a direct linear connection between vote preference and left-right placement will be found.

**Data and methodology**
The analysis employs data on individual-level, and uses survey data from the Candidate Countries Eurobarometers 2003.2 merged with the Comparative Manifesto Project II Data Set. The Eurobarometers measure political predispositions as a function of party choice, which is not very parsimonious to apply, since it would require that the issue would be investigated party-by-party, secondly, such a categorical variable would be technically difficult to include in a multivariate regression model. Therefore, the Eurobarometer data set was merged with the Comparative Manifesto Project II Data set in order to utilise the party information of left-right positions from the latter.\(^7\)

Given the rank-ordered nature of the dependent variable, this analysis employs ordinal logistic regression. The question and labels for the dependent variable after recoding are as follows:

*Generally speaking, do you think that (our country’s) membership of the European Union would be/will be: 1) A bad thing 2) Neither good nor bad 3) A good thing*\(^8\)

**Independent variables**
The predictors which have been chosen to measure awareness represent four different typologies of cognitive involvement, whereas political predispositions are measured as functions of the voter’s preferred party’s placement on the left-right scale. The first group of predictors of awareness employs questions which measure

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\(^7\) Since the left-right scale \(rile\) in the Comparative Manifesto Project II Data set is continuous and not intuitive, and that some parties have more than one observation, the variable has been manipulated to become more parsimonious to work with. First, \(rile\) was multiplied with the percentage of votes, sorted by country and a new variable was created by the mean of percentage vote, which was used to create an interim variable \(rile1\) which was a function of \(rile\) multiplied with percentage vote divided with the mean of percentage vote. Sorted by country, a further interim variable \(meanrile\) was created by the function of the mean of \(rile1\). Subtracting \(meanrile\) from the original variable \(rile\), an intuitive variable \(rilescore\) was created, which is sorted by country, contains one mean observation per party and centres ‘centre’ orientation at 0 with negative values denoting left-of-centre orientation and positive values right-of centre orientation.

\(^8\) Don’t know answers and missing values were deleted
the individual’s political participation and consist of two variables; one which asked
the respondents to place themselves on a scale on how often they discuss politics,
and one question which asks how often they try to persuade others of their opinion.
The second group of predictors investigates the degree to which the individuals pay
attention to the issue in the media; the first question asked how often the individual
watched news on television, and the second about news on the EU specifically. The
third set of questions controls for knowledge about the EU, and is divided into one
question on whether the respondents personally feels informed on a scale from 1 to
10, whilst a second variable test the actual knowledge of the respondent based on a
set of questions which asked the respondents to inform whether a set of statements
about the EU were true or false. The fourth group measures level of education, the
fifth measures the effect of left-right orientation, followed by a final test for
curvilinearity in rilescore using a squared term of the left-right variables. Following
this division of predictors into categories, the tests will be carried out as a sequence
of models which gradually increases the number of clustered variables.

At first glance, the models present several significant predictors of vote, most of
which suggest strong effects in the positive direction. The coefficients suggest that
voters to a great extent had mobilised cognitive factors in order to choose between
the options presented to them. To analyse the predictors individually; discussing
politics and persuading other fail to achieve significance over all models, and show
none in the final models – persuasion appears to have a certain effect before other
variables are controlled for, but loses its effect in Model III when the media
variables have been added. Watching EU news is a highly significant factor which
predicts high odds for voting yes, and the predictor remains significant also when
other variables are controlled for, however, the odds decrease slightly the more
predictors are added to the model. Interestingly, watching TV news suggests a
strong and negative effect on EU vote, which calls for further investigation. This can
be interpreted either as a sheer coincidence, or it can be suggested that watching
more news also would give people more access to negative information about the
EU, which could have contributed to producing a negative image of the EU.
However, such information may as well have been accessible through EU news in
general, which predicts a positive vote, so such interpretations have to be made
with caution. Also, general TV news could be perceived by the respondent as news
other than EU news, hence, the correlation which occurs in these tests may not
necessarily present a causal effect between watching TV news and being negatively
oriented towards EU membership. In the third model when the knowledge factors
are introduced, we see that both predictors are significant and strongly predict a
positive vote, which is also not surprising given the demographics in Hanley’s
study of the referendum, in addition to further studies which show that higher
knowledge predicts positive views towards the EU across several case-studies.
Table 1 - Testing Zaller’s model - Czech Republic, May 2003: Odds ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th>Model II</th>
<th>Model III</th>
<th>Model IV</th>
<th>Model V</th>
<th>Model VI</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood</td>
<td>865.48262</td>
<td>804.62139</td>
<td>748.66097</td>
<td>736.92012</td>
<td>409.05775</td>
<td>394.62864</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prob&gt;chi2</td>
<td>.0009</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFadden’s R²</td>
<td>.0081</td>
<td>.0778</td>
<td>.1138</td>
<td>.1258</td>
<td>.1929</td>
<td>.2213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often discuss politics</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.83*</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuading others of opinion</td>
<td>1.20**</td>
<td>1.16**</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching EU news</td>
<td>2.22**</td>
<td>1.68**</td>
<td>1.67**</td>
<td>1.59**</td>
<td>1.46**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV news</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge (self-reported)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.57**</td>
<td>1.47**</td>
<td>1.36**</td>
<td>1.35**</td>
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<td>Knowledge (actual)</td>
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<td>1.38**</td>
<td>1.34**</td>
<td>1.30**</td>
<td>1.29**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.45**</td>
<td>1.46**</td>
<td>1.37*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.05**</td>
<td>1.05**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Left-right position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at 0.05 level          ** Significant at 0.01 level
N= 567

Also in this model, we see that the previously added predictors lose effect slightly when the new variables are introduced. The effect of higher education is also not surprising given the demographics of the referendum vote; also for this sample, showed the higher educated were more likely to vote for than those with little or no education (Hanley 2004). Finally, left-right position is significant, but the effect appears weak, which can be explained by the previously mentioned suggestion that there may not be a clear linear connection between EU-vote and left-right positioning, which is confirmed by the squared term of the predictor: there appears to be a curvilinear effect of left-right positioning, in which the most positive voters were to be found in the centre. This confirms the findings reported in the previous section, which reports that the most Eurosceptic parties were located on the extreme left (the Communist Party) and the right (the Civic Democrats). The most important effect of the left-right predictor is that it lifts the overall model to hold a far higher overall explanatory effect than was the case for the first four models; the values of the $R^2$ and the Log-Likelihood become acceptably high to suggest an overall quality to the model. Moreover, the awareness predictors continue to lose effect, which suggest that this predictor alone was very strongly correlated with vote. The following section will divide the voters into left, centre and right to further investigate the effect of the previous coefficients, and whether political predispositions sent voters in different directions based on awareness.

**Awareness and political predispositions combined**

The `rulescore` variable for the Czech Republic created large intervals between the political parties, and given the clear gaps between left, centre and right, it became a relatively easy task to distinguish between voter groups. Parties with values lower that -10 were set as left, parties which deviated with -10 or +10 from the centre constituted the centre category, and parties with values over 10 were denoted as right. Setting the values of the various predictors which measured awareness to low, medium or high, three groups of level of awareness could be created, one low, one medium and one high.\(^{10}\)

The general picture suggests that when awareness increased, so did support for the EU. Low aware centre-and left-voters were not convinced about the advantages of EU membership, while surprisingly, low aware right-wing voters just about tipped the balance towards a yes, which suggests that they did not absorb Klaus’ Euroscepticism. The figures for medium aware voters show that they were significantly more positive towards EU membership than all low aware groups, particularly, the large difference between low and medium aware centre-voters is

\(^{10}\) This was done using the `prvalue` command in STATA, setting the values for the awareness predictors to minimum, medium and maximum.
remarkable; possibly, the higher level of engagement in the EU issue among the medium aware made these voters become overwhelmingly positive towards EU membership. Why medium aware right-voters seemed to have dismissed Klaus ‘Eurorealism’ may be explained that they simply knew more about the issue, which can be the effect which created the positive vote, which the regression models confirms, however, this is just a suggestion; further investigation into the issue will have to be conducted to state this for sure. Centre-voters were the most positive among the highly aware voters, closely followed by their counterparts on the right, who only had marginally lower probabilities. Again, voters on the left were slightly less convinced, though overwhelmingly positive towards the EU.

**Table 2 - Predicted probabilities for saying that EU membership would be a ‘good thing’ divided by voter groups and awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>0.424</td>
<td>0.415</td>
<td>0.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>0.747</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>0.959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The findings from the regression model and the table of predicted probabilities for the voter groups fail to fully meet the three hypotheses which were formulated from the hypotheses of Zaller’s model. To begin with the first hypothesis, which assumed that factors of awareness should have little impact on the vote, the results which were found in this study suggest the contrary; the effects of awareness predictors are strong and in a positive direction, again, with the exception of watching TV news, which partially confirms the second hypothesis that awareness may not necessarily predict the direction of vote. Even if the left-right variable also produces valid effects on votes and greatly increases the explanatory effect of the regression model as whole when it is being controlled for, as well as weakens the magnitude of the awareness variables, it still cannot be regarded as so overwhelmingly significant that it excludes the impact of other factors, most of which keep the expected level of significance. More likely, political predispositions and factors of awareness seem to work alongside each other.

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11 Left-wing voters were classified as voter who supported the Communist Party (KSCM) and the Social Democratic Party (CSSD). Centre-voters were defined as voters who supported the Green Party (SZ), the Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU -ČSL), and the Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US-DEU). Right-voters were defined as voters who supported the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), since this was the only party to score higher on rilescore than 10. Note that predicted probabilities with values higher than 0.5 are positive values.
When addressing the third hypothesis, which expects that political predispositions would be the strongest predictor of vote, we find that some of the findings can be argued to support Zaller’s model, while other findings do not. To begin with, political predispositions undoubtedly produce valid predictors for EU vote in the regression model, showing a curvilinear correlation in which the most positive voters were to be found in the centre group. When voter groups were divided into their respective left-right placement and divided by level of awareness, it does seem that voters followed their party’s recommendation to a certain extent; the left-voters accepted the convinced yes from their leaders (again, with possible exceptions of the Communist voters in the sample, who could have modified the strength of the yes), the centre-voters echoed the unambiguous yes from their mother parties – with the exception of the low aware left- and centre-voters. For the voters on the right, it seems that none of the groups picked up on the Eurosceptic statements from their President; the low aware were just leaning towards a yes, and the highly aware were overwhelmingly positive. Hence, if voters had been more influenced by the messages sent by the elites, it would appear plausible to predict lower support from voters on the left and the right, given the ambiguous elite messages, if Zaller’s logic would hold in this case. The fact that there is a substantial gap between low and highly aware in terms of support could possibly be interpreted as a reflection of the internal divisions in the parties on the edges, but this will only constitute speculations at this stage.

Still, the uniform pattern of increasing support as a function of increasing awareness makes it difficult not to question whether voters so blindly followed the elite recommendations, as Zaller would predict. This makes it possible to argue against Zaller’s hypotheses, however, these figures can also be used as partial support for his overall hypothesis, if we rephrase it slightly. Firstly, to argue against, it can be claimed that if political predispositions would be the strongest predictor of voter’s choices, it would override the impact of awareness, which should not produce different levels of support within the party groups, which was the case here. On the other hand, Zaller argues – for one-way message environments, that is - that only those with sufficient awareness will be able to understand the message conveyed and hence would support it. Hence, it could be argued that his thesis of reliance on awareness in one-way message environments may apply to two-way message environments as well, given the high support from the medium-to highly aware groups. However, the weak support from the low aware left and right-voters suggest that they apparently did pick up the ambiguous messages from the elites, which makes this argument quite vague. On the other hand, the lack of support from low aware centre-voters may suggest awareness seem to have had a stronger impact than elite cues. Moreover, the fact that the highly aware were more likely to vote yes than the medium and less aware, may
not just simply mean that they understood the official position and supported it, but since these would be expected to also understand contradictory messages: they appear to have evaluated both options, and in most cases, opted for a positive view towards EU membership. This contradicts suspicions that electorates in new democracies will blindly follow their leaders - the Czechs appeared to have mobilised endogenous factors in the process too - and critically analysed their parties’ positions. Again, we find it difficult to find support for Zaller’s model. What seems most apparent to conclude from the figures is that both groups of variables produced significant predictors towards EU vote, and that awareness and political predispositions interacted in the opinion formation process.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, Zaller’s hypothesis does not achieve sufficient support from the Czech case to conclude that the model can efficiently predict the opinion formation process in this case. While voters’ choices mostly were, at least partially, in line with their parties’ recommendations, they also clearly employed cognitive factors while they made up their minds towards the vote. The final decision of the majority of respondents in this sample to vote yes does not seem to have been a product of elite recommendation only – some voter groups actually partially went against their elites when the figures were broken down to level of awareness and left-right position. Therefore, it must be concluded that Zaller’s model fails to adequately explain public opinion formation in the Czech accession referendum when he predicted that political predispositions would be the determining factor in a two-way message environment. Due to the impact of awareness as well, it seems safest to opt for a conclusion for this case-study in line with Winnie the Pooh’s standard preferred option; ‘Yes, please, both.’

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**Data sets**


Candidate Countries Eurobarometers 2002.2, European Commission Eurobarometer Surveys


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