

EU Related Referendums = Second-Order Elections?

A Dutch single case study

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis will help answer the question whether the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum can be seen as a second-order election. An answer can pave the way for future research concerning the development and acceptance of referendums with a European context. The paper examines this question by applying it to the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum in form of a case study. Five hypotheses were developed to provide this answer. These hypotheses examine a combination of theories and characteristics of second-order elections and referendums which include for the most part ballot results, waste vote mentality, and the punishment trap in comparison with first-order elections. Survey data used in the analysis stems from the 'Election Survey Ukraine Referendum' provided by CentERdata while other data points were retrieved from the Dutch Election Council. The results confirm the hypotheses for the most part and one is able to say that the examined referendum can be seen as a second-order election. Now a broader study with more diverse cases is needed to confirm this notion. Understanding referendums with a European context in a new light enhances the interpretation of voting results and the research surrounding it.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Theory	7
2.1 Referendums	7
2.2 Second-order Elections	8
3. Methodology	12
3.1 Research Design	12
3.2 Case selection and Sampling	13
3.3 Operationalization and Data Analysis	14
4. Analysis	16
4.1 Data	16
4.2 Results	21
5. Conclusion	24
Appendix	27
References	28

1. Introduction

Originally established as an Economic Union, the European Union (EU) quickly grew towards unthinkable size and magnitude. With an increase in size, an increase in additional policy areas besides pure economics came about. Nowadays the European Union influences the everyday life of over 500 million citizens in Europe alone with policies in areas such as agriculture, climate action, over to environment and foreign affairs, all the way up to science and even transport. Over time the general interest and trust in the supranational institutions as well as membership in political parties are declining more and more which is supported by arguments that the EU is too elitist. This trend manifested itself even more with the first direct European Parliament Elections in 1979. Established to involve the public more into European politics, it did not draw in the expected participation.

A first analysis by Reif and Schmitt (1980) led to the conclusion that these European Parliament elections did not represent much more than nine simultaneous national second-order elections. Second-order elections are in this case elections which are seen by the public as less important than first-order elections such as national elections to determine the executive power. Beforehand second-order elections were only known in the national political arena, for example municipal and other various regional elections. Reif & Schmitt's analysis was also the first time that second-order elections were explored in the international realm. A notion of democratic deficit has long been lingering around the legitimacy of the European Union. To combat the growing criticism of a democratic deficit multiple measures such as the referendums and other forms of direct democracy are being held in order to actively involve more citizens in the decision making process (Chrysoschoou, 2010). The reignited use of direct democracy in the form of referendums enables citizens to have a more direct form of power over the EU. Referendums are giving the choice between change, mostly in the form of accepting a new policy, and the status quo and therefore giving the public its power. Now for the use and initiation of a referendum each member state has its own prescriptions and requirements.

Consequently, it is more common in some member states to initiate referendums than in other. Consensus-based decision making in the EU relies on the effort of each member state to be willing to reach an agreement which everyone can support. In recent years, more and more EU-skeptical groups urge to use more direct democratic means in order to block policies and work against the idea of the European Union and its consensus orientated approaches. Some say increasingly using referendums on EU policies gives the opportunity for a relatively low percentage of the population to hold the rest of the EU in a hostage-like situation. Thus the European Union is making itself ungovernable and vulnerable to extortion so some say (von Ondarza, 2016).

These statements lead me to examine if there is a difference between nationwide referendums on EU specific topics and national elections. In order to come closer towards the use and importance of referendums it is critical to understand the general voting behavior of the public. Voting efforts in terms of general elections are by now extensively researched. In contrast, voting behavior during referendums is less well understood. More precisely in order to investigate referendums under these

aspects it is important to understand if recent referendum results are reflecting the public opinion on the asked choice or if these opportunities are more likely to be used to express a general disagreement with Brussels or the corresponding national government. For example, vote choices are not always made in regards to the vote itself especially in the context of European Parliament elections concerning European issues. More often than not the vote decisions are related to current formations of the national government and therefore first-order election based institutions and events, as mentioned earlier. So in the eye and consideration of the voter, European Parliament elections for example are not really about European Parliament issues or about their members, but instead about national politics and the current government (Carruba & Timbone, 2005). Connecting to this stands the Franklin thesis which describes a similar phenomenon. Franklin and his team discovered that referendums and their results are influenced by issues which are not involved directly in the referendum topic itself. Instead the popularity of the current government acts as vote decision indicator for the public (Franklin, Marsh & Wlezien, 1994).

Since both, European Parliament elections and national referendums are shaped in similar fashion it would be interesting to investigate if referendums concerning the EU are influenced in the same way. Therefore these referendums might in actuality not be about the issues at stake, but might operate in the same way as European elections and represent more a valuation and feedback on the national government and its parties. This could move these referendums into second-order elections. Second-order elections in connection to EU referendums have not been extensively researched and could give new insight into the use of referendums as well as the acceptance by the public and its voting behavior. Hence this thesis will investigate if referendums are being treated as equally important as general election or if they can be categorized as second-order elections. This leads to the general question of:

Do referendums with a context to the European Union represent a second-order election?

One of the more recent European referendums is the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum in 2016. This referendum was the first one to be initiated through the Advisory Referendum Act. The new act enables citizens to subject most primary laws to a nonbinding referendum if 300,000 signatures are collected and a 30 percent turnout is met. This referendum was initiated from and for the public to express their opinion, about the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, with which the Dutch government can work with. Throughout the initiation and during the campaign of the referendum a series of critique came about concerned that the referendum is just a disguised opinion poll against the current government and to oppose the European Union in general. A similar case has been studied by Lubbers (2008) namely the Dutch referendum on the European Constitution in 2005. In this study a wide variety of influences were tested in which a notion of second-order effects in particular the popularity of government among others were present. Hobolt's and Brouard's (2011) research on the other hand did not result in a significant effect of

government popularity as a second-order indicator in the same case. It is worth mentioning that neither one of them focused solely on second-order characteristics. Therefore it would be interesting to see how the second-order election theory translates towards the recent referendum of 2016 since it was initiated by the public. The purpose of this single case study is to understand the voting behavior for past and future EU related referendums with similar conditions to this referendum.

In this thesis the dissociating between the topic of referendums, the voting behavior of the population, and the result of these referendums is being addressed. The above mentioned case will act as a case study and give an indication towards the research question. In order to get to the bottom of the research question a more case specific problem needs to be formulated. The following empirical descriptive research question will serve as such and be answered in this thesis:

Does the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum represent a second-order election?

This research question is built upon the sub-questions: Are there differences between voting in referendums and voting in first-order elections and if so which? This question will give first indications towards characteristics in a referendum which could indicate a second-order election. The differences will be compared with the second-order election theory and reviewed against the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement referendum. The next sub-question which should help answer the research question is: What role does the approval of the current national government and the European Union play during a referendum with European context? Dissatisfaction with the government and a corresponding No-vote could hint towards a punishment trap vote which supports the second-order election theory.

In order to evaluate the research question, general data such as turnout and voting results concerning the EU-Ukraine referendum is needed. In addition, survey data analyzing the voting population and individual voter in terms of political attitude and opinion is needed. Overall, the thesis will work with secondary data made available through the quantitative data set ‘Election Survey Ukraine Referendum¹’ provided by CentERdata. This data set covers the campaign phase of the referendum as well as opinion of the result and current government plus parties. New surveys were handed out twice in March before the referendum and once in April effectively after the referendum in 2016, which gives it a longitudinal attribute if necessary.

The first part of the analysis will be concentrated around the interest towards the referendum in general. For this purpose voter turnout is used as the dependent variable in order to evaluate the public interest. The variable will then be compared with the national average turnout for general parliamentary elections which are considered to be first-order elections. In addition ballots casted in an invalid way are being measured in the same procedure. The second part of my analysis focuses more

¹ Retrieved from: https://www.dataarchive.lissdata.nl/study_units/view/648

on the voting behavior, namely the waste vote mentality and the punishment trap. According to the second-order election theory the waste vote mentality is lower than in first-order elections. A consequence according to Koepke and Ringe (2006) is that smaller parties are being favored. To test this hypothesis a comparison between party vote share of the last national parliament election and the voters' preferred party support just before the referendum will be made. The second-order election theory states that a redistribution of support towards the smaller parties confirms a tendency towards second-order elections. At last the paper will take a look at the punishment trap aspect of second-order elections. It is assumed that discontentment with the current government as well as with European Union institutions will be expressed with disagreement towards European policy proposals and therefore as a No-vote in the referendum for the EU-Ukraine Association agreement. The reason being is the mindset of the voter who wants to oppose ideas from an unpopular government even if the issue itself is not necessarily against their beliefs. For this a correlation between the Yes/No vote and the popularity of the two governments is to be tested.

2. Theory

This part lays the theoretical groundwork of the thesis. In order to analyze the Dutch Ukraine-Referendum on the basis of second-order elections certain parameters have to be established. The following theories will define second-order elections and bring them in connection with European referendums and corresponding voting behavior. An overarching and introducing picture is hereby created by the term of direct democracy. Direct democracy is defined as a form of democracy where the voters are able to decide on a particular policy straight and without an intermediary. This is similar to the most common form of western democracies namely the representative democracy where the voter appoints a spokesperson to act on these policy issues on behalf of the voter. Common kinds of direct democracy can also be included and be part of a democracy such as referendums, initiatives and recalls (Hague & Harrop, 2016).

2.1 Referendums

“Popular referenda are a feasible and effective institution to fulfill individual preferences and are able to break the cartel of politicians directed against voters and taxpayers” (Frey, 1994, p.338). Nonetheless it is important to remember that these institutions of direct democracy are a supplement but no substitute for institutions of a representative democracy. Referendums should be decided on the lowest possible level in a federal system in order to establish decentralization which helps the information collection for the citizens, Frey says. A referendum should not just represent a simple choice between alternatives but seen as a process spreading over time. Hereby three stages are prevalent. First of comes the pre-referendum stage which describes the discussion between voters and politicians. This phase involves mutually beneficial bargaining and creation of the agenda of alternatives by the citizens. Discourse enables a communicative rationality and brings forth a shared view of what is normatively acceptable. A structure induced equilibrium of alternatives and preferences is established. After the alternatives, to be voted on, are established the formal decision stage is next in line. The most important part of this stage is “that the decision rule has to be more restrictive the more important the issue to be decided upon is” (Frey, 1994, p.339). At last stands the post referendum stage which as the name says involves the phase right after the referendum is held. Interesting is here how the result of the referendum is dealt with. Unexpected large minorities might have to be respected and a new initiative could be put in motion. If due to discussion and changed circumstances a new revised referendum arises one should not see this as a weakness of direct democracy but as a sign of a lively political process argues Frey (1994).

A referendum empowers the public to veto or approve policies, laws and/or constitutional amendments which are proposed by the government, as Lupia and Matsusaka (2004) state. In terms of referendums one can distinguish between several different types and generally speaking into two forms of features. One feature being the initiators behind the referendum, which can be either the executive or the public.

The other feature focuses on the obligation part of the referendum, namely if it is an advisory one or if the result has binding consequences. For example there are petition referendums which take place after the legislature passed laws which the electorate wants to challenge. Especially in the case of constitutional changes the legislative referendums come into play which can be mandatory and are a way of the legislature to ask for permission by the public. On the other side of the spectrum are advisory referendums which are created by the government in order to determine the public opinion in certain areas or on a specific case (Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004). Concerning the research of second-order effects, it is not to neglect whether a referendum is constitutionally required or a choice and if it is binding or not. The more informal a referendum is held the more likely second-order characteristics are present (Hug & Sciarini, 2000). In general one can say that the initiative process is quite expensive in order to bring change of policy. Only for people who want to create a change, that the corresponding government does not want to provide, it is cost effective so Gerber (1999) (mentioned in Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004). This is also a reason why a lot of public propositions deviate so far “from the current status quo (e.g., overhauling the property tax system), that legislators are unwilling to impose on themselves (e.g., term limits or change in campaign finance), [...] or that are a sensitive topic to touch (e.g., immigration policy and gay marriage)” (Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004, p.475-476). In order to interpret the results and also the incentive of a referendum one has to look closer towards the decision-making process of voters during a referendum and its campaign. There is plenty of theory on voting behavior in elections but only few are addressing direct democracy. First of all it is important to see the difference between referendums and elections. Referendums give the voter a choice between alternatives and not known candidates as in elections. Oftentimes these alternatives are not familiar and can be abstract. For that reason the corresponding campaigns by parties and other interest groups up to the referendum itself are quite important since they provide most of the information available to the voter.

2.2 Second-Order Elections

Aside from these rational choices of a voter, the second-order election theory resurfaces’ within most of the discussions about referendum results. As the name already hints, these elections and votes are seen by the voter as less important than national ones. Developed by Reif and Schmitt in 1980, the second-order election model causes a change in voting behavior because of the perceived unimportance. This theory was mainly developed and used to explain European Parliament elections. As already mentioned, in this paper it will be tested if the same characteristics are common in European referendums.

First-order elections are seen by the public as important and are most of the time elections at the national level which establish executive governments. In other words, elections with a close relationship to the core of power are more relevant in the eye of the public. Second-order elections are

mostly used for smaller local elections involving the second chamber of voting such as various regional and municipal elections. One of the most important aspects of second-order elections in a European context is the 'Less at stake Dimension' by Reif and Schmitt (1980). First of all, the voter turnout may be lower since more people are staying home from 'irrelevant' voting. Additionally, this may also be recognized by the political elite and in consequence less effort is put into campaigns which causes even less people to recognize the elections. While in first-order elections the large and established parties benefit from voters which preference lies more with a minor party, in second-order elections small and new political parties have the advantage. The perceived lack of importance lets the voter choose more freely for their actual political view and does not feel forced to vote for a party with realistic potential to govern. Another aspect of second-order voting is the increased number of invalidated ballots caused by displeasure from the first-order political arena (Reif & Schmitt, 1980).

In order to understand second-order elections better a short explanation of voting motivation in general is helpful. One can distinguish between three different types of motivation for voting. Strategic voting is the intention of a voter to vote for a candidate (or choice) other than their actual preferred choice. The idea behind is that the voter chooses a party which is more likely to be part of the government instead of a less significant one. Contrary to strategic voting stands the sincere voting. Here voters choose the party they feel ideologically closest to no matter how realistic it is for the party to be part of the new government. As a third category the expressive vote completes the picture. In order to make a statement and to express dissatisfaction with the current situation and/or government the electorate decides to vote for a party that conveys a message or statement against the first-order executive. Second-order elections differ from first-order elections in so far that voter might vote more sincerely and for the party position they feel closest to instead of strategically for a party with a potential to govern. Consequently, smaller parties and their position are being favored because the general waste vote mentality is lower (Carrubba & Timpone, 2005). Caused by the perceived lack of political consequence, voters are also inclined to cast expressive votes in order to make a statement towards the executive (Koepke & Ringe, 2006).

The national political agenda and concerns are influential for the public as well since more often than not vote choices are based on domestic issues. Evidence is still being found that votes in European Parliament elections are based on retrospective national government performance (Marsh, 1998; Carrubba & Timbone, 2005). One consequence of the concentration towards national parties is the so-called punishment trap where voters are using European elections and referendums to either punish or reward the parties which are currently in the government. The punishment trap describes a predicament for the electorate. While voting, for example on an international treaty through a referendum, the electorate is caught in a decision making trade-off since they mostly rely on incomplete information caused by the sheer volume of it and therefore have to trust campaign messages. Now to evaluate the content of the treaty and the amount of satisfaction with the current government at the same time brings the voter in the beforehand mentioned dilemma. There is a choice

between accepting a consensus based treaty or agreement and at the same time maybe unwillingly rewarding and supporting the national government or dismissing the agreement and punishing the government as well as the other way around (Schneider & Weitsmann, 1996). As a result it is possible that the outcomes of some referendums do not represent the actual opinion on the issue but more the satisfaction of the current national or European executive level (Hobolt, 2006). This phenomenon was first described by the Franklin thesis which states that “in domains of low salience such as foreign policy, we might expect opinions to be coupled to those in domains of high salience, such as governments’ handling of the economy” (Franklin et al., 1994, p.117). In other words, the results of referendums are connected to the popularity of the current government even if the content of the referendums has not much to do with the popularity. Therefore, the decision on the ballot paper may be made out of many different factors than just the voted on issue itself. In his analysis Franklin sees a relationship between referendum outcomes, the popularity of the government which proposed the referendum, as well as the individual party preferences. Which brings him to the conclusion “that referenda proposed by governments in Parliamentary regimes should be viewed as special cases of second order national elections in which the results should not necessarily be taken at face value because allowance must be made for the standing of governments in the first order arena” (Franklin, Van der Eijk & Marsh, 1995, p.110). A more recent study opens the possibility that factors such as prominence of European matters are also able influence to which extend the second-order election factors play a role (Franklin, 2002; Svensson, 2002). In this paper, however, these findings are not extensively conceptualized and tested. To complete the circle De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005) confirm that the evaluation of domestic politics and governments by the voter is relevant for the general EU support in return for European immigration referendums.

As one can clearly see second-order elections are in interaction with voting behavior which means that both aspects are in need to analyze the Dutch Ukraine referendum. Out of these indicators of the second-order election model the following hypotheses are derived which will be tested against the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum:

H1: Referendums are more likely to have a lower turnout than general elections.

H2: Referendums are more likely to have a higher proportion of invalidated ballots than general elections.

A perceived lack of importance and disagreement with the political first-order arena is likely to cause a higher amount of invalidated votes as well as a lower turnout than most first-order elections.

H3: The individual voter is more likely to support a minor party/position in a referendum than a major party/position in comparison to general elections.

The third hypothesis will go deeper into the voting behavior during second-order elections. In this instance the theory states that minor parties and positions are more likely to be preferred in second-order elections because the waste vote mentality is lowered. The voter is more likely to vote sincerely for the more ideologically closest party and position instead of choosing a compromise.

H4: If the current Dutch government is unpopular with the individual voter then relatively often the proposed Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement is more likely to be opposed by the individual voter.

H5: If the European Union is unpopular (or trust towards EU is low) with the Dutch individual voter then the proposed Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement is more likely to be opposed by the individual voter.

These two hypotheses are based on the previously mentioned theory that expressive voting is quite common with second-order elections. As a consequence a negative opinion about the government will likely lead to a rejection of proposed ideas by the respective government, also known as the punishment trap.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the strategy to answer the research question. The research design explains what is needed for the research and each necessary step involved. In addition potential threats to the measurements are shortly discussed. Afterwards, the case chosen for the research is being presented. Followed by a description of the data used and the basis on which a conclusion is drawn.

3.1 Research Design

This paper is going to examine a target population of the Dutch electorate after a referendum. Hereby it is going to concentrate on the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum 2016. The study of the Dutch referendum will be investigated against the background of the previous mentioned theories concerning second-order elections in connection with voting behavior. This single case study is supposed to explore how similar a referendum with European context is to a second-order election. Its main function derives around the idea to help identify questions concerning the theory of second-order elections in a relatively unexplored environment, as the field of second-order elections is, and to test possible as well as necessary measurements for future research.

At first one will take a look at the interest towards the referendum in general. For this purpose voter turnout is used as the dependent variable in order to evaluate the public interest. The variable will then be compared with the national average turnout for general parliamentary elections which are considered to be first-order elections. In addition the amount of invalidated ballots is measured in a similar fashion in order to identify an additional indicator for a possible second-order election.

The second part of the analysis focuses more on the voting behavior, namely the waste vote mentality. According to the second-order election theory the waste vote mentality is lower than in first-order elections. A consequence according to Koepke and Ringe (2006) is that smaller parties are being favored. To test this hypothesis a comparison between the referendum vote and the voters' preferred party support in a hypothetical general election will be made. By assigning each chosen party their appropriate stance on the referendum issue a deviation in vote choice between a (hypothetical) general election and a referendum will be made possible. According to the second-order election theory a redistribution of support towards the smaller parties or in this case a minor position confirms a tendency towards second-order elections.

The last part of my analysis will be concentrated around the punishment trap aspect of second-order elections. It is assumed that discontentment with the current government as well as with the European Union institutions will be expressed with disagreement towards European policy proposals and therefore as a No-vote in the referendum for the EU-Ukraine Association agreement. The reason being is the mindset of the voter who wants to oppose ideas from an unpopular government (even if the issue

itself is not necessarily against their beliefs). For this a correlation between the Yes/No vote and the popularity of the two governments is to be tested.

As for any other research method there are also potential threats within the research design of this single case study. The most common threat is construct validity, where it is of concern whether the reliability and replicability of this study is given. A single case study is also not exempt from threats towards its validity and significance. One has to keep in mind that this study does not have the ambition to answer the question if most European Union related referendums represent a second-order election. As already mentioned, it is more or less an approach to apply the second-order theory onto a new and current topic. Obviously the generalizability and external validity of this case study is not very high but the focus lays on the particularization in order to pave the way for more general applicable studies. Subsequently, a statistical generalization is less given than a utility for analytical generalization and an exploratory approach towards new theory-building or to reapply the studied theory. In this case the theory being considered might be the explanation of the Ukraine-Dutch referendum results and represents at the same time a most-likely test in order to find out if the theory finds an application in this sort of cases at all. A common threat is also the time order which does not apply towards this study since one can clearly distinguish the respondents' answers in both questionnaires between answers made before the referendum was held as well as after. Almost impossible to exclude is the possible of spuriousness by which two seemingly correlated variables are actually influenced by a third unknown factor. In order to combat this phenomenon the current relevant theory surrounding first- and second-order elections as well as voting behavior during referendums have to be studied to ensure an inclusion of all relevant variables.

3.2 Case selection and Sampling

For the case of this study the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum is chosen which took place on the 6th of April 2016 with 61 percent voting against the agreement (Electoral Council, 2017). This case is first of all relevant because of its topicality, the connection towards the EU, and it is the first referendum in the Netherlands which was a result of the Advisory Referendum Act. The new act enables citizens to subject most primary laws to a non-binding referendum if 300,000 signatures are collected and a 30 percent turnout is met. This referendum was initiated from and for the public to express their opinion about the Association which the Dutch government can work with. Throughout the initiation and during the campaign of the referendum a series of critique came about namely that the referendum is just a disguised opinion poll against the current government and to oppose the European Union in general. The purpose of this single case study is to understand the voting behavior for past and future EU related referendums with similar conditions. This referendum gives me the opportunity to study a population with enough quantitative data provided by the 'Election Survey Ukraine Referendum' by CentERdata. This dataset enables one

to analyze the population before and after the referendum on the topic of local and European politics as well as the specific referendum.

3.3 Operationalization and Data Analysis

As already mentioned in the previous section, the thesis will work with secondary data made available through the quantitative data set provided by CentERdata. This data set covers the campaign phase of the referendum as well as opinion of the result and current government plus parties. New surveys were handed out twice before the referendum and once effectively after the referendum, which gives it a longitudinal attribute if necessary. This survey was chosen over doing a new one because the size of respondents and the mentioned longitudinal aspect of it.

Up front a comparison between the voter turnout from the Dutch general elections in 2012 and the turnout from the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum in 2016. The same goes for invalidated ballots. A lower turnout for the referendum as well as a rise of invalidated ballots would indicate a lack of perceived importance and a form of protest which indicates a notion of second-order election. These consequences were foreshadowed by Reif and Schmitt's (1980) Less at stake Dimension. Just like a change in vote choice from a first-order election to a referendum as it is discussed in the next part.

The next part of the analysis is involved with the theory of waste vote mentality which is described by Carrubba & Timpone (2005) as well as Koepke & Ringe (2006). The theory states that while voting in first-order election the voter is more strategic and is likely to favor a party with potential to govern, while in second-order elections the voter is more truthful to their actual ideology. This is translated onto this case in the following way: the party choice in a hypothetical general election is being compared to the vote choice made in the referendum. Hereby the position on the Association Agreement by the parties plays an important role since the referendum was not a vote about a government composition but about accepting or denying the agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Therefore each hypothetical party choice is translated to the equal party position on the agreement. This makes it possible to compare a party choice in a first-order election with a vote choice in a second-order election. The mentioned comparison will then show if the voter deviated from the parties preferred position in the referendum. A difference of choice between the hypothetical election and the referendum will then show a lowered waste vote mentality in this referendum. A low waste vote mentality is an indicator for a second-order election.

As mentioned in the research design the analysis will be finalized with measuring the correlation between a Yes/No vote (dependent, dichotomous) and the confidence felt by the voter to the current (2006) Dutch government as well as to the European Union (independent, interval) in general. A relation between a No-vote and low trust, and therefore low popularity, in the government would be an indicator for a second-order election (Franklin et al., 1994; Franklin et al. 1995). By linking the

popularity of the government with the respective vote choice in the referendum one is able to determine if the phenomenon of a punishment trap, developed by Schneider and Weitsmann (1996), was present. If how the public judges its government of a first-order arena is influencing the vote choice in this referendum, then one can determine a second-order factor is present.

After explaining where the data is coming from and how it connects to the theory, an illustration on the concrete operationalization and its data description to answer the hypotheses follows.

For the conclusion of the first two hypotheses (H1+H2), the invalidated ballots and the turnout data will be retrieved. The data points will be compared against the general election of 2012, since it was the last major and most definite first-order election before the referendum, as well as against the most recent general election of 2017.

The phenomenon of waste vote mentality is another interesting aspect to consider while assessing a (supposedly) second-order election. CentERdata asked their respondents in their survey the following question: “If today’s parliamentary elections (second chamber) would be held, which party would you vote for?” (loose translation) A choice could be made between the eleven most popular parties in the Netherlands. Namely: VVD², PvdA, PVV, SP, CDA, D66, ChristenUnie, GroenLinks, SGP, Partij voor de Dieren, 50Plus. Additionally the options to write in an unnamed party, ‘I would not vote’, ‘Blanco/Invalid’, ‘Do not know’, and ‘I do not say’ were given in the survey but for the sake of simplicity not included in this study. In order to operationalize these results onto the third hypothesis (H3) the following labels were assigned: Party Supporting Association Agreement (Pro) and Party Not Supporting Association Agreement (Anti). This enables the comparison between the hypothetical party choices in a first-order election with the voting result of the referendum. The result will be visualized in a cross table analysis and be tested for significance through the Person Chi-Square test.

Finally, to get a picture of the attitude towards the current (2016) incumbent government, the Election Survey by CentERdata asked respondents the following question: “Can you on a scale of 0 to 10 indicate how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions or countries?” (loose translation) Relevant for this paper are the opinion ratings for the “European Union” as well as “The Dutch Government”. The 11 point scale will be trichotomized into Not Trusted, Neutral, and Trusted. Not Trusted includes the scale points of 0-3, while Trusted includes 7-10. Neutral, representing the more impartial opinions, is assigned to the scale points of 4-6. Trust is in this case seen as a measurement for popularity. The less trust the voter has in the respective government the less popular it is in the eye of the voter. Both of these variables are tested against the acceptance or disagreement with the Dutch Ukraine-EU referendum. A visualization through a cross table and the chi-square test will help to interpret and show a significant relationship.

² Table 5 explaining Party abbreviations to be found in the Appendix

4. Analysis

The goal of this analysis is to answer whether the Dutch Ukraine-European Union referendum can be categorized as a second-order election. This will help to give a better understanding of how referendums with connection to the European Union are approached by the public.

As described in the Operationalization above, the analysis will start of by interpreting the data points provided by the 'Election Survey Ukraine referendum' as well as the ballot and turnout data. This is followed by using these results to evaluate the developed hypotheses. In the beginning the turnout hypothesis H1 is assessed, namely: Referendums are more likely to have a lower turnout than general elections. Afterwards ballot characteristics are processed by the hypothesis H2: Referendums are more likely to have a higher proportion of invalidated ballots than general elections. It follows the assessment of waste vote mentality through the H3 hypothesis: The individual voter is more likely to support a minor party/position in a referendum than a major party/position in comparison to general elections. The analysis is being concluded by investigating the central concept of the punishment trap during the Dutch Ukraine-European Union referendum. The punishment trap will be tested with the fourth hypothesis H4: If the current Dutch government is unpopular with the individual voter then relatively often the proposed Ukraine-EU Association Agreement is more likely to be opposed by the individual voter. The last hypothesis (H5) follows the same concept but on European level: If the European Union is unpopular with the Dutch individual voter then the proposed Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement is more likely to be opposed by the individual voter.

For this analysis a post-referendum questionnaire from the 'Election Survey Ukraine referendum' will be used. A post-referendum questionnaire guaranties a more truthful answer concerning the voter's choice of supporting or opposing the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. The opinion towards the (at the time) current government is not expected to change significantly because of the referendum result.

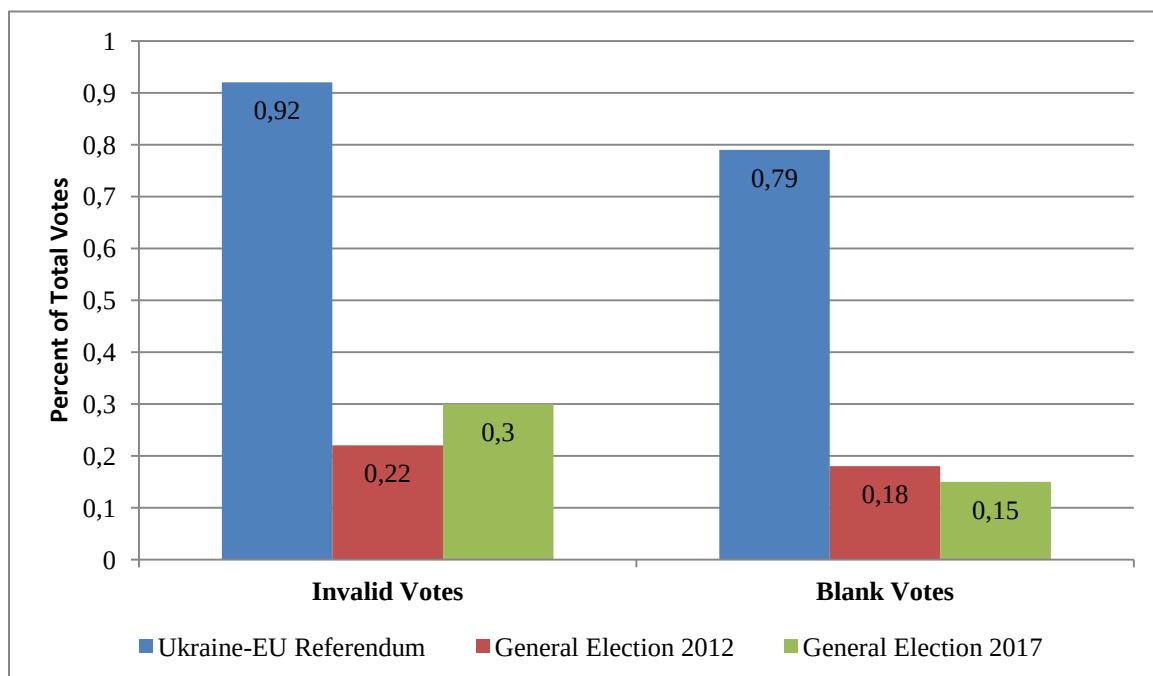
4.1 Data

For a second-order election it is expected that less people will be going to the voting booths than in first-order elections. Again the perceived lack of importance is supposed to play a deciding factor. In 2012 the turnout of the general election amounted to 74.6 percent (Electoral Council, 2013) and the 2017 general elections saw an 81.9 percent turnout rate (Kiesraad, 2017). The referendum on the other hand was only able to mobilize 32.3 percent of all eligible voters (Electoral Council, 2017). Comparing the most recent general election turnout with the referendum, one is able to see that 49.6 percent more citizens of the Netherlands voted in the first-order election.

Another similar identifying factor to determine a second-order election is the increased amount of invalidated votes in relation to first-order elections. In order to test if this holds true for the Dutch

Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum a comparison between the invalidated ballots and blank votes of the referendum as well as the amount from the last general elections of 2012 and 2017 will be made. Figure 1 below illustrates that the Dutch referendum accounted for 38,000 invalid votes which represent 0.92 percent of total votes. In addition, 32,344 (0.79%) blank votes were handed in (Electoral Council, 2017). An analysis of the Dutch general election in 2017 shows that 31,539 (0.3%) votes were marked as invalid and 15,876 which represent 0.15 percent of the total votes were left blank (Kiesraad, 2017). Similar number occurred during the general election of 2012: blank votes amounted to 17,004 and invalid ballots accounted for 20,984 combined these are 37,988 votes which represent 0.4 percent of all casted ballots (Electoral Council, 2013).

Figure 1. Comparison of Invalid and Blank Votes



Adapted from: Electoral Council, 2013; Electoral Council, 2017; Kiesraad, 2017

After concluding the first two hypotheses and shining some light onto the numerical differences of the ballots between first- and second-order elections, the analysis will now move to the individual party preference during referendums. With the next hypothesis (H3), the waste vote mentality will be checked against the Ukraine-European Union referendum case. According to the theory, in first-order elections large and established profit from voters whose ideal political position matches more with a minor party. The concern of wasting their vote leads them to support an established party during first-order elections instead of a minor party with a smaller likelihood of being part of the government. In second-order elections on the other hand the voter does not feel such a pressure to vote for a likely to govern party but instead is able to vote freely for their actual party preference caused by a perceived lack of importance. Since this case is a referendum it did not include the option to vote for a particular

party but only the choice between accepting and denying the association agreement. The party choices from the CentERdata survey question “If today’s parliamentary elections would be held, which party would you vote for?” will be assigned the following labels: pro association agreement party and anti association agreement party. By comparing the individuals preferred party (or its label) during a hypothetical general election to the actual vote choice in the referendum one will see how many votes deviated from the party position. This can show a difference in voting between these two types of elections and consequently the waste vote mentality.

As one can see in table 1 below, the relationship between supporting a party position during a referendum and a party during general elections is diverse. In this case, the individual voter, when supporting an ‘Anti-Party’, is more likely to vote in the referendum in accordance with the party position. While supporting a ‘Pro-Party’ during a simulated parliamentary election does not guarantee such a great consistency with a corresponding support of the referendum and in this case the Association Agreement. By looking at the table below and comparing the individuals who would vote for a party which supports the Association Agreement 29 percent deviated from their party position. In contrast, individuals who would support an ‘Anti-Party’ voted to more than 90 percent in line with the respective party position.

Table 1. Party Support during Hypothetical Parliamentary Elections in Comparison with the Referendum Vote

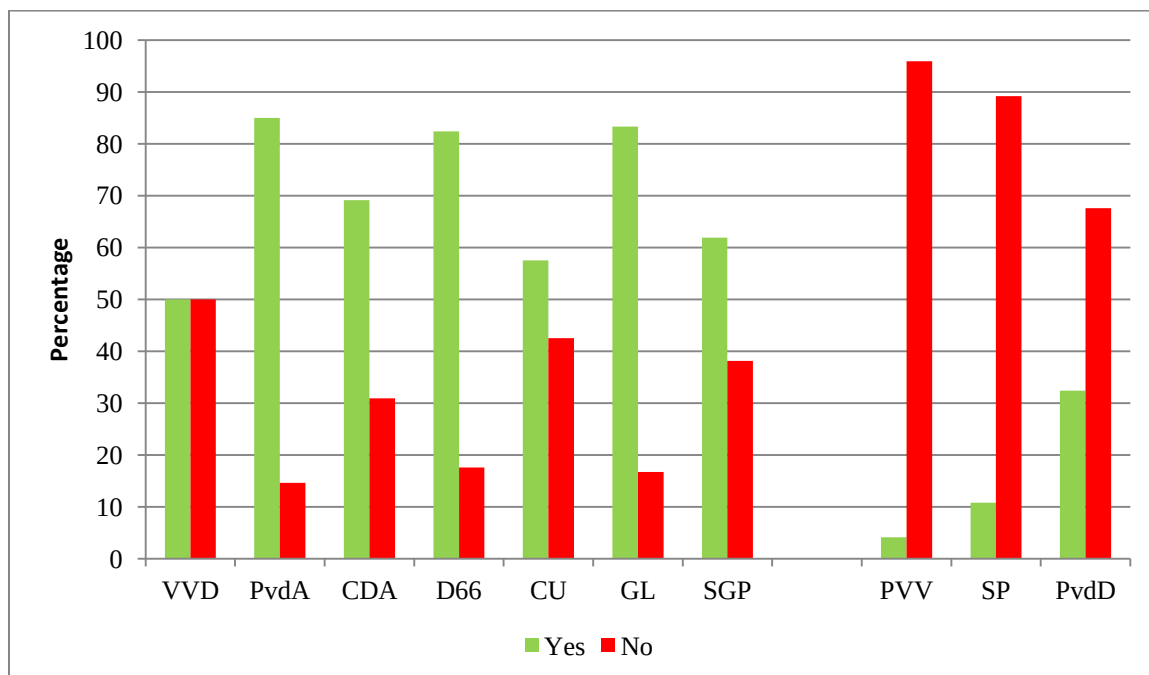
		Referendum Vote		
		In favor	Against	Total (N)
Party Support	Party Supporting Association Agreement (Pro)	71%	29%	100% 640
	Party Not Supporting Association Agreement (Anti)	9%	91%	100% 643
Total %		48%	52%	100% 1013

Pearson Chi-Square Value=359.349; df=1; p-value= .000
Adapted from: CentERdata. (2016)

In order to compare each supported party with its position and the respective referendum vote more closely a bar graph is being shown below (Figure 2). This figure shows clearly that every party supporting the Association Agreement was only able to convince a part of their supporters to vote in line with their position. The survey showed that only 50 percent of VVD supporters and around 60

percent of the two religious parties CU (57.5%) and SGP (61.9%) voted as the party position would suggest. On the other side of the spectrum, supporters of a party which does not agree with the Association Agreement where more convinced of their particular party position. Especially the PVV was able to motivate over 95 percent of their supporters to vote with No in the referendum. Just slightly less persuading was SP with a bit more than 89 percent and the PvdD with almost 68 percent towards their voters.

Figure 2. Referendum Vote per Party



Adapted from: CentERdata. (2016)

Moving onto the last two hypotheses, the survey shows that 90 percent of the electorate who had no trust in the Dutch government voted against the Association Agreement. People trusting their government were to 72 percent supportive of the agreement between the EU and Ukraine. A neutral attitude towards the executive resulted in a vote of 37 percent in favor of the agreement and 63 percent in opposition to it. As one can see in the table below, the relationship between attitude towards the government and the result on how each participant voted in the Ukraine-EU referendum is significant. A chi-square test resulted in a p-value of .000 and is therefore smaller than a significance level α (0.05). This shows a statistical evidence that attitude towards the government is a good indicator for how an individual voted in the Ukraine-EU referendum. It reinforces the statement and validates hypothesis H4, namely, if the current Dutch government is unpopular with the individual voter then relatively often the proposed Ukraine-EU Association Agreement is more likely to be opposed by the individual voter. By looking at table 2 below and comparing the percentage of not trusting voters who voted against the referendum with the percentage who trusted the government and voted in support of

the referendum, one can see a similar picture at both ends of the scale. Voters who rated their government with Not Trusted voted more strongly against the referendum than one would expect in comparison to the rest. This difference gets more extreme the more dissatisfied the voter was with the government. A similar result is seen at the other end of the spectrum (trust in the government), where more voter voted for the referendum than normally expected if they were satisfied with the government.

Table 2. Trust in the Dutch Government in Comparison with the Referendum Vote

		Referendum Vote		
		In favor	Against	Total (N)
Trust in Dutch Government	Not Trusted	10%	90%	100% 269
	Neutral	37%	63%	100% 643
	Trusted	72%	28%	100% 435
Total %		43%	57%	100% 1347

Pearson Chi-Square Value=273.582; df=2; p-value= .000
Adapted from: CentERdata. (2016)

In order to test the H5 hypothesis the same procedure is taken as with the first one. Table 3 provided below presents a similar story as the previous. This time the electorates vote choice is compared with their confidence in the European Union. 90 percent of the voter who did not trust the European Union decided against the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. A quite balanced vote with 45 percent in favor and 55 percent against the agreement was given by the people with a neutral mindset towards the EU. Trust in the EU resulted in a 78 percent vote in favor of the agreement. Again one is able to see in table 3 that the relationship between a vote on the referendum and the trust in the European Union is significant. The p-value of .000 is smaller than the significance level α at 0.05 which gives a clear indication that the opinion towards the European Union can be used as an indicator for the individual voting result concerning the Ukraine-EU referendum. At both ends of the table the respective referendum vote shows a great margin between both choices. This leads to the conclusion that if the European Union is unpopular (or trust towards EU is low) with the Dutch individual voter then the proposed Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement is more likely to be opposed by the individual voter.

Table 3. Trust in the European Union in Comparison with the Referendum Vote

		Referendum Vote		
		In favor	Against	Total (N)
Trust in European Union	Not Trusted	10%	90%	100% 403
	Neutral	45%	55%	100% 586
	Trusted	78%	22%	100% 344
Total %		43%	57%	100% 1333

Pearson Chi-Square Value=354.766; df=2; p-value= .000
Adapted from: CentERdata. (2016)

4.2 Results

After retrieving and analyzing the data in the previous section, the following part will take a deeper look into the sub-questions and the hypotheses. This will provide a clearer overview and picture to answer the research question at hand.

Longstanding theories surrounding second-order elections and referendums in general were used to determine five hypotheses which were to be tested against the Dutch referendum case and established to detect second-order characteristics. In addition sub-questions were developed to help answer the main research question of this thesis.

The first sub-question to answer was: Are there differences between voting in referendums and voting in first-order elections? One of the most prominent features of second-order election in comparison to first-order elections is the voting act in itself and if it is used. For one, it is expected that the turnout will be lower than in first-order elections (H1). In close connection is that the proportion of invalidated ballots turned in is likely to be higher than in first-order elections (H2). Both factors are based on the assumption that second-order elections draw less attention and are seen as less important in the eye of the public as mentioned in the theory beforehand (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). By comparing the turnout rates one is able to determine a first indication. The referendum with 32 percent of turnout lays way behind the general elections of 2012 and 2017 with 75 percent and 82 percent respectively. More than

twice as many voters turned up for the first-order elections than for the referendum. A similar result can be seen by looking at the invalid votes from the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum with the Dutch general elections of 2012 and 2017, one is able to see that percentage wise almost four times as many ballots were marked as invalid in the referendum as in the general elections. These numbers show another relevant difference between the referendum and a first-order election and the theory confirms this as another second-order attribute as well.

To answer the first sub-question further, additional theory was being consulted. The result was that for one, the assumed lack of importance in contrast to first-order elections such as general elections lets the electorate vote more freely in their own interest. Reif and Schnitt (1980) call this part of the 'Less at stake Dimension'. In close connection stands the lowered waste vote mentality by Koepke & Ringe (2006). A perceived drop in importance leads the voter to choose their position to which they feel closest to instead of the one representing a compromise between preferred position and likelihood to win leading to a higher amount of sincere votes. This phenomenon was to be tested with the third hypothesis H3: "The individual voter is more likely to support a small party (position) in a referendum than a big party (position) in comparison to general elections". In order to test this hypothesis the survey respondents preferred party in a hypothetical election were compared against their actual vote choice in the referendum. The analysis shows that voter supporting a party in favor of the Association Agreement, when being asked to vote in a hypothetical general election, deviated from their preferred party position by 29 percent with voting against the agreement. People supporting a party not agreeing with the Association Agreement voted more in line with their chosen party and its position. About 91 percent of these voters voted against the agreement. A more detailed view into each party and their supporters vote is shown in figure 1. Here one is able to confirm the notion given in table 1 that parties supporting the agreement were not able to mobilize and even convince as many of their voter to vote according to their own party position. Overall, this does not confirm that small parties profited more from this referendum than big parties because the focus was laid upon the Yes/No vote and not party size. On both sides of the voting spectrum were parties of all sizes present. Nonetheless, one is able to see that the fringe opinion by the Dutch parties of voting against the agreement was favored by the public. Consequently a lot of people deviated from their supported party and its position which shows that they voted in a sincere manner and as strategic as a first-order election for example would bring forth. As a consequence parties who profit from a strategic vote are likely not to benefit in a second-order election where sincere voting is more common. Concluding one cannot say that the hypothesis H3 is fully confirmed but the theory behind it is still relevant and supports a second-order election characteristic. With this we can see a first difference from the referendum to a first-order election such as the Dutch general elections.

The second sub-question was developed through Franklin's thesis concerning the effect of the government's popularity onto referendum outcomes. At the same time it was used to develop the hypotheses H4 and H5. The question reads as follows: What role does the approval of the current

national government and the European Union play in a referendum with European context? In this case, the popularity of the Dutch government and its connection to the referendum result, as well as the popularity of the European Union is being tested. This was done by creating cross tables in which the confidence in the Dutch government and confidence in the European Union was compared against the actual voting choice of each survey participant. The analysis verified both assumptions that popularity of incumbent governments does play a measurable factor in referendum results. The more a voter was dissatisfied with the Dutch government the more likely the individual voted against the Association Agreement and therefore the position of the government. Similar results were conducted with the popularity of the EU which reinforces the assumption of issue-voting or a punishment-trap by the public. These results answer the second sub-question and confirm the last two hypotheses which were developed to show second-order election attributes. Franklin's thesis (Franklin et. al, 1995) as well as Schneider & Weitsmann (1996) and Hobolt's (2006) assumption that referendum results are painting a picture of government satisfaction instead of the issue which was voted on, leads to a substantial assumption that the Ukraine-EU referendum contains second-order election attributes. All in all, one can say that the difference between voting in a referendum and voting in a first-order election is seen in a decline in turnout at the voting booth, a rise in invalidated ballots, and a change of voting behavior.

5. Conclusion

The goal of this bachelor thesis was to explore to what extent referendums with a European context can be seen as second-order elections. By using the case of the Dutch referendum concerning the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement from 2016 a first insight view can be given. To answer the case specific research question, whether the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum does represent a second-order election, was the aim of this paper. A recent surge in referendums throughout Europe reinvigorates a need to understand how these referendums are understood and used by the European public. This work examines sophisticated second-order election and European election theories in a new light by applying them to the rising form of public expression through European referendums.

An overview of the tested hypotheses looks like the following. A general and clear attribute of second-order elections and a product of the perceived lack of importance is the sinking turnout and rising amount of invalidated ballots in comparison to first-order elections. By comparing the data from the referendum with the last two general elections in the Netherlands both attributes were confirmed. A bit more complicated was it to test the third hypothesis, in which it was expected that during second-order elections party position from smaller parties were more likely supported by the electorate than positions from bigger parties. The theory says that in the case of a perceived unimportance the voter is inclined to vote more truly after their beliefs and not strategic for the party which is more likely to be elected. As already made clear, this theory causes two appliance problems onto this case. For one no parties are being elected because this is a referendum, which means that parties are only able to take up a position of either supporting the topic in the referendum or not. In addition, this case and the positions taken by each party did not separate on a defined line between small parties refusing the agreement and larger parties supporting it. Instead most parties were supporting the Association Agreement and only few were against it. But this still left open the opportunity to apply the waste vote mentality theory onto this case because the popular, established and therefore widely advocated opinion was to support the agreement. Parties who did not do so and would take up a different stance by not supporting it can be therefore seen as the fringe opinion and are comparable to in the theory mentioned smaller party position with unlikely expectation to win and get elected. The analysis showed that more people, who support a party encouraging the association, voted against the agreement and therefore with a No in the referendum, than people, who supported a party which is against the agreement but voted in favor of it. In other words, parties against the Association Agreement were able to convince almost 91 percent of their supporters to vote in cohesion with their position, while parties in favor of it were only able to mobilize 71 percent of their supporters to vote for the agreement and almost 29 percent deviated from the position of their chosen party. Under the case driven circumstances this analysis was done one was still able to examine a relevant attribute of second-order elections namely a diminished waste vote mentality during the Ukraine-EU referendum.

The additional assumption that popularity of the governmental bodies plays a role and influences the vote choice during a referendum is verified. Both the popularity of the Dutch national government as well as the trust in the European Union as a whole have a relationship with the vote choice within the Dutch electorate. Voter who did not trust the national and European government were likely to disapprove on the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine.

To sum up, the analysis showed that the created hypotheses to identify a second-order elections were mostly confirmed with the data presented, as illustrated in Table 4. This also confirms the theory surrounding these hypotheses and show that second-order elections theory can be transferred to referendums with a European context, at least in the case of the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. By laying out the characteristics of a second-order election, namely an under-average turnout, a rise in invalidated ballots, waste-vote mentality, and the punishment trap, the thesis confirms the notion that the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement was in fact a second-order election. The decision to be made between accepting the Association Agreement was in eye of the public only second-order to other issues.

Table 4. Hypotheses Confirmation

Hypothesis/ Second-order characteristic	Observation/ Confirmation
H1: Low turnout/ Less at stake Dimension	Yes
H2: Increasing invalidated ballots/ Less at stake Dimension	Yes
H3: Preferred position/ Waste vote mentality	Adapted
H4: Confidence Dutch gov./ Punishment trap	Yes
H5: Confidence EU/ Punishment trap	Yes

Hypothesis H3 and the surrounding theory could have been proven more clearly if the survey would have provided connecting data concerning the vote choice of the last general election and consequently first-order election. Such an answer would have made the question of a vote choice in a hypothetical general election for this research redundant and a bit more meaningful. In addition judgments by the questioners concerning each of the parties' position on the Association Agreement could have given a closer look at how party heuristics are developing between general elections and referendums. One can take away that the comparison between a vote choice in a general election and a referendum and therefore a first- and possible second-order election is no easy task.

Is has to be kept in mind that the result that the referendum is a second-order decision does not explain the result itself. Instead it enables to categorize this referendum within an interest realm of the electorate comparable to European Parliament elections. In addition it shows that the second-order election theory is not off the table for referendums with European context. Shortly mentioned research on the Dutch referendum in 2005 almost wrote this theory off. While for this case one cannot exclude additional factors such as immigration sentiment or campaign efforts playing a role, it certainly shows that second-order effects are still present.

Furthermore, it implies that while referendums enable the public to participate within more direct democracy, it does not mean that the public is willing and interested to use these additional

opportunities. Referendums are seen as one notion of direct democracy to combat the everlasting problem of democratic deficit of the European Union. This paper shows even though the public has more opportunities to involve themselves and make clear statements, with the help of referendums, that these are not always embraced and even recognized as such. Latching onto this is the notion that the perceived performances by governments on national and international level are guidelines for seemingly unattached issues such as referendums. In addition the positions of national parties do not play such an important role which amplifies the inability of governmental institutions to reach the public. It goes to show that several considerations unassociated with and unaligned with the influence the vote choice in a referendum

These aforementioned findings and statements have to be read with care as they are based on a single case study and represent another glance into this topic. The additional verification that referendums with a European context still bare the notion of a second-order decision can help politics as well as social and political research to understand the public and its voting behavior better. An ever improving interpretation of referendums is important because it determines how referendums are judged and what role they play in the European Union democracy. This can especially be of importance if European wide referendums are held for example on European constitutional changes and the potential results might not accurately represent the actual opinion of the electorate.

In terms of future research it is now advisable to expand the research concerning second-order elections in connection with referendums further to strengthen the theory surrounding it. In addition a more in-depth study of the Dutch Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement referendum would be helpful in order to support or improve the findings shown in this paper.

Appendix

Table 5. Dutch Political Parties (as mentioned in the thesis)

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Dutch Name</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid	Labour Party
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom
SP	Socialistische Partij	Socialist Party
CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christian Democratic Appeal
D66	Democraten 66	Democrats 66
CU	ChristenUnie	Christian Union
GL	GroenLinks	Green Left
SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	Reformed Political Party
PvdD	Partij voor de Dieren	Party for the Animals
50+	50PLUS	50 Plus

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