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The Priming of Referendum Votes on Swiss European Policy

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Abstract

For a long time the Swiss people have been opposed to a genuine, institutional, integration into the EU system. Three recent ballots (1992-2001) on EU integration projects have confirmed that only bilateral, economic, non-integrative agreements may rally a majority of Swiss voters. However beyond these structural invariants, my analysis attempts to assess the capacity of referendum campaigns to 'prime' the ingredients of voting decisions. Based on survey data and a sample of media campaign information, I investigate the degree of *congruity* between campaign issues and individual voting motives. I establish that the voting motives of integration opponents reflect the issues of 'no' campaigns more substantially than do the motives of supporters with respect to the issues of 'yes' campaigns. From this baseline the level of arguments-motives congruity is traced to differences in five possible moderators of priming: media exposure; time of voting decision (as a surrogate measure for attention to the campaign); affective involvement in the issues; political predispositions; and political awareness.

The analysis provides strong confirmation of the hypothesized effect of political awareness, whereby more knowledgeable voters systematically use voting motives that rank higher in the media hierarchy — in both linguistics areas and for both 'yes' and 'no' sides. By contrast the effect of the other moderators is apparently more contingent on particular circumstances. Relatively well-known issues and arguments (i.e. many 'no' issues) tend to gain prominence in people's minds through the selective filter of *affective dispositions*, namely the personal significance of ballots and the general attitude toward EU integration. On the contrary less salient or familiar issues (i.e. like many 'yes' issues) have to make their way through primarily *cognitive*, *attentional* barriers. Besides on occasion, too much media exposure may even swamp the effect of campaign messages and actually reduce priming effects. On the whole the results fit quite nicely with some recent research showing that cognitive and affective engagement exerts various and often opposite influences on priming effects, depending on issues, on particular indicators, and on the specific mediators which the adopted measures supposedly regulate.

The Priming of Referendum Votes on Swiss European policy

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1. Introduction

The study of political campaigns and of their effects on voters has been on the scholarly agenda for several decades now. Today the number of books, journal articles, and other contributions devoted to this subject is simply too large to be estimated with any precision. In part the considerable proliferation of analyses of electoral campaigns over the last thirty years stems from the development of research methods in communication science and from the striking *expansion in the scope and variety of mass media effects* which have progressively been taken into account (see McLeod *et al*. 1994; Kinder 1998). This diversification and specialization of the field was itself a consequence of the so-called 'minimal effects' conclusion reached in the 1950s and 1960s, whereby the mass media (and political campaigns in particular) were deemed to lead generally to a reinforcement or crystallization of pre-existing attitudes, but quite seldom to a true conversion experience (e.g. Lazarsfeld *et al*. 1944; Klapper 1960). Needless to say this was a quite unfortunate conclusion for communication researchers, who nevertheless felt uneasy about the classical paradigm and its reductionist focus on *short-term*, *persuasive effects* of media on *individual* voters or consumers. The mass media, it was argued, may have a stronger impact on mental constructs different from mere affective orientations (i.e. cognitions, stereotypes, schemata, etc.) and on different units of analysis than individuals (i.e. groups, institutions, society, or culture). Further, effects were conceived to operate at different time scales, to proceed casually or inadvertently as well as intentionally, and to eventuate through a variety of mechanisms having different consequences — "changing something, preventing something, facilitating something or reinforcing and reaffirming something" (McQuail 1977: 71). These speculations were conducive to the development of ground-breaking concepts and areas of research — agenda-setting, priming, framing, uses-and-gratifications, or media cultivation, to name just a few.

Although the new strands of enquiry did not always come up with formalized theories, since the 1970s political and communication scientists have been in a better position to answer the recurrent question: Why do some campaigns succeed and others fail? Their favourite answer

— "well, it depends" — has repeatedly pointed to the fact that a campaign can have a number of effects on different aspects and underpinnings of the vote. Among many other effects a campaign can reinforce voters' pre-existing beliefs and preferences, it can give them new considerations and improve their knowledge of issues, it can supply information about the prospects of the candidates running for office and prompt 'strategic voting', or it can provide voters with the criteria for judging the candidates. As these effects are not mutually exclusive, the campaign of a candidate might be successful, say, for suggesting that competitors should be judged on their capacity to handle security problems, but at the same time it may prove counterproductive by depicting the candidate as too confident in his victory and thus eliciting 'expressive' votes in favour of 'small' candidates. In addition success is contingent on countervailing efforts by opponents and on many contextual factors (electoral system, objective state of the economy, fickle political events, etc.) beyond the contenders' real grasp. Accordingly the relative success of a campaign must be defined in sectorial terms, depending on whether it causes deliberate and significant change in *one specific dependent variable*, and not on whether such eventual change translates into a final win at the polls.

In this paper we shall deal with just *one* aspect of campaigns and voting behaviour, namely the so-called *priming effects* of mass media. The priming theory argues that the media provide voters with the 'issues of the day', and thus influence the criteria by which they will judge the personality, political program, presumed abilities, and/or past performance of candidates. In other words, "by calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, and candidates for public office are judged" (Iyengar and Kinder 1987: 63). Contrary to what this last definition may suggest, priming is by no means restricted to the impact of TV news. As is the case of agenda-setting, of which priming is "really an extension" (Iyengar and Simon 1993: 368), any type of information can, under proper circumstances, permeate thoughts and considerations that citizens bring to bear on their voting decision. Similarly although the priming theory was developed primarily to study voting behaviour in the context of elections, we believe that it equally applies to the context of referendums — defining *voting motives* (instead of candidates' evaluations) as the dependent variable.

Our task in this paper will be to explore whether advertisement campaigns in Swiss newspapers have the potency to prime voting decisions on the subject of European policy. More specifically we shall attempt to determine which individual-level variables matter in the priming

process. For example is priming a question of affective involvement, in the sense that votes are primed most efficiently among interested citizens? Or is it (also) a matter of knowledge of the issues at stake, of mere exposure to the campaign, or of the amount of attention paid to it? This paper shall address these and related questions using survey and aggregate data from three recent ballots on Swiss European policy that took place in the period 1992-2001. Our purpose, be it recalled, is not to give a comprehensive view of the effects of campaigns on such affairs (such as their persuasive effect on the vote itself, or their impact on issue knowledge). Rather we shall focus on the relationship between campaign information and the *choice of voting motives*, as mediated and filtered by individual characteristics of the sort mentioned above.

The second section of this paper is devoted to the presentation of our theoretical model. We shall distinguish between the various mechanisms (or 'mediators') implied in the priming process, as well as between the main independent variables (or 'moderators') which have been shown to come into play in that process. In Section 3 we familiarize the reader with the empirical situation under study, namely the recent Swiss referendums about European integration policy; the operational design and measurements used are also described in detail. Section 4 then takes up the task of applying our model to the data at hand, revealing to what extent the referendum decisions of voters relate to the issues and arguments stressed by campaigners. Next a concluding section leads the discussion about some ambiguous or unexplored aspects of our analysis, and finally sums up the main results of the paper.[1]

2. The model

For one part voting behaviour is *structurally* determined. Very much has been written and demonstrated about the influence of social settings, the importance of political socialization in the family, or about generational and geographical patterns of political behaviour. *Voting motives* are no exception to this general rule. Consider for example neutrality and direct democratic rights: they are cornerstones of the Swiss state and have been internalised for more than 150 years in the value systems of Swiss citizens as part of the national identity. As such these highly prominent and accessible issues require only very few incentives (or no stimulation at all) to be mobilized and come to bear on referendum voting decisions. Some

[1] The author would like to thank Karin Gilland Lutz (Institute of Political Science, University of Bern) for her contribution in the data collection, as well as for her valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

issues or considerations are 'always there' for a significant part of the electorate and, for most foreign policy ballots, ignoring these issues is probably as ineffective as trying to downgrade their importance.[2]

2.1. Mediators of priming

However important this structural component, a substantial part of variance in voting motives has *conjunctural* sources, depending on which issues are tackled by campaigns and how intensely they are highlighted. In that respect the priming theory adds to our knowledge of how campaign themes and arguments leave an imprint on citizens' minds, and pass through a series of intermediate steps to finally determine a behavioural response in the form of a verbal justification for one's vote. As we shall see the theory is extremely fertile, but using it for our present purpose is not without difficulties. First, the theory itself is complex to operationalize, not least because the very concept of 'priming' is polysemic and there exist several understandings of what 'priming' really means. Originally the concept was introduced in biology, medicine and engineering, from where it was borrowed into social and cognitive psychology, as well as neuro-psychology. The common idea of most psychological definitions is that mental constructs that once were activated (or '*primes*') remain temporarily accessible and applicable to the interpretation of stimuli encountered at present time ('*the priming effect*').[3] Solicitation of a primed category renders this category immediately available for making sense of a new piece of information, which is then encoded in memory together or *highly associated with the prime*. Thus information will be evaluated in close proximity with the prime (e.g. positively or negatively, depending on the affective value of the prime) at some later time, no matter how long after information was first received (for a review, see Wyer and Srull 1989: chap. 6; Fiske and Taylor 1991: 257-266).

Later on the concept was adopted by communication and political scientists, who have made a somewhat simplified use of it. In their conception, priming is essentially a 'retrieval bias',

[2] To illustrate this point, neutrality is often given a pivotal function on the Swiss foreign policy attitude continuum (e.g. Haltiner 1998: 31-32). Varying conceptions of neutrality (abolition, support for a 'differential' or 'integral' policy) mould to a great extent Swiss citizens' positions on the 'openness–autonomy' cleavage — just like socio-demographic attributes determine positions on traditional domestic cleavages.

[3] Primes may rely mainly, but not exclusively, on *explicit semantic memory*. For instance, Schacter and Buckner (1998) draw a fundamental distinction between 'perceptual' and 'conceptual' priming, and argue that while the first phenomenon is totally dissociated from explicit memory, this might not be the case with the second conceptual type, because "explicit retrieval processes may sometimes play a significant role in conceptual priming tasks" (1998: 187).

whereby frequently or recently activated memories tend to outweigh less salient or less easy-to-use information in the making of judgments about political objects; on the other hand, the assimilation and biased-encoding features of the priming process are generally neglected. Therefrom arises a second difficulty of the theory, at least as conceived in political and communication sciences. Because of its focus on the *retrieval* step of the process, this priming theory is not sufficient, in our opinion, to account for the full effect of variables mediating the *encoding* step — especially the effect of political knowledge. But introducing such variables sets out new concerns, because some of them yield opposite effects from one step of the process to the next (Iyengar and Kinder 1987: 95-6; Miller and Krosnick 2000: 303-4). On occasion, these countervailing effects may cancel one another, producing a seemingly absent or trivial net impact on priming.

What we need then is a more encompassing picture of the successive steps a piece of information must take in order to find its place among 'top-of-the-head' ideas and pervade the ingredients of political judgment. Our reasoning is that the whole process is roughly similar to the stochastic chain of psychological mechanisms outlined by specialists in the field of attitude change research, but with differential emphasis on some mediating steps. Shortly described cognitive, 'information-processing' models (e.g. McGuire 1985; Zaller 1992) posit that the path to attitude change is punctuated by a series of 'mediators', each of which is conditional on the fulfilment of the preceding. For instance to take but a simplified segment of the process, *yielding* to a message (i.e., agreeing with its conclusion) is determined by a whole host of dispositional factors but also presupposes effective *comprehension* of the message content, which in turns requires *interest* in the content, depending itself on *exposure* to the message in the first place. Some scholars have singled out 12 steps or more, leading from mere exposure to yielding, retention, recall, behaviour, or beyond. Applying these models to the case at hand, one sees easily that extensive efforts to persuade voters can be ruined by the failure to overcome a single step, because a campaign "is like a chain. It cannot be stronger than its weakest link" (Alcalay and Bell 2000: 18). Elsewhere (Marquis 2002; Marquis and Gilland Lutz, forthcoming), we have developed a fuller account of the causal chain of mediators, distinguishing seven main steps from exposure to opinionation. Very briefly our basic model claims that greatest effects on attitudes and opinions follow from the stochastic, multiplicative impact of some variable of interest on each successive step in the information-processing chain. At the same time the model allows for some mediators to occur non-se-

quentially (for instance, sometimes the process goes backwards from interest to exposure), or to be skipped altogether under certain circumstances.

Now from the standpoint of *priming* theory, the importance of some mediators is reduced in comparison with more standard *persuasive* settings, while others deserve more careful consideration. To begin with we share McGuire's (1985: 286) concern that attitude research has focused too exclusively on the **yielding** mediator. There is reason to believe that a voter can retain pieces of information which she takes to be incompatible with her own values, predispositions, or knowledge (e.g. Hovland and Weiss 1951). On the other hand although getting such 'unconvincing' information is hardly relevant for the *modification* of core attitudes toward a ballot question, it does contribute to **activating** pre-existing memories and thus to 'refreshing' one's attitudes. To the extent that tastes and predispositions play a role in the priming process, it is more in shaping the set of attitudes that are acquired in the long run and can be mobilized through exposure to campaigns, as well as in directing attention to some types of news rather than others. In other words we are pointing to the fact that memory content is biased toward consistency with general underlying orientations (e.g. ideology), and that exposure and attention to novel information is partly selective (Iyengar 1990). Another reason for stressing the activation step is that accessible mental constructs play a role in the interpretation and **encoding** of new stimuli, as we argued earlier. For instance people use schemata and other mental concepts for assimilating new information, so far as these concepts have been primed with sufficient frequency or recency (e.g. Ottati and Wyer 1990; Fiske and Taylor 1991: chap. 7). We thus come to see priming as a dynamic, non-recursive, and biased process of knowledge accumulation in which contingent delivery of arguments by campaigners and chronic affective/cognitive leanings jointly determine the saliency of relevant mental constructs, which in turn guide the acquisition and activation of further beliefs.

Salient constructs also play a paramount role at the **recall** step, as they are most easily remembered or serve as *retrieval cues* to search for less accessible beliefs. For example accessible schemata are considered to bias the recall of stored information (e.g. Conover and Feldman 1984; Lodge and McGraw 1991). The same holds for salient attitudes (e.g. Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 599-604) and situational factors of the recall context (e.g. Bower 1991; Clore *et al*. 1994).[4] Such recall biases occur because of the assumed *associative structure of*

[4] According to Schacter (1996), every recollection stems from combining a mnemonic "trace" (*the engram*) with a mnemonic "guide" (*the retrieval cue*) which allows to find this trace again. The nature of recalled information

human memory (e.g. Anderson 1983; Carlston 1994). According to this view knowledge or feeling units ('nodes') are interwoven by a series of semantic, conceptual, logical, contextual, analogical, or temporal relations ('links'). Given this reticular, network-like structure, "the presentation of a certain stimulus having a particular meaning 'primes' other semantically related concepts, thus heightening the likelihood that thoughts with much the same meaning as the presentation stimulus will come to mind. It is as if the activation of the primed ideas has spread along the associative pathways to other semantically related thoughts" (Jo and Berkowitz 1994: 46). Besides, each episode of such 'spreading activation' has the 'Socratic effect' (McGuire 1960) of reinforcing utilized pathways, while neglected links and memories continue to lie dormant and decay over time.[5] As a consequence beliefs that happen to possess numerous, strong, and fluid links with top-of-the-head constructs have a higher likelihood to be recalled than less accessible beliefs.

Next if the interpretation of information — especially of *ambiguous* stimuli — is prejudiced on the meaning of salient memory elements, then this mechanism may also apply to the survey interview situation, that is, to the **opinionation** mechanism. Contrary to the usual portrayal of interviewees thoroughly searching their memory for ready-to-use responses, a 'reactive' (and maybe defensive) attitude to survey questions is probably prevalent. In fact many respondents have a hard time just trying to make sense of the questions posed to them, and struggle to "construct sensible answers" on the spot, or use 'satisficing' devices (e.g. Krosnick and Alwin 1987). It is no surprise then that various elements of the response context, including the questions themselves, concur in *priming the ingredients of poll answers* — if not simply providing them.[6] But from the angle of this study, the specific question of *voting motives* raised by pollsters is probably conducive to more endogenous recollection biases. Imagine a voter holding no instantly accessible opinion as to why she voted 'yes' or 'no' on a

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thus depends on the connection between encoding and retrieval contexts: "the specific way a person thinks about, or encodes, an event determines what "gets into" the engram, and the likelihood of later recalling the event depends on the extent to which a retrieval cue reinstates or matches the original encoding. Explicit remembering always depends on the similarity or affinity between encoding and retrieval processes" (Schacter 1996: 60).

[5] Following "selectionist" models of human brain (e.g. Edelman and Tononi 2000), the synaptic links allowing for the activation of beliefs (or neurons altogether) disappear if they are not 'excited' over a long period of time. This basic representation is shared by different models accounting for the natural decay of human memory, or for memory 'interference' mechanisms — whereby the acquisition of new information about an object can accelerate the forgetting of old beliefs (see Anderson 1995: 198-211; Schacter 1996: 72-81; Sikström and Jaber 2002).

[6] Tendencies such as 'acquiescence', 'social desirability', 'framing' and other types of response biases have long been documented by survey researchers (for a review, see Krosnick 1999; Tourangeau *et al*. 2000).

ballot measure.[7] This voter might well be tempted to *rationalize* her decision — in order to please the interviewer or value herself — and may choose an answer from whichever apparently meaningful justifications pop up to her mind. In some cases this way of doing is all the more straightforward as the respondent may judge from the ease with which an idea comes to mind that it has intrinsic value, in a manner reminiscent of the 'availability heuristic' outlined by Tversky and Kahneman (1973; Schwarz and Vaughn 2002). In other cases, a voter's rationalizations can be driven by her *own* responses about related topics (e.g. Tourangeau *et al*. 1989; Todorov 2000). Depending on what the person has answered, for example, to previous questions pointing to her knowledge of the ballot or to her affective judgment of key issues, she may be driven (more or less consciously) to hold some *consistency* between her responses and to retrieve evaluatively congruent memories (e.g. Hastie and Park 1986; Lacy 2001).[8]

But in any case, such 'biased' reports are usually *not* random: they still reflect the interpretative, heuristic role of salient constructs that have been primed during the campaign (or which belong to the set of 'structural' issues pervading the public). At least in the perspective of this study, it does not really matter how closely or loosely these reports relate to the *actual* motivations of one's voting decision. To be sure alleged "motives" might be very misleading at times, for instance if they were induced by some peripheral aspect of the survey question, yet they do not come out of nowhere. Even merely rationalizing opinions are generally elicited by 'real' internalised beliefs; they do reveal something of citizens' memory content, and of information potentially acquired during referendum campaigns. In the end this is what priming theory is all about; its purpose is not to ascertain the 'fidelity' or 'truth' of political judgment. Of course *experimental* studies can get a more reliable picture of the underlying factors of voting by making priming unobtrusive and controlling with precision the nature and quantity of incoming information. This is impossible for either survey researchers (and for

[7] For example, her decision may date back for several months, or may stem from shallow reasons she does not remember (e.g. recommendation from a party or friend). Or else, if people evaluate political objects '*on-line*', without storing the first-hand information into long-term memory (e.g. Lodge *et al*. 1989; Mackie and Asuncion 1990), a voter may well quickly forget the original reasons that motivated her vote.

[8] This kind of rationalization may happen in particular when affective evaluations of ballot issues *precede* voting motives in the questionnaire, and when the cognitive basis of evaluations is not immediately accessible in memory (see Lodge *et al*. 1995: 311). Then the formation of subsequent opinions may proceed from the logic of 'biased retrieval models', whereby prior judgments have the potential to bias recall toward evaluatively *consistent* cognitions (Hastie and Park 1986: 260). Besides some specialists underline that consistency is implicitly solicited by opinion surveys; according to Biocca, "self-report methodology by its very nature and structure invites the respondent to give meaning to his or her behavior. The very act of responding is an invitation to rationalize one's behavior, to create attitudinal 'causes' for one's actions" (1988: 58). More generally, post-hoc rationalization may be encouraged by the deep rooting of 'rational thinking' in the Western culture (Abelson 1996: 32-3).

this study in particular), or for political actors vying to impose 'their' issues on both the campaign and voters' agendas. Nevertheless, electoral campaigns are most likely "organized with priming in mind" (Kinder 1998: 182).

To sum up we may distinguish *seven essential steps* in the priming process. First, **exposure** to the campaign information about ballot issues must take place for any of the next steps to occur. Second, effective **reception** of an argument depends, among other things, on a citizen paying sufficient attention to it and comprehending it. Third, **yielding** to the persuasive content of an argument may occur, in which case it modifies — fundamentally or marginally — the attitude the person possesses about the issue in question. To do so however, requires a fourth step where accepted information undergoes **encoding** in memory, whereby the centrality, stability, and other features of the new 'engram' depend in part on the depth of processing at previous stages (see below). Fifth, a stored belief may experience an **activation** process through the reception of directly or indirectly related material, with the consequence of reinforcing its links with other constructs and heightening its likelihood of being recalled at some later time. Sixth, the **retrieval** step occurs when information is recovered from long-term memory and deposited into working memory, occupying the person's present thoughts. Finally, **opinionation** represents a conceptually distinct step (though empirically difficult to separate) from retrieval, as 'sampling', 'editing', and other processes combine retrieved ideas with elements of the response context to produce survey answers.[9]

2.2. Moderators of priming

Now coming to terms with the individual-level variables affecting the magnitude and direction of priming effects — the 'moderators' of priming[10] — we believe that identifying these variables is a theoretical as much an empirical matter. If one conceives of priming effects as a behavioural and opinionation 'satisficing' bias, whereby a person restricts the ba-

[9] Besides we might add that our model does not specify a particular mediator for the carrying out of *behaviours*. To be sure behaviour is conceived as a partial outcome of the causal chain presented thus far. In fact it is quite common to view behaviours, and especially voting, as best predicted by proximate causes such as opinions, perceptions, preferences, and other psychological variables — the "funnel of causality" perspective (e.g. Campbell *et al*. 1960: 24-32; Miller and Shanks 1996). However since behaviours are *not directly measured* by survey methods, but rather *inferred from self-reports*, in our model they are given quite the same status as opinions. As sketched above, opinionation itself is a form of behaviour; it is largely a *constructive process*, not a mere 'revealing' of pre-existing and ready-to-tell attitudes (see Zaller and Feldman 1992; Tourangeau *et al*. 2000).

[10] We borrow the distinction between 'mediators' and 'moderators' of priming from Miller and Krosnick (2000), who themselves ascribe it to the work of Baron and Kenny.

sis of her thoughts and actions on just the few considerations that come most easily to mind, variables like issue knowledge and affective involvement may well play the primary role. In such an account of priming, people least concerned and least knowledgeable about an issue are logically the designated victims of accessibility biases. However research has shown that phenomena affected by priming effects range far beyond opinionation or decision-making situations. Indeed we may imagine a continuum of phenomena ranging from basic physiological processes (e.g. perception) to more articulate judgmental processes (e.g. verbal evaluation). Besides independently from this distinction, we may contrast wholly unconscious processes with more controlled ones. In short the moderators of priming effects most probably extend beyond the few variables shown to directly affect the mix of considerations coming to mind when making a decision or expressing an opinion.

As a matter of fact empirical analyses of priming vary in both the dependent and independent variables under study.[11] In this paper we will restrict our discussion to one category of dependent variables, namely to the priming of *issues*. However that does not make things much easier to come about. Depending on which primes and which target objects are highlighted by the empirical context or defined by researchers as the scope of their analysis, the 'moderators' of priming effects may well differ from one situation to the next. First, from the angle of the actual *empirical situation*, an electoral campaign focusing on well-identified, divisive issues imbued with strong partisan undertones would tend to put a premium on partisanship and other **predispositions**. Thus it is that some studies have identified priming as a "highly partisan phenomenon" (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995: 88), whereby a party which 'owns' an issue is often successful in priming evaluations or votes by this issue among its supporters,

[11] As concerns the *dependent* variable (i.e. the "primed" concept), it is striking that the vast majority of empirical studies have focused on the evaluation of *political leaders* (and especially of presidential candidates) in the context of *U.S. elections*. However since the 1990s, an increasing number of studies have been conducted in other countries as well (like Canada; e.g. Johnston *et al*. 1992), and the priming theory has been successfully applied to the evaluation of political *groups* (e.g. McGraw and Ling 2003), specific public *policies* (e.g. Pollock 1994), or particular *issues* (e.g. Domke *et al*. 1998). Next, regarding the independent variables (i.e. the 'primes'), one may distinguish between issues, leaders, and parties (Gidengil *et al*. 2002). In the context of political competitions, voters' evaluations might be influenced by three dimensions of *issues:* their salience (emphasized through the agenda-setting function of mass media), their valence (defined as negative vs. positive media spin), and the attribution of responsibility for 'success' and 'failure' in the handling of the issue in question (e.g. Iyengar 1991; Miller and Krosnick 2000; de Vreese 2004). Next, directly or through the portrayal of issues, the media can tap at least five characteristics of a political *candidate* that might be consequential for voters' evaluations: the candidate's trustworthiness, his competence, his electoral viability, his ideological position, or — mainly if he has been in office — his job performance (e.g. Bartels 1988; Miller and Krosnick 1996; Mendelsohn 1996). To some extent, the same dimensions also apply to the media treatment of *parties*, thereby enhancing the role of partisanship in political judgments. It may be noted that a 'hydraulic pattern' — similar to that prevailing *between issues* (see below) — seems to occur between issues, parties, and leaders, whereby the effect of one of these three ingredients of political judgments tends to mute the effect of the others (see Mendelsohn 1996; Gidengil *et al*. 2002).

but will fail to distract voters with other ideological leanings from their own concerns. In other words, under some circumstances, the media prime "most effectively those viewers who are predisposed to accept the message in the first place", because they "simply remind them of what they already know" (Iyengar and Kinder 1987: 93).

By contrast, political **knowledge** may come to play a more important role with respect to issues which are of less salience, and whose ideological implications are less easily identifiable. This is expected because knowledge has a *facilitating role* at the reception step (more knowledgeable people tend to have better perception, understanding and interest in the political messages they are exposed to, in particular when these messages are low-key), but also at the encoding and retrieval steps. Indeed political "experts" tend to be more 'schematic' than 'novices', and they possess larger stores of pre-existing beliefs that facilitate the interpretation of ambiguous information, and that help the anchoring *and* recall of new memories (e.g. Conover and Feldman 1984; Ottati and Wyer 1990; Krosnick and Brannon 1993). Along with the cognitive responses they provoke, primes will thus be better assimilated into the cognitive structure of knowledgeable people, and their activation effect on related beliefs will be more enduring, enhancing the likelihood that they will influence later evaluations. Quite different is the situation of simple or familiar issues, or issues giving way to abundant information. In this case, virtually everybody is able to perceive and interpret media messages; accordingly, political knowledge plays a lesser role at the reception step. Next, because experts have larger and better organized cognitive structures, knowledge will again tend to help the integration of primes. However because novices have more to learn about issues, and this learning process is facilitated by the easiness and/or abundance of information, the ratio of newly acquired primes to pre-existing considerations will tend to be larger, and the overall effect of knowledge will be to swamp the impact of any new encoded information. Further, this *inertial effect* of knowledge (Lodge *et al*. 1989; Zaller 1992; Holbrook *et al*. 2001)[12] may interact with political predispositions to release its *resistance effect*. Newly acquired primes may be embedded in tighter, value-ladden, mnemonic structures, to the extent that citizens are able to draw the ideological implications of messages

[12] However all specialists do not share the rationale for this inertial effect of knowledge. Advocates of "memory-based" models (e.g. Zaller 1992) argue that experts possess a high number of pre-existing beliefs which 'absorb' the impact of additional information. Proponents of 'on-line' models (e.g. Lodge *et al*. 1989) claim that experts tend to form general, on-line, impressions of political objects, which are quite insensitive to the internalisation of new beliefs in explicit memory. We personally agree with Zaller that most political judgments are probably *memory-based*, in particular in the context of *ballot objects*. At least in Switzerland, ballots proposals are voted upon about once every quarter year; they are like 'moving targets', and most likely do not afford on-line processing, or 'impression formation'.

they receive, and therefore give more meaning to information which is compatible with their own values. Other things being equal, knowledge should thus increase the accessibility and recall of 'ideologically consistent' primes.[13]

In sum, variations in the context of political communication may well explain why awareness tends to increase priming in some cases (e.g. Krosnick and Brannon 1993; Miller and Krosnick 2000), and tends to decrease priming or yields no effect in other cases (e.g. Iyengar *et al*. 1984; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Krosnick and Kinder 1990).[14] Now the 'moderators' of priming effects may also be contingent on the *scope and methods of analysis* defined by researchers. For instance the delay between the *acquisition* and the *operation* of primes has varied in empirical research, yielding contrasting results. Typically experimental studies allow for only a brief delay between exposure to priming information and evaluation of leaders; by contrast survey research implies longer periods of time. In general priming effects decrease in magnitude as a function of the amount of time between prime and stimulus (see Wyer and Srull 1989: 124-5; Fiske and Taylor 1991: 261-2; DeCoster and Claypool 2004). Accordingly factors that contribute to sustaining the accessibility of primes should minimize the decaying of priming effects. One such factor is political knowledge, possibly explaining why experts tend to exhibit smaller priming effects than novices in experimental settings — because the *resistance* function of knowledge prevails over its *retention* function — and tend to show greater effects in field settings — because in this case the retention function of knowledge prevails (Miller and Krosnick 1996).

We would expect the same pattern of effects with respect to the role of **affective involvement** in issues. By 'affective involvement' we mean the interest and personal significance attributed to an object. Involvement has been related to the *depth* of processing and to alternative *modes* of processing, namely the scrutiny and elaboration of argumentative substance vs. the use of peripheral cues such as credibility of the source or partisan endorsement of a given communication (e.g. Perloff 1985; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Chaiken 1987; Ajzen and Sexton

[13] Moreover as has long been known by attitude researchers (e.g. McGuire and Papageorgis 1962; Petty and Cacioppo 1986), the awareness of a source's intent to persuade can fuel more resistance to its messages. Similarly as knowledge probably correlates with the awareness of the influence of primes, knowledgeable people might *correct for this influence*, rather than 'assimilate' it (see DeCoster and Claypool 2004), especially when the abundance and/or one-sidedness of information arouses the suspicion as to the possibility of being 'manipulated'. Yet, whether this 'correction effect' really applies to non-experimental settings is far from obvious.

[14] In Miller and Krosnick's (2000) account, though, knowledge promoted priming only among people who trust the media. As for Krosnick and Kinder (1990: 508), they admitted that knowledge might increase the effect of more *abstract* primes.

1999). An issue of personal relevance to a person will tend to foster a more 'elaborate' or 'central' processing of messages related to this issue, mobilizing her pre-existing knowledge and values and prompting cognitive responses. By contrast, more 'peripheral' or 'heuristic' styles of processing are devoted to affectively less engaging information. As a result, information acquired under conditions of low involvement has been found to be more unstable, more susceptible to counter-argumentation, and less predictive of behaviour than information encoded under high involvement. In the short run — as in most laboratory conditions — the difference between motivated and unmotivated citizens may well be trivial. But this is less likely when some delay between exposure to prime and evaluation enhances the importance of stable, high-involvement, mental constructs.

In other words, using survey data priming effects should be maximal among involved citizens. However only those issues that a person finds of personal significance may permeate the standards of her evaluations. Besides it is unclear whether involvement may not intervene directly at the opinionation step as well. For instance, people who feel on the whole unconcerned about the issues of an election or referendum are certainly more prone to 'satisfice': they may not take into account all they know about these issues when making evaluations, but only the arguments made most accessible by their encounters with campaign information. This would precisely *enhance* priming, to the extent that such uninvolved people have been sufficiently exposed to campaign messages. Alternatively if the uninvolved are simultaneously inattentive to the campaign, their minds may be imbued with concerns or principles having little to do with the issues emphasized by the campaigners. Besides, involvement may also play a role at the yielding step, to the extent that it sets out a 'biased processing' of information rather than a more peripheral and neutral treatment (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).[15] In the end, given the lack of evidence about the role of affective involvement in the priming process, this role remains essentially an empirical question.[16]

[15] According to the *ELM* model, involvement will tend to decrease the acceptance of arguments only to the extent that they are of 'poor' quality, or if factors favouring a 'biased processing' of information are operating. Pre-existing schemata may be one such factor; the awareness of the source's persuasive intent or too frequent repetitions of a message can also lead to a biased treatment (Petty and Cacioppo 1986: 111-33). These last two factors may well be present in most campaign situations, making biased processing of information quite likely.

[16] Actually there is some evidence about the impact of the *general interest in issues*. For example, Miller and Krosnick (2000) found that assessments of the national importance of problems (i.e. 'agenda-setting') do *not* mediate priming; Iyengar and Kinder (1987) observed small (and inconsistent) effects of interest in politics or chronic political participation; de Vreese (2004) noted that interest in politics tends to decrease priming; or Krosnick and Brannon (1993) showed that interest in the Gulf War decreased priming on that issue (when tested in a multivariate analysis with knowledge and exposure). However none of these studies addressed the specific question of *personal relevance* or *affective involvement* in issues, as it is conceived in this paper.

To sum up, we have pointed out three possible moderators of priming effects: political predispositions, political knowledge, and issue involvement. Although the role of these moderators is certainly not unconditional, but often contingent on the empirical situation and on the scope and methods of analysis used by researchers, by and large they were hypothesized to intervene in the reception, yielding, encoding, activation, retrieval, and opinionation steps. Now we consider two moderators that speak more specifically to the first two steps in the global process, exposure and reception. In fact many empirical studies, and particularly survey analyses, have been unable — or unwilling — to discriminate between sheer *exposure* to a message and *attention* to it (that is, a subcomponent of our reception step). The difficulty stems from the fact that a lot of respondents fail to report exposure to a message or source because they did not pay sufficient attention to it and cannot recall it (or conversely, some respondents claim to have paid attention to messages they were *not* actually exposed to). However, although *attention* seems to be an important prerequisite for a variety of priming effects to take place, pioneer neuro-psychological research on basic priming tasks (e.g. Schacter and Buckner 1998; Magnussen and Greenlee 1999; Squire and Kandel 1999: chap. 8; Dehaene *et al*. 2002) has shown that even *subconscious* primes can set out cognitive processes, suggesting the existence of *implicit* 'perceptual' or 'semantic' memory systems. Slightly more accessible to conscious experience are phenomena implying diffuse exposure — and often inadvertent attention — to cumulative media information about grand social and cultural themes.[17]

Still more obtrusive is the way in which the mass media prime the ingredients of judgments about political leaders, parties, or issues. In this respect, typical electoral contexts (the object of most priming studies) cannot be directly compared with less structured situations like referendums, political scandals, or involvement in foreign conflicts (e.g. Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Iyengar and Simon 1993; Stoker 1993; Mendelsohn 1996; Edwards and Swenson 1997; Zaller 1998; de Vreese 2004). But if anything ambiguity might actually *enhance* the reliance on the media to make sense of uncertain situations (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1989; Blumler and Gurevitch 1996). Therefore more often than not, the level of **media exposure** has been shown to facilitate the priming of issues at stake in elections, referendums, or other political events. Indeed exceptions have been reported where media exposure tends to prime

[17] For instance it has been demonstrated how violent media content can prime aggressive scripts and ideas, and lead to hostile behavior (e.g. Jo and Berkowitz 1994; Bushman and Huesmann 2001), or how media covering the spread of AIDS disease along with homosexuality *or* heterosexuality case-stories primed the evaluation of AIDS-related policies in different ways (Pollock 1994).

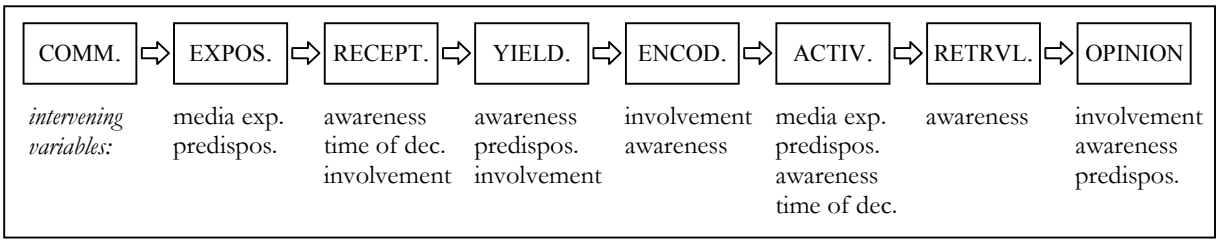
candidates' features, but not *issues* (e.g. Mendelsohn 1996; Gidengil *et al*. 2002); where experimental messages maximize priming effects already at moderate exposure levels (Iyengar *et al*. 1984); or where the media have only short-lived effects on evaluations, or no effect whatsoever (e.g. Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1998). Still other studies do not measure media exposure directly, but rather infer it from differences in the standards of evaluations that people make before and after some key event. Finally Krosnick and Brannon (1993) observed that media exposure *decreases* priming when tested in a multivariate analysis along with knowledge and interest. They argued that high media exposure (partialled out of the effect of knowledge) reduces priming, because highly exposed people absorb many additional stories and are also attentive to other domains which are peripheral to the main prime — the impact of the 'big message' is diluted. However appealing, this argument needs further empirical support to be established on firmer grounds.

Finally in the context of elections or referendums, individual differences in priming effects might be reducible to the reception step, as it is captured by the **moment of the voting decision**. In the literature on political persuasion (e.g. O'Keefe 1975; Chaffee and Choe 1980; Chaffee and Rimal 1996; but see Fournier *et al*. 2004), it has been shown that people taking an early decision (i.e. before the outset of the campaign or in its first stage) tend afterwards to shift their attention or to selectively process new information, and thus become relatively impervious to messages delivered subsequently to their decision. In contrast, people putting off their decision until the last moment also fail to attend much of the campaign, and thus base their vote on reasons that often have little to do with the issue emphases of campaigners. Third, citizens who take their decision *during* the campaigns (i.e. neither too early nor too late) are probably the most exposed and attentive to them, and the most susceptible to persuasive appeals. Quite clearly the mechanism thought to be involved in this trichotomous account of persuasive effects is the *attention* to political messages. Therefore it equally applies to the study of priming effects, whereby we expect the 'campaign deciders' to be more sensitive to elite treatment of issues than are the 'early deciders' and 'late deciders' (see Hayes 2002). Besides as is the case of media exposure, we expect the degree of attention to be also involved in the *activation* step.

To sum up, we have outlined five potential moderators of priming effects. First, the level of knowledge (or '**awareness**') of issues is assumed to facilitate priming by regulating the reception, yielding, encoding, activation, retrieval, and opinionation steps. Although

awareness might have opposite effects in some steps (possibly at the yielding step with familiar and well-publicized issues), its pervasive impact throughout most information-processing stages may produce the biggest effect of all investigated moderators. Second, political **predispositions** are expected to constrain priming as they intervene in the exposure, yielding, activation, and opinionation steps; people should be most likely primed on issues that are consistent with their own political leanings. Third, affective **involvement** is expected to play a role at the reception and encoding steps (and possibly, but oppositely, at the yielding and opinionation steps as well), leading to a consolidation of primes. Fourth, **media exposure** should facilitate priming effects by increasing exposure to, and activation of, primes. Fifth, the **time of voting decision** is assumed to measure attention to campaign messages, and therefore to regulate the reception and activation of primes; in this regard, campaign deciders should be primed more effectively than early and late deciders. The whole sequence of mechanisms, each one with its possible moderators, is displayed in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: The theoretical model



Recently several empirical studies have focused on the interactive effects of different *moderators*, suggesting at the same time the importance of distinguishing between *mediators* of priming. Thus the model presented above does justice to the new orientations in the priming literature. However we also consciously neglect other possible moderators in the process — like interpersonal communications or trust in the media (see Mendelsohn 1996; Miller and Krosnick 2000; Gidengil *et al*. 2002). Similarly the operational model presented below does not account for the role of the accessibility and 'applicability' of primes (see Miller and Krosnick 1996, 2000; Todorov 2000; DeCoster and Claypool 2004). Thus, for example, we do not directly investigate whether accessibility does really mediate priming — a basic, and often unquestioned, assumption which has recently come under harsh scrutiny (Miller and Krosnick 2000). But as will soon become clear, the very nature of our empirical

data requires a singular operational design, which makes comparison with previous work anyway difficult to perform.

3. Operationalization

Before presenting our operational model, it is necessary to briefly describe the empirical situation investigated in the ensuing sections of the paper, as well as the empirical data at our disposal. This is all the more necessary as some peculiarities in the object of analysis will require departures from usual priming studies, both in the operational design and in the measurement procedures.

3.1. Empirical situation and data

Our investigation of priming effects shall focus on three votes about European integration that took place between 1992 and 2001 in Switzerland. The first vote, in December 1992, referred to whether or not Switzerland should join the European Economic Area, a label used to denote a range of (at that time) non-EU Western countries such as Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Austria, which sought a more regularized relationship with the EU without becoming members. The EEA provided full access to the common market without granting the EEA countries a place at the EU's decision-making table. The Swiss government supported the bid for Switzerland to become part of the EEA, and the result of the referendum was a 'no' (the vote was almost 50-50 per cent, but a majority of cantons had 'no' results). The second vote, in May 2000, was about the 'Bilateral Agreements' concluded between Switzerland and the EU. These agreements contained seven dossiers: research collaboration; public procurement; technical barriers to trade; agricultural policy; civil aviation; land transport through the Alps; and the free movement of people. Again the Swiss government supported a 'yes' decision, and this time it got its way (67 per cent 'yes'; 33 per cent 'no').[18] The third vote, in March 2001, asked whether the Swiss people wanted the government to reactivate the Swiss EU membership application that had been lodged in 1992, and suspended shortly thereafter, after the EEA referendum debacle. The government did not support this initiative, which — like most other initiatives — failed at the urns (23 per cent 'yes'; 77 per cent 'no'; all cantons 'no').

[18] A huge majority of cantons (21 against 2) voted 'yes'; however, the project did not require the double majority of people and cantons, and the clear majority of the people was enough to secure the government's victory.

To get a most accurate picture of what issues the mass media emphasized in the period before the three referendums, we drew on campaign advertisements published in the Swiss press during the four weeks preceding each ballot (for a full account of data collection, see Marquis 2002: chap. 5). Six newspapers, three in each of the two main linguistic regions — German-speaking and French-speaking — were selected to make a sample of Swiss newspapers.[19] Although this sample is by no means representative in a statistical sense, it does cover a political and spatial landscape which is as broad as possible. Next, our decision to focus on political *ads* diffused by campaigners, rather than on news or editorials, was based on the assumption that ads were more representative of the opinions and issues stressed in the campaigns at large than were reports and views of journalists. Somehow in light of the 'gate-keeping' function of journalists (see Patterson 1998; Jamieson and Cappella 2000), political ads constitute a more 'egalitarian' means of expression and diffusion of ideas. Thus all kinds of actors (e.g. parties, ad hoc committees, trade unions, economic associations, clubs, business enterprises, environmental groups, etc.) were represented among advertisers — including simple citizens who were responsible for more than 25% of ads in all three campaigns. Besides the three ad campaigns were of *considerable intensity*, if one may judge from the total size of ads in comparison with the size measured for other campaigns.[20] In other words, the likelihood is comparatively high that a variety of issues will arise along with the involvement of a variety of actors, and the issues of the campaigns at large (as featured in TV or radio programs, in direct mailing, in street posters, in letters to the editors, and the like) are possibly better reflected by ads than by any other medium alone. Admittedly however, we cannot rule out that the reliance on ads occasionally 'misses the mark', and so may sometimes constitute a reductionist account of campaign issues.[21]

With these caveats in mind, we collected all ads published in the six aforementioned newspapers during the four weeks before the ballots, yielding a total of 1698 ads for all three

[19] For German Switzerland: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Tages-Anzeiger*, and *Blick*. For French Switzerland: *Journal de Genève* (in 1992) / *Le Temps* (in 2000 and 2001), *Tribune de Genève*, and *Le Matin*. *Le Temps* replaced *Journal de Genève*, because the latter disappeared in 1998. The choice of these six newspapers was driven by considerations of representativity and diversity of opinion: in each region, one newspaper leans to the right, one of them leans to the centre-left, while the last one is a tabloid without clear political orientation (for more details, see Marquis 2002).

[20] With total surfaces of 267'462 cm^2, 40'478 cm^2, and 50'558 cm^2, respectively, the campaigns on the EEA, Bilateral Agreements, and 'Yes to Europe' initiative rank among the top decile of ads campaign sizes for all ballots hold at the federal level between June 1981 and June 1999. We wish to thank Hanspeter Kriesi (University of Zürich) for giving us access to this data.

[21] For example, if journalists collectively have priorities that are quite different from the aggregate agenda of political actors, and if journalists do not see the transmittal and representation of 'public opinion' as part of their job (see Bennett 1989; Tipton 1992; King and Schudson 1995), then reciprocally, political ads would not reflect the (supposedly) important role of journalists in priming the campaign issues.

campaigns. This data shows that the three campaigns evolved in various ways and at different rates, with different configurations of actors taking part in them. In 1992 the EEA ballot triggered an amazingly heated political debate. On average about 8 ads were placed in each paper each day, with a total surface amounting to 210 full newspaper pages over the last four weeks of the campaign. Such a degree of involvement was never seen before in the history of Swiss direct democracy and will probably not be equalled for a long time — the very high participation at the polls (79 %) confirms this account. Although many more ads issued a 'no' than a 'yes' vote recommendation (about 70 % against 30 %), the situation was more balanced in terms of ads surface and money spending (about 50 percent of the total surface is to be credited to each camp). On both sides the campaign gained in intensity from the first to the fourth week (from 10 to 162 ads among supporters, from 80 to 358 ads among opponents); however opponents of the project maintained a substantial lead all over the campaign (see Figure 3.1). All kinds of advertisers took part in the battle, ranging from simple citizens to 'ad-hoc committees' (i.e. committees that are usually created for the single purpose of fighting the campaign), 'partisan committees' (i.e. committees with the backing of one or several political parties), enterprises, or sectorial interest groups such as trade unions, economic associations, or the influential *Association for a neutral and independent Switzerland*.[22] In comparison political parties were responsible for only 4 percent of ads, which suggests that their presence was completely overshadowed by the involvement of other actors. As for the Swiss government, its own interpretation of jurisprudence holds that it never should get directly involved in advertising campaigns (see Goetschel 1994; Germann 1996).

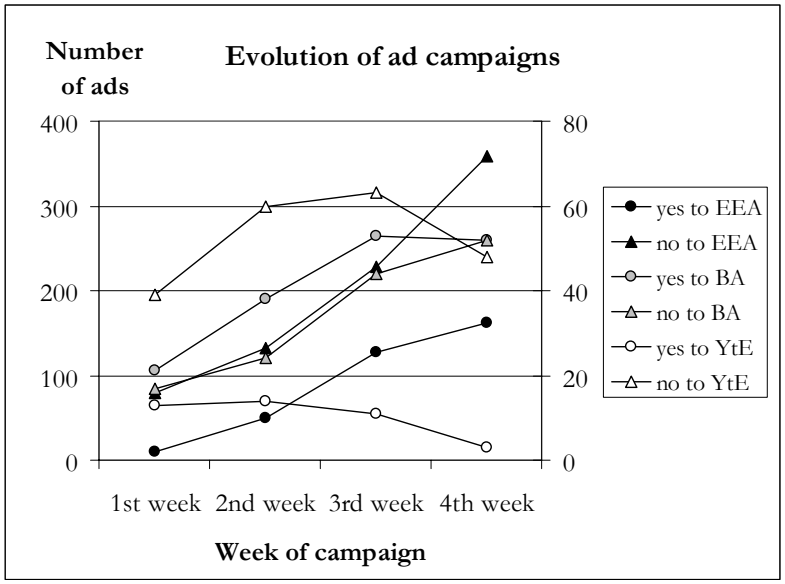
In 2000 the campaign about the Bilateral Agreements was dominated by 'ad-hoc committees'; more or less well-known individuals who took out ad space; politicians; and 'partisan committees'.[23] 55 per cent of the ads advocated a 'yes' vote; moreover among all major types of campaigners there was a majority of 'yes' ads — sometimes greater than 90 per cent (partisan committees, politicians, and sectorial interest groups). In overall terms the campaign

[22] 26% of all ads were placed by simple citizens (alone or with other actors), 40% by sectorial interest groups (i.e. economic associations, trade unions, military organizations, business enterprises, environmental groups, confessional groups, the *Association for a neutral and independent Switzerland*, the *Group for a Switzerland without army*), 25% by ad-hoc committees, and 11% by partisan committees — the total percentage exceeds 100 because it was common that more than one actor was behind an ad; the same remark applies to the figures for the other votes provided below.

[23] The ads were primarily sponsored by the following categories of actors: 'ad-hoc committees' (38% of ads); individuals (27%); politicians (24%); 'partisan committees' (18%); sectorial interest groups (17%); political parties (14%); and societies and clubs (13%). As for the other two campaigns, the advertisers originated from all over Switzerland, with an emphasis on the federal capital Bern and the big cities Geneva and Zürich, where sizeable proportions of the population live and where it is natural for parties, associations, and other groups, to have their basis.

grew more intense the closer time drew to the date of the vote (see Figure 3.1). As was the case of the EEA, this pattern may be typical of vote situations where the outcome is rather unclear, and where campaigners may feel that the battle can be won or lost until the last moment. They may have been right to feel this way: in the 2000 campaign the polls leading up to the referendum did show a diminishing 'yes' lead as time drew closer to voting day: during the four years preceding the vote, when the Swiss government negotiated the Bilateral Agreements with the EU, a solid 70 per cent majority of people claimed in opinion polls that they would definitely vote 'yes' to the Agreements (compared to around 20 per cent definite 'no' voters and 10 per cent undecided; see GfS 2000). However between April and May — the time just before the vote — a 72 per cent majority dropped to the low sixties in the last polls, whereas the referendum outcome itself, as mentioned above, was somewhere in between these figures: 67 per cent 'yes'.

Figure 3.1 : Evolution in the number of ads, by campaign and side taken



Notes:
EEA: European Economic Area.
BA: Bilateral Agreements between Switzerland and the EU.
YtE: Initiative 'Yes to Europe'.
The left-hand axis refers to the EEA; the right-hand axis refers to the two other votes.

In 2001 individuals were the most arduous campaigners by quite a margin, followed by political parties and ad-hoc committees.[24] 16 per cent of the ads favoured a 'yes' result, and only ads emanating from ad-hoc committees were on balance (52 per cent) favourable to the 'Yes to Europe' initiative. The campaign trajectory was almost perfectly symmetrical: 20 per cent of ads appeared in the first week, and then the campaign peaked in intensity in weeks two

[24] The main advertisers were: individuals (37%), political parties (24%), ad-hoc committees (21%), politicians (17%), and sectorial interest groups (14%).

and three (30 per cent of ads each week). The intensity level then fell back down to 20 per cent in the final week before the vote. However the 'no' campaign dominated each of the four weeks.[25] Incidentally this trend parallels the shrinking of support for the initiative in the population, as revealed by a series of opinion polls (see Longchamp 2001).

The overall picture that emerges from the structure of ad campaigns is very helpful to understand the context in which citizens took their voting decisions. However this data does not address the question of the 'ingredients' of these decisions — ideological, symbolic, utilitarian, or otherwise. Thus we content-analysed the ads, coding the issues that were addressed in the texts. In this we followed a procedure devised to make the coding of *issues* comparable to the coding of *voting motives* in the survey data, our second main data source. Before we embark on the description of the procedure, we briefly comment on the general features of our survey data. As it happens, Swiss citizens can vote on one or more issues about once every quarter, and a survey is routinely carried out in the two weeks following the votes. These so-called 'Vox surveys' (quota-sampled to reflect linguistic regions, gender, professions, dwelling place, and age groups) contain many more or less standardized questions. These standard items ask about people's level of interest in the issues, their knowledge about them, about what sources of information they used to make their voting decision, what point in time they made up their minds about how to vote, about their voting motives, and so on. Besides, for the three EU-related votes in 1992, 2000, and 2001, there were also questions about people's general attitude toward Switzerland's eventual accession to the European Union. Thus data from the Vox surveys offers the advantage of a rather high degree of cross-temporal comparability.

3.2. Operational design

To sum up, we have two data sets available. The first pertains to the relative importance of campaign issues; that is, it informs us of the potential 'primes'. The second data set consists of individual data measuring the 'moderators' of priming and the judgments that have supposedly been primed during the campaign. Media priming theory asserts that exposure to an issue primed by the mass media enhances the weight of this issue among the criteria that people use for making judgments about candidates, policies, or other political objects. The

[25] In the first week, three quarters (75 per cent) of ads were 'no' ads. Four fifths (81 per cent) were 'no' ads in the second week, and in the third week that figure grew to 85 per cent. In the final week before the vote 94 per cent of ads were 'no' ads.

empirical situation investigated in this study is quite particular though. To begin with the objects of evaluation are the ballot proposals voted upon by Swiss citizens — not candidates or parties. Then in contrast with most priming studies, we have no available data to determine how *issue-specific* evaluations of a ballot (where the 'issues' would be those stressed by the campaign) influence its *overall* evaluations (i.e. votes). Instead we possess data about the *voting motives* reported by respondents. Using an open-ended question ("What are the main reasons why you accepted/refused [title of ballot]? And what else?"), a maximum of two such motives were gathered.

Therefrom, a proper inference from priming theory would be that people tend to use more motives relating to issues that were stressed by the campaign — to the extent that people were exposed to the campaign in the first place. This is because encounters with campaign information have the effect of reinforcing the accessibility of some arguments and issues to the detriment of others. Inattentive people, on the other hand, should mention a higher proportion of issues which the campaign did not tackle, or addressed only peripherally. This '**hydraulic pattern**' (Rogers and Dearing 1988; Iyengar and Simon 1993; Miller and Krosnick 1996) develops because there is a more or less *fixed amount of attentional capacity* within each individual cognitive system. As some issues come to the fore and catch the attention of citizens, other issues are pushed into their cognitive background. Hence we premise our operational design on this hydraulic pattern, and hypothesize that, in comparison with more 'immune' citizens, 'victims' of priming — so defined by the moderators' analysis performed above — will report more arguments that were stressed in the media and less arguments that were downplayed or entirely ignored.

The next matter is how to relate voting motives to campaign issues. Our reasoning was that categories for voting motives cannot be changed,[26] and that the only possible adjustments are to be made to the coding of campaign issues. Our coding sheet was thus determined by the number and nature of voting motives categories as they were defined in the Vox surveys' codebook. In a number of cases we had to collapse two or more categories, because the short descriptives for each response modality meant it was difficult to clearly distinguish between intrinsically different issues or arguments. But to our own surprise, the procedure did not yield more 'residual' cases (i.e. issues or contextual information that could not be assigned to

[26] Our request to the institute in charge of data collection for obtaining the original open-ended responses was not successful.

any of the existing categories) than the survey responses themselves.[27] In this way, we got two identical lists of issues with their respective importance for campaigners and for voters (see Appendix).

We then applied a correlational analysis to the series of data for each ballot and for each side taken by campaigners and voters — the 'yes' side and the 'no' side. The aim of this analysis was to assess the overall *congruity* of voting motives with campaign arguments, and to determine whether differences exist in that respect between the three ballots, between supporters and opponents of the ballot proposals, as well as between the two main linguistic regions. Pearsonian correlations were chosen, though ordinal rank-order correlations were also tested and yielded much the same results.[28] What the correlations express is the degree to which the prominence structure among campaign issues matches the corresponding structure amongst voting motives. High positive values are attained when voters' justifications roughly 'resonate' with the media's focal attention to 'top issues' *and* parallel the media's neglect of other issues. By contrast near-zero values are reached when the comparison of structures expresses at best random congruity, while high negative values signal a campaign which was unable to distract voters from their pre-existing rationale to judge the ballots and failed to attract them to its own standards of evaluation.

Before we go on, an important caveat is in point. On the whole one should exercise caution in interpreting the correlation coefficients of the sort proposed here. For one thing, these measures are certainly not devoid of artifactual influences. First, due to the aggregation of the data, the risk of ecological fallacy cannot be ruled out. A second artifact may pertain to the mere number of items used in our correlational analysis. All other things equal, a higher number of discrete categories for arguments and motives should tendencially *decrease* the strength of correlations (Rogers and Dearing 1988: 574). However as we shall see, such asymmetries cannot be invoked for explaining differences in priming effects between supporters and op-

[27] On average (across the three campaigns × two sides) 7.8% of the total weight of arguments were not assignable to pre-existing categories, while 8.6% of voting motives were similarly unclassifiable. Not coded altogether were mere vote recommendations (e.g., 'vote yes'), indications about the state of public opinion (e.g. 'the Swiss are wise and will vote no'), appeals to turn out at the polls (e.g. 'the ballot is of extreme importance'), negative assessments about opponents, comments on the unfolding of the campaign, and other non-substantive information.

[28] If anything, rank-order (Spearman's rho) correlations tended to accentuate the differences between ballots, between sides, and between subgroups of voters. However these statistics are extremely sensitive to the smallest variations in the numerical values of the original, non-ranked, categories, so that the slightest unrepresentativeness of the ads-based media content may have worse consequences than in the case of Pearsonian correlations (which minimize the risk that miniscule differences yield markedly different correlations).

ponents of ballot reforms. A third artifact could originate in sampling error and other problems associated with the measurement of voting motivations. In this regard, it may be argued that the smaller *Ns* for the French-speaking region render the inference of the electorate's real motives from the survey data more hazardous and unstable. Finally, a fourth possible artifact, namely the biased measurement of campaigns through reductionist focus on advertisements, has already been discussed in the previous section; of course it does not help circumvent the residual uncertainty inherent in our data.

Admittedly aggregate, correlational evidence is potentially flawed with inferential problems, thus limiting the persuasiveness and significance of our results. Therefore we limited the use of correlational analysis to the assessment of overall congruity levels between campaign arguments and voting motives, and to rough comparisons between ballots, sides (yes vs. no), and regions. In order to establish the influence of *moderators* of priming effects, we focused on individual data — using correlational analysis as an alternative method mainly to enhance the confidence in our results. To capture the effect of moderators, we first replaced the (arbitrary) codes of voting motives by the rank order of the corresponding issues in the media hierarchy. Then applying OLS regression, we were able to determine if the possible moderators of priming did really induce people to justify their votes with issues that ranked higher in the priorities of campaigners. As the analysis will suggest, our design is a helpful exploratory tool for detecting causes of variation in issues-motives congruity — if not priming effects directly.

3.3. Measurement

Beginning with the precise measurement of **campaign arguments**, let us first describe how the *relative importance* of arguments was quantitatively assessed. Using a qualitative text analysis program, we were able to code the arguments; meanwhile the program automatically imputed to each *text* and to each *argument* two numerical addresses corresponding to its starting line and its ending line. We thus possess information about the length of an argument, the proportion of a given text which is devoted to that argument (PROPARG), and the relative position of the argument in the text (POSITION). By combining the PROPARG and POSITION measures, we created a first weighting index (POND1), whose purpose is to approximate the 'internal' prominence of an argument or issue (i.e. in relation with other information in the

same ad).[29] Next, each argument was multiplied by the number of its occurrences in the investigated newspapers. Then a second weighting index (POND2) took into consideration the size of each ad, that is, the *visibility* of each argument. In keeping with the literature on the mechanisms of public attention and response (e.g. Neuman 1990; Price and Zaller 1993; Stewart and Ward 1994), a *logarithmic function* was used to implement the idea that marginal returns of an increase in ad size are generally diminishing.[30] Finally all weighted arguments of one particular type were added; repeating the same procedure for each issue yielded the list used for our correlational analysis (see Appendix).

The second component of this analysis consists of the **voting motives** reported by respondents. Only voters (i.e. respondents who indicated that they had taken part in the ballot) were included in the analysis, thus excluding the 'virtual' motives of non-voters. The data for voting motives is made of the absolute number of voters classified in the different categories of motives. Although the numerical basis is not the same as for campaign issues, this is irrelevant for the computation of correlations, since in that respect only the relative importance of categories matters.

Coming now to the *moderators* of priming effects, it may be recalled that five such variables were singled out in our theoretical model. First, for lack of better indicators, **media exposure** was measured by the number of different media respondents reported having used to get information about the ballot proposals. 12 different media were included in the Vox questions, namely: newspaper articles; radio; television; information booklets issued by the government; prints; advertisements in newspapers; street posters; letters to the editor; street stands; direct mailing; discussions at the workplace; Internet (for the EEA: flyers). The variable ranges from

[29] Based on research about 'primacy' and 'recency effects' (for a review, see Anderson 1978; Schenk 1987; Gunter 1987: chap. 8), we gave the highest weight to arguments appearing early in a text, and the least weight to arguments appearing in the middle of a text. The values of POSITION varying between 0 and 1, we constrained our index to satisfy the following conditions: $f(0)=1$; $f(0.5)= 0.5$; $f(1)=0.75$. The resolution of the corresponding equations yielded a rule of thumb of the type $1.5x^2 - 1.75x + 1$, which was then applied to the real values for POSITION. After fitting numerical values to the actual maximal text length, and after setting a minimal threshold to avoid negative and tiny values, the ensuing index varies between 0.25 and 1. The final index POND1 is obtained by adding the values of PROPARG to this last index; eventual values are comprised between 0.27 and 2.00.

[30] Given the initial distribution of ads size (comprised between 12 cm^2 and 2560 cm^2), a logarithmic function was defined so that all transformed values range between 1 and 10: POND2=3.8643×[log10(size)]-3.1703. Note that in contrast to other studies, we do not use a *logistic* function, because we do not hypothesize the existence of a 'takeoff point'. Our rationale is that, at least among voters, virtually everybody knows what the main issue is — the upcoming ballot vote — and that no particular stimulation is required to attract the reader's attention to the mere existence of that issue. Even the smallest ad will evoke the perspective of the future ballot, provided that it has been *seen* — the probability of which is lower than for larger ads, according to our second weighting index.

0 to 12, and was recoded into two categories: 0 to 5 media used; 6 to 12 media used. On this basis, 59% of voters in the whole sample qualify as 'little exposed' and 41% as 'quite exposed'.

Second, as suggested above, *attention to the campaign* was measured by the **time of voting decision**. The variables 'campaign' and 'late', together with the reference category 'early', are dummy variables indicating when voters made their voting decision: early (before the campaign got really started), during the campaign, or quite late.[31] About 52% of voters are classified as 'early deciders', 34% as 'campaign deciders', and 14% as 'late deciders'.

For the operationalization of **predispositions**, we deliberately avoided using variables that specifically and directly addressed the issue of European integration or EU accession. Instead we used a 6-point bipolar scale indicating whether people favoured Switzerland's openness to the outside world or preferred to defend domestic traditions. We then recoded the responses into two categories of approximately equal importance — in the whole sample for the three votes, 50% of voters are classified as 'pro-EU' and 50% as 'anti-EU'.[32]

Our measure of **political awareness** was made from a standardized index of background knowledge about the vote issues, ranging between 1 (very low) and 4 (very high).[33] This index was simply recoded into two equivalent categories: 'unaware' voters (1-2) and 'aware' voters (3-4). About 63% of voters in the total sample are classified as 'aware', and 37% as 'unaware'.

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[31] 'Early deciders' are people whose voting decision was 'clear from the beginning', i.e. was made more than six weeks before the vote. 'Late deciders' took their decision in the last week of the campaign. 'Campaign deciders' took their decision between one and six weeks before the vote.

[32] For the EEA vote in 1992, the openness vs. traditions item was not available. Therefore we resorted to other indicators, namely an item asking how frequently the respondent considers herself as a European citizen (often, sometimes, never) and an item asking if the Swiss government's European policy is 'too active', 'about right', or 'too cautious'. Combining the responses to these questions and recoding them into two categories yielded 53% of rather 'anti-EU' voters and 47% of rather 'pro-EU' voters.

[33] This index relies on questions about the title of the ballot (0: unknown; 1: known), about the content of the object (0: no valid answer; 1: one feature known; 2: two features known), about the governmental vote recommendation (0: unknown; 1: known), about specific aspects of the project's content (0 to 8 aspects known), or about the capacity to motivate one's vote decision (0 to 1 motive given). Since these questions were not systematically posed for the three ballots, here are the variables used for each ballot: EEA: title, content, government's position, motivation. BA: content, specific questions. YtE: title, content, motivation. After summation of the scores on each question, the index was recoded so as to obtain four categories of comparable size. This was possible only to some extent, given the small number of original values; for the EEA and YtE data the final index is clearly skewed toward higher values.

Finally, our measure of affective **involvement** was created from a question asking respondents how personally important a vote issue was to them.[34] Responses in the bottom half of the scale (1-5) were recoded into an 'uninvolved' voters category, while the other half (6-10) was assigned to 'involved' voters. 65% of voters in the total sample are classified as 'involved'.

4. Empirical results

The presentation of our empirical results will unfold in two parts. First, we give an overview of the structure of campaign issues and voting motives in the three EU-related ballot votes. In doing so, we provide first indications about the overall capacity of campaigns to yield priming effects. Second, we introduce the moderator variables into the analysis. Using OLS regression we show that some moderators of priming *do* enhance the congruity of campaign issues and voting motives, while other moderators seem to play a minor role.

4.1. The dominance principle

As a rule, ballots on Swiss foreign policy trigger heated campaigns. Most of the time these contests have brought to light the dominant position of isolationist actors in terms of financial resources and media presence, even though the proposals were usually supported by a clear majority of the parliamentary and partisan elite (Kriesi *et al*. 1993; Marquis 1997). But more importantly, the evidence shows that opponents to the reforms capitalize on their strong advertising position to win the battle of *arguments*. Too-close-to-call money races like the EEA or the Swiss Blue Helmet Force project (1994) were definitely settled by means of arguments, narratives, or images (Schneider and Hess 1995; Marquis 2002: chap. 7). Even the Bilateral Agreements with the EU, which were able to coalesce a broad array of interests and thus to achieve obvious campaign dominance, are still not an exception to the rule: opponents

[34] Unfortunately the question wording for this survey item changed slightly between surveys (1992 was somewhat different from 2000 and 2001). As is well-known, slight wording changes can have non-negligible but hard-to-estimate effects. We assume that in this instance, the effect may have been to reduce the number of people who fell into the 'found vote issue important' category in 1992 compared to the other years — although the EEA campaign was much more intense and the turnout was much higher than in the two subsequent votes, suggesting that the project was deemed more important in the population at large. Therefore it seems peculiar that the 'involved' category in 1992 has a comparatively low number of people, and we put the reason down to the question wording changes.

were able to make up for their trailing position in the media by delivering far more arguments for their side (Duding 2001).

Table 4.1: Volume of campaign advertisements and arguments in Swiss press

	German-speaking region		French-speaking region	
	Ads number / surface (m^2)	Argum. number / weight (POND2)	Ads number / surface (m^2)	Argum. number / weight (POND2)
Yes to EEA (12/1992)	254 / 10.27	641/ 4603	94 / 2.74	328 / 2275
No to EEA (12/1992)	605 / 10.67	2278 / 13'656	193 / 3.07	674 / 4654
Yes to BA (05/2000)	85 / 1.57	131 / 741	79 / 0.88	102 / 554
No to BA (05/2000)	46 / 0.87	215 / 1212	91 / 0.72	279 / 1212
Yes to YtE (03/2001)	19 / 0.26	28 / 181	22 / 0.16	37 / 203
No to YtE (03/2001)	72 / 2.15	243 / 2172	138 / 2.48	405 / 2974

What lies behind the argumentative dominance of opponents to the official Swiss foreign policy is, we believe, a structural matter — not a strategic issue or practical question of how to lead a successful campaign. Owing to some 'status quo bias' (e.g. Kahneman *et al*. 1991), 'issue ownership' logic (Budge 1993; Petrocik 1996) or emphasis on 'narrative fidelity' (Snow and Benford 1988), opponents achieve initial and 'natural' superiority over an important set of issues. These are, for instance, the questions of independence, neutrality, direct democracy, federalism and bureaucracy, immigration and law-and-order issues, and a whole host of other aspects of the Swiss political, social, and cultural identity that are said to be jeopardized by European integration. This state of affairs is relevant to the *'dominance principle'* conceived by William Riker, whereby the loser on an issue "ceases to discuss it, while the winner continues to exploit it" (Riker 1993: 81-82). In other words there will be no lasting confrontation on issues that produce a winner and a loser, but rather a shift of the defeated camp toward other matters, with the consequence that "most of the time opponents do not talk about the same things" (1993: 82). Thus according to the dominance principle, supporters of the ballot reforms may be driven away from such issues as neutrality or direct democracy and compelled to search for other battlefields. Nevertheless it is probably more difficult to exercise control over new themes and to invent convincing arguments than just rehearsing or reframing old ones. By and large the rhetorical interaction between campaign adversaries may benefit upholders of the status quo (Spiegler 2000) and may consolidate the 'status quo bias' observed in direct democratic practice (e.g. Möckli 1996; Brunetti 1997; Banducci 1998).

In a nutshell, we expect the opponents of Swiss European integration to exhibit more *arguments* in their campaigns than do supporters, independently of the number of *advertisements* published; in other words, we expect 'no' ads to contain more arguments than 'yes' ads. As can be seen from Table 4.1, opponents were able to increase their financial advantage or to partly compensate for a lack of resources by securing a clear majority of arguments in all contests. Though in some cases supporters prevailed over opponents in terms of the number or total size of ads, very different is the picture in terms of number and weight of arguments. On average (over the three ballots), opponents delivered 3.94 arguments per ad in German Switzerland and 3.16 arguments in French Switzerland; this is plainly more than the respective rates of 1.84 and 2.15 arguments per ad provided by supporters of the reforms. All in all, we recorded 4094 arguments (average of three ballots: 1365) on the 'no' side and 1267 arguments (average: 422) on the 'yes' side of campaigns. Needless to say this is a striking contrast in campaign conduct.

There might be several explanations for this imbalance in the provision of arguments for the two sides.[35] One of them has to do with the dominance principle sketched above: opponents had such a great rhetorical advantage on some key dimensions of the ballots that supporters had no real choice but to retreat behind a few themes with less emotional appeal and less intrinsic variety — access to the European market, economic benefits, or 'the time is ripe', to name just the most widely used arguments in each ballot. Supporters hardly ever tried, for instance, to argue that the reforms were harmless for neutrality or popular rights. The only significant departure from the dominance principle occurred during the campaign on the

[35] Beyond the dominance principle there are at least two possible *methodological* reasons for the greater frequency of opponents' arguments. To begin with, remember that the range of discrete arguments categories stems from the classification of corresponding voting motives by the VOX-pollsters (hence one single category may aggregate a collection of two or more distinct arguments by other standards). Provided that more categories were considered for the 'no' side of ballots, there is of necessity a greater absolute *variability* in the number of con arguments — although the intrinsic *variety* might not be superior. This entails a higher likelihood of gathering two different con arguments by chance alone than collecting two distinct pro arguments. As a matter of fact, the dominance of opponents in terms of arguments was clearest on the ballot for which the ratio of pro/con arguments categories was the lowest (YtE initiative). But the dominance was still very obvious for ballots admitting an almost equivalent number of categories for 'yes' and 'no' sides. Second, one may stress that the 'residual category' (containing all arguments which have no corresponding voting motive) is often greater for the yes side. Since this category is not taken into account in Table 4.1 and in further analyses, it may lead to underestimating the range of pro arguments that were really employed in the campaigns. But again this bias is not systematic across campaigns and explains barely more than a very little part of the difference between the argumentative strength of the two camps. Finally, one might point to the fact that studies applying different coding conventions reached the same conclusion about opponents' dominance (e.g. Duding 2001). On the whole, methodological biases are most probably of minor importance.

European Economic Area, when both camps were determined to win the issue of unemployment, and blamed each other for taking the risk of worsening the problem.[36]

One might add that differences between linguistic areas exist, as one would expect given the segmented media and communication system in Switzerland (Kriesi *et al*. 1996).[37] Yet these differences do not really affect the depicted pattern — if anything, the contrast between opponents and supporters is even more acute in the French-speaking region for two out of the three ballots. Finally, there does not appear to be any systematic shift in the balance of arguments over the course of the campaigns. Unlike the EEA campaign, the two recent ballots did not exhibit any erosion of the opponents' dominance. But a full account of the dominance principle's dynamics probably requires a longer time period than the four weeks interval under study here (see Riker 1993).

Table 4.2: Pearsonian correlation (Spearman's rho in parentheses) between arguments in campaign ads and voters' motivations for their decision

	German-speaking region	French-speaking region	N (items)
Yes to European Economic Area (Dec. 1992)	0.12 (0.60)	0.08 (0.20)	18
No to European Economic Area (Dec. 1992)	0.57 (0.48)	0.16 (0.16)	21
Yes to Bilateral Agreements (May 2000)	0.04 (0.23)	–0.11 (–0.23)	15
No to Bilateral Agreements (May 2000)	0.27 (0.38)	0.27 (0.52)	17
Yes to initiative 'Yes to Europe' (March 2001)	–0.25 (–0.47)	0.16 (0.50)	7
No to initiative 'Yes to Europe' (March 2001)	0.35 (0.62)	0.01 (0.20)	12

4.2. General patterns of arguments-motives congruity

Now does the narrative domination of 'no' campaigns translate into a greater potency in priming the voting decisions of Swiss citizens? At the most general level, one can notice a substantial difference between the 'yes' and 'no' sides of the ballots (see Table 4.2). With a single exception (the YtE initiative in the French-speaking region), the correlation coefficient

[36] The outcome of this confrontation was a tie: the issue widely polarized the Swiss public, with supporters and opponents strongly disagreeing over the argument that joining the EEA would aggravate unemployment (see Marquis 2002: 559). Another example in recent history comes from the 1994 campaign on the Swiss Blue Helmet force, where supporters of the project focussed about one quarter of their arguments on the issue of neutrality, attempting to convince that the detachment would not obstruct the Swiss policy of neutrality, but rather reinforce it. This argument eventually proved a disaster, as it was invoked as a voting motive by only some 4% of citizens having approved the project (Wernli *et al*. 1994).

[37] This segmented pattern allows for qualitatively different processes to take place in both regions. At very first sight, this segmentation can be seen from the limited extent to which campaign issues and voting motives correlate across the linguistic border: on average, the correlation is .68 for campaigns and .73 for voters.

is consistently higher in the opponents' camp, suggesting that the correspondence between campaign arguments and individual motives is greater for rejecting ballot proposals than for accepting them. This is a hardly surprising result, since the same pattern was obtained for three other foreign policy ballots held in the 1980s and 1990s — namely UNO-membership, IMF-membership and creation of a Swiss Blue Helmet force (see Marquis 2002: chap. 8). The asymmetry between the apparent efficiency of 'yes' and 'no' appeals can be interpreted as demonstrating a greater *consonance* of the anti-European arguments with the political opinions, values and issue priorities of the population at large; we shall return to this interpretation in the concluding section. Alternatively this asymmetry could denote an intrinsic superiority in the strategies of the anti-European campaigners or, as suggested above, their *supremacy over key issues* of the ballot. The general pattern found in Table 4.2 is all the more remarkable as the ballot proposals *did* win a substantial proportion of popular votes, at least in the cases of the EEA and the BA. In other words this relative achievement of the pro-European camp cannot be ascribed to its priming of issues among the electorate, implying that many voters supported the Swiss government's European integration policy for other reasons than being compelled by the arguments and issue emphasis of their own camp.

Whatever the actual underlying mechanisms of pro-European voting, a second feature of the results in Table 4.2 is that *all* linkages between arguments and motives seem quite weak, as reflected in the low (and occasionally even negative) correlation coefficients. The campaign against the EEA is an important exception in that respect, since the congruity of arguments and motives is quite high in the German-speaking region.[38] This leads us to stress a third feature of our results: more often than not, correlations are higher in the German-speaking than in the French-speaking region. This discrepancy is obvious in the case of the votes against the EEA, against the YtE initiative and in favour of the BA, replicating our findings for the three foreign policy votes of the 1980s and 1990s mentioned above (see Marquis 2002: 585). However the YtE initiative was a fiasco in the *German-speaking* region, and the correlations in the remaining cases (yes to EEA, no to BA) show no difference between the two regions. This prevents us from jumping into the conclusion that votes can be effectively primed only in the German part of the country. But participation in and knowledge of direct democratic politics is thought to be larger in the German-speaking area, indeed (Wälti 1993; Brunner 1993). Accordingly the effort of campaigners to prime voting decisions might suffer

[38] To some degree, the campaign against the BA can also be credited with a relative success, in both linguistic regions, whereas the campaign against the YtE initiative apparently had some impact in the German-speaking region.

from a deficit of comprehension or attention in French Switzerland; a second, methodological, explanation is provided below. On the other hand, the *intensity* of campaigns has to be rejected as an alternative explanation for the differential outcomes in the two linguistic regions.[39]

Before we proceed with a more detailed analysis, recall that some caution is due in interpreting correlations coefficients of the sort used here. In particular the number of categories involved in the computation of correlations may have a confounding influence on the magnitude of these correlations. However this bias cannot be invoked to explain the seeming superiority of opponents' campaigns; as a matter of fact, the greater number of items on the 'no' side (which is an incidental product of the coding of motives by VOX-pollsters) is associated with *higher* correlations. At the same time though, provided that correlations are extremely sensitive to very discordant pairs of measures, a higher number of items probably reduces the likelihood of a single pair being very much at variance and, when actually observed, moderates its possible impact on the magnitude of correlations. In total, the impact of the number of items on the size of correlations is quite indeterminate. Nevertheless it follows from these methodological considerations that the *relative variations* in the strength of correlations *for each individual campaign* should be the focus of interest, rather than absolute magnitudes which are obviously difficult to interpret in their own right and to compare across ballots. Our concern will be to observe how the potential *moderators of priming* (see chap. 2.2) are conducive to such variations in the level of correlations between campaign arguments and voting motives.

4.3. Effects of moderators

According to our model, the crystallization of voting motives does not (and need not) follow a uniform pattern across all categories of voters. Since the electorate is stratified in terms of attentional, cognitive, and affective resources, a variety of voters will tune into the campaign

[39] In fact, taking the total weight of arguments as an indicator of the overall volume of communications on a ballot helps very little in explaining the interregional gap. For instance the campaign in favour of joining the EEA was twice as important in the German-speaking region, although it was hardly more successful in matching voting motives with elite arguments. On the contrary, equally low-key campaigns in favour of the YtE initiative in both regions yielded very different priming effects across the linguistic border. As it appears, the intensity of campaigns does *not* covary with the priming success of campaigners in Western Switzerland, whereas it does seem to constrain voting motives in the Eastern part of the country. A rather crude measure of this covariance is a bivariate correlation between the total weight of arguments and the level of arguments-motives congruity. This procedure yields a coefficient of 0.74 for the German-speaking region, but of only 0.09 for the French-speaking region.

at different intensity levels, for various purposes, and may find different merits in different lines of argumentation. Therefore it is to be expected that campaigns do not supply equally compelling reasons for voting to all voters. To test for this assumption, we performed an analysis of the impact of the theoretical moderators of priming effects.

As a preliminary test, we first relied on correlational evidence of the sort used in the previous section. We broke down our survey data by the various categories of the moderator variables, and related the motives of each separate group to the elite arguments.[40] Then, by comparing the correlations for complementary categories (e.g. uninvolved and involved voters in German Switzerland for the EEA ballot), we determined if each moderator was a *possible* explanation for the level of arguments-motives congruity in the various empirical situations. On the whole, the five moderators singled out by our model do account for substantial variations in the arguments-motives congruity. Of the 67 relationships that could be tested (excluding those based on too small subsamples), 42 turned out to be sizeable — if not significant in any statistical sense — and 29 were in line with our hypotheses (see Table 4.3).

The role of awareness and predispositions squared with our model's predictions quite consistently, whereas media exposure and involvement were least supportive of our hypotheses. As a matter of fact our measure of *predispositions* yields sometimes quite sizeable differences in congruity scores between individuals who were predisposed to accept the campaign arguments and those who were not. Besides, this constraint on priming seems to have grown over time, possibly reflecting the increasing significance of basic attitudes toward EU-membership. In comparison, the effects of *awareness* are more modest, but apparently more robust across ballots and linguistic areas — all votes saw the operation of awareness on the voting motives of at least one camp (supporters or opponents) in both regions. On the other hand, *exposure* and *involvement* have a less systematic impact on the magnitude of priming. With respect to these variables, one fourth of situations conformed to our expectations, but twice as many cases failed to show any difference between categories of voters, while other cases were rather suggestive of 'boomerang' effects — more exposed or more involved citizens actually exhibiting *lower* congruity scores. Finally, the *time of voting decision* always bears some relation to congruity; however this relation varies across the contexts of particular votes. Still to the extent that *attention to the campaign* often varies as a curvilinear (inverted

[40] Of course this research strategy is premised on the belief that measurement and other biases contaminate different subsamples of our data more or less evenly

Table 4.3: Congruity between campaign arguments and voting motives (Pearson's r): differences between subgroups of voters

		Time of decision *(camp. – early)*	*(camp. – late)*	**Exposure** *(quite exp. – little exp.)*	**Predispos.** *(consistent – inconsistent)*	**Involvement** *(quite inv. – little inv.)*	**Awareness** *(quite aware – little aware)*
German Switz.	Yes to EEA	0.08	0.14*	-0.13*	-0.06	0.02	-0.04
	No to EEA	0.04	0.40***	0.01	0.04	-0.15*	0.14*
	Yes to BA	0.17*	0.08	0.02	0.04	-0.18*	0.17*
	No to BA	0.09	0.15*	0.03	0.28**	-0.04	-0.20**
	Yes to YtE	0.17*	0.68***	0.29**	0.39***	0.16*	0.14*
	No to YtE	-0.18*	-0.49***	-0.10*	0.42***	0.42***	0.11*
French Switz.	Yes to EEA	0.11*	0.29**	0.10*	0.11*	0.06	-0.09
	No to EEA	0.16*	.[a]	-0.08	.[a]	-0.02	0.12*
	Yes to BA	-0.14*	0.05	0.02	-0.24**	0.29**	0.11*
	No to BA	-0.18*	.[a]	0.11*	.[a]	.[a]	-0.06
	Yes to YtE	-0.17*	-0.19*	-0.09	0.20**	-0.02	0.12*
	No to YtE	-0.21**	0.02	-0.10*	0.23**	0.05	-0.04
Average German Switz.		0.06	0.16	0.02	0.19	0.04	0.05
Average French Switz.		-0.07	0.04	-0.01	0.08	0.07	0.03
Average Switzerland		-0.01	0.11	0.01	0.14	0.05	0.04

Notes: *** : Δ >.30. ** : Δ >.20. * : Δ >.10. [a] : n <10. Figures in the Table are subtractions between the correlation coefficients obtained for the two subgroups of voters indicated in each column head.

U-shaped) function of time, campaign deciders were seemingly the most primed group in a majority of cases.[41]

For all the uncertainty surrounding the use of aggregate, correlational evidence, we now turn to a different way of measuring the effect of moderators. The basic idea of this analysis is simple: if priming occurs under the constraint of the moderators investigated thus far, then the arguments scoring highest in the mass media hierarchy should also be used as prominent motives among citizens theoretically most susceptible to priming — i.e. among either aware, involved, exposed, or 'predisposed' voters, as well as campaign deciders.

[41] As suggested by independent analyses (not reported here, but available upon request to the author), the departure of some campaigns from the assumed curvilinear relation between congruity and time of voting decision might have something to do with the *expectations about the outcome* of ballots. The idea is that *uncertainty* about the outcome reinforces the role of attentional resources and leads to a stratification of the electorate along the lines suggested thus far. On the contrary, *certainty* about the outcome probably decreases attention in the first place, because a predictable contest is less appealing to voters. Thus for ballots that get to be seen as foregone conclusions, the most attentive citizens might be those who took their decision *before* a 'yes' or a 'no' appears as the only likely scenario — i.e. by default, the *early* deciders. Therefore in some cases a curvilinear relationship between priming and time of decision is to be expected, while in other cases a negative relationship should come about.

To test this proposition, we recoded the voting motives variables by imputing to each response category its *rank in the media hierarchy*. Thus instead of arbitrary codes, we now have a scale of rank-orders, ranging from 1 to the lowest rank (usually corresponding to the total number of response categories).[42] Then if priming is triggered by, say, awareness of ballot issues, voting motives of knowledgeable citizens should, on average, rank higher on this scale than should motives of less informed voters. Finally, the scale polarity was reversed, so that the expected relationships will yield positive coefficients. The resulting scale is not highly skewed toward high values — a majority of voting motives are usually *not* concentrated among the top 3 or 4 arguments emphasized by the mass media.[43] Although the convergence can be substantial on some occasions, on the whole there is a rather high independence between the hierarchies of media and citizens' 'agendas'; therefore there is substantial variance in the choice of voting motives.[44] In addition throughout the following analysis, cases were weighted to guarantee comparable *Ns* for the three ballots.

As Table 4.4 shows, a multivariate regression analysis reveals few, but meaningful, relations between our model's independent variables and the media prominence of voting motives. A regression coefficient of +1.00 means that the variable induces answering the voting motives question with an argument classified one rank higher in the media hierarchy. Of the 42 'sizeable' relationships uncovered by our correlational analysis, 14 (i.e. exactly a third) are confirmed by the regression analysis.[45] The other way round, all significant relationships shown by the regression results could have been expected on the basis of the correlational evidence. In other words, all relations at the *individual* level replicate similar relations at the *aggregate* level. The only exception to this pattern is the coefficient suggesting that issue awareness also enhances the priming of the vote of opponents to the YtE initiative in French Switzerland. Indeed awareness ends up as the best predictor of voting motives, as more knowledgeable citizens tend quite systematically to justify their vote with arguments that

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[42] The lowest rank needs not always be equal to the number of categories, most notably because there are *ties* between categories obtaining *no arguments at all* in the media. Among 16 categories for instance, if three motives received absolutely no media coverage, they will all be classified as rank 14.

[43] For descriptive purposes the measure was *standardized across ballots* so as to range between 0 and 10. Then with a standard deviation of 2.59 ('yes' motives) and 2.58 ('no' motives), the respective skewness measures are only –.34 and –.76, indicating a slight bump at higher values.

[44] Remember from Section 4.2 that the rank-order correlations between campaign arguments and voting motives are quite similar to the usual (Pearsonian) correlations. If anything, Spearman's correlations tend to exclude near-zero values and to accentuate congruity differences between geographic regions or categories of citizens. But they do *not* display a tight correspondence between the hierarchies of arguments and motives; the average correlation across the 6 ballot positions is 0.31 in German Switzerland, and 0.23 in French Switzerland.

[45] Next, of the 28 relationships which are not confirmed, 19 are nevertheless somewhat supported by regression coefficients running in the same direction — a result that could hardly come up by chance alone. Moreover the coefficients whose direction is *opposite* to the correlational analysis never reach even marginal levels of significance ($p>.25$ in all cases, cf. † in Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Predictors of congruity between campaign arguments and voting motives (unstandardized regression coefficients)

		Early dec.	*Late dec.*	*Exposure*	*Predisposit.*	*Involvement*	*Awareness*	R^2
German Switz.	Yes to EEA	-.36	*.07*	**-1.33*****	-.32	.25	.73†	.04
	No to EEA	-.56	**-3.03*****	-.22	.66	*-.21*	**1.40***	.04
	Yes to BA	**-.84***	-.52	-.06	.56†	*.15*	**1.00*****	.04
	No to BA	-1.10†	*-1.10*	.23	*1.89†*	.14	*-.72*	.04
	Yes to YtE	.21	**-1.18****	*.26*	*-.10*	*.01*	**.66****	.13
	No to YtE	.38†	**.72****	*-.10*	**.67*****	**.63****	**1.22*****	.15
French Switz.	Yes to EEA	*-.92†*	**-3.35****	*.00*	*.49*	.36	1.08†	.09
	No to EEA	*1.76*	4.46	3.25	.[a]	.12	*.83*	.07
	Yes to BA	*.19*	.71	.21	*-.22*	**1.74***	*.71*	.04
	No to BA	*-1.06*	-.66	*2.26*	2.91†	.99	-.98	.16
	Yes to YtE	*.50†*	*.05*	-.45†	*-.58*	.23	**.61***	.15
	No to YtE	*.45*	-.49	*.40*	*.22*	.01	1.26**	.09
Significant (expected) relations, whole Switzerland		1 (1)	4 (3)	1 (0)	1 (1)	2 (2)	6 (6)	*Total:* 15 (13)

Notes: †: p<.25. *: p<.10. **: p<.05. ***: p<.01. [a] : no coefficient because variable is constant.
Coefficients in **bold** replicate the findings of the correlational analysis, while coefficients in *italics* do not.

score higher in the media hierarchy. On the contrary, attitudes toward EU integration (and to a lesser extent, media exposure and the time of voting decision) seem to lose much of their explanatory power in comparison with the correlational evidence. Let us recall however, that the design here is *multivariate*, which may account for some dilution of effects. In addition, the fact that confirmation of original hypotheses occurs far more frequently with the German than with the French data (9 vs. 4) suggests that statistically insignificant relations might stem in part from too small Ns.

Comparing now the regression results with the original model, it turns out that the hypotheses are confirmed in less than one fourth of cases (13 out of 59, adopting a permissive significance threshold of .10), but also that evidence for unpredicted relations is virtually non-existent (2 cases). In fact most cases fall in the 'no effect' range.[46]

As a whole, the results from the regression analysis are more suggestive of *methodological* constraints impeding the disclosure of some existing regularities (possibly the quality of

[46] Or so it would seem. However 66% of coefficients run in a direction consistent with the hypotheses, a pattern highly unlikely to arise by chance alone. This proportion rises to 71% if one considers bivariate relationships (not reported here), and further to 79% if one leaves aside the most ambiguous effects, those related to the time of voting decision.

primary and secondary data, measurement error, small number of cases, attenuation of effects by a multivariate design, etc.) than they are suggestive of *substantive* weaknesses of the model requiring refutation and abandonment of the theory. True, the results *do* indicate that variables like media exposure may possibly contribute *negatively* to the priming process in some situations, while the contribution of other variables like predispositions and involvement is probably more marginal than expected. But the partial overlapping of results at the aggregate and individual levels is quite striking in some respects, and leads us to two conclusions. First, there is a cross-validation of the two methods used in this paper as regards the pervasive role of political awareness in the priming process. Second, parts of the model are verified by both methods *despite largely suboptimal quality of the available data*. To this extent, one is entitled to think that methodological limitations may hinder the verification of further segments of the theory.

Since one of these constraints is the very small number of cases, we reconducted the regression analysis with the whole sample, that is, without distinguishing between ballots.[47] Besides, in order to establish our findings on firmer grounds we added a number of control variables: educational level (ranging from 1 to 6); age; gender (women, as compared to men); four dummies indicating basic political leanings (left, center, right, and far right voters, which were contrasted with voters without clear ideological position). Table 4.5 summarizes the results of this analysis.

As it turns out, our previous findings are confirmed once again, while other, less conspicuous, relations are now made visible. The impact of awareness is clearly established for both supporters and opponents of ballot reforms. By contrast, the negative effect of media exposure and the temporal evolution of attention to the campaign seem to concern first and foremost supporters of ballots. On the contrary, predispositions and involvement in the issues appear to matter only for opponents (albeit marginally for predispositions). Moreover as shown by a stepwise procedure, the control variables do not suppress the effect of moderators, and add relatively little to the explanatory capacity of the model (though they have more weight in the French-speaking than in the German-speaking region).

[47] The voting motives order was standardized so that all ranks vary between 0 and 10. Thus a regression coefficient of +1.00 means that a given variable induces using voting motives classified *one tenth higher* in the media hierarchy.

Table 4.5: Predictors of congruity between campaign arguments and voting motives (unstandardized regression coefficients)

	'Yes' voting motives		'No' voting motives	
	German Sw.	French Sw.	German Sw.	French Sw.
Early deciders [a]	–.35*	–.02	–.05	.35
Late deciders [a]	–.54*	–.29	–.20	–.42
Exposure	–.37**	–.56**	–.10	.68*
Predisposition [b]	.07	–.01	.29*	.27
Involvement	–.16	.36	.45***	.20
Awareness	.92****	.63**	.79****	.77**
Education level	–.09	.11	–.14**	–.01
Gender [c]	–.07	–.12	.12	–.15
Age	.00	–.01	–.01**	.02
Left [d]	–.69	.80**	–.04	–1.32**
Center [d]	–.91**	.18	.08	–.50
Right [d]	–.70	–.05	–.36	.20
Far right [d]	–.60	.69	.45	–.52
Constant	3.08****	5.13****	4.00****	5.96****
R^2	.04 (N=889)	.06 (N=381)	.06 (N=986)	.11 (N=186)

Notes. *: p<.10. **: p<.05. ***: p<.01. ****: p<.001.
[a] : reference category: campaign deciders. [b] : pro-EU for 'yes' motives; anti-EU for 'no' motives.
[c] : reference category: men. [d] : reference category: voters without ideological position.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this final section we begin with some considerations about the methodological frame developed for the analysis of 'priming effects'. Next, we address a few substantive issues raised by the interpretation of our empirical results. We conclude with a brief summary of the main trends uncovered by our study.

5.1. Methodological issues

In this paper we have tried to capture the priming effects of campaigns on the vote decisions of Swiss voters about European policy. To this aim, we relied on secondary survey data and on our own 'sample' of campaign information. Admittedly our operational design is an attempt at making the best use of largely suboptimal data. As a matter of fact the three ballots we are interested in have already taken place. No experimental data is available; there is no panel data either, nor even 'before-after' independent survey samples to make inferential assumptions about the role of campaigns. We are left with one-shot surveys conducted for all-

purpose ex-post analysis. Mainly because it provides no control over actual media exposure, our study is potentially flawed with inferential misattribution of causality for the observed (mis)match between campaign issues and voting motives. But we believe it also has *heuristic value*. With only minimal documentation about the empirical context of the votes, we propose an original way of capturing *potential* priming effects, in which the 'hydraulic' nature of priming is put forward. Two methods were devised to implement this 'hydraulic pattern' idea. First, we used aggregate data and correlation analysis to establish the level of *congruity* between campaign arguments and voting motives. Null or negative correlations certainly account for small or non-existent priming effects, whereas the opposite is not true — positive correlations cannot by themselves establish the existence of an effect. If the analogy with statistical concepts is allowed, our correlational analysis is probably more noteworthy for its *power* in hypothesis testing than for its capacity to avoid typical Type I errors.

Second, to reduce the risk of committing such errors in the present study, we provided an alternative — and also quite simple — way of measuring the issues-motives congruity. Using individual data and OLS regression, we were able to show that the choice of arguments to justify one's vote decision is not independent of the amount of media attention paid to these arguments, and that the dependency on issues that were primed by the media is highest for citizens who are theoretically most vulnerable to priming effects.

An interesting thing to note about the comparison of the two methods used in Section 4 is that virtually no result obtained at the individual level could not have been predicted at the aggregate level, thus providing plausible indications of cross-validation between the two methods. But the regressions also *qualify* the results of the correlational analysis. Owing to its multivariate design, the regression analysis enables us to determine the *net effect* of each priming moderator. The comparison of total and net effects suggests that priming eventuates through the fulfilment of successive mediators — exposure, reception, yielding, activation, and other likely steps. Indeed the influence of one moderator, as revealed by a bivariate analysis, is easily reduced or suppressed (but occasionally also boosted) when simultaneously taking into account other moderators possibly involved in different mechanisms.

However our analysis cannot go beyond its methodological limits. For one thing, variations in the level of *congruity* between campaign issues and voting motives is but one inferential method for detecting *priming* effects. Moreover one clear weakness of the design is the

complete separateness in the analysis of the two 'sides' of each ballot. With the data at our disposal, it is not possible to investigate the effect of 'no' issues on 'yes' votes, nor the effect of 'yes' issues on 'no' votes. Hence one may object that our results do not take into account facilitating as well as inhibiting effects of arguments provided by the side which voters eventually dismissed.

5.2. Substantive issues

Although we found robust patterns in the role played by some moderators, as a whole the 'priming' capacity of campaigns is apparently rather limited — at least recent campaigns about European policy in Switzerland. This possibly points to the importance of the *structural* sources of voting motives (see Section 2). Many qualitative studies have sought to explain the success or failure of political elites to prime popular decisions by the (in)ability of their campaigns to 'resonate' with values, myths, or 'narratives' in the population at large (e.g. Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Plasser 1993). Pushing this reasoning a little further, one might maintain that public opinion influences the campaign agenda as much as the other way round. This hypothesis has been explored in *agenda-setting* research (e.g. Behr and Iyengar 1985; Brosius and Weimann 1996), suggesting that on occasion agenda-setting is a non-recursive process where both media and public opinion stand as sources of issue salience. We strongly believe that part of the success achieved by (first and foremost opponents') political ads stems from campaigners recognizing citizens' deepest concerns and accordingly stressing those issues which most resonate with public feelings. As our analysis of the 'dominance principle' may imply, the historical substratum of issues in Swiss foreign policy gives a structural advantage to upholders of the status quo.

Whatever the original sources of issue salience,[48] our theoretical model is about how the priming *process* occurs within voters' mind systems. Some of the moderators of priming investigated here, such as media exposure and time of voting decision, are clearly involved in the first steps of the process, by regulating exposure and attention to campaign information. When other moderators are held constant, we find that media exposure is not enough to promote priming on its own — as has consistently been reported for other kinds of media effects. Only when information is relatively scarce (like in the case of 'no' campaigns in

[48] It may be that the campaign agenda influences the citizens' agenda, or the other way round; alternatively, it may be that 'real-world' events exert an influence on *both* agendas (Neuman and Fryling 1985; McLeod *et al*. 1994).

French Switzerland) does exposure contribute more to enhancing priming than — possibly — to 'diluting' the effects of the 'big message'. As for the time of voting decision, results suggest that *attention* to the campaign slightly facilitates priming. It might be argued that the role of attention would have been demonstrated more clearly, had we been able to measure attention directly rather than using a surrogate measure. Interestingly though, attention seems to foster the reception of campaign arguments among *supporters* of the ballots, while this assimilative role appears to be taken over by issue involvement and predispositions among *opponents*. In other words, one feature of the 'old' (i.e. status quo) arguments seems to be their *resonance* with pre-existing values, thus facilitating yielding and encoding. By contrast, 'new' (i.e. pro-integration) arguments appear to permeate voting decisions mainly through *attentional* mechanisms.

However it is difficult to assign any of the mentioned moderators to one definite mediator in the priming process. The role of political awareness is a paramount example in that respect. Awareness has by far the most robust effect on the issues-motives congruity, but it also has the widest 'range of application', since this moderator is likely to get involved in almost every mediator (see Figure 2.1). Similarly other moderators may be involved in several steps, including the *activation* mechanism. It may be recalled that the activation mediator was singled out to account for the possibility that, by exciting associative pathways in long-term memory, campaign messages 'refresh' pre-existing beliefs without creating new ones (i.e. without transiting through the yielding step). However important, this accessibility explanation of priming effects should not downplay the role of encoding processes. As a matter of fact, in comparison with communication and political science research, psychological research has laid more emphasis on priming as an *encoding* — rather than *retrieval* — bias. Because novel stimuli are interpreted and stored in memory in close association with previously acquired primes, the details of original stimuli will tend to decay over time, and only the primed, assimilated, representation of the stimuli will be remembered when some judgment is asked for.[49] Of course, as for many other aspects of our model, an experimental design would be highly recommended to properly control for the role of our moderators in the

[49] One hint that priming is more likely an encoding than a retrieval bias is provided by experimental manipulations of time gaps between measures. It was observed that longer delays between the *exposure* to a stimulus (already primed by previous information) and the *rating* of the primed concept tend to enhance priming effects (for more detail and interpretation, see Wyer and Srull 1989: 124-5; Fiske and Taylor 1991: 261-2). This tendency might even explain some inconsistencies in our results (e.g. explaining how different delays between stimulus and rating may lessen the differences between early and campaign deciders).

different mechanisms of the information processing chain. This is a step we hope to take in the future.

5.3. Summary

For a long time the Swiss people have been opposed to a genuine, institutional, integration into the EU system. Three recent ballots (1992-2001) on EU integration projects have confirmed that only bilateral, economic, non-integrative agreements may rally a majority of Swiss voters. However beyond these structural invariants, our analysis attempted to assess the capacity of referendum campaigns to 'prime' the ingredients of voting decisions. Based on survey data and a sample of campaign information, we investigated the degree of *congruity* between campaign issues and individual voting motives. We established that the voting motives of integration opponents reflect the issues of 'no' campaigns more substantially than do the motives of supporters with respect to the issues of 'yes' campaigns. From this baseline, the level of arguments-motives congruity was traced to differences in five possible moderators of priming: media exposure, time of voting decision (as a surrogate measure for attention to the campaign), affective involvement in the issues, political predispositions, and political awareness.

First, a correlational analysis provided mixed support for the influence of all variables — although the evidence was strongest for awareness and predispositions, and weakest for involvement and media use. Next, using an alternative measure of the congruity between campaign issues and voting motives, we provided strong confirmation of the hypothesized effect of political awareness, whereby more knowledgeable voters systematically use voting motives that rank higher in the media hierarchy — in both linguistics areas and for both 'yes' and 'no' sides. By contrast the effect of the other moderators is apparently more contingent on particular circumstances. Relatively well-known issues and arguments (i.e. many 'no' issues) tend to gain prominence in people's minds through the selective filter of *affective dispositions*, namely the personal significance of ballots and the general attitude toward EU integration.[50] On the contrary, less salient or familiar issues (i.e. like many 'yes' issues) have to make their way through primarily *cognitive*, *attentional* barriers. Besides on occasion, too

[50] Alternatively, involvement might be more relevant to the priming of 'no issues' because involved individuals are more affected by persuasive *emotive* appeals (as is the case of many 'no' arguments) than less involved individuals — independent of the messages' cognitive content, and to the extent that the issues are value-ladden (Huddy and Gunn-thorsdottir 2000: 751-2).

much media exposure — especially in the case of faltering campaigns that do not consistently stress the same set of arguments — may even swamp the effect of campaign messages and actually reduce priming effects. On the whole, our results fit quite nicely with some recent research (e.g. Krosnick and Brannon 1993; Miller and Krosnick 2000) showing that cognitive and affective engagement exerts various and often opposite influences on priming effects, depending on issues, on particular indicators, and on the specific mediators which the adopted measures supposedly regulate.

Appendix

Table A.1: Campaign issues and voting motives about the European Economic Area

Code	*Short description of issue /motive*	*% of all arguments*	*% of all motives*
Y12	Most beneficial solution; profit for all	3.6	4.9
Y31	Economic benefits; relaunch the Swiss economy	5.0	18.8
Y32	Avoid isolation; against the Swiss "Sonderfall"	7.0	18.2
Y33	Open to Europe; widen our horizon	1.2	10.0
Y34	We are Europeans; coresponsibility, solidarity	7.7	6.5
Y35	Go forward; change things	7.9	2.6
Y36	Secure the future of the youth, of our children	2.3	9.5
Y37	Prepare the future	3.3	3.9
Y38	"Alleingang" is no solution; no alternative to the EEA	13.5	5.0
Y39	Open up borders	0.0	1.7
Y41	Limit unemployment, create jobs	14.2	7.2
Y42	Free movement of people; get jobs abroad	0.4	3.4
Y43	Free movement of goods; four liberties	0.2	0.6
Y44	Access to the European market; exportations, business	24.3	3.6
Y45	First step toward EU accession	0.2	0.4
Y46	Study abroad; recognition of diplomas	1.8	2.2
Y48	Price cuts; maintain earnings and living standards	6.9	0.6
Y49	Against nationalism, against patriotism	0.6	1.0
	Total of 'yes' issues / motives	100% (N=6877)	100% (N=697)
N12	Threat to homeland; "die Schweiz nicht verkaufen"	5.8	2.8
N13	Already so many problems (retirement pensions, drugs, etc.)	0.5	1.6
N31	Too early; moment is inopportune	0.5	5.7
N32	Joining the EEA is too costly; more bureaucracy	5.0	6.5
N33	Loss of independence; neutrality is threatened	10.3	7.2
N34	Mistrust of "Big Europe", not reliable	2.8	10.3
N35	Lack of information; too many controversial arguments	0.4	8.2
N36	Lack of clarity from government, sanction against government	1.7	4.7
N37	Status quo is preferable	5.3	2.5
N38	Economic benefits of staying outside the EU	7.1	5.7
N41	EEA leads to the EU; EEA is the EU antechamber	2.8	3.6
N42	Rise of unemployment	8.6	10.5
N43	Joining the EEA will cause an invasion of foreign workers	20.2	10.6
N44	*Incomes, standards of living will fall*	10.9	2.0
N45	Prices, taxes will rise	3.0	1.0
N46	No co-decision; diktat from Brussels; foreign judges	10.6	7.4
N47	Against European "colossus"; against European capitalism	2.6	3.6
N48	Ecological decline; environment protection	0.7	2.5
N49	Swiss agriculture is threatened	0.2	2.8
N50	Not against opening the country, but not in that way	0.8	0.7
N51	Drawbacks for women	0.2	0.3
	Total of 'no' issues / motives	100% (N=18'310)	100% (N=612)

Table A.2: Campaign issues and voting motives about the Bilateral Agreements

Code	*Short description of issue /motive*	*% of all arguments*	*% of all motives*
Y10+14+15+19	Pressure was high; agreements are important, beneficial	10.8	7.5
Y11+12	Directly concerned; have an international network, work abroad	1.5	1.7
Y13	Benefits to the youth	1.3	13.0
Y20+21+22+29	Against EU accession, in favour of the bilateral way	7.1	8.6
Y30+32+39	Open up the country; Switzerland is part of Europe	6.5	19.9
Y31	For EU accession, therefore also for the agreements	7.4	1.0
Y33	Express solidarity	7.1	1.0
Y34	Against isolation; against "Swiss Island"; abolish borders	3.6	4.8
Y35	Collaboration with the EU; more exchanges with Europe	6.8	6.7
Y40+41+49	General benefits from the agreements	0.8	5.4
Y42	Well negotiated compromise; good mix of distance and convergence	16.3	3.8
Y43	Economically and financially profitable	18.6	20.3
Y44	Free movement of people; more jobs and opportunities abroad	1.8	5.0
Y45	Formation, studies abroad; facilitates research collaboration	9.5	0.8
Y46	Benefits for air traffic; helpful for Swissair	1.0	0.8
	Total of 'yes' issues / motives	100% (N=1186)	100% (N=523)
N10+13+19	Agreements are unnecessary; present situation is satisfactory	7.5	11.7
N11+16	Against government; Swiss people is ignored; only the rich profit	11.4	1.1
N14	Agreements badly negotiated; one-sided, detrimental to Switzerland	5.9	6.4
N15	Agreements cost too much; taxes will rise	4.7	2.6
N20+21+25+29	Against Europe or EU accession; situation is bad all over Europe	4.2	17.7
N22	First step to the EU; no way back; agreements undenounceable	9.8	4.5
N24	Was already against the EEA	0.6	0.0
N30+31+39	Against free movement of people	13.0	12.4
N32	Incomes will fall; wage dumping; social dumping	9.2	7.9
N33+34	Will elicit too much immigration; already too many foreigners	6.9	9.0
N40+44+49	Threat to Swiss values; autarchy; freedom of action	1.3	0.4
N41+12+23	For neutrality, independence; diktat from Brussels	9.2	10.5
N42	Popular rights get lost; threat to democracy	3.0	0.0
N43	Sellout of the homeland; Swiss identity is threatened	0.5	1.5
N50+51+52+59	Bad consequences for Swiss agriculture	4.6	5.3
N60+61+62+69	Bad consequences for the canton of Ticino	0.0	2.6
N70+71+79	Avalanche of truck traffic; 40 tons trucks through the Alps; ecology	8.3	6.4
	Total of 'no' issues / motives	100% (N=2424)	100% (N=266)

Table A.3: Campaign issues and voting motives about the "Yes to Europe" initiative

Code	*Short description of issue /motive*	*% of all arguments*	*% of all motives*
Y10+11+12+19	Solution for the future; makes sense; is important for us	2.6	9.0
Y20+21+29	For EU accession; EU is a good thing; remain sovereign	17.0	32.3
Y22	Against isolation; we can't succeed alone; we are part of Europe	18.6	16.9
Y23+24	Open up the country; no free-riding; against hucksters	6.2	18.0
Y25	Finally join the EU; the time is ripe	40.6	7.9
Y30+31+32+36+39	Negotiations can't be a bad thing; lead discussions; step forward	15.1	8.6
Y33+34+35+93	Exert pressure; counterweight to the "Neinsager"; tactical coup	0.0	7.1
	Total of 'yes' issues / motives	100% (N=384)	100% (N=266)
N10+11+12+14+19	Too extreme solution; utopia, is bound to fail; too complicated	1.5	7.7
N13+15+22+26	Is imposed on us; betrayal of the fatherland; diktat from Brussels	23.6	12.6
N20+21+25+27+29	Against EU accession; fear of the EU; mistrust in EU policies	13.8	22.6
N23	EU costs too much; economic drawbacks	27.6	6.8
N24	Threat to neutrality, direct democracy, federalism; "Sonderfall"	19.9	3.9
N31+39	We have time; question is not urgent; we should not rush	0.4	8.0
N32	The time is not ripe; people is not ready	6.7	17.3
N33+34	At first observe the effect of Bilateral Agreements; only for BA	4.8	14.4
N35	At first see how the EU evolves (Eastern enlargement, euro, etc.)	0.0	2.1
N36	In favour of EU accession, but not now	0.4	1.0
N40+41+42+43+49	Follow the government; competence of the government	0.8	2.4
N91	Reference to other countries (Austria, Norway, etc.)	0.4	1.1
	Total of 'no' issues / motives	100% (N=5147)	100% (N=839)

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