



Universiteit  
Leiden

# Thesis evaluation Max Powell

## Student details:

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## Programme details

**Programme:** European Politics and Society

**Specialisation:**

**EC:** 30

## Evaluators:

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## Thesis details:

**Title:** The Irish Lisbon Treaty Referendums 2008 and 2009: Which themes were present in the debate?

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

Checked by supervisor

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by M. Broad: it can be made public through the repository.

# Summary assessment/comments

This was an interesting and most appropriate thesis for the EPS programme. The decision to compare how the two Irish Lisbon Treaty referendums were framed was a sensible one, but the justification for doing so ought to have been more robust. Plenty of information was presented on the referendums themselves, and the student clearly knew their stuff. That said, it was a bit of a shame that the conclusions offered were not always robust or as sufficiently geared to answering the questions asked. A decent piece, nonetheless.

## Criteria

### Knowledge and insight

This thesis focused on the two Irish Lisbon Treaty referendums of 2008 and 2009. More specifically, it sought to identify what themes were present, and how they were framed, in the respective debates, offering the potential indirectly to infer why the results of the two plebiscites were different. The opening paragraphs did a decent job of setting out the startling nature of the 2008 vote on p. 6 was arguably a little descriptive and verbose. Section 1.2 could also have drawn more effectively on prevailing scholarship – or at the very least cited relevant scholars – to explain briefly what we know about the campaigns and why this study could indeed be considered 'worthwhile'. It was also odd that so many questions were being asked at the top of p. 8 from which the research question itself, delineated in section 1.3, felt disconnected. To this end, having a series of sub-questions would probably have made more sense.

This last would have helped contextualise more the literature review from p. 10 – as submitted, this tended to take as a given that current scholarship 'is lacking [...] a deeper analysis' without really demonstrating as much. It would have been useful therein to go into detail how this lacuna materialises and what we gain from any 'insight into how the contents of this treaty were used by both sides' (p. 12). It was, however, on firmer ground with mention of second-order votes – I wonder whether the section on Nice could have been sharper (and was the research question ever going to sufficiently address whether 'issues discussed during both Nice referendums were resolved?'). More too might have been said about how comparable the French and Dutch votes are with the Irish case – and, again, was the job here to understand how these instances 'compare to the Lisbon Treaty referendums in Ireland'. Overall this sometimes felt a bit clunky and forced, with a very decent range of scholarship not always being deployed as effectively as it might have to help justify the present study.

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

### Application knowledge and insight

The thesis deployed a content analysis, consulting various newspapers to ascertain what issues were brought up by the main players and how they framed such topics. The selection of newspapers was defended quite effectively on p. 26, but discussion on how the content analysis was operationalised in practice could have gone still further at times – there was a potential selection bias in the themes identified on p. 30 that the student might have addressed. That said, the student did address the 'open' nature of this approach, so obviously a good deal of thought had been put into the approach taken. The range and number of sources consulted was also impressive.

**Assessment:** good

**Weighing:** n/a

## Reaching conclusions

At the top of p. 31, the student (perhaps inadvertently?) made hypothetical assumptions about possible variation in issue salience between the two referendums. This was a sensible premise, but it did need to be unpacked – it would certainly have helped identify whether something necessarily surprising or unexpected then materialised about the votes, or perhaps whether there was greater consistency despite the changed environment in which the 2009 referendum took place compared to the one in 2008. It was interesting to see 'the economy' emerge as the dominant issue in the second referendum but this could have been more effectively related to the literature on the topic (for instance, and related to my comment above, would we have expected as much? Was the thesis confirming or contradicting prevailing academic thinking?). It also sometimes claimed more than the evidence presented would justify – I remained unconvinced, for instance, about how the "'no" campaign benefited previous French and Dutch Constitutional referendums' (p. 43). This nevertheless had some interesting things to say about how the more complex way in which the economic issue was handled by the two opposing sides, as well as how risk frames matured as time went on. And the discussion was certainly detailed, managing to flesh out each of the frames. It is true that chapter 4 read a bit descriptively – I would have been more forgiving here had the conclusion managed to address all the questions that the thesis had originally set itself. It was a commendable and interesting piece nonetheless.

**Assessment:** good

**Weighing:** n/a

## Communication

The thesis was generally well written, clear and pacy. That said, there were a few oddities of expression and several grammar mistakes – the possessive apostrophe (for instance, Irelands no vote rather than Ireland's no vote on p. 6) had a particularly tough time of it. Quotations did not need to be italicised either. While none of this indicated a lack of knowledge on the student's part, it did point towards a certain inattention to detail during the final stages of preparing the thesis for submission.

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Learning skills

Met

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Formal requirements

Met

## Final assessment

On 31-07-2022 this thesis is graded with a 7.4

## Signatures

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Broad', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

M. Broad