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Daniela Floß

# The Impact of Mass Media on Political Support

## A Preferences-Perceptions Model of Media Effects

Nomos
Edition Reinhard Fischer

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This thesis was accepted as a doctoral dissertation by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Zurich in the fall semester 2009 on the recommendation of Professor Dr. Frank Marcinkowski and Professor Dr. Werner Wirth.

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To my family

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This study was conducted within the framework of the project "The Dynamics of Political Institutions in Mediated Democracies: Political Bargaining and the Transformation of the Public Sphere", led by Frank Marcinkowski. The project is embedded in the National Centre of Competence in Research: Challenges to Democracy in the 21st century (NCCR Democracy). The work was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

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Zürich, February 2010 Daniela Floß

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# 1. Political Support and Mass Media: Relevance and Objectives of this Study

This study investigates the impact of the mass media on citizens' political support. More precisely, the main interest of this work lays in the effects of the way in which mass media present political processes. Political processes in this study refer to day-to-day discussions of possible solutions to political problems and decision-making within the government, the parliament, or the political administration. The term "political support" is used in this study to refer to "an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively" (cf. Easton, 1975, p. 436). Although political support might refer not only to evaluative attitudes but also to behavior (cf. Easton, 1975, p. 436), the interest of this study is limited to the aspect of political support as empirically observable evaluative attitudes of citizens.[1] Thus the study focuses on confidence or trust[2] in political institutions, political actors, and democracy. Trust is understood as the belief that the government or any other political institution is operating according to one's normative expectations of how they should function (A. H. Miller, 1974, p. 989) and individual interests of the citizen are attended to even without scrutiny (cf. Easton, 1975, p. 447; Gamson, 1968). Consequentially, political distrust is "a realistic critique of political performance and/or of fiduciary responsibility in the light of accepted democratic values" (Barber, 1983, p. 80f.).

In order to investigate the impact of media presentations of political processes on political support, this study focuses on the example of Switzerland as a typical consensus democracy. As regards political decision-making strategies, bargaining is the dominant modus in consensus democracies (Czada, 2000; Lehmbruch, 2003; Lijphart, 1999). The endeavor to find collective compromises between diverging interests is the main purpose of bargaining procedures (Marcinkowski, 2005). Mass media, in contrast, tend to focus on discord instead of compromises and emphasize the behavior of single actors instead of collective actions (Grande, 2000; Marcinkowski, 2005). The distinct presentation of political processes by the mass media, hence, may challenge citizens' political support (Marcinkowski, 2000, p. 211; Sarcinelli, 1998, p. 553).

1 This study's focus on evaluative attitudes is motivated by two factors. First, for economic reasons the scope of independent variables that are of interest in this study had to be restricted. Second, according to the value-attitude-behavior hierarchy, changes in behavior are a result of attitude changes (Bentler & Speckart, 1981; Homer & Kahle, 1988). In line with this, political participation was found to result from party identification and beliefs about government responsiveness (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982), for instance.

2 In literature the terms confidence and trust are often used interchangeably.

Confidence in political institutions and actors is an important resource for the stability of modern societies (Kaina, 2004). Modern societies are highly fragmented and characterized by functional differentiation. It is political confidence or trust in particular that serves the reduction of complexity and facilitates individual behavior as well as collective actions (Luhmann, 1989). Although political support is considered a relevant resource, it is generally found to have declined in a majority of western democracies over the last quarter-century (Lipset & Schneider, 1983; Pharr, Putman, & Dalton, 2000; Walz, 1996). On the whole, citizens in Switzerland are more confident in their government and their parliament than their neighbors in Germany or Austria (Linder, 2005). Nevertheless, Swiss citizens' confidence in political institutions has also declined in recent years (Freitag, 2001). In 1989, close to twice as many citizens had confidence in the parliament than in 1996, as indicated by data from representative surveys (Brunner & Siger, 1997). Similarly, the survey data showed that in 1989 eight out of ten citizens had confidence in the government, compared to five out of ten respondents in 1996. This pattern appeared to be rather stable: At the beginning of the year 2009 also about five out of ten Swiss citizens had confidence in the government, compared to four out of ten citizens that expressed their disapproval (gfs.bern, 2009a).

Among other causes, mass media appeared to be an important factor that may contribute to a decline of political support. A variety of studies attest the influence of indicators such as economic growth, unemployment, and inflation (Citrin, 1974; Gilley, 2006). Furthermore, institutional structures (Norris, 1999) and aspects of political processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) were found to explain levels of political support. In addition, there are studies which show that the mass media's news coverage also contributes to the political malaise. Most studies consider mass media not as the only or even primary factor influencing political attitudes (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; Maurer, 2003; Nye Jr, 1997). However, media are considered to be an important factor, because media information is a relevant source of political information (Blödorn, Gerhards, & Klinger, 2005; Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997). Moreover, the media coverage does not merely mirror political realities. Rather, the political information in the mass media is shaped by selection and interpretation processes of journalists (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Marcinkowski, 2000; Maurer, 2003a, 2003b; Sarcinelli, 1998). Being shaped by journalistic rules of selection and interpretation, media content is found to be increasingly negative (Ehmig, 1991; Floß & Marcinkowski, 2008; Hallin, 1992; Kepplinger, 1998; Lipset & Schneider, 1983; M. M. Miller & Denham, 1994; Nye Jr, 1997; T. E. Patterson, 1996). These findings fuel the assumption that there is a distinct impact of media information on political attitudes that goes above and beyond the impact of political reality aspects. In general, then, Wolling (1999, p. 43) maintains that the three empirical phenomena mentioned above – the increasing political dissatisfaction of citizens, the important role of media as a source of political information, and the increasing negativity of media content – warrant the assumption that media may be a significant cause for political dissatisfaction.

Thus, the mass media's impact on political support has been extensively studied

in recent years. Although considerable research has been devoted to the impact of election campaign coverage, rather less attention has been paid to the effects of media presentations of political decision-making processes. The majority of research on mass media's impact on political attitudes is interested in the effects of election campaign coverage (Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson, 2002; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, & Oegema, 2006; Pfau, 1987; Rhee, 1997; Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001; Valentino, Buhr, & Beckmann, 2001), effects of media information on certain policy issues (Iyengar, 1989; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997), or the impact of media information on campaign issues (De Vreese, 2004, 2005; De Vreese & Semetko, 2002). Previous research on media effect has neglected to consider the effects of media depictions of routine decision-making processes such as the discussion of possible problem solutions and the formation of binding decisions (Arnold, 2004; Morris & Clawson, 2007). However, there is research in political science that shows that not only what was decided but also how a decision was made has an impact on citizens' confidence in political actors and institutions (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002).

> "Our analysis also demonstrates that media coverage of the legislative process is a significant determinant of mass approval for Congress. While some recent studies have discussed the public's disdain for legislative processes (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; 2002), there have been no attempts to tie media coverage of legislative process to citizen approval" (Morris & Clawson, 2007, p. 3).

Hence the first objective of the present study is to contribute to media effects research by investigating the impact of media presentations of political decision-making processes on political support.

Previous research has shown that exposure to negative or critical media content may be associated with a decrease in political support (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Kepplinger, 1998, 2000; Kleinnijenhuis, et al., 2006; Maurer, 2003b; Min, 2004; T. E. Patterson, 1996; Wolling, 1999). The majority of studies focuses on outcomes and neglects the investigation of effect mechanisms and processes, however. Hence there is a need for future studies to gain an "improved theoretical understanding of why strategy-oriented media coverage is associated with negative civic outcomes" (Besley & McComas, 2005, p. 429f.), for instance. The second objective of the present study, then, is to explore the mechanisms by which media information about political processes affects citizens' political support.

Moreover, the media's impact on political attitudes was found to vary as a function of different contextual factors (cf. Maurer, 2003b; Moy & Pfau, 2000; Moy, Pfau, & Kahlor, 1999). It would seem, therefore, that further investigations are needed in order to specify the conditions under which media information contributes to a decrease in political support. Whereas research in political science shows that the relationship between political perceptions and related preferences is a relevant predictor of political support (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), media effects re-

search has neglected to consider whether media's impact on political support differs as a function of individual preferences.[3] Hence the third objective of the present study is to contribute to media effects research by exploring the conditions under which media information about political processes affects political support. More precisely, this study endeavours to examine the impact of media information about political processes on political support as a function of individual preferences as regards political processes. Because, as of yet, no standardized scale to measure process preferences and perceptions exists (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147), a further objective of this study is the development and validation of such measures.

In general then, the aim of the present work is to extend previous research in three respects. First, this study aims to investigate the impact of mass media's presentations of political decision-making processes on citizens' political support. Second, efforts are made to examine the processes by which the effects occur. And third, this study explores the conditions under which those effects are particularly strong by considering the role of individual process preferences. Thus, this study's research question is: *How and under which conditions do mass media's presentations of political decision-making processes affect citizens' political support?*

In order to provide theoretical answers to this question, this study draws on two strands of literature, namely discrepancy theory and cultivation theory. In order to explain how the media presentations of political decision-making processes affect support, the study builds on cultivation theory (W. P. Eveland, Jr., 2002). Regarding political decision-making procedures at the national level, the media impact on perceptions is presumed to be strong, because people have fewer opportunities to confirm or deny the medium's depictions based on firsthand experiences. Hence this study argues that regular patterns in how the media presents political decision-making processes may account for changes in the perception of political processes. Media information about political processes within the parliament, for instance, was found to focus on discord and to be characterized by a general negative tone (Lichter & Amundson, 1994; Morris & Clawson, 2005, 2007). Thus, the media may foster the audience's perception that political processes within the government are shaped by discord. The perception of political processes, in turn, is assumed to predict levels of political support. Hence the media may contribute to a decline of political support by en-hancing the perception that political processes are fraught with conflict, for example.

In order to examine the conditions under which the impact of media presentations of political processes on support is particularly strong, this study draws on findings from cognitive psychology and, specifically, discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987).

3 The term preferences in this study refers to "a comparative evaluation of (i.e. a ranking over) a set of objects" (Druckman & Lupia, 2000, p. 2). While acknowledging that the role of preferences in the sense of ideological orientations (e.g. Zaller, 1992), for instance, has been investigated in previous research, it is that special type of preferences in the sense of individual importance attached to certain aspects that is the interest of this study.

This theory basically assumes that "evaluations of individual, social or political objects are partly grounded in disparities between expectations and perceptions" (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 703). Accordingly, studies from political science show that the relationship between perceptions of political realities and related preferences explains variances in support for political actors and institutions (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kimball & Patterson, 1997; S. C. Patterson, Boynton, & Hedlund, 1969). Whereas congruence between perceptions and preferences may enhance confidence, incongruence was found to decrease political confidence. For instance, Patterson, Boynton, & Hedlund (1969) found high levels of support for citizens who feel that what the legislature is like comes close to what they expect of it. In contrast, low levels of support were found for citizens who perceive wide gaps between their perceptions of the legislature and the way they would prefer it to be. Building on discrepancy theory, this study assumes that the effects of process perceptions on political support vary as a function of individual preferences regarding political processes. More precisely, the study assumes that the impact of certain perceptions of political processes is particularly strong, if those aspects of political processes are considered to be important. An example might illustrate this assumption: A person perceives decision-making processes within the parliament to be inefficient. However, this person considers it important that political processes in the parliament are efficient. For this person, efficiency preferences are strong, but political processes within the parliament are perceived to be inefficient. Hence there is a discrepancy between process preferences and perceptions. As a consequence, this person presumably will have low levels of confidence in the parliament. In contrast, imagine another person who also perceives political processes to be inefficient but does not consider efficiency to be important. All else being equal, this person probably has higher levels of confidence in the parliament than the first person. With regard to the media's impact, this study, then, argues that the impact of the media via the perception of political processes on political support is particularly strong for those citizens that hold strong related preferences regarding political decision-making processes.

Empirically, this study approached the research question by investigating the impact of both routine use of political information in the mass media and exposure to specific news articles on political support. This was done based on standardized online surveys with 523 participants from the German-speaking part of Switzerland with an experimental study embedded.[4] In addition, data from a comprehensive content analysis of news coverage in Switzerland and Germany[5] were used to inform

4 The German-speaking part of Switzerland was selected because this enabled the comparison of results from the content analysis as well as findings from the pilot surveys on measuring process preferences and perceptions without having language differences. For financial reasons, the Italian- and French-speaking parts could not be included in this study.

5 The content analysis and the present work were conducted within the framework of the project "The Dynamics of Political Institutions in Mediated Democracies: Political Bargaining and the Transformation of the Public Sphere", led by Frank Marcinkowski. The project is embedded in the National Centre of Competence in Research: Challenges to Democracy in

the development of stimulus material for the experimental study and to provide background information for the interpretations of findings concerning the impact of media use on the perception of political processes and political support.

In general, the study's results lent support to the assumption that mass media may contribute to a decrease of political support by shaping the perception of political processes. In addition, in line with this study's expectations the findings indicate that the media's impact on political support was particularly strong for those respondents for whom the related aspects of decision-making processes are particularly important. However, the perception of those aspects of political processes that are deeply anchored in political beliefs and ideologies of the citizens was found to be rather resistant to media effects. In the main, this study presents first empirical results regarding the role of individual preferences – in the sense of evaluative rankings – as moderator of media effects. The findings may contribute to a differentiation of the rather general claim that negative or critical media information results in a decline of political support.

The outline of this work is as follows. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature on mass media's impact on political support. In Chapter 3 a theoretical model is developed which is designed to capture individual-level differences in political support and takes central account of the relationship between media information, individual perceptions of political processes and individual preferences regarding political processes. Chapter 4 presents the investigation of characteristic patterns in media presentations of political decision-making processes. The development of a scale to measure citizens' process preferences and perceptions is described in Chapter 5. The short-term effects of news articles on process perceptions and political support were investigated in an experimental study that is presented in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 refers to the long-term impact of media use on process perceptions and political support and takes central account of the role of individual process preferences in shaping the relationship between media use and political support. Finally, Chapter 8 offers a general discussion of this study's findings and suggests implications for future research.

the 21st century (NCCR Democracy). Germany was selected as reference case in the content analysis in order to be able to compare patterns of news coverage in Switzerland as a consensus democracy with data from a rather competitive democracy.

# 2. The Impact of Mass Media on Political Attitudes

As outlined in the previous chapter, this study's research question is: How and under what conditions do the mass media's presentations of political decision-making processes affect citizens' political support? The mass media's impact on political support has been extensively studied in recent years. The aim of this literature review, then, is to provide an overview of the state of research that investigates the relationship between political media information and the recipients' political attitudes in order to stimulate the development of a theoretical model that attempts to explain the impact of the mass media's presentations of political decision-making processes on political support. Hence studies that investigate the relationship between mass media and political attitudes are the focus of the literature review in this chapter. Two criteria were formulated in order to guide the selection of the studies. With regard to the independent variable, studies that look at the media's impact on evaluative political attitudes related to political support are selected. The review therefore includes studies on the media's impact on trust in political institutions or politicians, political malaise, political cynicism, political efficacy, or political alienation. Studies that investigate the media's impact on evaluative attitudes not related to political aspects, such as media effects on social trust (Norris, 2002) or the media's impact on confidence in the news media, the court system or public schools (Moy & Pfau, 2000), are not included. Also excluded from this overview are studies exploring the association between media use and political behavior, for instance research interested in media effects on mobilization or political participation (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005; Newton, 1999). The same applies to studies that examine the media's impact on political knowledge (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; W. P. Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Tan, 1980). With regard to the dependent variable, studies that investigate the impact of political media information are chosen. Studies investigating the impact of entertainment media content on political attitudes are not the focus of this review.

Studies that fulfill both criteria and probe the impact of political media information on evaluative political attitudes were included in the literature review. The table in Appendix 10.1 presents an overview of the studies that are included in this literature overview. The studies are based on various theoretical approaches, such as videomalaise theory, framing effects theory, and priming theory. A comprehensive overview of these theories would go beyond this study's framework. Instead, this chapter focuses on substantial findings with regard to the relationship between political media information and citizens' political attitudes. Only in cases where I consider it necessary for the understanding of research findings will I refer to the theoretical foundations. The state of scientific debate concerning three core questions is reflected. Section 2.1 gives an overview of different aspects of political media information that were found to have an impact on citizens' political support:

Routine media use of political information, exposure to certain aspects of media content and exposure to strategy frames are distinguished. The purpose of this section is to provide answers to the question of which aspects of media presentations of political decision-making processes may affect citizens' political support. Section 2.2 focuses on the question of how media information affects attitudes and reflects mechanisms and mediating variables. Some studies, for instance, investigate whether the media influence political support by shaping the perception of political realities. Section 2.3 discusses conditions under which the mass media's impact on political attitudes is particularly likely. For instance studies provide evidence for the assumption that high levels of general trust in the media might enhance the likelihood of media effects. Based on this overview, those moderator variables that are most applicable for this study's research interest are selected. Generally, methodological aspects of the studies are considered in all the sections in order to inform methodological choices of the present work. Section 2.4 summarizes identified research gaps and their implications for the present study.

## *2.1. Political Media Information as a Predictor of Political Attitudes*

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of studies investigating the relationship between political media information and political attitudes. In Section 2.1.1, studies that, in the tradition of videomalaise theory, explore the relationship between *routine use of political media information* and political attitudes are presented. Based on the previously described selection criteria for the literature review, I focus on those studies that are interested in effects of the use of political information. Section 2.1.2 presents studies investigating the impact of *specific aspects of media content* on citizens' political attitudes. More precisely, studies that explore the impact of content aspects which are presumed to have negative effects on citizens' political attitudes are the focus of attention here. Relevant studies investigate the impact of a variety of media content aspects, such as media attention to political scandals, the media's conflict-orientation, and media criticism. A rather narrow conceptualization of media aspects associated with negative effects on political attitudes are *media strategy frames*. Thus, I present studies on the effects of strategy frames in a separate section (Section 2.1.3). Section 2.1.4 discusses identified research voids and suggestions for the present study.

### 2.1.1. The Impact of Routine Use of Political Media Information

Various studies focus on routine media use as a predictor of political attitudes. The "videomalaise" hypothesis by Robinson (1975, 1976, 1977) has been particularly influential. According to this hypothesis, television is held responsible for a decline of political support due to its "interpretive, sensational, aggressive, and anti-

institutional news items" (Robinson, 1976, p. 426), its "extraordinary emphasis on negativistic reportage" and the "predilection for violence and conflict" (Robinson, 1976, p. 428). Compared to the press, television is supposed to have a profound effect on political attitudes due to its high credibility and large audience. In order to investigate the impact of this presumably negativistic television news coverage on audience attitudes, media use measures were used as surrogates for media content data. Based on cross-sectional survey data, Robinson (1976) demonstrated that people who solely rely on television[6] during political campaigns show lower levels of political efficacy[7] than subjects relying on some other medium. This finding led the author to conclude that television news foster political cynicism. In general, the empirical evidence for this claim provided by Robinson is rather weak. The majority of results are based on cross-tabulations.

The work of Robinson (1975, 1976, 1977) stimulated a variety of subsequent studies, producing ambiguous results. A multitude of studies indicate that there is no significant relationship between media use and political attitudes, especially if the results are controlled for socio-demographic variables and/or other relevant factors. Recent studies from the U.S. showed that media use is a weak predictor of cynicism (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennett, 1999; Hetherington, 1998; Pinkleton & Austin, 2002; Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998). For example, a study by Moy et al. (Moy & Pfau, 2000; Moy, et al., 1999) investigated the relationship between people's use of specific communication sources (newspaper, television, political talk radio) and political attitudes.[8] The study encompasses media content analyses and surveys that were conducted over a two-year period. Based on regression analyses that control for other relevant predictors, the authors found a relative lack of media effects on confidence in presidency and Congress. This finding is supported by other

6 Television exposure was measured with the question: 'Of all these ways of following the campaign, which one would you say you got the most information from - newspapers, radio, television, magazines?'

7 Political efficacy was measured with the following five items (Robinson, 1976): 'Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on', 'Voting is the only way that people like me can have a say about how the government runs things', 'People like me don't have any say about what the government does', 'The way people vote is the main thing that decides how things are run in this country', 'I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think.'

8 Media use of political news is measured not only as exposure to a communication source but also as attention paid to that source. The media use variable was built as an average index of media use and attention measures. Confidence in institutions was measured on three levels: the global attitude toward institution (based on six differentials, i.e. foolish/wise, favorable/unfavorable, wrong/right, negative/positive, unacceptable/acceptable, bad/good), trust in institutions (untrustworthy/trustworthy) and confidence in institutions ('How much confidence would you place in the institution?'). The content analysis employed the same measures that were used in the survey. The data analysis is not based on individual level data, however, because subjects were not assigned to indices of that media content which they actually have used. Rather, media use was included as an independent variable in the analytical models. The link with the content data was established when interpreting the results.

studies in the context of the presidential election campaigns (O'Keefe, 1980) and in the framework of an off-year election (Leshner & McKean, 1997).

Expanding the U.S. focus of research, Holtz-Bacha (1990) found that for Germany the assumption of the videomalaise theory does not hold. Findings based on a survey of the West German electorate suggest that high levels of exposure to political information in both television and print media are associated with lower levels of political alienation.[9] Instead, it was exposure to entertainment content in print and television that explained higher levels of political distrust. For Great Britain, a study by (Newton, 1999) provided findings that challenge the videomalaise assumption. The author used data from the 1996 British Attitudes Social Survey and showed that neither the use of political information in tabloid newspapers nor the use of political information in television was associated with political malaise. Consistently, taking a national comparative perspective, Norris (2000) found no association between television use and civic malaise in many advanced industrialized democracies based on World Value Survey data.

Recent research extends the analysis of the relationship between media use and political attitudes and investigates the effects of internet use (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Wolling, 2009). Findings based on an online survey among web users in the context of U.S. election campaigns suggest that reliance on the internet is associated with lower levels of trust in the government (Johnson & Kaye, 2003). In contrast, a study by Wolling (2009) with citizens of Germany found that the use of political information on the internet does not result in a decrease of confidence in democracy. The ambiguous findings on the role of the internet in these studies might be due to differences in the conceptualization of independent variables.

Other studies indicate that the relationship between media use and political attitudes is more complex than videomalaise hypothesis suggests. For instance, a study by Becker & Whitney (1980) suggests that the effects of media use on political attitudes are contingent upon the object of attitude, i.e. national or local government. Based on survey data, the authors investigated the relationship between media dependency[10], trust in the national government, and trust in the local government. With age and education being controlled for, television use had a significant negative effect on trust in the local government, but a non-significant effect on trust in the national government. Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (1998) argue that the impact of

9 Political alienation was measured with the following six items (Holtz-Bacha, 1990): 'Politics in a democracy depends on the individual citizens', 'Politicians forget their voters once they are elected', 'People like me don't have any influence on the effectiveness of our government', 'Politics is a dirty business', 'Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on', 'Politicians never say what they really think.'

10 People are dependent upon a medium if they rely on that medium, use it regularly, and pay attention to information on local and national political affairs in that medium. Media dependency, hence, not only accounts for the use of a certain medium but also describes the relationship between the use of this particular medium and the use of other media (Becker & Whitney, 1980).

media use on political attitudes is different for emotional reactions compared to cognitive responses. "When people make judgments based on emotions, they react from the gut, which means they often react instinctively" (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1998, p. 479). Using data from a national survey of public attitudes, the authors did not find an effect of media use on cognitive evaluations of Congress. But those who rely on television or the radio – compared to newspapers – as their main source of political information were more likely to have negative emotions toward Congress.[11] Hence political media use appeared to be associated with emotional but not cognitive responses.

### 2.1.2. The Impact of Certain Aspects of News Coverage

The studies presented in the previous section investigate the relationship between media use and political support. Hence they cannot provide answers to the question of which precise aspects of media content may be responsible for a decline of political support. This question is the focus of research presented in this section. This overview focuses on studies that examine the impact of media content aspects that are presumed to have negative effects on political attitudes.

For instance, research suggests that the *interpretative style of news* is associated with a decrease of political support (T. E. Patterson, 1993, 1996). The interpretative style goes along with journalistic cynicism, because journalists "constantly question politicians' motives, methods, and effectiveness" (T. E. Patterson, 1996, p. 103). Based on a content analysis of the election coverage from 1990 to 1992, Patterson (1993) found an increase in interpretative and horse-race journalism. The author reported parallel trends of an increase of interpretative news in the media coverage and a decrease of voters' satisfaction with political leaders, Congress and the presidency in the U.S. Because of this parallelism, the author concluded that the interpretative news style leads to citizens' dissatisfaction with political leaders and institutions.

Other studies indicate that *media presentation of political actors* may contribute to a decrease in citizens' political support. For Germany, Kepplinger (1998, 2000) showed that negative presentations of political actors in the media coverage increased since the late 1960s. For the same time period, the author noted a decline in support for the political elite in Germany. Based on these parallel trends, the author concluded that negative depictions of political actors in the media decrease citizens' trust in political leaders. A study by Maurer (2003a, 2003b) provides more confidence regarding the assumed causality of the relationship between media presentations of political actors and citizens' political attitudes. Based on a data set that combines media content data and panel survey data on the individual level, the

11 Emotional evaluations of Congress are measured with questions referring to anger, unease, fear, and disgust.

author found that negative presentations of political actors[12] resulted in a decline of political support.

Miller et al. (1979) investigated the impact of *media criticism* on trust in the government.[13] Critical newspapers are those containing a high proportion of articles that criticize aspects of the political sphere. The authors combined data from a content analysis of 94 newspapers' front pages with survey data. For each respondent, the survey data were matched with content data from those newspapers which were actually read by that respondent. The authors found that readers of highly critical papers were more distrustful of government than others. This finding is consistent with results from a study by Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, & Oegema (2006). The authors investigated the impact of news coverage of the 2002 electoral campaign in the Netherlands on political attitudes of the citizens. The data analysis is based on media content and survey data that were linked on the individual level. For each respondent, only that part of the media coverage that this respondent could actually have been perceived, was included in the analysis. Based on the results, the authors concluded that critical statements in conflict-oriented and party-related news discourage trust in political leaders.[14] In line with this finding, Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht (1997), based on a distributed-lag time series regression model, found that the negative tone of media coverage of Congress decreases public approval for Congress. A study by Wolling (1999) probed the effects of negative statements in media articles based on a combination of media content analysis and survey data. In the data set, each person was assigned media content values that describe the media outlets used by this person. The results show that negative statements in the media decrease respondents' identification with the political community. There were no significant effects of negative media information on subjects' legitimacy of the political system or their perceived efficiency of the political system, however.

Research in the field of political sciences showed that trust in government significantly decreases when political scandals arise (Chanley, Rudolph, & Rahn, 2000). In line with this finding, media scientists have investigated the role of *media attention*

12 The index describing the media's presentation of political actors was built as the arithmetical difference between negative and positive presentations of political actors in the media.

13 Trust in government was measured with the standard National Election Survey (NES) trust in government scale. The scale encompasses the following items: 'Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?', 'How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right – just always, or only some of the time?', 'Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all people?', 'Do you feel that almost all of the people running the government are smart people, who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a few of them don't seem to know what they are doing?', 'Do you think that quite a few people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked at all?' (A. H. Miller, et al., 1979).

14 The dependent variable trust in political leaders was measured with two questions; the first referring to how one would rate a politician as a political leader, the second one asking how one would rate a politician's capacity to be aware of the people's problems.

*to political scandals* as a predictor of citizens' political attitudes. A study by Morris & Clawson (2007) tests the hypothesis that media attention to political scandals weakens public approval of Congress. In order to test this assumption, the authors analyzed the evening news coverage of the U.S. Congress from 1990 through 2006 in the New York Times (NYT) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). The authors coded whether the newscasts contained information on congressional scandals.[15] Based on time-series models, the results indicate that approval of Congress[16] drops, if media attention to scandals in Congress increased. The results are controlled for economic expectations and presidential approval. In contrast, a study investigating the impact of media attention to scandals on political support in Germany (Wolling, 2001) does not support the assumption that media attention to scandals decreases support. Based on the combination of media content and survey data, Wolling (2001) showed that media coverage of political scandals[17] is not related to the perceived legitimacy of the political system, if variables such as media use and perception of the economy are included as control variables. The ambiguous findings might be due to differences in the conceptualization of independent variables. Whereas the study by Morris & Clawson (2007) looked at the media's impact on approval of Congress, Wolling (2001) investigated media effects on system legitimacy, i.e. satisfaction with democracy.

Morris & Clawson (2007) probed the effects of media *depictions of political processes* on public approval. The authors found that media attention to legislative maneuverings[18] results in significant declines of public approval and supposed that this finding indicates that "the masses do not enjoy viewing the bureaucratic elements of the lawmaking processes, such as committee procedures, markups, floor proceedings, amendments, veto threats, etc." (Morris & Clawson, 2007, p. 18). In addition, the authors probed whether *references to political conflicts* or political compromises in the media affect political attitudes. Conflict-oriented news was hypothesized to decrease approval of Congress. The results, however, showed that neither media attention to political conflict nor media attention to political compromises significantly contributed to a decrease in support for Congress. In contrast, as individual, partisan, or within-party conflicts increase in the media, public approval for Congress was found to increase. Other studies, in contrast, indicate that media attention to conflict and discord enhances the political malaise. For instance, Mutz & Reeves (2005, p. 3), based on an experimental study, found

15 An article was coded as scandalous congressional news, if it contains illegal or unethical misdeeds in which Congress was directly or indirectly involved.

16 Public approval for Congress was included in the data analysis as a single item-measure based on a variety of questions such as 'Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?', or, 'Do you have a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little confidence in Congress?'

17 Media articles that refer to illegal, illegitimate or unethical political behavior were coded as scandal coverage.

18 Legislative maneuvering was coded when the articles refer to activities in the law-making process, such as filibusters, hearings, vetoes, etc.

that exposure to political debates that are shaped by incivility significantly decreases subjects' trust in politicians, trust in Congress, and trust in the government.

### 2.1.3. The Impact of Media Strategy Frames

Research on media framing constitutes a very broad and diverse field and this study cannot provide a comprehensive overview. An extensive overview of media framing research was recently provided by Matthes (2007b), for example. Nevertheless, some clarifying remarks on the media frames concept are considered to be important in order to outline the underlying assumptions of the studies presented here. Most studies in political communication research are interested in emphasis or issue framing effects (Druckman, 2001a, 2004; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Matthes, 2007b), in contrast to equivalence framing rooted in psychological research (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Whereas equivalent framing refers to logically equivalent versions of a message (for instance Version A of a message informs about 400 people that will lose their jobs and Version B of this messages informs about a 1/3 probability that nobody will lose its job and a 2/3 probability that 600 people will lose their jobs), emphasis framing refers to differences in the salience of several considerations. For instance, a hate group can be framed in terms of free speech or it can be framed in terms of public safety, each frame emphasizing different considerations (Druckman, 2004). The most relevant definition of emphasis framing stems from Entmann (1993, p. 52) and reads:

> "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication test, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation."

This literature review includes studies examining framing effects on political attitudes. The framing of political news in terms of strategic considerations in particular is found to foster political cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; De Vreese, 2005; Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001; Valentino, Buhr, et al., 2001). Media strategy frames are characterized by the following elements:

> "(1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics, and audience (voters); (4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; (5) heavy weighing of polls and the candidate's standing in them" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 33).

Several experimental studies conducted by Cappella & Jamieson (1996, 1997) provide the first empirical evidence for the impact of media strategy frames on recipients' political cynicism.[19] A series of experimental studies (post-test-only design

19 The authors defined political cynicism as an attitude that implies "that the self-interest of political actors is their primary goal and that the common interest is secondary at best or played out only for its political advantage" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 142). The political cynicism index was developed in order to measure attitudes addressing political events such

with control group) showed that strategy frames in political news are activating cynicism about political campaigns, policy, and governance. The experiments dealt with different political news contexts, including news reports on political ads, election campaigns and a complex public policy debate (the health care reform debate of 1994).

Subsequent research delivers further evidence for the assumption that strategy frames decrease political support. For instance Valentino and collaborators (Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001; Valentino, Buhr, et al., 2001) explored the effect of strategy frames on campaign evaluations and trust in government. In general, the authors found that strategy framed campaign news foster strategy oriented thoughts and reactions and increase negative evaluations of the campaign. Moreover, strategy frames appeared to reduce confidence in government, but this effect was not statistically significant for the general sample.

A study by De Vreese (2004) contributes to framing research by examining strategy framing effects in a non-U.S. context and in a non-election setting. In addition, this study is not only interested in short-term effects but also explores longer-term effects of strategy frames on political cynicism. [20] The author investigated the impact of media frames in the news coverage of debates about the enlargement of the EU on political cynicism. Because "recent studies of the effects of strategic news coverage have focused on the press but predicted that television might be an even more powerful medium for effects of strategic news" (De Vreese, 2004, p. 197), the author looked at the effects of television newscasts. The impact of strategy frames was tested based on a two-wave experiment with immediate and delayed (one week after the treatment) posttests. Subjects who received the story with the strategy frame showed significantly higher levels of political cynicism than subjects who received the story with the issue focus. This effect was significant only in the immediate posttest, but not in the delayed posttest. De Vreese (2004) concluded that strategic news affects cynicism also outside the context of election campaigns. However, these effects were found to disappear over time when individuals were not frequently and repeatedly exposed to strategic news. A study based on a two-wave panel survey in combination with media content data by De Vreese (2005) increases

as campaigns and debates, especially the trustworthiness of deliberative processes and the motivation of actors. The index is related to standard measures of trust in the government, confidence in the government and political efficacy without being highly redundant with the other measures. Cynicism was measured through a series of questions about the motives of politicians, their honesty, superficiality and self-interest. The items focus on "manipulativeness of advocates (candidates in campaigns and representatives of groups in policy debates), dishonesty, winning and getting ahead, looking good, using fear, the absence of real choice, and the role of big money" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 143).

20 Political cynicism was measured with the following four items derived from Cappella & Jamieson (1997): 'Politicians are too superficial when dealing with enlargement', 'Politicians are too concerned with public opinion about enlargement', 'The debate about enlargement is more about strategy then content', and 'Politicians are clear and honest in their arguments about enlargement.'

the generalizability of findings from experimental research. The results indicate that "strategic reporting is not per se cynicism-invoking"; rather the effects appeared to be contingent upon the level of strategic reporting in news coverage (De Vreese, 2005, p. 284).

### 2.1.4. Summary and Conclusion

Regarding the effects of *routine media use*, the videomalaise theory has been particularly influential. The empirical evidence for the videomalaise assumption, however, is thin and videomalaise research has been subject of intense criticism. Besides methodological concerns, the primary point of criticism refers to the underlying assumption that there is a homogeneous critical and negative character of media content. This assumption is not tested empirically in most studies. Furthermore, studies in the tradition of videomalaise theory are not able to provide answers to the crucial question of which precise characteristics of news media coverage have an impact on political attitudes (Wolling, 1999). Critics of the videomalaise assumption argue that it is not so much the intensity of news consumption; instead, the explanation of political attitudes lies in characteristics of the news (Kleinnijenhuis, et al., 2006, p. 89).

Studies that investigate the effects of *specific aspects of news content* on political attitudes provide answers to the question of which aspects of news coverage may contribute to a decrease of political support. Whereas negative media content is found to weaken approval, positive media content does not necessarily strengthen support (Maurer, 2003b). Likewise, research shows that the effect of negative information on political attitudes is larger than the effect of positive information (Allen & Burrell, 2002; Lau, 1982). In general, the literature review shows that media content aspects such as negative statements in the media, media cynicism, and a negative tone of news coverage impact on the audience's political attitudes. With regard to this study's research interest in the effects of media presentations of political processes, negative media information on political processes will be considered as a predictor of political support. Previous research on the impact of news coverage of political processes suggests that attention to political discord or conflicts (Durr, et al., 1997; Mutz & Reeves, 2005) and the presentation of legislative maneuverings (Morris & Clawson, 2007) decrease political support. Thus, the impact of media information about political processes will be investigated in the present work by focusing on the role of media attention to political conflicts and legislative maneuverings.

Other studies provide evidence for the assumption that *media strategy frames* shape political attitudes. The majority of studies on strategy framing effects are experimental studies that focus on short-term effects (Bertram Scheufele, 2004a, 2004b). The posttests were conducted directly after the stimulus treatment, a scenario that does not reflect realistic decision-making situations. "The high internal validity of experimentation comes at the price of unnatural viewing environments

and forced exposure" (De Vreese, 2005, p. 287). In general, it seems rather less applicable to consider strategy frames as an independent variable in the present work, because the impact of strategy frames on political attitudes results from their influence on the perceptions of motivations and strategies of political actors (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Thus, strategy frames appear to be less relevant for the analysis of media presentations of political decision-making processes. Moreover, strategy frames were found to be characteristic for election campaign coverage (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996), but are less dominant in public policy news (Lawrence, 2000). It seems warranted to suggest that strategy frames are also less characteristic for media presentations of day-to-day political decision-making processes.

In general, the literature review shows that the mass media's impact on political attitudes is investigated by using a variety of different *conceptualizations of political attitudes*. For instance, studies investigate the impact of media information on political trust, political cynicism, political malaise, or political alienation. For a recent and comprehensive overview of these concepts see Wolling (1999). In the present study, conceptualizations of political support will not include references to benchmarks of political evaluations other than yardsticks referring to aspects of political decision-making processes, so that this study's participants are not "distracted" from the role of political processes when forming attitudes of political support. Such benchmarks of evaluation are included in many measures, however. For instance, items of the political efficacy scale imply the expectation that public officials should care about what people think. The cynicism scale implies benchmarks of evaluation, such as politicians' honesty, their conscientiousness and issue orientation. Similarly, the trust in government scale includes yardsticks for assessment, such as considering the interests of all the people and being smart. The same refers to measures of political alienation, which refer to politicians' honesty, for instance. Because the concept of political culture is very diverse and in general encompasses behavioural components as well as evaluative attitudes, it is also considered somewhat less appropriate for the purpose of this study. This study, then, will focus on the media's impact on confidence in political institutions and the evaluation of their performance. Different objects of evaluation are distinguished in the literature and will be considered in this study. Wolling (1999) for instance differentiated between authorities, regime, and political community. Pickel & Walz (1997) distinguished between parties, political authorities, political institutions, and democracy. Easton (1975, p. 437) argues that the distinction between people running institutions, that is the "incumbents of offices", and the political institutions as such is useful. In this study government, parliament, democracy, and political actors are distinguished as objects of political support.

Three points of criticism apply to all three strands of the research, i.e. studies on the impact of media use, media content aspects and media strategy frames on political support. First, the *majority of studies focus on the effects of election and campaign coverage* (Benoit, et al., 2002; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; De Vreese, 2004, 2005; De Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Kleinnijenhuis, et al., 2006; Pfau, 1987; Rhee, 1997; Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001; Valentino, Buhr, et al., 2001). Thus, little

is known about the impact of strategy frames outside the election context, for instance (De Vreese, 2004, p. 191). Second, research interested in the direct relationship between media negativity and political attitudes focuses on outcomes and neglects the investigation of *effect mechanisms and processes*. For instance, there is a need for future studies to gain an "improved theoretical understanding of why strategy-oriented media coverage is associated with negative civic outcomes" (Besley & McComas, 2005, p. 429f.). In order to inform the conceptualization of effect mechanisms in this study, research that considers effect mechanisms is presented in Section 2.2. Third, research neglects to consider the *conditions* under which political attitudes are particularly susceptible to media effects. In order to inform the choice of possible conditions, an overview of studies exploring the conditionality of media effects is given in Section 2.3.

### *2.2. Mechanisms by which Media Information has an Impact on Political Attitudes*

This section provides an overview of studies that examine the effect mechanisms in order to explain how media information alters political attitudes. The investigation of process mechanisms is an important aim in research:

> "Establishing relationships between variables is important, because correlation is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for claiming that two variables are causally related. Of even greater scientific interest is explaining how or by what means a causal effect occurs" (Preacher & Hayes, 2008, p. 879).

In order to investigate how the media affect political attitudes, research considers variables that mediate the relationship between media information and political attitudes. "Questions about cause–effect relations invoke the idea of mediation, the process by which some variables exert influences on others through intervening or mediator variables" (Preacher & Hayes, 2008, p. 879). Despite potential non-significant direct associations between media and political support, there might be a significant indirect effect. Such a significant indirect effect, then, would describe the effect of media information on political support via the influence on a third variable. The overview of variables that mediate the relationship between media information and political attitudes in this section will inform the choice of possible mediators in the present study. More precisely, plausible explanations for the way in which media depictions of political decision-making processes may evoke a decrease in political support will be developed. Because only a few studies on the media's impact on political support consider mediating variables, the present section expands the focus on studies that investigate the media's impact on attitudes of political support and also includes studies on the relationship between media and attitudes towards policy issues, in order to provide a rather broad overview of possible mediators.

Research, for instance, suggests that the mass media may decrease political support by shaping the perception of political realities (Section 2.2.1). Other studies propose that simple media attention to certain political issues may shape presidential evaluations, because these issues then serve as a benchmark for the evaluation (Sec-

tion 2.2.2). Further studies indicate that media information may foster fear and anger which might in turn lead to an increase in political distrust (Section 2.2.3). The media may not only serve as an obstacle to political support but also contribute to it by enhancing citizens' political knowledge (Section 2.2.4). Seciton 2.2.5 summarizes the findings and discusses suggestions for the present study.

### 2.2.1. Trough Effects on Social Reality Perceptions

Some research suggests that social reality perceptions might mediate the media's impact on political attitudes. Although the mass media's influence on social reality perceptions is at the core of cultivation research (see Section 3.2.1), this section is not about cultivation research, because cultivation research perceives reality perceptions as an independent variable. Instead, this section focuses on the role of reality perceptions as a variable that mediates the relationship between media information and political attitudes.

For instance, a study by Hetherington (1996) investigates the relationship between media use, the audiences' perception of the economy and vote choice in the framework of the 1992 U.S. national election. The author found a highly significant and negative effect of both media consumption in general and attention to the presidential campaign in particular on voters' perceptions of the national economy. In addition, there was a highly significant effect of economic evaluation on vote choice. Hence, the author concluded that mass media had an "indirect impact on vote choice through contribution of negative retrospective economic evaluations" (Hetherington, 1996, p. 383). The study does not provide a test of mediation in the strict sense, because the effect of economic evaluations on vote choice is not controlled for media consumption (cf. Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Other studies showed that attributions of responsibility function as a mediator of media effects. Those responsibility attributions can be described as a distinct aspect of social reality perceptions. In a series of experimental studies, Iyengar (1987) explored the effect of media framing of political issues. Two versions of media framing are distinguished: Framing issues in terms of societal outcomes (issue framing) and framing issues in terms of particular victims and individual fates (episodic framing). These media frames were found to alter the attribution of responsibility. Results indicate that issue frames foster the attribution of responsibility for political problems to the political system and episodic frames foster the attribution of responsibility to individual persons. The attribution of responsibility to the political system, in turn, was linked with the assessment of presidential performance. "The more individuals attribute problems to structural or systemic causes, the more critical they are of President Reagan's performance" (Iyengar, 1987, p. 828). The assumption of indirect framing effects was not tested empirically in a strict sense, because the effects of responsibility attributions on presidential evaluation were not controlled for the impact of media frames. Iyengar & Simon (1993) replicated the experimental findings reported above with survey data.

### 2.2.2. Trough Effects on Issue Accessibility or Perceived Issue Importance

Another explanation for the mechanisms by which media information affects political attitudes is suggested by priming theory.[21] Some scholars argue that priming effects provide an explanation for the mechanisms by which negative media information affects political attitudes, because most of the stimuli used in priming experiments have been bad news, not good news (Kosicki, 2002, p. 76). Building on the idea of agenda-setting, researchers formulated the hypothesis that media coverage influences citizens' assessment of the presidential performance by altering the importance that citizens describe to national policy issues (Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984; Kosicki, 1993; M. E. McCombs & Shaw, 1993). The priming hypothesis assumes that "by focusing on some issues and not others, the news may determine the standards by which a president's performance is evaluated and may, as a result, provoke surges and declines in presidential popularity" (J. M. Miller & Krosnick, 1996, p. 80). Iyengar & Simon (1993) examined the priming hypothesis in the context of the Gulf crisis based on a combination of content analysis and survey data. The content analysis of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) news coverage between August 1990 and May 1991 showed that the Gulf war received an increasing amount of media attention. As a parallel trend, citizens were found to perceive that the crisis was the most important problem facing the country. As a consequence, they assigned greater weight to their beliefs and opinions concerning foreign policy when forming attitudes towards George Bush. These attitudes were shown to override the role of economic assessments, and, in turn, made the perception of George Bush more positive. Similarly, Krosnick & Brannon (1993), based on survey data from the National Election Panel Study (NES), found support for their assumption that the media's focus on the Gulf crisis increased the impact of George Bush's handling of the crisis on his overall job performance. In a study on the Iran-contra disclosure, Krosnick & Kinder (1990) found the same effect pattern. The authors assumed that for citizens who had been interviewed after the disclosure, the issue of the U.S. intervening in Central America had a greater impact on their presidential evaluations than for citizens who had been interviewed before the story broke. Other studies showed that although priming effects may explain presidential evaluations, they are less applicable to predict evaluations of political groups (McGraw & Ling, 2003). In all these studies, the assumed indirect priming effects were not the subject of strict empirical tests, however.

21 Discussions on how priming and framing effects differ go beyond the scope of this paper. For further information see, for instance, Price & Tewksbury (1997).

### 2.2.3. Trough Effects on Emotions

Most research in the field of political media effects focuses on cognitive, not on affective responses. Hence, Kinder (1998, p. 190) argues that "about the emotional requirements of citizenship, or the emotional foundations of political opinion, little is heard". Until now, only a few studies have explored the relationship between media information, emotional responses and political attitudes. For instance Schemer (2009) reported findings that indicate that the news coverage in tabloids fuels negative emotions. Those negative emotions, in turn, affected subjects' political attitudes. Based on data from a three-wave panel survey the author showed that political media information in the context of a referendum on the asylum law in Switzerland raised negative emotions, such as fear and anger. These emotions were found to have consequences for policy judgments, more precisely attitudes towards the modification of the asylum law, in turn. This finding is consistent with results from a study by Sotirovic (2001). The author showed that fear acts as a mediator of media use on attitudes towards punitive policies. In line with these results, Holbert (2004) found that police reality show viewing predicts fear of crime. Fear of crime, in turn, was found to lead to the endorsement of capital punishment and handgun ownership.

### 2.2.4. Trough Effects on Political Knowledge

A variety of studies indicate that media information increases the audience's political knowledge (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997). For instance, Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson (2002) found that watching primary campaigns enhanced the viewers' knowledge of the candidate's policy positions. Studies that address the question of how media effects on political knowledge are related to changes in political attitudes are rather rare. Interesting findings in this respect are provided in a study by Moy & Pfau (2000). Using structural equation modeling, the authors not only investigated direct effects of media information on confidence in political institutions, but also indirect effects through the media's impact on political knowledge. Findings indicate that newspaper use increased political knowledge, which in turn enhanced trust and confidence in the presidency and Congress. Talk show viewing, in contrast, had a negative indirect effect on trust and confidence in Congress via political knowledge. Overall, the authors found more positive indirect effects than negative indirect effects. On the whole, then, the findings suggest that media's impact on political knowledge might lead to an increase of political support. Findings from a study on trust in the World Trade Organization (WTO) do not confirm this assumption (Moy, Torres, Tanaka, & McCluskey, 2005). The authors found no indirect effects of media reliance through institutional knowledge on trust in the WTO.

### 2.2.5. Summary and Conclusion

A variety of studies presented in this section give explanations for the question of how media information influence political attitudes. Studies investigating the relationship between media information, *perceptions of social reality* and political attitudes provide some evidence for the assumption that reality perceptions act as a mediator of the mass media's impact on political attitudes. On the side of the independent variable, studies investigated effects on individuals' policy satisfaction and satisfaction with the performance of political leaders. It seems plausible to argue that the results may generalize media effects on political support. Thus, conceptualizing perceptions of political decision-making processes as a factor that mediates the relationship between media presentations of decision-making processes and political support appears to be promising.

Studies in the tradition of priming research provide evidence for the assumption that perceived *issue accessibility or perceived issue importance* might mediate the relationship between media information and political attitudes, and presidential evaluations in particular. In general, research so far has tended to neglect the question whether citizens consider the national importance of an issue and, hence, engage in a cognitive process, or whether priming is just a function of accessibility and occurs unconsciously (J. M. Miller, 2007). The influence of the assumed mediating variables is not explicitly investigated in most studies: "Despite the normative implications of the conventional wisdom that accessibility mediates agenda setting, to date the hypothesis has not been subject to empirical tests" (J. M. Miller, 2007, p. 691) because "in virtually every past agenda-setting study, content and accessibility are confounded" (J. M. Miller, 2007, p. 707). The same is true with respect to priming research.

Other studies provide empirical evidence for the assumption that *emotional responses* may mediate the effects of media information on policy attitudes. Although emotions appeared to be a relevant mediator of the relationship between media information and policy attitudes, little is known at present with respect to the role of emotions as a mediator of the media's impact on attitudes towards political institutions, actors or democracy. It appears that emotions are less likely to mediate the relationship between media presentations of day-to-day political decision-making processes and political support.

*Political knowledge* may mediate the effects of media information on confidence in political institutions. The findings are rather diverse, indicating positive indirect effects of media exposure on confidence in some cases and negative indirect effects in other cases. With regard to the research purpose of this study, I may assume that political knowledge might mediate the relationship between media information about political processes and citizens' political support. By increasing the knowledge about political processes, the media might also shape their perception. The two concepts, hence, appear to be closely related in that case.

The majority of studies which investigate media effects and consider mediating variables did not apply the data analytical procedures to estimate indirect effects in a

strict sense. Hence most of what is known about the mediating impact of social reality perceptions, for instance, is based on plausible theoretical argumentations rather than on a solid empirical basis. Whereas a mediating variable is influenced by the independent variable and then, in turn, influences the dependent variable, a moderating variable specifies the conditions under which a given effect occurs, as well as conditions under which the strength or direction of an effect varries (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997). The following section provides an overview of variables that may moderate the relationship between media information and political attitudes.

### *2.3. Conditionality of the Media's Impact on Political Attitudes*

This section provides a brief overview of variables that specify the conditions under which media effects on political attitudes are particularly likely. The purpose of this section is to inform the selection of moderator variables that might be relevant with respect to the present study's research interest. In order to provide a rather broad overview of possible moderators, the present section expands its focus on studies that explore the media's impact on political support and also includes studies on the relationship between media and attitudes towards policy issues. Several studies indicate that media effects are particularly strong, if the audience's trust in media is high (Section 2.3.1). Other studies indicate that media's impact on political attitudes varies as a function of individuals' political sophistication (Section 2.3.2). Further studies investigate whether media effects are contingent upon the general intensity of media use (Section 2.3.3). More recently, the modus of information processing has been the focus of scholars' attention. Section 2.3.4 provides an overview of research exploring the moderating role of online vs. memory-based processing of media information. Section 2.3.5 presents studies that explore the moderating effects of individual predispositions. Finally, Section 2.3.6 summarizes the findings and discusses suggestions for the present study.

#### 2.3.1. The Role of Media Trust and Media Credibility

The perceived trustworthiness or credibility of mass media[22] is considered a relevant precondition for the media to have an impact on political attitudes. More precisely, media effects are supposed to be stronger if trust in media information is high (Matthes, 2007b, p. 187). This argument traces back to the classical persuasion studies by Hovland & Weiss (1951). Empirical support for the assumption that media credibility enhances the likelihood of media effects is given in an experimental study

22 The terms are used interchangeably in media effects research (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 231f.).

by Druckman (2001b), for instance. The framing of news from a credible source (New York Times) was found to have a greater impact on attitudes than news frames from a source considered non-credible (The National Enquirer). Consistently, J.M. Miller & Krosnick (2000) found that priming effects are more likely to occur among people with high levels of general trust in the media compared to individuals with low trust levels.[23] The assumptions of moderation were tested by including interaction terms as well as the original predictor and moderator variables in the regression models. Similar findings were provided by Garramone (1984). Wolling (1999) also reported results which indicate that credible media sources exert stronger influence on political attitudes than less credible media sources.[24] Media credibility was found to moderate the media's effects on the evaluation of government performance and the assessment of implementations of political decisions. The media's impact on other political attitudes was found to be independent of media credibility, however. The author therefore concluded that media credibility moderates the media's impact only in part (Wolling, 1999, p. 216f.). In contrast to the majority of findings, Matthes (2007b) reported results that do not support the assumption that trust in media moderates the strength of media effects. The findings are based on empirical tests using group comparisons (low vs. high trust respondents) in structural equation modeling. The author explained that the low variance in the trust variable might account for this finding.

### 2.3.2. The Role of Political Sophistication

A variety of studies suggests that the mass media's impact on political attitudes is contingent upon the level of political sophistication of the audience or other related concepts such as political expertise, political awareness, political knowledge and political involvement. The term political sophistication refers to the "cognitive complexity about politics" and is related to a person's political belief system (PBS)

23 Trust in the media was measured as self-reported measures, captured with three questions referring to the media in general.

24 The assumption of moderating effects was tested based on the inclusion of interaction variables into regression models. In order to compute the interaction variables, for each media outlet the author recoded high credibility levels with '1'and low credibility levels with a value of '0'. These values were then multiplied with the value that was assigned to the media outlets based on findings from the content analysis (Wolling, 1999, p. 279). Those product indicators were included in the regression analysis, the original media content indicators were excluded from the regression analysis. This procedure seems problematic for two reasons. First, the values of the product term for the non-credible media content will all be zero, as the product of any other number and zero is zero. Hence, no variance on the interaction variable for the non-credible media content existed. Moreover, not including the original predictor variable and moderator variable in regression analyses with product interaction terms is considered problematical, because the results are not controlled for the effects of both predictor and moderator variable on the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1175f., Friedrich, 1982).

(Luskin, 1978, p. 861). High sophistication is given when the belief system is large (high number of political cognitions), wide-ranging (dispersion of cognitions among categories), and highly constrained (strong interconnectedness of cognitions). The three characteristics of the PBS – size, range and constraint – are interrelated. In the information-processing literature such an extensive, organized knowledge is referred to as expertise. Hence, "political sophistication is political expertise", Luskin (1978, p. 861) concluded. Zaller (1992) also remarked on the similarity of concepts such as political expertise, sophistication, and involvement. He preferred the term "political awareness" because it encompasses both the "reception and comprehension of communications from the political environment" (Zaller, 1992, p. 21). Zaller operationalizes political awareness as political knowledge. In general, then, political expertise, political awareness, political knowledge, and political sophistication are related concepts.

The traditional dosage-resistance perspective in media effect research assumes that "the more knowledge one has, the more resistant one should be", because knowledgeable people are assumed to have a variety of other sources for political information beyond media that might shape their political judgments (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956).[25] Empirical evidence for the assumption is, for instance, given in a study on the association between talk radio use and political confidence by Pfau et al. (1998). The relationship between talk radio use and political confidence was found to be particularly strong for people who are less interested in politics. Hence, the authors came to the conclusion that for the politically less interested subjects, mass media depictions exert much greater impact than for the political experts (Pfau, et al., 1998, p. 732). Consistently, Valentino, Beckmann, et al. (2001) reported that politically sophisticated individuals were mostly unaffected by strategy framing effects, whereas the least sophisticated are particularly vulnerable to strategic campaign news coverage. Political expertise appears to reduce not only the likelihood of cognitive reactions to media content, but also emotional reactions. Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (1998) found that the relationship between media exposure and emotional attitudes was especially strong for political novices compared to politically experienced individuals.

Zaller (1992) argued that two conditions must be fulfilled so that political awareness enhances the likelihood of resistance to media's impact. First, the media information needs to be inconsistent with individual predispositions. Second, the link between information and predispositions needs to be rather abstract. Conversely, "the more simple and direct the link between a predisposition and an issue, the less important awareness is likely to be in regulating responses to political communications on that issue" (Zaller, 1992, p. 48). Taking the two conditions into account, the

25 An alternative explanation of the mechanisms at work is given by research from cognitive psychology. From this perspective, it seems plausible to argue that politically knowledgeable persons are more resistant to media impact because they have more tightly organized political thoughts (Lusk & Judd, 1988) and, hence, are more likely to possess more extreme attitudes and have a greater attitude consistency. Both aspects were found to hamper attitude changes.

empirical results provided by the author support the assumption that politically aware people[26] are more resistant to media effects than individuals with low levels of political awareness. For instance, the author found that highly aware individuals were able to resist the dominant pro Vietnam War messages in media information in the period from 1964 to 1966. As a result, patterns of support differed for politically aware compared to politically unaware people.

Others argue that political expertise is a factor that facilitated information storage and retrieval and, hence, increases the likelihood of media effects. For example, Price & Zaller (1993) found that the more political knowledge a person has, the better is the individual recall of media information. And Tewskbury (1999) showed that politically knowledgeable people are more likely to engage in systematic information processing than people with low levels of political knowledge. Information storage and retrieval, in turn, may enhance media effects (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956). For instance, Krosnick & Brannon (1993) found greater priming effects for political knowledgeable, when the effects of political knowledge, media exposure and political interest were investigated simultaneously. Similarly, Wolling (1999) reported findings which indicate that the effects of negative media information on perceived internal political efficacy are stronger if political interest is high. The author concluded that people need to be interested in political information and process the information thoroughly for the information to have an effect on political attitudes (Wolling, 1999, p. 215).

### 2.3.3. The Role of Intensity of General Media Use

The traditional dosage perspective in media effect research assumes that "the greater one's dosage of media content, the more one should be influenced by it" (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956). Empirical support for this assumption is given in a study by A.H. Miller et al. (1979, p. 75ff.), for instance. The results indicate that the impact of media criticism on respondents' political cynicism is greater for those respondents with high media exposure levels compared to respondents with low media exposure levels. The alternative hypothesis, in contrast, assumes smaller media effects under the condition of greater dosages. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that people who are only minimally exposed to the news "will absorb little other than the 'big message' contained in the lead stories and repeated regularly across media and across time" (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993, p. 956). In support for this assumption, the study by Krosnick & Brannon (1993) showed that media priming effects are stronger for people with lower levels of general media exposure compared to individuals with high levels of exposure.

26 Political awareness is measured with questions about factual knowledge about politics, because this captures "what has actually gotten into people's minds" (Zaller, 1992, p. 21).

### 2.3.4. The Role of Information Processing Strategies

Recent research investigates the mode of attitude formation as an important variable that moderates media effects (Matthes, 2007a, 2007b). Two strategies of attitude formation are discussed in the literature, namely memory-based attitude formation and online attitude formation. Memory-based models focus on attitude accessibility and assume that individuals form evaluative attitudes based on information that is "on top of their heads" and hence more easily available (D. A. Scheufele, 2000, p. 299). Opinions are constructed at the time the judgment is expressed, attitudes rely on information recall and specific items must be retrieved from memory in order to construct an overall evaluation (Hastie & Park, 1986). Thus, in case of memory-based attitude formation, there is a strong correspondence between retrieved information in memory and the evaluative attitude (Hastie & Park, 1986; Lichtenstein & Skrull, 1987). Judgments that are built online are made at the time the information is acquired. The updated evaluation is then transferred to the long-term memory (Kinder, 1998, p. 184f.). Aspects that alter evaluations might vanish from memory, and people just retrieve the overall evaluation from memory "without reviewing the information upon which it is based" (Rahn, Aldrich, & Borgida, 1994, p. 193). Hertel & Bless (2000) mention that a precondition for online information processing is that there are pre-existing attitudes. Likewise, Tormalla and Petty (2001, p. 1600) state that if there was no opinion formed prior to information exposure, the judgment will be built in a memory-based fashion at the time a decision is required. Whereas some authors speak of contrasting models, others argue that both models "are 'right' but under different conditions" (McGraw, 2000, p. 813).

The most current and comprehensive investigation of media effects as a function of the information processing strategy was recently provided by Matthes (2007a, 2007b). The author argues that the impact of media frames is greater for memory-based attitudes than for online-built attitudes. Using group comparison in structural equation modeling, the empirical results support this assumption. This finding is in line with empirical results from other studies in media effects research (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). However, these studies fall short in actually investigating the role of information processing strategies and merely refer to such strategies when explaining the obtained results.

### 2.3.5. The Role of Individual Predispositions

Considering the role of individual predispositions, the "reception-acceptance model" of attitude change by Zaller (1992) is of particular relevance in public opinion research. Zaller (1992, p. 22) defined predispositions as "stable, individual-level traits that regulate the acceptance or non-acceptance of the political communications a person receives." Predispositions are argued to be part of lifetime experiences, to be shaped by socialization and to depend on personality factors and tastes. Moreover, political predispositions are assumed to be rather independent from mass media

information, a type of elite-supplied information: "Elites are not assumed to have an important role in shaping people's political predispositions" (Zaller, 1992, p. 23). If predispositions are influenced by media information, then this impact is argued to be subject to long-term changes. Zaller (1992, p. 23) conceptualizes *political values* as one "of the various different types of predispositions" and the central moderators of attitude changes. Values are understood by Zaller (1992, p. 23) as "general and enduring standards" that have a more central position than attitudes in individuals' belief systems.[27] The author assumes that the likelihood of media effects decreases with the distance between individual values and the value coloration of the messages. Based on surveys from the Center for Political Studies (CPS) and data from the National Election Studies (NES), the author found support for the assumption that political values hamper the influence of contradictory information on attitudes. The effects were consistent over a variety of measures of political predispositions. For instance political values were measured as hawk-dove attitudes (Zaller, 1992, p. 213ff.), attitudes concerning domestic politics and foreign politics, left-right orientation, and values regarding job guarantees, government services, and minority aid (Zaller, 1992, p. 344f.). The applicability of "reception-acceptance model" is restricted to specific circumstances: "The model applies only to cases in which one can demonstrate or plausibly assume the existence of particular change-inducing messages having distinct ideological colorations" (Zaller, 1992, p. 301). No empirical support for the model was found, for instance, with regard to the explanation of trust in government (Zaller, 1992, pp. 299-301).

Other predispositions considered in media effects research are *viewer expectations*. For instance, Pfau (1987) studied the influence of televised intraparty political debates during the 1984 presidential campaign as a function of viewer expectations with regard to appropriate communication behavior. Drawing on expectancy theory (Burgoon & Miller, 1985)[28] the author argued that if the language used in the intraparty political debates violates these viewer expectations, the support for political actors involved in the debates will decrease. Survey data based on a quasi-experimental design supports this assumption. Hence, the author concluded that "expectancy theory should be incorporated into further studies of political debate influence. As in this study, it is likely to better predict attitude change than standard explanations (such as attitudes about issue positions, leadership, and personality)" (Pfau, 1987, p. 695).

A study by Mutz & Reeves (2005) focused on the role of *personality factors* as a moderator of media effects. More precisely, the authors hypothesized that the individual propensity for conflict avoidance moderates the impact of exposure to uncivil discourse in a televised political debate on political trust. The results showed that respondents who are generally uncomfortable with face-to-face disagreement had much lower levels of political trust as a result of exposure to the uncivil condition

27 According to Zaller (1992) values constitute "domain-specific organizing principles". The term "ideology", in contrast, refers to a more general left-right scheme.

28 Expectancy theory assumes attitude changes in relation to expectations about language use.

compared to exposure to the civil condition. For respondents who find disagreements somewhat enjoyable, exposure to the uncivil condition generated slightly higher levels of political trust than exposure to the civil condition.

Predispositions can also be understood in terms *individual schemas*. For example, Shen (2004) suggested that media framing effects are moderated by individual differences in political schemas. Schemas are defined as knowledge structures that describe chronically accessible and organized knowledge about a given concept. A schema is hypothesized to moderate media effects by influencing the "encoding, selection, abstraction, […] storage […], retrieval and interpretation of information" (Shen, 2004, p. 133). Based on an experimental study, the author showed that subjects with different schemas responded to media stimuli significantly differently. Individuals with issue political schemas were more likely to draw upon issue-related thoughts after being exposed to issue messages than participants with character schemas. In contrast, individuals with character political schemas were more likely to draw upon character-related thoughts after being exposed to character messages than participants with issue schemas.

### 2.3.6. Summary and Conclusion

Research shows that a variety of factors may moderate the relationship between media information and political attitudes. Studies are largely consistent in their finding that media effects are stronger if *trust in media* is high. Although several studies indicate that *political sophistication* enhances the strength of media effects, other findings indicate less intense media effects for politically knowledgeable people compared to novices. In general, then, the empirical evidence regarding the moderating role of political expertise is inconsistent (De Vreese, 2004; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). The diversity of findings might to some extent be explained by different operationalizations of political sophistication, ranging from the single-item measures as the level of formal education (Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001), a combined index encompassing awareness of, interest in and knowledge about a political institution (Moy & Pfau, 2000), to factual knowledge (Zaller, 1992). In addition, Druckman & Nelson (2003, p. 732, emphasis in original) suggested that a possible confounding of political knowledge and prior opinions may explain the variance in research findings:

> "The problem with past work is that while individuals with prior opinions may be more knowledgeable, it is not the knowledge *per se* that is at work; rather, it is the existence of prior opinions based on other information that vitiates the impact of a new frame."

The differences in research findings might also be accounted for by varying context factors, such as trust in the media. For instance, Miller & Krosnick (2000) suggest that knowledge only enhances priming effects among people who trust the media. Moreover, the impact of political knowledge appears to differ with respect to the type of media effects under study. Whereas political knowledge is found to hamper the media's persuasive impact on evaluative political attitudes (for instance

Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001), political knowledge contributed to the effects of media information on political cognitions (for instance Price & Zaller, 1993).

With respect to the conditionality of media effects on the *general intensity of media use*, research also provides inconsistent findings. Whereas some studies indicate that a high intensity of media use might strengthen media effects, other studies reported lower media effects in the condition of high intensity media use. Differences in the operationalization of media use might account for the diversity in findings. For instance, A. H. Miller et al. (1979, p. 75ff.) investigated the role of general exposure to national politics in the media. And Krosnick & Brannon (1993, p. 966) built an index of media exposure that combined media use in general and media use about the 1990 elections. In addition, the lack of consideration given to context factors such as trust in the media might explain the diversity in findings.

The findings on the moderating impact of the *information processing strategies* generally suggest that media effects are larger when judgments are made based on memory (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Matthes, 2007b). As of yet, only a few studies include explicit measures of the information processing strategy (for instance Matthes, 2007b). Other authors use proxy measures, such as the "Need to Evaluate" concept (for instance Druckman & Nelson, 2003). In order to facilitate the use of applicable measures of information processing, Matthes, Wirth, & Schemer (2007) discussed concepts to measure the mode of information processing in surveys.

Other studies suggest that individual *predispositions* moderate the relationship between media information and political attitudes. Studies exploring the moderating role of political values, schemas, personality factors, or expectations about language use were presented. All these aspects of predispositions were found to act as significant moderator of media effects. With respect to this study's research question on the impact of media depictions of political processes on political support, literature from political science emphasizes the role of preferences regarding political decision-making processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Hence process preferences as a form of predispositions will be the focus of the present study. To date, media effects research has tended to neglect the role of preferences regarding political processes.[29]

With regard to the data analytical procedures applied to test the role of moderator variables, some studies do not provide solid empirical evidence for the assumed

29 However, the argument that individual preferences matter shows some similarity with the assumption that priming effects depend on the relevance of an issue with regard to the evaluative task (Iyengar, et al., 1984; Kiousis, 2003). But whereas the general relevance of an issue is conceptualized as characteristic of an issue, preferences in this study are understood as the individual perceived relevance of an issue and, hence, are conceptualized as characteristics of the individuals. For more information on the theoretical arguments of the present study see Chapter 3. The argument also seems compatible with the argument by Pfau (1987) that expectations regarding language use matter. Whereas Pfau considers expectations regarding language use, the present study is interested in expectations regarding aspects of decision-making political processes.

moderator effects (for instance Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Regarding those studies that did so, a variety of approaches was found. Most studies included interaction terms as well as the original predictor and moderator variables into regression models (J. M. Miller & Krosnick, 2000) or analysis of variance models (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Another approach found in more recent studies is testing interactions by means of group comparisons using structural equation modeling (Matthes, 2007b).

### *2.4. Summary and Suggestions for the Present Study*

Based on the reviewed literature, it seems that the relationship between political media information and citizens' attitudes can best be described as a dynamic process. The media's impact on political support appears to be influenced by reality perceptions, issue accessibility or political knowledge, for instance, and is contingent upon a variety of factors that describe the individual susceptibility to media effects, such as the perceived credibility of media information, the level of political sophistication or individual values. Overall, media effects on political support tend to be strongest when the level of political sophistication of the recipients is low (Zaller, 1992), the audience holds low levels of partisanship (Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001) and the media information is perceived to be highly trustworthy (Druckman, 2001b). Whereas negative media content is found to weaken approval, positive media content does not necessarily strengthen support (Maurer, 2003b).

Several limitations of previous research were discussed. This section summarizes suggestions for the investigation of the impact of media presentations of political decision-making processes on political support in this study. First, the *majority of studies focus on election and campaign coverage.* Little is known about the impact of the media's presentation of political decision-making processes on citizens' political support: "There have been no attempts to tie media coverage of legislative process to citizen approval" (Morris & Clawson, 2007, p. 3). Studies from political science, however, indicate that political decision-making processes are an important factor in shaping citizens' political support. "The frustrating conflict and unsatisfying compromise inherent in the process erode public confidence in the institution's membership and leaders" (Morris & Clawson, 2005, p. 311). Hence, the *present study will look at the effects of media depictions of day-to-day political decision-making processes.* Stimulated by findings provided by studies that investigate the effects of distinct aspects of media coverage on political attitudes, the impact of media presentation of political processes in terms of conflict-orientation and procedural maneuverings will be the focus.

Second, previous research concentrated on examining the direct relationship between media information and political attitudes. Thus, studies neglected to explore the way *how media information affects political attitudes*. The question of how the effects occur is addressed by studies that consider mediating variables in order to explore effect mechanisms. The overview of literature that is summarized in Appen-

dix 10.1 shows that only 13 out of the 49 studies that are summarized in the table consider mediating variables. "We need to move beyond descriptions of whether an effect occurs or not and focus more on explaining why and how those effects occur" (Potter, 1993, p. 597). What Potter (1993) formulated with regard to cultivation research refers also to media effects research in general. A variety of studies have shown that media content might harm political support by shaping the perception of political realities. Hence, the *present study focuses on reality perceptions as a mediator* of the relationship between media information and political support. Reality perceptions are considered to be most applicable with regard to this study's research question, because it seems very plausible to assume that media information about political processes affects the perception of these processes. The perception, in turn, may predict political support.[30] Other mediators discussed in the literature are considered to be somewhat less appropriate. For instance, it seems less warranted to suggest that media information about day-to-day political processes (not distinct processes that might include potential for emotional arousal) raises emotional reactions such as fear or anger.

Third, research tends to neglect the considerations of *conditions under which the media's impact on political attitudes is particularly likely*. In media effects research, "less common are studies that consider differential impacts among different categories of people. Yet, a strong theoretical literature suggests such work is precisely what is required in order to better understand media effects during campaigns" (Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001, p. 348). The overview of literature summarized in Appendix 10.1 shows that only 15 out of the 49 studies that are summarized in the table consider possible moderators of media effects. Considering moderating variables is important, as the failure to consider moderators might prevent researchers from finding significant effects and, hence, result in an underestimation of media effects. "One of the keys to uncovering this 'buried' stronger effects is to identify 'third variables' that are suppressing the relationship" (Potter, 1993, p. 591). With respect to this study's research question on the impact of media depictions of political processes, literature from political science emphasizes the role of preferences regarding political decision-making processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Hence, the role of *role of individual preferences* as a sort of predisposition will be of particular interest in this study.

The literature review was also used to inform methodological choices for the present study. The majority of research is based on aggregate level data that are criticized for their inherent risk of ecological fallacy. Hence, this study will be based on *individual level* data. The data analysis, moreover, will apply *multivariate models* that simultaneously control multiple influencing factors. The use of socio-

30 Based on the literature reviewed, the present study assumes that routine media use may not predict attitudes of political support. However, media use may account for variances in the perception of political processes (see Section 3.2.1). Hence, there might be an indirect relationship between routine media use and political attitudes through the perception of political processes.

demographic control variables in the present study will be guided by explicit formulations of indicator functions and intervention assumptions (Bertram Scheufele & Wimmer, 2006). Although studies provide evidence for the assumption that negative media content is related to low levels of political support, the *direction of causality* is not explicitly addressed in the majority of studies. Most studies investigate the media's impact on political attitudes based on cross sectional survey data. These studies are not able to provide evidence for the assumed causality of the relationship between media information and political attitudes. For instance, it seems plausible to argue that "cynical people are drawn to those communication sources that reflect their attitudes" (Pfau, et al., 1998, p. 741). Likewise, Tan (1981, p. 145) based on an analysis of survey data concludes "that causal models taking mass media use variables as effects rather than causes of political orientations have some validity, particularly for white samples". Besides the implementation of experimental or panel designs, considering the mechanisms by which media distort or enhance political attitudes might contribute to the investigation of causality. Thus, by considering *mediation* the present study might contribute to the investigation of the causal mechanisms by which media information shapes political attitudes. The majority of studies presented in this chapter do not apply data analytical procedures that provide a strict test of mediation. In order to gain more confidence in the assumed mechanisms, more applicable methods of data analysis will be applied in the present work.

In general, this study makes efforts to contribute to media effects research by exploring the relationship between media presentations of political processes, citizens' perceptions of political processes, individual preferences regarding political processes, and political support. The focus of the present work is in line with recent findings from political science showing, first, that aspects of political process explain political attitudes (for instance John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a) and, second, that the relationship between perceptions and preferences predicts political attitudes (for instance Kimball & Patterson, 1997). The following chapter elaborates the theoretical argument of the present study.

# 3. A Preferences-Perceptions Model of Media Effects on Political Support

Based on the literature review in the previous chapter, I have formulated three suggestions for the present study. First, this study extends the focus of media effects research on the context of election campaigns by investigating the effect of media presentations of day-to-day political decision-making processes on citizens' political support. It thus focuses on media depictions of discussions of possible solutions to political problems and decision-making processes within the government, the parliament, or the political administration. The impact of media presentations of referenda or other processes that are geared towards citizens' participation is not considered here. Second, this study aims to explain the mechanisms by which media information about political processes affects citizens' political support. Drawing on cultivation theory and the assumption that subjects' reliance on mass media accounts for perceptions of social reality (Eveland, 2002), this study investigates the role of audience perceptions of political processes as mediator of the relationship between media information and political support. Third, the present work endeavors to specify the conditions under which media presentations of political processes are particularly likely to have an impact on political support. Building on research that shows that the relationship between perceptions of political institutions and related preferences explains confidence levels (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kimball & Patterson, 1997), media effects are assumed to vary as a function of individual preferences as regards political decision-making processes.[31]

Considering these three suggestions, this chapter develops a theoretical model that captures individual-level differences in political support and takes central account of the relationship between media information, perceptions of political processes, preferences as regards political processes, and political support. Citizens' process perceptions as well as their process preferences and attitudes of political support are conceptualized as cognitive attitudes. In general, the definition of an attitude is "simply that it is a hypothetical construct involving the evaluation of some object" (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2008). This definition by Roskos-Ewoldsen encompasses three aspects of attitudes: First, attitudes are hypothetical, meaning that they cannot be observed directly and need to be measured indirectly with a variety of different items. Second, attitudes involve evaluations. Third, attitudes are directed

31 Research investigating the role of preferences with respect to policy issues does not fall within the scope of the present study. Policy preferences are considered in spatial models of voting, for example. These models compare the distance between voters' and candidates' positions on political issues in order to predict vote choices (Enelow & Hinich, 1990). Similarly, A. H. Miller (1974) argues that citizens hold low levels of trust in the government if they are unsatisfied with the policy alternatives offered to solve current problems.

towards objects, i.e. things, ideas, individuals, or groups. The concept of attitudes encompasses affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. Emotional reactions and feelings toward an object of evaluation are affective attitudes. The behavioral component encompasses actions directed towards the object of evaluation (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2008). Cognitive attitudes, which are the focus of this study, are thoughts and beliefs about an object of evaluation.

Process preferences in this study are understood as citizens' expectations of how political decisions should be made and how political institutions should operate. Hence, process preferences "determine what people want" (De Mesquita & McDermott, 2004, p. 276). More precisely, preferences are conceptualized as "a comparative evaluation of (i.e. a ranking over) a set of objects" (Druckman & Lupia, 2000, p. 2). Building on this definition of preferences as a ranking of various options, process preferences in this study describe which aspects of decision-making processes are relatively important for an individual compared to other process aspects. The preferences are hypothesized to be stored in memory and to be drawn on when people make decisions (Druckman & Lupia, 2000, p. 2). The term "preferences" instead of "expectations" is used here in order to emphasize the role of comparative evaluations and judgments about the relative importance of different process aspects. The term "expectations", which is used in some studies to describe what people want (Kimball & Patterson, 1997; S. C. Patterson, et al., 1969), is not used in this work, because it is mainly used in the literature to refer to what people think will happen in the future (Dolan & Holbrook, 2001, p. 28).

Process perceptions refer to the pictures that citizens have in their heads about the way political decisions are made. Because "the world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind", man makes "trustworthy pictures inside his head of the world beyond his reach" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 29). Since perceptions of political processes are "attitudes and beliefs about others" (Shrum, 2008), they can be conceptualized as social perceptions. Characteristic for social perceptions is that different individuals may hold diverse perceptions of the same group of other people, because social perceptions are an "active and constructive process" (Samochowiec & Wähnke, 2008). "How individuals interpret the real world around them" (Hoffmann & Glynn, 2008) is, for instance, influenced not only by experiences but also by individual expectancies and motivations (Shrum, 2008).

The purpose of the preferences-perceptions model of media effects that will be developed in this chapter is to explain alterations in political support as responses to media-induced changes in the perception of political processes. In addition, the mass media's impact on political support is assumed to vary as a function of individual process preferences. The model's arguments are backed up with references to established theories and selected empirical evidence. Section 3.1 refers to the role of the preferences-perceptions relationship as predictor of political support. Section 3.2 elaborates the assumption that media presentations of political decision-making processes shape the audience's perception of these processes. In addition, the chapter elucidates the argument that process preferences are rooted in the political culture of a nation and discusses possibilities for media effects on process preferences. It

also presents research that investigates how the media depict political decision-making processes in order to inform propositions about possible effects of the media on citizens' perceptions of political processes and political support. Section 3.3 then summarizes the main assumptions and outlines the propositions of the preferences-perceptions model of media effects. This study's empirical program to test the model is presented in Section 3.4.

### *3.1. The Preferences-Perceptions Relationship as Predictor of Political Support*

The role of process aspects as determinant of political evaluations is emphasized in a variety of studies. "Given that people are often ambivalent, agnostic, or uninterested in specific policy, citizens often use their views about process to inform their political decisions" (Dyck & Baldassare, 2009, p. 552). Empirical research interested in the impact of procedural justice on public approval of authorities and institutions supports this assumption. "According to the procedural justice perspective citizens are not only sensitive to outcomes in evaluating leaders. In addition, they respond to their judgment of the fairness of procedures by which outcomes are allocated" (Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985, p. 703). For example, Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw (1985) based on data from two empirical studies concluded that perceptions of procedural fairness and justice have more influence upon the approval of political leaders and institutions than do outcome-related concerns. Based on panel survey data Grimes (2006) showed that the perceived fairness of processes by which collective decisions are taken predicts public approval of political institutions. The perceived justice of procedures was also found to impact the approval of the Supreme Court (Tyler & Rasinski, 1991). In line with this result, Ramirez (2008) found that subjects exposed to information that presented Supreme Court proceedings as fair showed higher levels of support for the Court than subjects exposed to information that presented the proceedings as unfair. Similar findings are reported by Baird & Gangl (2006). Besides the analysis of the impact of perceived procedural fairness, there is a "need to identify those procedures which citizens feel are fair" (Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985, p. 721). This question, however, is not addressed in procedural justice research so far.

This section elaborates the argument that the relationship between citizens' perceptions of political processes and their preferences concerning political decision-making processes explains variations in political support. The role of the preferences-perceptions relationship as predictor of political support is based on the basic assumption that "evaluations of individual, social or political objects are partly grounded in disparities between expectations and perceptions" (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 703). The notion that inconsistencies in a person's beliefs system result in personal discomfort has a long history in social psychology, e.g. in concepts such as dissonance, imbalance, incongruence (cf. Higgins, 1987, p. 63).

The argument that political support is shaped by the relationship between perceptions of political processes and according preferences is in line with findings from

studies in political science which show that confidence in political institutions or actors varies as a function of the relationship between citizens' perceptions and preferences. These studies emphasize the point that it is not only the perception of political realities that explains evaluative attitudes. Instead, political preferences matter also. Patterson et al. (1969) were among the first researchers to investigate the role of perceptions-preferences relations as predictor of political support. Their study investigates the role of the perceptions-preferences differential on support for legislators:

> "We expect high levels of legislative support from citizens whose feelings about what the legislature is like come close to their expectation of it. And, low levels of legislative support should be exhibited by those for whom there are wide gaps between their perceptions of the legislature and what they expect of it" (S. C. Patterson, et al., 1969).

Perceptions were measured with items on a 10-point scale that indicate whether respondents think that legislators are influenced by several actors or agencies. In addition, items which measure the extent to which legislators have certain characteristics were included in the survey. Expectations were measured with items on a 10-point scale measuring whether legislators should be influenced by a series of actors or agencies and the extent to which members of the legislature ought to have certain characteristics. Hence, both perception and expectation items refer to two aspects of the representative legislature: influencing agencies and legislators' characteristics. Using survey data from a representative sample of citizens in Iowa State, the authors assessed the impact of the relationship between perceptions and expectations on subjects' support for legislators. In order to do so, the authors assigned the subjects to two groups, indicating congruence or incongruence between perceptions and expectations towards the legislators. The congruent group showed higher mean support scores than did the incongruent group. The authors interpreted these results as support for their hypothesis that congruence between perceptions and expectations fosters support, whereas incongruence leads to low levels of support. The authors concluded that perceptions-expectations differentials explain variance in support for the legislators.

A study by Kimball & Patterson (1997) gives further empirical validity to this line of argument. The authors expanded previous research by investigating the impact of the expectations-perceptions discrepancy on attitudes towards Congress in a multivariate explanatory environment. Using data from a 1994 post-election survey with citizens in Ohio State, the authors analyzed citizens' expectations regarding motives and connections of incumbents as well as according perceptions. Based on calculations of the difference between expectations and perceptions, discrepancy items were built. By means of factor analysis, two dimensions of the expectations-perceptions discrepancy concerning Congress were derived: A candidacy factor including attributes such as individual motivation and connections, and an experience factor embracing aspects such as training, experience, loyalty, and reelection interests. The multivariate estimation by means of multiple regression (including socio-demographic variables, party identification, political involvement) shows that the two discrepancy factors have a direct and significant impact on evaluations of

Congress. In order to compare the explanatory power of the two discrepancy factors against the predictive power of expectation and perception measures, the authors ran a multivariate model that included perception measures and expectation measures. This model showed lower levels of fit than the model that includes the two discrepancy factors. Thus, the authors conclude that "public attitudes toward Congress hinge very much upon public expectations, [and] citizens' perceptions of congressional performance" (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 722).

More recent research on political support underscores the importance of political processes (John R. Hibbing & Elisabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001; John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, 2001b; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (2002) argue that citizens hold preferences not only with respect to political actors, but also with regard to political processes. "Dissatisfaction usually stems from perceptions about how government goes about its business, not what the government does. Processes, I argue, are not only means to policy ends but, instead, are often ends in themselves" (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 35). The authors assume that discrepancies between process preferences and the perception of political processes account for variances in support levels (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Their study on process preferences and public approval of government (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, 2001b; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) provides evidence for this assumption. The authors used a specially designed national survey of 1.266 randomly selected adults as well as focus group discussions in order to investigate the governmental procedures that people want and the perceptions of the working of government. In the focus group discussions, the authors found that

> "people tend to speak more directly and with more confidence about the flawed processes of government than they do about intractable policy dilemmas. The more I listened to them describe their perceptions of government, the more I was taken with the fact that people care deeply about procedures by which policies are produced" (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147).

Using measurements of process perceptions and process preferences in the standardized survey[32], the differential was built to obtain a measure for the perceived process gap. In a multivariate setting controlling for socio-demographics, political knowledge, party identification, and policy satisfaction, the authors found a significant effect of the process gap variable on approval of the government. A process that matches an individual's preferences as to how a political process should work in-

32 Citizens' process preferences are measured with the questions: "Some people say what I need in this country is for ordinary people like you and me to decide for ourselves what needs to be done and how. Others say ordinary people are too busy and should instead allow elected officials and bureaucrats to make all political decisions. Still others say a combination would be best. Imagine a seven-point scale with 1 being ordinary people making all decisions on their own and 7 being elected officials and bureaucrats making all the decisions on their own while 2,3,4,5, or 6 indicate in-between opinions on the two extremes. Which number from 1 to 7 best represents …how you think government should work? ... how you think the national government in Washington actually works?" (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 412).

creases approval, whereas discrepancies decrease support. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995; 2002) maintained that aspects of political processes such as conflict, compromise, bargaining, intense debate and deliberation, competition between diverging interests, and procedural inefficiency are considered particularly unappealing by the American public. Instead, Americans want efficiency and decisiveness from their government. The authors conclude that "the extent to which individuals believe actual processes are inconsistent with their own process preferences is an important variable in understanding the current public mood" (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 145).

Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997), in their study on congressional approval, came to a similar conclusion. The authors used time-series containing a quarterly measure of approval from 1974 to 1993 in order to analyze the impact of congressional actions on public attitudes towards Congress. The authors assumed that at times when Congress acts as required by its institutional role, support declines because expectations of decisive action and efficiency are not being fulfilled. The findings indicate that mass support for Congress tends to drop when major legislation is under consideration, legislation via the veto override occurs, and the level of conflict within Congress is high:

> "As the representatives of a diverse and heterogeneous country, members seldom find themselves in agreement. The resulting contentiousness can permeate Congressional activity, frustrating those who look to Congress for decisive action and making the process appear overly political and petty. When it does act, particularly on broad issues culminating in major legislation, the inability of the outcome to satisfy all sides can reflect poorly on the institution. To the public, then, the very activities which characterize Congress and the legislative process – deliberation, debate, and decision making – cause it to appear quarrelsome, unproductive, and controversial, and thus diminish it in the public eye. In sum, I contend that changes in levels of Congressional approval are related to characteristics of Congress and the legislative and representative tasks with which it is constitutionally charged" (Durr, et al., 1997, p. 176).

The assumption that the perception of legislative work challenges citizens' expectation is part of the general argument: "Congressional approval can therefore be understood as a byproduct of Congress' constitutionally-defined role and the public's perhaps unrealistic expectations." (Durr, et al., 1997, p. 200). However, this assumption was not investigated empirically, as no measures of citizens' expectations of Congress were applied in the study. Likewise, Patzelt (2001) argues that confidence in parliament decreases because quarrels and conflicts are visible, whereas people expect corporate actions instead.

I, then, build on a solid foundation in assuming that the relationship between the perception of political processes and related preferences contributes to the explanation of political support. This argument is consistent with studies from other fields. For instance, a study by Kehoe & Ponting (2003) shows that the degree to which respondents feel that health policy leaders share with them the support for the Canada Health Act value of 'equal accessibility' determines trust in health care policy actors and the health care system. In line with this finding, Boxx, Odom, & Dunn (1991) argue that value congruence fosters organizational commitment. According to the authors, organizational performance would be enhanced if the organ-

izational culture is congruent with the values and beliefs of the employees. In line with their expectations, the authors found that commitment, satisfaction, and cohesion are strengthened if the organization is shaped by values which employees believe should exist. In addition, there are studies which indicate that the preferences-perceptions relationship affects consumers' satisfaction with products. For example, Cadotte, Woodruff, & Jenkins (1987) showed that if a brand (in this case a fast food restaurant) performs worse than expected, the dissatisfaction with the brand decreases.

Moreover, the argument that the relationship between preferences (i.e. some sort of a prototype or ideal image) and perceptions of reality predicts political support is in line with a variety of definitions of political trust or support. For instance, Miller (1974, p. 989) defined political trust as "the belief that the government is operating according to one's normative expectations of how government should function". And Barber (1983, p. 80f.) argued that political distrust is "a realistic critique of political performance and/or of fiduciary responsibility in the light of accepted democratic values." Walz (1996) contended that political support is based on the assumption that political institutions decide as expected. And Fuchs (1999a) maintained that one condition for the stability of democratic systems is the development of a political culture that is congruent with the implemented structure.

### *3.2. The Media's Impact on the Preferences-Perceptions Relationship*

Although the media is hypothesized to be an important source of political information, previous research has tended to neglect the role of the media in shaping the preference-perception relationship. This section elaborates the media's impact on the preferences-perceptions relationship. An exception to the tendency of research to neglect the role of the media is a study by Kimball & Patterson (1997). This study considers the media's role in influencing the preference-perception discrepancy and the consequences for political support.[33] The authors assumed that

> "citizens exposed to the admittedly negative political news emanating from the media, and particularly those exposed to the drumbeat of 'Congress-bashing', may thereby experience larger expectation-perception discrepancies and, accordingly, be less supportive of Congress than the media-underexposed" (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 721).

In order to test this assumption, the authors investigated the impact of attention paid to political news in the media on the discrepancy variables. The findings support the assumption: Subjects exposed to the media showed higher levels of preference-perception discrepancies and, as a consequence, exhibited lower ratings of Congress. Thus, the authors concluded:

33 For more information on the study by Kimball & Patterson (1997) see the description of this study in Section 3.1.

> "Improving public perceptions of congressional integrity will depend upon changes in both Congress and the mass media so that citizens receive more positive information about members of Congress. An adversarial press no doubt focuses public attention on congressional scandal, and on politicians' motivations for pursuing power, status, and wealth (Kerbel, 1995; Patterson, 1993). But the changes for improvement seem not very good; if anything, press coverage of Congress has tended to be more, not less, negative in recent years (Mann & Ornstein, 1994)." (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 723).

The study by Kimball & Patterson (1997) does not provide empirical answers to the question whether media information shapes the preferences-perceptions relationship by affecting preferences, perceptions, or both. Kimball & Patterson (1997) argue that the perception of political realities is based on direct experiences, social interactions and media information. In line with this assumption, the present study builds on cultivation research and assumes that the media affect citizens' perceptions of political decision-making processes. Section 3.2.1 elaborates this assumption.

As regards the question where preferences come from, Kimball & Patterson (1997) argue that socialization may be one important source for the development of ideas of an congressional ideal:

> "Citizens carry with them expectations, however rudimentary, about political institutions, Congress in particular, and about processes taking place within Congress. Such expectations may develop in the form of fuzzy images of the institution as a whole, arise from very partisan or ideological perspectives, biases, and distortions, focus on particular institutional actions or events, or concern the characteristics or attributes of the institution's members. Citizens' expectations about Congress may develop from specific socialization, perhaps in early life experience, about what Congress should be like. Civics textbook expectations about Congress's constitutional function, its members and their conduct, its representativeness, its accessibility, or its reliability in passing legislation may shape citizens' expectations, forming an image or 'prototype' of the congressional ideal." (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 701f.).

This assumption is in line with research showing that the political culture in which a citizen is socialized shapes preferences as regards political decision-making processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kaase & Newton, 1995; Linder & Steffen, 2006). Seciton 3.2.2 elucidates the role of the socialization with a political culture in shaping citizens' process preferences. The ways in which the mass media may affect the audience's process preferences are also discussed. In order to inform propositions about the impact of media presentations of political processes on citizens' perceptions of such processes and their levels of political support, Section 3.2.3 presents research that investigates how the mass media present political processes.

### 3.2.1. The Media's Impact on the Perception of Political Processes

Moy & Pfau (2000, p. 42) argue that it is not the performance of political institutions per se but "the public's perception of institutional performance that causes dissatisfaction." Hence, the authors contended that it is neither political processes nor per-

formances themselves that are vital for the support for political institutions but the citizens' subjective perception of them (Moy & Pfau, 2000; Pfau, et al., 1998). The subjective perception is affected by both a person's socio-demographic characteristics and the information a person has obtained. Past research shows that knowledge of political objects (issues, actors, institutions) exerts more influence than socio-demographic status (Pfau, et al., 1998, p. 731). Since in modern democratic societies citizens' knowledge of political objects mostly relies on mass information, the media are considered a relevant source for the perception of political realities. "Whether or not the media accurately reflect events, the point is that the mass media function as the critical conduit of perceptions of democratic institutions" (Moy & Pfau, 2000, p. 43).

The assumption that media information accounts for the audience's perception of political realities is in line with cultivation research. "Cultivation refers to the long-term formation of perceptions and beliefs about the world as a result of exposure to the media" (Potter, 1993, p. 564). Hence, cultivation effects refer to the media's impact on individuals' conceptions of reality over time. "Public beliefs are often shaped by subtle but repetitive messages contained in news and entertainment media content that are not overtly persuasive" (W. P. Eveland, Jr., 2002, p. 691). Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich, & Garrow (1995, p. 309) put cultivation effects in the realm of second-order socialization[34] (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and describe media information as an important source based on which people come to understand their environment during adulthood. Experiences, if available, are considered to be the main source of influence on perceptions. However, in cases when direct experiences are absent, people might accept the media's depictions of reality. "Television programming's depictions are influential mainly in those circumstances in which people have limited opportunity to confirm or deny television's symbolic images firsthand" (Pfau, et al., 1995, p. 310). In cases where direct experiences and media information are consonant, media might amplify the impact of experiences on reality perceptions.

Traditionally, cultivation research conceptualizes media use, television use in particular, as the factor influencing social reality perceptions (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Gerbner, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982). Early cultivation research was interested in the impact of violent television programming on viewers' perception of violence and criminality. Gerbner et al. (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, et al., 1980; Gerbner, et al., 1982) argue that television does not provide an accurate portrayal of reality and hypothesize that, as a consequence, heavy viewers perceive crime and violence as much more prevalent than they are in reality. "For heavy viewers, television virtually monopolizes and subsumes other sources of information, ideas, and consciousness" (Gerbner, et al., 1980, p. 14). The authors reported empirical findings that lend support to their assumptions. A reanalysis of

34 Whereas secondary socialization occurs during adulthood, primary socialization occurs during childhood.

the NORC[35] General Social Survey data set, on which much of the empirical support for Gerbner's hypothesis is based, revealed little support for this assumption, however (Hirsch, 1980). Mainstreaming and resonance hypotheses are further developments of the cultivation concept (Gerbner, et al., 1980). The resonance hypothesis describes an interaction effect: Media effects are greater when television content is consistent with real-life situations experienced by the viewer. The mainstreaming hypothesis proposes that original variances in attitudes diminish among heavy viewers as a result of television's impact on their attitudes. This results in "the sharing of that commonality among heavy viewers in those demographic groups whose light viewers hold divergent views" (Gerbner, et al., 1980, p. 15). As a consequence, the political spectrum is hypothesized to narrow down (Gerbner, et al., 1982).

In further research, television viewing was found to be responsible for a variety of social reality perceptions above and beyond the audience's impressions of violence and criminality. For instance, Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich, & Garrow (1995) investigated the influence of depictions of attorneys in television programming on the public's perception of attorneys. The study encompasses a content analysis of prime-time programming aired during one week and a mail survey with a random sample of attorneys in a Midwestern city as a real world check. The public perception of attorneys was measured with a telephone survey of a random sample. The authors found that public perceptions of attorneys, in terms of gender, age, class and specialization in criminal law, were significantly related to television's depictions of attorneys.

Whereas traditional cultivation research does not provide explanations of how cultivation effects occur (Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1988), more recent studies focus on psychological process explanations. The idea of a two-step process of cultivation effects is of particular relevance. For instance, Bilandzic & Rössler (2004) suggest that cultivation effects first encompass the encoding and storage of information (knowledge), and second the construction of a judgment about reality. Similarly, Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler (1987) assume that a "viewer […] uses the multitude of viewing experiences to create summative beliefs" (Hawkins, et al., 1987, p. 555). These summative beliefs are, then, expected to influence reality perceptions. The findings of their study did not support this hypothesis, however. Factual knowledge about reality (first-order cultivation effects) did not appear to be a mediator for the effect of television use on reality perceptions (second-order beliefs).

Shrum (1996, 2001, 2004) tested the idea not of a two-step process of cultivation effects but of a two-part model of effects. Findings from an experimental study support the assumption of a two-part model of cultivation effects. In this study, first-order cultivation effects refer to media's impact on factual presentations of social realities, for instance in terms of how many percent of Americans have been involved in a violent crime. Second-order cultivation effects refer to media's impact on attitude and belief judgments such as being afraid to walk alone at night. The author suggested that demographic judgments (first-order cultivation effects) are

35 NORC is the National Opinion Research Center. Its headquarters are on campus of the University of Chicago.

formed based on memory. Hence, the accessibility of certain aspects acts as a mediator for the media-judgment relationship. "Heavy television viewing creates an accessibility bias, and that bias has an effect on real-world frequency estimates of things often seen on television" (Shrum, 1996, p. 499). Second-order cultivation effects, in contrast, are assumed to be built during the time of exposure to the information. Thus, second-order effects are proposed to be separate effects above and beyond first-order cultivation effects.

In line with cultivation research, then, this study assumes long-term effects of media on the perception of political processes. Thus, regular patterns of information may account for changes in these perceptions. The media's influence on these perceptions is assumed to increase with a decrease in the impact of direct experiences (Pfau, et al., 1995, p. 310). Hence, in terms of political decision-making at the national level, media impact is presumed to be strong, because national decision-making processes are considered to be circumstances for which people have less opportunity to confirm or deny the media's presentations based on firsthand experiences.

### 3.2.2. The Media's Impact on Preferences Regarding Political Processes

Although media effects research provides some insights into how media affects policy preferences, little is known about the media's impact on citizens' preferences concerning political decision-making processes. Regarding the association between media and political preferences, there are studies which show that the media shape citizens' policy preferences (Jordan, 1993; M. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Pan & Kosicki, 1996). For instance, Pan & Kosicki (1996) found that the use of information-oriented media affects the audience's ideological orientations. These orientations, in turn, were found to have an impact on racial policy preferences. Policy preferences were measured, for instance, as support for the government's efforts to assist blacks or support for increasing federal spending to assist blacks. Studies carried out in the framework of agenda setting research showed that the media may have an impact on which policy issues people consider to be important (M. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; M. E. McCombs & Shaw, 1993). For instance, the perceived importance of policy issues was measured with the following question: "What are you most concerned about these days? That is, regardless of what politicians say, what are the two or three main things which you think the government should concentrate on doing something about?" (M. McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 178). The media were found to affect what citizens think the government should do, i.e. their policy preferences.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine from these studies that investigate the link between media information and citizens' preferences regarding *what* should be done, whether media information also has an impact on citizens' preferences as regards *how* political decisions should be made. Based on the current state of research, it remains an empirically open question whether media information might

affect citizens' process preferences above and beyond the impact of political culture, or whether process preferences are rather independent from media information. Thus, the present study takes into consideration that media information might not only shape the perceptions of political processes but also foster certain process preferences. This might be the case, because mass media act as agent of socialization. Hence long-term effects of media use on preferences regarding decision-making processes might be plausible. This might also be the case if media information continuously contains claims that political processes should be more efficient or more efforts should be made to find a compromise between diverging interests, for example. The media's descriptions of the status quo might also shape attitudes towards how the situation should be instead. For instance, media effects on the audience's preferences as regards the efficiency of political processes might occur if the media depict political processes simply as inefficient.

### 3.2.3. The Media's Presentations of Political Processes

The assumption that media presentations of political processes may affect citizens' perceptions of political processes and possibly preferences as regards political processes raises the question of how the media depict political decision-making processes. In order to inform propositions concerning the media's impact on citizens' perceptions of such processes and their levels of political support, this section presents research that analyses how the mass media present political processes.

A variety of research indicates that mass media not only mirror political realities but present a picture of political life that is shaped by the rules and norms of the news production process. This could result in media depictions of political processes that might challenge the way in which political institutions actually operate (Marcinkowski, 2005). Many recent studies have focused on the media's presentation of election campaigns. The news coverage of election campaigns was found to be shaped by references to who is going to win and who is going to lose, attention to performances and perceptions of political actors, the language of wars and games, and a generally negative tone (Druckman, 2005; Rhee, 1997; Semetko & Schoenbach, 2003).

Whereas the majority of media content research investigates mass media's presentations of election campaigns, fewer studies examine the media's depictions of routine political decision-making processes. Arnold (2004, p. 16) maintained that "most of the literature focuses on how the press covers wars, presidents, election campaigns, and policy issues. Scholars have largely ignored press coverage of Congress and its members". Little is known about the characteristics of media coverage of day-to-day political processes, either within Congress, the executive branch or the administrative branch. Likewise, Morris & Clawson (2007, p. 3) argued that "given the importance of understanding how the media portray Congress, the limited scope of this field of research relative to other political institutions, events, and issues is surprising."

Studies which analyze the news coverage of the parliament might provide some answers to the question of how the media presents routine decision-making processes. Based on data from a national comparative content analysis of media coverage of parliament (Negrine, 1998, 1999), Marcinkowski (2000) reported findings on media depictions of the parliament in Germany. The author concluded that the majority of media articles about the parliament provide information about political decision-making procedures, but less information was found with respect to the substance of political decisions in the parliament. Based on an analysis of the parliamentary coverage in television networks[36] between 1972 and 1992, Lichter & Amundson (1994) found that attention to scandals and the focus on unethical behavior increased during the investigated period. News coverage of policy debates, in contrast, decreased. Moreover, the findings indicated that the media increasingly focused on political discord and that the news coverage was shaped by a rather negative tone. These changes are interpreted by the authors as trends towards more adversarial news coverage. In general, then, the authors concluded that the news coverage of the parliament "reflects the tendency of journalists to emphasize conflict over concord, politics over policies, and personal foibles over institutional functions" (Lichter & Amundson, 1994, p. 139). The authors assumed that these characteristics of the news coverage of parliament reflect the journalists' "impatience towards the messiness and inefficiency of representative institutions" (Lichter & Amundson, 1994, p. 139). Similarly, a study by Lawrence (2000) showed that at the level of the nation state, political discourses in the media are shaped by the game frame, i.e. the news contained stories about politicians winning or losing elections, legislative debates, or strategies for winning. Political debates on the state level were not shaped by the game frame, in contrast.

A study by Morris & Clawson (2005, 2007) takes a more detailed look at congressional news coverage and is interested in how the media portray this "complex and dynamic institution" (Morris & Clawson, 2007, p. 5). Based on a content analysis of the New York Times and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) evening news coverage of the U.S. Congress from January 1990 through June 1998, Morris & Clawson (2005) investigated whether the stories discussed processes of legislative maneuvering, such as committee hearings, floor procedures and tactics, or vetoes. The role that conflicts, compromises, and scandals play in the news coverage was also probed. The authors found that procedural issues make up a substantial part of media coverage of Congress; in particular, democratic legislative processes which include conflict, debate and to a lesser extent compromise are covered in the news. Overall, congressional conflict was much more prominent in the news than compromise. "Conflict is highly present in congressional news" (Morris & Clawson, 2005, p. 306). In general, the results suggest that legislative maneuvering is very visible in the news. "The legislative process is not only prevalent in the media dur-

36 National Broadcasting Company (NBC), American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS)

ing major policy debates, but also in day-to-day coverage" (Morris & Clawson, 2005, p. 311).

In general, then, there is empirical evidence that the day-to-day business of politics, i.e. routine decision-making processes, is visible in the mass media. Media coverage of processes within the parliament was found to focus on conflicts and to be shaped by a negative tone (Lichter & Amundson, 1994; Morris & Clawson, 2005, 2007). On the whole, the empirical results lend support to the assumption that congressional news coverage is rather adversarial, focusing on discord instead of consensus. The conclusion that the news media adopt an adversarial style when depicting political processes refers mainly to news coverage of political processes in the U.S., from which the majority of empirical evidence comes. Comparatively less is known about media presentations of political processes in Europe, Switzerland in particular. There is research that suggests that the general trend towards an increase in adversarial media content may either be hampered or strengthened by a nation's political culture. For instance, Marcinkowski (2006) argued that news media coverage reflects a nation's political culture. In a consensus democracy like Switzerland, media presentations of political processes are expected to be shaped by consensus-orientation rather than focusing on competition and power struggles. In order to test whether the adversarial style of news coverage of political processes also holds for the case of Switzerland, this study includes a content analysis of the presentation of decision-making processes in the Swiss media (see Chapter 4).

The finding that news media focus on political discord and negative aspects of political processes gives particular cause for concern in view of what is known about citizens' process preferences. Apparently, the aspects that are unfavorable, rather than favorable, to citizens' political support are those aspects that news media focus on. What consequences, then, might media-shaped perceptions of political decision-making processes have for citizens' political confidence? This question is at the core of the preferences-perceptions model of media effects.

### *3.3. Outline of the Preferences-Perceptions Model of Media Effects*

The argument of discrepancy theory that the relationship between perceptions and according preferences predicts evaluative attitudes is widely considered in health research, marketing studies, and also in political science. With respect to media effects research, however, the argument has stimulated less research. The purpose of the present study is to build on discrepancy theory in order to explain the impact of media presentations of political decision-making processes on political support. Hence, this chapter presents a preferences-perceptions model of media effects.

Drawing on self-discrepancy theory from social psychology, this study argues that the relationship between reality perceptions and according preferences predicts political evaluative attitudes. This argument was also advanced in previous studies. For example, Kimball & Patterson (1997) show that legislators' inability to live up to the public's overall expectations fosters disapproval of Congress. In a similar

vein, the institution's role to engage in extensive debates shaped by partisanship and conflict was found to account for low levels of support for Congress, because the institution diverges from citizens' expectations of how Congress should act (Durr, et al., 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Building on the discrepancy argument, this study more precisely assumes that the relationship between perceptions of political processes and according preferences explains citizens' levels of political support.

In order to explain how media information about political processes affects citizens' political support, this study assumes that the way political processes are presented in the media affects citizens' perceptions of political processes. This argument is in line with cultivation theory (W. P. Eveland, Jr., 2002; Gerbner, 1998) and is backed up by previous studies showing that the mass media shape the perception of social realities (for instance Pfau, et al., 1995). Particularly in situations where direct experiences are missing, media effects are considered to be strong. Hence, it seems warranted to suggest that for routine political decision-making processes on the national level – a field where direct experiences are unlikely for the majority of citizens – mass media's impact on the perception of such processes is rather strong. Both short-term and long-term effects of media information on the perception of political processes appear plausible. The assumption of long-term effects of the media on reality perceptions is in line with cultivation theory. In addition, findings from experimental research in the tradition of framing effects suggest that short-term effects of media information on reality perceptions may occur also.

The perception of political processes, in turn, is assumed to influence citizens' levels of political support. Thus, the model argues that media presentations of political processes affect political support indirectly via the perception of these processes. In general, then, the model assumes that the audience's perceptions of political processes act as mediator of the relationship between media presentation of political processes and political support.

- Proposition 1: The media's presentations of political processes shape the perception of political processes. Process perceptions, in turn, influence political support.

Little is known about the media's impact on citizens' preferences concerning political decision-making processes. Studies in political science have emphasized the role of the political culture in shaping citizens' process preferences (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kaase & Newton, 1995; Linder & Steffen, 2006). It remains an empirically open question whether process preferences are influenced by the mass media. Hence, the present study takes into consideration that media information may not only shape the perceptions of political processes but also influence citizens' preferences as regards political processes. Especially long-term effects of media use might be considered in this respect as part of political socialization.

In order to specify the conditions under which the impact of media's presentations of political processes on political support is particularly likely, the model builds on research that shows that the relationship between perceptions of political

institutions and related preferences explains confidence levels (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kimball & Patterson, 1997). Hence, stronger effects on political support are assumed if there is a large magnitude of the relationship between what individuals prefer and what they perceive is actually the case. A large discrepancy exists, for example, when a person perceives political processes as conflict-oriented, but prefers compromise-seeking endeavors. In that case, the model assumes that the perception of political processes as conflict-oriented has a strong impact on that person's level of political confidence. Thus, the model suggests that the impact of media-shaped perceptions of political processes is particularly strong when according preferences are strong. In general, then, the model argues that media information which challenges citizens' preferences might account for lower levels of political support. This study's argument is that media impact on political support is moderated by individual preferences as regards political decision-making processes. Media patterns, then, are not a challenge to democratic attitudes per se, but certain media patterns would have a negative impact on political support for those persons for whom media information contributes to a negative preference-perception discrepancy.

- Proposition 2: Process preferences moderate the impact of political perceptions on political support.

The assumption that process preferences moderate the media's impact on political attitudes is in line with studies in media effects research which consider the role of individual expectations. For instance, Maurer (2003b, p. 97) hypothesized that media effects are especially strong if the media give the impression that political actors do not provide the political solutions or outputs that are expected by the public. Likewise, Kleinnijenhuis and van Hoof (2009) suggested that ambiguous news about the government's policy plans on a given issue decrease citizens' satisfaction with the government information relating to that issue, precisely because the news coverage contradicts their preferences: "News consumers want distinctive policy ambitions" (Kleinnijenhuis & van Hoof, 2009, p. 6). This argumentation implicitly assumes that the impact of news coverage (ambiguity) on satisfaction results from its discrepancy with citizens' expectations (decisiveness). The findings support the assumption that ambiguity in the news coverage decreases satisfaction with government information. The proposed conditionality of the effect on citizens' preferences is not probed, however, since there is no empirical investigation of the underlying assumption that people want distinctive policy. The argument that not only the audience's perceptions but also its individual preferences matter is put forward in a study by Mutz & Reeves (2005) as well. The authors (Mutz & Reeves, 2005, p. 9) argued that

> "people expect political actors to act in a predictable manner, an expectation based on the world of face-to-face interaction, where civility is the norm. When politicians do not act according to these expectations, they create negative reactions in viewers" (Mutz & Reeves, 2005, p. 9).

Media presentations of political debates, then, were assumed to decrease political support by shaping the relationship between perceived incivility in political discourses and citizens' expectation that political actors obey the same social norms as ordinary citizens. In a similar vein, Morris & Clawson (2007) argued that media effects are based on the relationship between media presentations of bureaucratic elements and the political views of the audience that does not favor such bureaucratic procedures. The authors contended that Americans dislike legislative manoeuvring and expected a significant relationship between legislative manoeuvring coverage and support for Congress. The combination of content analysis data and longitudinal survey data provided evidence for this assumption: Support for Congress significantly drops when legislative procedure becomes more visible via the media.

Moreover, the model's assumption regarding the moderating impact of preferences is in line with priming research. Priming research assumes that issues that are considered to be important have a stronger impact on evaluative attitudes than issues that are considered to be unimportant (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982; J. M. Miller & Krosnick, 1996, 2000). In line with the assumption of priming effects research, this study's model assumes that the more weight citizens give certain aspects, the greater the influence of media information about these aspects on evaluative judgments will be. Some similarity can also be found with respect to the expectancy value theory which assumes that "the subjective value of each attribute contributes to the attitude in direct proportion to the strength of the belief" (Doll & Ajzen, 2008). Hence, this study's general argument integrates into a larger tradition of research interested in the moderating effects of value judgments or issue importance. The added value of the analytical model presented in this study is that it aims to differentiate the general statement that negative or critical media information generally decreases political support. Instead, the model assumes that media information has negative effects if it challenges an individual's preferences.

A precondition for the preferences-perceptions relationship to have an impact on political support is that this relationship is available and accessible. This assumption is based on arguments of self-discrepancy theory made by Higgins (1987). This theory stems from cognitive psychology and was developed in order to explain attitudes concerning the self. Availabilty and accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship can be understood in the following way:

> "Construct *availability* refers to the particular kinds of constructs that are actually present (i.e. available) in memory to be used to process new information, whereas construct *accessibility* refers to the readiness with which each stored construct is used in information processing" (Higgins, 1987, p. 320; emphasis in original).

With respect to political processes, the relationship between process preferences and process perceptions is available, if an individual has beliefs about the relationship between process perceptions and preferences stored in memory. Drawing on self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), the availability of beliefs referring to the discrepancy between preferences and perceptions is assumed to depend on the magnitude of the preferences-perceptions discrepancy. The greater the incongruence between process perceptions and process preferences, the more the discrepancy

belief is available. In other words, the more a person believes that political processes are not in line with individual process preferences, the more this belief will be available in memory.

An available discrepancy between process preferences and process perceptions will be without consequences for political support, however, if it is not activated to be used in the processing of information and the formation of attitudes. The likelihood that an available self-discrepancy will be activated is contingent upon its accessibility. "Another important purpose of self-discrepancy theory, then, is to introduce construct accessibility as a predictor of when available types of incompatible beliefs (and which of the available types) will induce discomfort" (Higgins, 1987, p. 320). This assumption is in line with expectancy value theory, which assumes that attitude changes can occur either by changing already accessible beliefs or by making new beliefs accessible (Doll & Ajzen, 2008). The accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship describes the readiness with which this relationship can be used in information processing. If beliefs about the preferences-perceptions relationship are easily accessible, they are at the top of an individual's head. The accessibility of a discrepancy belief depends on the recency of activation, the frequency of activation and the applicability for information-processing tasks (Higgins, 1987). The more recently and the more frequently a discrepancy is activated, the more likely it is to be used for information processing. In addition, the more applicable a construct, the greater is the likelihood of activation. The greater the accessibility of the discrepancy between process preferences and perceptions for a citizen, the greater is the likelihood that this discrepancy will have an impact on that citizen's political support. Hence, increasing the temporary accessibility or the chronic accessibility of the discrepancy between process preferences and process perceptions results in attitude changes, but only for those subjects with a high magnitude of discrepancy.

- Proposition 3: Accessibility of the preference-perception relationship enhances the effects of the preference-perception relationship on political support.

External factors can produce temporary differences in the accessibility of generally available constructs, for example though exposure to construct-related stimuli, i.e. through priming. Hence, media information might not only affect the magnitude of the preference-perception relationship but also the accessibility of this relationship in memory. If the magnitude of the discrepancy is already high, media might affect political support through priming without actually changing either process perceptions or process preferences. Besides temporary accessibility, Higgins (1987, p. 320) distinguishes chronic individual differences in construct accessibility. Chronic accessibility is given if certain aspects have high activation potentials at all times. Frequent activation might make constructs chronically accessible. Hence media information might alter the chronic accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship over time, especially when the media regularly provide highly consistent messages. "It may well be that structural consistencies in the news – tendencies to emphasize conflict, dramatic themes, personalities, timeliness, and

proximity – do contribute over time to chronic accessibility of certain constructs" (Price & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 200). In line with assumptions by Zaller (1992, p. 85f.), this study assumes that people with high levels of political awareness are more likely to hold chronically accessible preference-perception relationships than people with low levels of political awareness. A chronically accessible preferences-perceptions relationship might increase the likelihood of media effects on political attitudes. Hence, the effects outlined above might be stronger for people with high levels of political awareness compared to people with low levels of political awareness, because for the high politically aware, there is a chronic accessibility of the preference-perception relationship. Higgins (1987) argued that both the temporary and the chronic accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship can be stimulated by activating a single component of the discrepancy, i.e. either preferences or perceptions.

Figure 3.1 presents a graphical depiction of the model. An example shall illustrate the model's assumptions: A person A thinks that it is important that political processes are shaped by compromise. If the media present political decision-making processes within a certain political institution – the government, for instance – as being shaped by conflicts and power struggles instead of compromise-seeking endeavors, the media might affect this person's perception of decision-making processes within the government as conflict-oriented. Thus, there is a high magnitude of the discrepancy between this person's process preferences and perceptions. As compromise preferences are strong and compromises are not perceived to play a role in political decision-making within the government, a negative discrepancy between preferences and perceptions exists. Hence, this person will presumably have a low level of confidence in the government. Instead, if the media regularly present political decision-making processes within the government as compromise-oriented, the same person A might perceive political decisions as being based on compromises. Thus, there is a small magnitude of the discrepancy between preferences and perceptions. In fact, the preference-perception discrepancy in this case might even be a positive one, indicating that compromise-seeking endeavors are perceived to play a greater role than is important for that person. Hence, this person will presumably have higher levels of confidence in the government.

Imagine another person B who has also been exposed to conflict-oriented media content but does not consider compromise-seeking endeavors to be an important aspect of decision-making procedures. In that case, the magnitude of the preferences-perceptions relationship is small and media information is assumed to exert no negative impact on political confidence. In other words, the probability that the political support of person A is stronger than the political support of person B, given that both are exposed to the same media content, increases with the incongruence of preferences and perceptions of person A compared to that of person B. The greater the magnitude of this negative discrepancy, the less supportive citizens are considered to be, given that the discrepancy between process perceptions and process preferences is accessible in memory.

With regard to the role of the accessibility of the discrepancy between process

preferences and perceptions, the following may be considered: The more recent and frequent the activation of the discrepancy between preferences for compromises and perceptions of discord held by person A, the more accessible this discrepancy is hypothesized to be. As a consequence, the lower this person's political support will be. Because the magnitude of the discrepancy between person B's lack of compromise preferences and conflict perceptions is low, increasing the accessible of this discrepancy will have no effects on this person's level of political support.

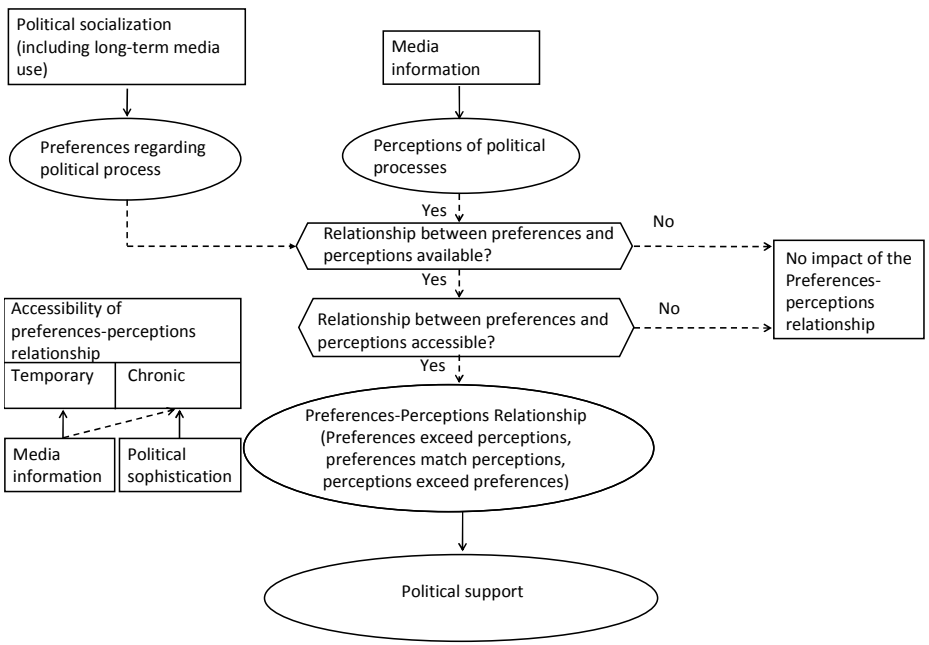



*Figure 3.1. Flow Diagram of the Preferences-Perceptions Model of Media Effects. Circles Represent Mental Processes, Dashed Lines Represent Implicit Assumptions that Are Not Tested Empirically*

Although the model's assumption that the relationship between perceptions of political processes and related preferences explains political support is backed by a multitude of empirical findings and appears to be intuitively plausible, three aspects merit special consideration. First, citizens might not have very specific preferences concerning how political decisions should be made. If individuals do not hold process preferences, their levels of political support might not be affected by the relationship between process preferences and process perceptions. This scenario is relatively unlikely, however. According to self-discrepancy theory, people need not to be aware of the relationship between preferences and perceptions for this relationship to affect evaluative attitudes. People must only be able to retrieve attributes of

the relationship between process perceptions and process preferences when asked to do so (Higgins, 1987, p. 324):

> "I should note that self-discrepancy theory does not assume that people are aware of either the availability or the accessibility of their self-discrepancies. It is clear that the availability and accessibility of stored social constructs can influence social information processing automatically and without awareness […] Thus, self-discrepancy theory assumes that the available and accessible negative psychological situations embodied in one's self-discrepancies can be used to assign meaning to events without one's being aware of either the discrepancies or their impact on processing. The measure of self-discrepancies requires only that one be able to retrieve attributes of specific self-state representations when asked to do so. It does *not* require that one be aware of the relations among these attributes or of their significance." (Higgins, 1987, p. 324; emphasis in original).

Hence, it seems plausible to assume that although they might be unable to say which aspects of political processes are particularly important to them, people might have the impression that they do not want the processes they perceive.

Second, research suggests that predictors of political support differ with respect to different objects of evaluation (cf. Easton, 1975; Fuchs, 1993). Thus, the question arises whether the argument that the relationship between process preferences and process perceptions explains political support holds in a similar manner for attitudes towards the government, the parliament, political actors, and democracy.[37] The relationship between process perceptions and process preferences might not predict support for a political object if people either had no perceptions of political processes related to this object or if people had no preferences with regard to decision-making processes related to this object. The assumption that citizens have no opportunity to develop perceptions of political processes related to different political objects appears somewhat implausible, because mass media offer information about political decision-making processes in a variety of different contexts. The assumption that citizens do not hold any preferences with respect to political decision-making processes related to different political objects also appears to be somewhat implausible. As I have already argued, process preferences might exist without individuals being aware of them. Thus, I posit that the model's assumptions are of a rather general type and therefore hold for a variety of different objects of evaluation. The explanatory power of the model in this study will be investigated for different political objects of evaluation, i.e. the parliament, the government, political actors, and democracy in order to test this assumption.

Third, the argument that the relationship between preferences and perceptions predicts political support implicitly assumes that citizens are able to differentiate between preferences and perceptions. This assumption is not tested in the majority of studies. However, previous research has shown that large individual discrepancies between preferences and perceptions exist (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 706ff.; S. C. Patterson, et al., 1969). Such large individual differences between preferences

37 Attitudes of political support towards the government, the parliament, political actors, and democracy are the focus of the present study.

and perceptions could be seen as an indicator for the assumption that people do recognize preferences and perceptions as different cognitive constructs. Nevertheless, the present study will test the discriminant validity of process preferences and process perceptions in order to provide empirical evidence for the assumption that citizens do distinguish between the perception of political processes and related preferences.

### *3.4. This Study's Empirical Program to Test the Model*

The preferences-perceptions model of media effects takes central account of the relationship between media information, perceptions of political processes, preferences as regards political processes, and political support. Thereby, the model explicates the mechanisms by which media information about political processes is assumed to affect citizens' levels of political support. The model proposes that media induced changes in the perception of political processes account for variances in political support. Hence, citizens' perceptions of how political decisions are made and how political processes look like are presumed to act as mediator of mass media's effects on political support. In addition, the model specifies the conditions under which the media's impact on political support is particularly likely. The model assumes that the media's impact on political support varies as a function of individual process preferences. Hence, process preferences are supposed to act as moderator of the media's impact on political support. The model aims to contribute to media effects research by differentiating the general statement that negative or critical media information enhances the political malaise. Instead, the model assumes that effects of media information on political support are stronger if media information contradicts individuals' preferences.

In order to test the assumptions, the present study encompasses the following empirical program (see Figure 3.2): First, *media information of political decision-making processes* in Switzerland is analyzed in order to derive characteristic patterns of media presentation of decision-making procedures (Chapter 4). Previous research indicates that decision-making processes are visible in the media (Morris & Clawson, 2005). The dominant focus on conflicts in parliamentary coverage that was found in several studies (Lichter & Amundson, 1994; Morris & Clawson, 2005, 2007), led Lichter & Amundson (1994, p. 139) to conclude that the media coverage of the parliament is "adversarial". However, the media might not generally present political processes as adversarial; rather, a nation's political communication might be shaped by its political culture. As most studies investigate news coverage of parliament in the U.S., further research is needed in order to gain insights into the manner in which political processes are presented in other nations. The purposes of the content analysis are to derive characteristic patterns of media presentations of political processes in Switzerland, to inform the development of stimulus articles for the experimental study, and to provide background information for the findings as regards the relationship between media use, process perceptions, and political support.

Second, *standardized scales to measure process preferences and process perceptions* (Chapter 5) was developed in pilot studies, because little attention has been paid to the conceptualization and measurement of political process preferences and according process perceptions as yet:

> "Scholars have paid less attention to measure public opinion of current processes and, especially, to identify people's preferred procedures. Indeed, survey instruments rarely include questions about what government processes respondents would like to see." (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147).

This is also found to be the case with respect to the measurement of process perceptions. According to Weatherford (1992, p. 149) the measurement of process attitudes is "scattered and unsystematic". Not only in the U.S. context but also in other national contexts, the measurement of citizens' perceptions of political decision-making processes and/or the measurement of according perceptions is neglected in empirical research. Within the "Beliefs in Government" research program of the European Science Foundation, for example, political preferences were measured in terms of attitudes towards government responsibility for policy issues only (for instance Ardigó, 1995). The items used to measure process preferences and perceptions relate to characteristic patterns of media's presentations of political processes that were found in the content analysis.

Regarding the impact of mass media on process perceptions and political support, the model assumes both short-term and long-term effects. Hence, third, the *short-term effects of media information* on process perceptions and political support are investigated in an experimental study (Chapter 6). This study conceptualizes exposure to specific news articles as situational impact factor. Besides the effects of exposure to selected media articles that contain negative depictions of political decision-making processes, this study looks at the impact of routine media use. Routine media use patterns are considered to be relatively stable and distinctive ways of interacting with the media (McLeod & McDonald, 1985). In the present study, these stable patterns of media use are conceptualized as a surrogate measure for media content. Thus, fourth, the *long-term impact of media information* on process perceptions and political support is investigated based on data from a survey with citizens from the German-speaking part of Switzerland (Chapter 7). Here, the relationship between routine media use and political attitudes is in focus. Thereby, the mechanisms by which the use of political media information affects citizens' political support are explored along with the conditions under which media information about political processes affects political support.

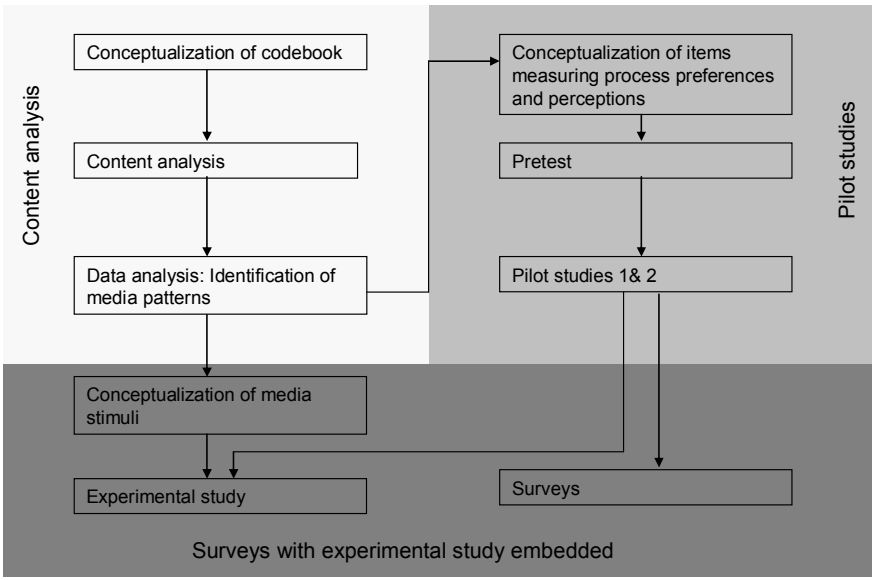



*Figure 3.2. Empirical Parts of the Study*

# 4. Media Presentations of Political Decision-Making Processes

In order to test the assumptions of the preferences-perceptions model of media effects, the present study, first, analyzes the media presentation of political decision-making processes in Switzerland. The aim of this study is to investigate whether the assumption of an adversarial style of presenting decision-making procedures also holds for news coverage in Switzerland. This study's research question is presented in Section 4.1. The methodological details are considered in Section 4.2. Section 4.3 describes the results, followed by a summary and discussion in Section 4.4.

## *4.1. Research Question*

Following their own rules of news production, the media do not mirror political processes but might present a distinct picture of the way political decisions are reached. Although there is empirical research on the mass media's presentation of political campaigns or certain policy issues (for instance De Vreese, 2005; De Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Kleinnijenhuis & van Hoof, 2009; Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001; Valentino, Buhr, et al., 2001), there is less research dealing with media presentations of political processes (Arnold, 2004). In general, research shows an increasing tendency on the part of the media to present information about Congress in terms of conflicts, winners and losers, strategies, and political discord. For instance, media coverage of processes within the parliament was found to focus on conflicts and to be shaped by a negative tone (Lichter & Amundson, 1994; Morris & Clawson, 2005, 2007). This emphasis on adversarial aspects might also be characteristic of media information about day-to-day political decision-making processes in general. Because the conclusion that the news media adopt an adversarial style when depicting political processes is based on empirical evidence that stems mainly from the U.S., comparatively less is known about media presentations of political processes in Europe, Switzerland in particular. In fact, the literature provides theoretical arguments that would, rather, speak for an emphasis on aspects of consensus and compromises in the case of Swiss media, since Switzerland is a consensus-democracy (Marcinkowski, 2006). Hence, the following research question will guide the data analysis:

- RQ1: Which aspects characterize the presentation of day-to-day political decision-making processes in the news coverage of Swiss media?

This study is interested in differences in the presentation of political processes within the legislative and the executive branch. In order to derive patterns that are specific for contemporary news coverage in Swiss media, the analysis follows a comparative perspective over time. Moreover, a national comparison between Switzerland and Germany is intended to shed light on the question whether political

decision-making procedures are presented differently in consensus-democracies compared with more competitive systems like Germany.

### *4.2. Method*

Section 4.2.1 describes the sample that was used to investigate the media coverage of political decision-making processes in Switzerland and Germany. The operationalization of variables is presented in Section 4.2.2. Section 4.2.3 contains information on how the content analysis was conducted.

#### 4.2.1. Content Analysis Sample

In order to include media with different qualities, a broadsheet, a regional paper, and a tabloid from each nation were included in the sample. The selection criterion was circulation, so the sampling unit consists of papers with the highest circulation. For Switzerland, these are "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" ("NZZ", WEMF[38] 2005: 150.945), "Tages-Anzeiger" (236.569), and "Blick" ( 262.262). For Germany, "Süddeutsche Zeitung" ("SZ", IVW Q1/2008[39]: 450.201), "Freie Presse" (IVW Q3/2006: 336.968) and "Bild" (paid circulation IVW Q2/2006: 3.599.652) were chosen. Television newscasts were also investigated. The main evening news on German public television, "Tagesschau" (average of 9.73 million viewers per day), and the main evening news on Swiss public television, "Tagesschau" (average of 1 million viewers per day), were selected for the analysis. Since this study focuses on the media presentation of political decision-making processes, the analysis of media content is based on the newspapers' front pages and the pages on national politics. Letters to the editor were not analyzed in the study.

The newspapers were investigated in a longitudinal perspective, because this study is interested in possible differences in media coverage patterns at different points in time. In order to exclude "special times" in the context of elections, articles from the second years of the legislative term were chosen as a time of regular political decision-making. Newspaper editions from 1964/65, 1984/85 and 2003/2004, 2004/2005 were examined.[40] The time comparison allows us to observe any potential specific patterns in contemporary news coverage. The patterns observed in contemporary media presentations will serve as a guideline for the development of the

38 WEMF ("AG für Werbemedienforschung") is an advertising media research institute in Switzerland.

39 IVW ("Informationsgemeinschaft zur Feststellung der Verbreitung von Werbeträgern e.V.") is advertising media research institute in Germany.

40 As a time of regular political decision-making, a one-year period beginning with the second year after the election of the German Chancellor and the election of the Swiss Federal Council (after the elections for the National Council), was chosen.

experimental stimuli in Section 6.2.2. By random selection, ten percent of all newspaper editions in the selected coding periods were chosen. After excluding all Sundays and national holidays, a sample of 10 percent of all editions makes 30 or 31 editions per coding period and newspaper, so in total 428 issues were examined. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the content analysis sample.

Based on the selected newspaper editions, all articles that were considered relevant for the purpose of this content analysis were coded. More precisely, all articles that address political decision-making processes and problem-solving procedures on the national level within the legislative (parliament, commissions etc.), the executive branch (cabinet, minister etc.), or the administration were coded.[41] In total, then, 633 articles from newspapers (366 articles from German papers, and 267 articles from Swiss papers) from the basis of the analysis, as Table 4.1 shows.

In order to probe whether the newspapers have a unique perspective on political decision-making in the government and parliament (cf. Mutz & Reeves, 2005, p. 2), the results are compared with findings from an analysis of political television news. For financial reasons, the analysis of television newscasts was restricted to the current time period. More precisely, newscasts within the period from 12/10/2004 to 12/09/2005 for Switzerland and within the period from 11/22/2006 to 11/21/2007 for Germany were investigated. In total, 175 newscasts from German television's evening news and 90 newscasts from Swiss television's evening news were coded.

41 An article was coded if the headline or the lead of the article contains a reference to a political institution or political actor and the article refers to political decision-making and problem-solving procedures. Thus the article might not only refer to decision-taking, but also the preparation of decisions and their implementation. If the article mentions more than one institution or actor, those article contents that refer to the institution or actor receiving the most attention were coded.

| Switzerland | | | Germany | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Election of government | | | Election of chancellor | | |
| Election Day: 12/12/1963 | Election Day: 12/7/1983 | Election Day: 12/10/2003 | Election Day: 10/17/1963 | Election Day: 3/30/1983 | Election Day: 10/22/2002 |
| Coding period | | | Coding period | | |
| 12/12/1964 - 12/11/1965 | 12/7/1984 - 12/61985 | 12/10/2004 - 12/9/2005 | 10/17/1964 – 10/16/1965 | 3/30/1984 - 3/29/1985 | 10/22/2003 – 10/21/2004 |
| NZZ 28 | NZZ 45 | NZZ 60 | SZ 54 | SZ 62 | SZ 100 |
| Blick 15 | Blick 8 | Blick 31 | Bild 27 | Bild 16 | Bild 31 |
| | | Tages-Anzeiger 80 | | | Freie Presse 66 |
| Total articles 43 | Total articles 53 | Total articles 171 | Total articles 81 | Total articles 78 | Total articles 207 |

Note. Entries are number of coded news articles

Legend. For the coding period between 12/12/1964 and 12/11/1965, 28 articles from the "NZZ" and 15 articles from "Blick" were coded, resulting in an amount of 43 articles in total for the period of 1964/1965.

*Table 4.1. Content Analysis Sample*

### 4.2.2. Codebook and Reliability

The codebook was used for the analysis of print and television news and encompassed four variable blocks. First, formal aspects were considered (name of publication or broadcasting channel, length, placing, journalistic genre, and use of quotations). Second, thematic aspects were coded (political institution, type of decision-making processes, policy cycle, and policy field). Third, references in media coverage to various aspects of political decision-making processes were coded. And fourth, the media's attention to aspects of political legitimacy was coded. The codebook for the analysis of television newscasts[42] was largely the same as the press codebook but includes some additional variables on images and pictures and vari-

42 The introductory or concluding moderation and the actual news report were coded as two separate articles.

ables on specific aspects of the presentation of political negotiations. The following variables were included in the data analysis conducted in the framework of this study. The variables were measured with dichotomous variables in the form of a question. For more detailed information about the variables, the codebook (in German language) can be requested from the author.

- *Power struggle*: Does the article refer to power struggles or discord between political institutions or actors?
- *Accusation*: Do political actors blame each other or accuse somebody of something?
- *Compromise*: Does the article focus on consensus-seeking endeavors or the search for political compromises?
- *Understanding*: Does the article refer to political actors talking to each other, listening to each other, or mutual understanding?
- *Winning and losing*: Does the article refer to winners or losers among political actors?
- *Collective attribution*: Does the article present political decisions as the result of joint interests and motives?
- *Collective action:* Does the article refer to collective actions and the role of joint behavior?
- *Inability*: Does the article refer to the inability of political actors, institutions or processes to solve political problems?
- *Failure*: Does the article refer to the failure of political actors, processes or institutions?

To test intercoder reliability, each coder observed the same subset of the sample that consists of 50 newspaper articles.[43] Reliability was calculated using the Software program PRAM (Program for Reliability Assessment with Multiple Coders). To evaluate inter-coder reliability, Holsti's R is used. In Table 4.2, the average values over all coder pairs are given. The variables collective attribution and collective action appeared to be somewhat problematical. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

43 There was another reliability test for the television analysis. The results do not differ significantly from the reliability results reported here.

| Variables | Holsti's R |
|---|---|
| Medium | 1.00 |
| Length | 0.93 |
| Placement | 0.97 |
| Journalistic genre | 0.78 |
| Collective attribution | 0.67 |
| Collective action | 0.62 |
| Compromise | 0.81 |
| Understanding | 0.75 |
| Power Struggle | 0.81 |
| Accusation | 0.78 |
| Winning and Losing | 0.88 |
| Inability | 0.75 |
| Failure | 0.87 |

Note. For item wordings see description in the text above.

*Table 4.2. Intercoder Reliability*

### 4.2.3. Procedure

The relevant material was collected by researching online data-bases and online archives as well as in libraries. The title and the first paragraph of all articles within the relevant sections of the selected newspaper issues were read. Based on this information, a decision was made as to whether an article was relevant or not. The newscasts were taken from online archives. Four students of mass communication at the University of Zurich coded the material. Three sessions of coder training took place in April 2007. An additional training session for the content analysis of television newscasts was conducted in September 2007. Coding was done at computer workstations at the University of Zurich from May 2007 until October 2007. The data material was randomly distributed across time and coders in order to reduce systematic biases. An online platform was set up to facilitate the communication among the coders and the author. Potential difficulties in the coding process were therefore transparent and traceable. Moreover, the online platform was used to supply the coders with information and current updates.

*4.3. Results*

Based on the content analysis data, this study investigated how the mass media in the German-speaking part of Switzerland present political decision-making processes. More precisely, the role of discord and references to procedural inefficiency were investigated. The analysis takes a comparative perspective over institutions, newspaper types, time, television vs. press, and nations. Based on the comparative approach, it was probed whether characteristics of the presentation of political processes are rather stable or invariant as regards time, media types, or nations. Section 4.3.1 describes findings on how the media present political decision-making processes. In Section 4.3.2, the relationship between the variables is investigated in order to derive characteristic patterns of media presentations of political processes.

### 4.3.1. Characteristics of the Media's Presentations of Political Processes

Because media information on political processes might differ with respect to the institutional affiliation of procedures, this study compares the media's presentation of political decision-making processes within the executive and the legislative branch. Overall, 62 percent of articles in the Swiss newspapers provide information about political decision-making procedures within the executive branch, whereas 38 percent of articles present processes taking place within the legislative branch. A comparison between the different newspaper types showed that the focus on governmental procedures is particularly strong in the Swiss tabloid: 82 percent of articles in the tabloid refer to decision-making procedures in the government. In contrast, 56 percent of articles in the broadsheet and 59 percent of articles in the regional newspaper refer to the executive. In television, 54 percent of all newscasts focus on the government compared to 55 percent of newscasts that present parliamentary processes. In line with this study's definition of political processes as day-to-day discussions of possible solutions to political problems and decision-making within the government, the parliament, or the political administration, the most dominant actor type in the media are elected officials. More precisely, 99 percent of articles about government and 93 percent of articles of articles about parliament included references to political actors, followed by non-elected political actors (20 and 25 percent respectively).

In order to investigate how the Swiss newspapers and television newscasts present political decision-making processes, media attention to several process aspects was analyzed. The findings showed that the presentation of political processes is partly contingent upon whether the articles refer to the executive or the legislative branch. Hence, Table 4.3 presents the percentage of articles referring to different aspects of political decision-making processes and compares press articles about the parliament with press articles about the government. The significance of the differences between the institutions was tested with the Chi-Square difference test. The

findings showed that, on the one hand, news articles about the parliament, more often than articles about the government, refer to political opponents' endeavors to reach an understanding and to find a political compromise, and to the role of collective actions. That does not imply, however, that political processes in the parliament are presented as especially consensus-oriented, because these articles contain more frequent references to power struggles than is the case for articles about the government. Interestingly, there is no difference in the presented inefficiency of decision-making processes: 15 percent of articles about the government and 10 percent of articles about the parliament depict political institutions or actors as incapable of finding solutions to political problems. In general, the data suggests that the news coverage of political processes within the legislative branch is more evaluative than the news coverage of political processes within the executive.

| | **Government** | **Parliament** | **Significance** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | percent (n=165) | percent (n=102) | p-value |
| Compromise | 29 | 40 | 0.04 |
| Understanding | 15 | 26 | 0.02 |
| Power struggle | 35 | 48 | 0.03 |
| Accusation | 15 | 12 | 0.28 |
| Collective attribution | 25 | 31 | 0.15 |
| Collective actions | 27 | 41 | 0.01 |
| Inability | 15 | 10 | 0.17 |
| Failure | 3 | 2 | 0.46 |
| Winning and losing | 7 | 9 | 0.34 |

Note. Significance of differences was tested based on the Chi-Square difference test. For more information on the variables see the overview in chapter 4.2.2

Legend. 29% of press articles on the government and 40% of press articles on political processes within the parliament refer to the role of consensus-seeking endeavors or the search for political compromises ("compromise"). This difference is statistically significant (p=0.04).

*Table 4.3. Presentation of Political Processes in Articles about Government and Parliament*

The comparison between the three *newspaper types* (broadsheet, regional paper and tabloid) showed that references to the role of consensus-seeking endeavors (compromises, mutual understanding) and the collective aspect of decision-making procedures (collective attribution, collective action) are most frequent in the broadsheet and least frequent in the tabloid (see Table 4.4). The presentation of political processes with respect to consensus-seeking endeavors and collectivity in the regional newspaper lies somewhere between the other two newspaper types. The focus

on political discord (power struggles, accusations) is found to be characteristic of all three newspaper types, although in the broadsheet this aspect is less emphasized than in the regional paper and in the tabloid. References to the inefficiency of political decision-making (inability) are found in the regional paper in particular.

| | **Tabloid** | | **Broadsheet** | | **Regional paper** | | **Significance** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl |
| | percent (n=44) | percent (n=10) | percent (n=74) | percent (n=59) | percent (n=47) | percent (n=33) | p-value | p-value |
| Compromise | 18 | 0 | 37 | 56 | 28 | 24 | 0.10 | 0.00 |
| Understanding | 5 | 0 | 24 | 39 | 9 | 9 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Power struggle | 27 | 70 | 30 | 41 | 51 | 55 | 0.03 | 0.15 |
| Accusation | 11 | 30 | 8 | 15 | 30 | 0 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| Collective attribution | 9 | 37 | 21 | 0 | 39 | 27 | 0.00 | 0.04 |
| Collective actions | 16 | 10 | 37 | 51 | 21 | 33 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| Inability | 11 | 0 | 8 | 10 | 28 | 12 | 0.01 | 0.52 |
| Failure | 7 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0.22 | 0.13 |
| Winning and losing | 14 | 10 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 15 | 0.03 | 0.26 |

Note. Significance of differences was tested based on the Chi-Square difference test. For more information on the variables see the overview in chapter 4.2.2

Legend. 18% of articles on the government in the tabloid and 37% of articles on the government in the broadsheet refer to the role of consensus-seeking endeavors or the search for political compromises ("compromise"). This difference is not statistically significant (p=0.10).

*Table 4.4. Presentation of Political Processes in Different Newspaper Types*

The comparison in a *time perspective* showed that references to certain aspects of political processes are characteristic of contemporary media coverage, whereas media references to other aspects appeared to be time-invariant (see Table 4.5). One characteristic of the news coverage during the period 2004/05 is that news articles refer to power struggles and present political actors as blaming each other more frequently than is the case for the previous time periods. Articles that refer to compromise-seeking endeavors, the role of collective actions and collective attributions are, in contrast, significantly less frequent in the press coverage in 2004/05 compared to 1964/56 and 1984/85. In general, this tendency is found for both articles about the government and articles about the parliament.

| | 1964/65 | | 1984/85 | | 2004/05 | | Significance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl |
| | percent (n=28) | percent (n=15) | percent (n=31) | percent (n=22) | percent (n=106) | percent (n=65) | p-value | p-value |
| Compromise | 39 | 80 | 32 | 64 | 26 | 23 | 0.33 | 0.00 |
| Understanding | 18 | 47 | 29 | 50 | 9 | 12 | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Power struggle | 18 | 20 | 26 | 50 | 43 | 54 | 0.03 | 0.06 |
| Accusation | 4 | 13 | 13 | 27 | 19 | 6 | 0.12 | 0.03 |
| Collective attribution | 39 | 60 | 29 | 32 | 20 | 25 | 0.09 | 0.03 |
| Collective actions | 25 | 60 | 52 | 86 | 20 | 28 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Inability | 7 | 0 | 16 | 9 | 16 | 12 | 0.48 | 0.35 |
| Failure | 7 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0.11 | 0.33 |
| Winning and losing | 4 | 0 | 7 | 14 | 8 | 9 | 0.75 | 0.35 |

Note. Significance of differences was tested based on the Chi-Square difference test. For more information on the variables see the overview in chapter 4.2.2

Legend. 80% of articles on the parliament in 1964/65, 64% of articles on the parliament in 1984/85 and 23% of articles on the parliament in 2004/2005 refer to the role of consensus-seeking endeavors or the search for political compromises ("compromise"). This difference is statistically significant (p=0.00).

*Table 4.5. Presentation of Political Processes at Different Points in Time*

The presentation of political decision-making processes in Swiss *newspapers* was also compared to the presentation on Swiss *television* (see Table 4.6). Because the content analysis of television newscasts was restricted to the period 2004/2005, this analysis is based on articles from the current news coverage in both print and television for reasons of comparability. The results indicate that television newscasts focus more frequently than the press articles about the role of compromises, understanding, and collective actions. More precisely, 59 percent of all newscasts in television contain references to consensus-seeking endeavors, 34 percent refer to the role of understanding the other political side, and 63 percent refer to collective actions, compared to 23 percent, 12 percent, and 26 percent of press articles respectively. However, television news also contains more references to accusations voiced by political actors than the newspapers. Whereas 46 percent of all television newscasts on parliamentary processes referred to political accusations, this was the case in only 6 percent of press articles. Comparing the presentation of decision-making processes in the government, the results also indicate that television news contain more references to compromises (43 percent), understanding (25 percent), and collective actions (41 percent), than the press coverage of the government (26 percent, 9 percent, and 20 percent, respectively). More press articles about processes within the executive branch (16 percent) than television newscasts (4 percent) present political actors or institutions as incapable of solving political problems. Television newscasts presenting decision-making processes within the parliament, how-

ever, refer to the inefficiency of political processes: 10 percent of newscasts about parliamentary processes refer to the inability of political actors or institutions to solve political problems.

| | Newspaper | | Television | | Significance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl | Gov | Parl |
| | percent (n=106) | percent (n=65) | percent (n=49) | percent (n=41) | p-value | p-value |
| Compromise | 26 | 23 | 43 | 59 | 0.03 | 0.00 |
| Understanding | 9 | 12 | 25 | 34 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Power struggle | 43 | 54 | 33 | 66 | 0.17 | 0.15 |
| Accusation | 19 | 6 | 22 | 46 | 0.37 | 0.00 |
| Collective attribution | 20 | 25 | 20 | 29 | 0.53 | 0.38 |
| Collective actions | 20 | 28 | 41 | 63 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Inability | 16 | 12 | 4 | 10 | 0.03 | 0.47 |
| Failure | 1 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 0.53 | 0.16 |
| Winning and losing | 8 | 9 | 4 | 17 | 0.34 | 0.19 |

Note. Significance of differences was tested based on the Chi-Square difference test. For more information on the variables see the overview in chapter 4.2.2

Legend. 26% of articles about the government in the newspapers and 43% of articles about the government in television refer to the role of consensus-seeking endeavors or the search for political compromises ("compromise"). This difference is statistically significant (p=0.03).

*Table 4.6. Presentation of Political Processes in Television and Press*

The comparison of press coverage in *Germany and Switzerland* shows that the characteristics of the presentation of political decision-making processes already described for the Swiss newspapers appear to be representative for the German press as well. In fact, the tendency to emphasize power struggles is even stronger in Germany. More precisely, 45 percent of all articles about the government in Germany (35 percent of articles in Switzerland) refer to power struggles and conflicts. In 21 percent of all articles about the government in Germany (15 percent of articles in Switzerland), political actors blame each other. Looking at the news coverage of the parliament, the differences are even more obvious: 60 percent of all articles about the parliament in Germany (48 percent of articles in Switzerland) refer to power struggles and conflicts. In 27 percent of all articles about the parliament in Germany (12 percent of articles in Switzerland), political actors blame each other.

### 4.3.2. Identifying Presentation Patterns

A correlation analysis was conducted in order to gain more information about typical patterns of media presentations of political decision-making processes. The results for the correlation analysis are presented in Table 4.7. Based on the correlation analysis, two distinct patterns of presenting political processes could be identified. The first pattern can be described as presenting political processes as consensus-oriented endeavors. This pattern encompasses the following variables: collective attribution, collective actions, compromises, and the role of understanding-seeking endeavors. These variables are positively correlated. The pattern, hence, is characterized by a focus on consensus-seeking endeavors and the role of collective actions and interests. The second pattern can be described as presenting political processes as shaped by power struggles. This pattern encompasses the following variables: power struggles, accusation, and winning and losing. The pattern, hence, is characterized by a focus on power struggles and the competitiveness of political processes (references to winners and losers of political decision-making processes). These variables are positively correlated. The two patterns are negatively linked: The items representing the power struggle focus are negatively associated with collective actions, collective attribution and compromise-seeking behavior and vice versa.

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Compromise | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| **2** | Understanding | .56 ** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| **3** | Power struggle | -.17 ** | -.12 | 1 | | | | | | |
| **4** | Accusation | .04 | -.05 | .47 ** | 1 | | | | | |
| **5** | Collective attribution | .39 ** | .33 ** | -.31 ** | -.17 ** | 1 | | | | |
| **6** | Collective actions | .36 ** | .45 ** | -.17 ** | -.11 | .28 ** | 1 | | | |
| **7** | Inability | -.06 | -.13 * | .24 ** | .17 ** | -.13 * | -.19 ** | 1 | | |
| **8** | Failure | .03 | -.08 | .10 | .07 | -.05 | -.11 | .08 | 1 | |
| **9** | Winning and losing | -.08 | -.10 | .23 ** | .17 ** | -.11 | -.04 | .10 | .13 * | 1 |

Note. Entries are Pearson correlation coefficients ( r ). For more information on the variables see the overview in chapter 4.2.2

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 (two-sided test of significance)

*Table 4.7. Correlation between Variables Measuring the Media's Presentation of Processes*

Items of both patterns consensus-orientation and power struggles are linked to references regarding the inefficiency of political processes. The power struggle pattern goes along with references to the inability of finding a solution to political problems (failure). In contrast, aspects of the consensus pattern are negatively related with the aspect of inability. This indicates that when political processes are presented by focusing on the role of consensus, articles are less likely to refer to the inability to solve political problems. In contrast, when political processes are pre-

sented by focusing on power struggles, articles are more likely to refer to the inability to solve political problems. The presentations patterns identified in the correlation analysis can contribute to the development of realistic stimulus material. According implications for the conceptualization of the stimulus material (see Section 6.2.3) are discussed in the following summarizing section.

### *4.4. Summary and Discussion*

The results from the content analysis indicate that media information on political decision-making processes encompasses aspects of collective action and attribution, compromise-seeking endeavors and the role of mutual understanding as well as references to power struggles, accusations, and the inability to solve political problems. Altogether, the characteristics of press coverage of political decision-making processes in the Swiss press appeared to be rather stable when compared across newspaper types and media information about political processes in different political institutions. However, the focus on political discord has increased during the last decades, whereas consensus-orientation and the attribution of decisions to collective actions have become less frequent in the media coverage. This finding is in line with previous research which shows that parliamentary coverage in the U.S. increasingly focuses on political discord (Lichter & Amundson, 1994) and conflicts (Morris & Clawson, 2005). From a methodological point of view, however, it should be borne in mind that this study's content analysis is based on a restricted sample. Three Swiss newspapers and television news from one broadcast channel were investigated, all of which were from the German-speaking part in Switzerland. Thus, the results might not apply to the news coverage in Switzerland in general. In addition, the finding that news coverage contains references to political discord and inability cannot be taken as evidence of a lack of media attention to the efficiency of political processes, for instance, because the content analysis included only a selection of variables measuring aspects of political processes which were considered to be relevant in the framework of the present study. Whereas references to the inefficiency of decision-making procedures were measured, references to the efficiency of such processes were not.

One purpose of this overview was to inform the conceptualization of stimulus material for the experimental study (Chapter 6). The results presented here hold several implications in this respect. First, findings suggest that the external validity of the stimulus material is greater, if the articles refer to political processes in the legislative branch, because articles about the parliament were found to contain more evaluative aspects than articles about the government. Second, based on the results it appears reasonable to use articles from regional papers as the base material for the development of the stimulus material, because the regional paper contained more evaluative aspects than the tabloid. In addition, the regional paper's position in terms of how political decision-making processes are presented lies somewhere between the tabloid and the broadsheet. Third, stimulus articles should relate to aspects that

are characteristic for contemporary media coverage, because the comparison of news coverage from different points in time showed that there are specific patterns that are characteristic for this period. This is the focus on power struggles in particular. Fourth, the comparison of presentations between German and Swiss press articles showed that the evaluative aspects that were found to be characteristic of the Swiss news coverage are also typical for media information in Germany. In fact, the German media's tendency to emphasize conflicts is even stronger. This finding suggests a greater external validity of the stimulus material.

A second purpose of this overview of results from the content analysis was to serve as interpretational background for the investigation of the relationship between the use of political information in television and political attitudes (Chapter 7). This study is based on the assumption that routine media use reflects the impact of characteristic patterns of media content that subjects were exposed to. What, then, are these characteristic patterns of information in television newscasts? The findings indicate that television news about political decision-making is shaped by a strong focus on political accusations, particularly when informing about parliamentary processes, although television news focuses on aspects of consensus-orientation at the same time. In addition, television news referred to the inability of political actors to solve political processes, particularly when informing about political processes in the parliament. Overall, the results indicated that television newscasts, in general, are more evaluative than press articles. The findings warrant the assumption that television might decrease the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the perception of political processes as efficient.

This chapter described the identification of characteristic media patterns in the presentation of political decision-making processes. The following chapter presents the development of a standardized scale to measure citizens' preferences concerning political processes and related perceptions in surveys.

# 5. Measuring Citizens' Process Preferences and Perceptions

Recent research suggests that both process preferences and process perceptions are relevant predictors of citizens' confidence in political institutions. So far, however, no standardized scale that systematically measures process preferences and perceptions has existed (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147). This chapter describes the development and validation of multi-dimensional scales which measures citizens' preferences concerning political decision-making processes and according perceptions. In Section 5.1 the hypotheses that guide the development of the scales are presented. The operationalizations of variables as well as the procedures of data collection are described in the method section in Section 5.2. The results indicate that citizens distinguish different dimensions of political process: consensus-orientation, competition and the efficiency of political decision-making processes (Section 5.3). Section 5.4 provides the reader with a summary and conclusion.

## *5.1. Hypotheses*

Survey research to date has focused on the measurement of policy preferences (for instance Krosnick, 1988; Page & Shapiro, 1992). There is no standardized scale to measure process preferences or the perception of political processes, however (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147; Weatherford, 1992, p. 149). Hence, an important aim of this study is the development of standardized scales to measure citizens' process preferences and process perceptions. Both process preferences and process perceptions may refer to different aspects of political processes. For instance, inclusiveness, transparency, equality, and responsiveness are considered to be relevant aspects of political processes (cf. Kaina, 2008). The focus of empirical research, however, is on the fairness of decision-making procedures (e.g. Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 2000; Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996). Procedural justice research investigates the perception of the trustworthiness of political processes, their neutrality, and the equal consideration of different opinions (Tyler, et al., 1996). Drawing on the work of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), efficiency can be considered as another aspect of political processes. Efficiency and fair behavior are also identified as dimensions of political processes in a study by Weatherford (1992). Using data from the National Election Studies, Weatherford showed that the differentiation between these process aspects is not only conceptually relevant, but also that citizens do distinguish between them. In the study by Weatherford (1992), efficiency refers to policy making without an undue waste of time or resources. Fairness refers to regular and predictable decision-making processes as well as an open and equal access to decisional arenas.

Literature on preference formation suggests that "what people want might be socially constructed" (De Mesquita & McDermott, 2004, p. 276). Hence it seems plausible to argue that preferences regarding political process develop within a distinct cultural setting and are therefore shaped by the political culture of a nation. In line with that, research in political science suggests that citizens' political preferences mainly develop on the basis of their political socialization within a distinct political culture (De Mesquita & McDermott, 2004, p. 276; Fuchs, 1999b; Widlavsky, 1987). Accordingly, citizens in different political cultures were found to hold distinct preferences as regards political decision-making processes. The political culture of consensus democracies, such as Switzerland, can be traced back to the dominant role of negotiations and bargaining processes and the consensus-orientation of political institutions. This fosters the citizens' expectation that social problems are best solved based on compromises (Linder & Steffen, 2006). Competitive democracies, in contrast, are shaped by the government-opposition code (Kaase & Newton, 1995). Majoritarian-based or hierarchical processes dominate and are characterized by elements of competition and the attribution of political achievements to certain political actors. The related expectations of the citizens are clearly defined programmes and parties that are capable of forming governments on their own (Kaase & Newton, 1995, p. 134). Similarly, Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) argue that U.S. citizens expect a stealth democracy, i.e. quick and decisive action: "[Americans] dislike compromise and bargaining […] and they dislike debate and publicly hashing things out, referring to such activities as haggling or bickering" (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, p. 18). Likewise, Walz (1996) argues that citizens in Germany expect political institutions to decide in the interest of the public good and in an effective and competent manner.

Building on the reviewed literature, this study will focus on three different dimensions of political processes. First, the study is interested in preferences concerning the consensus-orientation of political processes as well as according perceptions as an important aspect of political decision-making in consensus democracies. Second, this study refers to preferences and perceptions with regard to political competition as an aspect that was found to be of great value for citizens in competitive democracies (Kaase & Newton, 1995). And third, because research has shown that citizens in the U.S. want quick and decisive action (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), this study focuses on preferences and perceptions regarding the efficiency of political procedures. Consensus-orientation is associated with respectfulness and fairness of political behavior, the role of compromise-seeking endeavors and the fact that there are no losers in political processes. The competition dimension concerns the role of clear orders and the decisiveness of political actors and refers to political debates that are shaped by quarrels or power struggles as a way of competitive majoritarian-based decision-making processes. The efficiency dimension refers to easy structures of political processes, fast and efficient procedures and the avoidance of delays. Although other process aspects may be distinguished, these three aspects appear to be the most central ones in the literature and constitute a first step in the investigation of process preferences and perceptions.

- H1a: The scale to measure process preferences consists of three correlated dimensions: compromise-orientation, competition, and efficiency.
- H1b: The scale to measure process perceptions consists of three correlated dimensions: compromise-orientation, competition, and efficiency.
- H1c: The process preferences scale and the process perceptions scale are independent constructs.

Moreover, I assume that the measurement of process preferences is culturally invariant.[44] Cultural invariance refers to the aspect that a construct has the same meaning in different cultures. Measurement invariance is a precondition for interpreting differences in scores in different cultures (cf. Bensaou, Coyne, & Venkatraman, 1999; Little, 1997). The metric invariance of the process preference scales was tested with samples from two different cultures: Switzerland as a consensus democracy and Germany as a rather competitive democracy. Cultural invariance of the scale is given if it has the same measurement structure for citizens from Germany as it has for Swiss citizens.

- H2: The process preference scale is culturally invariant.

In addition, the invariance of the process preferences scale as regards the objects of assessment is assumed. This study distinguishes between process preferences concerning the executive political branch (i.e. the Swiss government) and the legislative branch (i.e. the Swiss parliament, which consists of National Council and Council of States). Invariance is given if the scale measures citizens' preferences as regards decision-making processes within the executive branch in the same manner as it measures citizens' preferences as regards decision-making processes within the legislative branch. This study is interested in the measurement invariance as a precondition for being able to meaningfully interpret differences in score.

- H3: The process preference scale shows invariance as regards the objects of assessment.

### *5.2. Method*

Section 5.2.1 describes the variables and operationalization. The data collection procedure is outlined in Section 5.2.2. Section 5.2.3 discusses the methods of data analysis.

44 Whereas the measurement of policy preferences has received some scholarly attention, the measurement of process preferences has not (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147). This study aims to make a methodological contribution to the development of a standardized scale to measure process preferences. Hence, the cultural invariance as well as the invariance regarding different objects of assessment were tested for the process preferences scale.

### 5.2.1. Variables and Operationalization

In this section, the operationalization of the variables is described (see Appendix 10.2 for precise item wordings; the survey questionnaires (in German language) can be requested from the author). The scales were designed as a multidimensional research instrument to understand the specific preferences that citizens hold concerning how political decisions should be made and the perceptions of how political decisions are actually made. Based on the literature, indicators of political efficiency, consensus-orientation and competition discussed are derived. In addition, special care was taken to ensure that the items developed to measure citizens' process preferences and perceptions are linked to patterns in media information on political decision-making procedures (see Chapter 4). Weatherford (1992) used indicators from the National Election Studies to measure the fairness of political processes. The items refer to the role of major interests, blame for corruption, fair courts, good politicians, trust in the government to do what is right, and the feeling of being well represented in the political system. Fairness in that sense is a rather broad concept that encompasses the role of lobbyists as well as issues of representativeness. The items used in this study, in contrast, were adapted from relational justice scale items that are used, for instance, by Tyler, Degoey, & Smith (1996) and Tyler & Rasinski (1991). The according items refer to the role of politeness and fairness and the equal consideration of different issue positions. The dimension consensus-orientation in this study, hence, encompasses six indicators that relate to the respectfulness and fairness of political behavior, whether political parties concede a point to the other side, the consideration of diverging interest, the avoidance of losers in a political process, and the role of political compromises.

To our knowledge, no survey items refer to the importance of competitive elements in decision-making processes. The items used in this study build on statements in an article by Kaase & Newton (1995). The dimension competition of political processes contains six items that relate to the decisiveness of political actors, the role of political quarrels and power struggles, the insistence on political opinions, the ability of political parties to put their plans through, and the possibility of hierarchical orders.

Using survey data from the American National Election Surveys, Weatherford (1992) found that efficiency can be measured by three indicators: Citizens' perception of the way political actors make use of financial resources (e.g. wasting taxes), the extent to which they perceive politicians as incompetent or crooked, and the extent to which respondent perceive that the people running the government are smart and know what they are doing. Efficiency in that sense encompasses both aspects of how resources are handled as well as aspects of political competence. The items used in this study focus on the measurement of efficiency in terms of time. The efficiency dimension of political processes is measured with five variables that refer to fast and efficient decision-making processes, simple and short processes, the avoidance of delays in decision-making, and the role of clear instructions.

Altogether, a set of 17 preference statements was developed. Because the literature provides evidence for the usefulness of rating scales as an alternative to ranking scales for the measurement of values (Alwin & Krosnick, 1985), a 7-point scale response format assessed how relevant the different aspects of political decision-making are for the individual respondent. When responding to the scale, individuals were asked the following questions: 'Citizens hold different preferences regarding how political decisions should be made. Please answer according to the following scale how important you consider the various preferences. The scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important)'. Preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes were for instance measured with the question 'How important is it for you, that political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side?' Preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes were for example measured with the question 'How important is it for you that political decision-making processes are simple and short?' The items used to measure process preferences are presented in Table 5.2.

The measurement of process perceptions was developed by adapting the process preferences items. All items were measured on a 7-point scale and had the following stem: 'Now we would like to know how, in your opinion, political decisions are actually made in Switzerland. Please answer according to the following scale and indicate to what extent the following statements on political decision-making processes in Switzerland, in your opinion, apply or not apply. The scale ranges from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (fully applies).' Perceived consensus-orientation of political processes was for instance measured with the statement 'Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side.' Perceived efficiency-orientation was for example measured with the statement 'Political decision-making processes are time-consuming.' The items used to measure process perceptions are presented in Table 5.3.

In order to test the cultural invariance of the process preferences scale (see Section 5.3.2), surveys with Swiss and German students were conducted. In these pilot studies, a Likert response format was used to measure process preferences.[45] The following question was asked: 'Please answer according to the following scale, to what extent you agree with the following statements. The scale ranges from 1 (fully agree) to 7 (do not agree at all).' Process perceptions were measured by asking: 'How are political decisions actually made in Switzerland/Germany? Please answer according to the following scale and indicate to what extent the following statements on political decision-making processes in Switzerland, in your opinion, apply or not apply. The scale ranges from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (fully applies).' The data from this comparative survey do not encompass all nine scales items. Therefore I am able to test the cultural invariance on a restricted data set only. Missing variables are the ones that refer to the question whether political parties should concede a point to

45 The Likert response format appeared to be somewhat problematical, because the items would not have been accepted as "own" statements. Therefore, process preferences in the final study were measured by asking how important a variety of process aspects are for the respondents.

the other side, one political party is able to put their plans through, and delays in political processes are avoided. Thus, for each of the three dimensions the data set contains two variables (shown in Table 5.5). The wording of items in this study is slightly different from the variables in the first study. The core messages are the same, however.

In order to test the discriminant validity of the process preferences scale as regards different objects of assessment, data from the another pilot survey with 530 Swiss citizens was used. Process preferences concerning decision-making processes in the Swiss government ("Bundesrat") and the Swiss parliament – which consists of National Council ("Nationalrat") and Council of States ("Ständerat") – were distinguished. A 7-point scale response format assessed how relevant the different aspects of political decision-making are for the individual respondent. When responding to the scale, individuals were asked the following questions: 'Citizens hold different preferences regarding how political decisions in the parliament should be made. Please answer according to the following scale how important you consider the various preferences. The scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important)', 'Citizens hold different preferences regarding how political decisions in the government should be made. Please answer according to the following scale how important you consider the various preferences. The scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important)'. Preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes were for instance measured with the question 'How important is it for you, that politicians in the parliament sometimes concede a point to the other side?' / 'How important is it for you that politicians in government sometimes concede a point to the other side?' Preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes were for example measured with the question 'How important is it for you that political decision-making processes in the parliament are simple and short?' / 'How important is it for you that political decision-making processes in the government are simple and short?' The items used to measure process preferences are presented in footnote 56.

### 5.2.2. Participants and Procedures

A first pretest of the process preferences and perceptions items was done with five persons.[46] The persons were informed about the purpose of pretesting the questionnaire. The test included a post-interview probing with a focus on comprehension. Pretests are a relevant step in developing the final questionnaires (Probst, 1998). They encompass the careful analysis of unclear formulations, redundancies, and questions that result in many "don't know" answers. Moreover, the variances of items might give hints on whether the scales are appropriate. In addition, pretests

46 The persons were doctoral students at the University of Zurich and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich.

give information on the question order. The insights from the pretest informed the further development of the survey items. Special attention was given to the items measuring process preferences and perceptions. Wordings were edited, single items were deleted, and complex items were simplified.

In a pilot study with samples from two different cultures, Switzerland as a consensus democracy and Germany as a rather competitive democracy, the cultural invariance of the process preferences scales was tested. In November and December 2007, standardized written surveys were conducted with college students in Germany (n = 163) and Switzerland (n = 150). Students in Münster, Lucerne, and Zurich participated in the study.[47] The survey was conducted within the framework of university lectures and seminars. The surveys were conducted in the German-speaking part of Switzerland only, which has the advantage that potential differences in the measurement in the two samples might not be attributed to language differences. The college samples seemed appropriate for the purpose of scale development, where representative samples are not necessarily required (Noar, 2003, p. 626). The survey dealt with attitudes toward the government and politicians. The samples had an above-average number of participants with higher levels of formal education. In the German survey, 42 percent were males, and the age ranged from 18 to 31 (M=22; SD=2.7). In the Swiss survey, 51 percent were males, and the age ranged from 18 to 33 (M= 22; SD=2.8). The duration of the surveys was approximately 15 minutes.

The second pilot study was conducted in March/April 2008 for the purpose of testing the invariance of the scale as regards different objects of assessment. The subjects were recruited in collaboration with "smartvote", an online voting decision-making tool in Switzerland.[48] In the "smartvote" post election survey in November and December 2007 a question was included that asked whether the respondent would be interested in participating in a social science research project. Those respondents who indicated 'yes' were included in a pool of potential participants. The sample therefore includes a high number of subjects with strong interests in politics. In addition, the sample has an above-average number of participants with a high level of formal education. The study was conducted as an online survey. Out of 800 invited subjects, 530 people completed the questionnaire. The response rate was 0.66. In the sample from the second pilot survey, 61 percent were males, and the age ranged from 16 to 76 (M=38; SD=13.9). The survey dealt with attitudes towards the government and parliament. The duration of the survey was approximately 15 minutes.

The development of the process perceptions and process preferences scales is based on data from a standardized online survey that was conducted in May 2008 in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Respondents were recruited through the

47 Thanks to Margit Bussmann, Frank Esser, Tina Freyburg, Frank Marcinkowski, Urs Scheuss, and Doreen Spörer for their help with the implementation of this pilot study.

48 The author thanks Jan Fivaz from the online voting platform "smartvote" for his help with the recruitment of participants (www.smartvote.ch).

newsletter of 'smartvote', an electronic voting decision-making tool in Switzerland. The newsletter is regularly sent to all registered users of the 'smartvote' online-platform (www.smartvote.ch). The participants, hence, were more interested in politics than the average Swiss citizen. Moreover, participants had an above-average level of higher educational degrees. For the purpose of scale development and validation, this survey sample was separated into two groups, a smaller sample with 157 participants who participated in the control group of the experimental study, and a second sample with 366 participants who participated in the two experimental groups. In the first group (n = 157), 64 percent were males, and the age ranged from 19 to 84 (M=42; SD=14.5). In the second group (n = 366), 69 percent were males, and the age ranged from 18 to 80 (M= 44; SD=15.5).

### 5.2.3. Data Analysis

The items measuring process preferences and process perceptions were tested by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum-likelihood parameter estimation. The analysis used EQS version 6.1 software (Bentler, 2006). CFA is a technique that can greatly enhance confidence in the structure and psychometric properties of a new measure (Noar, 2003) and several studies have provided evidence for the usefulness of CFA in further developing conventional measures of political attitudes (e.g. Funke, 2005; Weatherford, 1992). Data were tested for univariate and multivariate normal distribution. Extreme violations (moderate ones are given in parentheses) on the assumption of the univariate distribution are associated with skew values of at least 3 (2) and kurtosis of at least 20 (7) (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995). These values were not reached in all of the samples. Yuan, Lambert, & Fouladi (2004) developed an extension of the Mardia (1970; 1974) test of multivariate kurtosis that can be applied to data with missing values. The normalized estimate is interpretable as a standard normal variate; the hypothesis of multivariate normality must be rejected if it is outside the range of -3 to +3 (Bentler, 2006, p. 282f.). Strong outliers were excluded from data analysis. Missing values were estimated with the maximum likelihood method, also known as full information maximum likelihood (cf. Bentler, 2006, 275ff.). To evaluate the model fit, the following criteria were evaluated: the Chi-Square value divided by the number of degrees of freedom (< 3), the comparative fit index (CFI > .90), the Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < .06) with its 90% confidence interval (CI, lower bound < .05, upper bound < .10) ( Kline, 2005, p. 133ff.).

## *5.3. Results*

Section 5.3.1 presents the model development and validation of a scale to measure process preferences. Section 5.3.2 describes the development and validation of scales to measure citizens' perception of political processes. In Section 5.3.3, it was

tested whether respondents differentiate between process preferences and process perceptions. In addition, the cultural invariance of the process preferences scale was tested; the results are presented in Section 5.3.4. Moreover, the process preference scale was tested in terms of its invariance as regards different objects of assessment; Section 5.3.5 describes the findings. Finally, the construct validity of the scales is investigated (Section 5.3.6).

### 5.3.1. Process Preferences: Model Development and Validation

The scale to measure process preferences was designed as a multidimensional research instrument to understand the specific preferences that citizens hold concerning how political decisions should be made. Building on aspects of political efficiency, consensus-orientation, and competition that are discussed in the literature (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kaase & Newton, 1995; Linder & Steffen, 2006), a set of 17 preference statements was developed. In confirmatory factor analysis, the dimensions of process preferences (consensus-orientation, competition, and efficiency) can be modeled as latent variables that are each reflected by several indicators. Hence, an initial model was developed that specifies how the 17 indicators are related to the three latent factors (preferences towards the efficiency of political processes, preferences as regards the consensus-orientation, and preferences regarding political competition). In the initial model the factor consensus-orientation encompasses six indicators: the respectfulness of political behavior, the fairness of political actors, whether political parties concede a point to the other side, the consideration of diverging interest, the avoidance to distinguish between winners and losers of a political process, and the role of political compromises. The factor competition contains the following six items: whether political actors force their points, the role of political quarrels, the role of power struggles, the persistency of political actors, the ability of political parties to put their plans through, and the possibility of hierarchical orders. The dimension efficiency includes five variables: fast decision-making processes, efficient decision-making processes, simple and short processes, the avoidance of delays in decision-making, and the firm stand of political actors.

The initial model with 17 items was tested with the survey data from the final survey with Swiss citizens. For the purpose of scale development and validation this survey sample was separated into two groups, a smaller sample with 157 participants who participated in the control group of the experimental study, and a second sample with 366 participants who participated in the two experimental groups. The development of the scale is based on the sample with 157 participants. The unstandardized loading of the first indicator was fixed to 1.0 to scale the factor. The initial correlated factors model that was developed did not fit the data. Some indicators were not satisfactory and eight out of the initial 17 indicators were eliminated from

the analysis.[49] The resulting modified model encompasses nine indicators and is presented in Figure 5.1, Cronbach's Alpha was .69. The modified correlated factors model fits the data quite well (see Table 5.1). Standardized factor loading are structure coefficients that estimate indicator-factor loadings. The factor loadings for each set of indicators are relatively high, indicating that the factors are well represented by the according items (see Table 5.2). This also suggests convergent validity. Drawing on Boyle (1991) who argues that establishing reliability at the cost of validity is problematical, items with lower factor loadings (< .6) were not eliminated from the model in order to satisfy the complexity of the constructs.

The data-driven model modification process resulted in a correlated factor model that encompasses three factors with three indicators each. The factor efficiency describes preferences regarding the efficiency of political decision-making and includes indicators that refer to fast and efficient decision-making processes, simple structures of decision-making processes, and the avoidance of delays in political processes. The factor consensus-orientation describes preferences regarding the role of compromises in decision-making processes and encompasses variables that relate to the question of whether one party from time to time concedes a point to the other side, the consideration of divergent interests and compromise-seeking behavior. The factor competition describes preferences regarding the role of competition and clear alternative standpoints in political processes. It includes items that refer to the decisiveness of political actors who force their point, the ability of political parties to put their plans through, and the role of hierarchical orders. The correlations between the factors indicate that the three factors are distinct. For the correlation between the factor consensus-orientation and the factor competition $r = 0.01$; for the correlation between the factors consensus-orientation and efficiency $r = 0.21$; and for the correlation between the factors competition and efficiency $r = 0.64$. All correlations are significant at the 5% level.

49 I did take out the variables referring to the role of political quarrels and role of power struggles related to the competition factor, because those two variables refer too much to conflicts whereas the competition factor generally refers to competitive elements of political decision-making processes which not need be shaped by quarrels and power struggles. After removing these two variables, the item measuring the importance of insisting on an opinion showed a low loading on the competition factor and was also excluded. For the efficiency factor, I took out the two variables referring to efficient decision-making processes and clear instructions, because the Lagrange Multiplier test indicated problems with those variables. Moreover, the loading of the firm stand item was low and, hence, this item was excluded. For the consensus-orientation factor, I excluded the two variables measuring the importance of respectfulness of political behavior and fairness of political actors because both relate to general characteristics of political actors rather than a specific dimension of process preferences. Then I excluded the variable measuring the importance of having no losers of a political decision because of low loading.

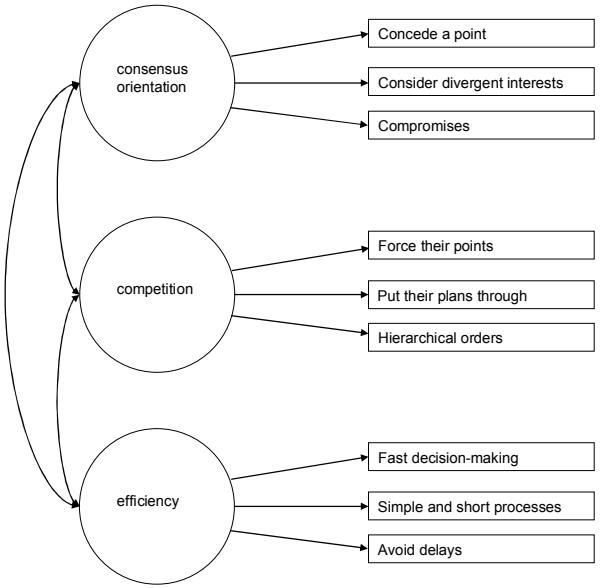



*Figure 5.1. Modified Measurement Model of Process Preferences. See Table 5.2 for variables, factor loadings, and indicator reliabilities (i.e. squared multiple correlations*

Further tests of alternative models were conducted to evaluate the discriminant and convergent validity of the scale.The modified model was compared with alternative models in a set of multisample analyses. If the models are nested, that is one model is a restricted version of the other, the relative fit of these models can be compared with the Chi-Square difference test. The specification of a model in which each of the nine indicators loads on only one factor provides a precise test of convergent and discriminant validity (Kline, 2005, p. 181). A one-factor model tests whether the items are measuring one overall factor rather than three individual factors. Support for this model would suggest that individuals do not differentiate among different dimensions of process preferences and they would best be represented by a unidimensional construct (Noar, 2003, p. 633f.). The results of selected fit indices clearly indicate poor fit for the one factor model (see Table 5.1). The fit is significantly worse than the fit for the correlated factors model, as the Chi-Square difference test shows.[50] Hence, the observed variables show discriminant validity and measure more than one domain. The three scales allow measuring preferences

50 Given a difference in Degrees of Freedom (df) of 3, the difference in Chi-Square is significant at the level of 5 % if it is 7.815 or larger. The Chi-Square difference here is larger than that value.

concerning efficiency, consensus-orientation and competition separately. In addition, an uncorrelated factors model tests the idea that the three factors are independent. Support for this model would suggest that the three dimensions of process preferences are independent constructs and thus are not related to one another (Noar, 2003, p. 634). Retention of this model suggests that what is being measured here are really three different constructs. As the uncorrelated factors model and the initial correlated factors model are nested, the former one being a restricted version of the latter, the relative fit of these models can be compared with the Chi-Square difference test. The uncorrelated factor model fitted the data not well (see Table 5.1), and the Chi-Square difference test indicates that the correlated factor model fitted the data significantly better.[51]

In general, then, the correlated factor model is superior to a one-factor model and superior to an uncorrelated factor model. The support for the correlated factor model suggests the possibility of a hierarchical model. A hierarchical model tests the idea that a second-order factor can account for relations between the three factors. Hence, the unanalyzed association between the correlated factors model is replaced by a second-order factor, which has no indicators and is presumed to have direct effects on the first-order factors (Kline, 2005, p. 193). This hierarchical model indicates that each of the three preference dimensions are first-order factors that are related to a second-order factor termed the general "process preference" factor. Retention of this model supports the idea that these three scales are subscale of one larger scale. Therefore, the three scales could be examined individually or summed together into one scale. The hierarchical model fits the data equally as well as the correlated factor model. This is the case because the second-order parameterization did not gain any degrees of freedom as it would with more indicators (Bentler, 2006, p. 45). Looking at the parameter estimates, the results indicate that the general factor "process preferences" is well represented by the factors competition and efficiency. However, it is not well represented by the factor consensus-orientation, the factor loading is low ($\beta = .19$). Hence, the correlated factors model was chosen as the superior model.

| | | | Fit Indexes | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Models** | **$Chi^2$** | **df** | **$Chi^2$/df** | **CFI** | **RMSEA** |
| One-factor model | 111.202 | 27 | 4.11 | .645 | .142 |
| Uncorrelated factors model | 58.640 | 27 | 2.17 | .868 | .087 |
| Correlated factors model | 25.141 | 24 | 1.05 | .998 | .013 |
| Hierarchical model | 25.439 | 24 | 1.06 | .996 | .015 |

*Table 5.1. Comparison of Alternative Measurement Models of Process Preferences*

51 Given a difference in Degrees of Freedom (df) of 3, the difference in Chi-Square is significant at the level of 5 % if it is 7.815 or larger. The Chi-Square difference here is larger than that value.

Models that are modified based on empirical data require the validation on an independent sample (Kline, 2005). Hence another sample of Swiss citizens from the same study was used (n = 366) for validation of the correlated factors model. The invariance in measurement models represents a continuum (Bollen, 1989, p. 356). Bollen (1989) suggests a hierarchy of invariance that can be assessed along the two overlapping dimensions: Invariance of model form and similarity in the parameter values. The first level refers to the number of factors. The hypothesis to be tested is that there are the same numbers of correlated common factors in both groups. Only if equality in model form is given, the similarity in parameter values can be tested. With respect to similarity in parameter values, I tested (1) whether the factor loadings linking the latent variable to the observed variable are the same in the two samples, (2) whether the factor variances and covariances are invariant, and (3) I tested the equality of measurement error variances as a higher form of invariance. Data analysis supported the hypothesis of invariance in model form. A set of multiple group analyses, then, tested the invariance of factor loadings, factor variances and covariances, and error variances. All parameters are found to be invariant across both samples. The fully constrained comparison results in two equivalent models. Table 5.2 shows the items, factor loadings, and reliabilities of the process preference scale. These results clearly support the validity of the scale. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .98, RMSEA =.03 (90% CI = .00, .05), Chi-Square = 82.61, df = 69. Cronbach's Alpha in the first sample was .69, in the second sample .65. Thus, H1a, which assumes that citizens' process preferences encompass the three dimensions efficiency, consensus-orientation and competition and that these preferences are correlated, is supported.

| Latent factor | Items<br>How important is it for you personally that… | Sample 1 (n=152)[a] | | Sample 2 (n=349)[b] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Factor loadings | Indicator reliabilities | Factor loadings | Indicator reliabilities |
| Consensus-orientation | | | | | |
| | .. political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side? | .683 | .467 | .683 | .467 |
| | … politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions? | .759 | .576 | .759 | .576 |
| | .. political decisions are based on compromises? | .589 | .347 | .589 | .347 |
| Competition | | | | | |
| | ... politicians are decisive and force their points? | .543 | .294 | .543 | .294 |
| | ... one political side is able to put their plans through? | .611 | .373 | .611 | .373 |
| | .. certain politicians could give hierarchical orders, if a decision has to be taken? | .596 | .356 | .596 | .356 |
| Efficiency | | | | | |
| | .. political problems are solved as fast as possible? | .774 | .599 | .774 | .599 |
| | ... political decision-making processes are simple and short? | .826 | .683 | .826 | .683 |
| | ... politicians do avoid delays when making political decisions? | .622 | .386 | .622 | .386 |

Note. Entries are factor loadings and indicator reliabilities (i.e. squared multiple correlations) of the modified (Sample 1) and confirmed scale (Sample 2).

All factor loadings are significant at the 5 % level

a Cases missing to 157 were excluded from the data analysis because they are statistical outliers.

b Cases missing to 366 were excluded from the data analysis because they are statistical outliers.

*Table 5.2. Items, Factor Loadings, and Indicator Reliabilities of Process Preferences Scale*

### 5.3.2. Measuring Process Perceptions

A model measuring process perceptions was tested by adapting the process preferences model. The scale to measure process perceptions encompasses three dimensions: consensus perceptions, efficiency perceptions and competition perceptions. The initial model with 17 items was tested with the survey data from the final survey

with the Swiss citizens. For the purpose of scale development and validation this survey sample was separated into two groups, a smaller sample with 157 participants who participated in the control group of the experimental study, and a second sample with 366 participants who participated in the two experimental groups. The development of the scale is based on the sample with 157 participants. The consensus dimension of process perceptions is measured with items referring to the role of compromises, the consideration of diverging interests, and whether or not politicians concede a point to the other side. The efficiency dimension of process perceptions is measured with items referring to delays in political decision-making procedures, simple and short processes and whether or not political problems are solved fast. The competition dimension of process perceptions is measured with items referring to the role of hierarchical orders, the decisiveness of political actors and whether or not political actors put their plans through. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .91, RMSEA =.07 (90% CI = .03, .10), Chi-Square = 43.50, df = 24. Cronbach's Alpha was .48. Whereas the factors efficiency perception and consensus perception are well represented by its indicators, the factor competition perception causes some trouble. The item "Politicians are decisive and force their points" shows a particularly low and non-significant loading on the competition perception factor. After excluding this item, the model fit improved significantly as indicated by the Chi-Square-Difference Test. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .97, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .00, .09), Chi-Square = 23.14, df = 17. Cronbach's Alpha was .47. See Table 5.3 for factor loadings and indicator reliabilities. Generally, the measures of process perceptions regarding the competition dimension are not ideal. Apparently citizens hold precise competition preferences, but not necessarily related perceptions.

| Latent factor | Items | Sample 1 (n=142)[a] | | Sample 2 (n=338)[b] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Factor loadings | Indicator reliabilities | Factor loadings | Indicator reliabilities |
| Consensus-orientation | | | | | |
| | Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side. | .662 | .438 | .679 | .461 |
| | Politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions. | .846 | .716 | .846 | .716 |
| | In Switzerland political decisions are based on compromises. | .580 | .337 | .580 | .337 |
| Competition | | | | | |
| | One political side puts their plans through. | .503 | .253 | .503 | .253 |
| | Certain politicians give hierarchical orders, if a decision has to be taken. | .304 | .092 | .304 | .092 |
| Efficiency | | | | | |
| | In Switzerland political problems are solved as fast as possible. | .815 | .665 | .815 | .665 |
| | Political decision-making processes in Switzerland are time-consuming.* | .418 | .175 | .418 | .175 |
| | Swiss politicians postpone decisions over and over again.* | .720 | .518 | .720 | .518 |

Note. Entires are factor loadings and indicator reliabilities (i.e. squared multiple correlations) of the modified (Sample 1) and confirmed scales (Sample 2).
All factor loadings are significant at the 5 % level
* reversed coding of the scale
a Cases missing to 157 were excluded from data analysis because they are statistical outliers.
b Cases missing to 366 were excluded from data analysis because they are statistical outliers.

*Table 5.3. Items, Factor Loadings, Indicator Reliabilities of Process Perceptions Scale*

Another sample of Swiss citizens from the same study was used (n = 366) for validation of the correlated factors model. For the scale measuring process perceptions, data analysis supported the hypothesis of invariance in model form. In a set of multiple group analyses I then tested the invariance of factor loadings, factor variances and covariances, and error variances. All parameters are found to be invariant across both samples. The fully constrained comparison results in two equivalent models.

Table 5.3 shows the items, factor loadings and reliabilities of the process perceptions scale. These results clearly support the validity of the scale. The calculated fit indices for the group comparison are: with CFI = .96, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .01, .06), Chi-Square = 78.24; df = 52. Cronbach's Alpha in the first sample was .45, in the second sample .44. In general, then, the findings support H1b.

### 5.3.3. Discriminant Validity of Preferences and Perceptions Scales

In order to compare citizens' process preferences and related process perceptions, the two scales to measure preferences and perceptions need to be discriminant, that is they need to measure different concepts. The discriminant validity of the process preferences and process perceptions scales was tested using the joint sample including participants group 1 and group 2 (n = 523).The discriminant validity of the process preferences and process perceptions scales was tested for the three dimensions, consensus, efficiency and competition, separately. The specification of a model in which each of the indicators loads on only one factor provides a precise test of convergent and discriminant validity (Kline, 2005, p. 181). A one-factor model tests whether the items are measuring one overall factor rather than two individual factors. Support for this model would suggest that individuals do not differentiate among different process preferences and process perceptions and both concepts would best be represented by a unidimensional construct (cf. Noar, 2003, p. 633f.). The results of selected fit indices clearly indicate poor fit for the one factor model for all three dimensions, consensus, efficiency and competition (see Table 5.4). The fit is significantly worse than the fit for the uncorrelated factors model, as the Chi-Square difference test shows.[52] An uncorrelated factors model tests the idea that the two factors are independent. Support for this model suggests that the process preferences and process perceptions scales are independent constructs and thus not related to one another (Noar, 2003, p. 634). Comparing the uncorrelated factor model with a correlated factor model, the correlated factors model did result in a significant reduction of Chi-Square for the efficiency and competition dimensions, but not for the consensus dimensions.[53] The correlation between efficiency preferences and efficiency perceptions was -.398 ($p < .005$); the correlation between competition preferences and competition perceptions was .515 ($p < .005$). In general, the findings support H1c and indicate that the process preferences and process perception factors show discriminant validity and the scales allow measuring process preferences and related perceptions separately, although preferences and perceptions that concern the

52 Given a difference in Degrees of Freedom (df) of 1, the difference in Chi-Square is significant at the level of 5 % if it is 3.841 or larger. The Chi-Square difference here is larger than that value.

53 Given a difference in Degrees of Freedom (df) of 1, the difference in Chi-Square is significant at the level of 5 % if it is 3.841 or larger. The Chi-Square differences for the efficiency dimension and the competition dimension are larger than that value.

efficiency of political processes and preferences and perceptions that concern the competition of political processes were found to be correlated.

| | | | Fit Indexes | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Models** | **Chi²** | **df** | **Chi²/df** | **CFI** | **RMSEA** |
| **Consensus Dimension** | | | | | |
| One-factor model | 272.718 | 10 | 27.27 | .469 | .236 |
| Uncorrelated factors model | 9.887 | 9 | 1.1 | .999 | .011 |
| Correlated factors model | 8.595 | 8 | 1.07 | .999 | .008 |
| **Efficiency Dimension** | | | | | |
| One-factor model | 465.045 | 10 | 46.5 | .291 | .296 |
| Uncorrelated factors model | 86.659 | 9 | 9.63 | .883 | .127 |
| Correlated factors model | 53.088 | 8 | 6.64 | .934 | .101 |
| **Competition Dimension** | | | | | |
| One-factor model | 63.844 | 6 | 10.64 | .738 | .129 |
| Uncorrelated factors model | 46.534 | 5 | 9.31 | .805 | .122 |
| Correlated factors model | 22.521 | 4 | 5.63 | .916 | .090 |

*Table 5.4. Process Preferences and Process Perceptions as Distinct Concepts*

### 5.3.4. Test of Cultural Invariance of Process Preferences Scale

Cultural invariance indicates that a construct has the same meaning in different cultures. The measurement invariance is a precondition for interpreting differences in scores in different cultures (cf. Bensaou, et al., 1999; Little, 1997). “Inadequate testing for the invariance of data across national groups weakens the interpretations that may be derived from cross-national empirical research” (Bensaou, et al., 1999, p. 672). In order to test the cultural invariance of the scale which is assumed in H2, data from the first pilot study was used. This study was conducted with college students in Germany (n = 163) and Switzerland (n = 150). Switzerland constitutes a typical consensus democracy, whereas Germany is a rather competitive democracy. The test of the cultural invariance is based on a restricted data set; for each of the

three dimensions the data set contains two variables;[54] the variables are shown in Table 5.5.

The test of measurement invariance between cultures is also evaluated as a continuum (Bensaou, et al., 1999; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The invariance in model form and the similarity in parameter values, i.e. the invariance of factor loadings, the invariance of factor variances and covariances, and the invariance of error variances, were tested. The data supported the hypothesis of invariance in model form. In a set of multiple group analyses, the invariance of factor loadings, factor variances and covariances was tested by setting equality constraints. All parameters are found to be invariant across both samples. The model that in addition constrained the error variances to be equal across the two groups did not fit the data, however. Table 5.3 shows the items, factor loadings, and reliabilities of the process preference scale for the model with equality constraints on the invariance of factor loadings, factor variances and covariances. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = 1.00, RMSEA =.00 (90% CI = .00, .05), Chi-Square = 17.02, df = 20. Cronbach's Alpha is .53 for the Swiss sample and .67 for the German sample. Results clearly indicate that the process preference scale shows cultural invariance and support H2. Therefore, differences in scores on the items can be meaningful compared across countries. However, although the factor variances are equivalent, the error variances are not, indicating that the indicators might not be equally reliable across constructs (cf. Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998, p. 81).

54 The wording of items in this study is slightly different from the variables in the other two studies. The core messages are the same, however.

| Latent factor | Items | Swiss Sample (n=147)[a] | | German Sample (n=162)[b] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Please answers according to the following scale to what extent you agree to the following statements. | Factor loadings | Indicator reliabilities | Factor loadings | Indicator reliabilities |
| Consensus-orientation | | | | | |
| | Politicians should give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions. | .637 | .405 | .514 | .265 |
| | Political solutions are best found by searching for compromises. | .551 | .303 | .520 | .271 |
| Competition | | | | | |
| | Politicians should be decisive and shouldn't squabble that much. | .649 | .421 | .822 | .676 |
| | Politicians should give hierarchical orders, if a decision has to be taken. | .540 | .292 | .675 | .456 |
| Efficiency | | | | | |
| | Political problems should be solved as fast as possible. | .431 | .186 | .389 | .152 |
| | Simple and easy-to-understand political solutions are better than complex programmes. | .629 | .395 | .691 | .477 |

Note. Entries are factor loadings and indicator reliabilities (i.e. squared multiple correlations) of the Swiss and German samples.

All factor loadings are significant at the 5 % level

a Cases missing to 150 were excluded from the data analysis because they are statistical outliers.

b Cases missing to 163 were excluded from the data analysis because they are statistical outliers.

*Table 5.5. Cultural Invariance of Process Preferences*

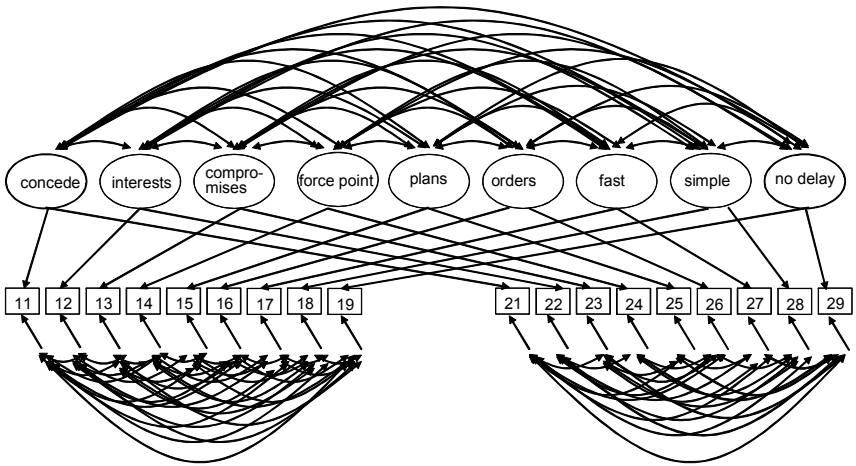
### 5.3.5. Process Preferences: Test of Invariance Regarding Objects of Assessment

H3 postulates that the scale is invariance as regards the objects of assessment, meaning that the scale measures process preferences equally well for different political institutions, such as the government and the parliament. In order to test this assumption, data from the second pilot survey with 530 Swiss citizens were used. Process preferences concerning decision-making processes in the Swiss government ("Bundesrat") and the Swiss parliament – which consists of National Council ("Nationalrat") and Council of States ("Ständerat") – were distinguished. To test the

invariance as regards the object of assessment, the data are perceived as multitreat-multimethod (MTMM) data, with treats being the nine process preference variables (concede a point, consider diverging interests, compromises, force their points, put their plans through, hierarchical orders, fast decision-making, simple and short processes, avoid delays) and methods being the two different objects of assessment (parliament and government). The conceptualization of the data as MTMM data with process preferences being the treats and methods being the object of assessment is considered to be appropriate, because the logic that underlies the analyses of MTMM data seems applicable for a test of invariance of measurement regarding different objects of assessment. In both cases, the research interest refers to convergent validity, and it is investigated whether different methods (or in this case objects of assessment) or traits (in this case process preferences) explain the variance of observed variables. Convergent validity is given when the variance is explained by traits rather than methods. Hence, if the variance of observed process preference variables is explained by process aspects rather than the objects of assessment, this supports the hypothesis that the scale is invariant as regards the two different object of assessment (government and parliament).

The literature suggests several models to analyze MTMM data (cf. Byrne & Goffin, 1993; Lance, Noble, & Scullen, 2007; H.W. Marsh & Bailey, 1991). I will present results that are based on a Correlated-Uniqueness Model (CU), an approach recently discussed in the literature (Byrne & Goffin, 1993; Lance, Noble, & Scullen, 2007; Marsh, Byrne, & Craven, 1992). Other approaches to test the invariance as regards objects of assessment for the process preferences scale are discussed by the author elsewhere (Floß, 2008). The CU Model was proposed by Marsh (1988) as an approach to MTMM analyses that allows method effects to be represented by correlated error/uniqueness terms (i.e. error covariances).

Figure 5.2 presents the CU Model used to test the hypothesis. Error covariances representing the same method were freely estimated. The measures which are loading on the same trait factor were constrained to have equal factor loadings for identification purposes (Kenny & Kashy, 1992, p. 169).




Note. Chi-Square (df=36, N 521) =62.71, Comparative fit index is .99, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .04 with a 90% confidence interval .02 - .05.
The numbers 11-19 and 21-29 are the number of the variables that measure preferences regarding political processes in the parliament and the government (see Table 5.6. for information on how the numbers relate to variables, see footnote 56 for information on the item wordings).

*Figure 5.2. Correlated Uniqueness Model of Preferences Regarding Different Objects*

The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .99, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .02, .05), Chi-Square = 62.72, df = 36. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 5.6. The findings are based on the analysis of 511 cases.[55] The trait-factor loadings for the CU model were strong (mean correlation =. 77) and all loadings were statistically significant. Each of the correlated uniqueness represents the correlation between two variables sharing the same method after removing trait effects (Marsh & Bailey, 1991, p. 66). The results suggest good convergent validity and lend support to H3 which assumes that the proposed process preferences scale is invariant as regards the object of assessment, i.e. parliament and government.

55 Cases missing to 530 were excluded from the data analysis because they are statistical outliers.

| | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 11 gov_concede | .842* | | | | | | | | |
| 12 gov_div interests | | .889* | | | | | | | |
| 13 gov_compromises | | | .834* | | | | | | |
| 14 gov_fast | | | | .815* | | | | | |
| 15 gov_short process | | | | | .784* | | | | |
| 16 gov_avoid delays | | | | | | .818* | | | |
| 17 gov_force points | | | | | | | .580* | | |
| 18 gov_plans through | | | | | | | | .740* | |
| 19 gov_orders | | | | | | | | | .779* |
| 21 parl_ concede | .730* | | | | | | | | |
| 22 parl_ div interests | | .642* | | | | | | | |
| 23 parl_compromises | | | .731* | | | | | | |
| 24 parl_fast | | | | .815* | | | | | |
| 25 parl_ short process | | | | | .827* | | | | |
| 26 parl_ avoid delays | | | | | | .816* | | | |
| 27 parl_ force points | | | | | | | .679* | | |
| 28 parl_ plans through | | | | | | | | .775* | |
| 29 parl_ orders | | | | | | | | | .712* |

| | Factor variances and covariances | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 concede | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 div interests | .552* | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 3 compromises | .763* | .618* | 1 | | | | | | |
| 4 fast | .199* | .1 | .035 | 1 | | | | | |
| 5 short process | .208* | .147* | .924 | .823* | 1 | | | | |
| 6 avoid delays | .288* | .216* | .138* | .717* | .612* | 1 | | | |
| 7 force points | .171 | .072 | -.055 | .436* | .591* | .356* | 1 | | |
| 8 plans through | -.121* | -.135 | -.204* | .277* | .347* | .158* | .478* | 1 | |
| 9 orders | .046 | -.082 | -.121 | .326* | .438* | .286* | .419* | .417* | 1 |

| | Unique variance and covariance | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 11 gov_concede | .321* | | | | | | | | |
| 12 gov_div interests | -.023 | .202* | | | | | | | |
| 13 gov_compromises | .081 | -.037 | .312* | | | | | | |
| 14 gov_fast | .005 | -.03 | -.106 | .427* | | | | | |
| 15 gov_short process | -.046 | .041 | -.026 | -.038 | .817* | | | | |
| 16 gov_avoid delays | .133 | .006 | .012 | -.141 | -.128 | .278* | | | |
| 17 gov_force points | -.151 | -.017 | -.11 | .061 | .029 | .112 | 1.379* | | |
| 18 gov_plans through | -.162* | .112 | -.029 | -.09 | .162* | -.004 | .171* | 1.234* | |
| 19 gov_orders | .125 | -.018 | -.03 | -.002 | .205* | .126 | .331* | .061 | 1.56* |

| Variable | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21 parl_ concede | .688* | | | | | | | | |
| 22 parl_ div interests | .277* | 1.087* | | | | | | | |
| 23 parl_compromises | .289* | .338* | .618* | | | | | | |
| 24 parl_fast | .022 | .087 | .048 | .426* | | | | | |
| 25 parl_ short process | .152* | -.018 | .08 | .380* | .603* | | | | |
| 26 parl_ avoid delays | -.009 | .068 | -.098 | .412* | .251* | .284* | | | |
| 27 parl_ force points | -.076 | -.019 | -.04 | -.008 | .015 | -0.086 | .819* | | |
| 28 parl_ plans through | .150* | -.143* | -.139* | -.07 | -.05 | 0.027 | .373* | .992* | |
| 29 parl_ orders | .059 | .103 | .022 | .036 | -.013 | -0.037 | .118 | .044 | 1.737* |

Note. Values of 1.00 are fixed a priori; * p <.05.

*Table 5.6. Results for the Correlated Uniqueness Model*

Based on the confirmation of the scale's invariance as regards objects of assessment, a comparison of citizens' preferences regarding political processes in the government and citizens preferences regarding political processes in the parliament was conducted. Table 5.7 shows a comparison of the mean values for citizens' preferences regarding the government and the parliament.[56] The findings suggest that there are no major differences. Likewise, the correlations between the items measuring process preferences regarding the government and corresponding items measuring process preferences regarding the parliament are high (mean correlation = .59). The empirical evidence for the scale's invariance as regards the objects of assessment along with the finding that citizens' process preferences do not differ significantly when comparing preferences concerning political processes in the government and the parliament warrant the assumption that citizens do hold rather general process preferences. Based on this assumption, the media effects study that is presented in Chapter 7 considers general process preferences as a moderator of the mass media's impact.

56 The following items were used to measure preferences concerning decision-making processes in the government and preferences concerning decision-making processes in the parliament: **Concede**: How important is it for you that politicians in the parliament sometimes concede a point to the other side? / How important is it for you that politicians in the government sometimes concede a point to the other side? **Div interests**: How important is it for you that politicians in the parliament give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions? / How important is it for you that politicians in the government give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions? **Compromises**: How important is it for you that political decisions in the parliament are based on compromises? / How important is it for you that political decisions in the government are based on compromises? **Fast**: How important is it for you that the parliament solves political problems as fast as possible? / How important is it for you that the government solves political problems as fast as possible? **Short processes**: How important is it for you that political decision-making processes in the parliament are simple and short? / How important is it for you that political decision-making processes in the government are simple and short? **Avoid delays**: How important is it for you that parliamentary actors avoid delays when making political decisions? / How important is it for you that governmental actors avoid delays when making political decisions? **Force points**: How important is it for you that politicians in the parliament are decisive and force their points? / How important is it for you that politicians in the government are decisive and force their points? **Plans through**: How important is it for you that in the parliament one political side is able to put their plans through? / How important is it for you that in the parliament one political side is able to put their plans through? **Orders**: How important is it for you that parliamentary actors could give hierarchical orders, if a decision has to be taken? 7 How important is it for you that governmental actors could give hierarchical orders, if a decision has to be taken?

| items | government | parliament |
|---|---|---|
| orders | 4.29 | 3.82 |
| plans through | 3.84 | 4.45 |
| force points | 4.96 | 5.46 |
| avoid delays | 6.23 | 6.21 |
| short processes | 5.40 | 5.43 |
| fast | 5.99 | 5.93 |
| compromises | 6.13 | 5.80 |
| div interests | 6.12 | 5.71 |
| concede | 6.07 | 5.73 |

Note. Entires are the means for preferences regarding political processes within the parliament and preferences regarding political processes within the government. "1" indicates aspect is not important at all, "7" indicates aspect is very important. Item wordings are presented in footnote 56.

*Table 5.7. Comparison between Preferences Regarding Parliament and Government*

### 5.3.6. Construct Validity of the Scales

Further analyses were conducted in order to test the construct validity of the scales. The analyses are based on the final survey and include participants from group 1 and group 2 (n = 523). The relationship between both process preferences and process perceptions and a set of variables can be analyzed in order to investigate the construct validity of the scales. Before the results will be presented, the reader will be provided with some descriptive information. Respondents' process preferences are listed in Table 5.8 along with the mean values and standard deviations. As regards process preferences, a higher mean score in Table 5.8 indicates greater importance attached to that attribute. As regards process perception questions, the higher the mean scores in the Table 5.8, the more the particular attribute applies to decision-making processes in Switzerland. The mean differentials indicate the mean distance between preferences and perceptions. Positive values indicate that preferences exceed perceptions and an attribute is considered to be important but not perceived to be accurate. Negative values indicate that perceptions exceed preferences and an attribute is considered less important but perceived to be accurate.

The most important attributes of political decision-making processes are the respectfulness and the fairness of political behavior. Other typical aspects of consensus democracy such as the consideration of diverging interests, the evading of power struggles and the conceding of points to the other side, are also important to the participants. Attributes of efficiency are also considered to be very important, namely the avoidance of delays and the efficiency of political processes. Factors

considered to be less important by the respondents are that there are no losers to a political process and that political actors are decisive and force their points. As for the process perceptions, the most accurate attribute of decision-making processes in Switzerland is that political decisions are based on compromises. The consideration of diverging interests, another characteristic element of decision-making processes in consensus democracies, is also perceived to be rather accurate. Moreover, politicians are perceived to put plans through and to be decisive and force their points. The subjects consider it least accurate to say that political processes are simple and fast and that political actors make efforts to avoid political quarrels and power struggles.

The comparison of preferences and perceptions shown in Table 5.8 indicates that there are substantial differences between what citizens expect from political processes and what they perceive is actually the case in reality. In the aggregate, respondents think that political processes are deficient in their avoidance of political power struggles. The mean differential is also large for the discrepancy with respect to the avoidance of quarrels and the discrepancy referring to the efficiency of political processes. There is only one differential with a negative sign, which indicates that, in the aggregate, respondents think that the way that political actors force their points surpasses their preferences. The value for this mean differences is, although significant, relatively small.

| | Preferences | | | Perceptions | | | Mean Differential | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Items** | **Mean** | **S.D.** | **Rank** | **Mean** | **S.D.** | **Rank** | **(Pref-Perc)** | **Rank** |
| respect | 6.30 | 1.04 | 1 | 3.64 | 1.23 | 8 | 2.66 * | 6 |
| fair | 6.19 | 1.02 | 2 | 3.65 | 1.19 | 7 | 2.54 * | 7,5 |
| div interests | 6.13 | 1.04 | 3 | 4.37 | 1.32 | 3 | 1.76 * | 11 |
| clear orders | 6.07 | 1.03 | 4 | 3.23 | 1.21 | 9 | 2.84 * | 5 |
| no power struggles | 6.06 | 1.29 | 5 | 2.33 | 1.33 | 14 | 3.73 * | 1 |
| concede | 5.90 | 1.14 | 6 | 3.95 | 1.28 | 6 | 1.95 * | 10 |
| avoid delays | 5.87 | 1.17 | 7 | 2.73 | 1.33 | 11 | 3.14 * | 2 |
| efficient processes | 5.72 | 1.24 | 8 | 2.82 | 1.22 | 10 | 2.90 * | 4 |
| no quarrels | 5.35 | 1.61 | 9 | 2.30 | 1.32 | 16 | 3.05 * | 3 |
| compromise | 5.23 | 1.39 | 10 | 5.13 | 1.30 | 1 | 0.10 * | 15 |
| no persistence | 5.10 | 1.48 | 11 | 2.56 | 1.20 | 12 | 2.54 * | 7,5 |
| put plans through | 5.10 | 1.36 | 12 | 4.33 | 1.37 | 4 | 0.77 * | 13 |
| fast | 4.71 | 1.44 | 13 | 2.32 | 1.07 | 15 | 2.39 * | 8 |
| hierarchic orders | 4.66 | 1.79 | 14 | 3.96 | 1.58 | 5 | 0.70 * | 14 |
| simple process | 4.48 | 1.59 | 15 | 2.12 | 1.28 | 17 | 2.36 * | 9 |
| force points | 3.70 | 1.54 | 16 | 4.46 | 1.31 | 2 | -0.76 * | 16 |
| no losers | 3.45 | 1.60 | 17 | 2.51 | 1.29 | 13 | 0.94 * | 12 |

Note. Entries are means and standard deviations. For information on item wordings see Appendix 10.2.
N between 484 (hierarchic orders) and 504 (respect)
* $p < .001$ by t-test

*Table 5.8. Mean Process Preferences – Perceptions Differentials*

Table 5.9 shows calculations of the general magnitude of the discrepancies across the 17 items. The table indicates the proportion of respondents whose perception of political processes matches, falls short of, or surpasses their preferences. For instance, a respondent is coded as having congruent preferences and perceptions if the respondent considers it to be extremely important that political decisions are based on compromises and also thinks that political decisions are based on compromises. If an attribute is coded as extremely important, and the respondent perceives that it is does not apply at all, the respondent is coded as having preferences that exceed perceptions. If an attribute is coded rather less important, and the respondent perceives that it does fully apply, the respondent is coded as having perceptions that exceed preferences. It is notable that for just a few aspects perceptions exceed preferences for a considerable proportion of respondents. This is the case for the following aspects: Political actors put heir plans through, political decisions are based on compromises, political actors force their points, and political actors make use of hierarchical orders. In contrast, about nine out of ten respondents perceive that political processes are less efficient, less fair and less shaped by clear orders than they should be. For a large majority of respondents, too, preferences exceed perceptions as regards the avoidance of political delays, the respectfulness of political actors, the political actors' evading of power struggles and political quarrels, and the rapidness of political decision-making. In general, the findings indicate that political processes do not match individual expectations on most of the measured attributes.

| Items | Congruent preferences and perceptions | Preferences exceed perceptions | Perceptions exceed preferences |
|---|---|---|---|
| respect | 6.9 | 89.5 | 3.6 |
| fair | 5.8 | 91.3 | 3.0 |
| div interests | 13.8 | 79.8 | 6.4 |
| clear orders | 7.0 | 90.2 | 2.9 |
| no power struggles | 6.3 | 84.8 | 8.9 |
| concede | 13.3 | 81.1 | 5.6 |
| avoid delays | 5.5 | 89.6 | 4.9 |
| efficient processes | 5.3 | 92.3 | 2.4 |
| no quarrels | 6.5 | 89.2 | 4.3 |
| compromise | 28.8 | 39.0 | 32.3 |
| no persistence | 9.4 | 83.4 | 7.2 |
| put plans through | 25.5 | 23.6 | 50.9 |
| fast | 10.6 | 85.0 | 4.4 |
| hierarchical orders | 26.9 | 51.4 | 21.7 |
| simple process | 9.6 | 81.0 | 9.4 |
| force points | 20.6 | 52.9 | 26.5 |
| no losers | 27.3 | 56.8 | 15.9 |

Note. Proportion of respondents whose perception of political processes matches, falls short of, or surpasses their preferences. For information an the items wordings, see Appendix 10.2.

N between 484 (hierarchical orders) and 504 (respect)

*Table 5.9. Relationship between Process Preferences and Perceptions*

The questionnaire contains ten items that measure citizens' political support. The items either refer to the government, the parliament, democracy, or political actors. The items were measured on a 10-point scale, with 1 indicating low support and 10 indicating high support.[57] Table 5.10 shows the aggregate levels of political support for the government, the parliament, political actors, and democracy that the respondents in the sample have. On average, support is lowest with respect to politicians, followed by support for the parliament. Support for the Swiss government is even higher, and the highest levels of political support were indicated with respect to democracy. In general, the political support of the study's participants appears to be stronger than the national average. In a national representative survey conducted in June 2008, only 41 percent of the respondents indicated that they trust the government (gfs.bern, 2009b), for instance.

57 The following items were used to measure political support. **trust government**: Please tell me on a score of 1-10 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 1 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust…government. **trust parliament**: Please tell me on a score of 1-10 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 1 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust … parliament (National Council and Council of States). **performance government**: How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the government? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates very bad, 10 indicates very good. **performance parliament**: How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the parliament? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates very bad, 10 indicates very good. **performance politicians**: How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of politicians in Switzerland altogether? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates very bad, 10 indicates very good. **satisfaction politicians**: How satisfied are you with the way politicians in Switzerland altogether solve the nation's problems? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates not satisfied at all, 10 indicates very satisfied. **trust politicians**: How much do you trust politicians in Switzerland altogether to act as they really should? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates no trust at all, 10 indicates very much trust. **satisfaction democracy**: On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Switzerland? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates not at all satisfied, 10 indicates very satisfied. **ideal democracy**: To what extent does democracy as it exists in Switzerland correspond to your personal version of an ideal democracy? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates no correspondence to personal vision at all, 10 indicates full correspondence to personal vision.

| Items | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| trust government | 6.39 | 1.97 |
| performance government | 6.04 | 1.88 |
| trust parliament | 5.81 | 1.72 |
| performance parliament | 5.51 | 1.63 |
| trust politicians | 4.89 | 1.71 |
| performance politicians | 5.47 | 1.48 |
| satisfaction politicians | 5.33 | 1.67 |
| satisfaction democracy | 7.16 | 1.77 |
| ideal democracy | 7.19 | 1.78 |

Note. Entries are the means. "1" indicate low levels of support, "10" indicates high level of support. N between 492 (performance parliament) and 506 (satisfaction democracy). Item wordings are presented in footnote 57.

*Table 5.10. Respondents' Level of Political Support*

In order to investigate variables that are related to respondents' process preferences, perceptions and the discrepancy between both, factor scores for process preferences, process perceptions and the discrepancy between both were built. The measurement model for citizens' process preferences as described in Section 5.3.1 indicates that there are three dimensions of process preferences, each being reflected by three items. Likewise, there are three dimensions of process perceptions, each being reflected by three items (see Section 5.3.2). The according nine attributes out of the initial 17 attributes were selected; the items are shown in Table 5.11. For each of the three process dimensions (efficiency, competition and consensus-orientation) a factor score was built. More precisely, the nine process preferences, process perceptions and preferences-perceptions differential items were each subjected to a separate factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation which does not presume orthogonal factors. The factor loadings were put to work to derive factor scores for each survey respondent. Regression method was selected to construct the factor scales. Table 5.11 shows the results for the factor analyses.

Respondents' process preferences are contingent upon their political ideology. A political right position is positively associated with the importance of efficiency ($r = .150$, $p < .001$) and competition ($r = .293$, $p < .001$), whereas consensus-orientation is less important ($r = -.204$, $p < .001$). There also is a correlation between age and preferences, indicating that all three preference dimensions – consensus ($r = .203$, $p < .001$), efficiency ($r = .203$, $p < .001$), and competition ( $r = .208$, $p < .001$) – are more important, the older the subjects are. The competitiveness of political processes is also more important for respondents with high levels of income ($r = .119$, $p < .001$). High income levels are also associated with lower preferences regarding the

consensus-orientation of political processes (r = -.136, p < .001). Moreover, women (M = -.207) consider efficiency significantly less important than men (M = .073, F = 7.886, df = 1, p < .001). No association was found between political interest and process preferences.

The perception of political processes is correlated with age, indicating that an older age is associated with the perception of political processes as less efficient (r = -.212, p = .005). A high level of formal education is correlated with the perception that political processes are consensus oriented ( r= .227, p < .001). Women are more likely to indicate that consensus-orientation is a characteristic of political processes than men ($M_{Women}$ = -.173, $M_{Men}$ = .081, F= 5.985, df = 1, p = .015); whereas men are more likely to say political processes are competitive than women ($M_{Women}$ = .199, $M_{Men}$ = -.085, F= 7.455, df = 1, p = .007). Respondents with high levels of political interest are more likely to perceive processes as consensus oriented (r = .154, p < .001).

| | **Preferences** | | | **Perceptions** | | | **Preferences-Perceptions Differential** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Items** | Factor 1: Consensus | Factor 2: Efficiency | Factor 3: Competition | Factor 1: Consensus | Factor 2: Efficiency | Factor 3: Competition | Factor 1: Consensus | Factor 2: Efficiency | Factor 3: Competition |
| concede | **.800** | .084 | -.027 | **.776** | -.012 | -.074 | **.702** | .161 | -.156 |
| div interests | **.841** | .005 | -.050 | **.835** | .067 | .067 | **.812** | .101 | -.074 |
| compromise | **.769** | -.090 | .058 | **.779** | -.134 | -.017 | **.826** | -.184 | .144 |
| fast | -.052 | **.981** | -.064 | .115 | **.543** | .404 | .055 | **.772** | .089 |
| simple process | -.088 | **.848** | .067 | -.108 | **.850** | -.137 | -.070 | **.883** | -.010 |
| avoid delays | .141 | **.745** | .056 | -.025 | **.849** | -.069 | .035 | **.829** | .037 |
| force points | .048 | .084 | **.653** | .147 | .109 | **.606** | .078 | .102 | **.667** |
| put plans through | -.113 | -.066 | **.818** | -.261 | -.094 | **.519** | -.066 | -.132 | **.745** |
| hierarchical orders | .057 | .016 | **.757** | -.061 | -.138 | **.657** | -.038 | .154 | **.642** |

Note. Items loading on a particular factor are shown in bold. Pattern matrix is shown. For information an the items wordings, see Appendix 10.2. N between 484 (hierarchical orders) and 504 (respect)

*Table 5.11. Factor Analysis of Perceptions, Preferences, and Discrepancies Items*

There also is a positive correlation between age and the discrepancy dimensions; older people are more likely to possess larger preferences-perceptions discrepancies on all three dimensions – consensus-orientation (r = .127, p < .001), efficiency (r = .152, p < .001), and competition (r = .164, p < .001) – than younger people. High levels of formal education (r = -.182, p < .001) and income (r = -.179, p < .001) go together with a less intense discrepancy as regards the consensus-orientation of political processes. And the more a respondents leans towards the political right, the less intense is the consensus discrepancy (r = -.161, p < .001), but the more intense is the competition discrepancy (r = .214, p < .001). With respect to gender, the findings suggest that for women the consensus-discrepancy is larger than for men ($M_{Women}$ = .166, $M_{Men}$ = -.065, F = 4.821, df = 1, p = .029). Men, in contrast, perceive a larger competition discrepancy than women ($M_{Women}$ = -.281, $M_{Men}$ = .117, F= 14.409, df = 1, p = .000).

In order to investigate the relationship between the discrepancy factors and political support, the items measuring political support were subjected to a factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation which does not presume orthogonal factors.[58] The factor loadings were put to work to derive factor scores for each survey respondent. Regression method was selected to construct the factor scales. Two factors are distinguished. The first factor describes support for the Swiss government. The second factor describes a general attitude of political support that encompasses support for the parliament, politicians, and democracy. High levels of the efficiency discrepancy factor ($r = -.201$, $p < .001$) and the competition discrepancy factor ($r = -.150$, $p < .001$) are significantly associated with lower levels of political support for the government. High levels of the efficiency discrepancy factors ( $r= -.354$, $p < .001$) and the consensus discrepancy factor ( $r= -.251$, $p < .001$) are significantly associated with lower levels of political support for the parliament, politicians, and democracy.

### *5.4. Summary and Discussion*

Because no standardized scales to measure citizens' preferences regarding political decision-making processes and according perceptions currently exist, one important aim of this study was the development and validation of a standardized scale for the measurement of citizens' process preferences and process perceptions. This chapter, then, proposed the first systematic scales to measure process preferences and related perceptions of political processes. For the measurement of process preferences, a measurement model was developed, tested and validated on another independent sample. Three dimensions of process preferences were distinguished: consensus-orientation, competition and efficiency. A theory-driven correlated factors model was tested on two independent samples using CFA. Whereas the first sample did indicate modification on the model, the second sample was used to validate the modified model. Further comparisons with alternative models did indicate that the model is superior to a one-factorial model, which underlines discriminant validity. The process preference scale encompasses three dimensions with three indicators each: consensus-orientation (concede a point, consider diverging interests, compromises), competition (force their points, put their plans through, hierarchical orders), and efficiency (fast decision-making, simple and short processes, avoid delays). Adapting the measurement model of the process preferences scale, a scale measuring citizens' perception of political processes was developed. In addition, evidence was provided for the discriminant validity between process preferences and process

58 Results from the factor analysis are, based on the pattern matrix, for factor 1: satisfaction government .870, performance government .904, for factor 2: trust parliament .616, performance parliament .594, performance politicians .609, satisfaction politicians .711, trust politicians .643, satisfaction democracy .899, ideal democracy .882. Item wordings are presented in footnote 89.

perceptions. The findings suggest that the process preferences and process perception scales allow measuring process preferences and related perceptions separately.

Further studies confirmed the cultural equivalence of the process preferences scale and its invariance as regards two different objects of assessment (parliament, government). The cultural invariance of a scale is an essential precondition to be able to meaningfully interpret differences in scores across different cultures. The scale's invariance as regards the object of assessment is a precondition to be able to meaningfully analyze possible differences in scores. Based on the confirmed invariance of the scale as regards different objects of assessment, findings indicated that subjects' preferences as regards political processes in the government and the parliament do not differ substantially.

In further analysis, the construct validity of the scales was tested. A left political ideology was found to be associated with preferences for the consensus-orientation of political processes, whereas a right political orientation was found to be related to a preference for efficient procedures. Both the discrepancy between the efficiency perceptions and related preferences as well as the discrepancy between consensus perceptions and related preferences were found to be associated with support for the government. More precisely, strong discrepancies – in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions – were found to be associated with lower levels of political support. This finding is in line with other research indicating that large discrepancies between political preferences and perceptions are linked to low levels of political support (Kimball & Patterson, 1997; S. C. Patterson, et al., 1969).

This study provides first empirical evidence of the concept of process preferences and process perceptions, but it also has several limitations. While the successful validation of the process preferences and process perceptions scales is the main focus of this article, it can only be a first step in future research. Hence, future research could investigate the role of other process aspects, such as inclusiveness, transparency, equality, and responsiveness (cf. Kaina, 2008).

The invariance of the process preferences scale was tested for preferences regarding parliament and government, but findings from this study might not hold for other objects of assessment, such as the political administrative sector, or individual political actors. Furthermore, testing the cultural invariance of the scale with data that encompass all nine variables and data from other countries would enhance the empirical validation of the scale's measurement invariance across different cultures. Moreover, the results might not generalize to other samples, because the samples used in this study are not representative for the Swiss or German citizens. Although this is not considered to be problematical for the purpose of scale development and validation, this study's samples hold implications for the generalizability of findings. The data presented here stem from samples that are characterized by a high level of political interest and high levels of formal education. Because preferences are based on knowledge and information (Druckman & Lupia, 2000), it seems plausible to assume that for individuals with low knowledge about politics or no interest in politics, process preferences might not be as diverse or be characterized by a different conceptual structure. Thus, tests of the proposed scale on data that stems from sam-

ples with participants that are only moderately or not interested in politics, as well as tests with data from individuals with low formal education, are needed.

Notwithstanding their limitations, the developed scales are a first attempt towards a standardized measurement of process preferences and perceptions. This study makes the assumption that considering process preference might contribute to research on media effects on political support. But before this assumption is investigated in Chapter 7, the following chapter presents insights on the short-term impact of media information on the perception of political processes based on an experimental study.

# 6. Short-Term Effects of Media on Process Perceptions and Political Support

An experiment was conducted in order to investigate the way in which specific aspects of media information may have short-term effects on the perception of political processes. In addition, the impact of media information on political support via its influence on the accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship was probed. The study's hypotheses and research questions are presented in Section 6.1. The methodological details are described in Section 6.2. Section 6.3 presents the study's results, followed by a summary and conclusion section (Section 6.4).

## *6.1. Research Questions and Hypotheses*

The study presented in this chapter focuses on the short-term impact of media information on the perception of political processes and political support. The investigation of the media's impact on the perception of political processes takes only two dimensions of political processes into consideration, namely consensus and efficiency. The two dimensions are selected, because the findings from the content analysis suggested that these aspects constitute characteristic patterns of media presentations of political processes. Moreover, competition as a third dimension of political processes is not considered in the analyses of media effects on political support, because competition was found to be less important in the context of Switzerland as a consensus democracy (see Section 5.3.6). Therefore, two versions of stimulus articles – one referring to the conflict-orientation of political processes, the other referring to the inefficiency of political procedures – were included in the experimental study. Whereas exposure to news articles which focus on conflicts in political decision-making processes are hypothesized to decrease the perception that political processes are consensus-oriented, exposure to news articles that focus on the inefficiency of political decision-making processes are hypothesized to decrease the perception that political processes are efficient.

- H1: Individuals exposed to conflict-oriented news articles are less likely to perceive political processes as consensus-oriented than individuals who are not exposed to conflict-oriented news articles.
- H2: Individuals exposed to inefficiency-focused news articles are less likely to perceive political processes as efficient than individuals who are not exposed to inefficiency-focused news articles.

In order to test whether the stimulus articles have an impact on preferences regarding political processes, the following research question was formulated:

- RQ1: Does exposure to the stimulus articles alter participants' preferences regarding political processes?

Following suggestions by Maurer (2003b, p. 101ff.) who argued that subjects who actually perceive the negativity of media articles are more likely to show negative effects on political support than subjects who do not perceive the mass media's negativity, I assume that there is not only a direct impact of exposure to the stimulus articles on the perception of political processes (H1 & H2) but also an indirect effect of news articles on the perception of political processes via the impressions that the articles raise in the view of the individual respondents.

- H3: Exposure to conflict-oriented news articles affects the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented via the impression that individuals gain from these articles.
- H4: Exposure to inefficiency-focused news articles affects the perception of political processes as efficient via the impression that individuals gain from these articles.

However, the relationship between the impression that the subjects gained from the articles and the perception of political processes might not be unidirectional in the sense that the article impression shapes the perception of political processes. The other direction of causality appears plausible also, i.e. the perception of political processes may shape the impression that the participants gain from the articles. This assumption is supported by the hypothesis theory of social perception. According to this theory, subjects' available considerations determine what aspects of reality they perceive, the conclusions that are drawn from these perceptions, and the likelihood of their retrieval at a later point in time (Bruner, 1957; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Lilli & Frey, 1993). Likewise, confirmation bias theory assumes that there is a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions (Klayman & H, 1987; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Hence, this study tests the assumption that there is a relationship between process perceptions and article impressions in the sense that the general perceptions of political processes influence the impression that participants gain from the news articles.

- H5: An individual's perceptions of political processes influence the impressions that the study's participant gains from the news articles.

The preferences-perceptions model of media effects assumes that media might not only affect the magnitude of the preference-perception relationship, but also the accessibility of this relationship in memory. Higgins (1987) found that an increase in the accessibility of the discrepancy between preferences and perceptions is related to an increase in discomfort, but only for subjects whose magnitude of the discrepancy is high. Temporary accessibility varies as a function of contextual priming (Higgins, 1987). Hence, media information might shape the temporary construct accessibility of incompatible beliefs through priming. For subjects with a high magnitude of the preference-perception discrepancy, I assume that the priming manipulation makes the discrepancy temporarily accessible. Thus, for subjects high in magnitude of the

preference-perception discrepancies, political support is assumed to decrease as a result of priming effects in the context of exposure to the news media articles.

- H6: For subjects high in the magnitude of the preference-perception discrepancies, exposure to the news articles decreases political support.

### *6.2. Method*

In media effects research, experimental designs are an established method to investigate casual mechanisms (Trepte & Wirth, 2004). Likewise, Iyengar (2002) emphasized the precise causal inference that experimental designs facilitate. Moreover, experiments make it possible to investigate not only effects, but also underlying mechanisms. Experiments are "useful in helping to develop and test theories to explore whether hypothesized relationships hold and under what conditions they are operative" (McDermott, 2002a, p. 126). Hence, experiments might contribute to an increased clarity of details (McDermott, 2002b). Although political support is considered to be a rather stable attitude, empirical studies investigating the effects of media information on confidence or trust in political institutions show that experimental designs are able to identify such effects (cf. for instance De Vreese, 2004; De Vreese, Boomgarden, & Semetko, 2005; Bertram Scheufele, 2008; Schuck & De Vreese, 2006; Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001). An experimental study was embedded in a series of surveys (see also Section 7.2). In Section 6.2.1 the experimental design and the study's participants are described. The procedures of data collection are depicted in Section 6.2.2. Section 6.2.3 describes the development of the stimulus material. Section 6.2.4 gives information on the operationalization of variables and Section 6.2.5 describes the methods of data analysis.

#### 6.2.1. Experimental Design and Participants

The experimental design applied in this study is a posttest only control group design[59] with two different treatments (Alternative-Treatments Design) and a control group. One treatment ($Tx_1$) consists of newspaper articles[60] with negative information about the consensus-orientation of political decision-making. Articles, for in-

59 Initially, an experimental design that encompasses both a pre- and a posttest was planned. However, in order to avoid sensitization effects, subject fatigue, and attrition, this design was rejected in favour of a posttest only design with control group. More information on those aspects is provided in the following paragraphs.

60 Ideally, the experimental stimuli should consist of television newscasts, in line with the assumption of this study that television news in particular has an impact on citizens' political support. Because the production of experimental television newscasts would have been too expensive, newspaper articles were used instead.

stance, refer to the aggressive and competitive behaviour of political actors, conflicts, and power struggles, or the lack of considering different interests. The alternative treatment ($Tx_2$) consists of newspaper articles with negative information about the efficiency of political decision-making. Articles, for instance, refer to delays, protracted decisions, time-consuming procedures, a lack of efficiency of decision-making processes, and the indecisiveness of political actors (see Section 6.2.2). The control group does not get any treatment. The experimental design is a between subjects-design (cf. Grabe & Westley, 2003, p. 285) .

The target population of this study consists of citizens from the German-speaking part of Switzerland who are at least 18 years old and hold voting rights. The study's participants were recruited in collaboration with the Swiss online election information tool smartvote (www.smartvote.ch). The registered users of this platform regularly receive newsletters. One of those newsletters for users of the German-speaking population contained information on the planned study as well as contact information for readers interested in participating. The sample, hence, is based on self-selection and is not representative of the Swiss population. Subjects are randomly assigned[61] to the different groups in order to create a pre-treatment similarity of the groups with respect to relevant variables, such as gender, age, income, education, and political interest. Thus, possible threats to the effects due to confounding variables are randomly distributed over conditions. Subjects in the different groups tend to have the same average characteristics; the only systematic difference is the treatment (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002, p. 248ff.). Consequently, changes in the outcome variable are not caused by differences of personal characteristics between the groups (McDermott, 2002a). Thus, random assignment facilitates casual inference.

In the control group (n = 157), 71 percent were males, the age ranged from 19 to 84 (M = 42; SD = 14.5), and 69 percent had a higher education entrance qualification or a higher level of formal education. In the conflict group (n = 189), 67 percent were males, the age ranged from 19 to 76 (M = 44; SD = 15.3), and 68 percent had a higher education entrance qualification or a higher level of formal education. In the inefficiency group (n = 177), 71 percent were males, the age ranged from 18 to 80 (M = 44; SD = 16.1), and 77 percent had a higher education entrance qualification or a higher level of formal education.

### 6.2.2. Procedures

The study was conceptualized as an internet experiment. Internet experiments are considered to be an efficient way of doing experimental research that makes it more easy to reach diverse populations (Iyengar, 2001). Citizens who sent an e-mail to the

61 Random assignment refers to the fact that units are assigned to conditions based only on chance. Each unit has a nonzero probability of being assigned to a condition.

author and expressed their interest in participating in the study were invited to participate in the research project on May 5, 2008. The initial survey took about 10 minutes to complete. The response rates are 0.82 for the experimental groups and 0.84 for the control group.[62] Rather surprisingly, the higher work load for participants in the experimental groups did not keep subjects from participating in the study. On May 19, 2008 an e-mail invitation to fill out an online questionnaire referring to a news article was sent to the participants in the two treatment groups. From then until May 23, 2008, the subjects in the two treatment groups received, each day, an invitation to an online questionnaire that referred to a news article. Each of the five surveys on news article took about five to eight minutes to complete. Response rates were between 0.89 and 0.92 for the conflict group and 0.86 and 0.90 for the efficiency group.[63] These rates are satisfactory; the treatment articles were received by the study's participants. In order to have a more detailed understanding of how the articles were received, I investigated how many articles were read by the participants in average. The majority of subjects (95 percent) answered the questions to all five articles. There is no significant difference between the two groups as regards how many articles were read. In addition, I looked at when the participants in average read the articles. An average of 66 percent of all participants read an article on the same day on which the article was sent, 18 percent read an article one or two days later, and 11 percent read an article within three to five days later. There is no significant difference between the two groups as regards when the articles were read.

On May 26, 2008 an invitation to participate in the final survey was sent out both to participants in the treatment groups and participants in the control group. The final survey took about 15 minutes to complete. Response rates are .89 for the treatment groups, .92 for the control group. Directly after the participants had completed the final survey, they were transferred to a website that contained the debriefing information.[64]

The quality of causal inferences and generalizations drawn from any research study depends on its measures to enhance validity and rule out alternative explanations. In this study, efforts were made to control for various threats to validity. How-

62 The response rates are calculated based on the complete data set because it is a general characteristic of the survey and not of the data set that is finally used for the analysis. The complete data set does include participants who are younger than 18 years old and participants who do not hold Swiss citizenship. In the complete data set, the number of participants in the conflict group is 209, in the inefficiency group 207, and in the control group 172. The response rate is given for the two experimental groups together, because the random assignment to either the group with conflict articles or the group with inefficiency articles took place after the initial survey was completed.

63 The values for the response rates do not match the attrition rates, because the former is based on the complete data set, whereas the latter is based on the adjusted data set that does not include subjects who are younger than 18 years or do not hold Swiss citizenship.

64 Subjects were informed about the study's interest in media effects on political support. They were also told that two different versions of newspaper articles were presented in the study in order to investigate possible effects. The debriefing also contained information on how to contact the researcher for information on research results.

ever, as there are tradeoffs between the several aspects, there are threats to validity that cannot be controlled with the design. Although most concerns regarding experimental studies refer to a lack in mundane realism (Graber, 2004; McDermott, 2002a), i.e. the similarity between an experimental setting and the real world, they fail the idea of experiments, since

> "the idea of experimentation is not primarily that a specific set of experimental results apply directly to broader conclusions about human behavior in other settings, but rather that these results develop and test theories that then, in turn, and in aggregation, help explain and predict underlying causal mechanisms in more universal issues" (McDermott, 2002a, p. 335f.).

Hence, in experimental designs, internal validity is vital to external validity. Even so, experiments can possess high levels on both dimensions. In this study care is taken to enhance both internal and external validity.

The internal validity of the study refers to the question of whether the relationship between two variables or concepts reflects a causal relationship (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 53f.). Since the participants are randomly assigned to the two treatment groups and the control group, a *selection bias* – i.e. systematic differences in subjects' characteristics that could cause the effect – is unlikely. Randomization should ensure that the three groups are equal on relevant variables, i.e. the initial levels of political support, process-preferences and process perceptions as well as political interest and socio-demographic variables. A comparison between the two treatment groups and the control groups in terms of the allocation of characteristic variables shows that the randomization was successful.[65] Table 6.1 gives an overview of the results from the mean comparisons with regard to age, income, education, political placement, radio use, regional newspaper use, national newspaper use, tabloid paper use, free newspaper use, television use, and internet use. There is only one significant difference between the groups: The subjects in the inefficiency treatment group read national newspapers less intensely than the participants in the control group and participants in the conflict treatment groups. Additional Chi-Square tests were conducted to test for differences as regards gender, the frequency of direct experiences with politics, and the frequency of indirect experiences with politics. These tests revealed no significant differences between the different conditions on gender[66], the

65 The randomization analysis is based on the final data set in order to test whether the randomization works for those participants who are actually included in the data analysis of media effects. The final data set does not include participants who are younger than 18 years old and participants that do not hold Swiss citizenship. Moreover, all subjects who participated in the initial survey only were excluded from the final data set (for more information on data preparation, see Section 5.3.3). In the final data set the number of participants in the conflict group is 189, in the inefficiency group 177, and in the control group 157.

66 69 percent men in the conflict group, 71 percent men in the inefficiency group, 71 percent men in the control group, Chi-Square = .931, df = 2, p =.628

frequency of direct experiences with politics[67], and the frequency with indirect experiences with politics.[68]

*History* is a threat to internal validity in the sense that events occurring concurrently with the treatment could also cause the effect. However, the design controls for history, as participants in the control group and the treatment groups are exposed to the same external events. Hence, any possible effects on political support of such external events (i.e. political scandals or economic crisis) have an equal effect on the levels of support of participants in all groups. Moreover, in order to minimize the possibility of impacts of external effects associated with election campaigns, a period of regular political decision-making was chosen as the timeframe for the experimental study. The study was conducted during summer 2008 as a non-election period.

In order to avoid unwanted *sensitization effects*, no pretest measurements on the dependent variables were included in the initial survey. Nosanchuck & Marchak (1969) reported that sensitization is the main unwanted effect of pretests. Pretests may draw the attention to the purpose of the study, which results in increased attention to relevant aspects of the study. This has consequences for the outcome variables. For instance, Nosanchuck & Marchak (1969) found consistency effects[69] when a pretest was used. As a consequence, subsequent attitude changes might be suppressed. Based on a review of experimental studies that include pretests, Bracht & Glass (1968) concluded that sensitization to subsequent treatment is most likely to occur when the dependent variable is a self-report measure. As in the present study the dependent variable is a self-reported measure, measurements of political support, process preferences, and process perceptions were not included in the initial survey that takes place before the treatment is implemented. Thus, the questionnaire in the initial survey focuses on socio-demographic variables and is kept rather short. This also contributes to the prevention of subject fatigue due to long item batteries. Besides the advantages associated with the lack of a pretest, there are also drawbacks. The lack of a pretest is particularly risky, if there is a likelihood of attrition from the study. Without pretest measures, it is more difficult to determine whether those subjects who had dropped out of the study differ from the participants who continued with respect to their characteristics on the dependent variables. Hence, in order to compensate for the abdication of a pretest, several measures to minimize the risk of attrition were taken.

67 38 percent no direct experiences in the conflict group, 34 percent no direct experiences in the inefficiency group, 37 percent no direct experiences in the control group, Chi-Square = 1.464, df = 4, p = .833

68 34 percent no indirect experiences in the conflict group, 34 percent no indirect experiences in the inefficiency group, 38 percent no indirect experiences in the control group, Chi-Square = 1.675, df = 4, p =. 795

69 Consistency effects refer to the desire of the respondents to appear consistent in answering what they perceive to be related questions. As a consequence, the answer to one question is moved in the direction to the other question (Weisberg, 2005, p. 119f.; Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996, p. 97).

| Variable | Mean | | | SD | | | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Conflict Group | Inefficiency Group | Control Group | Conflict Group | Inefficiency Group | Control Group | | |
| Age (in years) | 43.6 | 44.48 | 42.23 | 15.32 | 16.13 | 14.52 | 0.88 | .41 |
| Income (16 = 15.000 CHF and more) | 8.37 | 8.73 | 8.74 | 3.74 | 3.6 | 3.97 | 0.53 | .89 |
| Education (6 = college or university degree) | 4.9 | 5.04 | 5.2 | 1.19 | 1.27 | 1.22 | 2.68 | .07 |
| Political placemen(11 = far right) | 4.94 | 5.16 | 5.02 | 2.18 | 2.33 | 2.09 | 0.38 | .68 |
| Political interest (4 = very interested) | 3.56 | 3.49 | 3.56 | 0.53 | 0.54 | 0.58 | 0.86 | .43 |
| Radio use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 1.8 | 1.56 | 1.73 | 1.09 | 1.3 | 1.23 | 1.84 | .16 |
| Regional newspaper use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 1.16 | 1.23 | 1.31 | 1.05 | 1.16 | 1.08 | 0.77 | .47 |
| National newspaper use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 1.92 | 1.51 | 1.88 | 1.22 | 1.25 | 1.23 | 5.11 | .01 |
| Boulevard paper use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.17 | 0.5 | 0.41 | 0.38 | 0.11 | .90 |
| Free newspaper use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 0.68 | 0.63 | 0.75 | 0.79 | 0.65 | 0.69 | 1.07 | .34 |
| Television use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 1.96 | 1.74 | 1.82 | 1.28 | 1.29 | 1.21 | 1.87 | .31 |
| Internet use (4 = more than 1 hour) | 1.35 | 1.36 | 1.55 | 1.15 | 1.1 | 1.05 | 1.75 | .18 |

Note. Entries are the Standardized Means, Standard Deviations, F-Values, and significance of propability (two-tailed, p-value), with N between 132 (boulevard use in control group) and 188 (political interest in conflict group)

*Table 6.1. Results of Randomization Check*

Whereas several threats to internal validity are controlled for with the proposed design, *attrition*[70] remains an uncontrolled threat to internal validity. Attrition refers to the loss of responses from participants who drop out of the study after the subjects were randomly assigned to conditions (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 323). Attrition can happen before the treatment is implemented or after the treatment is implemented. Post-treatment attrition is a subset of selection bias that occurs after the treatment took place (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 59). Attrition is a problem if the participants who drop out of the study differ from those who continue to participate. Differences in the outcome measure could then be caused by that loss rather than by the treatment. In the present study, it will not be possible to prevent any attrition given the rather long duration of the experimental study. Although attrition cannot be controlled for, several measures were used to prevent attrition (cf. Shadish, et al., 2002, pp. 323-340). Questionnaires were kept as short as possible. In addition, the initial invitation to participate in the study contained detailed information about the structure of the study (number of questionnaires, approximate time it takes to complete the questionnaires, information about when the questionnaires will be sent) as well as the nature of the media stimuli, in order to avoid surprises for the participants later on. Subjects who did not participate in a survey were reminded to please do so in order to increase response rates and prevent attrition. Because research indicates that attrition is lower, when the time between random assignment and treatment implementation is minimized (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 331), the time span between the initial survey and the treatment phase was kept as short as possible. In that way, the time span should still allow enough time for the participants to complete the initial survey. Thus, the treatment was implemented two weeks after the invitation to participate in the initial survey had been sent. Most importantly, incentives were offered as compensation for the study participants' time and in order to motivate participants to stay in the study. There is empirical evidence that incentives are useful and have a positive effect on response rate (Harkness, Mohler, Schneid, & Christoph, 1998). All participants in the two treatment groups who completed the experimental study (initial and final survey plus at least one questionnaire on news article) could choose between a voucher for books to a value of 20 CHF and a voucher for the cinema (value of 18 CHF). Subjects in the control group who completed the initial and the final survey received a book voucher to the value of 10 CHF.

To be able to analyze whether people who drop out of the study differed from the ones who do not, relevant variables were measured in the initial survey conducted before the treatment takes place. This information enables attrition to be analyzed, in order to understand how much it threatens the validity of a conclusion about the treatment effectiveness (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 334ff.).[71] The rates of attrition from

70 Sometimes attrition is also called mortality.

71 The attrition analysis is based on the adjusted data set that does not include participants who are younger than 18 years old and participants who do not hold Swiss citizenship. However, subjects who participated in the initial survey only are part of this adjusted data set because

the initial survey to the final survey are 9.1 percent for the conflict group, 11.5 percent for the inefficiency group, and 8.2 percent for the control group. Comparing the initial survey with the response rate for the five surveys on the news articles, attrition ranges between 4.7 percent and 10.5 percent for the conflict group, and between 7.7 percent and 11 percent for the inefficiency group. There is almost no attrition from the article surveys to the final survey, indicating that those subjects who had the treatment also participated in the posttests. Hence, most attrition occurred before the treatment was implemented. Generally, if attrition is low (less than 10 percent) it can be neglected (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 229f.). Considering the sample of participants in the conflict group, the inefficiency group and the control group together, there are no significant differences between subjects who continued to participate and those who dropped out on relevant variables, e.g. variables that might be correlated with the outcome (age, income, education, political placement, political interest, media use; for all variables: $df = 5$, $F < 2.2$). There are also no differences between dropouts and individuals who continued participation as regards gender (Chi-Square = 1.304, $df = 5$, $p = .935$), direct experiences with politics (Chi-Square = 15.886, $df = 10$, $p=.103$), and indirect experiences with politics (Chi-Square = 9.856, $df = 10$, $p = .453$). In general, then, attrition appears to be no threat to internal validity in this study.

Regarding uncontrolled threats to construct validity of cause, *hypotheses guessing* by the participants as well as *reactivity to the experimental situation* and consequential influences on their responses are considered to be a serious threat. Literature suggests several ways to reduce this problem (cf. Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 77f.). One possible way is using ethically justifiable deceptions to ensure that subjects cannot guess the hypotheses (McDermott, 2002a, p. 41). In order to distract participants from the purpose of this study, they were told that the study is interested in the perception of political news coverage. Hence, questions on how the participants perceive and evaluate the news articles were included in the surveys. In addition, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality can reduce the risk of probands' evaluation apprehensions.

Participants received the survey questionnaires and media stimuli at home or in their office, depending on where they have internet access. Given the field setting, special care must be given to *treatment implementation*, treatment adherence in particular (cf. Shadish, et al., 2002, pp. 316-320; Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981). Treatment adherence in the study's context refers to the question of whether people read the newspaper articles as intended to. In order to improve adherence, the surveys include questions that refer to the stimulus articles. Manipulation checks were also looked at for information on whether treatment was received or not (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 317). What this study cannot control, however, is whether those subjects to

the analysis of their loss is precisely what attrition measures (for more information on data preparation see Section 7.2.2). In the adjusted data set, the number of participants in the conflict group is 205, in the inefficiency group 200, and in the control group 171.

which the articles and questionnaires were sent to are actually the ones who participated in the study.

### 6.2.3. Stimulus Material

The *strength, integrity, and effectiveness of a treatment* are central aspects of any experimental study (Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981, p. 156). Treatment strength is defined as the "a priori likelihood that the treatment could have its intended outcome" (Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981, p. 156). Treatment dose, frequency and length of the treatment define its strength. A strong treatment is aimed, because the effect size is considered to be relatively low, given that political support is a rather stable attitude. Regarding the strength of the treatment, different treatment strengths are used in experimental research that explores the effects of media information on political support. Strength ranges from one or two single articles at one point in time (cf. for instance De Vreese, 2004; Bertram Scheufele, 2008; Valentino, Beckmann, et al., 2001) to five days of treatment (cf. Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). In order to ensure treatment strength in the present study, the treatment could be measured over the period of two weeks, which would allow two posttests, one after each week. However, such a strong treatment involves the risk that the participants in the study get tired (subject fatigue) and drop out (attrition). In order to use a treatment that is both intense enough to evoke possible effects on the one hand, but is not too much of a burden for the study's participants on the other hand, the treatment consists of one media article per weekday and lasts over five days. Hence, five articles per participant constitute the treatment. The articles were sent to the respondents as part of online surveys. More precisely, respondents received one survey each day over the period of five consecutive days.

As there is a trade-off between treatment strength and generalizability of cause to real world conditions, efforts will be made to ensure that treatments are both strong and realistic. The authenticity of media stimuli is a very important aspect that shapes the external validity of experimental research (Matthes, 2007b, p. 306f.; Trepte & Wirth, 2004). Thus, this study makes efforts to ensure that the media stimuli are as authentic as possible. A precondition of external validity is that the stimulus material occurs in a similar form in real world situations. One way to ensure the external validity of media stimuli is to investigate regular and characteristic patterns of mass media content and to develop the media stimuli according to these patterns (for instance Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Iyengar, 1987). Therefore, results from the content analysis (Chapter 4) are used to inform the development of the media articles that serve as treatment in the experimental study.[72]

72 An alternative procedure could have been to conduct a qualitative content analysis. However, this would not allow us to derive characteristic patterns of media presentations of political processes. Such typical patterns, however, are reflected in media stimuli, which is why the development is based on findings from this quantitative analysis.

Based on the results from the media content analysis, two distinct media patterns of presenting political decision-making processes can be distinguished, namely the media's focus on the inefficiency of political processes and the media's emphasis of political discords and conflicts.

For the treatment articles, the general findings from the content analysis had to be specified and filled with precise phrases and expressions from the newspapers. Therefore, I more closely looked at selected articles that in the content analysis were found to contain aspects relating to the conflict-orientation and/or the inefficiency of political processes. These articles were scanned in search for applicable phrases and expressions. The experimental intervention consists of news articles that either contain critical media information about the lack of consensus-seeking behavior or critical media information about the lack of efficiency in political decision-making processes. Media information criticizing the lack of consensus refers to 1) power struggles or political conflicts, 2) the lack of consensus, 3) the role of collective actions, and 4) political competitions with winners and losers. Media information criticizing the efficiency refers to 1) the use of resources such as time and money, 2) the competence of political actors, 3) the role of hierarchical orders, and 4) the decisiveness of political actors. For more detailed information, the stimulus material (in German language) can be requested from the author.

The articles deal with decision-making processes in the parliament and the government. In order to ensure that the study's participants are motivated to read the articles, the issues addressed in the articles need to have certain relevance for the average citizen. In addition, the issues need to be subject of current discussion and they need to refer to problems that are of national relevance instead of international or regional importance. Based on these criteria, five issues were identified: 1) the reform of the federal old-age insurance, 2) the financing of the social long-term care insurance, 3) national climate policy, 4) non-smoker protection, and 5) disability insurance. Moreover, the articles were kept rather brief, ensuring that the two versions were equal in length.

The stimulus articles were conceptualized as news with interpretative elements. In order to have possible effects of stimulus articles on subjects' attitudes of political support, the stimuli have to be direct and obvious. Therefore, precise expressions, phrases and single indicator words are relevant. The two versions have similar leads or first sentences that concentrate on the most important facts, but are different at the core. Also, the titles are different and display the general tone of each version. In one version the focus is on conflicts. Regarding the conflict aspects, a decision had to be made on whether intra-institutional conflicts, inter-institutional conflicts or both conflict types should be included in the material. The decision was made in favor of including both conflict types in the material.[73] In the other version the focus

73 Durr et.al. (1997) found that intra-institutional conflicts have a negative impact on support, whereas inter-institutional conflicts might have positive effects on political support. However, as both aspects occur in media coverage, both versions were included in the stimulus material.

is on the inefficiency of decision-making procedures. The according paragraphs contain valuations, mostly in the form of direct or indirect quotes from political experts or participants.[74]

However, participants also must believe that the material is authentic and credible in order to have possible effects. Swiss journalists from different news organizations edited the articles in order to ensure the authenticity of the stimulus articles.[75] All articles contained the name or initials of a fictitious author or the identification code of a press agency.[76] In addition, with regard to the layout of the stimulus articles, they were suited to the design of regional Swiss newspapers.[77]

Experimental stimuli are evaluated with respect to their external and internal validity (Trepte & Wirth, 2004). Although stimuli can possess high levels of validity on both dimensions, there are trade-offs between the two. An important aspect of internal validity is that there are no differences between two versions of an article on other aspects than the treatment, for instance the perceived relevance of information or their comprehensiveness. The internal validity of the stimuli refers to the fact that changes in the outcome variable can be attributed to the manipulated aspects in the stimulus material. Hence, context variables must be the same across the different versions in order to eliminate the possibility of confounding effects (Trepte & Wirth, 2004, p. 78). Obviously, the more complex and diverse (and hence in most cases more realistic) the stimulus material is, the more difficult it is to eliminate the effects of the manipulated aspects from other aspects of the material. Nevertheless, efforts were made to keep the context factors constant across the two versions (conflict focus vs. inefficiency focus) of a stimulus article.

Stimuli pretests were conducted with Swiss students in March 2008 ($n = 21$). One group of participants received an article that focused on the conflict-orientation and discords of political processes, while the other group received an article that focused on the inefficiency of decision-making procedures. I expected that subjects in the conflict group would indicate more often that conflict-related statements were contained in the article than subjects in the inefficiency group, and vice versa. Significant differences were found in this respect. In addition, the pretests showed that the perceived trust in the articles did not differ as a function of the manipulation ($t < 1$).

74 The author thanks political scientists Andreas Ladner (IDHEAP Lausanne), and Urs Scheuss (University of Zurich) who agreed to be quoted in the articles.

75 The author thanks Bettina Epper from the "Bieler Tagblatt", Michel Wenzler from "Tages-Anzeiger", Kaspar Meuli, a freelance journalist and communication officer, and Guido Keel, online editor at Luzerner Medien for dedicating part of their valuable time to the editing of the stimulus articles.

76 Fictitious authors were used so that participants were not able to look the articles up in their newspapers or the internet. For the same reason, it was not mentioned which newspaper the articles (presumably) were taken from.

77 The layout of the stimulus articles was suited to the layout of the following regional papers: "Der Bund", "St. Galler Tagblatt", "Solothurner Zeitung", "Neue Luzerner Zeitung"

### 6.2.4. Variables and Operationalization

In this section, the operationalization of the variables is described (see Appendix 10.2 for precise item wordings; the survey questionnaires (in German language) can be requested from the author). *Process preferences* were measured after the treatment with six items that that relate to two dimensions of political processes, namely consensus-orientation and efficiency (for more information see Floß, 2008). Three items refer to preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$), three items refer to preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). All items were measured on a 7-point scale and had the stem 'In the following question we would like to know more about your political preferences. Citizens hold different preferences regarding how political decisions should be made in democratic systems. Please answer according to the following scale how important you personally consider the following preferences to be. The scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important).' Preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes were, for instance, measured with the question 'How important is it for you that political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side?' Preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes were for example measured with the question 'How important is it for you that political decision-making processes are simple and short?'

*Process perceptions* were measured after the treatment with six items that relate to two dimensions of political processes, namely consensus-orientation and efficiency. Three items refer to the perceived consensus-orientation of political processes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$), and three items refer to the perceived efficiency of political processes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$). All items were measured on a 7-point scale and had the stem 'Now we would like to know how, in your opinion, political decisions are actually made in Switzerland. Please answer according to the following scale and indicate to what extent the following statements on political decision-making processes in Switzerland, in your opinion, apply or not apply. The scale ranges from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (fully applies).' Perceived consensus-orientation of political processes was for instance measured with the statement 'Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side.' Perceived efficiency-orientation was for example measured with the statement 'Political decision-making processes are time-consuming.'

*Political support* was modeled as a hierarchical factor that refers to four objects of evaluation: government, parliament, politicians, and democracy (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). This conceptualization is in line with other research that conceptualizes political support as hierarchical factors, i.e. as a general attitude of political support that explains the relationship between more specific attitudes towards different objects of political support (Fuchs, 1989, p. 62ff.).[78] Political support was measured after the

78 Hierarchical factor models encompass a second order factor which explains the relationship between first order factors (Kline, 2005, p. 198ff.)

treatment. The measures build on established survey items ((e.g. European Social Survey 2008; Eurobarometer 1997; cf. Muller & Jukam, 1977; cf. Westle, 1989) and were adapted to the study's context. The items were measured on a 10-point scale, because a sensitive measurement of the independent variables controls for ceiling or floor effects. More precisely, the sensitive measurement ensures that scores on the variables are less likely to approach the maximum possible scores or the minimum possible scores, respectively.[79] Support for the government was assessed by two items, for example, 'How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the Swiss government?' Support for the parliament was measured with two items, for example, 'How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the Swiss parliament?' Support for politicians was assessed by three items, for instance 'How much do you trust politicians in Switzerland altogether to act as they really should?' Support for democracy was measured with two items, for example 'To what extent does democracy as it exists in Switzerland correspond to your personal version of an ideal democracy?'

*Article impressions* variables measure the subjects' perception of the stimulus articles. The items relate to two dimensions, the conflict-orientation and the inefficiency focus of news articles. Article impressions were assessed after the treatment with two items for each dimension. On a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not apply) to 4 (applies), subjects were asked to indicate what impression the articles raised with respect to the way political decisions are made. The items measuring participants' article impressions had the stem 'To begin with, we would like to ask you some questions on the news articles that we have sent to you last week. What impression did these articles raise with respect to the way political decisions are made?' The impression of articles as conflict-focused (Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$), for example, was measured with the question 'Have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decision-making processes are shaped by conflicts and power struggles?' The impression of articles as inefficiency-focused (Cronbach's $\alpha = .59$), for example, was measured with the question 'And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decision-making processes are time-consuming?'

The following socio-demographic control variables are included in data analysis as control variables: Age, gender, education, political ideology and political experience. Political experience is an index variable that was based on four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$). Two items measure political activity (party work, political mandate), and two items measure political experience in general (direct experiences through own political activity, indirect experiences through the political activity of friends or relatives). An index variable was built by counting the values indicating

79 Ceiling effects refer to the difficulty of obtaining further increases if responses already approach the maximum possible scores. Floor effects refer to the difficulty of obtaining further decreases if responses already approach the minimum possible scores (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 50).

experiences and activity; this variable range from 0 (no experience) to 4 (much experience).

### 6.2.5. Data Analysis

The SEM analyses used EQS version 6.1 software (Bentler, 2006). Missing values were treated using the maximum likelihood-method (ML-imputation algorithm), also known as full information maximum likelihood (cf. Bentler, 2006, p. 285ff.; Wothke, 2000). The data were tested for univariate and multivariate normal distribution and strong outliers were excluded from data analysis. Extreme violations (moderate ones are given in parentheses) on the assumption of the univariate distribution are associated with skew values of at least 3 (2) and kurtosis of at least 20 (7) (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995). These values were not reached. Strong outlier as regards multivariate normality distribution (cf. Yuan, Lambert, & Fouladi, 2004) were excluded from data analysis. Because the analysis is based on imputed data, I generally applied the distribution-free Satorra-Bentler estimation as an alternative to Maximum-Likelihood estimation. Robust methods might correct for deviations from the missing-at-random assumption. To evaluate the model fit, the following criteria were evaluated: the Chi-Square value divided by the number of degrees of freedom (< 3), the comparative fit index (CFI > .90), the Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < .06) with its 90% confidence interval (CI, lower bound < .05, upper bound < .10) ( Kline, 2005, p. 133ff.).

## *6.3. Results*

One objective of this study is to examine the effects that media presentations of political processes have on citizens' perceptions of political processes and their levels of political support. In this section, the short-term impact of experimental stimulus articles on respondents' perceptions of political processes and their political support is investigated. Section 6.3.1 presents the results from the treatment and manipulation checks. Then, Section 6.3.2 describes the findings on the articles' impact on the perception of political processes. One assumption of this study is that exposure to the stimulus articles may affect political support by increasing the temporary accessibility of the process preferences-perceptions discrepancies. This assumption is tested in Section 6.3.3.

### 6.3.1. Treatment and Manipulation Checks

The questions for the treatment and manipulation checks were included in each of the five surveys that included the stimulus articles (conflict group: n = 189, ineffi-

ciency group: n = 177). First, it was tested whether the participants perceived the aspects in the articles that are supposed to cause the effect. Therefore, the five questionnaires on the articles altogether included ten questions that asked whether aspects related to conflict occurred in the articles and ten questions that asked whether aspects related to inefficiency occurred in the articles. I expected that subjects in the conflict group more often than subjects in the inefficiency group indicate that the conflict-related statements occurred in the article, and vice versa. Subjects reading the conflict-oriented articles noticed more conflict-related aspects (M = 8.41, SD = 1.77) than subjects who read the inefficiency articles (M = 3.33, SD = 2.02). The difference between the two conditions was highly significant [$t(364) = 25.01$, $p < 0.001$]. Similarly, subjects reading the inefficiency-oriented articles noticed more inefficiency-related aspects (M = 7.49, SD = 2.05) than subjects who read the conflict articles (M = 2.02, SD = 1.75). This difference was also highly significant [$t(364) = -27.50$, $p < 0.001$].

Second, it was tested whether the manipulation worked as expected. The assumption is that subjects who read the articles with negative information about the consensus-orientation of political processes agreed more with the statement that the articles raise the impression that political processes are conflict-oriented than subjects who read the articles with focus on procedural inefficiency. Likewise, subjects who read the articles with negative information about the efficiency of political processes agree more with the statement that the articles raise the impression that political processes are inefficient than subjects who read the articles which focus on conflicts. The general impression which the articles raised with respect to political processes was assessed on a 4-point Likert scale. Two questions are linked to the role of conflicts; two are linked to inefficiency.[80] High scores on the article impression variables indicate that the respondents did agree that the articles raised a specific impression. The manipulation worked quite well: Respondents in the conflict article group reported a significant higher article conflict impression (M = 2.94, SD = 0.62) than respondents in the inefficiency article group (M = 2.50, SD = 0.77, $t(358) = 6.03$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, respondents in the conflict article group reported a significant higher article impression regarding uncompromising decisions (M = 2.48, SD = 0.76) than respondents in the inefficiency article group (M = 1.79, SD = 0.71, $t(353) = 8.82$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, respondents in the inefficiency article

80 The questions were the following: "What impression did these articles raise with respect to the way political decisions are made? Have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decision-making processes are shaped by conflicts and power struggles?" Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?", "And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decisions are made uncompromisingly? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?", "And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decision-making processes are time-consuming? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?", "And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decisions are postponed over and over again? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?"

group reported a significant higher article impression regarding time-consuming decision-making procedures (M = 3.55, SD = 0.72) than respondents in the conflict article group (M = 3.25, SD = 0.69, t (355) = - 3.97, p < 0.01). In a similar manner, respondents in the inefficiency article group reported a significant higher article impression regarding the postponement of decisions (M = 3.13, SD = 0.63) than respondents in the conflict article group (M = 2.83, SD = 0.71, t (348) = - 4.21, p < 0.01).

In order to ensure that the context variables were indifferent across the two article versions, subjects' trust in the stimulus articles was measured. Respondents were asked to indicate how much, on a 7-point Likert scale, they agree to statements which refer to the different dimension of trust in media, namely selectivity of facts, accuracy of depictions, and journalistic assessment (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Perceived trust in the articles (as a mean index) did not differ as a function of the manipulation (t < 1). Following the suggestion of Cappella & Jamieson (1997, p. 93ff.), this study also tested whether the manipulation had an impact on perceived comprehensibility and interestingness of the information as well as its relevance. Again, subjects were asked to indicate how much, on a 7-point Likert scale, they agree to statements referring to these aspects. The results showed that the perception of these aspects (based on a mean index) did not differ as a function of the manipulation (t < 1).

In sum, then, the findings suggest that the stimulus did work. The treatment was successful on the treatment level and also worked well on the manipulation level. The groups differ as regards the impression that the participants thought the articles raised with respect to political decision-making processes. The context variables, in contrast, were successfully held constant across the two groups.

### 6.3.2. Impact of Stimulus Articles on Process Perceptions

ANOVAs were used to probe the assumption that exposure to the stimulus articles affects the participants' perception of political processes (H1 & H2). The perception of consensus-orientation and the perception of efficiency-orientation were measured with three items each. Hence six one-factor analyses of variance were investigated in order to investigate possible differences between the treatment groups (conflict treatment group, efficiency treatment group, control group). To check for possible confounds, socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, political ideology, and political experience) were included as covariates. No significant main effects of the experimental variable are found.[81] However, the group differences are

81 "Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side": F = 0.60, p = .942, η2 = .002,
"Politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions.": F = 2.08, p = .126, η2 = .02,
"In Switzerland political decisions are based on compromises.": F = 1.05, p = .352, η2 = .01
"In Switzerland political problems are solved as fast as possible.": F = 2.14, p = .199, η2 =.01

generally in the predicted direction, as shown in Table 6.2. Regarding the items tapping the perception of the consensus-orientation of political processes, the mean values for participants in the conflict group are smaller than the mean values in the inefficiency group. The comparison with the control group shows no difference as regards the perception of political processes as compromise-based. Notably, this may indicate that exposure to those articles which focused on the inefficiency of political processes increased the perception that political processes are consensus-oriented. Regarding the items tapping the perception of the efficiency of political processes, the mean values of participants in the inefficiency group are smaller than the mean values in the control group, but the mean values for participants in the control group are rather similar to the ones in the inefficiency group. Notably, this may indicate that the conflict stimulus articles not only shaped the perception that political processes are conflict-oriented, but also that these processes are inefficient.

| | **Conflict Group** | **Inefficiency Group** | **Control Group** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side. | 3.90 | 4.05 | 3.98 |
| Politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions. | 4.15 | 4.52 | 4.43 |
| In Switzerland political decisions are based on compromises. | 5.08 | 5.28 | 5.02 |
| In Switzerland political problems are solved as fast as possible. | 1.95 | 2.11 | 2.27 |
| Political decision-making processes in Switzerland are time-consuming. | 2.24 | 2.21 | 2.47 |
| Swiss politicians postpone decisions over and over again.* | 2.69 | 2.61 | 2.83 |

Note. Entries are adjusted means from ANOVA with six covariates: age, gender, education, income, political interest, political experience. The higher scores indicates that aspects are perceived as accurate.

N between 120 (Control group: "Political decision-making processes in Switzerland are time-consuming.") and 157 (Conflict group: "Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side.")

* = reversed scale

*Table 6.2. Adjusted Means for Process Perceptions in Experimental Groups*

"Political decision-making processes in Switzerland are time-consuming.": $F = 1.68$, $p = .187$, $\eta 2 = .01$

"Swiss politicians postpone decisions over and over again.": $F = 0.94$, $p = .390$, $\eta 2 = .004$

Another model was run with factor scores for consensus perception and efficiency perception as dependent variables. The construction of factor scales is described in Section 5.3.6. Table 5.9 presents the results for the factor analysis.[82] Socio-demographic control variables (gender, age, education, income, political ideology, and political experience) were included as covariates. Findings showed that there are no significant differences between subjects in the conflict articles group, subjects in the inefficiency articles groups and subjects in the control group as regards consensus perception ($F = 1.32$ $p = .27$ $\eta^2 = .01$) and efficiency perception ($F = 1.76$, $p = .17$, $\eta^2 = .01$). In general, then, the data do not support H1 and H2. The experimental manipulation did not change subjects' process perceptions. Political attitudes appear to be rather stable and resistant to such a relatively small dosage of five news articles. The results showed a significant impact of gender ($F = 4.22$, $p = .04$) and education ($F = 20.08$, $p = .000$) on the perception of political processes as regards the consensus-orientation and a significant impact of age ($F = 13.53$, $p = .000$) on the perception of political processes as regards efficiency.

Further ANOVAs were conducted to test whether exposure to the stimulus articles affects the participants' preferences regarding political processes (RQ1). The models include factor scores for consensus preferences and efficiency preferences as dependent variables. The construction of factor scales is described in Section 5.3.6. Socio-demographic control variables (gender, age, education, income, political ideology, and political experience) were included as covariates. Findings showed that there are no significant differences between subjects in the conflict articles group, subjects in the inefficiency articles groups and subjects in the control group as regards consensus preferences ($F = 0.48$, $p = .62$, $\eta^2 = .003$) and efficiency preferences ($F = 2.15$, $p = .12$, $\eta^2 = .01$). These findings indicate that the experimental manipulation did not change subjects' process preferences. Political attitudes appear to be rather stable and resistant to such a relatively small dosage of five news articles. The results showed a significant impact of age ($F = 17.79$, $p = .000$) and political ideology ($F = 14.23$, $p = .000$) on the consensus preferences and significant effects of age ($F = 11.10$, $p = .001$), gender ($F = 5.8{,}5$ $p = .02$), education ($F = 4.54$, $p = .03$), and political ideology ($F = 10.60$, $p = .001$) on efficiency preferences.

Maurer (2003b, p. 101ff.) argued that subjects who are not only exposed to negative media information but also perceive the media coverage to be negative are more likely to be affected by negative media information than subjects who do not perceive the mass media's negativity. Following this reasoning, a further analysis included the impressions that subjects gained from the article as variables that mediate the effects of stimulus articles on the perception of political processes (H3 & H4). This model was investigated using structural equation modeling. It is based on the sample of participants in the two treatment groups (n = 366), because there is no

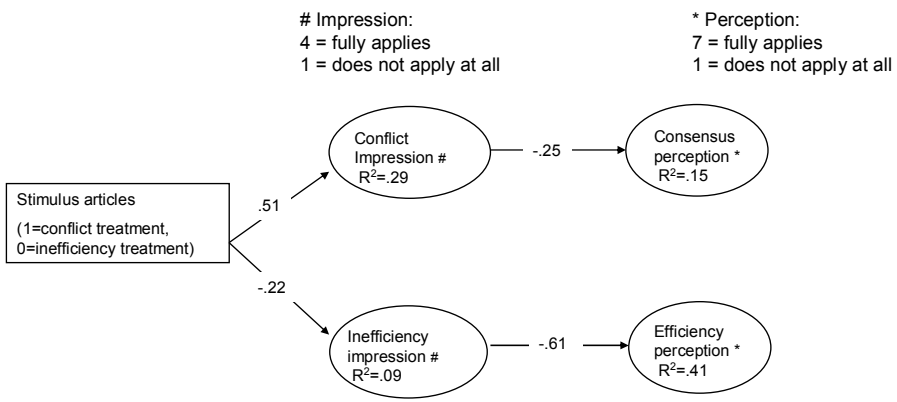
82 The process perception items were subjected to factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation which does not presume orthogonal factors. The factor loadings were used to derive factor scores for each survey respondent. Regression method was selected to construct the factor scales.

measurement of article impressions for the subjects in the control group. The independent variable stimulus is coded in one manifest variable by dummy coding the two treatment groups[83] (cf. Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Pedhazur & Pedhazur Schmelkin, 1991). Exposure to the stimulus articles (0 = exposure to inefficiency-focused articles, 1 = exposure to conflict-focused articles) was specified as predictor of the articles' conflict impression and the articles' inefficiency impression. A higher score on the article impression scale indicates that respondents agree that the articles raised the according impression. For more information on the measurement models for the article impression factors see Appendix 10.3. The article impression variables, in turn, were specified as predictors of the perception of political processes. More precisely, the model includes the effect from the conflict impression of the articles on the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the effect from the inefficiency impression of the articles on the perception of political processes as inefficient (see Appendix 10.3 for information on measurement models of consensus and efficiency perceptions). Socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education, political experience, and political ideology) were included in order to control for their influence. In favour of clarity they are not displayed in the figures, however. Figure 6.1 shows the model and the results.

The model showed a significant effect of the stimulus articles on conflict impression ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .05$) and a significant effect of the stimulus articles on inefficiency impression ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < .05$). The conflict impression variable, in turn, significantly predicted the consensus perception of political processes ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < .05$). The stronger the respondents thought that the articles did raise the impression that political processes are conflict-oriented, the less consensus-oriented political are processes perceived to be. Likewise, the inefficiency impression variable, in turn, significantly predicted the efficiency perception of political processes ($\beta = -0.61$, $p < .05$). The stronger the respondents thought that the articles did raise the impression that political processes are inefficient, the less efficient are political processes perceived to be. The indirect effect of the stimulus articles on the consensus perception of political processes via conflict impression was $\beta = -0.13$ and was statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 3.00, $p < .05$. The indirect effect of the stimulus articles on the efficiency perception of political processes via inefficiency impression was $\beta = 0.14$ and was also statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 3.41, $p < .05$. Hence findings indicate that the stimulus articles decreased both the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the perception of political processes as inefficient indirectly via their influence on article impressions. Thus, the data supports H3 and H4. In addition, the model shows significant effects of gender (coded as 1 = woman, 2 = man; $\beta = 0.21$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and significant effects of gender

83 Dummy coding consists of 1's and 0's, with 1 signifying membership in a category under consideration and 0 signifying no membership in that category. For two treatment groups, one variable was built with conflict treatment being 1 and inefficiency treatment being 0.

(β = 0.20, p < .05) and age (β = -0.24, p < .05) on the efficiency perception of political processes. There is also a significant effect of age (β = 0.14, p < .05) on the article conflict impression and a significant effect of gender (β = 0.16, p < .05) on the article inefficiency impression. This indicates that men, highly educated persons and persons of a younger age are more likely to perceive political processes as consensus-oriented than women, persons with lower levels of formal education and persons of older age. Persons of a younger age and men are also more likely to perceive political processes as efficient than persons of an older age and women. People of an older age are also more likely to have the impression that the stimulus articles present political processes as conflict-oriented than people of a younger age, and men are more likely to have the impression that the stimulus articles present political processes as inefficient than women. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .91, RMSEA =.05 (90% CI = .04, .07), Chi-Square = 161.41, df = 76.




Note. Shown are standardized path coefficients. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Chi-Square (df=76, N 361) =161.41, Comparative fit index is .91, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .05 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .07.

*Figure 6.1. The Impact of Stimulus Articles on Process Perceptions*

The results suggest that there is a relationship between the article impression variables and process perceptions. As regards the causal direction of this relationship, however, a plausible assumption might be that respondents' general perception of political processes may affect their attitude towards the impressions that the articles raise. In fact, H5 assumes that there is such an impact of individual process perceptions on the impressions that the study's participants gain from the news articles. In order to test this assumption, the model described in Figure 6.1 was estimated with reversed effects, i.e. process perceptions were modeled as predictors of article impressions. Thus, both process perceptions and stimulus articles were specified as predictors of article impressions. The model showed a significant effect of

the stimulus articles (1 = conflict-focused articles, 0 = inefficiency-focused articles) on conflict impression ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .05$) and a significant effect of the stimulus articles on inefficiency impression ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .05$). The conflict impression variable was also significantly predicted by the consensus perception of political processes ($\beta = -0.24$, $p < .05$). The less consensus-oriented political processes are perceived to be, the more likely are the articles considered to present political decision-making processes as conflict-oriented. Similarly, the inefficiency impression variable was significantly predicted by the efficiency perception of political processes ($\beta = -0.68$, $p < .05$). The less efficient political processes are perceived to be, the more likely are the articles considered to present political decision-making processes as inefficient. The model fit was quite satisfactory, with CFI = .89, RMSEA =.06 (90% CI = .05, .07), Chi-Square = 190.40, df = 85. Thus, the data does provide support for the assumption that the impression which the articles raised is determined by respondents' perception of political processes.

### 6.3.3. Effect of Stimulus Articles on Political Support via Effects on Accessibility

Priming effects are assumed, i.e. exposure to the articles is proposed to make the discrepancy temporarily accessible for participants who are high in the magnitude of the discrepancy (H6). As a result, for subjects who are high in the magnitude of the preference-perception discrepancy, it is predicted that the political support decreases as a result of exposure to the stimulus articles. To test this prediction, a series of magnitude of discrepancy (high, low) x experimental treatment (exposure to conflict articles, no exposure to conflict articles / exposure to inefficiency articles, no exposure to inefficiency articles respectively) ANOVAs was performed on political support; one series for the effect of the consensus discrepancy on political support, the other series for the effect of the efficiency discrepancy on political support. The discrepancy items are factor scores for consensus discrepancy and efficiency discrepancy. The construction of factor scales is described in Section 5.3.6, and Table 5.9 presents the results for the factor analysis.[84] The high vs. low discrepancy magnitude groups were built based on a median split. Respondents with consensus discrepancies above the median (MD = 1.33) were put in the high consensus discrepancy group (n = 128), respondents with consensus discrepancies below the median were put in the low consensus discrepancy group (n = 129). Respondents with efficiency discrepancies above the median (MD = 2.66) were put in the high efficiency discrepancy group (n = 131), and respondents with efficiency discrepancies below the median were put in the low efficiency discrepancy group (n = 127). The support items are also factor scores; the construction of the factor scores is described in

84 The discrepancy items were subjected to factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation which does not presume orthogonal factors. The factor loadings were used to derive factor scores for each survey respondent. Regression method was selected to construct the factor scales.

Section 5.3.6.[85] Two factors are distinguished. The first factor refers to support for the government. The second factor encompasses support for the parliament, support for political actors, and support for democracy. Socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, political ideology, and political experience) were included as covariates. The results show a significant main effect of the consensus discrepancy on support for the parliament, political actors and democracy ($F = 10.075$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2=0.06$), a significant main effect of the efficiency discrepancy on support for the government ($F = 8.023$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2=0.04$) and a significant main effect of the efficiency discrepancy on support for the parliament, political actors and democracy ($F = 16.166$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2=0.09$). The main effect of the consensus discrepancy on support for the government was not significant ($F = 1.571$, $p = .219$, $\eta^2=0.004$). These results indicate that a large discrepancy between process preferences and process perceptions (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions) is associated with lower levels of political support. The main effects of the treatment and the two-way interaction effects on support for the government and support for the parliament, political actors and democracy were all non-significant.[86] The lack of significant interaction effects indicates that political support does not decrease as a result of exposure to the stimulus articles for subjects who are high in the magnitude of the preference-perception discrepancy. Thus, the data do not support H6.

### *6.4. Summary and Discussion*

This chapter reported findings on the impact of the experimental stimulus articles on respondents' perceptions of political processes. The results indicate that the stimulus

85 The political support items were subjected to factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation which does not presume orthogonal factors. The factor loadings were used to derive factor scores for each survey respondent. Regression method was selected to construct the factor scales.

86 Main effect of the conflict treatment on support for the government: ($F = 1.792$, $p = .182$, $\eta2 = 0.006$).
Main effect of the conflict treatment on support for the parliament, political actors and democracy: ($F = .336$, $p = .563$, $\eta2 = 0.004$).
Main effect of the inefficiency treatment on support for the government: ($F = 2.084$, $p = 150$, $\eta2 = 0.006$).
Main effect of the inefficiency treatment on support for the parliament, political actors and democracy: ($F = .006$, $p = .000$, $\eta2 = 0.000$).
Interaction effect conflict treatment & discrepancy magnitude on support for the government: ($F = 1.490$, $p = .223$).
Interaction effect conflict treatment & discrepancy magnitude on support for the parliament, political actors and democracy: ($F = .177$, $p = 674$).
Interaction effect inefficiency treatment & discrepancy magnitude on support for the government: ($F = .087$, $p = .768$).
Interaction effect inefficiency treatment & discrepancy magnitude on support for the parliament, political actors and democracy: ($F = .600$, $p = .439$).

articles did not affect the participants' perception of political processes. More precisely, exposure to conflict-oriented articles did not decrease participants' perception of political processes as being consensus-oriented, nor did the exposure to inefficiency-oriented articles decrease the participants' perception of political processes as being efficient. A variety of factors might explain the null findings. From a methodological point of view, more precise measures of the independent variable political support which are more closely linked to the news articles' content could be applied in order to enhance the likelihood of effects. Such measurements could refer to respondents' confidence in political actors with regard to the way they handle the protection of non-smokers or the reform of the federal old-age insurance, for example. Both issues were addressed in the stimulus articles. Another methodological aspect seems worthy of consideration. Ideally, because the impact of television was assumed to be stronger than the impact of the newspapers, I would have liked to use television newscast instead of newspaper articles as stimuli in the present study. Because of the costs involved with television stimuli, this was not possible, however. Moreover, the study's sample consists of individuals with particularly high levels of political interest and political support. Thus, the sample provides a hard test for the effect assumptions. Therefore one might be able to find significant effects of stimulus articles in future studies with samples of political novices whose political attitudes are found to be less strong and stable (Fiske, Kinder & Larter, 1982; Iyengar et al. 1984). However, not only methodological aspects might be relevant, the theoretical assumptions should be reconsidered also. It seems warranted to suggest that the absence of empirical evidence for the assumed effects of stimulus articles on political support in this study may indicate that the perceptions of political processes are shaped already before the participants were exposed to the stimuli. In line with the assumptions of cultivation theory, the mass media's impact on reality perceptions, then, might be subject to long-term changes rather than short-term changes. According hypotheses are tested in Chapter 7.

Looking at the indirect effects of exposure to the stimulus articles on political support via the impressions that the articles raised in the view of the participants, the findings indicate that such indirect effects took place. More precisely, the results suggest that the stimulus articles decreased both the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the perception of political processes as inefficient, indirectly via article impressions. However, the test of this assumption is based on a quasi-experimental design. Because quasi-experiments lack random assignment, they are more likely to suffer from threats to validity than randomized experiments. In particular, quasi-experiments provide less support for causal inferences due to inherent threats to internal validity. Most importantly, the self-selection of participants to the treatment conditions raises concern (cf. Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 13f.). In this study self-selection takes place because the participants decide for themselves which impressions the articles raise. Hence, not only the treatment, but also alternative explanations might account for the observed effect. Thus, researchers have to worry about ruling out alternative explanations in order to get a more valid estimate of the treatment effect.

In this study, it seems plausible to assume that not only stimulus articles, but also general political attitudes might shape the impressions that the articles raise. More precisely, it seems warranted to suggest that if an individual perceives a political process as being conflict-oriented, this person is also more likely to get the impression that news articles present political processes as conflict-oriented, for example.[87] The results presented here support the assumption that general process perceptions affect the impression that subjects gain from the stimulus articles. The relationship between process perceptions and article impressions, hence, might be reciprocal. Nevertheless, the significant treatment effects on the article impression variables that were found in the manipulation check suggest that the impression which the articles raise in the view of the respondents is not only affected by individual process perceptions but also by stimulus articles.

Besides the impact of news articles on the perception of political processes, this chapter also addressed the impact of exposure to the news articles on political support. The assumption here is that exposure to the articles increases the temporary accessibility of already available discrepancies between process preferences and perceptions through priming. As a result, the levels of political support of those subjects who are high in magnitude of the discrepancy are hypothesized to decrease. The results did not support this assumption, however. The conceptualization of the post-test questionnaire might account for this null finding. The items included in this questionnaire may have blurred the priming condition, because participants in the conflict group as well as participants in the inefficiency group were asked questions referring to both the consensus-orientation of political processes and the efficiency of political processes. In this exploratory study, this was done in order to be able to compare the impact of respondents' routine media use on perceptions and preferences concerning both aspects of political processes (consensus and efficiency, see Chapter 7). However, future studies that are interested in priming effects on the temporary accessibility of preferences-perceptions relationships should apply experimental designs with posttest measures which refer to the manipulated aspects only. An according study could, for instance, follow this procedure: Subjects are asked to fill out a questionnaire a few weeks before the experimental session in order to determine the magnitude of their relationship between process preferences and perceptions. Respondents are then divided into high and low consensus preferences-perceptions discrepancy groups and into high and low efficiency preferences-perceptions discrepancy groups. These divisions then can be used to create two distinct groups of subjects varying on which type of discrepancy was predominant:

87 This assumption is in line with the hypothesis theory of social perception, for instance. According to this theory, available considerations of people determine which aspects of reality they perceive, the conclusions that they drawn from those perceptions, and the likelihood of their retrieval at a later point in time (Bruner, 1957; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Lilli & Frey, 1993). Similarly, confirmation bias theory assumes that individuals have a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms their preconceptions (Klayman & H, 1987; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979).

A high consensus preferences-perceptions discrepancy/low efficiency preferences-perceptions discrepancy group and a high efficiency preferences-perceptions discrepancy/low consensus preferences-perceptions discrepancy group (cf. Higgins, 1987). At the experimental session, a pre-test on prior levels of political support could be conducted. Subjects then are exposed to either news articles with references to the conflict-orientation of political processes or news articles with references to the inefficiency of political processes. Following the exposure to these articles, a post-test would measure the levels of political support.

Despite its limitations, the experimental study does provide first insights into the relationship between exposure to media information about political decision-making processes and citizens' perceptions of such processes. The following chapter presents further analyses as regards the long-term impact of routine media use on process perceptions and attitudes of political support.

# 7. Long-Term Effects of Media on Process Perceptions and Political Support

This chapter presents the investigation of long-term effects of media information on citizens' process perceptions and political support. In this study, routine use of mass media is assumed to reflect the influence of characteristic patterns of the media coverage. Media use patterns are considered to be relatively stable and distinctive ways of interacting with the media (McLeod & McDonald, 1985). These stable patterns are recently referred to as logic of an institutional news media (Marcinkowski, 2005). In addition, the role of citizens' individual process preferences as moderator of the media's impact is examined. The research questions and hypotheses are presented in Section 7.1. Section 7.2 describes the methodological design. The findings are presented in Section 7.3., followed by a summary and discussion (Section 7.4).

## *7.1. Research Questions and Hypotheses*

Routine media use in this study is measured with respect to the use of political information. The routine use of newspapers and the routine use of television are distinguished. Not only is television generally assumed to contain more negative political information than newspapers, it also includes visual information, which results in dual information-processing strategies. Thus the likelihood of a possible impact of television on social reality perceptions might increase. Moreover, the results from the media content analysis that are presented in Chapter 4 indicate that television newscasts, in general, are more evaluative than press articles. Televisions news about political decision-making processes was found to be shaped by a strong focus on political accusations, particularly when informing about parliamentary processes, although television news at the same time focuses on aspects of consensus. In addition, television news referred to the inability of political actors to solve political processes, particularly when informing about political processes in the parliament.

Following the tradition of videomalaise and cultivation research, possible effects of routine television use are assumed to capture long-term changes of political attitudes. As regards the impact on process perceptions, I assume that routine television use shapes the perception of certain qualities of political processes. Based on the finding that the television presents political processes with references to political discord and procedural inefficiency (Chapter 4), I hypothesize that television use decreases both the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the perception of political processes as efficient.

- H1: The more intensive a person's television use is, the less are political processes perceived as consensus-oriented by that person.
- H2: The more intensive a person's television use is, the less are political processes perceived as efficient by that person.

Based on the preferences-perceptions model of media effects, the perception of political processes is hypothesized to explain levels of political support. Both a decrease in the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and a decrease in the perception of political processes as efficient are assumed to be associated with lower levels of political support.

- H3: The less consensus-oriented political processes are perceived by a person, the lower is this person's level of political support.
- H4: The less efficient political processes are perceived by a person, the lower is this person's level of political support.

The concept of political support in this study encompasses attitudes towards different objects of evaluation, namely government, parliament, political actors, and democracy. In order to test whether the assumed effect mechanisms vary with respect to these different objects of evaluation, I formulate the following research question.

- RQ1: Does the model explain citizens' support for the government, support for the parliament, support for political actors, and support for democracy equally well?

Little is known about the media's link to individual process preferences of the citizens. Whether routine television use affects citizens' process preferences will be a question open to empiricism. Similarly, it is an open question whether the media might affect political support by shaping citizens' process preferences. Hence, I formulate a research question in order to test whether process preferences mediate the relationship between television use.

- RQ2: Do citizens' process preferences mediate the effect of routine television use and/or exposure to news articles on political support?

Whereas the mediating variable is influenced by the independent variable and then, in turn, influences the dependent variable, a moderating variable specifies the conditions under which a given effect occurs, as well as conditions under which the strength or direction of an effect vary (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997). The core assumption here is that process preferences moderate the impact of process perceptions on political support. Drawing on discrepancy theory, I expect that the effects of process perceptions on political support are smaller if the perceived quality of political processes is in line with individual process preferences. In contrast, I expect that the effects of process perceptions on political support are stronger if the perceived quality of political processes is contrary to what a person does prefer. More precisely, I assume that if a subject holds strong preferences regarding the

consensus-orientation of political processes, the consensus perception has a stronger influence on political support than it would be the case for subjects with low consensus preferences. Likewise, if a subject holds strong preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes, the efficiency perception has a stronger influence on political support than it would be the case for subjects with low efficiency preferences.

- H3a: The impact of consensus perceptions on political support is stronger for subjects with high levels of consensus preferences than it is for subjects with low levels of consensus preferences.
- H4a: The impact of efficiency perceptions on political support is stronger for subjects with high levels of efficiency preferences than it is for subjects with low levels of efficiency preferences.

The media is assumed to affect political support via its influence on the perception of political processes. Process preferences, hence, might moderate the media's impact on political support in the end. Thus, if H1 and H3a are considered together, and if H2 and H4a are considered together, assumptions of moderated mediation follow (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). The assumption of moderated mediation is that process preferences moderate the indirect effect of media information on political support via the perception of political processes. More precisely, I assume the following hypotheses. These hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 7.1.

- H5: The impact of television use on political support via consensus perception is stronger for subjects with high levels of consensus preferences than it is for subjects with low levels of consensus preferences.
- H6: The impact of television use on political support via efficiency perception is stronger for subjects with high levels of efficiency preferences than it is for subjects with low levels of efficiency preferences.

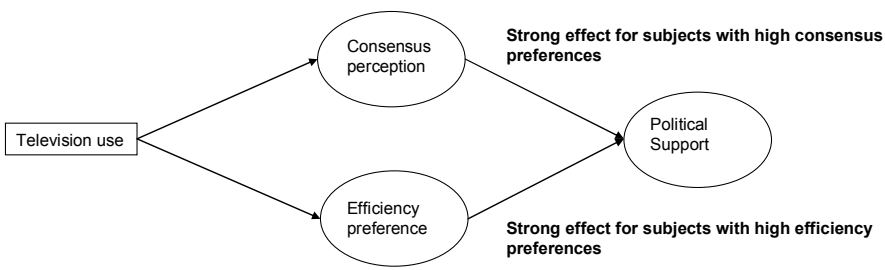



*Figure 7.1. Process Preferences as Moderator of Television Use-Support Relationship*

The chronic accessibility of the preference-perception relationships is argued to be high for people with high levels of political awareness and to be low for people with low levels of political awareness. Because a chronically accessible preferences-perceptions relationship might increase the likelihood of effects of the preferences-perceptions relationship on political attitudes, I assume that the impact of the preferences-perceptions relationship might be stronger for people with high levels of political awareness compared to people with low levels of political awareness. More precisely, I assume that the relationship between process perceptions and preferences has a stronger impact on political support for individuals with high levels of political awareness compared to subjects with low levels of political awareness.

- H7: For subjects high in the magnitude of the discrepancies between process preferences and process perceptions, the relationship between preferences and perceptions has a stronger impact on political support of individuals with high levels of political awareness compared to subjects with low levels of political awareness.

### *7.2. Method*

The experimental study presented in Chapter 6 was embedded in a series of surveys, an initial survey that was conducted at Time 1 in the forerun of the experimental study (see Chapter 6), and a final survey that was conducted at Time 2 after the experimental treatment. Data from those two surveys are the basis for the analyses presented in this chapter. Hence, the data analyses in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 are partly based on the same data set. Section 7.2.1 describes the variables and operationalization. The data collection procedure is outlined in Section 7.2.2. The methods of data analysis are discussed in Section 7.2.3.

#### 7.2.1. Variables and Operationalization

In the following, the operationalization of the variables is described (see Appendix 10.2 for precise item wordings; the survey questionnaires (in German language) can be requested from the author). The measurement of concepts is based on multi-operational measures if possible, so that latent variables can be modeled in SEM. The use of political information in newspapers and television was assessed at Time 1, together with socio-demographic variables. Process perceptions and preferences, political support and the impression raised by the stimulus articles were measured two weeks later at Time 2. All means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 7.1.

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Stimulus (1=conflict treatment) | | | | | | | | | | 0.51 | 0.50 |
| 2 | Conflict impression (high score=applies) | .57 * | | | | | | | | | 4.98 | 0.39 |
| 3 | Inefficiency impression (high score=applies) | -.28 * | -.01 | | | | | | | | 7.59 | 0.30 |
| 4 | Intensity TV use (high score = high intensity) | .10 | .10 | .03 | | | | | | | 1.86 | 0.90 |
| 5 | Intensity newspaper use (high score = high intensity) | -.05 | -.02 | -.03 | .34 * | | | | | | 1.53 | 1.14 |
| 6 | Consensus perception (high score=applies) | -.15 * | -.29 * | .01 | -.09 | .04 | | | | | 0.03 | 0.85 |
| 7 | Efficiency perception (high score=applies) | -.03 | -.22 * | -.60 * | -.20 * | -.07 | -.17 * | | | | 6.13 | 0.68 |
| 8 | Consensus preference (high score = high preferences) | -.05 | .02 | .01 | .06 | .05 | .07 | -.03 | | | 5.98 | 0.71 |
| 9 | Efficiency preference (high score = high preferences) | -.01 | .19 * | .36 * | .24 * | -.01 | -.20 * | -.43 * | .09 | | 4.39 | 1.26 |
| 10 | Political support (high score = high support) | -.09 | -.31 * | -.28 * | -.10 | -.02 | .47 * | .38 * | .15 * | -.25 * | | 1.29 |

Note. Entries are Pearson correlation coefficients (r), Standardized Means and Standard Deviations. Numbers 4 and 5 are measured at Time 1.
* $p < .05$ (two-sided test of significance)

*Table 7.1. Intercorrelations between Manifest and Latent Variables Included in the Study*

*Process preferences* were measured at Time 2 with six items that that relate to two dimensions of political processes, namely consensus-orientation and efficiency (for more information see Floß, 2008). Three items refer to preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$), and three items refer to preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). All items were measured on a 7-point scale and had the stem 'In the following question we would like to know more about your political preferences. Citizens hold different preferences regarding how political decisions should be made in democratic systems. Please answer according to the following scale how important you personally consider the following preferences to be. The scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important).' Preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes were, for instance, measured with the question 'How important is it for you, that political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side?' Preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes were, for example, measured with the question 'How important is it for you that political decision-making processes are simple and short?'

*Process perceptions* were measured at Time 2 by six items that relate to two dimensions of political processes, namely consensus-orientation and efficiency. Three

items refer to the perceived consensus-orientation of political processes (Cronbach's α = .74), and three items refer to the perceived efficiency of political processes (Cronbach's α = .67). All items were measured on a 7-point scale and had the stem 'Now we would like to know how, in your opinion, political decisions are actually made in Switzerland. Please answer according to the following scale and indicate to what extent the following statements on political decision-making processes in Switzerland, in your opinion, apply or not apply. The scale ranges from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (fully applies).' Perceived consensus-orientation of political processes was, for instance, measured with the statement 'Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side.' Perceived efficiency-orientation was, for example, measured with the statement 'Political decision-making processes are time-consuming.'

*Political support* was modeled as a hierarchical factor that refers to four objects of evaluation: government, parliament, politicians, and democracy (Cronbach's α = .91). This conceptualization is in line with other research that conceptualizes political support as hierarchical factors, i.e. as a general attitude of political support that explains the relationship between more specific attitudes towards different objects of political support (Fuchs, 1989, p. 62ff.).[88] Political support was measured at Time 2. The measures build on established survey items ((e.g. European Social Survey 2008; Eurobarometer 1997; cf. Muller & Jukam, 1977; cf. Westle, 1989) and were adapted to the study's context. Support for the government was assessed by two items, for example, 'How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the Swiss government?' Support for the parliament was measured with two items, for example, 'How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the Swiss parliament?' Support for politicians was assessed by three items, for instance 'How much do you trust politicians in Switzerland altogether to act as they really should?' Support for democracy was measured with two items, for example 'To what extent does democracy as it exists in Switzerland correspond to your personal version of an ideal democracy?'

*Routine media use* was measured with items adapted from the European Social Survey. Respondents were asked to indicate how much of their time – on an average weekday – they generally spent using news or programmes about politics and current affairs on the radio, on television, in the newspaper or on the internet (less than ¼ hour; ¼ to ½ hour, more than ½ hour, up to 1 hour; more than 1 hour). The *television use* variable was built by recoding the answers for television into categories of less than ½ hour; more than ½ hour, up to 1 hour; and more than 1 hour. The *newspaper use* variable was built as an additive index based on the answers for local newspapers and national newspapers that were recoded into categories of less than ½ hour; more than ½ hour, up to 1 hour; and more than 1 hour.

*Political experience* is an index variable based on four items (Cronbach's α = .64). In line with an operationalization of direct political experiences by Wolling

88 Hierarchical factor models encompass a second order factor which explains the relationship between first order factors (Kline, 2005, p. 198ff.)

(2009), two items measure political activity, the stem 'There are different possibilities to be politically active. Some of them are mentioned below. Please indicate for each of these activities whether it applies to you or does not apply to you' was followed by 'engaging actively in party work' and 'hold a political mandate.' Two items measure political experience in general, for example people were asked 'Do you have direct experiences with political everyday business due to your professional employment or other occupations? (Yes, regularly; yes, occasionally; no)'. An index variable was built by counting the values indicating experience and activity; this variable range from 0 (no experience) to 4 (much experience).

*Political awareness* is an additive index variable based on two items: political interest and frequency of political discussions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$), each of them being measured on a 4-point scale, and ranges from 1 (low level of political awareness) to 8 (high level of political awareness). The items political interest and frequency of discussions were used to build the political awareness variable because they are closely related to political knowledge (Cassel, 1984).

The following *socio-demographic variables* were included in the analysis as control variables: age (as an indicator of cumulative political experiences), gender (as an indicator of gender-specific aspects of socialization), education (as an indicator for educational influences), and political ideology (measured as left-right orientation on an 11-point scale, as an indicator for political preferences in general).

### 7.2.2. Participants and Procedure

The surveys were conducted as web surveys. Web surveys are commonly used not only in applied research but also in basic research. This study considers several measures in order to deal with potential weaknesses of web surveys, such as a low response rate, the skewed attributes of internet population, and the impersonal atmosphere (Evans & Mathur, 2005). The web survey design affects both the efficiency in which respondents complete a survey and the non-response rates (Couper, Traugott, & Lamis, 2001). Hence, the instrument must be simple to understand and easy to complete (Couper, 2000, p. 475). The surveys were conducted using "Limesurvey", an open source online survey application that enables custom preferred layout and design.[89] A progress indicator was used, because studies show that it might keep participants motivated to complete the survey (Couper, et al., 2001, p. 243f.). Other findings suggested that multiple-item screen versions took significantly less time to complete than single-item screens and result in fewer "don't know" answers (Couper, et al., 2001, p. 244f.). Therefore, this study used multiple-item screens. Moreover, the possibility to save preliminary answers and to continue with the survey at a later point in time was offered in order to facilitate the process for the participants.

89 This software is written in PHP (hypertext pre-processor).

The target population of this study are citizens from the German-speaking part of Switzerland who are at least 18 years old and hold voting rights. The subjects were recruited in collaboration with "smartvote", an online voting decision-making tool in Switzerland. An advertisement was placed in an e-mail newsletter that was sent to all users of "smartvote" in the German-speaking part of Switzerland on October 11, 2007. Subjects who were interested in taking part in a social science research project were asked to contact the author. In total 735 citizens sent an e-mail and expressed their interest in participating in the study. The recruitment procedure constructed what Cooper's typology would call a volunteer panel nonprobability Web survey (2000, p. 477ff.).

The series of surveys encompassed an initial survey, five surveys with news articles, and a final survey. For more information on the data collection procedure see also Section 6.2.2. After the data collection had been finished, the data set was prepared.[90] The *complete data set* includes participants who are younger than 18 years old and participants who do not hold Swiss citizenship. In the complete data set, the number of participants in the conflict group is 209, in the inefficiency group 207, and in the control group 172. From the complete data set, all cases that do not belong to the target population were deleted. The resulting *adjusted data set* does not include participants who are younger than 18 years old and participants who do not hold Swiss citizenship. However, subjects who did participate in the initial survey only and dropped out later on are part of the adjusted data set. In the adjusted data set, the number of participants in the conflict group is 205, in the inefficiency group 200, and in the control group 171. From the adjusted data set, all subjects who participated only in the initial survey were deleted. These 53 cases were not included in the *final data set* which contains 523 cases.

Most participants in this study's sample (n = 523) are male. More precisely, 67 percent of the subjects are men, and 29 percent are women. The rest did not indicate their gender. The average age is 43.5 years, but the sample shows a great range (SD = 15.37). One third of the subjects are 34 years old or younger, and one third are 50 years old or older. The participants in general show a high level of formal education: 52 percent have a college or university degree, and an additional 17 percent hold a university entrance qualification. Regarding the household income after tax, the income ranges from less than 1,000 CHF per month to more than 15,000 CHF per month.Most participants indicate a household income of 6,000 to 7,000 CHF; the average income is about 8,100 CHF.

In general, the participants are very interested in politics. More precisely, 56 percent say that they are very interested and 41 percent indicate that they are moder-

90 Limesurvey automatically generated a code for each subject so that they can be identified across the different surveys (initial survey, article surveys, and final survey). Based on this identification code, all surveys for the participants in the conflict treatment group were added together in SPSS with the add variables-command. The same procedure was done for the participants in the inefficiency group and the control group. The data sets were than added together with the add-cases command.

ately interested in politics. Likewise, 48 percent say that they often participate in discussions about political issues with family and friends, and 44 percent say that this is the case occasionally. The variables political interest and frequency of political discussions are highly correlated ($r = .516$, $p < .05$). The respondents are also rather experienced with political day-to-day business. One out of five participants indicates that he or she frequently has direct experiences with politics, and 41 percent say that this is the case occasionally. 16 percent of the respondents frequently and 46 percent occasionally have indirect experiences with politics through relatives or friends. The subjects in general are not only interested in politics and experienced with the political day-to-day business; some of them also actively participate in politics. About one out of five participants is an active party member, 27 percent are engaged in an interest group and 10 percent even hold a political mandate.

Moreover, the sample in general shows a high level of use of the media for political information. More precisely, for at least 15 minutes on an average day, 85 percent of respondents use the radio, 69 percent read a local paper, 79 percent read a national paper, 81 percent watch political information on television, and 79 percent use the internet. The use of tabloids and free papers is less intensive among the participants. Only 15 percent of the respondents read a tabloid and 56 percent read a free paper for at least 15 minutes on an average day. All subjects use at least one of the different types of political media information for at least 15 minutes a day.

### 7.2.3. Data Analysis

In order to investigate the media's impact on political support, structural equation modeling (SEM) is used as it allows modeling the presumed relationship between the measured independent, dependent, and mediating variables. Generally, the literature mentions several advantages of SEM compared to regression models, for instance. First, SEM provides more accurate effect estimates. More precisely, if several measures of a construct are gathered and relationships among latent variables are analyzed, then SEM will control for measurement errors[91] and analyze unattenuated relationships. Latent variables are variables that are not directly observed but inferred from other variables that are observed and measured (so-called manifest variables). The relationship between latent variables and their indicators is described in measurement models. The measurement models of this study are presented in Appendix 10.3. Hence, structural equation models have two parts, i.e. measurement parts and structural parts. Structural parts estimate the structural coefficients between the latent and/or manifest variables. Using latent variables, SEM permits us to study the influence of one error-free construct on another, eliminating potential bias due to attenuation. The model controls for measurement error by estimating the

91 The term measurement error refers to "the extent to which random error affects the measurement of a given variable" (Bedeian, Day, & Kelloway, 1997, p. 786).

"true" correlation between variables. These adjustments for measurement error provide results based on hypothetical rather than obtained data (Bedeian, et al., 1997, p. 794f.). In general, measurement errors are considered a serious threat to causal analysis, because they affect the explained variance of an independent variable (Bedeian, Day, & Kelloway, 1997).

Second, SEM allows us to analyze precise processes which may explain changes in the outcome variables (Russell, Kahn, & Altmaier, 1998). The effect mechanisms are investigated by integrating mediating variables into the model. The importance of considering indirect effects in media effects, as well as the usefulness of SEM for investigations of mediation models, is emphasized by several authors (Brandl, 2004; Holbert & Stephenson, 2002, 2003; Matthes, 2007b). Another advantage of SEM compared to regression models is that more than one independent variable can be used and the independent variables can be highly correlated. In order to be able to investigate the data in this study based on SEM, the data collection took requirements of SEM into consideration, e.g. the use of several measures of a construct in order to be able to conceptualize latent variables and the recruitment of enough participants to ensure that the sample size is large enough.

The SEM analyses used EQS version 6.1 software (Bentler, 2006). The data were tested for univariate and multivariate normal distribution and strong outliers were excluded from data analysis. Extreme violations (moderate ones are given in parentheses) on the assumption of the univariate distribution are associated with skew values of at least 3 (2) and kurtosis of at least 20 (7) (West, et al., 1995). These values were not reached with the original variables. Mean-centered variables[92], however, showed some violations of univariate normality. Yuan, Lambert and Fouladi (2004) developed an extension of the Mardia test of multivariate kurtosis (1970, 1974) that can be applied to data with missing values. The normalized estimate is interpretable as a standard normal variate; the hypothesis of multivariate normality must be rejected if it is outside the range of -3 to +3 (Bentler, 2006, p. 282f.). For models with mean-centered variables the variate was outside this range.[93] Hence, the distribution-free Satorra-Bentler estimation as an alternative to Maximum-Likelihood estimation was applied (cf. Bentler, 2006, p. 137ff.). This method uses the Maximum-Likelihood estimation, but corrects test statistics and the standard errors (Benteler, 2006, p. 136ff., 289). In addition, robust methods might correct for deviations from the missing-at-random assumption.

Missing values were treated using the maximum likelihood-method (ML-imputation algorithm), also known as full information maximum likelihood (cf. Bentler, 2006, p. 285ff.; Wothke, 2000).[94] The appropriateness of imputing missing

92 Mean-centered variables were used for the computation of latent interaction variables.

93 Nonnormality problems in the context of estimating latent interaction effects might occur (Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004; Schermelleh-Engel, Klein, & Moosbrugger, 1998).

94 The values for those participants who dropped out of the study were not imputed. Subjects who did not participate in the final survey or did not complete any of the article surveys were excluded from the final data set that is the basis for the data analysis, because for them no

values depends on the characteristics of the missing data patterns. However, the ML-imputation algorithm does not necessitate that data are missing completely at random (MCAR: missingness depends on observed values in the data set); it can also be used with data missing at random, a weaker kind of mechanism (MAR: missingness depends on unobserved values) (Benteler, 2006, p. 276). As there is no statistical test whether this assumption holds for a given set of data, researchers are asked to carefully analyze the missing data patterns. In addition, using robust methods might correct for deviations from the MAR assumption. Because the analysis is based on imputed data, I generally applied the distribution-free Satorra-Bentler estimation as an alternative to Maximum-Likelihood estimation.

As regards the investigation of the assumed moderator effect, some studies use the arithmetic difference between preferences and perceptions (Kimball & Patterson, 1997), an approach that is consistent with the proximity model of candidate evaluation (Grynaviski & Corrigan, 2006). In proximity models of candidate evaluation, proximity scores indicate how close an individual's stand is to the stand of candidates, mostly with respect to policy issue positions. Other studies base their data analysis on comparisons between groups of people with congruent and incongruent preference-perception relationships (S. C. Patterson, et al., 1969). Another possibility would be to build the product of perceptions and preferences. Such an approach is suggested by the expectancy value model (Doll & Ajzen, 2008). To test whether process preferences would moderate the relationship between process perceptions and political support using SEM, I followed the latent interaction approach of an unconstrained model suggested by Marsh et al. (2004). Because process preferences were measured continuously, this approach appeared to be more applicable than a multigroup comparison based on arbitrary cut-off values. Marsh et al. (Marsh, et al., 2004) proposed testing for latent interactions by multiplying mean-centred indicators of predictor and moderator and specifying these products as indicators of the latent interaction factor. As suggested by Marsh et al. (2004), I estimated the latent interaction models with a mean structure incorporated.

To evaluate the model fit, the following criteria were evaluated: the Chi-Square value divided by the number of degrees of freedom (< 3), the comparative fit index (CFI > .90), the Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < .06) with its 90% confidence interval (CI, lower bound < .05, upper bound < .10) (cf. Kline, 2005, p. 133ff.).

measurement of either the treatment perception or the mediating and dependent variable exists. Moreover, no systematic effects of attrition are assumed, because those who dropped out of the study after the initial survey do not differ from those who further participated in the study.

*7.3. Results*

This section investigates the relationship between routine media use and political support. The correlations between variables measuring media use, process perceptions, process preferences and political support are displayed in Table 7.1. The perceptions of political processes were significantly associated with political support in a way that both the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and the perception of political processes as efficient are linked with higher levels of political support. Moreover, process preferences were significantly related to political support. Whereas high levels of consensus preferences are associated with high levels of political support, high levels of efficiency preferences are related to low levels of political support. Television use is significantly related to efficiency perception and efficiency preference. A high intensity of television use is associated with the perception of political processes as less efficient. A high intensity of television use is linked to stronger preferences regarding the efficiency of decision-making processes. There is no significant relationship between newspaper use and process perceptions or political support.

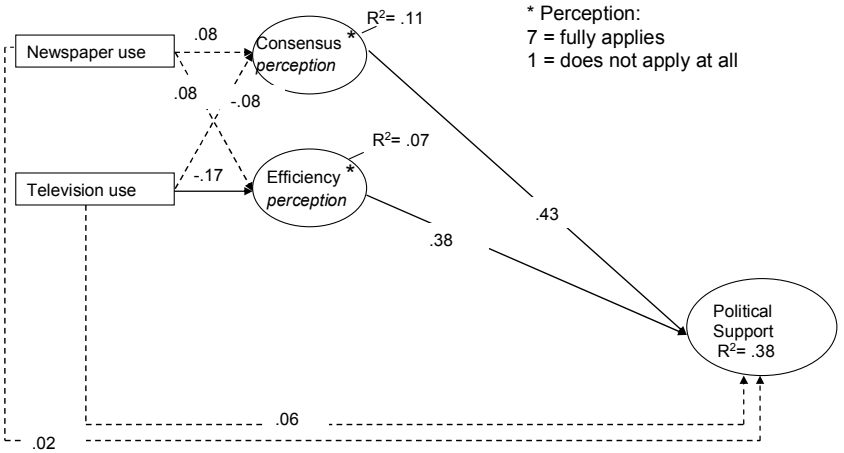
A variety of structural equation models were analyzed in order to test the assumptions formulated in Section 7.3.1. The analyses presented here are based on the sample of participants in the two treatment groups (n = 366).[95] Socio-demographic control variables (gender, age, education, political experience, and political ideology) were included in all of these models. In the interest of clarity, they are not displayed in the figures, however. Disturbances and error terms are omitted from the figures for clarity as well. Besides manifest variables (i.e. newspaper use, television use and exposure to stimulus articles) there are latent variables included in the models which are measured by several indicators in order to correct for measurement errors. The according measurement models are described in Appendix 10.3. In the figures, manifest variables are presented in squares and latent variables are presented in circles. Section 7.3.1 presents analyses of the role of routine media use as a predictor of political support. More precisely, the assumption that respondents' process perceptions mediate the impact of media use on political support is investigated. In addition, the media's impact on preferences regarding political decision-making processes and the discrepancy between preferences and perceptions is investigated (Section 7.3.2). In Section 7.3.3, the role of process preferences as a moderator of the impact of media on political support is analyzed. Section 7.3.4 presents

95 Because no measurement of respondents' article impressions exists for the participants in the control group, models that include the article impression variables are based on the sample of participants in the two treatment groups. In order to facilitate comparisons between the models, not only the models including the impression variables but also all other models are based on the sample of participants in the two treatment groups. Comparisons of results for models which are based on the sample with participants in the treatment groups (n = 366) with results for the same models based on the total sample (n = 523) show that the results differ only marginally (some path estimates differ slightly in the second digit after the decimal point).

findings concerning the moderating impact of chronic accessibility. In Section 7.3.5, the joint impact of situational exposure to media articles and long-term media use is explored.

### 7.3.1. The Impact of Television Use on Process Perceptions and Political Support

The following model tests the assumption that subjects' perceptions of the consensus-orientation of political processes and their perception of the efficiency of political processes mediate the impact of television use on political support (see Figure 7.2). Newspaper use and television use were specified as predictors of consensus perception, efficiency perception and political support. In addition, consensus perception and efficiency perception were specified as predictors of political support. The variables television use and newspaper use were allowed to correlate. Television use predicted the efficiency perception of political processes significantly ($\beta$ = -0.17, $p < .05$), supporting H2. The more intensively television is used for political information, the less are political processes perceived as efficient. In contrast, neither television nor newspaper use had a significant effect on consensus perception. Thus, H1 is not supported. The consensus perception, however, was a strong significant predictor of political support ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < .05$). Political support was also significantly affected by efficiency perception ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .05$). The less efficient or consensus-oriented political processes are perceived to be, the lower is the level of political support. Thus, H3 and H4 were supported. The support for H2 and H4 indicates possible indirect effects of television use on political support via the perception of political processes as inefficient. The indirect effect of television use on political support via efficiency perception was $\beta = -0.06$ and was statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 2.20, $p < .05$. Thus, television use had an indirect impact on political support by shaping the efficiency perception of political processes. In addition, the model shows significant effects of gender ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta$ = -0.16, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta$ = -0.20, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes. There is also a significant effect of gender ($\beta$ = -0.17, $p < .05$) on political support. This indicates that men, highly educated persons and persons of a younger age are more likely to perceive political processes as consensus-oriented than women, persons with lower levels of formal education and persons of older age. Persons of a younger age also are more likely to perceive political processes as efficient than persons of older age. And women are more likely to have high levels of political support than men. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .94, RMSEA =.05 (90% CI = .04, .06), Chi-Square = 352.40, df = 167.




Note. Shown are standardized path coefficients. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. Chi-Square (df=167, N 354) =352.40, Comparative fit index is .94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .05 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .06.

*Figure 7.2. The Impact of Media Use on Process Perceptions and Political Support*

In order to provide answers to the fist research question on potential differences in predicting political support for the government, support for the parliament, support for political actors, and support for democracy, the model presented in Figure 7.2 was tested separately for the specific objects of evaluation (government, parliament, political actors, and democracy). More precisely, in each model, newspaper use and television use were specified as predictors of consensus perception, efficiency perception and support for the precise object of evaluation. In addition, consensus perception and efficiency perception were specified as predictors of support for the precise object of evaluation. The variables television use and newspaper use were allowed to correlate. The results are presented in Table 7.2. In general, the results show that intensive use of political information on television is associated with a decrease of respondents' perception that political processes are efficient. The perception of political processes, in turn, is related with support for the different objects of evaluation in the sense that the perception of political processes as not efficient and/or the perception of political processes as not consensus-oriented are linked to lower levels of political support. As regards differences in the predictive power, the findings suggest that the specified predictors have the largest predictive power with regard to support for politicians ($r^2 = .35$), and the least predictive power with regard to support for the government ($r^2 = .17$). Looking at the impact of the distinct predictors on the different attitudes of political support, the results indicate that there is a significant impact of consensus perception on support for the parliament, support for politicians, and support for democracy. However, there was no significant effect of consensus perceptions on support for the government. And an-

other difference is noteworthy: The efficiency perception exerts a strong influence on support for the government. With regard to support for politicians and support for democracy, however, the impact of the consensus perception on support is stronger than the influence of efficiency perception. The impact of the socio-demographic control variables on the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and efficient is similar to previously reported findings (see Section 6.5.1).[96] There are, however, differences as regards the control variables' impact on support for the different objects of evaluation. In line with previously reported findings (see Section 6.5.1), gender was a significant predictor of support for the parliament ($\beta$ = -0.19, $p < .05$), support for politicians ($\beta$ = -0.13, $p < .05$) and support for democracy ($\beta$ = -0.10, $p < .05$). Support for the government, however, was significantly affected by political ideology ($\beta$ = -0.23, $p < .05$). This result indicates that the more a person is oriented towards the political right, the lower is this person's support for the government. The model fit for the model predicting support for the government was satisfactory, with CFI = .97, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .02, .06), Chi-Square = 90.46, df = 53. The model fit for the model predicting support for the parliament was satisfactory, with CFI = .98, RMSEA =.03 (90% CI = .00, .05), Chi-Square = 74.03, df = 52. The model fit for the model predicting support for politicians was satisfactory, with CFI = .98, RMSEA =.03 (90% CI = .00, .05), Chi-Square = 92.65, df = 66. The model fit for the model predicting support for democracy was satisfactory, with CFI = .96, RMSEA =.05 (90% CI = .03, .06), Chi-Square = 95.79, df = 52.

96 As for the model estimating support for the government, there was a significant effect of gender ($\beta$ = 0.19, $p < .05$), education ($\beta$ = 0.21, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta$ = -0.14, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta$ = -0.22, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes. As for the model estimating support for the parliament, there was a significant effect of gender ($\beta$ = 0.18, $p < .05$), education ($\beta$ = 0.19, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta$ = -0.16, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta$ = -0.22, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes. As for the model estimating support politicians, there was a significant effect of gender ($\beta$ = 0.17, $p < .05$), education ($\beta$ = 0.20, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta$ = -0.15, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta$ = -0.23, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes. As for the model estimating support for democracy, there was a significant effect of gender ($\beta$ = 0.19, $p < .05$), education ($\beta$ = 0. 91, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta$ = -0.15, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta$= -0.21, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes.

| Parameter | Estimate | | Parameter | Estimate | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support for the government ($r^2$= .17) | n=361 | | Support for politicians ($r^2$= .35) | n=360 | |
| Newspaper Use → Consensus perception | 0.07 | | Newspaper Use → Consensus perception | 0.06 | |
| Newspaper Use → Efficiency perception | 0.05 | | Newspaper Use → Efficiency perception | 0.08 | |
| Television Use → Consensus perception | -0.08 | | Television Use → Consensus perception | -0.08 | |
| Television Use→ Efficiency perception | -0.17 | * | Television Use→ Efficiency perception | -0.15 | * |
| Consensus perception → Support | 0.10 | | Consensus perception → Support | 0.45 | * |
| Efficiency perception → Support | 0.27 | * | Efficiency perception → Support | 0.33 | * |
| Support for the parliament ($r^2$= .26) | n=362 | | Support for democracy ($r^2$= .30) | n=361 | |
| Newspaper Use → Consensus perception | 0.10 | | Press Use → Consensus perception | 0.11 | |
| Newspaper Use→ Efficiency perception | 0.04 | | PressUse → Efficiency perception | 0.05 | |
| Television Use → Consensus perception | -0.07 | | Television Use → Consensus perception | -0.08 | |
| Television Use → Efficiency perception | -0.18 | * | Television Use → Efficiency perception | -0.17 | * |
| Consensus perception → Support | 0.29 | * | Consensus perception → Support | 0.42 | * |
| Efficiency perception → Support | 0.30 | * | Efficiency perception → Support | 0.27 | * |

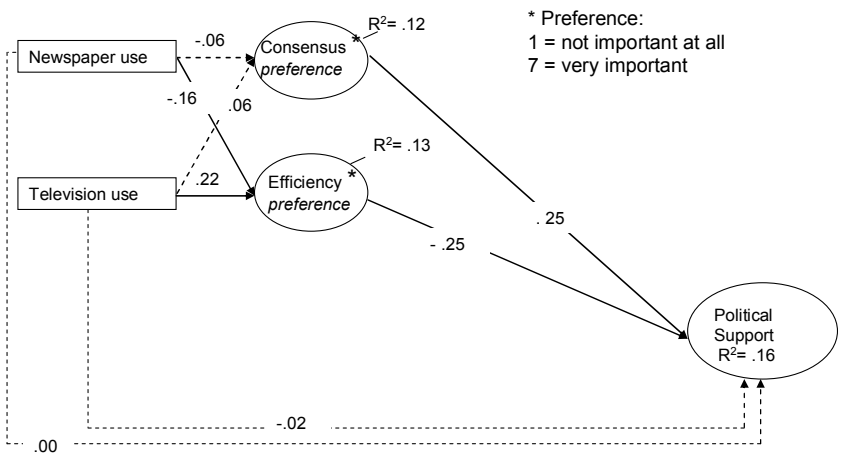
Note. * indicates that path estimates are statistically significant at .05 or above.

*Table 7.2. Predicting Support for Different Objects of Evaluation*

### 7.3.2. The Impact of Television Use on Process Preferences and Political Support

To provide answers with regard to the second research question, referring to the impact of media use on citizens' process preferences and the effect of process preferences on political support, a model was tested that includes process preferences as a mediator of the effect of routine media use on political support (see Figure 7.3). Newspaper use and television use were specified as predictors of consensus preference, efficiency preference and political support. In addition, consensus preference and efficiency preference were specified as predictors of political support. The variables television use and newspaper use were allowed to correlate. Both newspaper use ($\beta$ = -0.16, $p < .05$) and television use ($\beta$ = 0.22, $p < .05$) significantly predicted preference regarding the efficiency of political processes. The more intensively newspapers are used for political information, the less strong are preferences as regards the efficiency of political processes. In contrast, the more intensively television is used for political information, the stronger are preferences as regards the efficiency of political processes. In contrast, neither television use nor newspaper use had a significant effect on consensus preferences. Consensus preferences, however, were a strong significant predictor of political support ($\beta$ = 0.25, $p < .05$). Political support was also significantly affected by efficiency preferences ($\beta$ = -0.25, $p < .05$). Whereas there is a positive relationship between consensus preferences and political support, indicating that the stronger the consensus preferences, the higher is the level of political support, the relationship between efficiency preferences and political support is negative. This indicates that the stronger the efficiency preferences, the lower is the level of political support. In addition, the model shows significant effects of political ideology ($\beta$ = -0.24, $p < .05$), political experience ($\beta$ =

-0.14, p < .05) and age (β = 0.26, p < .05) on preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes and significant effects of gender (β = 0.14, p < .05) and age (β = 0.22, p < .05) on preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes. There is also a significant effect of age (β = -0.22, p < .05) on political support. This indicates that for political left oriented persons, people with less political experience and persons of an older age, there is a greater probability of having strong consensus preferences than for political right oriented persons, people with intensive political experience and persons of a younger age. Persons of an older age and men are also more likely to prefer efficient processes than persons of a younger age and women. And the older a person is, the lower are the levels of political support. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .93, RMSEA =.05 (90% CI = .04, .06), Chi-Square = 360.66, df = 167.




Note. Shown are standardized path coefficients. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. Chi-Square (df=167, N 356) =360.66, Comparative fit index is .93, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .05 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .06.

*Figure 7.3. The Impact of Media Use on Process Preferences and Political Support*

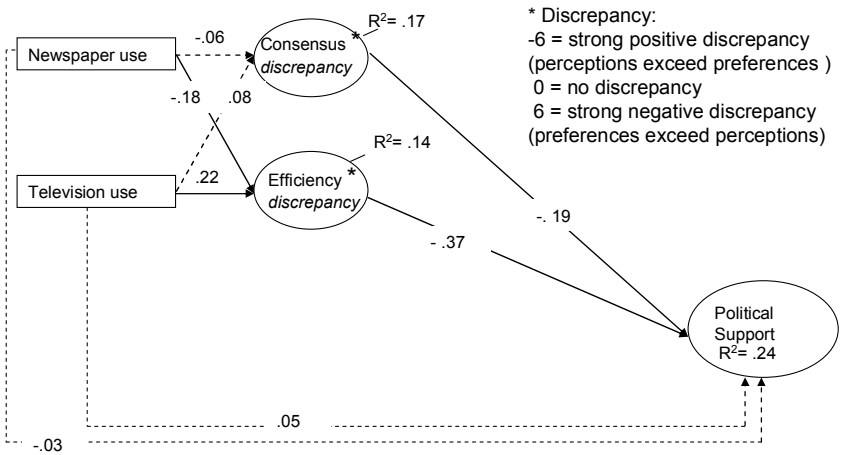
The results suggest possible indirect effects of newspaper use and television use on support via their impact on efficiency preferences. The indirect effect of newspaper use on political support via efficiency preference was β = 0.04 and was not statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 1.92, p > .05. The indirect effect of television use on political support via efficiency preference was β = -0.05 and was statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 2.44, p < .05. Thus, television use decreased political support by shaping citizens' efficiency preferences regarding political processes.

The previous findings indicate that television use may enhance the importance of efficient processes and at the same raise the impression that political processes are

inefficient. Thus, it seems warranted to suggest that television use may increase the discrepancy between respondents' efficiency preferences and the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency. In order to probe this assumption, a model was tested that specifies the discrepancy between consensus preferences and consensus perceptions (consensus discrepancy) and the discrepancy between efficiency preferences and efficiency perceptions (efficiency discrepancy) as variables that mediate the impact of media use on political support (see Figure 7.4). Discrepancy items were computed by subtracting the preferences items from the respective perceptions items (with reversed coded scales so that low scores indicate that a certain aspect of political processes fully applies to reality). The latent factors consensus discrepancy and efficiency are modeled similar to the perceptions and preferences factors[97] (for more information on the measurement models see Appendix 10.3, for more information on the computation of discrepancy items see Section 6.3.3). Newspaper use and television use were specified as predictors of consensus discrepancy, efficiency discrepancy and political support. In addition, consensus discrepancy and efficiency discrepancy were specified as predictors of political support. The variables television use and newspaper use were allowed to correlate. Both newspaper use ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$) and television use ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .05$) predicted the efficiency discrepancy significantly. The more intensively newspapers are used for political information, the smaller is the efficiency discrepancy. In contrast, the more intensively television is used for political information, the greater is the efficiency discrepancy. In contrast, neither television use nor newspaper use had a significant effect on consensus discrepancy. Consensus discrepancy however, was a strong significant predictor of political support ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < .05$). Political support was also significantly affected by efficiency discrepancy ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < .05$). The stronger the consensus or the efficiency discrepancies are (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions), the lower is the level of political support. In addition, the model shows significant effects of gender ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < .05$), political ideology ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$), political experiences ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .05$) on the magnitude of the discrepancy between consensus preferences and consensus perceptions. There is also a significant effect of age ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .05$) on the magnitude of the discrepancy between efficiency preferences. This indicates that for women, people with lower levels of formal education, political left oriented people, persons with lower levels of political experience and persons of an older age there is a greater probability of having a large negative discrepancy between consensus preferences and consensus perceptions (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions) than men, people with higher levels of formal education, political right oriented people, persons with higher levels of political experience and persons of a younger age. And the older a person is, the larger is the

97 The consensus discrepancy factor encompasses the following discrepancy items: consider diverging interests, concede a point to the other side and the role of compromises. The efficiency discrepancy factor encompasses the following discrepancy items: fast decision-making, simple and short processes, avoid delays.

negative discrepancy between efficiency preferences and efficiency perceptions. The model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .94, RMSEA =.06 (90% CI = .04, .06), Chi-Square = 337.38, df = 167.




Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. Chi-Square (df=167, N 356) =337.38, Comparative fit index is .94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .05 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .06.

*Figure 7.4. The Impact of Media Use on Discrepancies and Support*

The results suggest possible indirect effects of newspaper use and television use on support via their impact on efficiency discrepancy. The indirect effect of newspaper use on political support via efficiency discrepancy was $\beta = 0.07$ and was statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 2.43, $p < .05$. The indirect effect of television use on political support via efficiency discrepancy was $\beta = -0.08$ and was statistically significant as indicated by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), $Z_{Sobel}$: 3.07, $p < .05$. The results suggest that media use has an indirect impact on political support by shaping citizens' efficiency discrepancies. Whereas the indirect effect of newspaper use on political support was positive, indicating that higher levels of newspaper use are associated with higher levels of political support, the indirect effect of television use on political support was negative, indicating that higher levels of television use are associated with lower levels of political support.

### 7.3.3. The Role of Process Preferences as Moderator of Effects on Political Support

One important objective of the present study is to explore the conditions under which media information about political processes affects political support. This study makes the argument that the impact of media-shaped perceptions of political processes on political support is particularly strong for subjects for whom related aspects of decision-making procedures are important. A variety of structural equation models were analyzed in order to test this assumption. In all of these models, socio-demographic control variables (gender, age, education, political experience, and political ideology) were included. They are not displayed in the figures in the interest of clarity.

Drawing on discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), this study assumes that process preferences moderate the relationship between process perceptions and political support. More precisely, it is hypothesized that the perception of political processes in terms of their consensus-orientation affects support particularly for those individuals who hold strong preferences as regards the consensus-orientation of political processes (H3a). Likewise, it is proposed that the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency affects support particularly for those individuals who hold strong preferences as regards the efficiency of political processes (H4a). Because process preferences were measured continuously, I refrained from a multigroup comparison based on arbitrary cut-off values. Instead I specified a latent interaction model to test the hypotheses (Marsh et al., 2004). For the two process perceptions-preferences interaction factors (efficiency interaction and consensus interaction) there were three perception items and three preferences items each. I generated three indicators for each of the two latent interactions by multiplying items with similar factor loadings on latent predictor and moderator variables with each other (Marsh, et al., 2004). In order to build the discrepancy variables, the perception variables were recoded so that high scores indicate that the according aspects are perceived to not apply to decision-making processes in Switzerland. High scores on the preference variables indicate that according aspects of decision-making processes are important to the respondent. High scores on the interaction variables, then, indicate a large negative discrepancy between process perceptions and process preferences (negative discrepancy = aspects are important but do not apply to reality). Process perceptions (with reversed scale, mean-centred indicators), process preferences (with mean-centred indicators) and the latent interaction thereof were specified as predictors of political support. All predictors were allowed to correlate. The model showed a significant effect of consensus perception on support ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < .05$), a significant effect of efficiency perception on support ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .05$), a significant effect of consensus preference on support ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .05$), a significant effect of the latent interaction between consensus perception and consensus preference on support ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < .05$), and a significant effect of the latent interaction between efficiency perception and efficiency preference on support ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .05$). There was also a significant effect of age on political support ($\beta = -0.14$, $p <$

.05). Model fit was satisfactory with CFI = .93, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .03, .04), Chi-Square = 674.42, df = 431.

The significant effects of both the consensus preference - consensus perception interaction and the efficiency preference - efficiency perception interaction support the assumption that the relationship between process preferences and perceptions predicts political support. When interpreting interaction effects, one has to bear in mind that "the inclusion of a multiplicative term converts a general statement of relationship into a conditional statement of relationship" (Friedrich, 1982, p. 804). It therefore makes sense to evaluate the conditional relationship between process perceptions and political support within the observed range of process preferences (cf. Friedrich, 1982; Ping, 2003), in order to test whether stronger effects of the perception-preference relationship on political support are associated with a larger preferences-perceptions magnitude (i.e. strong preferences regarding certain aspects of political processes on the one hand and the perception that these aspects do not apply to reality on the other hand). Since consensus preferences range from -4.9 to 1.1, the relationship between consensus perception and political support varies, over the observed range of consensus preference, from 3.28 to -1.20 (see Table 7.3). Similarly, since efficiency preferences range from -3.3 to 2.7, the relationship between efficiency perception and political support varies, over the observed range of efficiency preference, from -0.03 to -0.89. The negative impact of consensus perceptions on political support increases with increasing levels of consensus preferences. Hence the results indicate that the more an individual values the consensus-orientation of political processes, the stronger a negative perception of political processes in terms of their consensus-orientation contributes to a decrease of political support. Interestingly, for subjects with consensus preferences below the mean, negative perceptions of the consensus-orientation of political processes are related to an increase in support. The negative impact of efficiency perceptions on political support increases with increasing levels of efficiency preferences. Hence the results indicate that the more an individual values the efficiency of political processes, the stronger a negative perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency contributes to a decrease of political support. Thus, H1a and H2a are supported.

| Level X[a] | | Coefficient Z[b] | Level X[a] | | Coefficient Z[b] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Consensus preference | | Consensus perception | Efficiency preference | | Efficiency perception |
| high | 1.1 | -1.20 | high | 2.7 | -0.89 |
| | 0.5 | -0.75 | | 2 | -0.79 |
| mean | 0 | -0.38 | | 1 | -0.65 |
| | -1 | 0.37 | mean | 0 | -0.50 |
| | -2 | 1.11 | | -1 | -0.36 |
| | -3 | 1.86 | | -2 | -0.22 |
| | -4 | 2.60 | | -3 | -0.07 |
| low | -4.9 | 3.28 | low | -3.3 | -0.03 |

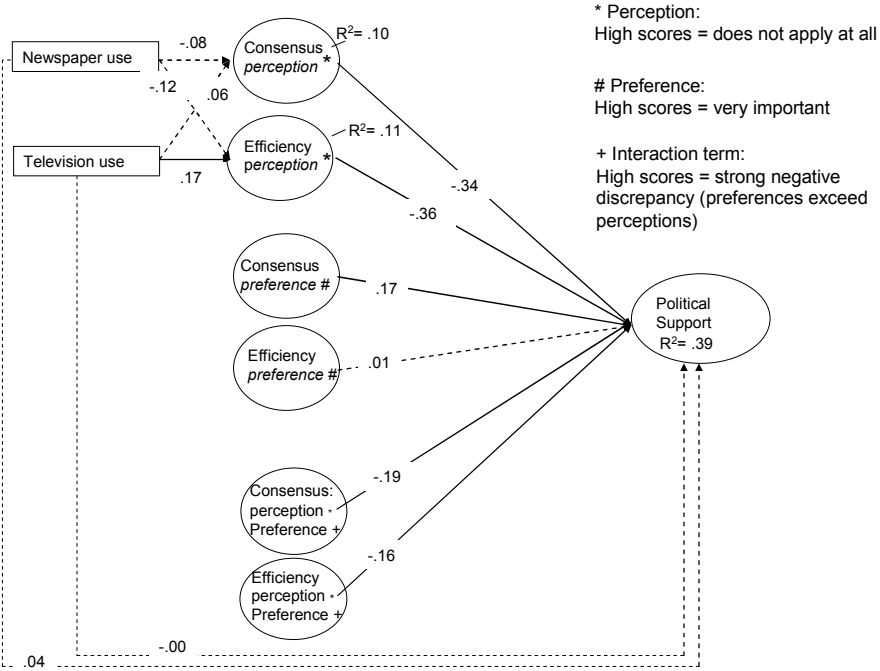
a As suggested by Ping (2003), the level X of consensus preference is determined by the observed variable (indicator) with the loading of 1 on the consensus preference factor. This indicator ranged from -4.9 (= low) to1.1 (=high) in the study.

b Shown are the unstandardized coefficients. The coefficient of Z was (.-0.380-.0.746X)Z. For example, when X = 1.1 the coefficient of Z was -0.380-0.746*(1.1) = -1.20

*Table 7.3. Perception-Support Relation Moderated by Preferences*

In order to examine whether the indirect effect of television use on support via efficiency perceptions varies systematically as a function of efficiency preferences (H6), the mediation model in Figure 7.4 was tested with interaction effects between process perceptions and process preferences included. The so-called moderated mediation model (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) is shown in Figure 7.5. Process perceptions (with reversed scale, mean-centred indicators), process preferences (with mean-centred indicators) and the latent interaction thereof were specified as predictors of political support. Television use and newspaper use were specified as predictors of consensus perception and efficiency perception. The model showed a significant effect of television use on the efficiency perception of political processes ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$). Efficiency perception, in turn significantly affects political support ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < .05$). The effect of the latent interaction between efficiency perception and efficiency preference on support was significant ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < .05$). Because there is no effect of television use on consensus perception of political processes, H5 assuming moderated indirect effects of television use on political support via consensus perceptions is not supported. In line with previously reported findings (see Section 6.5.1), the model shows significant effects of gender ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes.[98] There is also a significant effect of gender ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$) on political support. Model fit was satisfactory with CFI = .90, RMSEA =.04 (90% CI = .04, .05), Chi-Square = 867.78, df = 481.

98 Differences in the signs of coefficients are caused by the reversed recoding of process perceptions in models that include interaction effects.




Note. Shown are standardized path coefficients. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. Chi-Square (df=481, N 346) =867.78, Comparative fit index is .90, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .04 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .05.

*Figure 7.5. Differential Effects on Political Support Depending on Process Preferences*

The finding of a significant effect of the interaction between efficiency preference and efficiency perceptions on political support does not necessarily warrant the suggestion that the indirect impact of television use on political support via the perception of political processes as inefficient is moderated by efficiency preferences. In order to test this assumption, the conditional relationship between television use and political support via efficiency perceptions can be evaluated within the observed range of process preferences (cf. Friedrich, 1982; Ping, 2003). Since efficiency preferences range from -3.3 to 2.7, the indirect relationship between television use and political support via efficiency perception varies, over the observed range of efficiency preference, from -0.01 to -0.14 (see Table 7.4). The results show that the negative effects of television use on political support via efficiency perceptions increased with increasing levels of efficiency preferences. Hence the findings suggest that the impact of television use on political support via its influence on the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency is particularly strong for individuals for whom efficient decision-making procedures are important. Thus, the assumption of moderated mediation formulated in H2b is supported.

| Level U[a] Efficiency preference | | Coefficient Z[b] Efficiency perception | Coefficient TV use on support X[c] mediated by efficiency perception |
|---|---|---|---|
| high | 2.7 | -1.01 | -0.14 |
| | 2 | -0.90 | -0.13 |
| | 1 | -0.75 | -0.11 |
| mean | 0 | -0.60 | -0.08 |
| | -1 | -0.45 | -0.06 |
| | -2 | -0.29 | -0.04 |
| | -3 | -0.14 | -0.02 |
| low | -3.3 | -0.10 | -0.01 |

a As suggested by Ping (2003), the level U of efficiency preference is determined by the observed variable (indicator) with the loading of 1 on the efficiency preference factor. This indicator ranged from -3.3 (= low) to 2.7 (=high) in the study.

b Shown are the unstandardized coefficients. The coefficient of Z was (-0.598-0.152U)Z. For example, when U = 2.7 the coefficient of Z was -0.578-0.152*(2.7) = -1.01.

c From path analysis (see Wright 1934), the (unstandardized or standardized) structural coefficient of X's association with Y via or mediated by Z is the product of the (unstandardized or standardized) structural coefficient on the X-Z path, c, with the (unstandardized or standardized) moderated structural coefficient on the Z-Y path, (-0.598-0.152U), which equals 0.14*(-0.598-0.152U). For example, when U = 2.7 the coefficient of X was 0.14*(-0.598-0.152*(2.7)) = -0.14.

*Table 7.4. Television-Support Relation Moderated by Preferences*

### 7.3.4. Chronical Accessibility as Moderator

With respect to the role of political awareness, for subjects high in the magnitude of the discrepancy between process preferences and process perceptions, the effects of the preferences-perceptions relationship on political support are hypothesized to be stronger for people with high levels of political awareness compared to people with low levels of political awareness (H7). In order to test this assumption, a model was investigated that tests whether the moderating effect of preferences was different for individuals with high levels of political awareness compared to individuals with low levels of political awareness. Therefore, in a first step, those participants who show either a discrepancy between consensus preferences and consensus perceptions (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions) or a discrepancy between efficiency preferences and efficiency perceptions (in the sense that preferences exceed perceptions) were selected. Those participants who show values > 0 on either one of the two discrepancy factors[99] were included in the analysis (n = 227). In a second step, groups were built based on a median split of the political awareness variable (MD = 7). All subjects with political awareness values < 7 were put in the low awareness

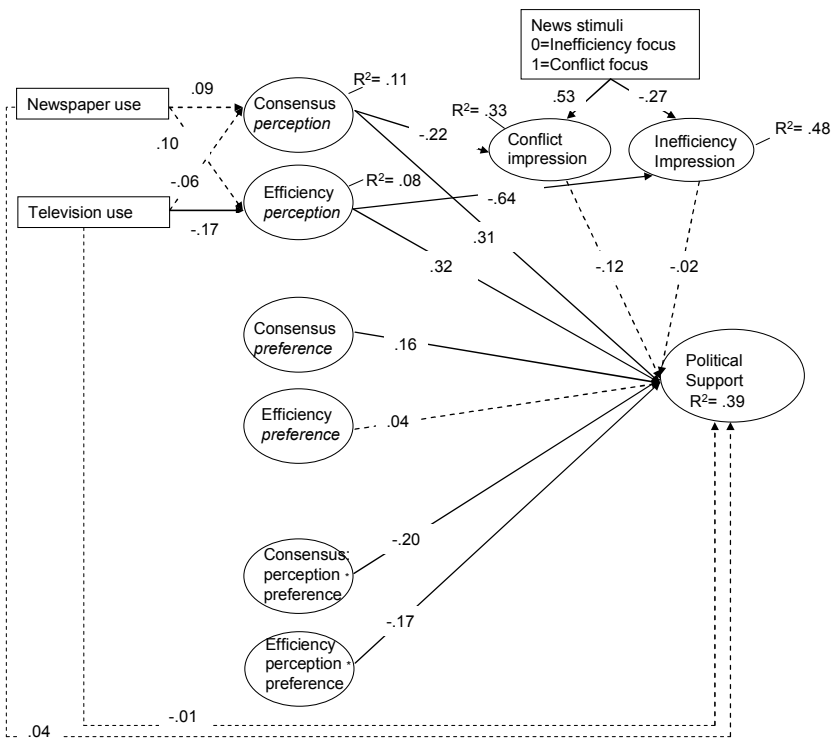
99 The discrepancy items were subjected to factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation. The formation of the discrepancy factors is described in Section 6.3.3.

group (n = 96), and all subjects with vales > 7 were put in the high awareness group (n = 71). The first model on latent interaction effects described in Section 7.3.3 was tested in a group comparison for the low awareness and high awareness group. The group comparison model was estimated by constraining the paths, the factor loadings, and the covariances to be equal for the two groups. This constrained model resulted in a model whit satisfactory fit with CFI = .89, RMSEA =.05 (90% CI = .04, .06), Chi-Square = 1114.05, df = 886. In order to test whether the impact of the interaction terms is stronger for the participants in the high awareness group than for participants in the low awareness group, it was tested whether this fit could be improved significantly by releasing equality constraints on the paths from the latent interaction between consensus perception and consensus preference on political support and constraints from the latent interaction between efficiency perception and efficiency preference on political support. In each case, when one of the two constraints was released, there was no statistically significant reduction in Chi-Square (Chi-Square difference =.13, df = 1, p = .72 with $\beta$ = -0.21, p = .06, for political aware and $\beta$ = -0.08, p = .54 for unaware for the interaction between consensus perception and consensus preference; Chi-Square-difference = 1.04, df = 1, p = .31 with $\beta$ = 0.01, p = .54, for political aware and $\beta$ = -0.14, p = .28 for unaware for the interaction between efficiency perception and efficiency preference). This indicates that the assumption that the relationship between perceptions and preferences affects political support particularly for individuals in the high political awareness group compared to individuals in the low awareness group does not hold. Thus, H7 is not supported.

### 7.3.5. The Joint Impact of Media Use and Situational Exposure

Because the experimental study described in Chapter 6 is embedded in a series of surveys, there is the opportunity to investigate the joint impact of long-term effects of media use and exposure to stimulus articles on process perceptions and political support. Therefore, subjects' article impressions (inefficiency impression and conflict impression) were added to the model presented in Figure 7.5. Newspaper use and television use were specified as predictors of consensus perception, efficiency perception and political support. In line with findings in Chapter 6, consensus perception and efficiency perception were specified as predictors of article conflict impression, article inefficiency impression, and political support. Exposure to the stimulus articles (0 = exposure to inefficiency-focused articles, 1 = exposure to conflict-focused articles) was specified as a predictor of the articles' conflict impression and the articles' inefficiency impression. The article impression variables, in turn, were specified as predictors of political support. The variables television use and newspaper use were allowed to correlate (see Figure 7.6). In line with the assumptions, both article conflict impression ($\beta$ = -0.24, p < .05) and article inefficiency impression ($\beta$ = -0.66, p < .05) were affected by subjects' general perception of political processes. The less consensus-oriented political processes are perceived to

be, the more the respondents agreed with the statement that the articles raise the impression that political processes are conflict-oriented. The less efficient political processes are perceived to be, the more the respondents agreed with the statement that the articles raise the impression political processes are inefficient. The conflict impressions that subjects gained from the experimental news articles was moderately related to political support ($\beta$ = -0.15, $p < .05$), and there was no significant effect for the inefficiency impression on political support. In line with previously reported findings, the model shows significant effects of gender ($\beta$ = 0.16, $p < .05$), education ($\beta$ = 0.21, $p < .05$) and age ($\beta$ = -0.17, $p < .05$) on the consensus perception of political processes and a significant effect of age ($\beta$ = -0.17, $p < .05$) on the efficiency perception of political processes. There is also a significant effect of gender ($\beta$ = -0.13, $p < .05$) on political support. Model fit was satisfactory, with CFI = .93, RMSEA =.05 (90% CI = .04, .05), Chi-Square = 518.87, df = 277.




Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above. Dashed lines indicate insignificant paths. Chi-Square (df=671, N 346) =1033.90, Comparative fit index is .90, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .04 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .05.

*Figure 7.6. The Joint Impact of Media Use and Stimulus Articles on Support*

In general, then, the findings indicate that the general perception of political processes influences the impression that people gain from the news articles. An alternative version of this model with paths from conflict impression on conflict perception and paths from inefficiency impression on efficiency perception, however, results in a model with equivalent fit (see also Section 6.3.2). This suggests that the relationship between article impressions and process preferences might be reciprocal. The inclusion of article impressions into the model did not enhance the amount of explained variance of political support ($r^2$ = .38 for the model without impression factors, $r^2$ = .39 for the model with impression factors), however. Thus, the results suggest that there is no independent effect of article impressions on political support above and beyond the impact of process perceptions.

### *7.4. Summary and Discussion*

This section presented results from analyses of the relationship between routine media use and political support. The analyses focused on the mechanisms by which media information affects citizens' political support. In line with the assumption that media use influences political support indirectly by shaping the perception of political decision-making processes, results showed that television use has a significant effect on political support via its impact on the efficiency perception of political processes. More precisely, the findings indicate that high levels of television use are associated with the perception of political processes as inefficient. The more a person perceives political processes as inefficient, the lower are this person's levels of political support. The effect of television use on the perception of political processes as conflict-oriented was insignificant, however. As expected, there was no significant impact of newspaper use on the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented and no significant impact of newspaper use on the perception of political processes as inefficient. Hence there was also no indirect effect of newspaper use on political support. Television's impact on political attitudes may be stronger than the impact of newspapers, because television information is subject to dual information coding (audio information and visual information). In line with this assumption, other studies provide evidence for the assumption that dual-coding enhances media effects (Druckman, 2003; Van der Model & Van der Voort, 2000).

Against the background of findings from the content analysis, the lack of effects of television use on consensus perception is rather surprising. Results from the content analysis showed that television newscasts frequently contained references to political accusations and discord, particularly when presenting decision-making processes within the parliament. So why did television's strong focus on political accusations not affect the respondents' consensus perceptions? One explanation is suggested by findings reported earlier (Section 6.4.2), which show that exposure to the conflict-oriented stimulus articles may not only raise the impression that political

processes are conflict-oriented but might also foster the impression that political processes are inefficient.[100] These findings warrant the assumption that the conflict-oriented news coverage in television might have contributed to the audience's perception that political processes are inefficient. Another possible explanation refers to the role of the Swiss political culture. Literature suggests that strong beliefs and ideologies are less susceptible to media effects: Television is the most influential "in cultivating assumptions about which there is little opportunity to learn first-hand and which are not strongly anchored in established beliefs and ideologies" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 191). In a consensus democracy like Switzerland, where consensus-orientation of is of great value to the citizens (Linder & Steffen, 2006), the perception of political processes in terms of the role of consensus and compromises may not be prone to media effects, then. This assumption is supported by results of this study which indicate that aspects of political socialization are important predictors of both individuals' perception of political processes in terms of consensus-orientation and their preferences regarding the consensus-orientation of political processes. More precisely, consensus preferences and consensus perceptions were found to be significantly affected by socio-demographic characteristics (gender, education, and age) as well as a person's political experiences and political ideology.

The impact of television use on political support via process perceptions was tested separately for distinct objects of support, namely support for the government, support for the parliament, support for politicians and support for democracy. The explained variance was strongest for the model estimating support for politicians and least strong for the model estimating support for the government. This finding is in line with research showing that changes in political support are most dramatic for political authorities, a phenomenon called "skepticisms of elites" (Dalton, 1999, p. 74). Two differences are noteworthy: Whereas the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency predicted support for the government, support for politicians and support for democracy were affected rather by the perception of the consensus-orientation of political processes. Consensus-orientation as a central value in consensus democracies, hence, is linked with support for democracy. This finding is in line with the studies emphasizing the relationship between cultural values and system legitimacy (Fuchs, 1999b, 2002).

Additional models were tested in order to probe whether process preferences mediate the impact of media use on political support. Both newspaper use and television use were found to affect respondents' preferences as regards the efficiency of political decision-making processes. Whereas intensive newspaper use was associated with lower preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes, intensive television use was related to strong preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes. There was an indirect effect of television use on political support via effects on preferences for efficient decision-making procedures. In general, then, television use appears to shape both the perceptions of political processes in terms of

100 Although these effects are not significant, the differences between the treatment groups are in the direction described here.

their efficiency and participants' preferences regarding the efficiency of political procedures. Hence a further model tested the media's impact on the discrepancies between process preferences and perceptions. Both newspaper use and television were found to affect respondents' preferences-perceptions discrepancies as regards the effi-ciency of political decision-making processes. Whereas intensive newspaper use was associated with smaller discrepancies between preferences and perceptions regarding the efficiency of political processes, intensive television use was related to larger discrepancies between preferences and perceptions regarding the efficiency of political processes. There was an indirect effect of television use on political support in the sense that television use increased the discrepancy between efficiency preferences and perceptions and, thus, decreased political support in turn. There was also an indirect effect of newspaper use on political support in the sense that newspaper use decreased the discrepancy between efficiency preferences and perceptions and, thus, increased political support in turn.

Moreover, the results presented in this chapter suggest that the relationship between preferences and perceptions shapes political support. More precisely, findings indicated that the more important consensus-orientated political processes are for an individual, the stronger a negative perception of political processes in terms of their consensus-orientation contributes to a decrease of political support. Likewise, the more important efficient political processes are for an individual, the stronger a negative perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency contributes to a decrease of political support. With regard to the role of the media, the results showed that the impact of television use on political support via its effect on the perception of political processes in terms of their efficiency is not the same for all subjects. Findings indicated a strong indirect effect of television use on support via efficiency perceptions particularly for those subjects with high efficiency preferences. The results warrant the assumption that subjects with high preferences regarding the efficiency of political decision-making processes are particularly susceptible to media effects, because television shapes the perception that political processes are inefficient. This finding is in line with an assumption by Volgy & Schwarz (1980, p. 158):

> "Fear of turning off audiences with complex stories and situations has led regularly scheduled televised news programs to offer presentations that are reduced to the lowest common denominator, infused with simplistic symbols and with essentially superficial evaluations of complex problems. It is possible that this way of presenting the world leads to a state where persons depending primarily on television news become more intolerant of problems or conflicts that require complex, uneasy, and long-term solutions."

Test of differences between groups of people with high vs. low levels of political awareness did not indicate significant differences. This finding might suggest that a chronically accessible preferences-perceptions relationship does not increase the impact of the preferences-perceptions relationship on political support for subjects that are high in the magnitude of discrepancies between process preferences and process perceptions. However, methodological reasons might account for this null finding. The variance of the political awareness variable is particularly low

(M=7.03, SD= 0.95). Furthermore, political awareness might not have been a good indicator for the individuals' chronic accessibility of the relationship between process preferences and perceptions. Political awareness might indicate the individuals' awareness of the relationship between process preferences and perceptions rather than the chronic accessibility of the relationship. Considering the political awareness variable as an indicator for the people's awareness of the relationship between process preferences and perceptions, the findings reported here are in line with the assumption that awareness is not a precondition for the relationship between preferences and perceptions to shape evaluative attitudes (Higgins, 1987). Future studies based on samples with individuals that are particularly low in their political awareness and individuals particularly high in their political awareness would be needed to shed more light on the role of political awareness. In addition, studies that test alternative indicators of chronic accessibility would be needed. The general intensity of media use might be an appropriate indicator. In general, the examination of the model's conditionality to levels of political awareness by means of group comparisons appeared to be an applicable procedure. However, in order to be able to make use of group comparisons, future studies should ensure that the group variables show the necessary variance. In addition, a sufficient number of subjects in each group is required.

Further analysis showed that there is no independent effect of situational exposure to media articles on political support above and beyond the impact of routine media use.

# 8. Conclusions

Mass media's impact on political support has been the subject of extensive research in recent years. The present study aimed to contribute to this research by asking the following research question: *How and under which conditions do mass media's presentations of political decision-making processes affect citizens' political support?* The objective of this study was to expand on previous research in three respects. First, this work investigated the impact of mass media's presentations of political decision-making processes on citizens' political support, because little is known about the impact of media presentations of routine political processes (Arnold, 2004; Morris & Clawson, 2007). Previous research has concentrated on the effects of media information in the context of election campaigns, "but there have been no attempts to tie media coverage of legislative process to citizen approval" (Morris & Clawson, 2007, p. 3). The second objective of the present study was to probe the mechanisms by which media information about political processes affects citizens' political support, since previous studies focused on outcomes and tended to neglect the investigation of effect mechanisms. Moreover, the empirical findings on mass media's impact on political malaise are ambiguous. Hence research is needed that probes the precise conditions under which the mass media may contribute to a decline of political support. Studies in political science indicate that the relationship between the perception of political realities and related preferences is a relevant predictor of political support. Research on media effects has so far neglected to investigate whether media's impact on political support is contingent upon individual preferences.[101] Thus, the third objective of this study is the analysis of the media's impact on political support as a function of individual preferences as regards political processes. Because research lacks a standardized measurement of process preferences and perceptions, a further aim of this study was the development and validation of standardized scales to measure both.

In order to provide answers to the research question, a preferences-perceptions model of media effects on political support was developed. This model describes both the mechanisms by which media information on political decision-making processes affects political support and the conditions under which the media's impact is particularly likely. It takes central account of the relationship between media information, individual perceptions of political processes, individual preferences regarding political processes, and political support. As regards the effect mechanisms, the model draws on cultivation theory (W. P. Eveland, Jr., 2002) and argues that the way media cover political decision-making processes shapes the perception

101 Previous research addressed media effects as a function of preferences in the sense of ideological orientations, for instance (e.g. Zaller, 1992). This study, however, looks at the role of individual preferences in the sense of importance attached to certain process aspects.

of political processes by the recipients. The perception of political processes, in turn, is assumed to predict levels of political support. With respect to the conditions that make those effects particularly likely, the model builds on discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987; Kimball & Patterson, 1997; S. C. Patterson, et al., 1969). Discrepancy theory assumes that "evaluations of individual, social or political objects are partly grounded in disparities between expectations and perceptions" (Kimball & Patterson, 1997, p. 703). Thus, the model proposes that the impact of the perception of specific process aspects on political support is particularly strong if a person holds strong preferences towards these aspects of political processes. Based on the distinction between consensus democracy and majoritarian democracy, this study distinguishes between preferences with respect to the efficiency of political processes and preferences concerning the role of compromise-seeking endeavors. In addition, the model assumes that media information might shape the temporary accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship through priming. As a result, the impact of the relationship on political support is assumed to be stronger. Likewise, chronic accessibility may foster the impact of the preferences-perceptions relationship on political support.

In order to test the theoretical assumptions and to provide answers to the research question, this study investigated the impact of both routine use of political information in the mass media and exposure to specific news articles on political support. A series of standardized online surveys with 523 citizens from the German-speaking part of Switzerland was therefore conducted. The surveys embedded an experimental study. In the experimental setting, the participants were randomly assigned to two treatment groups and a control group. One treatment group received news articles that contained critical information about the consensus-orientation of political processes. The other treatment group received news articles that included critical information about the efficiency of political processes. In addition, data from a comprehensive content analysis of media presentations of political decision-making processes in Switzerland provided the background for the interpretations of findings.

Regarding the mechanisms by which media information affects political support, the results indicate, overall, that media may decrease political support by shaping the perception of certain aspects of political processes. Findings from the content analyses that were presented in this study suggested that television news referred to political discord and power struggles as well as the inefficiency of political decision-making processes, the latter especially when reporting on political processes within the parliament. These media coverage patterns appeared to be not without consequences for citizens' political support. The survey results indicated that television use enhanced the perception of political processes as inefficient. This finding corresponds to studies which show that media information shapes recipients' perception of political institutions (Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001). The perception of political processes as inefficient, in turn, led to a decrease in political support. Hence television use was found to decrease political support indirectly via the perception of political processes as inefficient. The use of television for political information was not directly related to the respondents' levels of political support. This result is in

line with previous research, which shows that there is no direct association between television use for political information and support for the government or parliament (Bennett, et al., 1999; Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Moy, et al., 1999; O'Keefe, 1980).

The results indicate that the media particularly affect the perception of those aspects of political processes which are not closely related to central values and beliefs of a citizen's political culture. Although television newscasts were found to focus on political discord, power struggles, and accusations, this study's results indicated that there is no significant relationship between television use and the perception of political processes as consensus-oriented. Building on the assumption expressed in the literature, that attitudes which are rooted in beliefs and ideologies are less prone to media effects (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 191), the lack of significant media effects on the perception of political processes in terms of consensus-orientation appears to be reasonable. Considering the context of political culture in Switzerland, the following explanation might account for the findings: The political culture in Switzerland is characterized by values of consensus and compromises (Linder & Steffen, 2006). This warrants the assumption that the perception of political processes in terms of consensus-orientation is deeply rooted in citizens' beliefs and is based on information from a variety of sources other than news media. Thus, the mass media's impact on perceptions of aspects of political processes that are related to these central values might be limited. Further comparative studies would be needed in order to investigate whether in competitive democracies like the U.S. – where endeavours for compromises and consensus are not important for the citizens (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) – television use is significantly related to consensus perceptions.

Concerning the impact of exposure to specific newspaper articles, this study found that exposure to distinct media articles did not contribute to direct changes in the perception of political processes. Both exposure to newspaper articles that contained critical information about the consensus-orientation of political processes and exposure to newspaper articles that contained critical information about the efficiency of political processes did not change the perception of political processes by the recipients. Thus, it seems warranted to suggest that mass media's impact on reality perceptions may be subject to long-term changes rather than short-term changes. This assumption is in line with cultivation research that conceptualizes attitude changes as long-term processes (W. P. Eveland, Jr., 2002).

With regard to the conditions under which the impact of media's presentations of political processes on political support is particularly likely, the findings support the assumption that individual preferences concerning political processes matter. The media's impact on political support via the perception of political processes appeared to be particularly strong for those citizens for whom according aspects of political processes are very important. More precisely, this study found that television use had an indirect impact on political support via the perception of political processes as inefficient, particularly for those respondents for whom efficient decision-making procedures are important. In contrast, for those respondents for whom efficient decision-making procedures are unimportant, the impact of television use

on political support via the perception of political processes as inefficient was not significant. This finding is consistent with other research using the discrepancy concept (Moretti & Higgins, 1990). Moreover, the results are in line with findings from previous studies that showed that the impact of satisfaction with results of government policy on trust in the government is stronger for people who perceive that this policy issue is an important issue (Kleinnijenhuis & van Hoof, 2009). Hence the assumption that political preferences in the sense of importance rankings are a significant moderator of media effects appears to be applicable to media effects research in general. For instance, the impact of strategy frames on political cynicism might be contingent upon individual preferences as regards the role of motives and strategies of political actors.

Regarding role of accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship, the preferences-perceptions model of media effects assumes that situational exposure to information may increase the temporary accessibility of already available discrepancies between process preferences and perceptions through priming. The findings presented in this study did not support this assumption, however. Because methodological reasons might be responsible for this null finding, future research is needed with respect to priming effects on the temporary accessibility of preferences-perceptions relationships. Moreover, the model assumes that a chronically accessible preferences-perceptions relationship does increase the impact of the preferences-perceptions relationship on political support. Because the findings reported here are less compelling, further studies that test alternative indicators of chronic accessibility are needed in order to gain more evidence as regards the moderating role of chronic accessibility.

In general, the empirical evidence presented here support the preferences-perceptions model of media effects in some parts. With regards to other parts, however, further research is needed. The assumption that media information shape citizens' perceptions of political processes in the long-term receives empirical support. Moreover, process perceptions were found to impact attitudes of political support (Proposition 1). In addition, the impact of process perceptions on support was found to vary as a function of process preferences (Proposition 2). Whereas the assumption that the process-preferences relationship predicts political support receives support, further research is needed with respect to the moderating role of the accessibility of the preferences-perceptions relationship (Proposition 3). Furthermore, future studies shall investigate in more detail the media's impact on process preferences in order to test the stability of such political preferences and to specify the conditions under which media information might alter preferences. Looking at the diagram of the model in Figure 3.1, it appears that the middle part of the model is backed up by empirical evidence presented in this study. Future research, hence, could focus on the investigation of assumptions that are illustrated in the left part of the model.

This study provides several methodological contributions. The scales measuring process perceptions and process preferences were found to encompass three dimensions each, namely consensus-orientation, competition, and efficiency. The developed scales are a first step towards a standardized measurement of process prefer-

ences and perceptions. Further research, however, shall investigate the role of additional process dimensions, such as transparency, responsiveness or inclusiveness. The use of confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modeling appeared to be valuable for the development and validation of the scales measuring the perception of political processes and according preferences. In further analyses, the cultural equivalence of the process preference scale was confirmed. In addition, the study provided empirical evidence which support the assumption that the scale is invariant as regards different objects of assessment. The invariance as regards the object of evaluation was investigated with a multi-method-multi-treat approach. This appeared to be an applicable procedure which could be used in future studies that are interested in the issue of scale invariance in terms of different objects of evaluation.

Furthermore, the use of structural equation modeling appeared to be useful to investigate media effects on complex political attitudes. In order to account for the factorial structure of attitudes such as political support (Wolling, 1999, pp. 33-36), these variables can be modeled as latent factors that are reflected by several indicators that measure different dimensions of a concept. Moreover, structural equation modeling facilitates the investigation of mediation (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002, 2003). Investigating indirect effects with mediation analysis is considered to be important for the further development of theories (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Preacher, et al., 2007). Structural equation modeling might also contribute to future studies that apply a cross-cultural comparative research design in ascertaining measurement equivalence as a pre-condition for comparisons of effects over samples from different cultures. This study applied latent interactions to test moderating assumptions in structural equation models. Based on the experiences, I may suggest using latent interactions in future studies as an applicable alternative to group comparisons in cases when moderator variables are measured continuously.

Several limitations of this study deserve special consideration. First, this study's reliance on media use measures as surrogate for media content data limits the validity of its findings. Studies that are based on media use measures cannot provide answers to the question which aspects of media coverage contribute to the explanation of political attitudes. In order to be able to trace back the media's impact on citizens' process perceptions to precise aspects of how political processes were presented in the news coverage, a study that is based on a data set which links content measures and attitude measures would be needed. Such a data set should match measures of presentations of political decision-making processes in those media outlets that an individual was exposed to with measurements of this individual's political attitudes. Only such a design can provide evidence for the assumption that media presentations of political processes account for the variance in process perceptions and rule out the possibility that other aspects, such as a general negativity in media content, are responsible for the effects. A content analysis of the news coverage that was used by the survey participants was beyond the scope of this study, however.

Second, the investigation of media effects in this exploratory study is based on a

non- representative sample of highly educated and politically interested citizens. Although using specific samples is considered to be appropriate for exploratory research, the generalizability of the findings reported here is limited. Thus, it is not possible to determine from these data whether the effects of television use on the perceptions of political processes and political support also hold for people with low levels of political interest and/or lower levels of formal education. Studies that test the preferences-perceptions model of media effects based on a representative sample would be needed to enhance the generalizability of the findings presented here. Moreover, the findings of this study are restricted to Switzerland as a typical consensus democracy. Hence it remains an open question whether the findings presented here would also hold with regard to the relationship between media information and political attitudes in other cultural settings, such as competitive democracies. Future research that investigates the media's impact on political attitudes as a function of political preferences in different political cultures could contribute to the understanding of the moderating role of process preferences.

Third, the findings on the impact of television use on the perception of political processes and political support are based on cross-sectional survey data. Thus, the results of this study cannot be taken as evidence for the assumed causality of effects. Although this study's consideration of effect mechanisms may contribute to the investigating of causality, it is not a test in a strict sense. The results of this study indicate that there is an indirect effect of television use on political support via the perception of political processes as being inefficient. It seems more plausible to argue that television use shapes the perception of political processes than to assume that subjects with certain process perceptions use television for their political information more often than individuals which do not share these process perceptions. However, future research based on experimental designs or panel surveys is needed in order to put the assumed causal mechanisms to a strict test.

Despite its preliminary character, the findings do suggest that media may affect citizens' political support by shaping the perception of certain aspects of political realities. The less these perceptions are related to established ideologies or beliefs, the stronger might the relationship between mass media and political perceptions be. Hence the findings of this study do suggest that it may be useful to include social reality perceptions as a mediating variable in the prediction of political attitudes from media use measures. Future research interested in explaining the mechanisms by which media effects occur could, hence, consider reality perceptions. The preferences-perceptions model of media effects, for instance, might be used to explain dynamic changes in opinion levels as a response to shifts in perceived political realities due to changes in the media information that a person is exposed to.

However exploratory, this study may offer some insight into the role of preferences as a moderator of media effects. The study thus contributes to the specification of conditions under which media coverage might negatively influence citizens' political support by showing that long-term effects of routine television use on political support in some circumstances are contingent upon political preferences. Similar arguments were already made in other contexts. For instance, Kleinnijenhuis & van

Hoof (2009) argue that ambiguous media information on policy plans of the government decrease recipients' support because the news content is not in line with citizens' preferences of decisive governmental plans. Mutz & Reeves (2005, p. 3) found that incivility in political debates significantly decreased trust in politicians and argued that what it is about those conflicts in the media that makes people angry is that political actors then "violate the norms for everyday, face-to-face discourse." These studies do not provide empirical evidence for their assumptions that recipients' preferences matter, however. The present study, then, presents the first empirical evidence for the role of individual preferences – in the sense of importance rankings – in moderating the effects of media information on political attitudes.

However, this study's findings on the role of preferences are restricted to process preferences. It is not possible to conclude from this study that preferences with respect to policy issues or characteristics of political actors are an important moderator of media effects. Despite its preliminary character, the research reported here would seem to indicate that the preferences concept is fruitful and could be incorporated into future research, not only with respect to process preferences, but also with respect to preferences regarding other aspects of political life. The preferences-perceptions model of media effects specifies in greater detail than previous research how media information interacts with existing political preferences in forming individual attitudes of political support. In that sense, the model might be used in future studies to explain the relationship between perceptions of political realities and political support as a function of related preferences of the citizens. Based on the proposed model, then, the general statement that negative or critical media coverage tends to contribute to a decline in political support might be further differentiated. The model proposes that negative media content does not, per se, decrease political support. Rather, the model assumes that media information threatens political support if it opposes citizens' preferences. Moreover, the model allows defining circumstances under which media information might contribute to an increase in political support: In situations when media information is in line with the audience's individual preferences, media information might enhance political support.

In general, then, the research reported here would seem to indicate that the way mass media presents political decision-making processes is not without consequences for the political support that the audience holds for political actors, institutions, and democracy. The information in the mass media is shaped by journalists' selection and interpretation processes (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Marcinkowski, 2000; Maurer, 2003a, 2003b; Sarcinelli, 1998). As results from the content analysis of media presentations of political decision-making processes showed, the news coverage focuses on political discord and power struggles and refers to the inefficiency of political decision-making procedures. This distinct presentation of political processes by the mass media may shape the perception of political realities and challenge citizens' political support.

Although the media's presentations of political processes are not without consequences for political support, the findings indicate that media information does not unfold its effects on all citizens in a similar wary. The findings presented here rather

suggest that mass media's impact on political support is contingent upon citizens' individual preferences. More precisely, media content was found to challenge citizens' political support if it contradicts their individual preferences. The findings shed new light on the democratic performance of citizens in suggesting that they are less vulnerable to media effects than, for instance, assumed by videomalaise theory (Robinson, 1976). To get back to the definition of political distrust by Barber (1983) that was quoted at the outset, this study suggests that political distrust is a critique of political processes as perceived based on media information in the light of individual preferences. It seems warranted to suggest that citizens' political support is not affected by media information per se but, rather, that it is shaped by rational reasoning of the citizens as to whether aspects that are important to them apply to political reality. The media information may contribute to this reasoning, but individual preferences of the citizens might matter also.

Based on the preferences-perceptions model of media effects, then, two different strategies of how the media could in fact contribute to citizens' political approval can be discussed. This study agrees with Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (2002, p. 161ff.), who argued that in order to enhance citizens' political support, people should not necessarily be given the processes they want. One possible measure to enhance political support, then, would be to suit citizens' process preferences to political processes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 245). Clearly, agents of socialization such as family or schools would be asked to teach people to tolerate conflict, for instance. But mass media might also have a role to play. This study's findings indicated that the media may not only shape the perception of political processes, but also citizens' process preferences. More precisely, news coverage in television was found to strengthen the audience's preferences as regards the efficiency of decision-making processes. The preferences as regards efficiency were found to be associated with a decrease in political support. Instead, journalists could contribute to a consolidation of political support by being less impatient and by accepting that political decision-making processes may take their time. The other strategy could be to suit political processes to citizens' process preferences (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 245). In the light of this study's findings, this would mean that the media's information could be suited to citizens' process preferences, because the media are an important source of information about political processes. Just as the media might contribute to the political malaise if they focus on those aspects of political processes which are particularly unfavorable in the eye of the citizens, media could also contribute to an increase in political approval by strengthening those aspects of political processes that are considered favorable by the majority of citizens. Such aspects are shaped partly by the political culture of a nation. Hence it seems to be important that journalists consider dominant political values when informing about political processes. Routines of news production that are closely linked to the political culture of a nation might foster a style of news reporting that facilitates the citizens' political support.

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# 10. Appendix

## *10.1. Overview of Items Included in the Literature Review*

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***General Media Use*** | | | | | | | |
| Becker & Whitney 1980 | Representative telephone survey in Ohio | Television & newspaper dependencies (regularly use, pay attention to national & local affairs) | Age, education | - | - | Trust | Differential; yes on trust in local government, no for national government |
| Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennett 1999 | Data from the 1996 National Election Study, 1997 Pew Center Poll | Exposure to news and entertainment television programs, newspaper, talk radio | Education, gender, race, partisanship, ideology, family income, economic perceptions, and faith in people | - | - | Trust in government | No |
| Hetherington 1996 | National Election Studies | Media use | Cost of living evaluation, Bush feeling Thermometer, party identification, talk about politics | Evaluation of economy | - | Vote for Bush | Yes |
| Hetherington 1998 | National Election Studies | Television consumption & attention | Education, age, race, income, sex | - | - | Political trust | No |
| Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 1998 | Public Perceptions of Congress Survey | Television reliance, radio reliance | Age, sex, income, education, knowledge, ideology, party ID, race, external efficacy, political involvement | - | - | Emotional feelings towards congress (fear, anger, disgust) | Yes |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Holtz-Bacha 1990 | Representative survey of West-German electorate | Television use, newspaper use | Age, sex, education, political interest | - | - | Political alienation | No for use of political information |
| Johnson & Kaye 2003 | Online survey of politically interested Web users | Intensity of web use, reliance on the web | - | - | - | Trust in government | No for intensity, yes for web reliance |
| Leshner & McKean 1997 | Representative telephone survey in Columbia | Use of television news for political and government information | Education, age, income, race, gender, party identification, voter registration, political interest | - | - | Political cynicism | No |
| Moy, Pfau & Kahlor 1999 | Representative telephone survey in Midwestern county | Exposure & attention to different media sources | Sex, age, education, political partisanship, institutional expertise | - | - | Confidence in various political institutions | No effects on confidence in presidency or government |
| Moy & Pfau 2000 | Representative telephone survey in Midwestern county & Content Analysis | Media use (interpreted as variance as regards presentation of confidence in institutions) | Sex, age, education, income, party ID | Political knowledge | - | Confidence in government and presidency (and other institutions) | Generally rather indirect effects via expertise |
| Newton 1999 | British Social Attitudes survey of 1996 | Television use | Income, education, gender, age, government ID | - | - | Trust & cynicism | No for use of political information, yes for general television use |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Norris 2000 | World Value Surveys 1995-97 | Television use (intensity) | Gender, class, education, age and more | - | - | Regime support, institutional confidence | In some countries only: small effect on regime support, no effect on institutional confidence |
| O'Keefe 1980 | Representative personal survey in Summit County, Ohio | Television reliance, newspaper reliance | - | - | - | Political alienation | No negative effects |
| Pfau, Moy, Holbert, Szabo, Lin, & Zhang 1998 | Representative telephone survey & Content Analysis | Talk radio use | Sex, age, education, income, expertise, party ID | - | - | Confidence in congress and presidency | No |
| Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman 1998 | Random telephone survey of Washington state voters | Active media use (actively seek information, pay attention to news) | Demographic variables | - | - | Political cynicism | Potentially reciprocal relationship between active media use and cynicism |
| Pinkleton & Austin 2002 | Random telephone survey of Washington state voters | Media use & media satisfaction measures | Education | - | - | Political cynicism (trust measures) | Negative relationship with active media use. |
| Robinson 1976 | National Election Studies & experimental studies | Television reliance (use only TV) | - | - | - | Political efficacy | Yes |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wolling 1999 | Personal survey with electorate of major city in Germany, Representative Studies of German electorate, Content Analysis | Media use | Sex, age, identification with government parties, evaluation of economy, life satisfaction, disadvantages through politics, political deficits | - | Political interest, trust in media | Efficiency and legitimacy of governmental system, efficiency of government, identification with political community, confidence in political institutions | Media use in general increased support; stronger effects for political interested and credible media outlets |
| Wolling 2009 | Representative panel survey for German electorate | Internet use | Socialization, economy perception, political experiences, interpersonal communication, use of other media sources | - | - | Satisfaction with democracy | No |
| ***Use of specific media content aspects*** | | | | | | | |
| Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht 1997 | Content analysis & survey data matched at aggregate level | Negativity of media coverage in New York Times | Variety of political process aspects (major bills, veto overrides) and individual approval measures were controlled | - | - | Public support for the Congress | Yes |
| Iyengar, Kinder, Peters,& Krosnick 1984 | Experimental studies | Media attention to national issues (energy, defense, inflation) | - | Issue accessibility | Political knowledge | General performance, competence, evaluation of integrity | Yes for general performance and competence, no for evaluation of integrity |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iyengar & Simon 1993 | Content analysis & National Election Survey | Media attention to Gulf crisis | - | Importance of foreign policy | - | Evaluation of Bush | Yes |
| Kepplinger 2000 | Content Analysis & Representative Survey for German Electorate | Media presentation of political actors | - | - | - | Trust in political actors | Yes |
| Kiousis 2003 | Longitudinal time-series design (media content & survey) | Media coverage on Monica Lewinsky scandal | Economic indicators, time | - | - | Evaluation of Bill Clinton | Yes for perceived favorability, less effects on job approval |
| Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof & Oegema 2006 | Representative survey with Dutch electorate & Content Analysis matched | Negative ton | Sex, age, education, and political knowledge, prior vote | - | - | Political trust | Yes |
| Krosnick & Brannon 1993 | National Election Survey | Media attention to Gulf war crisis | Gender, race, age, education, region | Importance of Bush's handling of the crisis | Political knowledge, political interest, levels of media exposure | Evaluation of Bush | Stronger effects for knowledgeable, greater priming effects with lower levels of exposure & interest |
| Krosnick & Kinder 1990 | National Election Survey | Media attention to Central Asia | Gender, age, education, income, region, party identification | Importance of the US intervention in Central Asia | - | Evaluation of Bush's performance | Yes |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maurer 2003b | 6-wave representative panel survey of electorate in major German city & Content Analysis matched | Negative presentations of political actors in the media | Age, sex, education, political interest, party ID, political expectations | Perception of media coverage | - | Confidence in democracy | Moderate effects |
| McGraw & Ling 2003 | Experimental study | News article on abortion and the Family Medical Leave Act with responsibility either for president or feminist movement | Gender, religion, media trust, political knowledge, partisan identification, feminist identification | Impact of approval of performance on that issue | Political knowledge and media trust | General evaluation of President and feminist movement | Yes for presidential evaluation, no for evaluation of feminist movement |
| Miller, Goldenberg & Erbring1979 | National Election Survey & Content Analysis matched | Media cynicism | Policy dissatisfaction, incumbent support, media exposure | - | Level of media exposure | Trust in government | Yes; stronger effects for individuals with high levels of media exposure |
| Miller & Krosnick 1996 | Experimental studies & survey data | Media attention to issues | - | Accessibility and relevance of issue | Media exposure, political knowledge | Presidential evaluation | Yes, diverging findings as regards role of moderators |
| Miller & Krosnick 2000 | Experimental studies | Media article on a certain issue | - | Priming: perceived importance of that issue | Political knowledge, trust in media | Presidential performance evaluation | Yes, in particular when trust in media and political knowledge is high |
| Morris & Clawson 2007 | Survey data & Content analysis matched | Media attention to political scandals, conflict and compromise, legislative maneuvering | Economic expectations and presidential approval | - | - | Public support | Yes for scandals and legislative maneuvering, no for conflict and compromise |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect/Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mutz & Reeves 2005 | Experimental studies | Level of incivility in television debates | - | - | Individual propensity for conflict avoidance | Trust in political institutions and actors | Yes |
| Patterson 1996 | Content Analysis & Survey Data | Interpretative media style, horse race | - | - | - | Satisfaction with political leaders, the congress and the presidency | Yes |
| Pfau 1987 | Experimental study | Televised intraparty political debates | - | - | Viewer expectancies regarding language use | Attitudes about participating candidates | Yes, viewer expectancies as important moderator |
| Tewskbury 1999 | Experimental study | Television news profile of a political candidate | - | - | Consumption goals, political expertise | Evaluation of political candidate | Yes, in particular for evaluation as consumption goal |
| Wolling 1999 | Personal survey with electorate of major city in Germany, Representative Studies of German electorate, Content Analysis matched | Amount of negative statements | Sex, age, identification with government parties, evaluation of economy, life satisfaction, disadvantages through politics, political deficits | - | Political interest, trust in media | Efficiency and legitimacy of governmental system, efficiency of government, identification with political community, confidence in political institutions | Negativity decreased political support, other variables such as personalization and conflict orientation showed no effects; stronger effects for political interested and credible media outlets |
| Wolling 2001 | Personal survey with electorate of major city in Germany & Content Analysis matched | Media attention to political scandals | Media use, economy perception, etc | - | - | System legitimacy | No |

| *Media frames* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Study** | **Method** | **Independent variable(s)** | **Control variable(s)** | **Mediating variable(s)** | **Moderating variable(s)** | **Dependent Variable(s)** | **Effect / Relationship** |
| Cappella & Jamieson 1997 | Experimental studies | Strategy frames | - | - | - | Political cynicism | Yes |
| De Vreese 2004 | Experimental study | Strategy frames | Political knowledge, political efficacy | - | - | Political cynicism | Yes for short-term effects, no for long-term effects |
| De Vreese 2005 | 2-wave panel surveys and content analysis | Strategy frames | Gender, age, education, government evaluation, political sophistication, the respondent's level of cynicism | - | - | Political cynicism | Yes; Effects are contingent upon the level of strategic reporting in news coverage: yes for Denmark, no for Netherlands |
| De Vreese & Semetko 2002 | 2-wave panel surveys and content analysis | Strategy frames | Gender, age, education, political efficacy, campaign involvement, government approval, EU skepticism | - | - | Political cynicism | Yes |
| Druckman 2001b | Experimental Studies | Media frames: framing Ku Klux Klan rally in terms of free speech vs. Public order | - | Importance of free speech vs. Public safety | Trust in source / trust in medium | Tolerance of Ku Klux Klan | Yes, trust moderates the relationship between frames and tolerance |
| Druckman & Neslon 2003 | Experimental Study | Media frames: framing the McCain-Feingold reform bill in terms of free speech vs. Special interest | - | Importance of free speech vs. Special interest | Need to evaluate (NE) | Support for McCain-Feingold | Stronger priming effects for individuals with low NE |

| Study | Method | Independent variable(s) | Control variable(s) | Mediating variable(s) | Moderating variable(s) | Dependent Variable(s) | Effect / Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iyengar 1987 | Experimental Studies | Issue framing (in contrast to episodic framing) | - | Systemic attribution of responsibility | - | Assessment of presidential performance | Yes |
| Matthes 2007b | Survey data & Content analysis | Media frames | Political ideology, education, age, sex | - | Modus of information processing (online vs. memory-based) | Attitude toward government, political opposition, unemployed people | Stronger effects for memory-based processing |
| Shen 2004 | Experimental study | Media frames (character vs. issue) | - | - | Individual schemas | Voter cognitions | Schemas moderated the impact of media frames on voter cognitions |
| Valentino, Beckmann & Buhr 2001 | Experimental study | Strategy frames | - | - | Partisanship and political sophistication (education) | Confidence in government | Yes but only for non partisans |
| Valentino, Buhr & Beckmann 2001 | Experimental study | Strategy frames | - | - | - | Negative reactions to candidate, policy initiative or characteristics of the story | Yes |

Note. This table presents an overview of empirical findings regarding the relationship between political media information and attitudes of political confidence.
Thereby I selected only the aspects that are relevant with regard to the present study's research interest. Hence, the studies might encompass more findings than the ones presented here.

*Process preferences:* In the following question we would like to know more about your political preferences. Citizens hold different preferences regarding how political decisions should be made in democratic systems. Please answer according to the following scale, how import
ant you consider the following preferences. The scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important). How important is it for you, that…
… political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side? [**concede**]
… politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions? [**div interests**]
… political decisions are based on compromises? [**compromise**]
… political problems are solved as fast as possible? [**fast**]
… political decision-making processes are simple and short? [**simple process**]
… politicians do avoid delays when making political decisions? [**avoid delays**]
… politicians are decisive and force their points? [**force points**]
… one political side is able to put their plans through? [**put plans through**]
… certain politicians could give hierarchical orders, if a decision has to be taken? [**hierarchical orders**]
… politicians tread each other with respect. [**respect**]
… politicians treat each other fairly. [**fair**]
… there are no losers of political decisions. [**no losers**]
… political actors give clear orders as to how to proceed further after a decision has been taken. [**clear orders**]
… political decisions are not hampered by quarrels between political parties. [**no quarrels**]
… political decisions are not hampered by power struggles. [**no power struggles**]
… political opponents do not insist on their opinions. [**no persistence**]

(Given in parentheses are denotations of variables in figures and tables.)

*Process perceptions:*
Now we would like to know how, in your opinion, political decisions are actually made in Switzerland. Please answer according to the following scale and indicate to what extent the following statements on political decision-making processes in Switzerland, in your opinion, apply or not apply. The scale ranges from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (fully applies).
Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side. [**concede**]
Politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions. [**div interests**]
In Switzerland political decisions are based on compromises. [**compromise**]
In Switzerland political problems are solved as fast as possible. [**fast**]
Political decision-making processes in Switzerland are time-consuming.* [**simple process**]

Swiss politicians postpone decisions over and over again.* [**avoid delays**]
Swiss politicians are decisive and force their points. [**force points**]
In political discussions in Switzerland one political side mostly put their plans through. [**put plans through**]
In Switzerland, certain politicians can give hierarchical orders if a decision has to be taken. [**hierarchical orders**]
Swiss politicians tread each other with respect. [**respect**]
Swiss politicians treat each other fairly. [**fair**]
In Swiss decision-making processes, there are no losers of political decisions. [**no losers**]
Political problems in Switzerland are solved as efficient as possible. [**efficient processes**]
Swiss political actors give clear orders as to how to proceed further after a decision has been taken. [**clear orders**]
In Switzerland, political decisions are not hampered by quarrels between political parties. [**no quarrels**]
In Switzerland, political decisions are not hampered by power struggles. [**no power struggles**]
In Switzerland, political opponents do not insist on their opinions. [**no persistence**]

(* = reversed scale, given in parentheses are denotations of variables in figures and tables.)

*Political Support*: In the following we would like to ask or you opinion on Swiss politics. Please tell me on a score of 1-10 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 1 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.
… government,
… parliament (National Council and Council of States)
How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the government? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates very bad, 10 indicates very good.
How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of the parliament?
Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates very bad, 10 indicates very good.
How good or bad do you consider the present general performance of politicians in Switzerland altogether?
Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates very bad, 10 indicates very good.
How satisfied are you with the way politicians in Switzerland altogether solve the nation's problems? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates not satisfied at all, 10 indicates very satisfied.

How much do you trust politicians in Switzerland altogether to act as they really should? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates no trust at all, 10 indicates very much trust.
On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Switzerland? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates not at all satisfied, 10 indicates very satisfied.
To what extent does democracy as it exists in Switzerland correspond to your personal version of an ideal democracy? Please answer according to the following scale, 1 indicates no correspondence to personal vision at all, 10 indicates full correspondence to personal vision.

*Article impression*: To begin with, we would like to ask you some questions on the news articles that we have sent to you last week. What impression did these articles raise with respect to the way political decisions are made?
Have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decision-making processes are shaped by conflicts and power struggles? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?
And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decisions are made uncompromisingly? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?
And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decision-making processes are time-consuming? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?
And have the articles, all in all, raised the impression that political decisions are postponed over and over again? Would you say this applies, rather applies, does rather not apply, or does not apply?

*Television & newspaper use:* On an average weekday, how much of your time is generally spent using news or programmes about politics and current affairs in the radio, in television, in the newspaper or in the internet? (None; Less than ¼ hour; ¼ to ½ hour, more than ½ hour, up to 1 hour; more than 1 hour; Don't know)
Local newspaper, National newspaper, Tabloid, Free newspaper, Television, Radio, Internet

*Political experiences:* There are different possibilities to be politically active. Some of them are mentioned below. Please indicate for each of those activities whether it applies or does not apply to you.
… engaging actively in party work.
… hold a political mandate.
Do you have direct experiences with political everyday business due to your professional employment or other occupations? (Yes, regularly; yes, occasionally; no)
Do you gain insight into political everyday business through friends or acquaintances and their occupations? (Yes, regularly; yes, occasionally; no)

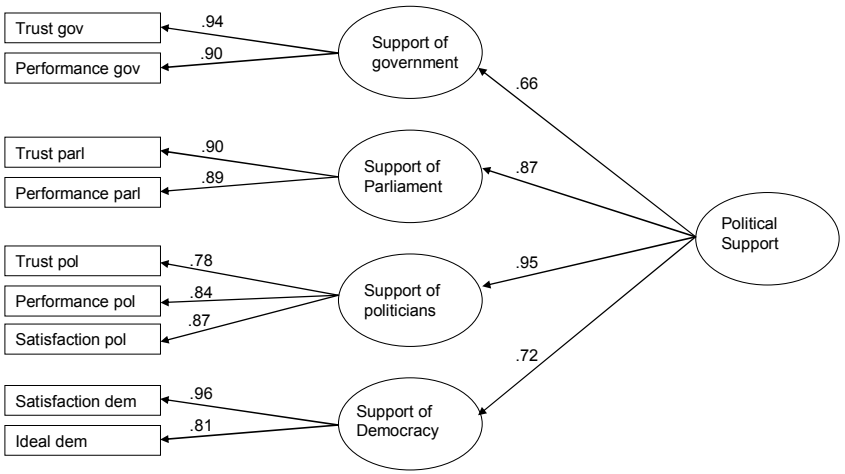
*Political awareness:* How interested would you say you are in politics? (very interested, somewhat interested, not much interested, or not at all interested, don't know)
When you get together with friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently,
occasionally, rarely, or never? (frequently, occasionally, rarely, never, don't know)

*Political ideology:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 11 where 1 means the left and 11 means the right?
(European Social Survey).

*Age* was measured with an open question and recoded into categories of 18 thru 32; 33 thru 43; 44 thru 54; 55 thru 96 (percentiles). *Education* was measured on a 6-point scale ranging from no degree (1) to college or university degree (6).

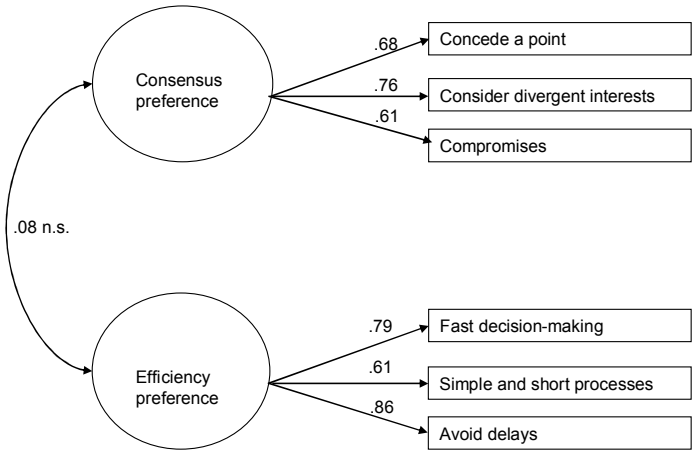
## *10.3. Measurement Models of Latent Factors Used in the Analyses*

Measurement Model for Political Support (Hierarchical Factor Models that Encompasses Four First-Order Factors)



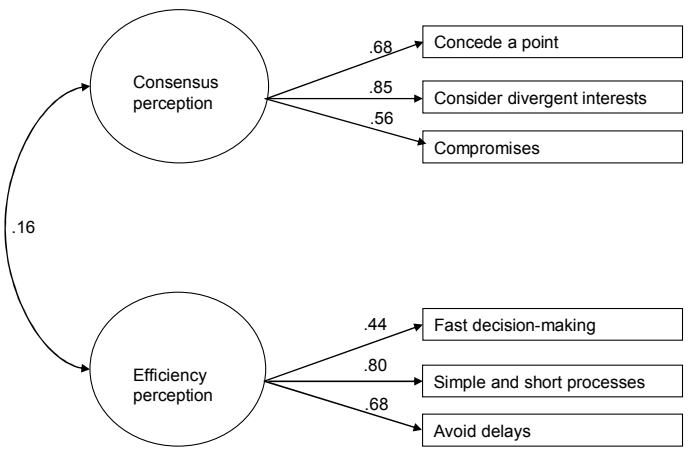

Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above.
Chi-Square (df=23, *N* 339) = 109.67, Comparative fit index is .94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .10 with a 90% confidence interval .08 - .12.

Measurement of Consensus and Efficiency Preferences (Correlated Factors Model)



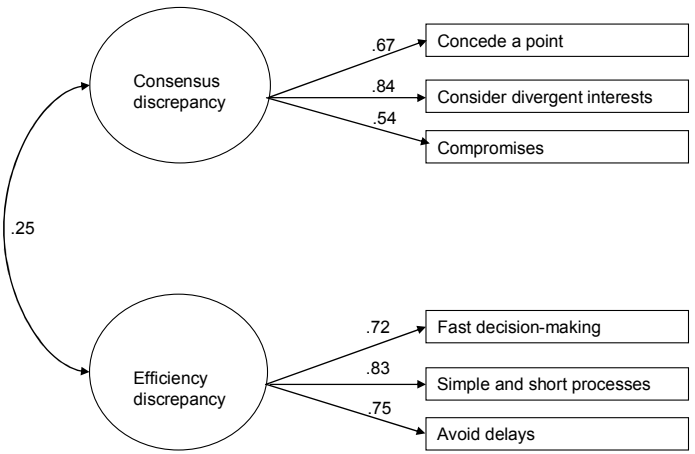

Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above.
Chi-Square (df=8, N 351) = 18.33, Comparative fit index is .98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .06 with a 90% confidence interval .02 - .10.

Measurement of Consensus and Efficiency Perceptions (Correlated Factors Model)



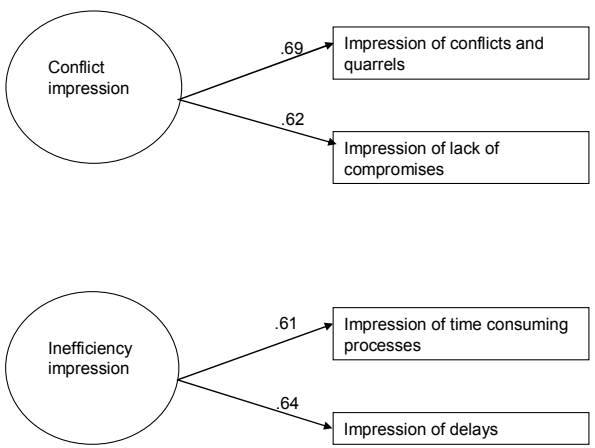

Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above.
Chi-Square (df=8, N 343) = 20.04, Comparative fit index is .96, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .07 with a 90% confidence interval .03 - .10.

Measurement of Consensus and Efficiency Discrepancies (Correlated Factors Model)




Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above.
Chi-Square (df=8, N 350) = 11.04, Comparative fit index is .99, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .03 with a 90% confidence interval .00 - .08.

Measurement of Article Impression (Uncorrelated Factors Model)




Note. All the solid line paths are statistically significant at .05 or above.
Chi-Square (df=4, N 364) =15.30, Comparative fit index is .92, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .08 with a 90% confidence interval .04 - .13.