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

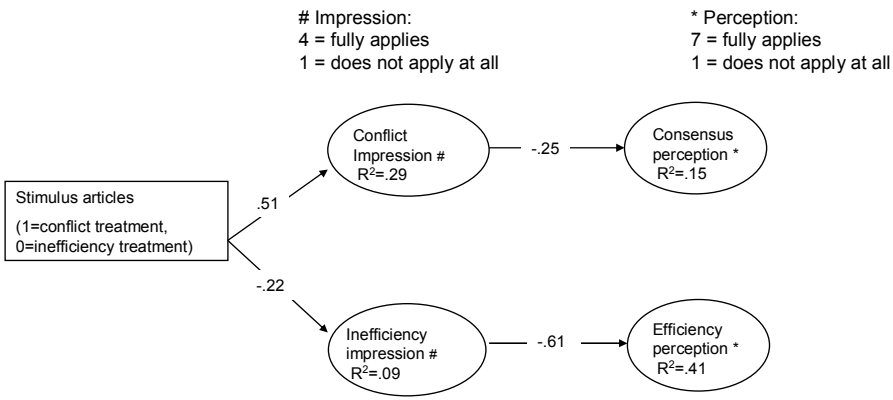
82 The process perception items were subjected to factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation which does not presume orthogonal factors. The factor loadings were used to derive factor scores for each survey respondent. Regression method was selected to construct the factor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