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

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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

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