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

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 α = .70), and three items refer to preferences regarding the efficiency of political processes (Cronbach's α = .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

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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 some-times 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 politi-cal 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 cur-rent 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 *televi-sion 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 *news-paper 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

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

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(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 α = .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.

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

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