

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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> However, the group differences are

81 “Political parties sometimes concede a point to the other side”:  $F = 0.60$ ,  $p = .942$ ,  $\eta^2 = .002$ , “Politicians give consideration to diverging interests when searching for solutions.”:  $F = 2.08$ ,  $p = .126$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , “In Switzerland political decisions are based on compromises.”:  $F = 1.05$ ,  $p = .352$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ , “In Switzerland political problems are solved as fast as possible.”:  $F = 2.14$ ,  $p = .199$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$