(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).