Elite Conflicts and Their Effects on Political Support as a Function of Elite and Mass Polarization

By

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Abstract

The main contribution of this dissertation is the exploration of how a certain type of disconnection between the political elite and citizens may impact support for the democratic political system. Specifically, this dissertation is concerned with how differences in elite and mass polarization mediate the effects of conflicts, verbal attacks and negativity among partisan elites on support for the political system. I find that it is not the frequently loathed conflict-rich talk of politicians in itself that raises negative feelings among the citizens about the political system and the actors. Rather, the effect occurs when differences in polarization between political elites and their followers are especially pronounced. Thus, the dissertation contributes to the political communication literature by identifying the condition under which negativity, disagreements and conflict-rich talk among politicians creates negative citizen attitudes towards how democracy works. The implication is that it is not the natural tendency of the democratic process to generate visible displays of elite conflict that makes citizens dislike democratic politics, but when it coincides with an apparent oversupply of ideological polarization among elites relative to how much citizens themselves get divided on an ideological basis.

Chapter 2 uses three waves of European Election Study (EES) data to show that elite polarization increases how conflictual EU-related news are prior to a European Parliament (EP) election. Chapter 3 uses a dataset on university students in 24 countries prior to the 2014 EP election and finds that when citizens are more polarized, the same campaign debate is perceived as being less negative by them. Chapter 4 again uses EES data to examine the main empirical argument of the dissertation. It finds that in countries where elites are more polarized than the electorate, support for the political system is more strongly undermined by exposure to explicit conflicts between politicians than elsewhere. Finally, in Chapter 5, based on a survey of a representative sample of the online population in a country with a clear

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disconnect between elite and mass polarization on EU issues, I test whether conflictual rhetoric in such contexts in fact hurts popular support for democracy as the previous findings suggest.

In general, the dissertation partly supports and partly complements the elite integration theory outlined by John Higley (most recently in 2010), namely that strong elite divisions bring uncertainty and decreasing support among citizens for the entire political system. The dissertation shows that when partisan elites are divided to a larger extent than their supporters in the electorate, even less harsh debates are seen by citizens as more conflictual, and this decreases political support. However, my results also show that when elites differ little from the masses in how politically polarized they are, or when masses are more polarized, citizens are less sensitive to expressions of elite debates, perceive less negativity in politics, and their support for regimes does not decrease significantly when exposed to signs of elite conflict.

These results support that citizens react to elite behavior: when citizens have to listen to endless elite disagreements and conflict-rich talk on a particular issue in which they are more or less united, this bothers them, and they articulate their distaste in the form of decreasing political support for the system that produced these endless disagreements.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction and state of the art

1.1. The gap between the political realities of political elites and citizens

Current political developments, such as the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union and Donald Trump's victory in the Republican primaries, and later in the presidential elections, seem to underline the idea that mainstream political elites have become increasingly disconnected from their citizens in Western democracies and this prompts a backlash among citizens. The political realities of those leading the countries and of the voters seem to be drifting apart: in the first case most of the MPs supported the UK remaining in the EU, while in the second case even GOP leaders were trying to find a way to prevent Trump from becoming their candidate. Many journalistic analyses explaining these two phenomena conclude that both of these results show an increasing discrepancy between the electorate and their representatives (e.g. Tietze, 2016), a rejection of elites by the voters (Hawking, 2016), a chaos unleashed by elites (Delaney, 2016), or as the former editor-in-chief of the Washington Times puts it: *"That's the parallel between Brexit and the presidential election here at home. It's the disconnect between the establishment elites and the people whose interests they plunder with such ease and abandon*" (Pruden, 2016).

In case of the United Kingdom, many news accounts identify this increasing gap as a reason for the public's decision: parties have abandoned their traditional voters (Goodwin, 2016), elites follow the interests of smaller groups represented by lobbyists rather than those of majority of citizens (Zingales, 2016), and a majority of citizens remain unrepresented by major political parties (Wilkinson, 2016). Journalists hypothesize that for these reasons, trust in political, media and business elites has decreased (Bernstein, 2016). Trump's nomination as the Republican presidential candidate (and also the relatively good results for Bernie Sanders) was explained by media outlets with similar arguments: in some cases both main parties have offered options too far to the left or right for the electorate, while in other cases they have

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provided positions that are too moderate. This has left the electorate with no real choices about certain issues (Garcia, 2016), or the party leaders have held different views than their supporters about important questions such as Social Security and immigration (Drutman, 2015) or about the chances of Trump winning the presidency (Sargent, 2016). Similar accounts later emerged to explain Trump's presidential victory (e.g. Hanson, 2016).

Elite-mass disconnection in the US has also been widely analyzed in the political science literature. Scholars often argue that voters are not represented by their elected officials on certain issues. In some cases this means that the policy options provided by the representatives are less extreme than those preferred by the electorate (e.g. Ahler & Broockman, 2015) or, more often, that citizens' preferred positions are somewhere between the two opposing positions offered by political parties (e.g. Ellis & Stimson, 2012). These gaps may narrow as certain institutions become responsive to citizens' opinions (Stimson, Mackuen, & Erikson, 1995), or may persist if citizens only weakly influence institutional decisions (Gilens & Page, 2014).[1]

However, political elites being disconnected from citizens does not necessarily mean a lack of representation of particular positions; it may also mean a more general ideological difference between the two (Ahler & Broockman, 2015). Fiorina and his collaborators discuss this phenomenon in multiple pieces with *disconnect* in their titles (e.g. Fiorina & Levendusky, 2006; Fiorina & Abrams, 2009), in which they essentially argue that while the political elite has been polarizing lately in the United States, the electorate remains less polarized (and mass polarization is highly exaggerated in the literature, as shown in Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005).[2] These opposing processes result in a huge gap between the two. The authors do not

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[1] However, it is difficult to measure this gap, because measurements of citizens' opinions change over time (Barabas, 2007), and are often oversimplified, meaning that citizens can actually have positions much closer to those of politicians than it superficially appears based on certain simplified questions (Levy, Wright, & Citrin, 2015).

[2] There at least three reasons why mass polarization is over-reported: the masses falsely seem to be polarized due to the polarized choices citizens have in the political arena (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005), media over-emphasize polarization (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2014), or citizens perceive polarization to be higher than it actually is (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2013).

deny that citizens align their ideological positions based on those of their preferred parties, using the elite positions as cues (Levendusky, 2013a). However, in their view this does not mean that masses also cluster around the ideological poles as the elite does (Hetherington, 2009). However, others claim that elite polarization not only increases negativity in politics but also leads to polarization in the electorate (e.g. McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006).[3, 4] Thus, there is a debate about the levels of mass polarization (for more on the two positions, see: Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998; and Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2008). However, there is agreement that mass polarization is probably less intense than elite polarization is in the US (Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006).

If there is indeed a gap between elite and the mass polarization, this implies several consequences on the individual level: there is some evidence that citizens want more moderate politicians (Bafumi & Herron, 2010), or that they want politicians who are not more moderate on certain issues, but are moderate in general with a similar mix of views on issues (Ahler & Broockman, 2015). This increasing gap in the polarization levels of political elites and citizens can be harmful for democracies (e.g. Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997) for various reasons: because ideologically less extreme voters are represented by officials closer to the extremes (Bafumi & Herron, 2010), citizens miss seeing political actors compromise (e.g. Harbridge, Malhotra, & Harrison, 2014), gridlocks become more typical (Flynn & Harbridge, 2016), or political conflicts arise too regularly (Hetherington, 2008) compared to what citizens may feel justified. Ahler (2016) argues that it is the procedural effects of high elite polarization, such as gridlock, incivility and political conflicts that really disturb less polarized citizens.

This dissertation contributes to the literature by assessing whether and how one form of ideological disconnection between elites and masses hurts support for democracies. The

[3] For three possible theoretical arguments connecting the two, see the work by Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz (2006). For current levels of polarization in the US, see Pew (2014).
[4] Hetherington (2009) argues that this also works the other way around: with more polarized masses, elites have no incentive to moderate themselves in any way.

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underlying idea is that a context with different levels of polarization of elites and citizens does not necessarily hurt in and of itself. However, when voters in such a disconnected country face constant violations of societal norms in the form of visible elite conflicts[5], debates and conflictual rhetoric, this has a negative effect on approval of the political system. The next section presents arguments supporting the negative effects of elite conflicts in such disconnected political contexts on the basis of the elite integration theory.

1.2. Do differences between political elites' and citizens' polarization levels hurt support for democracy?

Differences in the political realities, opinions and polarization levels of elites and the general public have been described by multiple theories focusing on elites. In addition to other differences, they propose various ways to achieve stability given the existing gap between political elites and voters. McAllister (1991) summarizes three main theories on possible differences in mass and elite political opinions, and finds that to achieve democratic stability these theories present the following normative statements and proposals: a) educate masses to give them a greater influence on decisions (classical elite theory); b) limit voters' decision-making possibilities only to choose between the elite groups (democratic elitism); and c) to have a unified elite, which downplays certain divisive issues, and thus makes elite conflicts less harsh (elite integration theory).[6]

As a proponent of elite integration theory, John Higley and his co-authors argue in multiple papers that a consensually united political elite is necessary for political stability (e.g. Higley & Burton, 2006). By this they mean an elite whose members share a set of informal rules and norms, meaning that they agree on the procedural rules, although they might disagree

[5] See the section in this chapter on the main concepts for a discussion of forms and definitions of elite conflicts.
[6] Empirical analyses conducted by McAllister (1991) show the feasibility of the latter two propositions.

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on substantive questions. In this way they can maintain political stability, as the norms prevent disruptive actions and ensure that issues are discussed in a way that does not undermine stability (e.g. Higley, 2006). This stability is sustained by elite factions by engaging in mutual trust, by avoiding explosive conflicts, and by competing for power in a restricted way (Higley & Pakulski, 2008).

Many authors agree with the above argument, but it is also not without both criticisms and extensions. First, Higley and Burton (2006) previously identified many countries with elite consensus and unity that have actually become more polarized over time, including Poland and Hungary. Authors pointing to increasing disunity among elites do not question that elite unity produces political stability, but they show that elite consensus may be increasingly absent in countries originally identified as united (Baylis, 2012). However, these authors not only show that some countries may no longer be good examples of unified elites, but also support the original argument by pointing to the ways in which increased disunity and polarization of elites may undermine political stability in these cases through their negative psychological, moral, public policy, patronage or delegitimizing effects (Körösényi, 2013). Second, Medding (1982) complements the original theory with the degree of popular consensus among citizens. He introduces mass polarization and citizen unity to the model by claiming that elites' disagreement and polarization must be greater, at least to some extent, than those of the masses, because this higher polarization makes them more appealing to the voters by showing more possible options.

Elite integration theory and its extensions support the initial idea presented in the first section. If there is a difference in the within group variation of values between political elites and citizens, this is not necessarily problematic for democracies. However, growing disunity, distrust and chaos among elites, especially if they are accompanied by debates on the shared norms and rules, can lead to decreasing political stability and support. As is argued below in

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Chapter 4, elite conflicts, especially if they are uncivil, violate social norms and thus alienate citizens from politics (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). This effect is expected to be stronger in contexts where citizens are more united than their representatives, as this disconnection is made more visible by constant conflict-rich disagreements between politicians.

After emphasizing the importance of the context, the next section briefly summarizes the general theories on the relevance of elite conflicts in understanding citizens' political behavior and in maintaining political support.[7]

1.3. Why elite conflicts matter for democracies

How politicians interact with each other, and how their communication is presented to citizens, are important parts of politics. Indeed, a growing literature focuses on their possible effects on citizens' political behavior. This section briefly outlines two related traditions of thought in this literature: process-based explanations of citizens' political behavior, and attempts at exploring how political communication takes place from elites to citizens.

Citizens' political behavior, such as support for the political system (e.g. Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Citrin, 1974; Citrin & Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998; Inglehart, 1988; Mayne, 2007; Miller, 1974; Mishler & Rose, 2001) or voting behavior (e.g. Bartels, 2010; Geys, 2006; Smets & van Ham, 2013), are widely analyzed topics in the political science literature. The related explanatory models mostly fit into the tradition of policy-based explanations for people's orientation to the political system. Although cultural, economic and political factors all appear in these accounts, they share a focus on the effects of policy outcomes (meaning the actual political results and performance of the political system) and of perceived policy outputs (meaning the political decisions) on citizens'

[7] Political support, regime support, support for the political system, support for democracy are used as synonyms in the dissertation, and are measured as satisfaction with democracy following the article by Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson (1995). For more details see the Dependent variable section in Chapter 4.

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relationship with the political system (Funk, 2001; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001). As Citrin (1974) argues: *"Political elites produce policies; in exchange, they receive trust from citizens satisfied with these policies and cynicism from those who are disappointed*" (Citrin, 1974, p. 973).

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) explicitly formulate the idea that not only the evaluations of policy decisions, but also evaluations of political processes may have an effect on citizens' behavior. This is similar to the argument by Ahler (2016), presented in the first section before. But they support this argument by showing that, in certain time periods in the US, policies alone can explain neither the variation in, nor the level of satisfaction with the government. These and other authors define political processes to include multiple factors that may drive citizens' political behavior: perception of representational and accountability linkages (Dumont & Varone, 2006), procedural regularity, differences in the expectations and perceptions of the characteristics of elected officials (Kimball & Patterson, 1997), or procedural justice and fairness (van Ryzin, 2011). However, these are not the only processes that may influence citizens' political behavior. Conflict-led processes in political institutions also have an effect, and some analyses propose that they decrease citizens' satisfaction with the political system (Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; for a more detailed literature review see Chapter 4). "*Its [Congress's] members will engage in time-honored activities of stalling, mutual blaming and finger-pointing. It is not pretty, but it is democracy at work…the process and outcome may be so unappealing that public respect for institution declines*" (Durr, Gilmour, & Wolbrecht, 1997, p. 182). Thus, based on the general literature on political support, elite conflicts seem to be an important factor in understanding citizens' political behavior.

A related tradition connects citizens' exposure to different news outlets, which are the main places for exposing political disagreements, with their political behavior; this field may

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be referred to as political communication and media studies. The media is what connects the realities of citizens to those of politicians, and the media can actually point out the discrepancy between these two realities. The media environment and content to some extent explains the variation in individuals' political behavior, e.g. their intention to participate in elections (Prior, 2007), their satisfaction with the political system (Patterson, 1993; Robinson, 1976), or their vote choices (Baum, 2005). As Norris (2011) and Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck (2006) conclude, it remains to be decided whether the net media effect is positive (the virtuous circle thesis) or negative (the video-malaise thesis). The former emphasizes that exposure to news increases political knowledge and interest, which goes together with increased political trust. The latter points out the negative influence of negativity and anti-institutionalism present on television: "*television journalism does cause frustration, cynicism, self-doubt, and malaise*" (Robinson, 1976, p. 425). In contrast to both these claims, some authors argue for minimal political effects of the media (see Bartels, 1993), especially now, as self-exposure to partisan media is high and growing (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). However, this tradition of media studies mainly focuses on the effects of the news in general, and not of political conflicts specifically.

For this dissertation, the relevant literature is at the crossroads of these traditions of thought. First of all, elite conflicts, as part of the political process, are the basis for the question under investigation. Second, the effect of citizens' exposure to media channels, which host these conflicts, is also an essential element of the research question. Thus, the subsequent chapters (especially those on the causes and consequences of negativity and conflicts) continue using this dual structure of political behavior and media studies.

After presenting the importance of the context (disconnected elites and masses) and the relevance of elite conflicts in understanding political stability, the following section introduces the main concepts used in the dissertation and it is followed by a discussion of the outline of the thesis, the main research question and the hypotheses of the chapters.

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1.4. Main concepts of the dissertation: negativity, attacks and conflicts

Now the main common concepts of the dissertation are introduced, which are used in all the chapters regarding the existence, strength and tone of elite conflicts. Given the different data sources used in different chapters, three different but related concepts are used to capture the appearance of elite conflicts in the public sphere: negativity (Chapters 3, 4 and 5), attacks (Chapter 3) and political conflicts (Chapters 2 and 4). In this section these three concepts are defined and the relationship among them is explored. More information on how these factors are measured is given in the relevant chapters.

The tone of political messages can be conceptualized in several ways. As proposed by Brooks and Geer (2007), it may be classified as positive/negative, civil/uncivil (to which Sobieraj & Berry, 2011, add "outrageous"), or trait-/issue-based.[8] The difference regarding the first pair is that a negative tone focuses on the opponent, and a positive tone on the speaker (e.g. Ansolabehere, et al., 1994; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Kaid & Johnston, 1991). This may be complemented by other categories, such as comparative, when both negative and positive are present (Jamieson, Waldman & Sherr, 2000), but this only makes sense on the message level and not on a more aggregated campaign level, as most campaigns are comparative and often use both positive and negative messages (Lau & Rovner, 2009).

Attacks are closely related to negativity, as they are functions within advertisements and debates meant to show weaknesses of opponents (Benoit & Harthcock, 1999). Many authors focusing on negativity use the word attack in their definitions of negativity (Finkel & Geer, 1998) or use the two words interchangeably (Ansolabehere, et al., 1994), although negativity

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[8] Although they are less relevant for the purposes of this chapter, the second and third pair of concepts are also defined here briefly. Regarding civil/uncivil disagreements, incivility includes animosity that violates certain social norms in order to resolve social conflicts (Funk, 2001). Civility includes several characteristics such as grounding the arguments in reasoning rather than emotions, criticism of ideas without hostility, politeness and respect of the opponent (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Darr, 2008). Issue-based conflicts are rather focused on policy issues, while trait-based conflicts are mainly focused on personal characteristics of politicians (Brooks & Geer, 2007).

does not necessarily mean ad hominem attacks (Lau & Rovner, 2009). Thus, based on the literature, while not identical, these two concepts are very closely related, not only empirically, but also by definition.

Political conflict is usually understood as an explicit or implicit disagreement between political actors (e.g. de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). Thus, although conflict does not explicitly include attacks or negativity in its definition, it is empirically very close to both of these (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011).

Although the definitions of these concepts seem to be quite straightforward, there is a significant constraint complicating the situation.[9] Treating all negative disagreements as equivalent may be problematic since they might differ in many ways. For instance, their relevance or civility may vary (Fridkin & Kenney, 2008); they may come up within political advertisements with one actor (e.g. Brooks & Geer, 2007) or in political debates with multiple ones (e.g. Mutz & Reeves, 2005), yielding completely different dynamics (Walter, 2014b); or, based on methodological and data collection decisions (laboratory experiment or observational study), negativity may be measured in completely different ways (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). An additional problem in arriving at a shared common definition comes from differing expert and citizen understandings of negativity/conflicts/attacks (for negativity see Geer & Lipsitz, 2013; for attacks see Chapter 3).

Despite the weaknesses of these concepts and the use of multiple concepts, the main idea behind them is similar and can be useful for this dissertation: they all measure some kind of hostility or at least political disagreement at the elite level. The next section discusses the main expectations regarding how these concepts together with elite-mass disconnection influence support for the political system.

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[9] These problems were mainly articulated in relation to negativity, but may be used for the concepts of attacks and conflicts as well.

1.5. Outline of the dissertation

Most results on the effects of elite conflicts come from the US (as seen in the previous sections of this chapter and later in Chapter 4), a country where elite and mass realities seem to be greatly diverging (as the empirics presented in the first section of Chapter 1 show; see e.g. Hetherington, 2009). This disconnection is observable in both value positions and in polarization levels, meaning that political elites are more polarized than the masses are. However, in such a case, based on what has been outlined in the section on elite integration theory, a somewhat negative effect is to be expected, especially if there are visible elite conflicts: when there is an elite-mass disconnection, and it is made constantly visible by elite conflicts, this does damage to political support for the system. The results of the empirical literature from the US, presented in Chapter 4, support this hypothesis.

A cross-national analysis would make it possible to better understand the role of elite conflicts in various settings, especially in multiple countries with many possible combinations of elite and mass polarization levels. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by using elite and mass polarization as contextual variables to better understand the relevance of conflicts/attacks and negativity, present in politics, for political support.

As summarized in Figure 1, the cases selected for this dissertation are the EU countries between 1999 and 2014 in five-year increments. Citizens' and political elites' polarization levels[10] are measured to determine whether there is an ideological disconnection between these groups, and more precisely to see whether there is a difference in how united these groups are on positions about a certain issue: whether they support further EU integration or not.[11] There

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[10] Elite and party polarization are similar concepts, and are used interchangeably in this dissertation. The same is true for mass, attitude and citizens' polarization.

[11] See Chapters 2 and 3 for the detailed operationalization of these two variables. Data sources are the European Election Studies Voter Study for mass (attitude) polarization (Schmitt et al., 2009, 2016; van der Eijk et al., n.d.; van Egmond et al., 2013) and the Chapel Hill expert survey for elite (party) polarization (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). Both variables measure dispersion in attitudes towards further EU integration. Here, for ease of comparison, the scores are standardized for all the country-years between 1999 and 2014 on the country level.

are several expectations regarding how this context shapes EU-related elite conflicts and political debates in these countries, and regarding how this context drives how elite conflicts and debates affect the stability of the political system.

The decision to use EU-related polarization instead of that measured on a left-right scale is mainly based on the EU-related focus of all the data used for this dissertation. This is useful not only because of data availability, but also for theoretical purposes. Disagreements on whether countries should or should not move further in EU integration are more than simple debates on substantial issues. They resemble the procedural disunity described by Higley and Burton (2006). Countries at the top left and bottom right are the most disconnected, where citizens and elites are differently differentiated on future EU integration. In the former case, citizens are more polarized than parties, while in the latter case the opposite is true. This is where visible elite conflicts are expected to disturb citizens more, as by explicit conflicts polarized elites alienate the less divided electorate.

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Both lines are at the means of their respective variables, the vertical line is at x=0, while the horizontal line is at y=0.

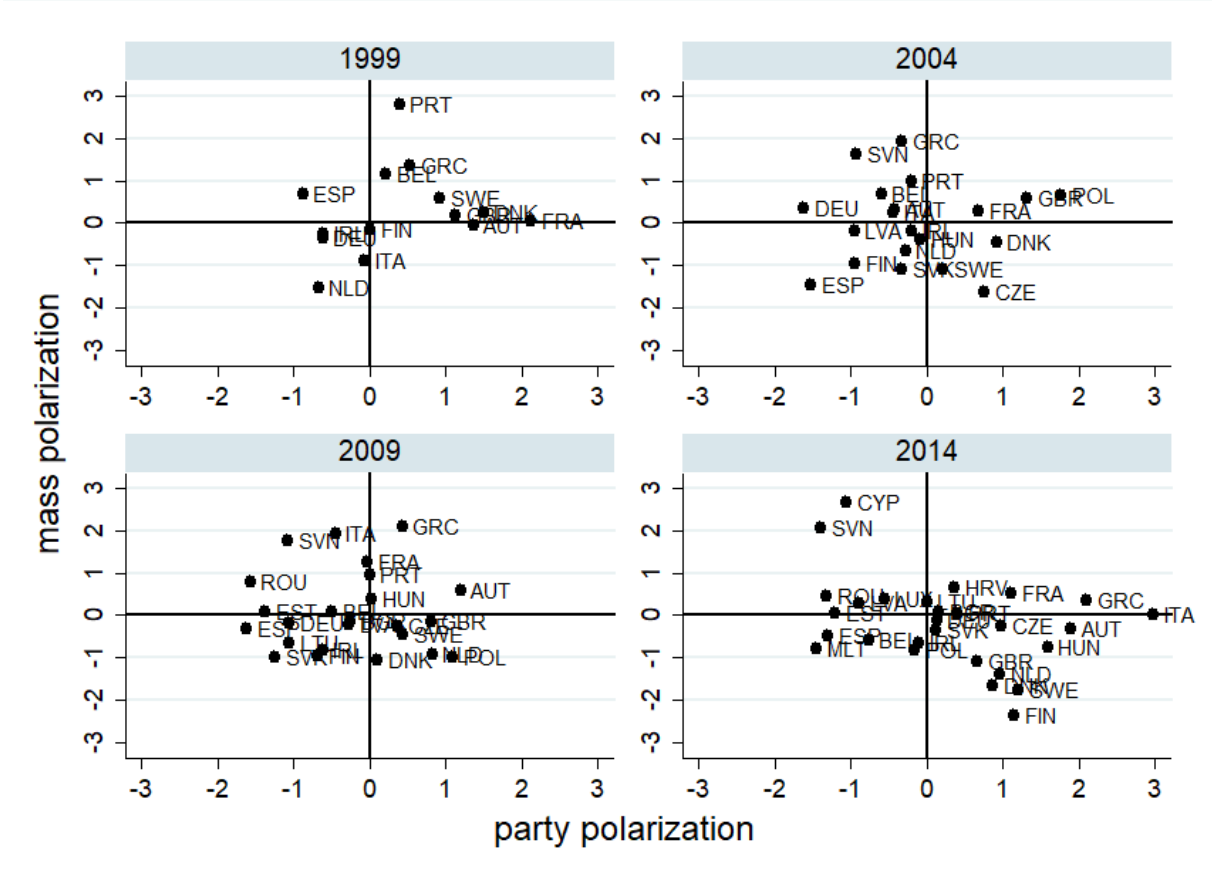

Figure 1 Elite (party) and mass polarization on EU-related issues in EU countries between 1999 and 2014

Note: The vertical axes show mass polarization levels in a given country – the values are standardized for all country-years, higher values mean higher polarization. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 3.1. The horizontal axes show party polarization levels in a given country – values are standardized for all country-years, higher values mean higher polarization. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 2. The four subgraphs show the polarization levels in four different years. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter Study, Chapel Hill expert survey.

The relevant literature and hypotheses are outlined in more detail in the appropriate places in the chapters, but an overview of the main expectations is also presented here. First, Chapter 2 presents the level of political conflicts in the media and identifies possible contributing factors in a comparative perspective over time and across countries in the EU. The main data sources used for this aggregate-level study are the three waves (1999, 2004, 2009) of the European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies (for more details on the datasets used, see the relevant chapters and Appendix 1). Elite unity in views on the EU is expected to influence the likelihood of conflictual rhetoric. Increasing disunity yields higher chances of

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norm violations and debates. Several studies indicate that party polarization and political conflicts are related (e.g. Geer, 2009; Hetherington, 2009), and thus more conflict-rich talk in countries where party polarization is high (x>0) is expected, which is the topic of Chapter 2. The main hypothesis (H_1) can be formulated as: *elite disunity or more polarized parties correlate with a more conflictual presentation of the issues in question.*

Chapter 3 focuses partly on how expert and citizen understandings of attacks in a debate differ. This is done by using multilevel models to analyze how EU citizens' perceptions differed from a more formally coded perception of an actual debate (the so-called Eurovision debate in 2014) both in general and across countries. The main logical argument assumes that if the masses are disunited and polarized, their views on elite conflicts are altered, and the harshness of debates is likely to be downplayed for them. The perceived negativity of the same political debate with a given negativity level should be lower in countries where mass polarization is high, since citizens' norms differ from those in more unified societies; people behave in a way that makes them warm up to conflictual and negative rhetoric (y>0), as is analyzed in Chapter 3. The main hypothesis in Chapter 3, H_2 can be formulated as: *those coming from a more attitude-polarized background should find the same debate less negative or attacking (probably because they find attacks and conflicts more palatable) than those coming from a less polarized country*.

Chapter 4 analyzes the effects on citizens' political behavior of both political conflicts in the news and of perceived negativity in televised debates, and asks whether there is a systematic difference among countries in these effects. The first part of the analysis is once again based on the EES datasets using multilevel models, while the second is performed on the dataset used in Chapter 3 with panel data analysis. Several hypotheses on whether contextual characteristics drive this relationship are tested within this chapter. As may be recalled, the main idea of the dissertation is that if citizens are united while elites are not, then there is a

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higher chance of citizens becoming alienated from politics, especially if there is a regular violation of societal norms in the form of constant visible elite conflicts. Thus, one must take into account the effects of both elite and mass polarization on citizens' attitudes, which is the main topic of Chapter 4. These expectations are formulated in three hypotheses: H_{3a}, *a more negative effect of political conflicts is expected in more party-polarized countries;* H_{3b}, *a less negative effect of political conflicts is expected in countries where the mass attitudes are more polarized*; and H_{3c}, *in countries where both elite polarization and attitude polarization are high, no additional effect of political conflicts on the support for the political system occurs beyond those described in* H_{3a} *and* H_{3b}.

Finally, based on the first three chapters, and diverging levels in EU-related elite and mass polarization, a typical case (from the bottom right in Figure 1) is selected: Hungary (in 2014), where the last analysis of the effects of political rhetoric on citizens' support for the political system was done using a survey experiment conducted close to the European Parliament elections in 2014. The main hypothesis is based on the results from the previous chapters: H_4: *a negative effect of negativity is expected on support for democracy in Hungary*.

The logic of the dissertation is presented in Figure 2 (the key relationships are described in parentheses).[12] Chapter 2 discusses relationships *a* and *c* (elite polarization –conflicts). Chapter 3 focuses on the relationship symbolized by arrow *f* (expert understanding of attacks – citizens' perceived attacks) and d (mass polarization – citizens' perceived negativity/attacks), but arrows *b* and *e* are also included as controls. Chapter 4, on the one hand, is concerned with relationship *i* (conflicts – support for the political system) and *k* (joint effect of conflicts and elite and mass polarization – support for the political system) and controls *g*, *h* and *m*. On the other hand, it analyzes relationship *j* (perceived negativity – support for the political system) and *l* (joint effect of perceived negativity and elite and mass polarization – support for the

[12] Depending on the chapter, the different boxes may mean different variables or may be measured slightly differently.

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political system) and controls *g*, *h* and *m*. Chapter 5 is a case study mainly of relationship *i* with controls from *h* within a given political context with given elite and mass polarization levels.

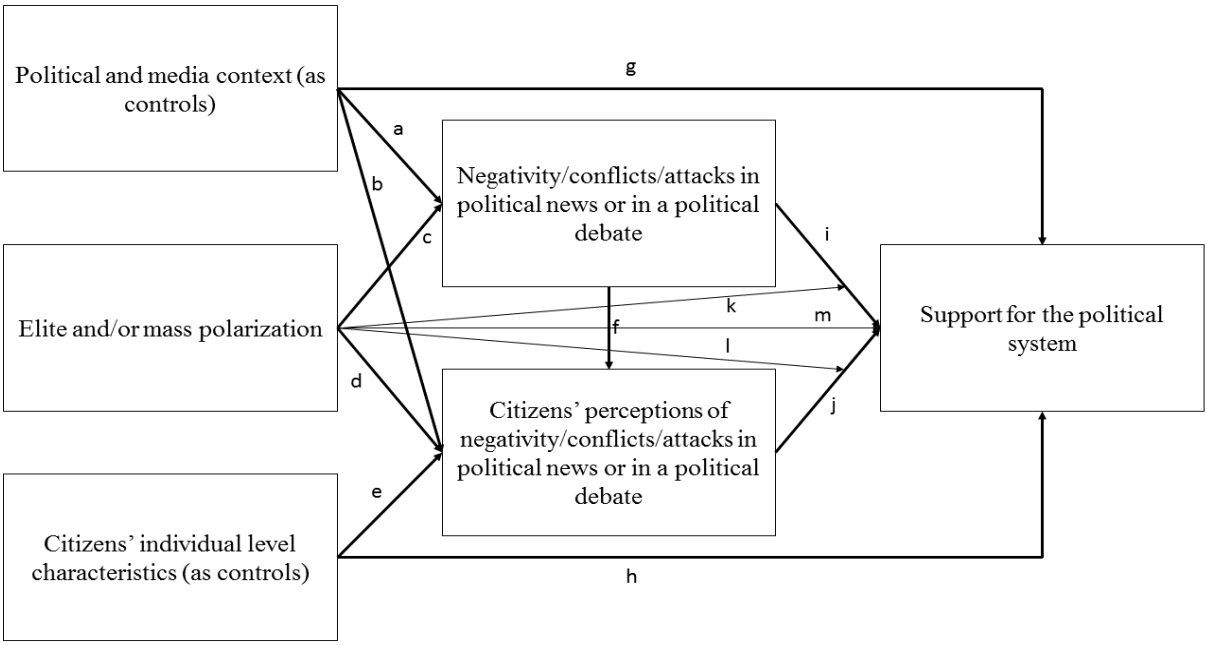

Figure 2 Outline of the dissertation

In sum, elite and mass polarization levels are important contextual factors that have been almost entirely left out of analyses on causes, perceptions and consequences of elite conflicts and negativity in the news. This dissertation tries to show whether elite or mass polarization, or the gap between these two, is what really matters for political systems in terms of the effects of elite conflicts. The underlying idea is that the increasing gap (when elites are more polarized and/or citizens are more united), together with harsher and more visible elite disagreements, damage support for political systems because the disconnection of elites and masses becomes more observable, elite rule-breaking becomes more likely to happen and is less supported in such cases. The implication is that it is neither visible displays of elite conflicts nor elite polarization on substantive issues in themselves that make citizens dislike democratic politics, but when the two coincide and yield an apparent oversupply of ideological polarization among elites relative to how much citizens themselves get divided on an ideological basis.

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Chapter 2 – Party polarization and political conflicts

2.1. Introduction

Political conflicts can be regarded as a prism that sheds light on the increasing disunity within political elites. One argument made in Chapter 1 is that when politicians become disunited, conflicts emerge between them, with many implications for the support for democracy, as examined in more detail in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 explores this relationship. Do politicians debate more when they are disunited?

This question is relevant not only for theoretical reasons. Many observers suggest that we currently live in an era of less compromise among the elites, rather than in an era showing the end of ideology and centripetal political competition. Growing negativity, attacks, conflicts and uncivil tones are found in political campaigns (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Geer, 2009), in political debates on television (Dailey, Hinck, & Hinck, 2008), in legislature (Jamieson, 1997), in political news (Geer, 2009; Sabato, 1991), in the political discourse in general (Hetherington, 2009; Mutz & Reeves, 2005), as well as in specific campaigns, like, famously, the most recent ones in the US (e.g. Harvard Kennedy School, 2016).

Much of this literature focuses on the US, but trends are similar in the European countries. Although both conflict levels and negativity have decreased since the early 1990s in some outlets in the UK and in the Netherlands, they have increased in others (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boomans, 2011). It has also been shown in general over a broader time span and a higher number of countries that, even with a small decline in the level of negativity during the late 1990s in particular countries, both negativity in general and negativity targeting politicians increased after 2002 (Walter, 2014b).

This aggregate-level chapter is concerned with the possible explanations and roots of political conflicts in a comparative perspective over time (in 1999, in 2004 and in 2009) and across countries (in the EU). It contributes to the literature in three ways.

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First of all, although the knowledge about the effects of conflicts is vast, the analysis of their roots is more limited (Schuck et al., 2013). Second, most of the literature on political disagreements is US-based, while cross-national studies with contextual characteristics are scarce (McKinney & Carlin, 2004; Schuck, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2016). Certain studies focus on single countries: e.g. Sweden (Gidenstam, 2015), Denmark (one election: Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; longitudinal analysis: Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2010; Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2011; Elmelund-Praestekaer & Mølgaard Svensson, 2014), Germany (Schweitzer, 2010), or the Netherlands (Walter, 2014a). Some authors focus on party-level variance of negativity with a qualitative assessment of country-level differences (Walter & van der Brug, 2013), and another paper discusses the determinants of conflict levels (Schuck et al., 2013), but without using countries as units of analysis.[13] Thus, this chapter helps to better understand the country-level roots of conflictual news in general. Third, and most importantly, Chapter 2 fits in with the logical flow of the whole dissertation by showing the first element of the main argument – i.e., that conflicts hurt support for democracy when elites and masses are differently polarized –, namely that disunited elites produce more political conflicts.

2.2. Sources of political conflicts in the news media

2.2.1. General explanations

How conflictual politics appears to be in the news can be determined by two direct sources: the political actors participating in the events, and the journalists covering those events. Using negativity, conflictual language and attacks may be useful for both sides.

Politicians' motivations to be conflictual may come from a high polarization of elites and parties, and thus from the intensifying disagreements between political sides (e.g. Geer,

[13] The last cited analysis is different methodologically in that it covers solely one year, has news stories as the units of analysis, compares different frames of which conflict is only one, and does not include the key variables presented here.

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2009; Hetherington, 2001; Hetherington, 2009; for more details see the next section), from their consultants who believe that conflictual campaign behavior is more successful in moving public opinion the intended way (Geer, 2009), from their desire to benefit from showing the weak sides of their opponents (e.g. Benoit & Harthcock, 1999), from the idea to behave in an unexpected manner and to be more memorable (Lau, 1985), from the aim to respond to negativity (Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2010), or merely as a way to attract voters' attention (Sood, & Iyengar, 2016).

Journalists tend to over-report negativity, attacks and conflicts when they cover political events (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005; Graber, 1997; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Jamieson, Waldman, & Devitt, 1998). The reasons for this increasing over-reporting may be that journalists are becoming more cynical about politics (Patterson, 1993; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011), or they want to attract more viewers/readers (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) and thus they try to sell good stories with conflicts (Wolfsfeld, 2011). As summarized by Geer (2009), there is a fit in increasing negativity in politics and media.[14]

2.2.2. Elite polarization

Following the main argument of the dissertation, disunited and polarized political elites are expected to initiate and increase political conflicts and conflictual rhetoric. Empirical findings show that elite polarization and negativity/conflicts seem to be highly correlated in the US, both in the Congress (e.g. Uslaner, 2000) and on television (e.g. Sinclair, 2002). Case studies of European countries also show that elite disunity on both procedural and substantive questions leads to more intense disagreements (Baylis, 2012).

[14] Moreover, there were instances when the over-reporting of modest actual negativity may have increased the actual levels later (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008).

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This co-occurrence of high elite polarization and conflicts may come about due to reasons that are more procedural or more substantive. The former occurs when one party questions the legitimacy of another and the rules of the game (Higley, 2006). The latter happens when parties move towards the ideological poles and have sharper divisions and more intense conflicts among themselves as the distance widens (Hetherington, 2009). Another possibility that combines both procedural and substantive types is when new parties arise, which increases both elite polarization and conflicts. Peter and de Vreese (2004) show that polarizing elites in the EU - especially when anti-EU parties enter the competition, not only generating more substantive debates but also raising legitimacy concerns - introduce conflicts in the news, which then become more interesting for newspapers and television channels to cover. As a caveat, they also note though that EU elections are not newsworthy enough and largely lack conflict.

It seems safe to assume though that with more elite polarization, more ideological perspectives emerge (Hallin & Mancini, 2010) and more disagreements happen (Geer, 2009), either because party positions move or because new parties emerge, leading to an increasing number of conflicts and intensified negativity.[15] Thus, the expectation, H_1 is that *elite disunity or more polarized parties correlate with a more conflictual presentation of the issues in question.*

2.2.3. Other explanations

As actors from both the political arena and the media are motivated to increase negativity, it should not come as a surprise that both the political sphere and the media contribute to changing levels of political conflicts. Media systems and political systems are interrelated in many ways. Many studies show how media and political contexts affect each other and interact while

[15] There is less work on whether mass level polarization is connected to conflicts in the news. Mutz (2006) shows a reversed causality, and argues that extreme, uncivil rhetoric on television may actually lead to mass level polarization, as increases partisans' distaste of opposition's politicians.

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influencing citizens' behavior[16] (in terms of vote choice see Schmitt-Beck (2004) or Popescu and Tóka (2002); regarding political knowledge see Tóka and Popescu (2009)). Authors use both political and media characteristics to distinguish different types of media systems not only in causal models but also in typologies. For instance, the frequently cited book by Hallin and Mancini (2004) uses both political and media characteristics when identifying three main media systems.

By following the dichotomy presented in the previous paragraphs, this section identifies both political and media system variables as possible additional explanations (to elite polarization as presented in the previous section) of the conflictual nature of political news. First, factors influencing how actual conflicts are presented in the media are covered; these factors are above all related to journalists and the media. Second, factors explaining actual conflict levels, those more related to politicians and to the political sphere, are summarized.

Media systems have many characteristics that can affect the main variable of interest. One of the key variables, as it is highly related to polarization (e.g. Hallin & Mancini, 2010; Lelkes, 2016; Levendusky, 2013b; Prior, 2013), is media-party parallelism, a metric of how parallel the media and party systems are (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). It may also be regarded as a measure showing how partisan media are (Lelkes, 2016). Following this conceptualization of parallelism, the present chapter defines it as the manifestation of *"partisanship of media audiences"* (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.28.), the extent to which citizens' political preferences are explained by their media consumption habits (van Kempen, 2007).

Higher levels of partisan media have been shown to make *"efforts to provoke visceral responses (e.g., anger, righteousness, fear, moral indignation) from the audience through the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, misleading or partially inaccurate information, ad*

[16] Or as others formulate the same mechanism differently: media plays a linking role between politics and citizens (Peter, & de Vreese, 2004; Mancini, & Swanson, 1996); or media effects on citizens' electoral behavior are moderated by the political context (Lawson, & McCann, 2004).

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hominem attacks, and partial truths about opponents" (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011, p. 20). Furthermore, as formulated by Hallin and Mancini (2010), in countries with high media-party parallelism, not only do the media want to over-represent conflicts, but ideological conflicts are also sharper and the style of politics is more confrontational.[17] Thus, the expectation is that a *higher level of media-party parallelism goes together with a higher level of conflict in the news.*

Many studies dealing with media effects claim that television and newspapers are different in nature: the former is a common ground for all citizens, while the latter is traditionally the source for partisan information (e.g. Goldman & Mutz, 2011). Walter and Vliegenthart (2010) show that newspapers in the Netherlands were much more likely to present trait attacks prior to the 2006 elections than television channels. However, using a subset of the data of this chapter, Schuck et al. (2013) show that conflict levels do not differ in newspapers and television. Outlet type may not only have an effect on the level of conflict, but may also modify the relationship between all the independent variables and the dependent variable (van Kempen, 2007). *Based on these considerations, television and newspapers are analyzed using different models in the later sections*.

As indicated earlier, one of the motivations behind journalists' increasing focus on elite conflicts is the desire to attract a greater viewership. Thus, one would expect that *if there is higher competition in the media market with more outlets being present, more conflicts are covered in the news* (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004). However, the results in Europe are ambiguous in this respect (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011).

In addition to the media, the party system is also relevant to understand the conflictual nature of news, as the actual conflict levels are influenced by politicians (Pfetsch et al., 2014). The fragmentation of the party system is expected to be important for various reasons, and

[17] An alternative hypothesis would be that more partisan outlets may have less conflicts because they contain less contradictory, less dissimilar views, as they propose the ideas of only one party (this argument was put forth by Goldman & Mutz, 2011).

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diverse findings have been reported in this respect. On the one hand, in multiparty systems the media is usually skewed towards the larger parties, thus smaller parties have to fight hard to get media attention (Vergeer, Hermans, & Cunha, 2012), which may result in a more conflictual presentation of their programs. Furthermore, in these systems more parties contest with each other, thus there is a higher chance of explicitly formulating conflicting ideas (Schuck et al., 2013). On the other hand, in multiparty systems parties should be more careful with attacks as they must take into account possible future coalition agreements (Walter, 2014a) or the fact that attacking an opposing party may benefit a third party more than the initiator of the attack (Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2010). Thus the initiator of an attack is always taking on some risk (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008). However, as Elmelund-Praestekaer and Mølgaard Svensson (2014) show, after controlling for parties' opinions on coalition forming, a higher number of parties tends to increase political conflict level. Thus, in general, *fragmentation of the party system and a higher number of parties are expected to positively correlate with political conflicts.*

Finally, one may also control for whether or not there was an additional election besides the EP election in a given year, with the expectation that *an additional campaign may go together with a lower conflict level* because it decreases the importance of the EP campaign (Schuck et al., 2013).

2.3. Data and methods

2.3.1. Scope

Similarly to Chapter 4, this chapter uses the 1999, 2004 and 2009 waves of the European Election Studies (EES) Media Study (Banducci et al., 2014) and Voter Study (Schmitt et al., 2009; van der Eijk et al., n.d.; van Egmond et al., 2013).[18] Data on the dependent variable have

[18] European Election Studies Voter Study can be downloaded from the website of Marsh and Mikhaylov, from the GESIS and the PIREDEU websites (Schmitt et al., 2009; van der Eijk et al., n.d.; van Egmond et al., 2013;

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been collected from EU countries, meaning 15 countries in 1999, 24 countries (one country missing) in 2004 and 27 countries in 2009. Finally, although 162 cases could have been included in the dataset (theoretically 27 countries*3 years*2 outlets), due to missing data (for instance in 1999 many countries were not part of the EU, and thus data collection was not performed), fewer cases are present in the analyses. Although variable operationalization is discussed in the following sections, see Appendix 2 for further details.

2.3.2. Dependent variable

Conflict has been conceptualized and measured in very different ways both in political behavior and in the framing literature. Most authors use a very simple understanding of conflict: an explicit or implicit disagreement between political actors. A campaign or media outlet is conflictual in proportion to the relative quantity of conflictual stories it presents (number of conflictual stories divided by the number of all stories) (e.g. de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001), or negative in proportion to the relative number of negative stories it presents (Finkel & Geer, 1998). More conflictual news usually means more political blame, criticisms and personal attacks between politicians, and a less balanced presentation of debates.

This chapter uses EES Media Study to construct the dependent variable. In this dataset (with some exceptions), EU-related stories for two television news outlets and three newspapers were coded in almost all EU countries for several weeks (the exact outlet numbers and time span depends on the wave of the study and on the country) before the upcoming European Parliament elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009. The exact means of data collection are covered in the longitudinal codebook of EES. The total number of coded stories is 104,772, of which 68,345 include information on at least one of the three variables used for constructing the

"GESIS", n.d.; Marsh & Mikhaylov, n.d.; "PIREDEU", n.d.). All are probability samples asked in 15 (1999), 25 (2004) and 27 (2009) EU countries, with 13549, 28861 and 27069 respondents.

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dependent variable. Data are available both at the GESIS and the PIREDEU websites (Banducci et al., 2014; "GESIS", n.d; "PIREDEU", n.d.).

Following de Vreese, Peter and Semetko (2001), Schuck, Vliegenthart and de Vreese (2016) and Schuck et al. (2013), three variables from the EES Media Study were used to construct the dependent variable: *a) "Explicitly: story mentions two or more sides of a problem or issue"; b) "Explicitly: story mentions any conflict / disagreement"; c) "Explicitly: story says that one actor reproaches / blames / criticizes another"*.[19] All three were measured as dummy (0-1) variables, and they were averaged to measure each story on a 0-1 scale. The means of this newly created conflict variable were computed for each country and year, where higher values indicate higher conflict levels. Admittedly, measuring how conflictual outlets in the media are by using a media content analysis that covers only a limited number of outlets for a limited time period before the EP elections may not be the best approach to capture the real conflict levels in the news. However, the outlets were chosen such that they include the most significant news media, both tabloid and highbrow outlets. The time period covered is not randomly chosen but includes the final weeks of an actual EP election campaign – not quite so salient as national elections but still one with increasing importance and with a fair bit of spending and electoral participation in most EU member states (de Vreese et al., 2006; Schuck et al., 2011). Thus, this dataset still provides a unique opportunity to better understand how elite polarization drives political conflicts.

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2.3.3. Elite polarization

Conceptualizations and operationalizations of political polarization differ in the literature based on a number of features. First of all, it may be measured at the level of the masses (e.g. Enyedi

[19] The authors of these studies use one more variable to measure the level of conflicts, which was excluded from this study since that variable was not included in all three waves.

& Bértoa, 2010; Rehm, 2011), the parties (elite) (e.g. Kitschelt & Rehm, 2010; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006), or a combination (e.g. Hetherington, 2009; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006). Second, there may be differences among these measurements regarding the dimensional space in which the polarization is measured: it might be left-right (Dalton, 2008; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2010), liberal-conservative (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal 2006) or multi-dimensional (Hetherington, 2009; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2015).[20]

Throughout this dissertation both elite (a.k.a. "party") and mass (or "attitude") polarizations are measured. The measurements for elite polarization are described in more detail in this chapter, while mass polarization is described in the next one. As mentioned in Chapter 1, given that all the data used in the dissertation are related to EP elections, polarization is also measured as a deviation in positions about EU integration, both at the elite level and at the mass level.

Party polarization is measured using the following Chapel Hill question on party positions towards the EU: *"POSITION = overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in YEAR"* (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). The weighted means (weighted by party vote shares) for each country and year were subtracted from party scores, the difference was taken to the power of two, and they were then added, weighted by party vote shares within each country and year (this is a standard measure; see Taylor & Hernan, 1971; for the same use of Chapel Hill data, see Lachat, 2008). For 1999 the 1999 scores were used, for 2004 the 2002 scores were used (2006 could have been used, but many elections used for the 2006 data happened after 2004, thus 2002 seemed to be more relevant), and for 2009 the 2010 scores were used (as the closest data collection year). Scores were standardized on the

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[20] In addition to these conceptual differences, indices to measure polarization also differ in the data they use: with mass-level polarization it may be voters' self-placement (e.g. Enyedi & Bértoa, 2010; Hetherington, 2009), while with party (elite) polarization it may be individual perception of party system polarization (e.g. Dalton, 2008; Vegetti, 2012), expert surveys (e.g. Lachat, 2008), party manifestos (e.g. Schneider, 2004), or roll call votes (e.g. McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006).

aggregate level for the three years together (to compare them with each other over time and across space).

2.3.4. Controls

Media-party parallelism (press-party and television-party) is measured as proposed by van Kempen (2007).[21] The likelihood to vote for each party within each country and year (usually measured on a 0-10 scale in all the three years) was regressed on respondents' exposure to different news outlets (which had a readership/viewership higher than 5% within the whole country subsample) by using the EES Voter Study dataset. Exposure was measured as exposed or not to each television channel and newspaper in 1999, in 2004 and in 2009; in the last case, data were recoded due to measurement changes. Finally, within each country and year the adjusted R^2-s of these models were computed for each party and were summed after weighting by the vote share of the given party in the previous election (these data were collected from the NSD European Election Database). This sum was the measurement of media-party parallelism. This analysis was performed separately for television channels and for all newspaper outlets. There are many limitations of this variable construction: the number of outlets is taken into account only to some extent, many data points are missing, especially for 2004, and the measurement and possible categories of the variables included have changed slightly over time.

Although many studies regard *types of outlets* as an independent variable, in this chapter all analyses of them are conducted separately for the reasons discussed in the previous section. The EES Media Study dataset provides the outlet in which the given news story was presented. All outlets were coded as either television or newspaper by using an appendix for the

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[21] The scores were computed for 1999 as well, and the correlations between her scores (van Kempen, 2007, p. 310) and the scores used in this study are 0.992 for newspapers and 0.778 for television.

longitudinal codebook of the EES Media Study (in Excel format, named APPENDIX 1999 2004 2010 EES Media Content Analysis).

The number of media outlets is factored in as the number of those outlets mentioned/followed/regularly watched or read by at least 5% of the population in a given country in a given year in the EES Voter Study. Higher values mean a higher number of outlets.

Fragmentation of the party system is measured by the effective number of parties on the votes level. More fragmented systems have a higher value. The data source is the Quality of Government time-series dataset (Teorell, et al., 2016), and originally the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon et al., 2016).

Whether or not there was another election in a given year aside from the EP elections was measured by a 0-1 dummy variable and was determined on the basis of the Quality of Government time-series dataset (Teorell, et al., 2016).

2.4. Results

First of all, the conflict levels are shown across countries and years for the two outlets in Figures 3 and 4. In Figure 5 conflict levels are then compared over time, across outlets and through space in a slightly more aggregated manner.

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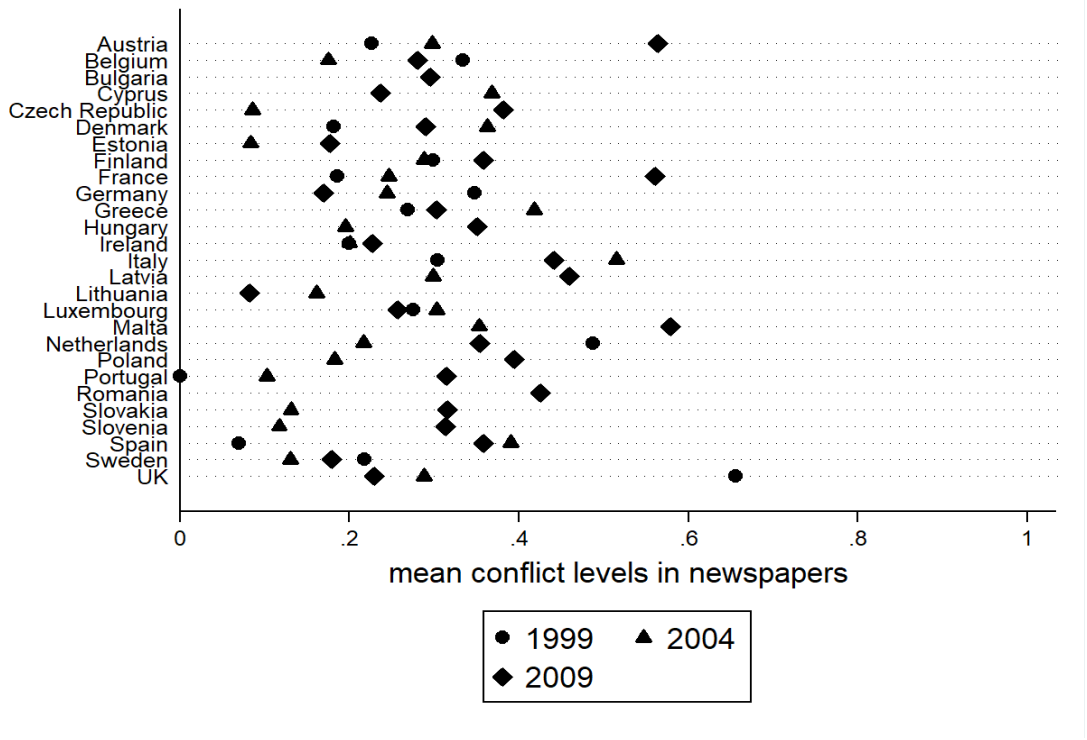

Figure 3 Conflict levels in newspapers by country and year

Note: The vertical axis shows countries. The horizontal axis shows mean conflict levels in newspapers in a given country – values run from 0 to 1, higher values mean more conflicts. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 2. The three symbols represent three years. Data source: European Election Studies Media Study.

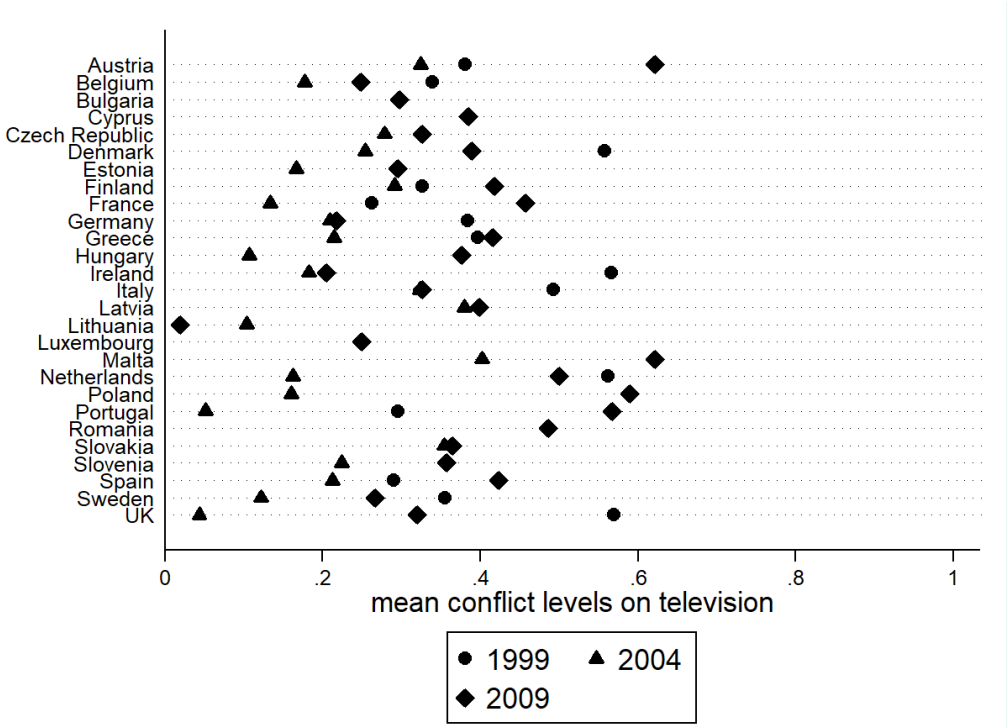

Figure 4 Conflict levels on television by country and year

Note: The vertical axis shows countries. The horizontal axis shows mean conflict levels on television in a given country – values run from 0 to 1, higher values mean more conflicts. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 2. The three symbols represent three years. Data source: European Election Studies Media Study.

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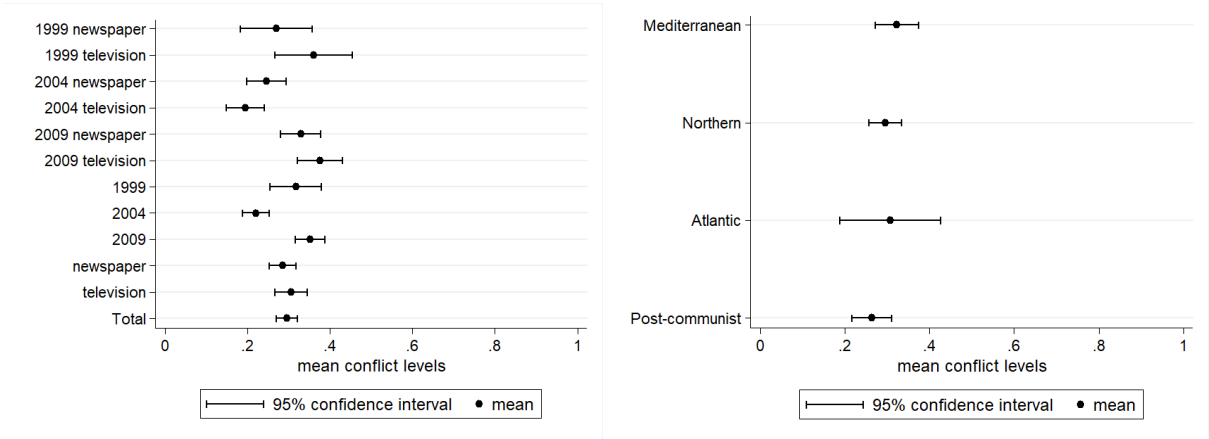

Figure 5 Conflict levels over time, across outlets and space

Note: The vertical axes show different groupings (outlets in years, years, outlets, space). The horizontal axes show mean conflict levels – values run from 0 to 1, higher values mean more conflicts. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 2. Dots represent means, while lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Data source: European Election Studies Media Study.

A quick comparison of the means shows that the differences are not that significant across outlets and space.[22] The mean conflict level for television is 0.325 (n=64) and 0.285 (n=67) for newspapers, which are not significantly different. Regarding space, the typology by Hallin and Mancini (2004), complemented here with post-communist societies, shows no significant differences: "polarized pluralist" countries have a mean of 0.332 (n=37), "democratic corporatist" countries have a mean of 0.309 (n=46), "liberal" countries have a mean of 0.307 (n=12), while post-communist countries have a mean of 0.270 (n=36). Differences are not statistically significant on the country level.

Regarding differences in time, the mean conflict levels were 0.339 in 1999 (n=29), 0.230 in 2004 (n=48) and 0.353 in 2009 (n=54). The mean in 2004 was lower than in 1999 or in 2009, and the differences are statistically significant ($p<0.01$). In addition to the EP election, 1999

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[22] For hypothesis testing, instead of multiple standard one-way ANOVAs, a repeated measures two-way full factorial ANOVA would have been more appropriate since the observations are not independent from each other (and there are more independent variables). The mean differences would have been slightly different as the number of cases would have been lower, as there are many countries in which data are missing for one or two years. All the results are very similar, however, to those presented here.

was the year with the first-step introduction of the Euro (de Vreese, 2001), which may explain high levels of conflicts in the media in that year.

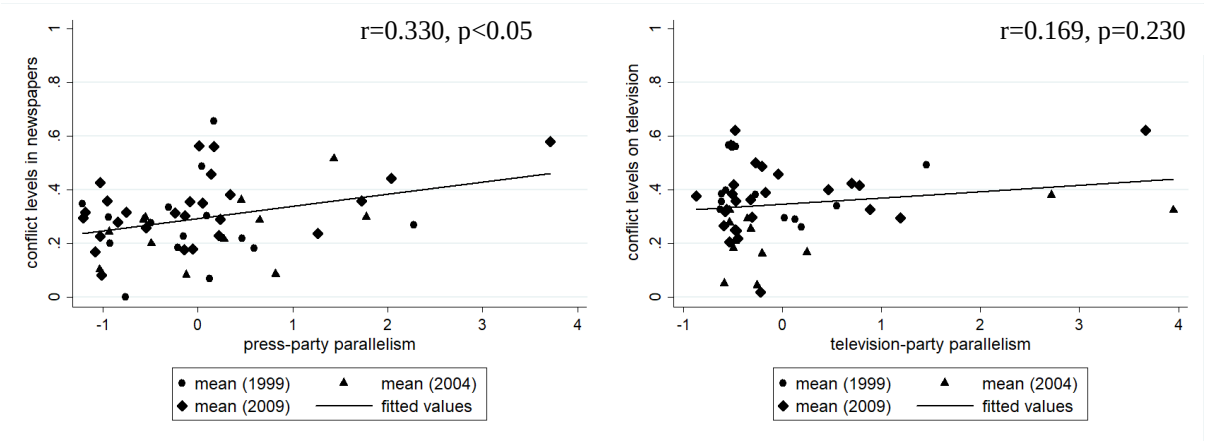

Figure 6 Conflict levels (in newspapers and on television) and media-party parallelism

Note: The vertical axes show mean conflict levels – values run from 0 to 1, higher values mean more conflicts. For the operationalization of the variables, see Appendix 2. The horizontal axes show media-party parallelism levels – values are standardized, higher values mean more parallelism. For the operationalization of the variables, see Appendix 2. Dots represent countries in different years. The three symbols represent three different years, while the line shows the fitted values in general. The two subgraphs show the conflict levels in newspapers and on television. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies, NSD European Election Database.

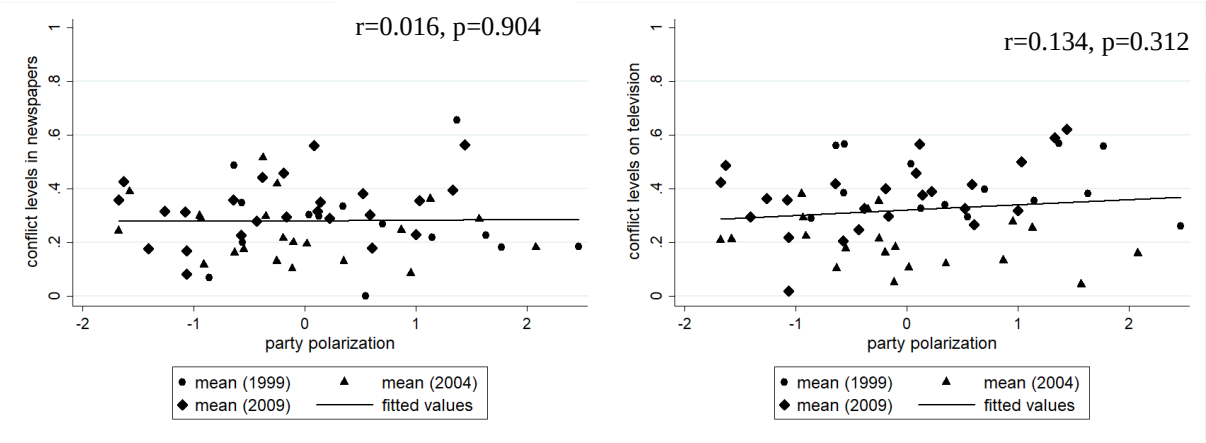

Figure 7 Conflict levels (in newspapers and on television) and party polarization

Note: The vertical axes show mean conflict levels – values run from 0 to 1, higher values mean more conflicts. For the operationalization of the variables, see Appendix 2. The horizontal axes show party polarization levels – values are standardized, higher values mean higher polarization. For the operationalization of the variables, see Appendix 2. Dots represent countries in different years. The three symbols represent three different years, while the line shows the fitted values in general. The two subgraphs show the conflict levels in newspapers and on television. Data sources: European Election Studies Media Study, Chapel Hill expert survey.

Figures 6 and 7 show the relationship between conflict levels and the key independent variables: media-party parallelism and party polarization respectively. In the case of newspapers only press-party parallelism shows a statistically significant positive relationship. If one runs the bivariate correlations by year, press-party parallelism has a positive relationship with conflict levels in newspapers in 2009 ($r=0.485$; $p<0.05$). In the case of television there is no statistically significant relationship in general. Correlations by year show statistically significant relationships with television-party parallelism in 2004 ($r=0.510$; $p<0.1$), in 2009 ($r=0.341$; $p<0.1$), and with party polarization in 2009 ($r=0.434$; $p<0.05$).

After all the descriptive and bivariate analyses, Table 1 (for newspapers) and Table 2 (for television) summarize the results of the multivariate analyses of the roots of political conflicts in the news.[23] All continuous independent variables were standardized. The dataset is time-series cross-sectional in structure, the cases are not independent from each other (it is assumed that there is both spatial and serial correlation in the models), and there is a relatively high number of countries (high N) and small number of years (low T). Thus, linear regression with Driscoll and Kraay standard errors is first used for both outlet types (Driscoll & Kraay, 1995; Hoechle, 2007) with and without year dummies (Models 1 and 2 respectively).

Second, fixed-effects regression is used (in Models 3 and 4) to exploit the full potential of the panel data and to substantiate causal claims. The following brief explanation of fixed-effects regression is mainly based on Allison (2009). With fixed-effects regression, one includes the countries as their own controls in the models (they are compared to themselves at different time points), thereby controlling for their omitted time-invariant characteristics, which makes it possible to look at how the change in the time-variant independent variables causes change in the dependent variable. Thus, one can make causal claims in an observational study. Finally,

[23] A super-population of countries is assumed in this case (and this is the sample of the assumed super-population) in order to make statistical significance meaningful. The analysis was done in Stata by using the xtreg and xtscc commands.

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year dummies are also included in separate models (4 in both tables) as a control to account for omitted EU-level time-variant variables (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013).[24]

However, there is a major problem with fixed-effects models. Fixed-effects regression focuses on the change within countries (both in the dependent and independent variables), and thus disregards the variation across countries and uses the variation within countries only over years. This means that when the number of years is very low (which is the case here: 3 for most countries, but even less in some instances), there is a huge loss of information, especially in case of variables that are time-variant but have little variation over time.

Table 1 Explaining conflict levels in newspapers

	Model 1a Driscoll-Kraay without year	**Model 2a** Driscoll-Kraay with year	**Model 3a** Fixed-effects without year	**Model 4a** Fixed-effects with year
Press-party parallelism	0.03#	0.02	0.01	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Number of newspapers	0.01	0.05#	-0.01	0.08
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Party polarization	-0.00	-0.01	-0.05	-0.05
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Election held that year				
yes	-0.04	-0.06	-0.01	-0.10
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Effective number of parties	0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Year				
2004		-0.11#		-0.22#
		(0.06)		(0.12)
2009		0.03		0.02
		(0.03)		(0.06)
Constant	0.30***	0.31***	0.30***	0.35***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)
N	48	48	48	48
R^2	0.0718	0.1833	0.4614	0.5961

***p<0.001;**p<0.01;*p<0.05; #p<0.1

Note: Driscoll-Kraay standard errors are in parentheses for the first two models. Standard errors are in parentheses for the fixed-effect models. Reference category for election held that year is *no*. Reference category for year is *1999*. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 2 in greater detail. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies, Chapel Hill expert survey, Quality of Government data, NSD European Election Database.

[24] In the case of fixed-effects regression, based on two tests for time fixed-effects for both newspapers and television, the time dummies should be included in the two models (p<0.01) (Torres-Reyna, 2007).

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In the case of newspapers, based on the F-tests none of the models fit the data ($p<0.05$). Looking at the non-fitting models, the low number of cases should be emphasized once again as a very serious limitation of this aggregate-level analysis.[25]

Press-party parallelism records a statistically significant effect only in the first model. Thus, there is only some weak evidence that higher press-party parallelism goes together with more political conflicts in the news.

Party polarization has no statistically significant effects, thus polarization of parties does not lead to more conflictual newspaper outlets.

Regarding controls, the results are as follows.[26] For number of newspapers, Model 2a shows a statistically significant positive effect, as was expected based on the higher competition argument. Neither effective number of parties, nor an additional election in a year influences political conflict levels in newspapers.

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[25] R^2-s for these fixed-effects regressions show a quite high explained variance of the dependent variable, but countries are included as controls for themselves within both models, which partially explains the high variance.
[26] For controls the results are discussed here; for the key variables the discussion is presented in the next section.

Table 2 Explaining conflict levels on television

	Model 1b Driscoll-Kraay without year	**Model 2b** Driscoll-Kraay with year	**Model 3b** Fixed-effects without year	**Model 4b** Fixed-effects with year
Television-party parallelism	0.02#	0.04***	-0.02	0.05
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Number of TV channels	-0.03#	-0.02*	-0.07*	-0.06#
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Party polarization	0.02#	0.01	-0.02	-0.08
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Election held that year				
Yes	-0.01	-0.05	-0.03	-0.12
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.08)
Effective number of parties	-0.02	-0.03*	0.05	0.05
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.08)	(0.06)
Year				
2004		-0.20***		-0.27**
		(0.02)		(0.07)
2009		-0.06**		-0.14*
		(0.02)		(0.06)
Constant	0.35***	0.43***	0.35***	0.50***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.05)
N	48	48	48	48
R^2	0.0995	0.3395	0.4414	0.7197

***p<0.001;**p<0.01;*p<0.05; #p<0.1

Note: Driscoll-Kraay standard errors are in parentheses for the first two models. Standard errors are in parentheses for the fixed-effect models. Reference category for election held that year is *no*. Reference category for year is *1999*. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 2 in greater detail. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies, Chapel Hill expert survey, Quality of Government data, NSD European Election Database.

Based on the F-tests, the models with year dummies fit the data (at least at a p<0.01 level).

Television-party parallelism has a statistically significant positive relationship in Models 1b and 2b. The original hypothesis, expecting more partisan media to be more conflictual, is supported by this model.

Results for party polarization show no effect in three models, but, as expected, one shows a statistically significant positive relationship with conflict levels (Model 1b).

The following results have been found with regard to controls. For number of channels, all models show a statistically significant negative effect: increasing numbers of television channels decrease conflict levels. This is exactly the opposite of what we have seen with

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newspapers. The reason behind this contradiction may be that when the number of television channels increases, there is more space to express all kinds of stories and no need to fit all the conflictual ones into one or two channels. Here number of parties correlates negatively with elite conflicts in one case (Model 2b). Two competing theories were presented in the literature review, but the one based on which the hypothesis was formed (expecting a positive correlation), is not supported by these results. When the number of parties is higher, elite conflicts on television are scarce. An additional election in a given year does not change the level of political conflicts on television.

2.5. Discussion

This goal of this chapter is to describe and explain elite conflict levels in the news in a comparative cross-country and longitudinal perspective. Although it faces several limitations, the main aim has been met. The results show that conflicts in the news are actually grounded both in the political system (influencing actual conflict levels) and in the media (influencing the presentation of conflict levels).

The results are partly in line with the expectations for the control variables. Regarding the key variables (media-party parallelism and party polarization), the expected effects were also partly detected, and mainly for television. In countries with more partisan television channels, more conflicts, or at least more criticism/blame and political attacks between politicians, are shown to the viewers according to two models (1b and 2b), and something similar is found for newspapers in Model 1a (also cross-nationally). It may be the case that considering only within country differences downplays the importance of media-party parallelism (in Models 3 and 4), and this is why no significant relationships are found in any of the fixed-effects models. Looking at the bivariate relationships in Figure 6, one can conclude

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that, at least in 2009, the more parallel media systems were more conflictual both in newspapers and on television, and in 2004 in the case of television.

The expectation is only partially met here that the more polarized parties in a country become, the more conflictual the news becomes. One model for television supports this statement, but otherwise the effect is not statistically significant. Between-country relationships in Figure 7 show that in 2009 there was a positive relationship between conflict levels and party polarization, at least for television.

Thus, one can conclude that, although the 2009 results for television seem to fit in the general argument of the dissertation, most of the other analyses do not confirm the initial expectations. However, there is at least one reason why one should not fully reject the original hypotheses, at least until the 2014 data come out (data are still under construction according to the EES website: "EES", n.d.), even if unfortunately, for the first time this will not contain television content analysis.

Both the 1999 and 2004 EP elections were exceptional. In 1999 the introduction of the Euro dominated EU-related news. Even in countries where parties more or less agreed on the future of the EU, they disagreed about this issue, which highly intensified elite conflicts (for instance in the UK, see de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). This is why conflict levels were relatively high in general (Figure 5), and even in countries with low party polarization (as seen in Figure 7). In 2004, the enlargement added new member states with similar polarization levels (md=0.20, p=0.663), but with lower conflict levels in newspapers (md=-0.10, $p<0.05$) and on television (md=0.01, p=0.744) compared to old member states, and this may have changed the general relationship.

Although past results provide no clear evidence, the most current trends (in 2009) seem to underline the general expectations. More partisan media and more polarized parties lead to more political conflicts. Returning to the main argument presented in Chapter 1, elites disunited

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on the question of EU integration produced more political conflicts and debates among themselves on EU issues in 2009 (at least on television), and this was only reinforced by the partisan media. These are the findings we can expect from the general theories on elite integration. Although these are based on domestic political processes, the 2009 EU elections seem to fit the same pattern.

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Chapter 3 – Mass polarization and perception of negativity

3.1. Introduction

Having shown that disunited elites produce more political conflicts, this chapter focuses on how citizens perceive elite debates and conflictual rhetoric. Do citizens perceive politics as being more conflictual when they are disunited themselves? Or do the cleavages within the electorate downplay the relevance of political conflicts? This is a very important step in understanding how the context modifies the role played by elite conflicts and negativity in political stability.

This chapter is different from the others in how it treats its key variable. The common feature of Chapters 2 and 4 is that they measure political conflicts in the news in a very similar way: as coded by trained experts. Thus, when the cross-national analyses are performed, a common expert understanding of conflict levels and their possible causes and consequences are analyzed. This makes those two analyses and the cross-national comparisons more meaningful, since using an expert coding addresses the cultural perception bias across countries regarding what is conflictual and what is not.

However, as summarized in Chapter 1, some authors argue that, although scholars seemingly use a very similar simple meaning of negativity/attacks/conflicts, even these concepts can differ considerably (either because of data collection, methods or operationalization), which may be a reason for the inconclusive results in the literature on their effects (e.g. Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).[27] However, some go further and claim that, aside from the lack of a common scholarly understanding, experts' and citizens' perceptions of negativity may also differ considerably (e.g. Sigelman & Kugler, 2003).[28]

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[27] Much of the literature is concerned with negativity. However, this chapter analyzes attacks as the key variable of interest due to data availability (but negativity is also included in a complementary analysis). As indicated in the Introduction, the two concepts are closely related by definition.

[28] The cross-country perspective (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001) of the dissertation further complicates the issue. The difference between a general expert understanding and citizens' understanding of political conflicts may vary across countries (as may citizens' perceptions of conflicts).

This chapter tries to shed light on the issue with the help of a unique dataset that observed how variation in attitude polarization among citizens may impact the perception of exactly the same, very elaborate, civil and lengthy elite communication. The author of this dissertation was able to participate in a study that collected data on the perception of a televised presidential debate prior to the European Parliament elections in 2014. The debate under investigation (the so-called Eurovision debate), held on 15 May 2014, was one of the seven televised debates among the candidates for the presidency of the European Commission and the only one in which all five candidates participated. National teams of researchers led by Jürgen Maier and Thorsten Faas collected data in all EU countries from a sample of university students watching the debate (Maier et al., 2017). These data provide a unique opportunity to better understand diverging perceptions of conflicts. More information on the debate itself is presented in the Data section.[29]

Using these data, this chapter makes three specific contributions to the literature. First of all, regarding the design, there are several weaknesses in studies of the effects of televised debates, and studies using a before-after design with a small time difference in collecting the two waves of data while controlling for the content of the debates are recommended by meta-analyses of the field (Zhu, Milavsky, & Biswas, 1994). The data used here meet these requirements. Second, it helps to reveal major differences in perceptions and the actual content of debates. Finally, as stated by McKinney and Carlin (2004): "*analysis of international debates would benefit from a cross-cultural comparative approach that would allow researchers to better understand the similarities and differences in both content and viewer reactions to debates*" (p. 228). This chapter aims to focus on how citizens of 24 EU countries viewed a particular debate, and how their perceptions varied across countries and differed from a more formally coded perception of the same debate.

[29] Although the other cross-national parts of this dissertation focus on political conflicts in the news throughout a campaign, due to data availability limitations this chapter deals with attacks and negativity in one debate.

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The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, the chapter discusses how citizen perceptions relate to those of experts, and possible driving factors both on the individual and contextual levels are presented, including the key independent variable, mass polarization. Data collection is then discussed in more detail, and finally multiple analyses are performed to better understand the nature of differences in perceptions of negativity in televised debates and to see the role of citizens' disunity in perceiving elite conflicts.

3.2. Perceptions and expert understandings of the main concepts

Literature on whether experts and citizens have the same understanding of negativity/conflict/attack is rather scarce, given most authors use a simple definition accepted by most scholars (Lau & Rovner, 2009). However, as argued by Sigelman and Kugler (2003), citizens, campaign experts and scholars all mean different things by negativity. Candidates and their staff often use "self-serving subjectivity" when assessing negativity, meaning that when they attack, they interpret it as a simple highlight of differences between candidate issue positions or characters; while when they are attacked, they present themselves as victims of a vicious attack, and call it negative campaigning (Sigelman & Kugler, 2003). Meanwhile, scholars try to be impartial in their definitions, resulting in the oversimplified concepts discussed in Chapter 1: a negative tone focuses on the opponent, while a positive tone on the speaker (e.g. Ansolabehere, et al., 1994; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Kaid & Johnston, 1991). However, the electorate differs from both of these groups: "*It is clear that these debates can be analyzed from an argumentative perspective. The real question, however, is how the viewer at home responds. Most average voters are probably not trained in judging by standard debate criteria… Thus, while scholars can study the transcripts of debates in terms of argument, the viewers at home may be well deprived of a true understanding of the*

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argumentative dimensions of the debates" (Hellweg, Pfau, & Brydon, 1992, p. 50). There are at least two main reasons why citizens interpret negativity differently.

First, there are differences in the general understanding of the concept. Although the positive-negative dichotomy is viewed without an associated value judgement by scholars, these concepts are easy to conflate with good, bad or dirty, which routinely happens in commentary (Jamieson, Waldman, & Sherr, 2000; Lau & Rovner, 2009). Thus, although a candidate making a simple comparison with his or her opponent may be seen as negative by a scholar (because it is opponent-based), citizens may view the candidate as being positive if the comparison is not "dirty." Mattes and Redlawsk (2015) show that opponent-based stories are only perceived as negative by the majority of respondents if they concern the attacked candidate's family. Otherwise, only a minority of citizens share the understanding of scholars when listening to opponent-based stories. Furthermore, citizens in general may just use the term negative to refer to anything they do not like (Geer & Lipsitz, 2013).

Second, the electorate either acquires information on campaigns selectively, or they understand the same messages differently based on certain characteristics. Citizens do not have time to follow campaign communications in great detail, but use shortcuts, often following their preferred candidates' lead, which may systematically bias the messages they get (Sigelman, & Kruger, 2003). Citizens are also motivated processors in the sense that they are more likely to accept negative messages on candidates they do not vote for, and find such messages to be less fair when they concern their preferred candidate or party (Stevens et al., 2008). This means that listening to a message and then perceiving the negativity of the message may be conditional based on partisanship. In other words *"they either do not learn disliked information or they fail to take into account negatives they do learn"* (Redlawsk, 2004, p. 606).

Empirical results concerning the relationship between experts' and citizens' perceptions are also inconclusive, similar to the literature on effects: some show a strong relationship

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between the two, while others actually show that despite some common understanding, these two differ in general and their difference varies across different groups within the electorate.

On the one hand, some studies analyze how the so-called media frames and audience frames, or perceptions of information in the media, may differ, and how they are connected to each other (e.g. Scheufele, 1999). An experiment conducted by Valkenburg, Semetko and de Vreese (1999) analyzes the possible effects of four media frames (conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, and economic consequences) of two EU-related issues. Their results show that if a story was formulated in a conflict frame, meaning the actors involved in the story clashed and blamed each other, respondents were more likely to recall the issues presented in the story as being conflictual. This finding suggests that what was considered as conflictual by the authors was regarded as conflictual by the respondents as well.

On the other hand, Sigelman and Kugler (2003) on the state level, and Geer and Lipsitz (2013) on the individual level, show that despite some overlap, negativity in political advertisements is understood differently by scholars and citizens. Although Sigelman and Kugler (2003) focus on the factors influencing individuals' perceptions of negativity (without controlling for expert-coded negativity levels), they qualitatively compare the two understandings of negativity on the state level in California, Georgia and Illinois, showing that the campaign in all states was viewed as more negative by experts than by citizens – granted, however, that citizens' views are very heterogeneous.

Geer and Lipsitz (2013) claim that there is a relationship between the two groups' understandings. However, they also show that partisanship plays an important moderating role in citizens' perceptions of negativity. First of all, audiences view an advertisement as more negative when it is sponsored by a candidate coming from a disliked party. Moreover, half of them view a positive expert-coded ad to be negative when the opposing candidate acts in it and

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the negativity perception gap between favored and opposing candidates' acting in positively expert-coded ads is quite high.

Based on these findings, one might conclude that experts' and the citizens' understandings of negativity overlap, but they also differ depending on certain characteristics of the electorate, most importantly partisanship. The possible control variables explaining citizens' perceptions of a given debate independently of a formal expert coding are briefly listed in the next section.

However, the main aim of this chapter is not to analyze the relationship among different understandings of conflicts, but to identify country-level differences in perceptions of negativity and conflicts. As we have seen in this section, how citizens view the political reality is expected to be related to a more rigorously and objectively viewed form of the same reality, but there should also be some differences. The question that relates to the main argument of the dissertation is whether masses from polarized countries perceive these political conflicts differently from others. Thus, the next section theorizes the possible effects of a polarized context in perceiving political conflicts.

3.3. Factors influencing perceptions of attacks in political debates

3.3.1. Mass polarization

As a cross-national study, this chapter focuses on how the cultural context may influence the perceived candidate debate tone. According to Hall (1976), communication is rooted in the expectations and values of the society in which it occurs. Thus, perceptions of attacks and conflictual rhetoric may differ across countries: "*Certainly the unique elements of a nation's*

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culture would affect what counts as … respectful … within a debate" (Dailey, Hinck, & Hinck, 2008, p. 164).[30]

The key country-level independent variable of this dissertation, polarization, may play a significant role in explaining citizens' perceptions of elite conflicts and attacks. As outlined in Chapter 1, an explicit and visible conflict between disunited elites often hurts social norms (e.g. Mutz & Reeves, 2005). However, these norms may vary across countries: the more polarized citizens are, the less sensitive they become, and the lower the threshold of norms is expected to be. This creates the expectation that citizens will view the same act as less negative or less conflictual in more mass polarized countries than citizens of less polarized contexts.

The main hypothesis of this chapter, hypothesis H_2 can be formulated as: *those coming from a more attitude-polarized background should find the same debate less negative or attacking (probably because they find attacks and conflicts more palatable) than those coming from a less polarized country*.

3.3.2. Country-level controls

In addition to mass polarization, there might be other context-level factors explaining citizens' perceptions of the same debate, as happened with the global perception of the 2004 US presidential debate (Beom, Carlin, & Silver, 2005). However, the cited study provides only some anecdotal evidence on the possible country-level driving factors of differing understandings. According to this evidence, respondents from more collectivist societies identified and disliked aggressiveness and clashes more than respondents from individualist

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[30] Differences in debate style (differences not on the receiving, but on the initiator side) also exist, but are less important for the purposes of this chapter. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the trends in negativity across countries. The literature on candidate image in political debates also analyzes the content of debates to show the level of attacks in presidential debates in South Korea (e.g. Beom, 2010; Lee, & Benoit, 2005), in East Germany (Baker & Norpoth, 1981), in Germany (Benoit & Hemmer, 2007), in Slovakia (Hrbková & Zagrapan, 2014) and in Finland (Isotalus, 2011) compared to the US.

societies.[31] Based on these differences, the following hypothesis may be formulated: *In more collectivist societies the same debate may be regarded as more negative than in individualist societies.*

3.3.3. Individual-level controls

As research on the relationship of real and perceived negativity/attack levels of debates is scarce, factors identified in literature on candidate image formation are also used in this section and are tested in the empirical part.[32] For the purposes of this chapter, the individual-level explanatory factors may be classified in three groups: content-related, candidate-related, and respondent-related (these latter two may be embedded).

As a conclusion from the literature review presented in the previous sections, although there are differences, one might expect a positive relationship between citizen and a more formal expert understandings of attacks. *Expert-coded attack levels should positively correlate with perceived attack levels.*

However, there might be other individual-level factors influencing perceived attack levels. Three of them are included in this analysis as control variables: one related to respondents, and two more as relational variables between respondents and candidates.

Warner et al. (2011) show that the gender of respondents had no effect on the evaluation of Obama, Biden, McCain or Palin in the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential debates. Geer and Lipsitz (2013) come to a similar conclusion when analyzing perceptions of negativity.

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[31] In business and conflict management studies this division seems to be one of the most important ones (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012), and there are many papers on how individualist and collectivist societies differ in conflict resolution styles: in the former dominating in a conflict is more prevalent, while in the latter avoiding conflicts is the preferred strategy (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

[32] "*Candidate image has been variously defined in the literature as being stimulus determined, that is, specifically projected by a politician, or as being perceiver determined, that is, composed of attributes given to a politician by the electorate*" *(Hellweg, 2004, p. 22).* For the purposes of this chapter, we are more concerned with the second conceptualization of candidate image: how citizens view the candidates. Candidate image is usually measured by a large number of items, and this aggregate measure includes how aggressive or calm candidates are (Kaid, 2004; Warner et al, 2011), which is related to their negativity and attack initiating behavior.

However, it might be the case that it is the relational gender (respondent compared to the politician) that matters. Schultz and Pancer (1997) focus on the gender differences between respondents and the candidates, and they identify the mechanism as a difference in in-group and out-group evaluations. They find that when the candidate is of the same sex, more attack leads to a better candidate image, while when the candidate is of the opposite sex, more attack initiated by him or her leads to a worse candidate image.[33] This is true for both genders. Thus we may expect that: *if the candidate and the respondent have different genders, this increases perceived negativity and perceived attack levels.*

Partisanship is an important factor in forming the electorate's negativity perceptions, both according to Geer and Lipsitz (2013) and Sigelman and Kugler (2003). The former show that an ad sponsored by the opposing candidate is viewed more negatively. The latter argue that supporting the losing candidate leads to a more negative perception of the campaign (this hypothesis cannot be tested in this paper as data were collected prior to elections). The party affiliations of respondents and candidates are also important based on the candidate image literature, as presented by Warner et al. (2011). They show that respondents who prefer a candidate have a better image of him or her, and a worse image of the others, which can once again be explained by the in-group/out-group mechanism. Thus we may expect that *if a respondent is affiliated with a candidate's party, he or she perceives less negativity initiated by that candidate.*

Gender and party affiliation hypotheses have been formulated as relational ones (how the respondent relates to the candidate in a particular aspect). The last hypothesis relates more to the respondents. Sigelman and Kugler (2003) hypothesize and show that political efficacy is important, as those disaffected by politics are more likely to view negative aspects of political

[33] Candidate image is negatively correlated with perceived attack levels. Thus, after taking this into account, their results show that more attacks lead to a lower perception of attacks when the gender is the same, and that more attacks lead to a higher perception of attacks when the gender is different.

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life, and less likely consider it as a meaningful action with high stakes. Thus we may formulate the expectation that *those with lower political interest perceive more negativity and more attacks.*

3.4. Research design

3.4.1. Data

The literature uses two main means of analyzing the effects of televised debates: observational studies (Maier & Faas, 2011) and experiments (most other studies).[34] However, the research design does not seem to be decisive in the literature on perceived candidate character evaluation (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003).

This chapter is based on a dataset collected in 24 European Union countries (countries not participating in the research were Belgium, Estonia, Luxembourg and Spain) by a research group led by Jürgen Maier and Thorsten Faas. Respondents from all these countries were gathered by national researchers in order to collect data on their attitudes towards the EU, on their opinion of the EP elections, on their perceptions of candidates running for the Presidency of the European Commission, and on their behavior related to EU politics. In Hungary the research was conducted by ELTE Peripato Group (Nikos Fokas, Zoltán Kmetty, Róbert Tardos) and the author of this dissertation.

The sample consisted of 870 respondents, of which 825 were university students. They came from the aforementioned countries, from a single city in each country, except for Austria,

[34] Papers analyzing the effects of televised debates differ in many ways other than being either an observational study or an experiment: within experimental settings either a viewer/non-viewer or a pre/post design is used (Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003), although a combination of the two would be the best scenario (Zhu, Milavsky, & Biswas, 1994); within the experimental group, either they use content analysis of the debate (Dailey, Hinck, & Hinck, 2008), or the debate is used in a pre/post design without taking into account the content (e.g. Wall, Golden, & James, 1988; McKinney, Rill, & Watson, 2011); the text of the debate is either manipulated by the researcher (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998) or is real (e.g. Wall, Golden, & James, 1988); among both types, they focus either on perceptions (e.g. Maier & Faas, 2003) or on the actual performance of the candidates (Ellsworth, 1965); and their dependent variables either measure general political attitudes or are more candidate-centered. This chapter uses a pre/post design, a content analysis of a real debate, focuses on perceptions, and uses both general and candidate-centered attitudes in the analyses.

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Italy and Romania, which were represented by two cities, and Germany with three cities represented in the sample.[35] Regarding the main descriptive statistics: 55.9% of the sample were females and 44.1% were males; the average age was 22.76. The voting preferences of the sample were different from those of the actual results of the EP elections. Based on the question about the national party to which the respondent feels closest (and after connecting them to their EP parent parties), the vote shares would have been the following (with the actual vote shares in parentheses): European People's Party 21.3% (29.43%), Progressive Alliance of Socialists 30.3% (25.43%), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe 7.0% (8.92%), European United Left 9.5% (6.92%), the Greens 25.2% (6.66%), and Others 6.7%; as we see, the Green party was greatly overrepresented in the sample, reflecting the well-documented affinity of the demographic group sampled for this party group (e.g. Franklin & Rüdig, 1992; O'Neill, 2012; Rivero & Rier, 2008).[36]

The data were collected in a very similar way in all countries. First, respondents filled out a questionnaire reflecting on the EU, the election campaign and the candidates, then they watched the Eurovision debate between the candidates for President of the European Commission (in some countries with simultaneous real-time response measurements), and finally they filled out a questionnaire with some questions identical to those in the pre-debate survey and some new questions.

The debate was held on May 15, 2014. It was the only debate out of the seven at which all five candidates were present and that was broadcast in all EU member countries. It was also the first debate for the Presidency of the European Commission, as this was the first time when the selection of this position was based on the EP election results. The five candidates

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[35] However, 31 Romanian cases (all from Bucharest) had to be removed as they had the same ID variable, and all the same data for the pre-election part.
[36] Maier et al. (2017) report slightly different frequencies and means on a weighted dataset.

participating were Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP), Martin Schulz (PES), Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE), Alexis Tsipras (PEL) and Ska Keller (Greens).

Unlike the high audience numbers for US debates, this one was viewed by a modest audience in all the countries. National research groups were asked to report both the estimated viewer ratings (the highest figure and the only one above 10% was for Cyprus at 13%), and the importance of the debates regarding their reach. It was considered highly important in only three countries: Croatia, Finland and Sweden. More information on the debate, the data and the transcript can be found in a working paper authored by the lead researchers of this project (Maier & Faas, 2014) and in a paper published by the entire team (Maier et al., 2017).

The questions relevant for this chapter concerned the negativity of the whole campaign (same question asked before and after the debate), on trust in different institutions (same six questions asked before and after the debate), and on candidate debate performance (six questions about each candidate asked only after the debate).[37]

3.4.2. Models used in the main analysis

Ideally, the pre-post design of the research would have been exploited in all the models used. However, this was not possible because not all the relevant questions were asked both before and after watching the debate. Thus, as can be seen, a complementary analysis in this chapter partly uses the panel structure of the data (another analysis in Chapter 4 will do so fully). However, since the key variable of this chapter, perceived candidate attacks, was measured only after the debate, the main analysis disregards the possibilities provided by a pre-post design.

Given the structure of the data, a three-level model was used to test the hypotheses (1, relational level between the respondents and candidates, 2, respondent level and 3, country-

[37] 1, *Candidate* profoundly promoted his political ideas; 2, The choice of *Candidate*'s words was improper; 3, *Candidate* attacked the other candidates a lot; 4, *Candidate* used a lot of facts to support his arguments; 5, *Candidate* often had to defend himself; 6, *Candidate* was very EU-skeptical.

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level). An OLS linear regression was not used, as incorporating both individual and country-level explanatory variables with such a pooled data structure would have caused biases and would have underestimated the standard errors of the coefficients of group-level predictors, leading to a high risk of rejecting a true null hypothesis (i.e. committing a Type I error).

The remedial measure for these problems is to use multilevel models. The model in the main analysis uses random intercepts for both individuals and countries. This essentially means that the fitted regression line for a given country and for a given individual differs from the average regression line in its intercept.[38]

Given the sample and its characteristics as discussed earlier, particularly considering that it is not a representative sample in any of the countries participating in the research, a major limitation of this analysis is its external validity (Maier et al., 2017). [39] Statistical inference is ambiguous in this case, as the underlying population of the sample used cannot be clearly defined.[40]

3.4.3. Variables

Although variable operationalization is discussed in the following paragraphs, see Appendix 3.1 (complementary analysis) and 3.2 (main analysis) for further details. Given the hypotheses presented in the literature review, the dependent variable is the perceived attack level of the candidates. Independent variables are the expert-coded attack level, gender, party affiliation, political efficacy, collectivism and attitude polarization. Both gender and party affiliation were measured as relational variables. The units of analysis are candidates as perceived by individuals, so one case is one candidate perceived by a given individual. This means that the

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[38] The command xtmixed in Stata is used for conducting the three-level multilevel analysis (Leckie, 2010).
[39] The analysis using fixed-effects regression in Chapter 4 at least includes individuals as their own controls, which can help to overcome at least some possible biases, but not the problem of external validity.
[40] However, Maier et al. (2017) argue that the debate effects may hold for well-educated and young European voters in general.

original 870 cases (number of respondents) are multiplied by 5 (number of candidates) and the new sample size is 4350.[41] This is only true for the main analysis. In the complementary analysis in this chapter, respondents remain the units of analysis.

The dependent variable was measured by using the question "*Candidate attacked the other candidates a lot"*, where the Candidate may be Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, Guy Verhofstadt, Alexis Tsipras, or Ska Keller. This variable was created from the five original variables separately measuring the five candidates' perceived attack levels. After recoding this variable, it was measured on a 0-1 scale, where higher values mean higher perceived attack levels.

The key independent variable, *attitude polarization* was measured as the standard deviation of the variable *"Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?"* from EES Voter Study within each country and year/wave (Schmitt et al., 2016). Other authors have used a similar logic to measure citizens' polarization with the same data, with the difference that they use a left-right scale (Vegetti, 2016). Higher values mean higher polarization, and they are standardized for 2014 on the country level.[42]

The other country-level variable, *collectivism* was collected from Geert Hofstede's website. After a recoding of his original measures, higher values mean a more collectivist society on a standardized scale ("Hofstede", n.d.).

Expert-coded attack levels were measured as coded by the author of this chapter, based on the transcripts provided by Maier and Faas (2014). Using the same scale that was used by the respondents, the debate was also content analyzed by the author. The total number of texts/speeches was 72, including 14 for Juncker, 13 for Schultz, 15 for Verhofstadt, 14 for

[41] Obviously, the final sample size in the analysis is smaller due to missing data.
[42] In other chapters where the 1999, 2004 and 2009 waves are used, after computing the scores, they were standardized across country-years on the aggregate level for the three waves together. Here scores are only standardized for 2014.

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Tsipras and 16 for Keller. The means of attack levels were 0.125 for Juncker, 0.192 for Schulz, 0.283 for Verhofstadt, 0.411 for Tsipras and 0.266 for Keller on a 0-1 scale.[43] Perhaps using the difference of perceived and actual attack levels as the dependent variable would have been more meaningful, but this would reflect a slightly different research question (what drives the difference) and would not change the coefficients of the other variables.

Gender was measured as a combination of the gender of the respondents and the gender of the candidate. Since Ska Keller is the only female candidate, a gender variable using all four possible relational combinations may measure something other than just gender differences, thus a simpler gender variable was created: 0, respondent and the candidate have the same gender; 1, they have different genders.

Party affiliation was measured by combining candidates' parties (EPP, PES, ALDE, PEL, and Greens respectively for the five candidates) with respondents' parties. The latter was based on the question in the pre-debate questionnaire *"Which party do you feel close to?"* and was recoded to EP parties by the author. The new party affiliation variable had three categories: 0, the parties of the respondent and the candidate are the same 1, the parties are different and 2, respondents did not reveal their preferences or did not feel close to any of the parties.

Political efficacy was measured by the question *"And to what extent would you say you are interested in the current European elections?"* on a 0-3 scale, where higher values mean higher efficacy. Its group-centered version was used in the multilevel model.

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[43] There are at least two problems with this coding. First, coding solely by the author may raise reliability concerns. Second, this variable does not have a large variation when integrated in the dataset with individuals evaluating candidates as the units of the analysis, since it has five values.

3.5. Results

3.5.1. Negativity of the campaign

Before analyzing how perceived and expert-coded candidate attack levels differ, an analysis of the campaigns is presented. Because a question about the negativity of the campaign was asked both before and after the debate, one can analyze how the perceptions changed.[44] Figure 8 shows the difference in mean perceived negativity of the campaigns before and after the debate between the candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission in all the countries.

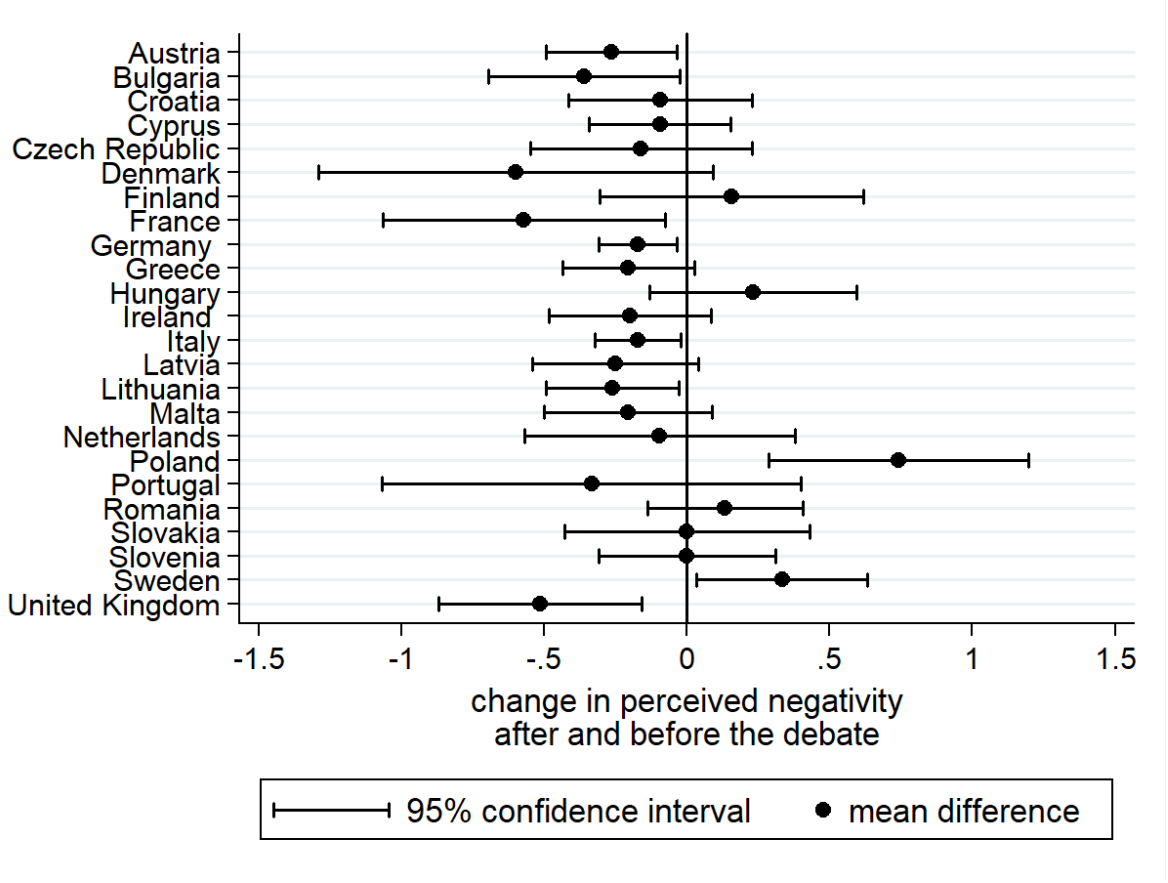

Figure 8 Change in perceived negativity of the campaign after and before the debate

Note: The vertical axis shows countries. The horizontal axis shows change in perceived negativity levels of the campaign after and before watching the debate – values theoretically can run from -4 to 4, higher values mean higher perceived negativity after the debate. For individual level operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 3.1. Dots represent country means of the individual level variable, while lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Data source: Eurovision debate data.

[44] The question used was "*The campaign is too negative*", and after a recoding it was measured on a 0-4 scale, where higher values mean more perceived negativity.

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The results summarized in Figure 8 show that in many countries the perceived negativity of the campaign decreased after the debate: Austria (md=-0.264, p<0.05), Bulgaria (md=-0.360, p<0.05), Denmark (md=-0.600, p<0.1), France (md=-0.571, p<0.05), Germany (md=-0.172, p<0.05), Greece (md=-0.205, p<0.1), Italy (md=-0.171, p<0.05), Latvia (md=-0.250, p<0.1), Lithuania (md=-0.261, p<0.05) and the UK (md=-0.515, p<0.01). Meanwhile, there are two countries where the perceived negativity of the whole campaign increased after watching the debate: Poland (md=0.742, p<0.01) and Sweden (md=0.333, p<0.05).[45]

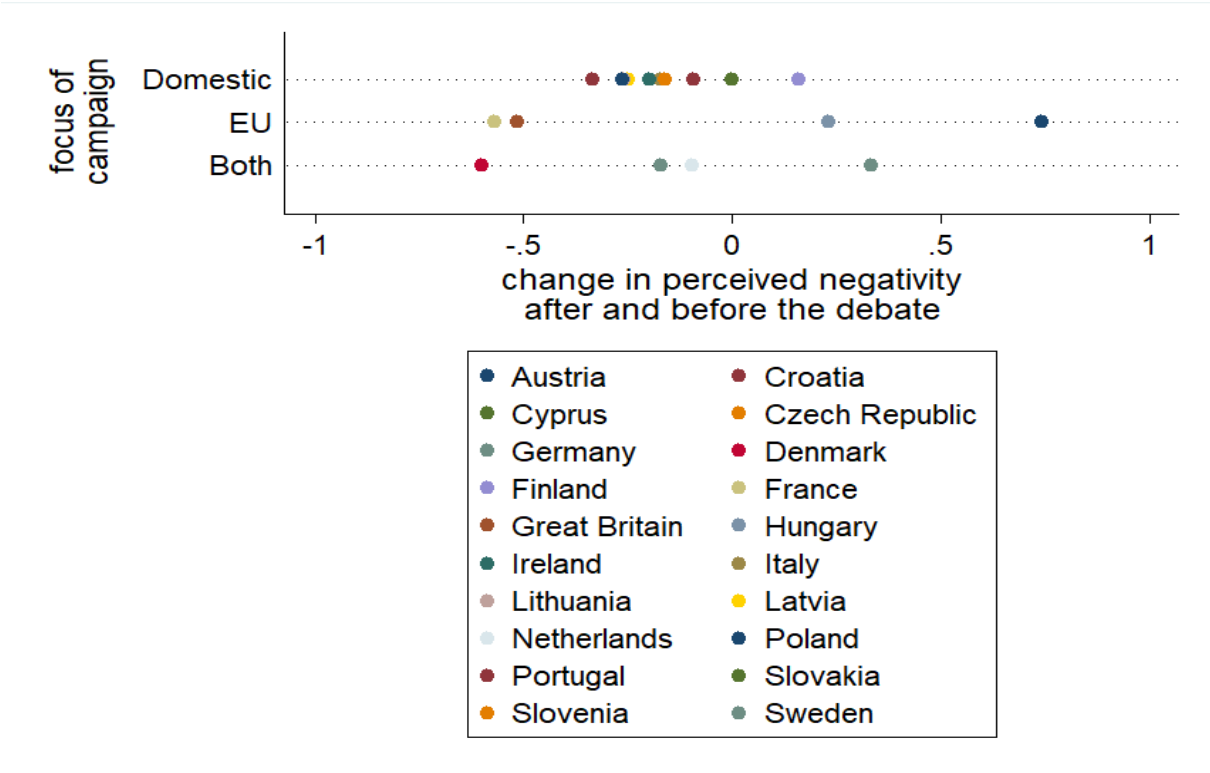

Figure 9 Change in perceived negativity across countries conditioned on the focus of campaign

Note: The vertical axis shows the focus of campaign – whether the main topics are domestic, EU-related or both. Operationalization builds on the TEPSA Report (2014). The horizontal axis shows change in perceived negativity levels of the campaign after and before watching the debate – values theoretically can run from -4 to 4, higher values mean higher perceived negativity after the debate. For individual level operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 3.1. Dots represent country means of the individual level variable. Different colors represent different countries. Data source: Eurovision debate data.

[45] Repeated measure t-tests were used separately for each country to test the differences. A repeated measure ANOVA with levels of perceived negativity at the two time points as the within-subject variables and country as the between-subjects factor could have been used and would have yielded exactly the same mean differences. Figure 8 shows the mean differences, while confidence intervals are computed with one-sample t-tests using the negativity difference variable separately for each country.

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Judging from reports on the 2014 EP member state campaigns, the campaign, both in countries with decreased negativity perceptions (Denmark, France, UK) and in those with increased negativity perceptions (Poland and Sweden), focused not only on local problems, but EU issues were also discussed to a considerable extent, with or without reference to domestic issues (TEPSA Report, 2014). Figure 9 shows that a high absolute value of perception change can be associated with the level on which issues were discussed in a campaign in a given country (using ANOVA for hypothesis testing, on the individual level $p<0.01$; on the country level $p<0.01$). The underlying logic may be that in countries where at least some EU-related topics were discussed, exposure to a political debate caused stronger reactions about campaign tone than in countries focusing solely on domestic issues.

However, the importance and visibility of EU-level campaign elements explain only the volume of change in perceptions and not their sign. An increase in perceived negativity means that the debate was considered negative by the respondent. It is worth returning to the logical explanations presented in Chapter 1 to better understand the sign of this relationship.

One possible explanatory factor of perceived negativity is attitude polarization, as discussed in earlier sections. In contexts where the electorate is more polarized the same debate is expected to be seen as less negative, because citizens are also strongly divided and can accommodate more hostility.

A related argument could be linked to the general campaign style of a given country. Intuitively, a negative relationship is expected[46]: as citizens encounter more conflicts, they become more used to them and develop different thresholds and expectations about negativity.[47]

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[46] However, Geer and Lipsitz (2013) show that people living in battleground states with high levels of negativity do not view the same ads differently.

[47] One must remember that the negativity of a campaign is expected to have a negative effect on the perceived negativity of a debate. In countries with more negative campaigns the debate is seen as being less negative (more negativity in a campaign makes people more used to it). However, the expert-coded negativity of a given debate is expected to have a positive relationship with the perceived negativity of that debate (as one assumes that citizens and experts mean at least partially the same things by this term). Thus, one of the variables is a contextual factor describing the campaign of a country/year/state, while the other is a characteristic of the given debate, which explains the different expectations about the effects.

Unfortunately, data on conflict levels of the 2014 EP election campaign are not publicly available (the 2014 wave of the EES Media Study has not yet been released: "EES", n.d.). Thus, country means of perceived negativity of the whole EP campaign (the negativity questions asked prior to watching the debate) are used as proxies for campaign style.

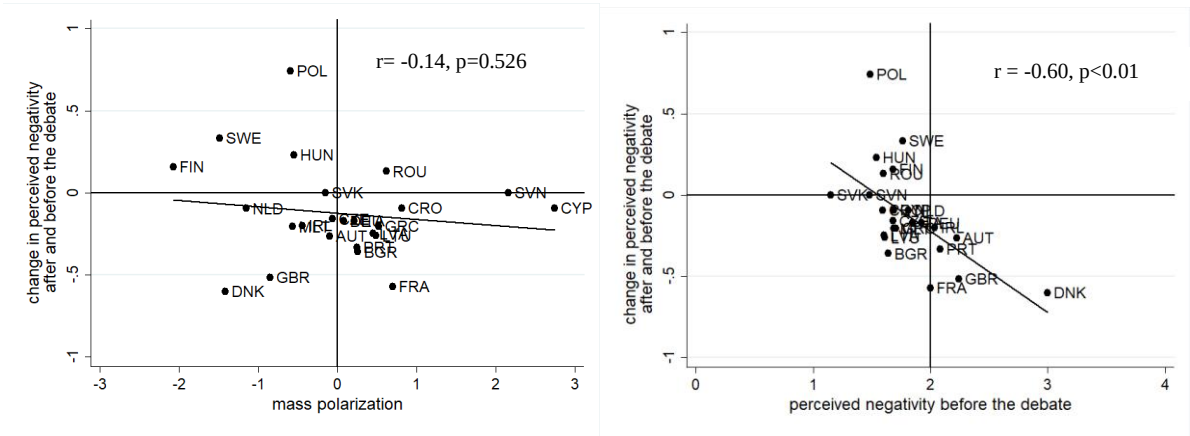

Figure 10 Correlations of change in perceived negativity with mass polarization and with perceived negativity prior to the debate [48]

Note: The vertical axes show change in perceived negativity levels of the campaign after and before watching the debate – values theoretically can run from -4 to 4, higher values mean higher perceived negativity after the debate. For individual level operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 3.1. The horizontal axes show 1, mass polarization levels – values are standardized, higher values mean higher polarization; 2, perceived negativity level of the campaign before the debate – values run from 0 to 4, higher values mean more perceived negativity. For operationalization of mass polarization and perceived negativity of the campaign before the debate, see Appendix 3.1. Dots represent country means. The two subgraphs show two different variables (mass polarization, perceived negativity of the campaign). Data sources: Eurovision debate data, European Election Studies Voter Study.

Figure 10 shows the bivariate relationships between the debate-induced change in negativity perceptions and mass polarization, and between the change in negativity perceptions and campaign negativity. The relationship with mass polarization is not statistically significant at the country-level (in an OLS linear regression controlling for perceived mean negativity before the debate, the negative effect becomes statistically significant: β=-0.10, $p<0.05$).

The relationship is statistically significant, strong and negative with perceived negativity of the campaign. This should not come as a surprise, given that the change is computed from

[48] Party polarization in EU issues is not correlated with perception difference (r=-0.0139, p=0.9484).

this variable. The two dotted lines separate four parts of the coordinate system: respondents in countries above the horizontal line (at y=0) have a higher perceived negativity of the campaign after the debate than before, while countries to the right of the vertical line (at x=2) have a rather negative average perception of the campaign.

Finally, an individual-level analysis of the difference in negativity is performed in which all the individual-level variables and collectivism from the main analysis are included (although only as controls), in addition to the two country-level variables identified above in Figure 10. Individual-level variables are not included as relational since this dataset is different from that in the main analysis. The focus of campaign variable from Figure 9 is not included in Model 1, since this would cause a major loss in sample size. The model fits the data based on an F-test ($F_{11,22}=6.84$, $p<0.001$).

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Table 3 Explaining the difference in perceived negativity levels after and before the debate

	Model 1
Gender	
female	-0.18*
	(0.07)
Party	
PES	0.09
	(0.12)
ALDE	0.06
	(0.16)
PEL	0.07
	(0.21)
Green	0.06
	(0.15)
Other	0.07
	(0.34)
Not voting or not answering	0.03
	(0.11)
Political efficacy	0.03
	(0.03)
Negativity prior to the debate	-0.22**
	(0.06)
Collectivism	0.04
	(0.04)
Mass polarization	-0.14*
	(0.07)
Constant	-0.06
	(0.11)
N	762
R^2	0.0524

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; # p<0.1.
Note: Country-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category for gender is *male*. Reference category for party is *EPP*. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 3.1 in greater detail. Data sources: Eurovision debate data, European Election Studies Voter Study, Hofstede (n.d.).

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While the model fit is not impressive, the results are in line with the aggregated-level findings: both attitude polarization and negativity perception of the campaign decrease the perceived negativity levels of the debate. This conforms to expectations: respondents from countries with disunited electorates and more negative campaigns perceive the same debate as less negative, as they are less sensitive and are more used to conflicts and negativity.[49] However,

[49] Having party polarization instead of attitude polarization in the model does not change the coefficients of other variables, but fails to record a statistically significant effect of its own.

this analysis says nothing about the relationship of expert and citizen understandings of negativity/attacks or conflicts. Thus, the next section explores this relationship in more detail.

3.5.2. Main analysis – explaining the perceived attack levels

Although the previous analysis provided an opportunity to analyze general negativity perceptions, the main problem is that expert-coded negativity levels could not be attached, since that would be a constant across all individuals, as they watched the same debate.[50] Thus, the closely related concept of attacks was used here, since the five participating candidates provided some variation in attack levels. Table 4 summarizes the possible effects of the variables outlined in the literature review.

Wald tests show the statistically significant fits of Model 2 (Wald chi2=472.82, $p<0.001$). The model-fits can also be compared with base models only with intercepts and a linear model without a multilevel structure. Likelihood-ratio tests are used for this purpose. The differences are statistically significant ($p<0.001$), thus there is strong evidence for using a multilevel model and for random intercepts across countries.

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[50] Since the mean for expert-coded attack level should be the same across all countries and individuals, only political efficacy, gender and party were centered to their group (country) means.

Table 4 Explaining perceived attack levels

	Model 2
Expert-coded attack level	0.87*** (0.04)
Gender	
different	-0.00 (0.01)
Party	
different	0.04* (0.02)
hidden preference	0.02 (0.02)
Political efficacy	0.01 (0.01)
Collectivism	0.02# (0.01)
Mass polarization	-0.03** (0.01)
Constant	0.22*** (0.01)
Constant variance - individual	0.06 (0.01)
Constant variance - country	0.03 (0.01)
N – level 1	3943
N – level 2	794
N – level 3	23
AIC	599
Log-likelihood	-288.31

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; # p<0.1.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category for gender is *same*. Reference category for party is *same*. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 3.2 in greater detail. Data sources: Eurovision debate data, European Election Studies Voter Study, Hofstede (n.d.).

The results of Model 2 are partly in line with the hypotheses for the respondent- and candidate-level variables. A higher expert-coded attack level correlates with higher perceived attack levels. Exposure to a candidate who is from a party that is not the preferred one of a respondent also increases the level of perceived attacks, as expected. Regarding gender, the results show that exposure to a candidate with a different gender does not influence perceived attack levels. Finally, higher political efficacy does not go together with lower perceived attack levels.

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Regarding contextual variables, collectivism has the expected effect: collectivism positively correlates with perceived attacks. Attitude polarization also has the expected effect, as it decreases perceived attack levels.

Random intercepts show that, after accounting for all the variables in the model, the unexplained variance due to differences across individuals is 18%, and to differences across countries is 9%.[51]

3.6. Discussion

Two empirical analyses are presented in Chapter 3, one to shed light on the background of negativity perceptions of a debate, and the other to better understand perceptions of conflictual behavior of candidates in a single debate.

The first analysis shows that negativity perceptions of a given debate differ across countries. Citizens from a context with high levels of negativity view the same debate as less negative. More importantly, those from a country where citizens agree less on whether EU unification should move further also view the same debate as less negative. This supports the previous discussions in Chapter 1 and in this chapter, namely that people from mass polarized countries view the same debate as less negative.

Second, the results of the main analysis suggest that perceived attack levels actually correlate with an expert understanding of the same concept. However, country-level differences in this perception were also found. Attitude polarization plays an important role in citizens' understandings of attacks and conflictual rhetoric. The more polarized masses actually see political candidates differently than those from a less polarized context: in this case, they do not find that the same candidate in the same debate initiated as many attacks as do the citizens from a less polarized country. This result holds even if one controls for the expert-coded level of

[51] 0.06/(0.06+0.03+0.25)=0.18; 0.03/(0.06+0.03+0.25)=0.09. Based on the computation by Leckie (2010).

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attacks, meaning that, although in general citizens and experts understand the same thing by attacks, there is a subjective element to perceptions, which is partly based on the mass polarization of the country citizens come from.

The findings of these two models are extremely important for the next chapter. They help better understand the causal mechanism connecting elite-mass disconnection to support for the political system. When citizens are disunited and polarized, they become more resistant to elite attacks, negativity and conflictual rhetoric, their perceptions are altered, and they do not see candidates as negative or debates as conflictual, at least compared to citizens from less mass polarized contexts. When they are disunited, their lives and realities are less disturbed by political conflicts, meaning that they can more easily live with these phenomena. Based on this finding, one might expect a less negative effect of political conflicts on support for political systems in countries where mass polarization is high.

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Chapter 4 – Political conflicts and support in different contexts

4.1. Introduction

This chapter contains the main analysis of the dissertation, as it focuses on the contextual effects of mass-elite disconnection. After analyzing how elite polarization affects levels of political conflict (Chapter 2), and how mass polarization alters the perceptions of attacks and negativity (Chapter 3), this chapter takes a step further and analyzes whether the difference between mass polarization and elite polarization alters how visible elite conflicts affect political support for the democratic political system.

In the context of the causal chain presented in Figure 2, Chapter 4 discusses the second stage. This chapter discusses the consequences of elite conflicts in a cross-national context in two studies: one based on the data presented in the previous chapter and one based on the European Election Studies.

Exposure to news media, especially to political conflicts, and their effects on citizens' general political attitudes and behavior are of great interest both to the literature on the behavioral effects of political debates and to political communication and media studies. This differentiation mirrors the two contributing elements discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: both the political act (political disagreement) and its presentation in the news influence political support.

In the political behavior literature, the tone of how political actors interact with each other in political debates, how they refer to each other in political advertisements, and how they discuss issues in televised debates are shown to correlate with citizens' political behavior. This encompasses their likelihood to vote (e.g. Ansolabehere, et al., 1994; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Schuck, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2016), their trust in the political institutions and their support for the political system (e.g. Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Wald & Lupfer, 1978), although the results often contradict each other

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and many authors find no relationship (e.g. Brader, 2005; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Krasno & Green, 2008, see the next section for more details). For a summary of the heterogeneous dependent variables and results, see the two meta-analyses conducted by Lau and his co-authors (Lau et al., 1999; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007).

As summarized in Chapter 1, media studies also yield heterogeneous results. According to some, the media environment somewhat explains the variation in citizens' political behavior (e.g. Bartels, 1993; Baum, 2005), while others cast doubt on this assertion (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). However, this area of media studies mainly focuses on the effects of the news in general, and not specifically on the effects of political disagreements presented in the media. It has been shown empirically that elite conflicts are quite important in the media coverage of political life (e.g. Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), and there are psychological causal arguments that conflicts presented in media reports have important political implications and effects on public opinion (Price, 1989). Previous empirical studies show that likelihood to vote may be influenced by the level of political conflicts covered in the media (de Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007). Conflict-oriented frames may increase political cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), and public opinion on policy issues may be changed by conflict-led discourse (Liebert, 2007).

Based on the cited studies one can conclude that, although the results are somewhat inconclusive, elite conflicts and conflictual rhetoric in the news seem to matter in many ways. This chapter examines their effects on support for the political system by using multiple analyses on different levels. Following the structure of the previous chapters and the main research question, all these analyses consider cross-national differences as well. In particular, the effects of political conflicts are analyzed in contexts with different elite-mass polarizations and disconnections. Thus, the main research question of the chapter is how political conflicts affect citizens' political behavior and whether there is any systematic difference among countries with different polarization levels. First, the possible causal mechanisms are identified

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both in general and with contextual variables, then the methods and the results of the two studies are presented, followed by a brief discussion of the findings.

4.2. Political conflicts and support for the political system

4.2.1. General mechanisms

As discussed in Chapter 2, the level of political conflicts is increasing not only in the US, but also internationally. The exposure to political conflicts may or may not hurt the political system.[52] Some authors show that there is a positive effect, especially within younger generations of citizens (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009), some find no effect (Martinez & Delegal, 1990; Jackson, Mondak, & Huckfeldt, 2009), while many others show a negative relationship (e.g. Brooks & Geer, 2007; Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Thorson, et al., 2000; Wald & Lupfer, 1978).[53]

First, the plausible mechanisms behind the deleterious effects are summarized. Although conflictual rhetoric may increase political engagement, it may simultaneously harm political support for the political system as a whole: "*One could imagine a scenario in which people witness caustic exchanges between candidates that makes them interested in politics … and also makes them more likely to vote in the next election …, but makes them feel cynical about politicians and the process of politics overall*" (Brooks & Geer, 2007, p. 10). There are three possible types of reasons for this effect.

The first is related to candidate image. When politicians argue with each other, or when they communicate their messages to the audience, they are usually judged by citizens based on whether they follow general social norms on how conflicts should be handled. Constant

[52] Out of multiple possible dependent variables, this chapter focuses solely on support for the political system, not on voter turnout, which has been researched more frequently.
[53] The point made in Chapter 1 is worth emphasizing once again, that negativity/political conflicts/attacks are not necessarily defined in the same way in all of these works, and authors often analyze different forms of it.

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violation of these norms may lead to a negative response by the citizenry because they are likely to be against violations of norms and rules, and in most social contexts people have a distaste for debates in general (but the norms are different across countries and are dependent on the context, as seen in the previous chapter). In short, elite conflicts and debates, especially if they are uncivil, deviate from social norms and thus alienate citizens from politics (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). A similar argument is provided by Durr, Gilmour and Wolbrecht (1997), who argue that finger-pointing, mutual blame and controversies arising during the legislative process are unappealing for the public, which causes a loss of respect and declining support. Ramirez (2009) argues along similar lines that citizens regard conflicts as a waste of time and as clear examples of possible partisan bias and avoidance of facts. Tyler (2001) claims that citizens not only evaluate the policies made by governments, but they make a broad ethical evaluation of the actors and their behavior.[54]

The second plausible mechanism to find negative effects is related to the general mood of citizens. Thorson and her co-authors (2000) show that negative messages affect the public mood, which means that citizens start to feel more negatively about the whole political environment, eventually leading to greater political cynicism. A similar conclusion is drawn by Brooks and Geer (2007), who argue that negativity (especially uncivil attacks) makes people think that they may also be vulnerable to such strengthening conflictual tendencies.

The third group of explanations of negative effects is related to citizens themselves. Thorson et al. (2000) show citizens' self-efficacy, their beliefs in their ability to shape the political system, deteriorates with negativity, making them more cynical about the system. Stevens (2008) shows that an increasing negative mood, and thus alienation from politics, may

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[54] These results may hold even if the distaste is caused by a single act by a given politician, as a cumulative effect, negative perceptions may add up, and citizens' dissatisfaction with politicians and politics increases in general (Funk, 2001).

hold true for a given part of the electorate, namely the less sophisticated, as they feel unable to understand politics.

Following the distinction used in previous chapters, we must emphasize that not only politicians, but also journalists may contribute to the adverse effects of political conflicts in the news media by over-reporting their negative aspects. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) posit the separation effect of conflict-oriented frames by showing that journalists tend to frame acts of politicians as if they are only pursuing their own self-interest. By perceiving self-interest as the main motivation of politicians, individuals may dismiss all their messages and the political system in general. According to Durr, Gilmour and Wolbrecht (1997) journalists tend to focus on disagreements during the decision-making process, which makes the final decisions seem like "*a patchwork of compromises*", thus further alienating citizens. Robinson (1976) claims that television injects negativity and anti-institutional bias into broadcasting, which paints a negative image of society and sociopolitical trends, both depressing citizens and turning them against the seemingly most responsible political institutions. Paterson (1993) also concludes that election news contributes to the distance between politicians and voters. Thus, the electorate is distanced from politics not only by political conflicts, but also by their overemphasis in the news (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

Contrary to the views on the possible damaging effects of negativity discussed above, some authors give explanations for an influence with an opposing sign. In certain cases incivility and violation of norms may help political actors achieve their goals. Incivility may be the honest reaction to certain challenges, and may make the actor more appealing (Bennett, 2011). Incivility may also increase interest in politics (but not satisfaction) by mobilizing certain minorities prone to accept and support an uncivil tone in politics, but potentially also discouraging majorities from participation in politics (Bennett, 2011). Focusing on a part of the electorate, McKinney and Rill (2009) argue that exposure to political debates, even to negative

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messages, may help citizens, especially young ones, identify themselves with the participating political actors. As a result, their political efficacy and knowledge increase and they start to feel closer to politics, which increases their trust in politicians.

Although the results are inconclusive on the effects of political conflicts and negativity in general, Lau, Sigelman and Rovner (2007) conclude that the effects on support for the political system (public mood, trust in institutions and satisfaction with the political system) found in the majority of the literature appear to be negative. They conclude that "*the effects are…overwhelmingly negative – not large but very consistent, and statistically significant for both political efficacy and trust in government*" (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007, p. 1184). Thus, the general expectation (without differentiating between countries) is to find a *negative relationship between exposure to political conflicts and support for the political system*.

4.2.2. Cross-national differences

As stated in the first section of this chapter, one main hypothesis of this dissertation is that context matters in the role played by elite conflicts and negativity in the life of democracies. Most studies discussed focus solely on the United States, but over different time periods. On the one hand, this limits our knowledge on the effects of negativity. On the other hand, disregarding the context and analyzing the same country at different times may explain the inconclusive results present in the literature (for the changes in the context in the elite and mass polarization levels in the US see, for example, Figure 5 in Hetherington, 2009).

As Desposato (2008) argues, findings on negativity hold only for the US or for a political system with a two-candidate, plurality-based electoral system.[55] The effects of negativity and

[55] Desposato (2007) argues that newly established democracies lack institutionalized party systems, thus most voters have to use campaign messages as a source of information more often than the electorates in more established democracies. As a result, the effects of campaigns are much stronger than in established democracies, regardless of whether they are negative or positive. On the one hand, effects might be more negative, since with less information about the democratic political system, negativity may reinforce general pessimism about democracy. On the other hand, the effects may be more positive, as a negative campaign in a newly democratized

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political conflicts may change depending on the country-level characteristics. Unlike the previous chapter, the main analysis here assumes a similar understanding of political conflicts across countries, and tries to show the differences in their effects on political behavior. Three country-level characteristics identified in this section are hypothesized to play a moderating role in the relationship between political conflicts and support for the political system: the two forms of polarization and democratization.

First of all, more importantly, polarizations at the mass and elite levels in a country are expected to mediate the effects of (exposure to) political conflicts in the news. As briefly outlined in Chapter 1 with regard to the relevance of context: when 1) elites are highly polarized; 2) the masses are not polarized; and 3) elites are more polarized than the masses, visible elite conflicts are expected to disturb citizens more and undermine their support for the political system. If this occurs under any or all three conditions can be analyzed separately.[56]

Party polarization is usually accompanied by increased levels of political conflicts (as discussed in Chapter 2, and as shown in 2009 and also partly longitudinally), since conflicts are intensified as competing elites approach them with more passion (Hetherington, 2009). Exposure to conflicts is expected to lead to less support, as seen in the previous section. However, this chapter is more concerned with their joint effect on support for the political system. As proposed by Stryker (2011): "*there still may be cause for concern to the extent that polarization is accompanied with greater incivility in political discourse... the impact of exposure to uncivil discourse in the media and in political campaigns find that such exposure can increase voters' emotional responses, diminish their trust and lead them to have more*

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country may validate the electoral process in general and may confirm that the elections are fair. However, Desposato's arguments are more relevant for newly democratized countries in other parts of the world, where party labels mean nothing, politicians' affiliations are not stable, and political parties are weak, which are not always the case in newly democratized EU countries, i.e. in Central and Eastern European countries. Thus, his results cannot be used here to form a hypotheses, given the universe of cases.

[56] Obviously, polarization may have an effect on support in and of itself. For instance, polarization alienates citizens (e.g. Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006). However, these effects are less interesting for the purposes of this chapter and the dissertation as a whole than the interaction effects with political conflicts.

negative evaluations of political institutions" (p. 8). According to this argument, higher elite polarization and negativity of political discourse go together and combine to damage support for political systems. Thus, as H_{3a}, *a more negative effect of political conflicts is expected in more party-polarized countries.*

Regarding attitude polarization, there are two arguments pointing in the same direction. Mutz (2006) argues that if masses are polarized, they show a lack of respect for political opponents. In contexts where citizens are less respectful of political opponents, one would expect the effects of political debates and conflictual rhetoric to be different, i.e. more positive compared to the rather negative effects in a system that is not so attitude-polarized. Furthermore, as explored in Chapter 3, if the masses are polarized, they have different thresholds of sensitivity, and view a political conflict as less conflictual and less negative than people from less polarized countries, which probably results in a less negative effect of conflicts in these contexts. Thus, as H_{3b}, *a less negative effect of political conflicts is expected in countries where the mass attitudes are more polarized.*

Regarding the third situation regarding polarization, it is not only the joint effects of these two variables with political conflicts that is interesting, but also the joint three-way interaction that they form. As the main argument goes, when elites are more polarized than citizens, political conflicts are expected to foreground this disconnection and hurt support for democracy. Thus, when both are high, no additional effect to those two presented in H_{3a} and H_{3b} is expected, since it is the gap between the two forms of polarization that should either further ameliorate (if mass polarization is higher) or worsen (if party polarization is higher) the effects of conflicts on political support. H_{3c} would then go as follows: *in countries where both elite polarization and attitude polarization are high, no additional effect of political conflicts on the support for the political system occurs beyond those described in H_{3a} and H_{3b}.*

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Obviously, this third hypothesis complements H_{3a} and H_{3b}, meaning that it is just an expectation of no additional (three-way) effects when both polarization levels are high. However, in countries where party polarization is higher than mass polarization, based on H_{3a} and H_{3b}, one expects a less positive effect of political conflicts on political support for the system.

Regarding democratization, Schuck, Boomgaarden and de Vreese (2013) argue that citizens in well-functioning democracies are used to well-functioning institutions, and political conflicts remind them that this is not necessarily the case. Thus, *one expects that in more democratized countries political conflicts have more negative effects on citizens' support for the whole political system*.[57] It is important to add that this hypothesis is not essential for the purposes of this dissertation, but it is tested as well as an external replication of the cited study on extended data.

4.3. Empirical studies

The literature on the effects of political conflicts uses a variety of research designs: experiments (Ansolabehere, et al., 1994; Brader, 2005; Forgette & Morris, 2006; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009), survey experiments (Brooks & Geer, 2007), natural experiments (Krasno & Green, 2008), individual-level observational studies (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Forgette & Morris, 2006; Schuck, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2016; Thorson, et al., 2000); aggregated level observational studies (Ansolabehere, et al., 1994; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Finkel & Geer, 1998) and focus groups (Stevens et al., 2008). Barabas et al. (2014) argue that high heterogeneity in research designs may contribute to heterogeneity in the results.

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[57] However, their dependent variable (political cynicism) is different from the one used later in this chapter.

Cross-country analyses offer more limited methodological choices. In the following sections, two studies based on two different data sources are presented: Study 1 uses the data from Chapter 2 in a nested form without aggregation, while Study 2 uses the panel data presented in Chapter 3.

4.4. Study 1

4.4.1. Scope

The section uses the 1999, 2004 and 2009 waves of the European Election Studies (EES) Media Study (Banducci et al., 2014) and Voter Study (Schmitt et al., 2009; van der Eijk et al., n.d.; van Egmond et al., 2013) for most of the individual-level variables, and Quality of Government data for country-level variables.

Data for all variables were collected on individuals from EU countries, which theoretically means 15 countries in 1999, 25 countries in 2004, and 27 countries in 2009. In practice, as discussed later, data on conflict levels of news outlets were essential to construct the key independent variable, which limited the number of countries included: all 15 EU countries in 1999, 13 countries in 2004 (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK), and all 27 EU countries in 2009.[58] Although variable operationalization is discussed in the following sections, see Appendix 4.1 for further details.

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[58] The reasons why only half of the countries are included in 2004 contain instances where no survey was performed (Malta), where individuals' exposure to news outlets was not measured (Belgium, Lithuania), and where alternative coding of individuals' exposure to news outlets was used.

4.4.2. Dependent variable

The main dependent variable is satisfaction with democracy in the home country of the respondent. The works discussed in the literature review conceptualize support for the political system in different ways: Mutz and Reeves (2005) regard it as trust in politicians, trust in government; Brooks and Geer (2007) treat it as trust in public officials; and McKinney and Rill (2009) conceptualize it as (inverse) political cynicism.

This chapter measures a slightly more abstract type of support (diffuse rather than specific) for the political system (e.g. Easton, 1975; Fuchs, Guidorossi, & Svensson, 1995; Haerpfer, 2007). This selection was based on data availability: satisfaction with democracy was the most relevant question asked in all three waves of EES.

Although key variables, such as political conflict and both polarization measures, were conceptually attached to the EU in all previous chapters, and once again are in this chapter too, satisfaction with democracy in general is used here instead of satisfaction with democracy in the EU. The reason is that the disconnection between domestic elites and citizens and the conflicts initiated by domestic elites in a given country are analyzed, even if the dispersions and conflicts are both EU-related.

After recoding, higher values mean higher satisfaction with democracy. The source for the data was the three waves of the EES.

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4.4.3. Key individual-level independent variable – exposure to conflicts in news

As noted in Chapter 2, both in political behavior and in the framing literature, various means have been used to define and measure conflict levels. Questions of conceptualization are discussed in Chapter 1, while a measurement using EES was presented in Chapter 2. However, as Chapter 2 is an aggregated-level study, many differences must be considered.

As this chapter builds on data with individuals as the level of analysis, their exposure to political conflicts in the news is of great interest. Some authors use news exposure without any reference (e.g. Bennett, 1994) or only with speculations regarding the content (e.g. de Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007, Schmitt-Beck, 2004; Voltmer & Schmitt-Beck, 2006). However, without knowing the political content of these news sources, it is difficult to figure out what exactly individuals were exposed to (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013; Prior, 2013), thus these measures suffer from validity problems (Barabas & Jerit, 2009). This is why many compute conflict levels with media content analysis and incorporate them in the models (e.g. Finkel & Geer, 1998; de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001), or add important political events and scandals to the models (Barabas et al., 2014).

A media content analysis is used for this study as well, in order to complement the individual-level data. The three questions (two-sides, conflict, blame in a given story) of the EES Media Study are again used to construct the key independent variable.[59] However, in this chapter outlet-level means, not country-level, are computed for the political conflict measure (which is the mean of those three variables) for each year.

After computing the conflict content of different outlets, the combination with individual-level data follows the method proposed by de Vreese, Peter and Semetko (2001), Schuck, Vliegenthart and de Vreese (2016) and Schuck et al. (2013).[60] To measure exposure of these outlets, the EES Voter Study is used, where the consumption of television news and newspaper outlets was asked about (0-no, 1-yes) in 1999 and 2004, and where the number of days individuals watch given television news or read newspaper outlets was collected in 2009.

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[59] As described before, EU-related stories for two television news outlets and for three newspapers were coded in almost all EU countries for a number of weeks (the exact number of outlets and the time span depends on the wave of the study and on the country) before the upcoming EP elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009. For detailed characteristics of the content analysis data, see the Dependent variable section of Chapter 2.

[60] As mentioned in Chapter 2, they use one more variable to measure the level of conflicts (personal attacks), which was excluded from this construct since it was not coded in all the three waves of the EES.

To combine the different waves, the 2009 data have been recoded such that 0 remained 0 (no consumption), while any amount of exposure to a given outlet was recoded to 1.

Finally, the two figures (exposure to outlets and outlet conflict level) for each individual have been combined with the following formula[61] within each country and year for television and newspapers separately (following the logic of Chapter 2). Then, as discussed in the next section, the variable was group-mean centered:

$$\text{Exposure to political conflicts} = \sum \text{Exposure}_i * \text{Conflict level}_i$$

This design has two main advantages and four potential pitfalls (aside from the validity issues discussed in Chapter 2). First of all, it includes media content (political conflict levels) in the analysis and does not build only on exposure. Second, although Mondak (1995) warns researchers working in this field about content being invariant in cross-sectional studies, using cross-country and longitudinal data help to overcome this problem (Banducci & Xezonakis, 2010).

However, there are at least four concerns regarding the key independent variable used in this chapter. The first is the general issue of using self-reported exposure measures in this type of research. Self-reported media exposure is not a good measurement item because of reliability and validity problems (Price & Zaller, 1993).

Second, as Bennett and Iyengar (2008) argue, increasing self-selection of news makes it more likely that those exposed to different news outlets systematically differ in their political attitudes and behavior, which makes it more difficult to decide on the direction of this relationship.

[61] Index *i* stands for different media outlets.

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The third concern is similar to the second (by claiming that there is a systematic difference between those watching and those not watching certain news outlets), but is rather related to the omitted variable bias. Banducci et al. (2013) argue that although between-subject studies can possibly account for the differences between those watching and not watching different media outlets, these two groups are so different in so many dimensions that omitted variable bias (not including variables with an effect both on the dependent variable and on the likelihood of watching in the models) is likely to occur.

The fourth concern is more related to the construction of this exposure variable. As Fazekas and Larsen (2016) show, the effects of general exposure and the effects of exposure to conflicts are indistinguishable, as the latter is just a weighted index of the former. Although the present study recoded the data and retained a dichotomous measure of whether a given outlet was watched or not, correlations remain high between general exposure and exposure to conflicts on the individual level, if only exposure to outlets which were coded in the media content analysis is considered ($r=0.850$, $p<0.001$ for television and $r=0.544$, $p<0.001$ for newspapers in 1999, $r=0.784$, $p<0.001$ for television and $r=0.731$, $p<0.001$ for newspapers in 2004, $r=0.798$, $p<0.001$ for television and $r=0.891$, $p<0.001$ for newspapers in 2009). Thus, one should bear in mind that the main analysis uses the combination of exposure and media content in this slightly problematic way.

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4.4.4. Key country-level independent variables

Three key country-level independent variables are used in this analysis: two forms of polarization, and democratization.

Polarization is once again understood in two different ways. As *mass polarization on EU-related issues* and as *party polarization on EU-related issues*, just as in previous chapters (for operationalization see Chapters 2 and 3).

Following the aggregation method used by Schuck, Boomgaarden and de Vreese (2013), *democratization* is measured as by the World Bank and Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2010). Higher values mean higher democratization. The data source is Quality of Government (Teorell, et al., 2016).

4.4.5. Controls

Controls[62] on the individual level have been collected from the EES Voter Study. *Left-right self-placement* is measured as "*In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. What is your position?*" where higher values mean being farther to the right. *Political interest* is measured by the question "*To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?"* where higher values mean being more interested. *Support for government* is measured as "*Do you approve or disapprove of the government's record to date?"* where higher values mean higher approval.

Socio-economic variables have been also collected from EES. *Gender* has the categories 1, male, and 2, female. *Social class* is 1, working class; 2, lower middle class; 3, middle class; 4, upper middle class; 5, upper class. *Place of residence* is also measured as a categorical variable: 1, rural area/village; 2, small or middle-sized town; 3, suburbs of large town or city; or large town or city (merged in 2009). Age is recoded from *Year of birth* in each wave and is

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[62] Selection of controls is based on a number of studies regarding satisfaction with democracy. The literature on this topic shows that the individual-level explanatory factors of individual-level satisfaction with democracy are cognitive political mobility (Anderson and Guillary, 1997; Inglehart, 1988), party preference (Anderson and Guillary, 1997; Inglehart, 1988), and whether the preferred party is in power or not. The latter two are not really possible to measure with these data, which is why approval of the government was used as a proxy for the preferred party being in power, as is usually done in the literature (e.g. Nevitte & Kanji, 2003), and left-right self-placement was substituted for party preference. Regarding cognitive political mobility, since political knowledge is difficult to measure in this case, only political interest is used. Socio-demographic variables are also statistically significant in most of the cited studies: age, gender and income. Instead of the latter, social class is used, and place of residence is also included as a control variable. Country-level explanatory variables of individual-level satisfaction are annual GDP growth, inflation (Mayne, 2007), the electoral system (Guldbrandtsen & Skaaning, 2010) and corruption (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003).

divided by 10 to make the coefficients more easily interpretable. All level-1 variables are centered to their group means.

Country-level controls are from the Quality of Government database (Teorell et al., 2016). Two electoral system variables are used. One is the *electoral system*: more proportional systems are measured as 0 and plurality systems as 1. *Whether there was another election* in a given year besides the EP elections is measured by a 0-1 dummy. *Corruption* is measured as the inverse of the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, with higher levels meaning higher corruption. Economic performance is measured by *GDP per capita* (GDP per capita, PPP, current international dollar) and *inflation* (Inflation, GDP deflator, annual %).

4.4.6. Models

Both individual and country-level explanatory variables are present in the pooled data (individuals nested in country-years). Using simple OLS linear regression would underestimate the standard errors of the coefficients of group-level predictors. Thus, there is a high risk of rejecting a true null hypothesis (committing a Type I error). As discussed in Chapter 3, the remedial measure for these problems is to use multilevel models (Leckie, 2010). [63]

Model 1 uses a random intercept model with no cross-level interactions. In Models 2, 3, 4, and 5, cross-level interactions of the three key country-level variables with the exposure to political conflicts variable are also added. The Results section presents likelihood-ratio tests to

[63] In the case of multilevel models the country-level variables are often centered to their grand means and the individual-level variables to their group means (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). The former means subtracting the mean of a given variable from each individual's value, while the second means subtracting the level-2 group means of a given variable from each individual's value. The rationale is that this makes it easier to interpret the coefficients and intercepts (while in uncentered cases the intercept shows the value of the response variable when the values of all the explanatory variables are equal to zero, which is often not meaningful) and that it makes level-1 variables uncorrelated with level-2 variables (Kreft & De Leeuw, 1998). However, others claim that this leads to biased estimates (Katrichis, 1993). Here level-1 variables (exposure to conflicts, left-right self-placement, age, political interest, support for government, gender, social class and place of residence) are centered to their group means to see the within-country effects, and for the exposure variable country means are also added to each model to show the between-country effects (the latter is not presented). In each model the key country-level variables were standardized on the country level, which also means centering to the grand mean (grand mean centering without standardization would not have changed the results in terms of statistical significance).

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compare the model-fits. These models have been created for both exposure to conflicts in newspapers and conflicts on television separately (letters *a* and *b* differentiate the outlet types).

4.4.7. Results

Tables 5 and 6 summarize the results for newspapers and television. Controls have been included in the models but are not presented here (see Appendices 4.2 and 4.3).

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Table 5 Explaining satisfaction with democracy by exposure to conflicts in newspapers[64]

	Model 1a Without interaction	**Model 2a** Mass polarization	**Model 3a** Party polarization	**Model 4a** Mass and party polarization	**Model 5a** Democratization
Exposure to conflict	0.05**	0.05**	0.04*	0.04*	0.05**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Mass polarization		-0.03		-0.05	
		(0.03)		(0.03)	
Mass polarization * Exposure to conflict		-0.00		-0.02	
		(0.02)		(0.02)	
Party polarization			0.04	0.04	
			(0.03)	(0.03)	
Party polarization * Exposure to conflict			-0.04*	-0.04*	
			(0.02)	(0.02)	
Mass polarization*Party polarization				-0.01	
				(0.04)	
Mass polarization*Party polarization * Exposure to conflict				-0.01	
				(0.02)	
Democratization					0.15
					(0.14)
Democratization* Exposure to conflict					0.00
					(0.02)
Constant	2.48***	2.47***	2.51***	2.50***	2.43***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Constant variance	0.20	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
N – level 1	35516	35516	32187	32187	29452
N – level 2	51	51	46	46	38
AIC	76614	76617	69656	69661	64379
Log-likelihood	-38286.02	-38285.57	-34805.15	-34803.27	-32166.46

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 4.1 in greater detail. See Appendix 4.2 for the missing controls. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies, Chapel Hill expert survey, Quality of Government data.

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[64] The country-level variables and their interactions are added separately to the models because of multicollinearity issues.

First, the model-fits in Table 5 are compared with each other. Based on the likelihood-ratio tests, all five models fit the data better than a linear model ($p<0.001$) or a baseline model with only a random intercept ($p<0.001$). When comparing the models with cross-level interactions to the first model with no interaction (Model 1a), Model 3a fit the data significantly better, at a $p<0.05$ significance level. When comparing the model-fits with the last three models (with different sample sizes), the cases with missing values were dropped from the model without interactions (with which they were compared) to ensure that the comparison was performed on the same sample.

The main finding in Model 1a in Table 5 is that exposure to political conflicts in newspapers generally increases support for the political system. This is a surprising result given the general hypothesis, but is not unprecedented, as Schuck, Boomgaarden and de Vreese (2013) find something similar in their study using one wave of the same data. Although all other models have the same main effect of exposure, Models 3a and 4a further complicate the story.

Party polarization shows a negative interaction term with exposure in both models. The more polarized parties are in a country, the less positive effect conflict exposure has on satisfaction. Regarding mass polarization and democratization no statistically significant interaction effects are found.

For television exposure, the model-fits can be compared to each other as shown in Table 6. Based on likelihood-ratio tests, all five models fit the data better than a linear regression ($p<0.001$) or a baseline model with only a random intercept ($p<0.001$). When comparing the models with cross-level interactions to the first model with no interaction (Model 1b), all models fit the data significantly better on at least a $p<0.05$ level. Once again, for the comparisons with Models 3b, 4b and 5b, missing cases were all dropped from the estimation sample for Model 1b.

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Table 6 Explaining satisfaction with democracy by exposure to conflicts on television

	Model 1b Without interaction	**Model 2b** Mass polarization	**Model 3b** Party polarization	**Model 4b** Mass and party polarization	**Model 5b** Democratization
Exposure to conflict	0.06*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.06** (0.02)
Mass polarization		-0.05# (0.03)		-0.07* (0.03)	
Mass polarization * Exposure to conflict		0.04* (0.01)		0.05** (0.02)	
Party polarization			0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	
Party polarization * Exposure to conflict			-0.04* (0.01)	-0.04** (0.01)	
Mass polarization*Party polarization				0.02 (0.04)	
Mass polarization*Party polarization * Exposure to conflict				-0.02 (0.02)	
Democratization					0.13 (0.14)
Democratization* Exposure to conflict					-0.07*** (0.02)
Constant	2.40*** (0.07)	2.39*** (0.07)	2.42*** (0.08)	2.42*** (0.08)	2.35*** (0.08)
Constant variance	0.20 (0.02)	0.19 (0.02)	0.20 (0.02)	0.19 (0.02)	0.20 (0.02)
N – level 1	37530	37530	34375	34375	30510
N – level 2	52	52	48	48	39
AIC	80686	80682	74099	74090	66341
Log-likelihood	-40322.20	-40317.78	-37026.28	-37017.87	-33147.48

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 4.1 in greater detail. See Appendix 4.3 for the missing controls. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies, Chapel Hill expert survey, Quality of Government data.

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Table 6 shows that exposure to political conflicts on television increases support for the political system according to all models. Mass polarization has a positive interaction term with the exposure variable in both models. The more polarized citizens are, the more positive the effect of conflict exposure on satisfaction. Party polarization shows a negative interaction term with the exposure variable in both models. The more polarized parties are, the less positive the effect of conflict exposure on satisfaction. Both of these findings support the general expectations. Regarding democratization, the expected negative joint effect with political conflicts has been found.

A null effect of the three-way interaction does not contradict the elite-mass disconnection explanation. Given the negative joint effect of conflicts and party polarization (in both cases) and the positive joint effect of conflicts and mass polarization (in the case of television), it may well be that in disconnected contexts exposure to conflicts undermines regime support, at least as the gap widens in a certain direction (higher party polarization, lower mass polarization), the effect becomes more negative. This does not mean that more negative effects of exposure to elite conflicts on regime support can only be observed in disconnected societies. Either more elite or less mass polarization together with political conflicts may undermine support in and of themselves.

It is important to add that mass polarization has a statistically significant negative main effect in both models in the case of television (Models 2b, 4b). As the main effects and interaction terms should be added up, this counters the positive interaction effects identified in those models. Essentially, increasing mass polarization in and of itself decreases satisfaction with democracy, but together with conflicts this negative effect disappears (at least in the case of television).

Obviously, this is an important finding. However, it does not contradict the original hypothesis (H_{3b}), which only states that in more polarized electorates political conflicts have

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more positive (or less negative) effects on political support than in less polarized ones, because of the different social norms of citizens. Moreover, approaching this interaction in a slightly different way, it can easily be fitted to our general scheme: when citizens are disunited, this very fact can be bad for support. But when they realize that conflicts are also characteristic of political elites, that being conflictual is the norm within the elite, this similarity makes the negative effects disappear, unlike in countries where this mass disunity is not accompanied by conflicts at all, or not to the same extent. The most important results are summarized in Figure 11.

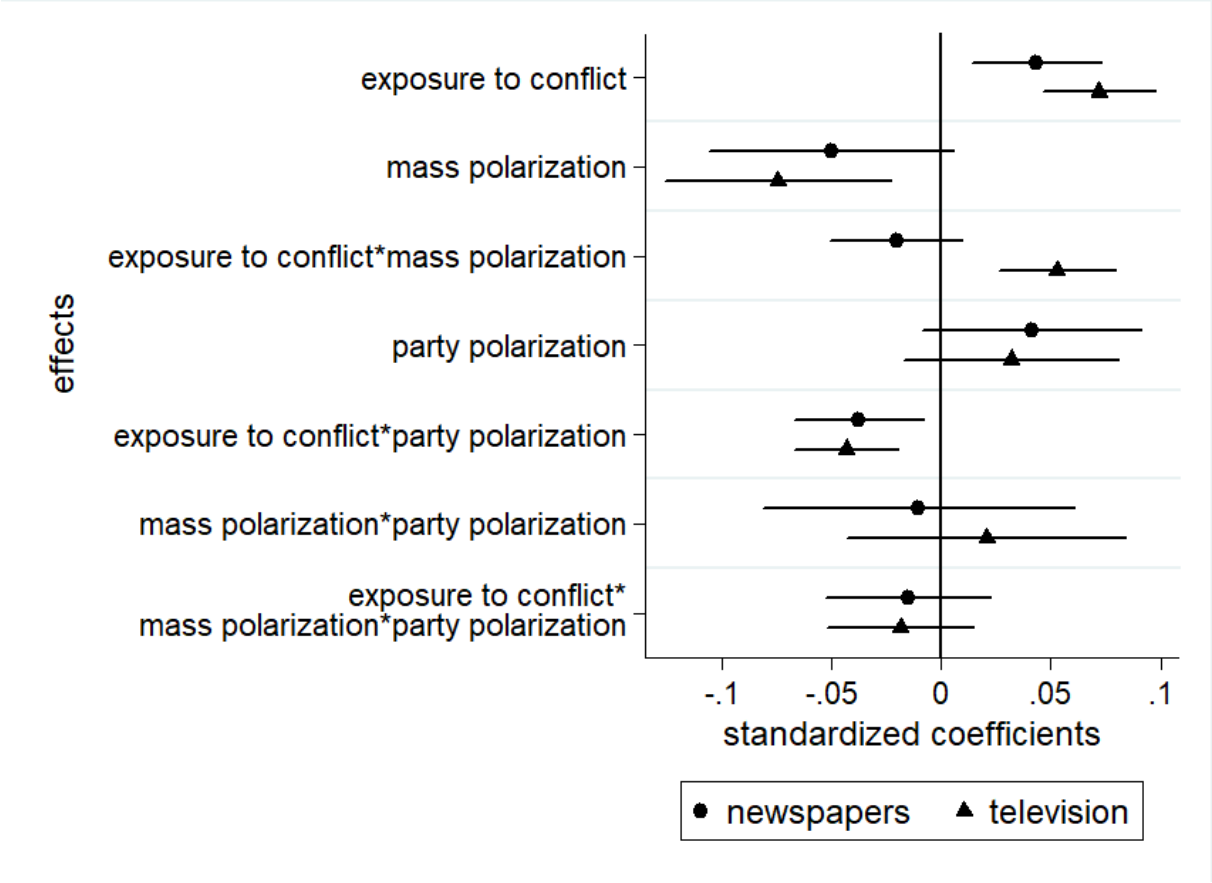

Figure 11 Effects of mass and party polarization, conflict exposure and their interactions

Note: The vertical axis shows the effects: 1, of exposure to conflict; 2, of mass polarization; 4, of party polarization; the interaction effects: 3, of exposure to conflict and mass polarization; 5, of exposure to conflict and party polarization; 6, of mass and party polarization; 7, a three-way interaction effect on support for democracy. The horizontal axis shows the standardized coefficients measuring the above-mentioned effects. The corresponding tables are Tables 5 and 6. Different symbols represent the effects for newspapers and television, while lines represent 90% confidence intervals for the effects. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies, Chapel Hill expert survey, Quality of Government data.

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4.5. Study 2

This chapter is mainly concerned with the effects of political conflicts and negativity on support for the political system. In the main analysis in Study 1, the key variable, conflicts, is measured with the same understanding, by trained coders. However, the data from Chapter 3 provide an opportunity to analyze the possible effects of perceived negativity on political behavior.[65] Following the general hypothesis of this chapter, one can assume that more negative campaigns go together with lower levels of trust in the political institutions.[66]

This analysis benefits from the panel structure of the data, since questions on perceived negativity and trust in political institutions were asked both before and after watching the Eurovision debate.[67] In this case it is possible to use a fixed-effects regression, which can exploit the full potential of the panel data to make causal claims.[68]

Thus, in the case of these panel data, the hypothesis is the following: *individuals who perceive a higher level of negativity due to the debate have a decreasing level of trust in politics*. This relationship is analyzed in general, with trust in the European Union (Model 1),[69] and with

[65] Because of data availability considerations, Study 2 in Chapter 4 uses different, albeit closely related, key independent (negativity) and dependent variables (trust in different political institutions) compared to the main analysis of this chapter in Study 1 (exposure to political conflicts, satisfaction with democracy). Regarding the operationalization of the variables, see Appendix 4.4 for further details.

[66] However, the case analyzed in Study 2 is different to some extent as it focuses on the effects of one debate – and not on that of a wider campaign period on both EU and national levels with more actors. Maier et al. (2017) present some empirical evidence that shows a positive effect of watching the 2014 Eurovision debate on positions on further EU integration in general; most probably because of respondents' increased knowledge on the candidates' positions in different issues. Thus, one might argue that, unlike in Study 1, the general hypothesis may not hold in this case. However, although this study uses the same data; the research design (analyzing how change in perceived negativity due to a debate affects change in trust), the models (fixed-effects regression), the variables (trust items) and the focus (both national and EU-level support) are different. Based on all these considerations, both signs of effects would be meaningful in this case.

[67] The negativity questions are those presented in the first Results section of Chapter 3. Trust questions were also gathered before and after exposure to the debate. The questions started with "*How much of the time do you think you can trust?"* and were then completed by six institutions (national parliament, national government, European Union, European Commission, political parties and politicians). The recoded variables were measured on a 0-4 scale where higher values mean higher trust.

[68] Although countries were the units of analysis in Chapter 2, the discussion of fixed-effects regressions and all their advantages holds for this analysis as well.

[69] Trust in the EU has been added because the debate, unlike in other chapters (except for Chapter 3), is not related to domestic elites.

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trust in the national parliament as the dependent variables (Model 2).[70] Afterwards, the two polarization measures and their interactions with perceived negativity change are also added, in order to see whether the effects of a change in perceived negativity on change in trust in the EU and on change in trust in the national parliament vary across the EU countries. All results are presented in Table 7. [71]

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[70] A repeated measures ANCOVA with trust in the institutions at the two time points, as the within-subjects variables, and the difference in the level of negativity over time as the covariate, yields exactly the same results.

[71] In Table 7, panel fixed-effects (or individual ID dummies) were used. Based on the Hausman-test, which compares the unbiased estimator (fixed-effects) with the more efficient one (random-effects), the latter may have been used in three cases (for Model 1 $p=0.776$; for Model 2 $p<0.05$; for Model 3 $p=0.339$; for Model 4 $p=0.176$) – in three cases one cannot reject the null hypothesis of no systematic difference between the two.

Table 7 Explaining trust in the European Union and in the national parliament

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
	EU – Without interactions	Parliament – Without interactions	EU – With interactions	Parliament – With interactions
Negativity perception	-0.01	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Negativity perception*Mass polarization			0.00	-0.02
			(0.03)	(0.03)
Negativity perception*Party polarization			0.05	-0.02
			(0.03)	(0.03)
Negativity perception*Mass polarization*Party polarization			-0.04	-0.02
			(0.04)	(0.03)
Time				
after	-0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Constant	2.20***	1.84***	2.19***	1.84***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
N	1611	1624	1611	1624
R^2	0.8568	0.9007	0.8574	0.9009

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category for time is *before*. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 4.4 in greater detail. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter Study, Eurovision debate data, Chapel Hill expert survey.

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Based on the results in Table 7,[72] neither negativity perception change, nor its interactions with different polarization types, affect trust in the EU or trust in the parliament. Superficially, these results contradict both our general and our context-based expectations. However, given the results of Chapter 3, the lack of an influencing role played by mass polarization should not come as a surprise.

4.6. Discussion

Superficially, the main results of the two analyses do not point in the same direction.[73] General exposure to political conflicts in the news seems to have a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy. However, perceived negativity does not seem to matter for political trust. This section presents five possible explanations for this difference in the findings and then attempts to derive a coherent narrative.

The first four explanations relate to the research design and are not relevant for the general story. First, the results in Study 1 and Study 2 may differ because perceived negativity and its effects may differ from actual negativity/political conflicts.[74] However, Chapter 3 showed a strong case against this explanation by showing the close relationship between negativity perceptions of respondents and experts/coders. Second, one might argue that the data on perceived negativity are from a very different, non-representative sample, and thus behave differently. Third, omitted variable bias may be present in the pooled cross-sectional analysis and absent in the models using panel fixed-effects regressions, where units are compared to themselves over time. Fourth, it may be that only the main analysis suffers from the problem

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[72] None of the models fits the data based on the F-tests.
[73] One might argue that the two analyses are different on so many levels (models, samples, data structure, time period, countries, data collection year) that there is little sense in comparing them.
[74] Furthermore, the concepts of negativity and political conflicts may tap into different phenomena as well. However, as was shown in the Introduction, negativity (the main variable of Chapter 3) and political conflicts (the main variable of Chapters 2 and 4) are strongly related concepts, thus comparison of their effects can be meaningful.

identified by Fazekas and Larsen (2016). In Study 2, negativity perceptions are measured directly by asking the respondents about the negativity of the campaign. In Study 1, however, the multiplication of exposure and conflict levels may lead to validity problems in the two multilevel models, since it might be better to measure the effects of general exposure to outlets, and not those of exposure to conflicts. And it may very well be the case that general exposure has a positive effect on support, while exposure to conflicts has a completely different effect.

Finally, by introducing interactions into our models, the diverging results may be more easily connected. Based on the results of Study 1, one can conclude that there are contexts in which exposure to more political conflicts harms the support for the political system. The multilevel analyses of Study 1 show that in countries with more EU-related party polarization and/or in less mass polarized countries (in the case of television), elite conflicts have a less positive effect on political support. These analyses support the main expectation that if parties are more disunited, and/or if the masses are more united in a country, exposure to more political conflicts and conflict-rich news decreases political support for the system (or at least has a less positive effect than in other contexts).[75]

The findings in Study 2 show that, despite the expectations, perceived negativity change neither affects political trust in general, nor is its effect influenced by the context. At first glance, this seems to contradict the findings from the multilevel models, which show that exposure to conflicts matters, and is conditioned by contextual factors (party and attitude polarizations). However, this makes more sense in the context of the argument of Chapter 3, and the two results can coexist, at least in the case of mass polarization as a contextual variable. In countries with higher mass polarization, conflicts hurt less (more precisely, it has greater positive effects)

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[75] The two additional observations discussed in the previous section should be emphasized once again. First of all, mass polarization in itself hurts democracy, but when it is accompanied by conflicts, this negative effect is diminished by the positive effect of the interaction. Second, although the three-way interaction of elite polarization, mass polarization and exposure to conflicts is not statistically significant, the elite-mass disconnection theory may still hold true.

based on the multilevel model (concerning television). In countries with increased mass polarization, citizens perceive the same debate as less negative and less conflictual, as shown in Chapter 3. Thus it may well be the case that when citizens are disunited, they are not taken aback by the elite conflicts because they use lower thresholds to evaluate what they see, and they are less upset, care less about negativity, and do not see the same acts as conflictual as do citizens from more mass-united countries (one must remember that the conflicts in Study 1 are coded similarly by experts). However, when considering effects of perceptions of negativity, rather than effects of exposure to expert-coded conflict and negativity, this positive effect of more polarized contexts disappears, because here, diverging individual thresholds for evaluating negativity and elite conflicts matter less as they already play a role in forming individual perceptions.

In addition to the general findings in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, Chapter 4 also supports the assertion that context is important when analyzing negativity, conflictual rhetoric and elite conflicts: their roots, their perceptions and their consequences all vary across countries. Watching and reading political messages/debates prior to the same election event (EP elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009) influence citizens from different countries quite differently, even if these messages are understood similarly. There is some evidence to support the initial hypothesis, i.e. that in countries with a wider gap between party polarization and attitude polarization (with the former being higher), political support for democracy is undermined more by exposure to conflicts. This has been one factor in the case selection for the last chapter, where effects of elite conflicts in a country with higher party and lower attitude polarizations are analyzed.

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Chapter 5 – Case study: Hungary, a country with a polarization gap

5.1. Introduction

The previous three chapters have analyzed the possible causes and effects of elite conflicts, conflictual rhetoric and negativity. This chapter complements the cross-national analyses by examining one country, Hungary, which, recently, seems to have been a typical case for disconnection in elite-mass polarization. The addition of this case study contributes to the dissertation by analyzing the effects of negativity in a typical case of disconnection using a quasi-experimental method: a survey experiment. This research design makes the general argument stronger if the expected effects are found, because unlike in previous analyses, here omitted variables are controlled for, the sample is representative of the population, and items were constructed in a way that guarantees high validity.

Hungary has been selected for the case study for several reasons.[76] The first is the striking pattern of Hungarian polarization. At least until recently, two closely balanced and internally cohesive camps faced each other without very strong economic policy differences (Palonen, 2009). Aside from marginal debates on public policies, symbolic issues have been the main subjects of debates between parties in Hungary (Körösényi 2013).[77] Growing polarization and camp mentality on the two sides have led to more biased perceptions of political reality, and also to a lack of conversation, increasing hostility and closing of the camps (Kapitány & Kapitány, 2014b; Körösényi, 2013). These related arguments make Hungary an interesting case because negativity and elite conflicts seem to be forces that help maintain the

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[76] One reason, not discussed in the main text, to select Hungary was related to convenience, like lesser language barriers and greater data collection opportunities.

[77] Körösényi (2013) argues that the elite consensus was not reached during the transition, and this is why there are no united elites in the way Higley and Burton (2006) describes them in Hungary. Aside from substantive debates, parties still argue on procedural and legitimacy issues. This is the additional symbolic component.

current political situation, and provide guidance for citizens to position themselves somewhere within the overall political spectrum.

In addition to identifying the trends of growing camp mentality and increasing polarization, one can compare elite and mass polarization levels. Elite polarization seems to be higher than that of the electorate. Moreover, as Körösényi (2013) argues, even procedural elite consensus is lacking in Hungary, which can also contribute to the damaging effects of negativity and conflicts. As shown by Vegetti (2016), even in left-right issues the parties are somewhat more polarized than the citizens in Hungary, but this is especially true for EU issues. Figure 12 depicts this difference (EU-related polarization was also shown in Figure 1). As argued throughout the whole dissertation, particularly in Chapter 4, in countries where elite and mass polarization deviate, and where the former is relatively high while the latter is relatively low, one expects stronger negative effects of visible elite conflicts. Figure 12 shows that the parties were more polarized than the electorate regarding EU issues in 2014.

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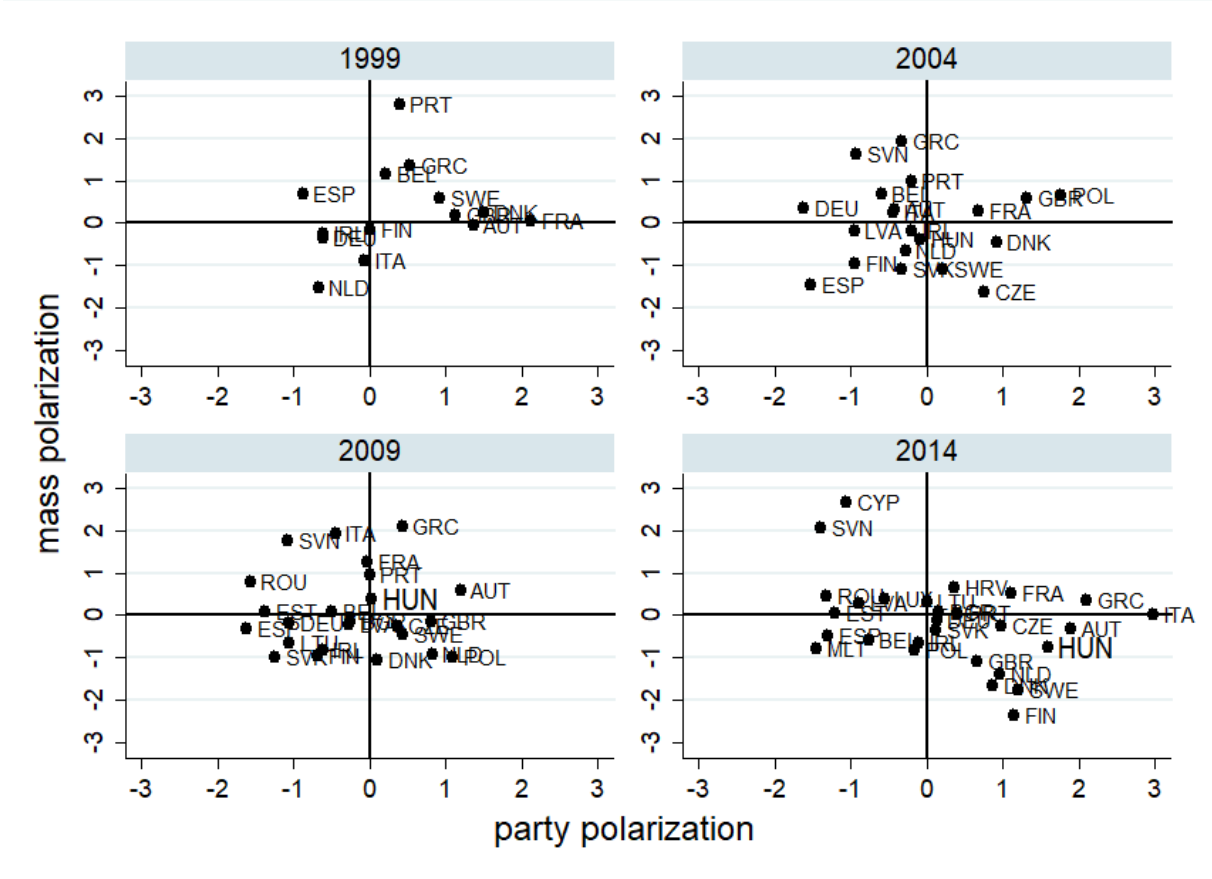

Figure 12 Elite (party) and mass polarization on EU-related issues in EU countries between 1999 and 2014, with Hungary highlighted

Note: The vertical axes show mass polarization levels in a given country – the values are standardized for all country-years, higher values mean higher polarization. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 3.1. The horizontal axes show party polarization levels in a given country – the values are standardized for all country-years, higher values mean higher polarization. For the operationalization of the variable, see Appendix 2. The four subgraphs show the polarization levels in four different years. Data sources: European Election Studies Media Study, Chapel Hill expert survey.

Second, both the logic and the results of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 support the selection of Hungary. According to Figures 3 and 4 in Chapter 2, Hungary was one of the countries where political conflict levels increased between 2004 and 2009 both on television and in newspapers. Thus, Hungary provides a good case for examining the effects of political conflicts in the context of rising campaign negativity.

Chapter 3 showed that Hungary was one of the countries where the 2014 Eurovision debate increased the negativity perceptions of the respondents (see Figure 8). This is exactly

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what should be observed in countries with relatively low mass polarization, thus Hungary seems to be a typical case in this respect as well.

The main analysis in Chapter 4 focused on how countries differ in exposure effects based on country-level characteristics. Based on the arguments and the findings presented there, and on Hungary's 2009 position in the attitudinal space shown in Figure 12 (relatively high mass polarization and low or neutral elite polarization), one would expect positive or null results when analyzing the effects of political conflicts on support for the political system. Separate OLS regressions conducted in Hungary lead to the results presented in Figure 13. Exposure to conflicts in newspapers has no significant effect, while exposure to conflicts on television has a statistically significant positive effect on satisfaction with democracy in Hungary.[78]

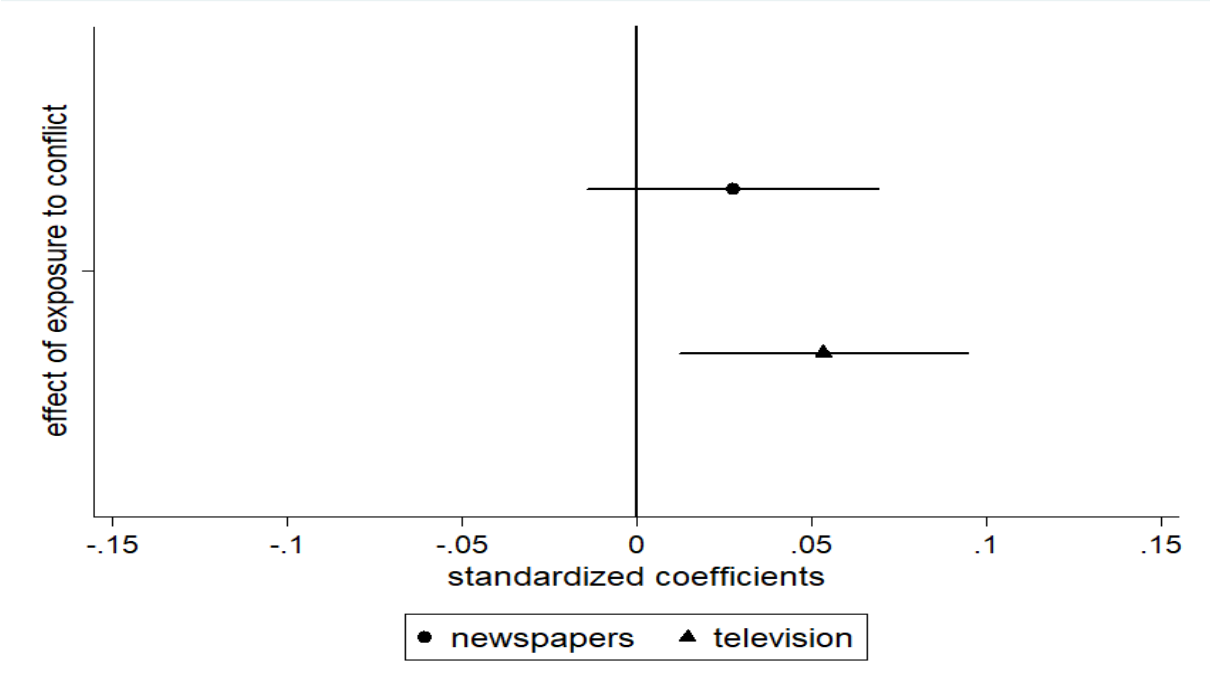

Figure 13 Newspaper and television exposure effects on satisfaction with democracy in Hungary in 2009

Note: The horizontal axis shows the standardized coefficients measuring the effects of exposure to conflict on support for democracy. Different symbols represent the effects for newspapers and television, while lines represent 90% confidence intervals for the effects. Data sources: European Election Studies Voter and Media Studies.

[78] First, instead of the two multilevel models used in Chapter 4, two OLS linear regressions with country-clustered standard errors using countries as dummies (not country characteristics) were used. The interaction term of country and exposure added to the main exposure effect shows that in Hungary exposure to conflictual news on television increases, while exposure to conflicts in newspapers does not change satisfaction with democracy. Figure 13 shows the exposure effects run separately in Hungary (after controlling for individual-level variables listed in Chapter 4).

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Based on the previous chapters, Hungary is a typical case for the elite-mass disconnection hypothesis for two reasons. First of all, in 2014 political elites seem to be more polarized on EU integration issues than citizens, which leads to the expectation of a negative effect of conflicts on political support.[79] Related to the first point, as expected in such countries, Hungarian respondents' threshold of assessing negativity seems to be different: they are more sensitive and they perceive the same debate to be more negative and conflictual as compared to citizens from other EU countries.

After briefly describing campaign characteristics and effects over the last 25 years of Hungarian democracy, those of the most recent EP election are analyzed. The hypotheses are tested based on a pilot study and on the analysis of a survey experiment conducted close to an actual EP election in 2014. The goal of this case study is to see whether, in such a typical case as Hungary in 2014, one can actually observe the expected negative effects of negativity and conflictual rhetoric on political support.

5.2. Negative campaigns in Hungary[80]

5.2.1. Trends

Both political communication and campaigns have changed considerably in Hungary since the transition. Most authors agree that the country experienced its first negative campaign in 2002, and negativity has intensified since then. Kapitány and Kapitány (e.g. 2014a, 2014b) have followed the values of political campaigns prior to all general parliamentary and EP elections

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[79] As seen in Figure 12, in 2009 mass polarization was relatively high, while party polarization was not. This might explain the null and positive effects in Figure 13. The different position of Hungary in this coordinate system explains the completely different expectations for 2014.

[80] The conceptualizations presented in Chapter 1 are followed here as well. "Negative campaign" is a similar concept used by most authors cited in this section. Sipos (2002) defines negativity somewhat differently with a subtle differentiation of two forms: all negative claims underlined by facts can be parts of a negative campaign, while anything with the intent of misinforming the electorate actually runs against democratic norms, limits electoral choices, and thus is not part of negative campaigns.

in the country since the transition, coming to the conclusion that the last campaign without harsh conflicts was in 1998.[81]

Without discussing all campaigns separately, an increase in negativity can be identified in the longitudinal trends. Using a content analysis of the Hungarian political news prior to all elections, Nábelek (2014) shows a continuous increase in negativity from 1990 till 2014, with the exception of 2010, when little was at stake, as one of the parties was expected to have a landslide victory (Kéri, 2010; Szabó, 2011). Most of these negative messages have increasingly targeted larger parties rather than smaller ones.

In addition to the negativity in political speeches and campaigns, as discussed in a cross-national context in Chapter 2, Hungarian journalists tend to over-report negativity by selecting scandalous stories, because these can increase readership (Szabó, 2011), or because the media is highly related to politics and is used, or at least partly influenced, by politicians (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013; Róka, 2008).[82]

European Parliament elections seem to hold the same patterns of increasing conflicts and negativity in Hungary as national elections. Figures 3 and 4 in Chapter 2 showed that conflicts became more common in the news prior to the European Parliament elections both in newspapers and on television between 2004 and 2009. Simon (2006) and Kapitány and Kapitány (2014a) also show the presence of negative elements in the Hungarian EP campaigns. Kapitány and Kapitány (2014a) argue that EP elections may serve as a rehearsal for parliamentary elections, thus negativity can be observed there as well, and the trends may mirror domestic ones.

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[81] Róka (2006) suggests an even earlier starting point: 1994.
[82] Szabó and Kiss (2011, 2012) call this phenomenon post-objectivism.

5.2.2. Effects

For the purposes of this chapter, it is also important to look at the possible effects of negativity in political discourse.[83] Regarding its effects on parties, some public opinion polls from 2006 show that the majority of the population thought that a negative campaign hurt both its initiator and its target, and was not successful (24.hu, 2006; hvg.hu, 2006).

Certain stories on individual parties seem to underline the possible negative effects of negative campaigns. The empirical literature contains examples of negative effects on both the initiator and target sides.

Regarding the first type of negative effects (when the party using a negative campaign is hurt), there are many speculations in Hungarian electoral studies. First, Hegedűs and his co-authors (2005) claim that communication mistakes in the 2002 campaign may have contributed to the defeat of Fidesz (see also the interview with László Kéri by *168 Óra*: Nagy, 2006). Second, some authors argue that the change in the campaign tone of the Alliance of Free Democrats contributed to their major losses in the 2009 European Parliament elections: while in 2006 they had an effective positive campaign with a child as the main character (Mihályffy, 2007), during the 2009 EP elections they ineffectively threatened the electorate with the possible (and later actual) rise of the Hungarian extreme right (Ördögh, 2010).[84] In discussing the campaign strategies of the 2006 national parliamentary elections, Török (2006) concludes that a successful (positive for the initiator) negative campaign has to meet three criteria: a) to show why the opposing camp is not a real alternative; b) to show why the initiator is a better alternative; and c) to make sure that negativity fits the image of the given party.

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[83] Here the specific Hungarian literature is presented. Expectations based on the general causal argument are given in the first section of this chapter and in the next section.

[84] According to Hargitai (2002), the Alliance of Free Democrats more successfully inserted negative elements in their national campaign in 2002 when they used humorous slogans about the governing party, such as Lop stop (Stop stealing). Török (2006) also emphasizes the importance of negative elements in their 2002 campaign, in which they tried to position themselves as the steady force that can provide a change in the government.

One example of negative effects for the targeted side is from 1994: decreasing support for the Hungarian Socialist Party prior to the campaign was partly explained by negative TV ads run against them (Závecz, 1994). Although all these claims about the effects of negativity on political parties refer to trends in support, they are somewhat speculative, and the hypotheses are not tested empirically.

Aside from the specific effects on parties, authors have also considered the general consequences of negative campaigns. Based on the increasing turnout between the first and second rounds in the 2002 national elections, Mihályffy (2005) assumes and concludes that the negative campaign had a mobilizing effect.

In contrast, Kapitány and Kapitány (2014b) identify four mechanisms working against positive effects of negative campaigns. First of all, according to them, certain negative messages can have unintended effects. For example, during the 2014 election campaign the left coalition candidates used colors and pictures to illustrate the social and economic problems of the country, but these failed to achieve their intended goals: instead of mobilization they served to further depress the public mood. Second, they argue that negativity increases fear on both sides of the electorate: fear of communism on the right wing, fear of dictatorship on the left wing. This fear is intensified by the elites, which makes conversation between the two camps of the political spectrum impossible, and hurts support for democracy as well. Third, they claim that negative campaigns initiated by either side usually focus on corruption scandals, and the publicity of such cases increases political cynicism. Part of this last element is character assassination (e.g. Pál Schmitt, Gordon Bajnai, Gyula Molnár).[85] Finally, they also argue that, given the political reality of permanent political attacks, conspiracy theories have become more widespread, which destroy social cohesion and usually lead to a divided society.

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[85] Former President of Hungary, former Prime Minister of Hungary, former mayor and MP respectively.

5.2.3. Hypotheses

As summarized in the Introduction of this chapter, the separate cross-sectional re-analysis of the 2009 data used in Chapter 4 resulted in inconclusive results (one not significant and one positive) regarding the effects of elite conflicts on political support for democracy within Hungary. However, there are two reasons why negative effects of political conflicts on support for the system are expected in this analysis. First, the 2014 position within the EU-related attitudinal space, depicted in Figure 12 (relatively high elite polarization and low mass polarization) would suggest a negative effect based on the general arguments and results from Chapter 4.

Second, the brief literature review in the previous section on possible country-specific campaign effects suggests a negative effect of negativity in campaigns, by supporting the idea with mainly theoretical considerations. As has been discussed, regardless of whether a party is the initiator or the target of a negative campaign, its popularity can easily decrease, and it can easily lose voters as a result. One might expect the same effect of conflicts on the whole political system: no matter whether citizens turn away from politics or from a party, or even if they start to identify with the political camp they prefer (and dislike the opposing camp more), their views of the system as a whole may deteriorate as a result of conflict.

However, based on the mechanisms identified in the previous section, negativity should usually hurt the feelings of those who are members of one of the political camps. The discussed anecdotal evidence on the causes of party popularity changes suggests that a negative influence of conflicts and negative campaigns may indeed be observed when citizens' preferred parties participate in them (Ördögh, 2010; Závecz, 1994).

Based on the empirical parts of previous chapters, as formulated in H_4, *a negative effect of negativity is expected on support for democracy in Hungary*. However, the research design of one of the studies in this chapter makes it possible to differentiate whether the preferred party

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of a respondent played a role in a debate or a given negative political message. Thus, based on theoretical considerations and anecdotal evidence *a more negative effect is expected when the preferred parties of the respondents are part of the negative campaign message.* [86]

5.3. Study 1

5.3.1. Research design

As part of the Political Behavior Research Group project entitled ”Experimental Political Behavior,” funded by the Research Support Scheme of Central European University, 198 Hungarian students, 18 years old or older, were recruited for an experiment in April 2013. Socio-economic information on respondents was first gathered, then respondents participated in four separate experiments, one of which was this study. The order of experiments was randomized to control for possible spillover effects. Obviously, the sample used for this experiment is not representative of the population of Hungary, thus the external validity of this study is low. The US literature shows that age may play a role in how negativity affects political support (McKinney & Banwart, 2005; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009). They show that although most types of debate formats positively influence young voters' political support, the more technology-using ones are more beneficial for this age group. Thus, one might expect this student sample to react differently to the stimuli than a representative sample of the Hungarian population: written texts should have a more moderate influence.[87]

Respondents were assigned to one of four groups: control, positive tone, civil negative tone and uncivil negative tone. In the control group respondents received no text. In all three treatment groups, they received texts of debates between X and Y politicians on three topics

[86] This analysis does not include those with no intention of voting. According to Kapitány and Kapitány (2014b), they are further demobilized by negative campaigns. We instead compare those whose preferred parties are part of the political messages with those whose preferred parties are not included.

[87] Another reason why one should be cautious when interpreting the results is that many of the respondents were not interested in politics, especially compared to Hungarians in general (60%, while in the representative sample used in the next study this ratio was 33%, and in the 2009 wave of EES it was 51%).

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(unemployment, environment and police). The content was the same but with three different tones: positive, civil negative and uncivil negative (for operationalization, see Brooks & Geer, 2007). The politicians were not affiliated with any of the actual political parties and the texts were made up.

Seven questions about each politician's debate style were asked in order to check the success of the manipulation. Only the one about fairness is presented later in the results section: "*Please tell me how much you agree with the following statements about X and Y politicians: 1, X was fair during the debate; 2, Y was fair during the debate"*.

The main dependent variable was measured in multiple ways.[88] Two are presented in this analysis. Political trust was measured with an aggregate index using seven questions, similar to that proposed by Mutz and Reeves (2005). The variable was standardized after aggregating the seven questions. Satisfaction with democracy was measured using the following question: *"Please tell me how much you are satisfied with how democracy works in this country?"* where higher values mean higher satisfaction, also on a standardized scale.

5.3.2. Results

Manipulation checks show that the mean perceived fairness differs in a statistically significant manner across the three groups that received a text ($p<0.001$).

Figure 14 summarizes the main results of Study 1: the means (and also the confidence intervals) in the two main dependent variables across the four groups. None of the means differ from each other in a statistically significant way.

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[88] See Appendix 5.1 for further details.

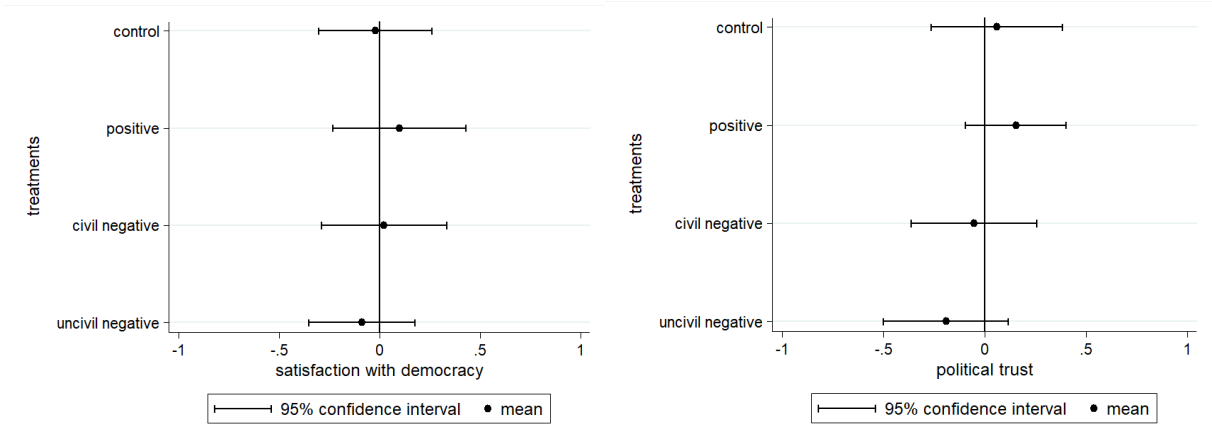

Figure 14 Means of satisfaction with democracy and political trust across all four conditions

Note: The vertical axis shows the four treatments – control, positive, civil negative and uncivil negative. The horizontal axis shows 1, mean satisfaction with democracy – values are standardized, higher values mean higher satisfaction; 2, mean political trust – values are standardized, higher values mean higher trust. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 5.1 in a greater detail. Dots represent means for each treatment, while lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The two subgraphs show two different variables (satisfaction with democracy, political trust). Data source: original data collection.

Although the differences are not statistically significant, the results are easily interpreted and not surprising. Trust in politicians and satisfaction with democracy are highest in the group with a positive tone, in the middle in the group with a civil negative tone and are the lowest in the group with an uncivil negative tone. Trust and satisfaction are always higher for those getting the positive message and are always lower for those presented with the uncivil negative message than for those in the control group.

There might be many reasons for not finding statistically significant differences among the groups. First of all, there are two possible problems with the sample: low sample size and the underlying population of the student sample (for reasons discussed in the section on design). Second, the manipulations may have been made ineffective by using non-existent politicians and texts made up mainly based on a US study without carefully taking into account either the

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relevance of the three selected topics, or how realistic the stories were in the analyzed context (original texts from Brooks & Geer, 2007 were modified to some extent).[89]

5.4. Study 2

5.4.1. Research design

In cooperation with a larger research team and with joint funding by Central European University, Harvard, MIT and UQ Montreal, a series of surveys was conducted just before and after the Hungarian parliamentary elections of April 6, 2014 and after the European Parliament election of May 25, 2014. Data collection was administered by the opinion polling company *Medián* and its partner *Kutatócentrum*, who provided the online panel. The questionnaire was programmed and tested by Gábor Simonovits, Gábor Tóka, Federico Vegetti and the author of this chapter, while the block (texts of experimental stimuli and questions) relevant for this study was written by Federico Vegetti and the author.

This particular study is based on the data collected at the end of May. The total number of respondents was 2433, of which 1795 completed the entire survey. The sample is representative of the Hungarian online population, although not of the overall Hungarian population. For instance, the gender distribution is different: 54% of the sample is male and 46% is female, while the ratios would be 47% and 53% respectively in the entire population.

This study uses a survey experiment embedded in the questionnaire. The relevant block contained a text from two different real parties along with several follow-up questions. The text was manipulated across different conditions. In terms of content, the texts were similar, comprised of real excerpts from party manifestos on two issues: same-sex marriage and multinational companies. The study had a 3*3*3*2 design where the first treatment was group

[89] This study produces one statistically significant result. After controlling for both political interest and vote choice (the party the respondent voted for), positive tone has a weak positive effect on satisfaction with democracy.

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labeling (no party labels – ideological group labels – party names), the second was party policy cues (two left-wing parties, LMP and MSZP contrasted in the texts – two right-wing parties, Fidesz and Jobbik contrasted in the texts – one left- and one right-wing party, MSZP and Fidesz contrasted in the texts), the third was tone (positive – civil negative – uncivil negative), and the fourth was the order of the two parties. The four treatments were independent from each other, respondents were randomly assigned and equal sizes were expected across the 54 groups. In this chapter, we are most concerned with the third treatment, the effect of tones.[90]

Tone was manipulated across the texts: there was a group (1) with a positive tone in which the candidate focused on himself/herself, a group (2) with a civil negative tone in which the candidate focused on the opponent, and a group (3) with an uncivil negative tone in which the candidate focused on the opponent with animosity and without respect (Brooks & Geer, 2007).

A variable was constructed to see whether a *preferred party was involved in the debate*. For this purpose the question on whether the respondent voted, the question on "*Which party's list did you vote for?",* and the second treatment variable about the two parties involved in the texts were used. If a party preferred by the respondent was involved in the debate, this variable was coded as 1, if not it was 0, and if the respondent was a non-voter it was 2.[91]

For manipulation check, the answers to the question "*To what extent do you think that this party has been fair with its political opponents in these statements?"* for the two parties were averaged, with values ranging from 1 to 5 (higher values mean more fair).

The *dependent variable* was measured with a general trust question asked after the treatment: "*How much do you trust political parties in general"*. This was measured on a 1-10 scale with higher values meaning higher trust.

[90] Regarding the operationalization of the variables, see Appendix 5.2 for further details.
[91] In the end, non-voters were removed from the analysis (they differed only slightly from voters whose preferred party was not involved).

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The research design of Study 2 shows four improvements compared to Study 1: a) the sample is an online representative sample of the population, which increases generalizability; b) the texts are real excerpts from party manifestos or posters; c) there are possibilities to control for more variables given both the more complicated design and the other treatments; and d) the data were collected close to an EP election, which makes it more realistic and a better fit for this dissertation, as EU-related conflicts have been the topic of the first three chapters.

5.4.2. Results

Based on the manipulation check, tone manipulation was partly perceived as expected: both the civil negative tone (md=-0.271, $p<0.001$) and the uncivil negative tone (md=-0.325, $p<0.001$) were perceived as less fair than the positive tone. However, no difference in fairness was perceived between civil and uncivil negative tones (md=-0.053, $p=0.516$).

Table 8 summarizes the results. Model 1 shows the general effects of campaign negativity without including party preferences. Models 2, 3, 4 and 5 include whether preferred parties of the respondents were involved in the two political messages. The difference among these four models is the following: in Model 2 the whole sample is included in the analysis, in Model 3 only those who were in treatment 1 of labeling (no label) are included, in Model 4 only those who were in treatment 2 of labeling (party group label) are included, and in Model 5 only those who were in treatment 3 of labeling (party name label) are included.

Based on the F-tests, Models 1 and 3 do not fit the data, while Models 2 ($p<0.001$), 4 and 5 ($p<0.05$) do. The explained variances are 1%, 3%, 1%, 4% and 5%, respectively. The results (simple main effects and interaction terms) are summarized in Table 8.

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Table 8 Explaining political trust in a Hungarian survey experiment[92]

	Model 1 Tone	**Model 2** Tone, party	**Model 3** Tone, party, no label	**Model 4** Tone, party, party group label	**Model 5** Tone, party, party name label
Tone					
civil negative	-0.15	0.07	-0.05	0.11	0.16
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.35)	(0.33)	(0.34)
uncivil negative	-0.02	0.28	-0.22	0.53	0.51
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.31)	(0.34)	(0.35)
Preferred party was involved					
yes, preferred party was involved	-	0.82***	0.36	1.21**	0.95**
		(0.20)	(0.33)	(0.37)	(0.34)
Tone × Preferred party was involved					
civil negative × yes, preferred party was involved	-	-0.47#	-0.22	-0.90#	-0.46
		(0.28)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)
uncivil negative × yes, preferred party was involved	-	-0.59*	0.05	-1.25*	-0.58
		(0.29)	(0.47)	(0.51)	(0.51)
Constant	2.81***	2.46***	3.09***	2.56***	1.83***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.40)	(0.43)	(0.39)
N	1521	1521	503	501	517
R^2	0.0139	0.0270	0.0122	0.0356	0.0549

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category for tone is *positive*. Reference category for preferred party was involved is *no, preferred party was not involved*. Reference category for the interaction is *positive X yes, preferred party was involved*. Operationalization of the variables is discussed in Appendix 5.2 in a greater detail. See Appendix 5.3 for the table with the missing controls. Data source: original data collection.

Based on Model 1, one can conclude that tone itself does not explain trust in parties in Hungary.[93] Model 2 shows (as do 4 and 5) that whether a preferred party is included in the texts matters, as this increases political trust. The main result of Model 2 is that both negative tones have a more negative effect on political trust when a preferred party is mentioned, compared to the positive tone (main effect and interaction term should be added).

However, analysis of separate labeling conditions partly modifies these findings. Model 3 shows that when no information is provided on the ideological stance of the parties, similar to Model 1, there are basically no effects at all (which underlines that labels do matter and are

[92] Age and gender are controlled for, but are not presented in Table 8 (see Appendix 5.3). Results are similar without controls, and sample size is the same since demographic characteristics were asked as compulsory questions. The only main difference is in the last model, Model 5, where uncivil tone has a statistically significant positive main effect on a p<0.1 level without controls.

[93] Collapsing the two negative tones into one yields similar results.

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important cues). However, Model 4 tells a completely different story. It shows that exposure to both civil and uncivil negative messages has a more negative effect on political trust when the ideological/political side of the preferred party is included in the text read by the respondent.

Some results presented in Table 8 seem to support the main hypotheses. Just as in Study 1, without considering any other factors, no significant results were found regarding tones. However, including a variable for the respondents' relationship with the parties involved results in a change, especially if the parties' ideological sides are revealed. When the preferred party of a respondent is included, and this is true both in general and when he or she knows the party camps involved in the debate, negative texts and messages have a more negative effect on general political trust than positive ones.

5.5. Discussion

Although the findings of Chapter 5 were at times inconclusive, the results from the more realistic analysis conducted close to a real campaign (2014 EP) in Hungary show that those who are more related to political conflicts (by supporting one of the parties involved in the conflict) move away from politics and lose political support when facing negativity and conflictual rhetoric, compared to the case when receiving positive messages.

Knowing that Hungarian elites and masses are differently dispersed in their views on EU integration, this negative influence of negativity should come as no surprise. Parties in Hungary have recently been more polarized than the electorate in their positions towards the EU. This disconnection, together with visible elite conflicts, reduces support for the political system, as expected from the contextual mechanisms identified in Chapter 4. When people face more heated talks close to the EP elections, they seem to lose political trust and become less satisfied with the system as a whole. In terms of this finding, this case study fits with the general logical flow of this dissertation.

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It is slightly puzzling that the negative effect does not occur in general, but only for those who are close to the debate by having their preferred candidate participating in it. However, this can be explained by the relatively low relevance of the EP elections (they lack newsworthiness, as proposed by de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001), especially soon after a parliamentary election. It would appear that citizens without any involvement are not affected by an EP campaign, its tone does not bother them, and it does not affect their political support. Among the rest, though, exposure to more negative messages reduces satisfaction with democracy, just as I expected given the markedly greater polarization of elites than masses in the given context.

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Conclusion

6.1. General contribution

As stated in Chapter 1, disconnection of elites and their electorate is a highly relevant topic given the latest developments in the world. Both the media and political science scholars identify many possible negative effects this disconnection has caused and may cause in the future. The general contribution of this dissertation is that it shows one possible route by which a certain type of elite-mass disconnection may hurt the political system.

Specifically, this dissertation has been concerned with how differences in elite and mass polarization mediate the effects of political conflicts, attacks and negativity on support for the political system. Both intensive elite polarization and low mass polarization decrease the otherwise positive effects of political conflicts on support. More precisely, more party polarization combined with more visible conflicts among political elites reduces support for the political system, especially when the electorate is less divided by issues or ideology (see Study 1 in Chapter 4). In such contexts conflictual elite behavior signals to a more united electorate that shared norms of conduct are not necessarily followed, or are even violated by political elites. These results support the elite integration theory of John Higley (2006, 2010), outlined in Chapter 1: a visible division within disunited elites brings uncertainty to the political system and undermines its stability.

This dissertation also contributes to the literature not only by showing how polarization, conflicts/negativity and political support for democracy are related, but also by identifying a plausible causal explanation among the three. Exposure to elite conflicts does not necessarily suppress political support; indeed, in countries with more mass polarization one can detect even sizeable positive effects (see Study 1 in Chapter 4). It has also been shown that in these countries citizens perceive a given debate as being less conflictual than their counterparts from less polarized contexts (see Chapter 3). By connecting these two arguments, one can better

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understand why more mass polarized countries experience a more positive effect of elite conflicts and negativity. When citizens are disunited and polarized, they are influenced more positively by conflict exposure because they do not evaluate the same acts as conflictual to the same extent as citizens from less polarized countries. Visibly disunited elites do not violate social norms so extensively in these contexts, because the norms are different, or divergence from norms appear better justified by the content and degree of partisan disagreements. Either way, the difference is in citizens' sensitivity to and acceptance of elite conflicts.[94]

This causal mechanism is partly supported by the results of Study 2 in Chapter 4: when negativity perceptions are concerned instead of exposure to conflicts as understood by trained coders, the relatively more positive effects of conflicts on support disappear in more mass polarized countries.[95] In other words, when we control for the sensitivity of citizens, as we compare how their conflict/negativity perceptions affect their satisfaction with the system, more and less polarized countries no longer differ in the effects of conflicts/negativity on political support. This is why one might assume that conflicts/negativity, if they are understood as perceived conflicts/negativity, may in fact have very similar effects on support across countries, and the difference in what people find to be conflictual or negative (which is highly dependent on elite-mass disconnection) is what actually drives the differences in effects on support. When elite disunity is high and mass disunity is low, even less harsh debates are seen as more conflictual or negative, which leads to continuously decreasing political support for the system. When elites differ little from masses in how divided they are, or when citizens are more divided, citizens become less sensitive, they perceive less negativity, and thus their political support for the system does not decrease substantially.

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[94] Moreover, if mass polarization is low while elite polarization is high in a country, besides the differences in how sensitive citizens are in their perceptions, political conflict levels may also be higher than in contexts with low elite polarization (Chapter 2).

[95] More precisely, both the general positive effects and the relatively more positive effects of more mass polarized countries disappear in this case.

6.2. Contribution to the literature on negativity

This dissertation also adds to the literature on negativity by identifying the conditioning role that polarization plays in the relationship between elite conflicts/negativity and political support for democracy. Research on the effects of negativity, especially on political support, is regarded as an inconclusive field of political science. There are many speculations on why this might be the case: different concepts, methods and measurements may all contribute to the differences (see, e.g., Geer & Lipsitz, 2013; Sigelman & Kugler, 2003). This dissertation has tried to add two more possible explanations – one present in previous literature and one not – in order to help better understand these effects and begin moving beyond this inconclusiveness.

First of all, citizens' negativity perceptions have been added to the analyses to determine whether the findings change with a different conceptualization. On the one hand, it is shown that citizens' and experts' understandings of negativity are usually closely related. On the other hand, it is also shown that there is a subjective element to what citizens understand as conflictual or negative, and there is a variation across countries in this subjective element. This cross-national difference in perceiving conflicts and negativity may contribute to differences in the effect on political support across countries. Thus, in general, effects on political support for democracy are different if citizens' conflict/negativity perceptions or if exposure to expert-coded conflict/negativity levels are concerned.

Second, most of the literature uses cross-sectional data collected in the US, without focusing on the context. This disregards the possible mediating effects of contextual characteristics, and may also explain the inconclusive results of the literature. It might be the case that analyses in different time periods, even within the same country, come to different conclusions partly because of the differences in the contexts where they are performed. This is the reason why, following some other authors (e.g. Schuck et al., 2013; Walter & van der Brug, 2013), this dissertation has analyzed contextual factors as well.

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The main contextual characteristic of this dissertation, difference in elite and mass polarization, has varied considerably within the last 50 years in the US too (Hetherington, 2009, Figure 5). This does not necessarily mean that this difference in polarizations is the only reason why negativity effects differed in studies conducted in different years. However, our results using the attitudinal space of elite and mass polarization on EU-related issues support the assertion that disconnection plays a role in altering the general effects. Thus, the dissertation's contribution to the literature on negativity is that a contextual variable has been used to better understand the causes and consequences of negativity, conflicts and attacks. Considering and including elite and mass polarization in the models appear to generate more conclusive findings regarding these three important variables in the literature on political communication and political behavior.

6.3. Main results

Let me summarize now briefly the most important results connected to the general argument for each chapter. I do so by citing and evaluating the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 has focused on the causes of elite conflict levels using observational data from the European Election Studies. The main hypothesis (H_1) was: *elite disunity or more polarized parties correlate with a more conflictual presentation of the issues in question.* Although longitudinal within-country models show that an increase in party polarization does not lead to more elite conflicts covered in newspapers, and there is some weak evidence that it leads to higher conflict levels on television; looking at the cross-sectional findings, the expected positive relationship exists in 2009 (for television). Thus, the latest trends seem to support the expectation: countries where elites are more polarized regarding the EU experience a more conflictual EP campaign. This result should not be surprising, as disunited elites probably introduce more conflicts into the television news. Furthermore, the polarization of the media,

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measured as parallelism of the media and politics, also contributes to higher conflict levels in 2009 (both for newspapers and television), and to some extent longitudinally.

Chapter 3 has been dedicated to developing a better understanding of citizens' perceptions of campaign negativity and political attacks. The analyses were based on respondents' perceptions before and after a televised debate between the presidential candidates of the EP parties, which made it possible to control for the actual content of the debate. The main hypothesis in Chapter 3 (H_2) was formulated as: *those coming from a more attitude-polarized background should find the same debate less negative or attacking (probably because they find attacks and conflicts more palatable) than those coming from a less polarized country*. As expected, the results indeed have shown that in countries with a more polarized electorate, perceptions of the same debate were more positive (even when one controls for previous campaign negativity), and the presidential candidates were seen as initiating less attacks in general (even after controlling for expert-coded attack levels of the candidates) than in countries with a less polarized electorate. These results buttress the argument that citizens in these contexts have different thresholds when evaluating negativity. It has also been shown that citizens from countries experiencing higher campaign negativity viewed the same debate as less negative, which also supports the argument that citizens have different sensitivity thresholds. Most likely, their experiences were different, and the EP debate was more positive than what they had seen previously. Aside from the contextual mediating factors, Chapter 3 has also shown that in general citizens' and experts' perceptions of attacks seem to correlate well.

Chapter 4 has focused on whether political conflicts increase or decrease support for democracy. The cross-country expectations were formulated in three hypotheses: H_{3a}, *a more negative effect of political conflicts is expected in more party-polarized countries;* H_{3b}, *a less negative effect of political conflicts is expected in countries where the mass attitudes are more polarized;* and H_{3c}, *in countries where both elite polarization and attitude polarization are high,*

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no additional effect of political conflicts on the support for the political system occurs beyond those described in H_{3a} and H_{3b}. There is some evidence to support these hypotheses, while the general effect of political conflicts is positive. First, elite polarization has a negative joint effect with conflict exposure on satisfaction with democracy, meaning that in countries with more polarized parties visible elite conflicts reduce system support compared to countries with less party polarization (based on all models in the multilevel analysis). Second, mass polarization has a positive joint effect with conflict exposure on satisfaction with democracy, meaning that in countries with less polarized electorates elite conflicts help support for the political system less than in countries with more mass polarization (based on all models in the multilevel analysis for television). Third, there is no three-way effect of elite and mass polarization and conflicts in any of the models. These results support the general argument of the dissertation: an increasing gap in elite and mass polarization (the former becoming higher and the latter becoming lower at the same time) would lead to decreasingly positive effects of political conflicts on political support. The underlying causal mechanisms, based on Chapter 3, are outlined in the general contribution section of this chapter: citizens in countries with such increasing ideological gaps probably perceive conflicts differently.

Finally, Chapter 5 has presented a case study using Hungary, a country which experienced high elite polarization, but lower mass polarization on EU issues in 2014. The main hypothesis was the following: H_4, *a negative effect of negativity is expected on support for democracy in Hungary*. The results only partially support the expectation of damaging effects by negative campaigns. In general these were not detected, but when party support is accounted for, the results become significantly negative, as expected in a sub-hypothesis. Thus, the effects of negativity on political support in Hungary, a typical case for this type of elite-mass disconnection (in EU-related polarization levels), do support the expectations.

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6.4. Limitations

The dissertation contributes to the literature by analyzing the mediating effect of elite-mass disconnection in polarization levels on political support. However, the entire causal chain, presented in Figure 2 and discussed in the General contribution section of the Conclusion, could not be analyzed using the same data. EES data have shown some evidence that polarized elites are more conflictual (Chapter 2), and have supported the idea that visible elite conflicts undermine political support more in countries where elite and mass polarization differ in a certain direction (Chapter 4). Analysis of the data on the televised Eurovision campaign debate provided some support for the idea that more polarized masses perceive a debate as less negative than citizens from less polarized countries (Chapter 3). These separate chapters point in the same direction, and a coherent story (outlined in the General contribution section) on the relationship among elite and mass polarization, conflicts/negativity, and political support can be told without major contradictions.

Using the same data would make the case stronger, but this was not possible given that the EES does not have questions on perceptions, while for the Eurovision debate, no data on campaign negativity in 2014 were available (and the data are not representative for any populations). Replications focusing on all the links but using the same data would help solidify the main argument about the role of polarization in negativity and conflict effects on political support (see Appendix 1 for more suggestions on possible replications). However, for this purpose, variables not only for exposure, but also for perception, would be needed in the EES.

One main contribution of the dissertation to the literature on negativity is its incorporation of polarization as a contextual variable. However, the validity of the results may be questioned for three reasons. The first of these is the limited number of cases. The dissertation uses a much broader country pool than most of the literature, as most studies focus solely on the US. Even the cross-national literature on political conflicts using the EES data

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concentrates only on one of the waves. This paper uses three different waves of the EES and two additional data collections (in both of which the author participated), which greatly extends its scope. However, the analyses are still performed on a limited number of cases and countries from one region, the European Union. Thus, although there is some variation in the two key variables, elite polarization and mass polarization, the universe of cases certainly limits how much disunity can be observed within these two groups. As the research by Desposato (e.g. 2007, 2008) shows, many characteristics present in the developing world may alter the effects of negativity. It may also be the case that polarization differences are less important in less democratized countries, or in countries where party politics play a different role. Thus, a replication on more regions would be needed.

Another element that raises concerns about the validity of the present study is how polarization is measured. Data availability posed a constraint on the type of elite-mass disconnection that could be analyzed, as only EU-related polarizations and EU-related political conflicts were available for analysis. However, EP campaigns do not contain too much conflicts and negativity (Peter & de Vreese, 2004), and EU-related issues are not generally salient (Spoon, 2012). Thus, a replication with domestic debates and elite conflicts would be needed. Nonetheless, significant effects can be found even with these settings, thus one can make the argument that stronger effects of conflicts on political support, and a stronger mediating role of polarization, would be expected if domestic issues were concerned.

Content analyses of conflict levels in Chapters 2 and 4 have presented additional validity concerns: a content analysis of 2-3 weeks of campaign news in a limited number of television channels and newspaper outlets does not necessarily show the EU-related conflict levels within those countries. This would also be a reason for later replications using additional content analyses. However, at this point, EES is still regarded as a unique data collection, which provides an opportunity for research using cross-national content analysis and an opportunity

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for a better understanding of negativity (e.g. Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013). To my knowledge, the POLCON project has been collecting some promising data on national election campaigns in some European countries between 2008 and 2015, which may later be used for these purposes as well ("POLCON", n.d.).

Besides these general constraints, there are additional technical concerns about external validity, reliability and measurement of variables, as discussed separately in each chapter. In sum, there are several limitations to this study, mainly imposed by the data available. Thus replication of the main findings on different datasets would be highly desirable.

6.5. Implications

The results of this dissertation paint a rather optimistic picture of democracies, for at least three different reasons. First of all, elite conflicts do not necessarily have negative effects on political support in general. This is quite a surprising result given the expectations, and it should be taken with caution. This essentially means that elite debates and disagreements may increase citizens' support for the political system by mechanisms not tested in this dissertation, but identified in the literature (see the literature review in Chapter 4): increased political sophistication, or the fact that citizens can better identify with the political system they live in if they hear multiple arguments on the same topic. However, it should be emphasized that conflicts are measured here in a way that does not include incivility, which may at least partly explain the non-negative effects.

Second, the results show that citizens can understand and try to influence the political reality they live in. When they mostly agree on an issue, and then they have to face endless disagreements on that particular issue, this bothers them, and they articulate their distaste in the form of decreasing political support for the system that produced these endless disagreements. The political system may use this distaste in a good way, as citizens try to signal the limits to

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which they can tolerate conflicts, and signal when politics and political elites try to unnecessarily occupy their societal reality. Whether political elites actually reflect on this decreasing support in such situations is a different question, but the results clearly show that in such a case the overreach can at least be detected in public opinion.

Finally, the results also imply that citizens punish polarized and disunited political elites only when this polarization is manifested in the form of visible conflicts. The dissertation shows that it is not necessarily differing positions that truly bother the electorate, but rather a situation in which they go together with visible elite conflicts. Furthermore, decreasing political support may move the political processes in the direction of elite consensus, if they rightly interpret citizens' signals of discontent.

These last two implications, that citizens react to political life and that they are bothered by disunited elites mainly when visible elite conflicts are also present, may be the ones most relevant for policy makers. Since this dissertation has focused on the effects of elite conflicts and negativity in general without partitioning them into separate political camps, it is difficult to formulate any policy recommendations for politicians interested in maximizing their vote shares. Based on these results, there is no evidence regarding the effects on different politicians' or parties' levels of popularity. Hence, the most straightforward incentive for competing partisan elites to express or suppress conflictual behavior is not, in general, at work. However, generally speaking, if there is a common will to stabilize democracies, even when political elites are divided ideologically, they should at least try to share some common norms and codes of conduct, maybe not question all policies proposed by the opposing political parties. In addition to having many other implications, such a consensus would help to downplay the relatively more negative effects of elite conflicts and negativity when they are not matched by a deep division among citizens.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Datasets used

	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Main dataset name	European Election Studies Media Study 1999, 2004, 2009	Data collected prior to the Eurovision debate in 2014 by a research group led by Jürgen Maier and Thorsten Faas.	1, European Election Studies Voter Study 1999, 2004, 2009 2, European Election Studies Media Study 1999, 2004, 2009	1, Experimental Political Behavior data collection. 2, Data on a representative sample of the Hungarian online population before the 2014 EP elections
Dataset availability	http://www.piredeu.eu/DC/Media_Study.asp	Restricted availability due to a temporary data embargo. Only the researchers involved have access to the international data.	1a, https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_marsh/ees_trend_file.php 1b-1c, GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences 2, http://www.piredeu.eu/DC/Media_Study.asp	1, Relevant parts are available upon request. 2, Restricted availability. Only the researchers involved have access to the full data.
Codes	Upon request from the author.	Upon request from the author.	Upon request from the author.	Upon request from the author.
Main models and codes used	1, Regression with Driscoll-Kraay standard errors – *xtscc* 2, Fixed-effects linear model – *xtreg, fe*	1, Linear regression – *reg* 2, Multilevel mixed-effects linear regression - *xtmixed*	1, Multilevel mixed-effects linear regression – *xtmixed* 2, Fixed-effects linear model – *xtreg, fe*	Linear regression – *reg*
External replications	1, Doing the analysis on a different set of countries would provide higher variance in party polarization and conflict levels. 2, Doing the analysis for 2014 would show if the relationships detected in 2009 still hold. 3, Doing the analysis for domestic issues would probably help to detect stronger relationships between party polarization and conflicts, as EU issues do not really contain many conflicts.	1, A similar data collection on a representative sample would add a lot to our understandings on negativity and attacks. 2, Data collection for more debates and/or years would help to add variation to the negativity and attack levels.	1, Analysis on a different set of countries would be beneficial since the disconnection hypothesis and the effect of political conflicts may not hold in developing countries. 2, Analysis of domestic issues would help to find a stronger effect of negativity and political conflicts on political support in countries with different elite and citizen polarizations, since domestic issues are more salient.	1, Other countries, where elite and mass realities are closer, should be selected, and analyzed as case studies as well. 2, Even the Hungarian data collection may be redone closer to a domestic election than to the EP elections.

Appendix 2 – Variable construction in Chapter 2

Variable	Construction	Source
Conflict levels	*Original form*: a, "Explicitly: story mentions two or more sides of a problem or issue - These "sides" do not necessarily indicate a conflict or disagreement."; b, "Explicitly: story mentions any conflict / disagreement - There needs to be reference to two opposing sides."; c, "Explicitly: story says that one actor reproaches / blames / criticizes another". Measured as 0 (no), 1 (yes). *Modifications*: Mean of the three variables for each story was computed. Means of the story conflict levels for both outlet types in each country-year were computed. *Final form*: 0-1, higher values mean more conflict.	EES Media Study
Press-party parallelism	*Original form*: "We have a number of parties in <name of your country> each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties?" in 1999 and 2004. "What mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for (Party X)" in 2009. Asked for multiple parties. Measured on a 1-10 scale in 1999 and 2004 and on a 0-10 one in 2009. *Modifications*: Regressed likelihood to vote for each party on reading each newspaper above 5% of readership (see the description of Number of newspapers) within each country-year. Collecting adjusted R^2-s for each model. Summing up the weighted (by vote shares – from NSD European Election Database) means within each country and year. Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more parallelism.	EES Voter Study, NSD European Election Database
Television-party parallelism	*Original form and modifications*: The same as in the description of Press parallelism, except for regressing on watching channels above 5% of viewership (see the description of Number of television channels). *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more parallelism.	EES Voter Study, NSD
Number of newspapers	*Original form*: "Which newspaper or newspapers do you read regularly?" in 1999 and in 2004; "In a typical week, how many days do you read the following newspapers?" in 2009. Theoretically a maximum number of 16 newspapers asked in 1999, 34 in 2004, three in 2009. Measured as 0 (no), 1 (yes) in 1999 and 2004, 0-7 days in 2009. *Modifications*: Recoded to 0 (originally 0), 1 (originally 1-7) in 2009. Number of newspapers computed in a country-year which reach 5% of 1-s. Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more newspapers.	EES Voter Study
Number of television channels	*Original form*: "Which channels or television news programs do you watch regularly?" in 1999 and 2004; "In a typical week, how many days do you watch the following news programmes?" in 2009. Theoretically a maximum number of 20 channels asked in 1999, 34 in 2004, two in 2009. Measured as 0 (no), 1 (yes) in 1999 and 2004, 0-7 days in 2009. *Modifications*: Recoded to 0 (originally 0), 1 (originally 1-7) in 2009. Number of channels computed in a country-year which reach 5% of 1-s. Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more channels.	EES Voter Study
Party polarization	*Original form*: "POSITION = overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in YEAR". All measured on a scale between 1 (strongly opposed) and 7 (strongly in favor) in 1999, 2002 (for 2004), 2010 (for 2009) and 2014. *Modifications*: Weighted (by vote shares – "vote percentage received by the party in the national election most prior to YEAR" from the same database) means for each country-year are computed. Then, they are subtracted from parties' position scores, are taken to the power of two, added up weighted by vote shares once again. Values are standardized (for this chapter only 1999, 2004 and 2009 data are used). *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean higher polarization.	Chapel Hill expert survey
Election held	*Original form*: "Legislative Election Held. "1" if there was a legislative election in this year." Measured as 0 (no), 1 (yes). No modifications done.	Quality of Government
Effective number of parties	*Original form*: "Effective number of parties on the votes level - Effective number of parties on the votes level according to the formula proposed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979)." *Modifications*: Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more parties.	Quality of Government
Year	1999, 2004, 2009	-

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Appendix 3

Appendix 3.1 – Variable construction in Chapter 3 (Table 3)

Variable	Construction	Source
Change in perceived negativity after and before the debate	*Original form*: "When you think about the current European election campaign. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The campaign is too negative." Measured on a 1 (strongly agree) -5 (strongly disagree) scale. Asked before and after the debate. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (5 to 0, 4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). Before scores subtracted from after scores. *Final form*: -4-4, higher values mean higher perceived negativity after the debate. Individual-level variable in Table 3, country-level variable in Figures 8, 9 and 10 (country means computed).	Eurovision debate data
Gender	*Original form*: "Are you male or female?" Measured as 1 (male), 2 (female). No modifications done. Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Party	*Original form*: "Which party do you feel close to ?" Measured either on open-list or closed-list depending on the country. *Modifications*: Each response recoded to EP political group. *Final form*: 1 (EPP), 2 (PES), 3 (ALDE), 4 (PEL), 5 (Green), 6 (Other), 7 (Not voting or not answering). Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Political efficacy	*Original form:* "To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?" Measured as 1 (very) - 4 (not at all). *Modifications*: Reversed coding (4 to 0, 3 to 1, 2 to 2, 1 to 3). Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean higher efficacy. Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
(Perceived) negativity prior to the debate	*Original form*: "When you think about the current European election campaign. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The campaign is too negative." Measured on a 1 (strongly agree) - 5 (strongly disagree) scale. Asked before the debate. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (5 to 0, 4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). Country means computed. *Final form*: 0-4 in Figure 10, standardized in Table 3, higher values mean higher perceived negativity. Country-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Collectivism	*Original form*: Individualism versus Collectivism Index. Measured on a 0-100 scale, where higher values mean more individualism. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (values subtracted from 100), values divided by 10. Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more collectivism. Country-level variable.	Hofstede (n.d.)
Mass polarization	*Original form*: "Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?" Measured as 1-10 in 1999 and 2004 (except for Sweden where a 0-10 scale was used) and as 0-10 in 2009 and 2014. *Modifications*: Recoding done in 2009 and 2014 to a 10-point scale. Northern Ireland dropped in 2004. Standard deviations computed for each country-year (using sample weights). Values are standardized (for this chapter only 2014 data are used). *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more polarization. Country-level variable.	EES Voter Study

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Appendix 3.2 – Variable construction in Chapter 3 (Table 4)

Variable	Construction	Source
Perceived attack level	*Original form*: "And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning Jean-Claude Juncker/Martin Schulz/Guy Verhofstadt/ Alexis Tsipras/Ska Keller? He attacked the other candidates a lot." Asked as four questions. Measured separately on a 1 (strongly agree) - 5 (strongly disagree) scale. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (5 to 0, 4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4), values divided by 4. *Final form*: 0-1, higher values mean higher attack level. Individual-candidate-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Expert-coded attack level	*Original form and modifications:* The debate (each text piece) coded by the author using the same coding scheme (0-4) as in the Perceived attack level variable. Values divided by 4. Candidate means computed. *Final form:* 0-1, higher values mean higher attack level. Candidate-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Gender	*Original form*: *a*, "Are you male or female?" Measured as 1 (male), 2 (female); *b*, Gender of the politician: 1 (Juncker/Schulz/Verhofstadt/Tsipras), 2 (Keller). *Modifications:* New variable creation looking at the relation of *a* and *b*. *Final form*: 0 (same gender/*a*=*b*), 1 (different gender/*a*!=*b*). Values are group mean centered. Individual-candidate-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Party	*Original form*: *a*, "Which party do you feel close to ?" Measured either on open-list or closed-list depending on the country; *b*, Party of the politician: 1 (Juncker), 2 (Schulz), 3 (Verhofstadt), 4 (Tsipras), 5 (Keller). *Modifications*: Each response in variable *a* recoded to EP political group as in Appendix 3.1. New variable creation looking at the relation of *a* and *b*. *Final form*: 1 (same party/*a*=*b*), 2 (different party/*a*!=*b*), 3 (hidden preference/*a*=7). Values are group mean centered. Individual-candidate-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Political efficacy	*Original form:* "To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?" Measured as 1 (very) - 4 (not at all). *Modifications*: Reversed coding (4 to 0, 3 to 1, 2 to 2, 1 to 3). *Final form*: 0-3, higher values mean higher efficacy. Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Collectivism	Same as in Appendix 3.1. Country-level variable.	Hofstede (n.d.)
Mass polarization	Same as in Appendix 3.1. Country-level variable.	EES Voter Study

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Appendix 4

Appendix 4.1 – Variable construction in Chapter 4 (Tables 5 and 6)

Variable	Construction	Source
Satisfaction with democracy	*Original form*: "On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in <name of your country>?" in 1999, "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in <name of the country>?" in 2004 and 2009. Measured on a 1 (not at all satisfied) – 4 (very satisfied) scale in 1999 (at least in the original dataset), and on a 1 (very satisfied) - 4 (not at all satisfied) scale in 2004 and 2009. *Modifications*: Reversed coding in 2004 and 2009 (4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). *Final form*: 1-4, higher values mean higher satisfaction. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Exposure to conflict	*Original form: a1*, exposure to newspapers: "Which newspaper or newspapers do you read regularly?" in 1999 and in 2004; "In a typical week, how many days do you read the following newspapers?" in 2009. Theoretically a maximum number of 16 newspapers asked in 1999, 34 in 2004, three in 2009. Measured as 0 (no), 1 (yes) in 1999 and 2004, 0-7 days in 2009. *a2*, exposure to television: "Which channels or television news programs do you watch regularly?" in 1999 and 2004; "In a typical week, how many days do you watch the following news programmes?" in 2009. Theoretically a maximum number of 20 channels asked in 1999, 34 in 2004, two in 2009. Measured as 0 (no), 1 (yes) in 1999 and 2004, 0-7 days in 2009. *b*, outlet conflict levels: See Appendix 2 – Conflict levels. The difference is that here specific newspaper/television channel means are computed separately. *Modifications:* a1 and a2, Recoded to 0 (originally 0), 1 (originally 1-7) in 2009. *a1* and *a2* are multiplied by conflict levels for each newspaper/television channel, which are present in both the individual level data (EES Voter Study) and the outlet level data (EES Media Study): 1, newspapers: a1*b2, television:a2*b. Values are added up both for newspapers and television channels separately for each individual. *Final form:* higher values mean more exposure for both variables (newspaper exposure and television exposure to conflict). Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variables.	EES Voter and Media Studies
Left-right self-placement	*Original form*: "In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". What is your position?" Measured on a 1 (left) – 10 (right) scale in 1999, and on a 0 (left) – 10 (right) scale in 2004 and 2009. *Modifications*: Recoding in 2004 and 2009 to a ten-point scale. *Final form*: 1-10, higher values mean more right. Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Political interest	*Original form*: "To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? Very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?" Measured on a 1 (not at all) – 4 (very) in 1999 (at least in the original dataset), and on a 1 (very) – 4 (not at all) scale in 2004 and 2009. *Modifications*: Reversed coding in 2004 and 2009 (4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). *Final form*: 1-4, higher values mean more interest. Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Support for government	*Original form*: "Do you approve or disapprove of the government's record to date?" Measured as 1 (disapprove), 2 (approve) in 1999(at least in the original dataset), and as 1 (approve), 2 (disapprove) in 2004 and 2009. *Modifications*: Reversed coding in 2004 and 2009 (2 to 1, 1 to 2). *Final form*: 1 (disapprove), 2 (approve). Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Gender	*Original form*: "Respondent is…" in 1999, "Are you?" in 2004 and 2009. Measured as 0 (male), 1 (female) in 1999, and as 1 (male), 2 (female) in 2004 and 2009. *Modifications:* Recoded to 1, 2 in 1999. *Final form*: 1 (male), 2 (female). Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study

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Place of residence	*Original form*: "Would you say you live in a rural area or village, in a small or middle size town, or in a large town?" in 1999 and 2004, "Would you say you live in a…" in 2009. Measured as 1 (rural area or village), 2 (small or middle size town), 3 (large town) in 1999 and 2004, 1 (rural area or village), 2 (small or middle-sized town), 3 (suburbs of large town or city), 4 (large town) in 2009. *Modifications*: Answers 3 and 4 merged, and coded as 3 in 2009. *Final form*: 1 (rural), 2 (small, middle), 3 (large). Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Age	*Original form:* "What year were you born?" *Modifications*: Subtracting from 1999, 2004 and 2009 in the three waves. *Final form*: 0-100, higher values mean higher age. Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Social class	*Original form*: "If you were asked to chose one of these five names for your social class, which would you say you belong to - the working class, the lower middle class, the middle class, the upper middle class or the upper class?" Measured as 1 (working class), 2 (lower middle class), 3 (middle class), 4 (upper middle class), 5 (upper class). No modifications done. Values are group mean centered. Individual-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Mass polarization	Same as in Appendix 3.1. Only 1999, 2004 and 2009 data are used. Country-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Party polarization	Same as in Appendix 2. Only 1999, 2004 and 2009 data are used. Country-level variable.	Chapel Hill expert survey
Democratization	*Original form*: "The Worldwide Governance Indicators - These indicators are based on several hundred individual variables measuring perceptions of governance, drawn from 31 separate data sources constructed by 25 different organizations. These individual measures of governance are assigned to categories capturing key dimensions of governance. An unobserved component model is used to construct six aggregate governance indicators." These six estimates are: a, "Control of Corruption"; b, "Government Effectiveness"; c, "Political Stability"; d, "Rule of Law"; e, "Regulatory Quality"; f, "Voice and Accountability". *Modifications*: Mean of the six variables are computed for each country-year. Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean higher democratization. Country-level variable.	Quality of Government
Electoral system	*Original form*: "Electoral Rule House. Which electoral rule (proportional representation or plurality) governs the election of the majority of House seats? This is coded 1 if most seats are Plurality, zero if most seats are Proportional." Measured as 0 (pr), 1 (plurality). No modifications done.	Quality of Government
Election held	Same as in Appendix 2. Country-level variable.	Quality of Government
Corruption	*Original form*: "Corruption Perceptions Index" Measured on a 0-100 scale, where higher values mean less corruption. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (values subtracted from 100). Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more corruption. Country-level variable.	Quality of Government
GDP per capita	*Original form*: "GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP)." *Modifications*: Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean higher GDP per capita. Country-level variable.	Quality of Government
Inflation	*Original form*: "Inflation as measured by the annual growth rate of the GDP implicit deflator shows the rate of price change in the economy as a whole." *Modifications*: Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean higher inflation. Country-level variable.	Quality of Government
Year	1999, 2004, 2009	-

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Appendix 4.2 – Missing controls from Table 5

	Model 1a Without interaction	**Model 2a** Mass polarization	**Model 3a** Party polarization	**Model 4a** Mass and party polarization	**Model 5a** Democratization
Left-right self-placement	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political interest	0.04***	0.04***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Support for government	0.46***	0.46***	0.44***	0.44***	0.47***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Place of residence 2	0.02#	0.02#	0.02	0.02	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Place of residence 3	0.02#	0.02#	0.02#	0.02#	0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Social class 2	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.04**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Social class 3	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Social class 4	0.17***	0.17***	0.18***	0.17***	0.18***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Social class 5	0.11**	0.11**	0.11**	0.11**	0.10*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

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Missing controls from Table 5 (continued)

	Model 1a Without interaction	**Model 2a** Mass polarization	**Model 3a** Party polarization	**Model 4a** Mass and party polarization	**Model 5a** Democratization
Electoral system	-0.12	-0.11	-0.15#	-0.13	-0.15
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)
Election held	-0.12	-0.09	-0.15#	-0.10	-0.20#
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.11)
Corruption	-0.29***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.08
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.14)
GDP per capita	0.08#	0.08#	0.05	0.05	0.13*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.05)
Inflation	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.07
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Exposure mean	0.13	0.15	-0.04	-0.01	0.27
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.37)

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

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Appendix 4.3 – Missing controls from Table 6

	Model 1a Without interaction	**Model 2a** Mass polarization	**Model 3a** Party polarization	**Model 4a** Mass and party polarization	**Model 5a** Democratization
Left-right self-placement	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political interest	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Support for government	0.46***	0.46***	0.45***	0.45***	0.46***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Place of residence 2	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Place of residence 3	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*	0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age	-0.01**	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Social class 2	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Social class 3	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***	0.13***	0.12***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Social class 4	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	0.19***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Social class 5	0.10**	0.10**	0.10**	0.10**	0.09*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

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Missing controls from Table 6 (continued)

	Model 1a Without interaction	**Model 2a** Mass polarization	**Model 3a** Party polarization	**Model 4a** Mass and party polarization	**Model 5a** Democratization
Electoral system	-0.10	-0.08	-0.11	-0.09	-0.12
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.10)
Election held	-0.08	-0.05	-0.10	-0.07	-0.10
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)
Corruption	-0.29***	-0.28***	-0.31***	-0.28***	-0.14
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.13)
GDP per capita	0.09*	0.09*	0.05	0.05	0.12*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Inflation	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.11	0.09
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Exposure mean	0.23	0.25#	0.17	0.18	0.30#
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

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Appendix 4.4 – Variable construction in Chapter 4 (Table 7)

Variable	Construction	Source
Trust in EU	*Original form*: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the following groups and institutions to do what is right? – The European Union". Measured on a 1 (almost always) - 5 (almost never) scale. Asked before and after the debate. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (5 to 0, 4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). *Final form*: 0-4, higher values mean higher trust. Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Trust in national parliament	*Original form*: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the following groups and institutions to do what is right? – Your national Parliament". Measured on a 1 (almost always) - 5 (almost never) scale. Asked before and after the debate. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (5 to 0, 4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). *Final form*: 0-4, higher values mean higher trust. Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Perceived negativity	*Original form*: "When you think about the current European election campaign. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The campaign is too negative." Measured on a 1 (strongly agree) - 5 (strongly disagree) scale. Asked before and after the debate. *Modifications*: Reversed coding (5 to 0, 4 to 1, 3 to 2, 2 to 3, 1 to 4). Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean higher perceived negativity. Individual-level variable.	Eurovision debate data
Mass polarization	Same as in Appendix 3.1. Only 2014 data are used. Country-level variable.	EES Voter Study
Party polarization	Same as in Appendix 2. Only 2014 data are used. Country-level variable.	Chapel Hill expert survey
Time	Measured as 1 (before the debate), 2 (after the debate).	-

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Appendix 5

Appendix 5.1 – Variable construction in Chapter 5 (Figure 14)

Variable	Construction	Source
Tone	*Original form*: Treatment. Measured as *control - positive - civil negative - uncivil negative*. No modifications done.	Original data collection
Satisfaction with democracy	*Original form*: "Please tell me how much you are satisfied with how democracy works in this country?" Measured on a 1 (not at all satisfied) – 7 (very satisfied) scale. *Modifications*: Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more satisfaction.	Original data collection
Political trust	*Original form*: Seven statements about politicians: a, "politicians generally have good intentions"; b, "politicians tell the truth in the media"; c, "most politicians try to act correctly"; d, "politicians try to keep their campaign promises"; e, "most politicians work for citizens, and we should be grateful for them"; f, "politicians do not deserve much respect in Hungary"; g "most politicians talk a lot, but do not act to solve the problems of the country", All are measured on a 1 (totally agree) – 5 (do not agree at all) scale. *Modifications*: From statements *a* to *e* scales are reversed, while *f* and *g* kept in the original way. Sum is computed for the seven trust variables. Values are standardized. *Final form*: standardized, higher values mean more trust.	Original data collection

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Appendix 5.2 – Variable construction in Chapter 5 (Table 8)

Variable	Construction	Source
Trust	*Original form*: "How much do you trust political parties in general?". Measured on a 1 - 10 scale. No modifications done.	Original data collection
Fairness	*Original form*: "To what extent do you think that this party has been fair with its political opponents in these statements?" Measured on a 1 (unfair) - 5 (fair) scale for both parties involved in the texts. *Modifications*: Mean for the two parties is computed. *Final form*: 1-5, higher values mean more fair.	Original data collection
Label	*Original form*: Treatment. Measured as *no label - group label - party name label*. No modifications done.	Original data collection
Tone	*Original form*: Treatment. Measured as *positive - civil negative - uncivil negative*. No modifications done.	Original data collection
Preferred party was involved	*Original form*: *a1*, "Many people did not participate in the last national elections because they were ill, did not have time or were not interested. Which statement describes you the best?" Measured as 1 (did not vote), 2 (thought about voting, but not voted), 3 (usually vote, but did not have time), 4 (voted); *a2*, "Which party's list did you vote for?" Measured as 1 (Fidesz-KDNP), 2 (Jobbik), 3 (LMP), 4 (MSZP-Együtt-DK-PM-MLP), 5 (other); *b*, Treatment. Measured as 1 (Fidesz-Jobbik), 2 (Fidesz-MSZP), 3 (Jobbik-Fidesz), 4 (LMP-MSZP), 5 (MSZP-Fidesz), 6 (MSZP-LMP). *Modifications*: New variable creation looking at the relation of *a2* and *b*. *Final form*: 1 (no, preferred party was not involved), 2 (yes, preferred party was involved), missing (was not sure about voting/*a1*=1|*a1*=2|*a1*=3).	Original data collection
Gender	*Original form*: "What is your sex?" Measured as 1 (male), 2 (female). No modifications done.	Original data collection
Age	*Original form*: "What year were you born?" *Modifications*: Subtracting from 2014. *Final form*: 0-100, higher values mean higher age.	Original data collection

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Appendix 5.3 – Table 8 with missing controls

	Model 1 Tone	**Model 2** Tone, party	**Model 3** Tone, party, no label	**Model 4** Tone, party, party group label	**Model 5** Tone, party, party name label
Tone					
civil negative	-0.15	0.07	-0.05	0.11	0.16
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.35)	(0.33)	(0.34)
uncivil negative	-0.02	0.28	-0.22	0.53	0.51
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.31)	(0.34)	(0.35)
Preferred party was involved					
yes, preferred party was involved	-	0.82***	0.36	1.21**	0.95**
		(0.20)	(0.33)	(0.37)	(0.34)
Tone × Preferred party was involved					
civil negative × yes, preferred party was involved	-	-0.47#	-0.22	-0.90#	-0.46
		(0.28)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)
uncivil negative × yes, preferred party was involved	-	-0.59*	0.05	-1.25*	-0.58
		(0.29)	(0.47)	(0.51)	(0.51)
Gender					
female	-0.06	-0.06	-0.17	-0.04	-0.05
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Age	0.02***	0.02***	0.01	0.01#	0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.81***	2.46***	3.09***	2.56***	1.83***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.40)	(0.43)	(0.39)
N	1521	1521	503	501	517
R^2	0.0139	0.0270	0.0122	0.0356	0.0549

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; #p<0.1.
Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

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