

Does Contact between the Represented and the Representatives Improve Political Trust? The Case of France and Germany.

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Paper prepared for the IPSA-Workshop on Changing Modes of Parliamentary Representation, October 2011 in Prague

Abstract

This contribution examines whether and how the kind of the citizens contacts with their elected representatives in France and Germany affects the feelings of being well represented by the representative and - mediated by this - the trust in the representative and the national parliament. We assume that the intensity of personal contacts with one's representative and the feeling of being treated adequately by him or her is positively related to feelings of being well represented and to political trust, not only towards the representative, but also towards the political institutions. We further assume that this immediate relationship between citizens and their representatives has a stronger impact on political trust and feelings of being well represented than the information on the political authorities indirectly transmitted and received via the mass media. A structural equation modeling approach is chosen in order to test these assumptions. The data stem from a public opinion survey conducted in France and Germany in 2011.

1 Introduction

In recent debates about the citizens' discontent with the so called political class, declining political trust is often regarded as a result of the social distance between the elected and their electorate. Improving the linkages between the normal citizens and the political leaders is seen as a means of regaining political trust which has declined over the last few decades (for example: Dalton 2004; Gabriel 2008; Listhaug 1995; Listhaug/Wiberg 1995; Norris 1999, 2011). When thinking about the trust generating capacity of personal interaction, most people have collective deliberative processes rather than individual interactions between particular citizens and particular representatives in mind. Nevertheless, not only collective, but also individual processes of social exchange presumably contribute to creating, maintaining and improving mutual trust. The underlying assumption is that people will trust people whom they personally know more easily than people they do not know. Thus, interpersonal communication of whatever type

can be regarded as a generator of trust (Hardin 2008:31).

Regarding the social context in which trust is embedded, a distinction is made between thick versus thin, personal versus social or particularized versus generalized trust (Newton 1999; Freitag/Traummüller 2009). This is not simply a conceptual matter, but the basis of a debate on the roots and referents of trust. According to Hardin (Hardin 1998, 1999, 2008), trust presupposes experience:

"As a rule, we trust only those with whom we have a rich enough relationship to judge them trustworthy" (Hardin 2008: 18, see also: Hardin 1998: 11).

Starting from a cognitive, experience based notion of trust, Hardin also doubts whether trust in political institutions is possible or necessary at all, since it depends on interaction with other people and having made some experience with their trustworthiness (Hardin 1998, 1998, 2008). If trust in political institutions exists at all, it is conceived as something very different from trusting people (Hardin 1999: 23) or as a mere derivate of trust in particular political actors representing the institutions under observation. Thus, political trust would mainly be dependent on how citizens communicate with their elected representatives and political bureaucrats and on the kinds of experiences made by them in their specific political interactions.

Regarded from this point of view, it can hardly be seen how trust in politicians and political institutions could emerge at all in modern societies. As shown by a large number of empirical studies, only a small minority of the citizens ever get into contact with political representatives. Personal contacts with representatives of the public administration are more frequent, but by no means part of people's daily lives (Armingeon 2007; Gabriel 2004). For most citizens, political life is almost exclusively perceived via mass media news and reporting. Thus, people's image of politics and political leaders is strongly influenced by the way mass media present politics and by the frequency of mass media consumption. According to a well-established tradition in political research, mass media reporting, particularly in television, plays a crucial role in shaping the citizens' political views. Accordingly, the negativist style of media reporting transmits a strongly biased - negative - perception of politics to the public, thus creating an atmosphere of discontent and distrust which also pertains to people's attitudes towards their elected representatives (Robinson 1976; Kepplinger 1998; Miller/Goldenberg/Erbring 1979; Newton 1997; Norris 2000, 2011: 169ff).

In the following analysis we focus on personal contact to an MP or the media coverage regarding representatives and their effect on political trust. When doing this, we add an intermediate step and highlight the role of citizens' feeling of being represented by their own MP for two reasons: First, political representation and trust are related concepts and both indicators for closeness or distance between politicians and constituencies, second, feelings of being represented like political trust might also be experienced-based.

"The idea that trust lies at the heart of representative government is a longstanding familiar one. Most important, conceiving of representative government as a relationship of trust means recognizing that the power

governors exercise is not for their own benefit but for the benefit of the governed, 'the people' however they may be defined" (Williamson 1998: 31).

Williamson illustrates the interdependence between political representation and trust: Trust is a core element of representative political systems and representation concerns the relation between the politicians and citizens (Urbinati/Warren 2008). In our analysis we focus on the impact of communication on citizens' feeling of being represented in the political system and answer the question whether the gap between citizens and representatives becomes smaller by means of communication, if political alienation and discontent with representatives decreases (for further discussion of these 'gaps' see Bengtsson/Wass 2011; Carman 2007; Méndez-Lago/Martinez 2002). Furthermore we illustrate whether the extend of citizens' feeling of being represented leads to an according level of political trust. As found by Hibbing/Theiss-Morse (1995) a perceived lack of firm linkages of the representative to their constituency is an important reason for negative feelings towards Congress. The underlying assumption is that contact (which is perceived positively) is conducive to citizens' feeling of being well represented. Consequently the experience based component highlighted in Hardin's conceptualization of trust is transmittable to citizens' perceptions of being represented by their own MP. Thus, in our analyses we investigate into the transfer mechanism that might exist between citizens' feelings of being represented by the own MP and trust in the representative, which are experience-based, and attitudes towards a political institution (here: the French and the German parliament).

Interestingly, the two contrasting approaches (personal communication versus mass media reporting) to analyzing the citizens' trust in the elected representatives and political institutions were rarely brought together. Our knowledge on the trust-building capacity of personal contacts between citizens and representatives as well as the information transmitted by mass media is fragmentary and contradictory. Some indirect support of the assumption of a positive impact of direct exchange between citizens and representatives on political trust is conveyed by research on trust in the individual Congressmen on the one hand and trust in the institution of congress on the other. As found in the United States (Fenno 1975; Parker/Davidson 1979; Hibbing/Theiss-Morse 1995), the former are far more trusted than the latter. At least in part, this can be attributed to the frequency of interaction between citizens and politicians at the level of electoral district. However, this finding was not supported by research on political trust in European democracies. As found in Germany, the institution of the German Bundestag enjoys higher trust by the public than the representatives in general and the representatives of their electoral district (Gabriel/Schöllhammer 2009). Although comparative empirical evidence on trust in these three different referents is not available, there exists some empirical evidence that trust in politicians is much lower than trust in the national parliament all over Europe (Dalton 2004; Gabriel/Walter-Rogg 2008; Norris 2011). The European data do not support the role of personal interaction as a precondition or facilitator of political trust. Only the evidence on the level of trust in national compared to local political institutions and actors in Germany lends some support to the interaction hypothesis: Trust is clearly highest at the local level where people have the best opportunity to get in personal touch with political leaders, while

it decreases if we move to the national and European tiers (Vetter 2010). To conclude, whether and how political communication impacts on political trust remains a largely unanswered question, from a theoretical as well as from an empirical point of view.

2 Research Question, Hypotheses and Data

In this paper, we will explore the complex path from individual patterns of political communication over the feeling of being represented by a MP to trust in political actors and institutions in France and Germany. On the background of research on this issue, we will address the following three questions:

1. Does direct personal interaction between the citizens and the representatives of their electoral districts in the national parliament promote trust in political actors and in institutions?
2. Does the frequency of exposure to (presumed negativist) media reporting about the representative undermine trust in those representatives of the political system?
3. What are the steps from the individual's communicative linkages to their representatives to trust in a national institution like the parliament?

Regarding the relationship between the citizens and the members of the national parliament, France and Germany have some characteristics in common, but they do also differ in some respects. The most important differences relate to the nature of the political regimes of the two countries, their electoral rules, and their political cultures (see for details: Meny/Knapp 1998). But irrespective of the varying contexts, the members of parliaments of the two countries are more similar than different regarding their linkages to their regional constituencies. In each of the two countries, the members of the national parliament have to mobilize broad support at the district level in order to be elected for parliament. In France, this is due to the majority electoral system according to which all members of the *Assemblée Nationale* are elected in their local district. Although the German electoral system is classified as a personalized proportional system (Powell 2000), it works in a similar way as in France regarding the fortunes of the candidates in parliamentary elections. Half of the members of the German *Bundstag* are elected according to a majority vote system, the other half, through elected state party tickets, mostly run as district candidates. Their relative success in the competition at the district level is among the most important criteria for being offered a promising place on the party lists. The elected candidates, although they did not run successfully for a direct mandate, behave as elected representatives of their districts and do active work there. Therefore, when looking at the electoral system from a formal-institutional point of view, the relevance of the local basis for the representatives' behavior appears to be more similar between France and Germany. Moreover, in party democracies like France and, particularly Germany, a purely individualist style of representation is not conducive to be nominated again as candidates. In order to survive in the intra-party competition for parliamentary positions, candidates and elected representatives need to be reliable partisans. Last, but not least, their influence on national politics is mediated by their party affiliation and reputation within

the party. To a certain degree, the similarities mentioned so far outweigh the difference going back to the regime characteristics.

In our empirical analysis of the impact of patterns of political interaction to trust in political institutions and actors, we will distinguish between two different types of political communication: the first type is personal experience gathered in immediate and active interactions between citizens and their representatives at the district level; the second is indirect and more passive exchange between the electorate and the elected which is conveyed by the mass media. Since the work of individual Members of Parliament does not play a major role in television news coverage, we will analyze the effect of (mostly local) newspapers in the exchange between the citizens and the representatives. While mass media consumption is not expected to be a source of favorable attitudes towards the representatives, direct communication is supposed to have this effect. Therefore we can expect opposite effects of these two types of interaction on the political attitudes under observation here. Accordingly, frequent personal interaction will promote favorable attitudes of the citizens to the elected. By contrast, as implied in the media malaise hypothesis, extensive perception of (negative) mass media reporting will undermine people's trust in politicians and political institutions.

These rather simple assumptions need some qualifications. The first refers to the role of personal contacts as antecedents of political trust. Since contacting one's representative does not necessarily imply positive experience, the quality of the interaction should be taken into account in addition to the mere frequency of contact. This needs to be examined irrespective of the plausible assumption, that frequent interaction will only become likely if the prior experience was encouraging. Hence we will directly investigate whether or not the citizens felt treated adequately by the representative. Beyond contacting, positive experience encountered during the contact may further increase favorable political attitudes. The second qualification refers to the impact of mass media consumption on political trust. The assumption that the mere amount of media exposure will have a positive or negative impact on the attitude toward the representative is too simplistic. The implied condition of a thoroughly negative style of reporting on politics by the media may be true or false. In any case, before attributing a negative impact of media exposure on trust, it needs to be clarified, first, whether or not the media reporting refers specifically to the object which is conceived as a referent of political trust and second, whether the content of reporting is positive, neutral or negative (Ervin 2001: 86ff). One of the reasons why the media malaise hypotheses mostly failed in empirical analyses is rooted in the simplistic operationalization of the role of media exposure (see, for example: Norris 2000, 2011). From our point of view, frequency of media exposure is far less important as a determinant of political trust than the perceived - positive or negative - content of the reports. However, frequency of exposure can be relevant as a mediator of the two kinds of influence mentioned before. In our explanatory model, feelings of being represented and political trust are generated on two paths: the citizens' personal contact with representatives and the mass media exposure regarding the representative. Since each of these two effects run in the opposite direction, it is possible that they cancel each other out. Hence, the questions for the net result of these two competing influences come to the fore.

Finally, the path running from communication to political trust needs to be examined carefully. Evidently, positive views of a representative may directly result from the frequency and nature of interaction between the citizens and the representatives. Nevertheless, it remains an open question whether this will directly lead to trusting the representative and the institution he or she is representing. The view of trust as "encapsulated interest" as stressed by Hardin (1998, 1999, 2008) entails a more complex view of the relationship between the citizens' expectations and the representatives' perceived trustworthiness. Contrary to Hardin, we do not interpret "taking into account other peoples' interest" as the core component of trust. Rather, perceiving representatives as having the electorate's concern in mind and acting accordingly should be seen as an antecedent of trust. If people repeatedly perceive the representative as a reliable promoter of their interest, they will perceive him or her as trustworthy and this - among others - will eventually generalize into trust (Braithwaite 1998; Gabriel/Walter-Rogg 2008; Chanley/Rahn/Rudolph 2001; Uslaner 2001). In this line of reasoning, we assume a positive impact of the representatives' assessment as being responsive to the constituency, but we do not equate political trust and perception of responsiveness.

In addition to the generalization of particular favorable experiences with a MP's responsiveness to a broader feeling of political trust, an additional process of generalization may put into effect if people perceive their particular representative as responsive and trustworthy. Positive feelings towards specific actors - the individual representative - may spill over to the category of politicians and parliaments and vice versa (Walter-Rogg 2005). Whether this is really the case, is a matter of empirical investigation.

The impact of direct and mediated interaction on the feeling of being well represented and on political trust will be analyzed in two steps: In the subsequent section of this, we will describe the patterns of interaction between citizens and representatives. We will show whether and how frequently French and German citizens interact with the MPs in their districts, how they assess the quality of this interaction and what this interaction implies for the citizens' assessment of responsiveness and political trust. Similarly, we will present data on the citizens' frequency of exposure to newspaper reporting on the local representative and on the perception of the tendency of the received information. These characteristics of mass media exposure, again, will be related to the citizens' attitudes towards the individual representatives and to the representative institutions of the German Bundestag and the French National Assembly. In the following section, the single parts of an explanatory model of political trust will be integrated into a structural equation model. This will include the variables introduced so far and some important antecedents of communicative behavior. We will conclude with a summary and discussion of the role of personal and mediated contact between citizens and their representatives in the generation of political trust in representative democracies.

3 Data and Measurement

The data used in the subsequent parts of this paper were gathered in a French-German research project¹ funded by the DFG (Germany) and ANR (France). The nationwide representative survey of 1.009 French and 1.553 German citizens was conducted from November, 17th to December 17th, 2010 by Infratest dimap (Germany) and TNS Sofres (France). The data for Germany include an overrepresentation of the East German sample which was adjusted to the distribution of the West- and East-German population by a population weight.

Our model contains three dependent variables: Responsiveness of MP, Trust in MP and Trust in national Parliament. The MP's responsiveness is captured by the question.

"Many institutions of public life deal with citizen's affairs. Please tell me for each of the following institutions how well you feel represented in regard of your personal views and concerns. Do you feel completely well represented, rather well represented, partly well represented, rather badly represented, completely badly represented." Scale: "very well" (2) to "very badly" (-2).

- *The MP of your constituency.*

Trust in MP and trust in parliament are involved in a larger battery that measures trust in numerous political and societal institutions. The item wording is as follows:

"Please tell me for each of the institutions I read out how much you trust it. Do you trust completely, rather trust, trust partly, rather don't trust, don't trust at all." Scale: "no trust at all" (-2) to "complete trust" (2).

- *Parliament*
- *The MP of your constituency*

The independent variables that seek to explain responsiveness of MP and trust in MP and national parliament can be broadly classified into indicators measuring contact with MP and indicators measuring media consumption about MP. The contact indicators contain one question about the frequency of contact during the past five years and a follow-up question which asks for the satisfaction with the contact(s). Frequency of contact is measured using a four point scale ranging from never (0) to several times a year (4), the satisfaction with contact-scale ranges from not satisfied (-2) to very satisfied (2). People who report no contact were of course not asked about satisfaction with contact.

Our model involves two media-related indicators: frequency of reading about MP in newspapers and the perceived tendency of the respective media content. We have to deal with a large number of missing values. The problem is even augmented by the fact that of course only those respondents who report at

¹Principal Investigators are Suzanne Schüttemeyer (MLU Halle Wittenberg), Oscar W. Gabriel (University of Stuttgart) and Eric Kerrouche (IEP de Bordeaux).

least some media consumption are posed the follow-up question on perceived tendency. To deal with this problem we generate two dummy variables. For the first variable (Perceived Negative Tendency) we code respondents who report negative connotation of media content with 1 and all others, that is respondents reporting positive or neutral connotation and no media consumption about MP at all with 0. We proceeded analogously and generated another dummy variable (Perceived Positive Tendency) this time coding positive connotation with 1. The category of reference for perceived tendency in media coverage are respondents indicating neutral connotation or no reading about the MP in the newspaper.

To estimate the influence of contacts and media consumption on the feeling of responsiveness and trust towards the MP, we have to control for a set of variables, namely political Interest, internal political efficacy, party identification and satisfaction with democracy. These indicators are measured using well-established standard instruments which do not have to be explained in greater detail here. Internal political efficacy is measured by a two item index. Political interest, political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy are rescaled from 0 (low) to 1 (high), party identification is a dichotomous variable with party identifiers coded 1. We include these variables because they are likely to be correlated with the dependent variables as well as with the independent variables. Including them avoids the occurrence of so called omitted variable bias. Finally, all scales were recoded to a range from 0 to 1 with 1 indicating high values. Respondents indicating not to know the MP but giving answers on the items of media consumption and contacts with the MP are set to missing value on these variables.

4 Contacts, Media Consumption and the Distribution of Trust

Before analyzing the impact of different kinds of linkages on citizens' feeling of being represented and trust in France and Germany in a structural equation model, we give an overview on citizens' perceptions of being represented by their own MP as well as trust in the own MP and in the national parliament.

Table 1: *Feeling of being represented and political trust*

	Feeling of being represented by own MP		Trust in own MP		Trust in Parliament	
	France	Germany	France	Germany	France	Germany
Mean	.324	.438	.517	.559	.465	.534
N	779	1160	828	1253	945	1523

Notes: Scale: 0="don't feel represented at all"/"do not trust at all" to 1="feel very well represented"/"trust completely". Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

On the whole, French citizens are more dissociated from their politicians and the parliament than the Germans. Especially when stating about their feeling of being represented by the own MP, the distance becomes obvious: The mean value of the French citizens is at .324, which implies that most of the citizens feel badly represented or not represented at all by their own MP. The

Table 2: *Linkages between citizens and MPs in France and Germany, in percent*

	Contact MP		Information about MP (F: "journal, presse", G: newspaper, magazine)		
	France	Germany		France	Germany
Never	86,3	83,8	Never	76,1	46,6
Less than once a year	5	9,3	Rarely	12,2	31,4
Once a year	4,4	3,9	Sometimes	6,4	17,3
Several times a year	4,3	3	Often	5,3	4,7
N	1008	1549		966	1520
<i>Mean satisfaction with contact^a</i>	<i>.722 (N=124)</i>	<i>.640 (N= 216)</i>	<i>Mean connotation media coverage^b</i>	<i>.471 (N=370)</i>	<i>.560 (N=640)</i>

Notes: a scale: 0="not satisfied at all" to 1="very satisfied", b scale: 0="very negative" to 1= "very positive". Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

Germans' mean value also indicates more negative than positive evaluations of the MP's responsiveness (.428). However, the mean values for trust in the own MP are higher and above the neutral point (.5) in both countries (France = .517, Germany = .559), which indicates that the feeling of trust prevails slightly. When stating about their trust in parliament, the mean value for the French falls into the category below .5, concurrently the Germans' mean value is above .5, which indicates a tendency of evaluating more positively than negatively. But we also detect similar patterns in both countries: In France as well as in Germany trust in the own MP reaches the highest scores, followed by trust in parliament, whereas the citizens' feeling of being represented by their own MP scores lowest.

Subsequently, the different modes of linkages between citizens and representatives as assumed factors of influence have to be taken into account. Table 2 shows how often citizens get into contact with their own Member of Parliament and how often they receive information about her via newspapers or magazines. Furthermore we show whether citizens in France and Germany are satisfied with the contact they had and we provide information on the perceived connotation of media coverage regarding the MP.

Most of the French and German citizens do not have contact to their own MP. In France there are 86.3 percent, in Germany 83.8 percent of the population who do not interact. In Germany, 9.3 percent of the citizens contact their MP less than once a year, between three and four percent once or several times a year. In France, there are less citizens who contact their MP rarely than in Germany although there are more than 4 percent who get into contact once or several times a year. In sum, the German citizens contact their MP more often than the French. However, those French, who interact do this more frequently than their German counterparts. Moreover, the French are more satisfied with the interaction than the Germans, as the mean values indicate (France = .722, Germany = .640).

A second relationship under investigation concerns the role of media usage

Table 3: *Contact with own MP, feelings of being represented and trust*

	Feeling of being represented by own MP		Trust in own MP		Trust in Parliament	
	France	Germany	France	Germany	France	Germany
Eta	.340***	.319***	.183***	.255***	.126*	.163***
N	779	1159	827	1251	944	1520

Notes: * $p < .005$; ** $p < .001$; *** $p < .000$. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

and media coverage. On the whole, less French citizens get information about their MP via newspapers than German citizens. 76.1 percent of the French respondents state never to read about their MP whereas in Germany this group consists of only 46.6 percent of the respondents. Among those who read about their MP in the newspaper, most state they do this rarely (12.2 percent in France, 31.4 percent in Germany). In both countries there is only a small group of people who read about their members of parliament often. But these results have to be interpreted carefully, as the categories differ slightly for France and Germany: While the German category includes the coverage of newspapers and political magazines, the French category includes references to "journal" or "presse".

On the whole, the media coverage in France is perceived more negatively than in Germany: Regarding the perceived tendency of media content, the mean value in France indicates a preponderance of negative connotations, whereas in Germany the mean value is located at the positive range of the scale, however, both are situated close to the neutral point. Referring to the hypothesis of mediamalaise and newsfactors, these results are very interesting as citizens in both countries do not perceive a strong negative connotation of the media coverage regarding the MP.

In the following we analyze the bivariate correlations between personal interaction and media coverage with perceptions of responsiveness and trust in the own MP and in parliament.

In both countries the correlation between having personal contact with an MP and the feeling of being represented is fairly pronounced as the eta values .340 (France) and .319 (Germany) indicate, whereas for Germany the score is slightly higher. Much weaker is the correlation between contacting an MP and trusting him or her in both countries. In contrast to the feeling of being represented, the correlation between contact with the own MP and trust in the MP is stronger in Germany (eta = .255) than in France (eta = .183). The lowest scores are found when analyzing the relation of contact to the MP and trust in parliament: In both countries a strong relation appears not to exist, as eta is lowest for France (.126) and only slightly higher for Germany (.163).

To sum up, contacting an MP is most strongly correlated with citizens' feeling of being represented by the own MP, followed by trust in the own MP. Trust in parliament is only weakly correlated with the individual contact to the MP. According to our initial assumption interpersonal contact can function as a generating factor of experience based trust. Unfortunately, our first empirical results do not confirm this hypothesis. The results regarding trust in the own MP and the weaker relations between contact and trust in parliament might give

Table 4: *Degree of satisfaction with contact, feelings of being represented and trust*

	Feeling of being represented by own MP		Trust in own MP		Trust in Parliament	
	France	Germany	France	Germany	France	Germany
Eta	.611***	.603***	.514***	.529***	.364*	.389***
N	116	208	123	210	123	214

Notes: * $p < .005$; ** $p < .001$; *** $p < .000$. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

evidence for the argument, that experience based trust is hardly transferable to political institutions, such as national parliaments. Because of the complexity of the relationship among the involved variables we cannot simply rely on the bivariate analysis; the results of the structural equation modeling which provides for this complexity will probably reveal more valid evidence to test the hypothesis. In reference to our research question we resume that personal contact does not promote a great deal of trust in political actors or institutions, whereas the correlation is stronger in Germany than in France.

As outlined above the mere fact of having contact to the MP and the frequency of this contact might not be the only factors that affect the feeling of being represented and trust: The perceived quality of contact seems to be relevant, too.

When analyzing the degree of satisfaction with contact to the MP and the feeling of being represented by him or her, the first results indicate a strong correlation (eta France = .611, eta Germany = .603). The eta values in the category trust in own MP lay above .5 for both countries and are also among the highest within the whole block of the bivariate analysis. Despite, trust in the national parliament has a much weaker correlation to the degree of satisfaction with contact - in France as well as in Germany. Again, individuals do not seem to transfer the satisfaction they gathered through communication with the MP to positive attitudes toward the parliament as an institution. This might give further evidence to confirming the assumption that a positive experience with an individual is hardly transferable into attitudes toward an institution. But approval or rejection of this hypothesis can only be accomplished by looking at the results of the subsequent structural analysis.

There is just a little part of society, who contacts politicians personally. Instead, mass media play a major role in the process of citizens' political impression and opinion formation. Table 5 shows the correlations between media usage and citizens' feelings of being represented as well as with trust in MP and parliament.

The fact of reading about the own MP in newspapers or magazines does not relate strongly to citizens' feeling of being represented by the own MP or trust they have in their own MP. In France as well as in Germany the etas are on a relatively low level, whereas the results concerning the feeling of being represented are slightly higher (.265 for France and .291 for Germany) than those regarding trust in the own MP (.226 for France and .248 for Germany). Besides, both correlations are stronger in Germany. Again, the correlation to trust in parliament is lowest, as the eta of .100 and .167 indicate which might be

Table 5: *Reading about own MP in newspapers or magazines, feelings of being represented and trust*

	Feeling of being represented by own MP		Trust in own MP		Trust in Parliament	
	France	Germany	France	Germany	France	Germany
Eta	.265***	.291***	.226***	.248***	.100*	.167***
N	759	1150	806	1237	907	1494

Notes: * $p < .005$; ** $p < .001$; *** $p < .000$. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

caused by the fact that we analyze the impact of media coverage on the own MP and not about the parliament. Possibly this points out again that people do not transfer their evaluation of the MP to the evaluation of the parliament. However, these results do not contain the connotation of the media coverage, which has to be taken into account when following our second research question.

Table 6: *Connotation of media coverage*

	Feeling of being represented by own MP		Trust in own MP		Trust in Parliament	
	France	Germany	France	Germany	France	Germany
Mean	.424	.511	.577	.607	.508	.572
Eta	.358***	.327***	.382***	.352***	.265***	.222***
N	336	574	349	603	356	637

Notes: * $p < .005$; ** $p < .001$; *** $p < .000$. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

When analyzing the impact of the connotation of media coverage, the results differ slightly from those already gathered: The strongest correlation exists between citizens' trust in their own MP and the connotation of media coverage, whereas the eta is higher in France (.382) than in Germany (.352). Likewise the feeling of being represented by the own MP is correlated with the connotation of media coverage, which is more pronounced in France than in Germany (eta .358 vs. 327). Again, the weakest correlation is found with trust in the national parliament.

In sum, it is neither the mere frequency of contact with the own MP, nor the mere frequency of reading about the MP that correlates strongly with citizens' feeling of being represented and political trust. Instead the degree of satisfaction and the perceived connotation of media coverage appears to be more influential to citizens' evaluations.

5 The Structure of Linkages and Trust

To test whether the results on the antecedents of perceived responsiveness and political trust remain stable if further theoretically important variables are controlled for and whether the assumed relationship fit the data well, we apply a structural equation modeling approach. The analysis is conducted out by using the SPSS add-on AMOS 19. The estimation of the structural model encompasses the following steps. First, we split the sample into three subsamples in order to deal adequately with missing values. The first subsample includes

people who not know the MP and therefore cannot have read about the MP in the newspaper and cannot have had any contact with him or her. Therefore, they have necessarily missing values on the items asking for tendency in media coverage and satisfaction with the contact. The second subsample consists of people indicating to know the MP but not having had contacts with him or her. Finally the last - and most interesting subsample regarding our research question - contains those respondents who know the MP and indicate to have had contact with him or her. Only this group has valid values on the item on satisfaction with contact.

In the next step, we will specify a baseline model for each of the three subsamples which was derived from theoretical assumptions about the antecedents and impact of feelings of responsiveness. Then the proposed structure was compared to the structure of the data to assess whether this initial model fits the data well. The model was calculated separately for France and Germany. The next step involved minor modifications according to the modification indices displayed in the AMOS output. We only performed those modifications being compatible with our theory and increasing the model fit significantly. By this we arrived at the so called configural model which reproduces the structure of the relationships found in data independently for each subsample in each country.

To perform a comparison between France and Germany for the different subsamples, we have to check for configural invariance. Configural invariance is the prerequisite for multi group comparisons in structural equation models and means that the specified model is applicable to both countries. Therefore the configural models for France and Germany are estimated simultaneously for each subsample. The achieved fit (χ^2 statistics) of the model provides the reference against which the so called invariance model is compared. The invariance model constraints all structural paths and covariances in the model as equal for both countries, except the differences encountered in the independent assessment of the configural models. If this model does not fit the data significantly worse than the unconstrained simultaneously estimated configural model, we can conclude that the structure of the relationship is invariant between the two countries. Otherwise we have to check for which paths or covariances the assumption of invariance has to be dropped. The required modifications are evaluated by the stepwise comparison of the χ^2 -statistics of the competing model (cf. Byrne 2004). By this we arrive at the final model in which some patterns are invariant between the countries and some are estimated freely.

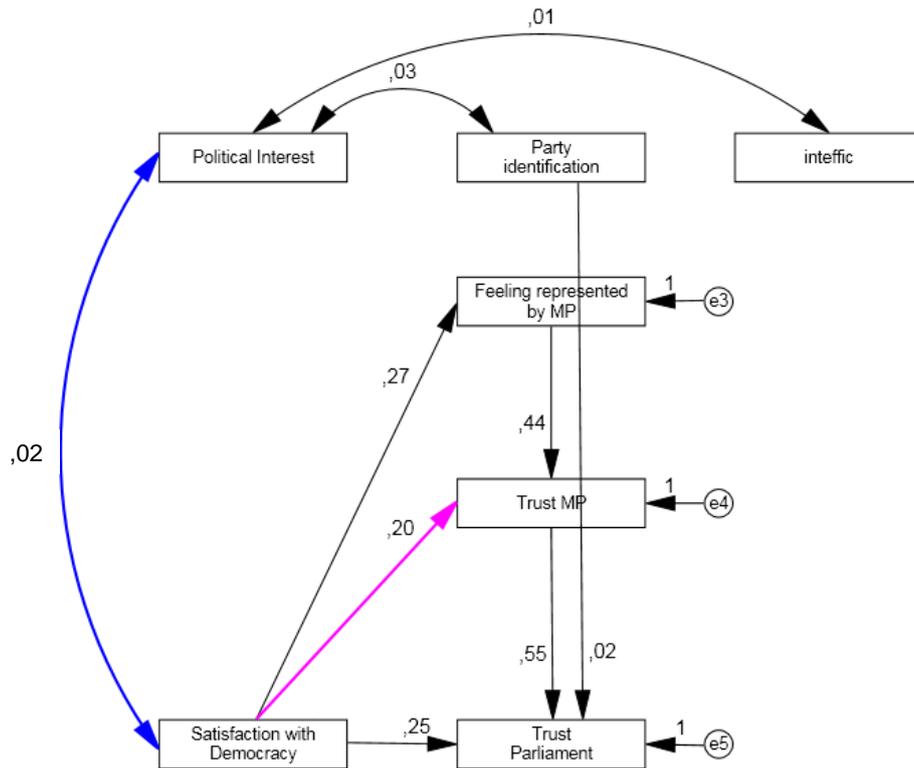
The baseline models for each subsample are reported in the appendix. The final models for each subsample are shown in figures 1 to 3. The comparison of the baseline models with the configural models, as well as the confrontation of the simultaneous estimation of the configural models with the invariance and final constrained models are displayed in table 5 in the appendix.

Although all final models fit the data adequately, the models for people not knowing the MP and those who know, but do not have had contact with him or her describe the structure of the relationship in the respective subsample somehow better than the third model entailing all theoretically interesting relationships.

Since the final models fit the data adequately, we are now able to turn to the interpretation of the substantial findings. The coefficients reported in figures 1 to 3 represent unstandardized regression weights (single-headed arrows) and covariances (curved double-headed arrows). The unstandardized coefficients allow comparisons between the subsamples and, where the coefficients are not invariant, also comparisons between the countries, France and Germany.

Since the specified relationships are increasingly complex as we move from the first to the third model, the subsequent interpretation will strictly focus on the main issues of concern, i.e. the paths running from contact - if included in the model - to perceived responsiveness and subsequently to political trust. Data on other relationships, although present in the figures, will not be given further attention during the interpretation.

Figure 1: *Determinants of trust in Parliament in France and Germany - Respondents not knowing MP*



Model fit: $\chi^2 = 68.693$, $p < .001$, 33 degrees of freedom. GFI: .977 / RMR: .006 / CFI: .963 / RMSEA: .036 / AIC: 114.693. Notes: Unstandardized estimates, significant on 10 percent. N=306 in France, N=520 in Germany. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

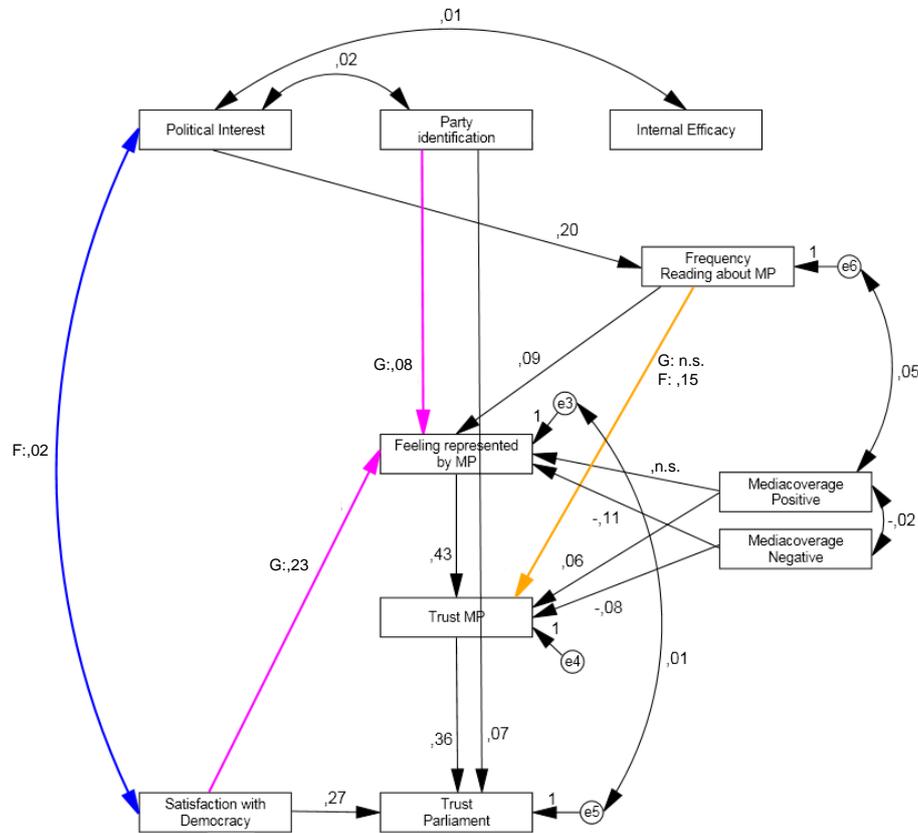
The explanatory model of political trust presented in Figure 1 refers to the group of largely uninvolved citizens neither holding direct nor indirect contact with the representatives from their constituencies. Although - due to controlling for traditional indicators of cognitive engagement such as political interest,

internal efficacy and party identification, we cannot assume that those people are completely uninvolved in politics. On the one hand, we know that those respondents are not engaged with the work of their representatives, on the other hand, we can infer from figure one, that cognitive engagement does not have a substantial impact on their attitudes towards the political actors and institutions here. If political trust is existent in this group, it is not grounded in own cognitions and experience. Nevertheless, political trust can be built among those people. As shown in several contributions to the analysis of political trust, a strong link exists between perceived responsiveness of the regional MP and trust in him or her (for example: Denters et al 2007; Gabriel/Walter-Rogg 2008). People feeling well represented by their MP also tend to trust him or her. Moreover, they generalize feelings of trust in individual representatives to the institution of the national parliament. In addition, a strong indirect effect of MP responsiveness on trust in parliament exists, which is mediated by trust in the local MP. What - beyond from the variables included here - eventually accounts for political trust in this group, is not the main question to be answered in this contribution. From research done so far, we know that social trust, satisfaction with personal life and support for the governing party or parties promote people's trust in parliament. Maybe, these kinds of influences are represented by the path running from satisfaction with the way democracy works to trust in parliament.

How does following politics in the mass media impact on the pattern reported so far? Before going into details, we should shortly characterize the segment of the public and the problem under observation in this second explanatory model and how it differs from the one described before. We are now analyzing the path to trust in the parliament existing in the group of citizens getting information about the work of their local representative via the mass media, since they have read something about him or her in the newspaper. The assumed influence of mass media reporting on people's feelings of being well represented and trusting political actors and institutions deviates in some important respects from most analyses on media malaise published so far. First and foremost, the referent of mass media reporting is the same as the referent of people's evaluations, i.e. the local representative. In most previous analyses, media reporting referred to politics in general while the political objects to be evaluated by the citizens were far more specific (parliament, democracy, representative). Second we are explicitly analyzing the impact - not just of the frequency of media consumption, but also of negativity or positivity of reporting.

We will first turn to the new element of our explanatory model, the impact of media reporting on perceived responsiveness. People frequently reading about the local MP in the mass media are more interested in politics, but there was no relation identified that would suggest these persons to have a particularly strong sense of internal political efficacy or an intense party identification. Mere frequency of having read about the representative's activity in the newspaper increases slightly the feeling of being well represented by him or her. A positive tendency of reporting does not contribute anything to the effect of frequent media perception, while negative reporting tends to neutralize the effect of frequency described before. Positive and negative perception of media coverage has also a direct, although small effect on trust in the MP. As demonstrated by the first diagram, the MP's perceived responsiveness increases trust in him or her,

Figure 2: *Determinants of trust in Parliament in France and Germany - Respondents knowing MP but not having had contact*

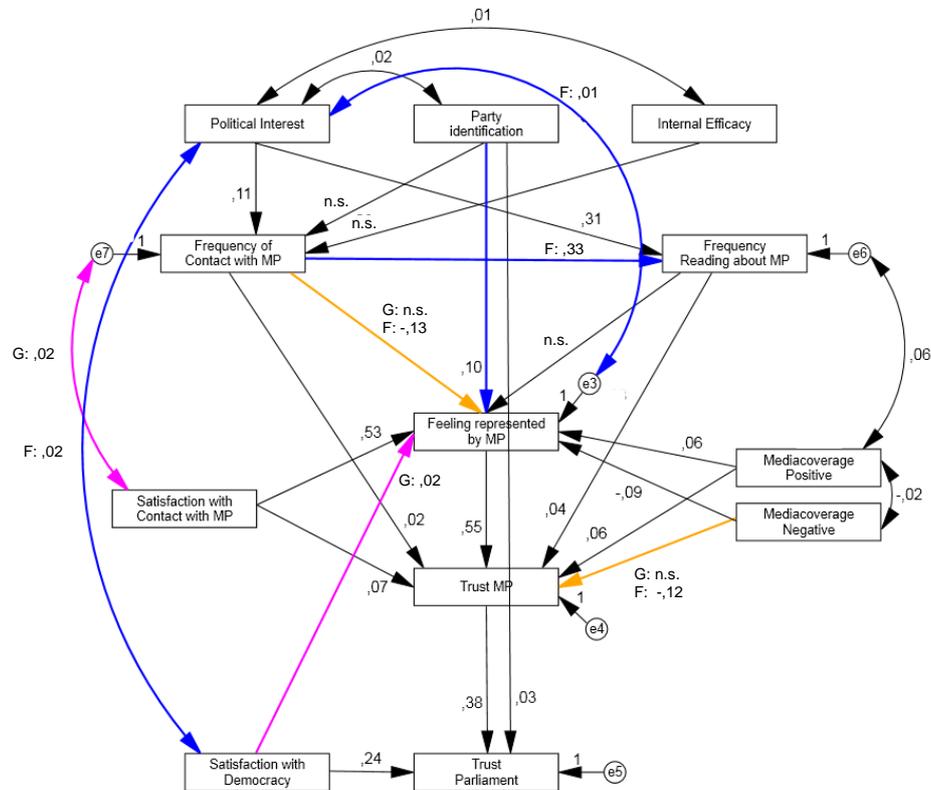


Model fit: $\chi^2 = 109.093^{***}$, $p < .001$, 70 degrees of freedom. GFI: .960 / RMR: .006 / CFI: .727 / RMSEA: .034 / AIC: 189.093. Notes: Unstandardized estimates, significant on 10 percent. N=225 in France, N=272 in Germany. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

and the strength of the direct relationship is not diminished, if media effects are introduced in the model. On the contrary, in addition to the direct effects described so far, news media reception exerts also a moderate indirect effect on trust in the MP via perceived responsiveness. In addition, frequency of media usage impinges on trust in the local MP, but only in France and not in Germany.

What can be said about the generalization of the perception of being well represented by one's local MP into a more general feeling of trust in him or her does also apply to the second aspect of carry-over processes of positive attitudes, i.e. from the particular MP to the institution of parliament. Obviously, the impact of trust in the MP on trust in parliament is smaller than observed in the non-attentive group of respondents. Nevertheless, the path still exists and the strength of the effect is sizeable. On the other hand, no direct path is running from media reception about the representative of the local constituency on trust in the national parliament. This effect is completely mediated by citizens' attitudes towards the local MP. Thus, a positive perception of the responsiveness and trustworthiness of the local representative contributes considerably to the

Figure 3: *Determinants of trust in Parliament in France and Germany - Respondents knowing MP and having had contact*



esteem of the national parliament, while perceived poor performance and low trustworthiness of local MPs do harm to the parliament's esteem. Regarding the impact of mass media reporting on political trust, the situation is more ramified than assumed in the simple versions of the media malaise hypotheses. Media have an impact on the citizens' political attitudes. They can indeed influence how the public sees the political world. But the media effect turns out to be weaker than often assumed, and people clearly attribute negative reporting to those who are the specific referents of reporting but not directly to other political objects.

The most complex relationship between the citizens and the national parliament as a political institution exists in the group of citizens who do not only become aware of the activities of their local representatives by reading newspapers but who - moreover - try to get in direct contact with them and switch from the role of a spectator to the role of an active participant. We will now describe how the process of building trust in the national parliament looks like in this group of strongly involved citizens and how direct and mediated interaction between those citizens and the representatives works in this group of

respondents. First, we will have a look at the role of mass media reception in the modified model, and then we will investigate into the role of direct interaction between the citizens and the parliamentarians.

While party identification and internal efficacy still do not matter as antecedents of reception of mass media news about the local representative, political interest is considerably more important in this respect among those citizens who actively communicate with their MPs than in the group described before. Moreover, direct contact is positively related to media consumption, but only in France. Frequent media perception is no longer directly relevant to the assessment of the representative's responsiveness, while the impact on trust in the MP becomes now also significant in Germany, but is very small in size. The effect of perceived negative reporting on the attribution of responsiveness becomes slightly weaker now than it was previously, while positive reporting now induces positive evaluation of the MP's responsiveness. Negativism does still impact negatively on trust in the MP in France, while positive reporting increases trust in the representative in both countries under observation here. We can conclude that among those citizens who have had contact with their district representative, mass media attention has an impact on the MP's trustworthiness and responsiveness. However, the mere frequency of media reception is now irrelevant to the respective attitude, while the perceived tendency of reporting, particularly positive reporting, promotes positive attitudes towards the representatives. This is the main respect distinguishing the role of mass media perception in the model described here from the previous one.

The question whether direct interaction between the citizens and the local MP could improve the perceived quality of political representation cannot be answered in the same way for France and Germany. In France, simply having contacted one's representative is conducive to regarding her or him as responsive, while this is not the case in Germany. But what contributes considerably to the feeling of responsiveness in both countries is satisfaction with the respective contact. Such an experience has also a small direct effect on trust in the MP. Compared to the effect of mass media, personal contact works similarly in the generation of positive feelings towards one's representative: Frequently being informed about the MP and having had contact with him do not strongly and consistently impact on positive attitudes. The kind of mediated and, particularly, direct experience made with the local representative counts in shaping the citizens' political attitudes towards their MPs. Plausibly, only satisfying direct contact generates feelings of being well represented and, to a clearly lesser degree, trust in the representative. Perceived media reporting works similarly, but its impact on positive attitudes is far weaker than direct experience.

Trust in the local MP is strongly dependent on perceived responsiveness again, but now a strong indirect effect of being satisfied with the contact on trust in the MP which is mediated by felt responsiveness is added to the direct one. As observed in the two other groups of respondents, a path runs also from trust in the MP on trust in parliament, while the perceived responsiveness of the local representative does not directly impact on trust in parliament. Nor does mass media reporting on the representatives or satisfaction with the contact having had with them impinge directly on trust in the national parliament.

One of the main purposes of this paper was to find out whether a joint model of explaining political trust as a result of processes of interaction between citizens and representatives in France and Germany fits the data. Having a look at the three subgroups under observation here, we come to clear conclusion on that issue. The similarities between those two countries outweigh the differences. Regarding the relationships between political communication and felt responsiveness on the one hand and statements on the quality of representation and trust in the representative, but also the parliament, there exist most nationally invariant paths. That means that the structural relationships between those variables are roughly the same in the two countries and the test for different national paths does not improve the quality of the estimatory model. Nevertheless, some specially national patterns need to be mentioned. Among those reading about their local MP in newspapers, but not directly contacting the representative, the mere frequency of contact has an effect on trust in the local MP in France, but not in Germany. There, it is just the kind of perceived media reporting which counts as an antecedent of trust in the local MP. However, this is the only national peculiarity identified by the estimatory model in the respects of core interest here.

In the last group of citizens interacting actively with the MP and reading about him or her in the newspaper the structure is not strongly different. Again, with a few exceptions, the basic structure of the relationship is more or less the same in France and Germany. Surprisingly and not easily to explain, the frequency of contact of French citizens to their local MP decreases trust in them - which is not the case in Germany. But this weak negative effect is far cancelled out if French are satisfied with the contact they had. Other than in Germany, trust in the local MP diminishes also in France if media reporting is perceived as being negative. Germany is only special regarding a direct positive link from contacting MPs to reading about them in newspapers. This cumulative pattern of experience is not present in France.

6 Summary, Discussion and Conclusions

Starting from the ongoing debate on the crisis of trust in representative democracies, we wanted to find out whether and how interaction between the citizens and the representatives could lead the citizens to develop a more positive view of politics, particularly regarding perceived responsiveness of the MP and political trust. The focus of this analyses was on grassroots rather than on national politics, namely the patterns of exchange at the district level and the carry over from these interactions to the parliament as a national political institution. As we found, a majority of the Germans trust in their local MP as well as in the national parliament, while most French respondents trust their MP, but do not trust the national assembly. In both countries, more people doubt than believe in the responsiveness of their MP. However, the differences in trust and perceived responsiveness are not very strong. While only a small segment of the French and German respondents report on having had personal contacts with their MP, Germans do far more use the information on their MP provided by newspapers than do French and thus are more susceptible to the influence of mass media on their attitudes towards the representative.

Irrespective of this difference in media consumption, the impact of interaction between citizens and representatives on perceived responsiveness and political trust does not greatly vary between those two countries. Mere frequency of media consumption does not strongly matter as an antecedent of trust and responsiveness as it is the case for mere frequency of contacting. What really accounts for perceived MP's responsiveness is satisfaction with contact. Citizens having made positive experience with the way the local representative deals with their concerns are far more convinced of his responsiveness than people lacking this kind of experience, largely no matter how frequent the contact with the representative has occurred. Compared to the direct interaction, positive or negative information on the MP transmitted by the printmedia counts far less and frequency of media use is irrelevant if the perception as negative or positive is known. Thus, the representatives' behavior in their interaction in their constituency is a key to being assessed as responsive political actor or not. For citizens' relationship to politics, this is an important thing, since the perception of responsiveness is generalized to trust in the MP and, even more important, trust in parliament. The political message derived from these findings is the following: MPs who handle their personal contacts with the electorate competently, contribute strongly to the generation of political trust. But unfortunately, so far they reach only a small segment of the local constituents.

7 Appendix - Baselinemodels and Tables

Figure 4: *Baselinemodel - Respondents not knowing MP*

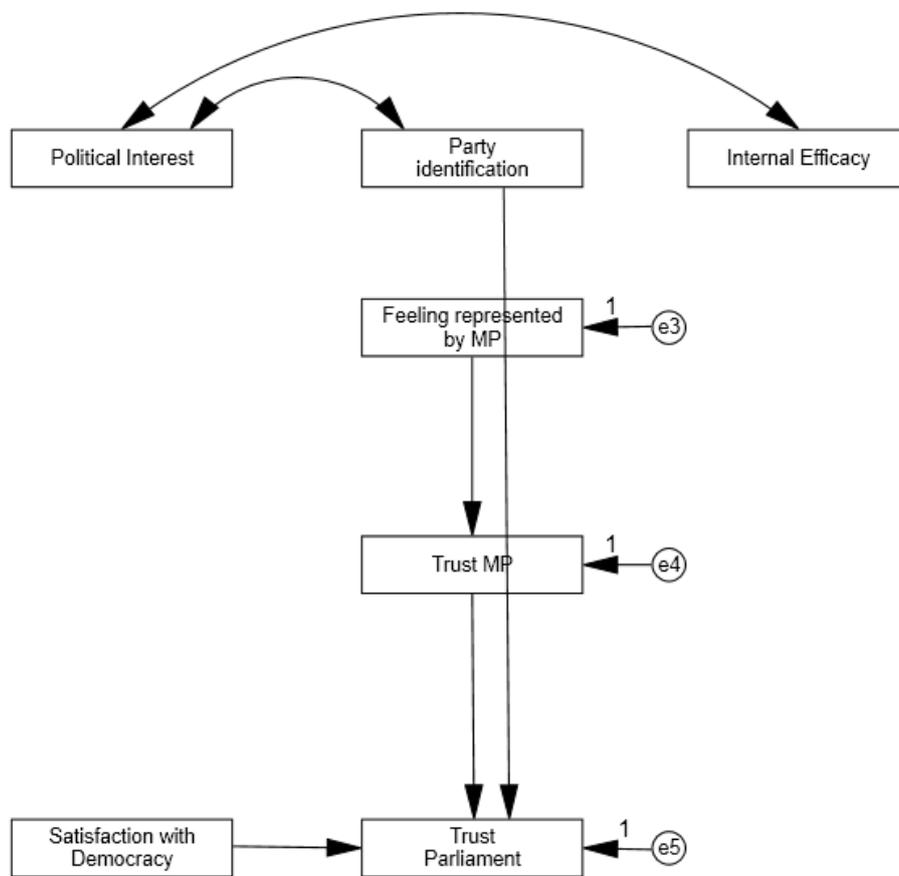


Figure 5: *Baselinemodel - Respondents knowing MP but not having had contact*

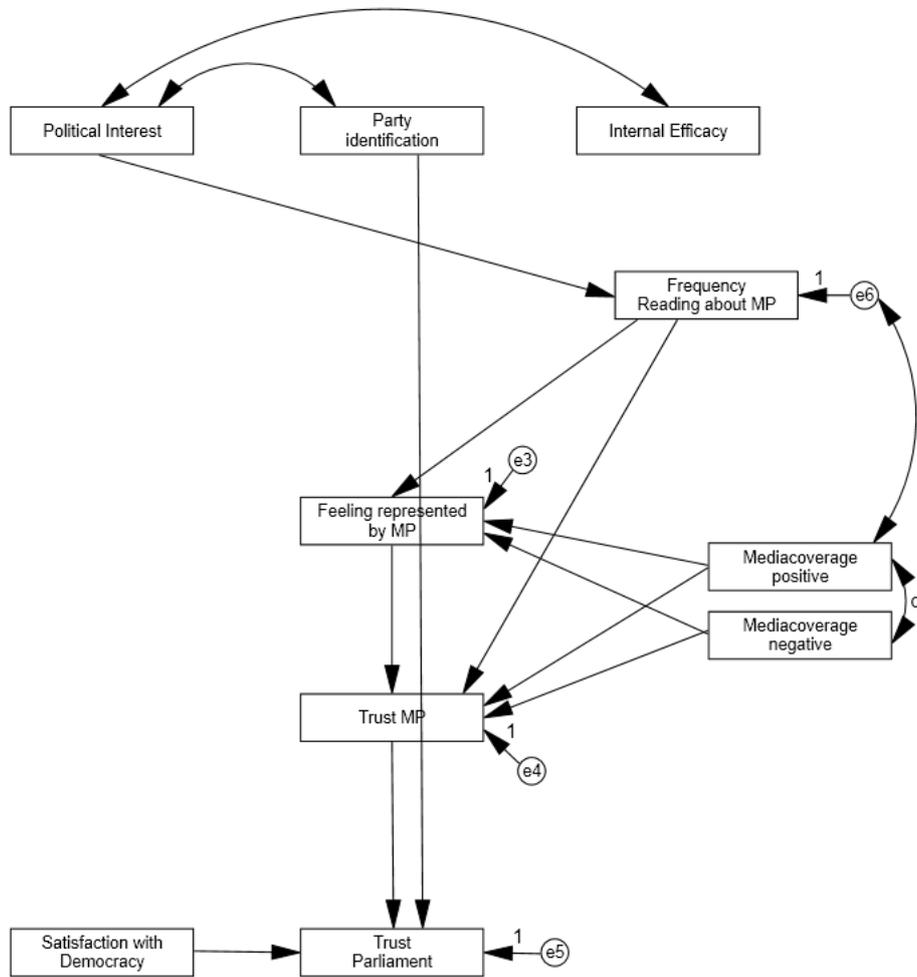


Figure 6: *Baselinemodel - Respondents knowing MP and having had contact*

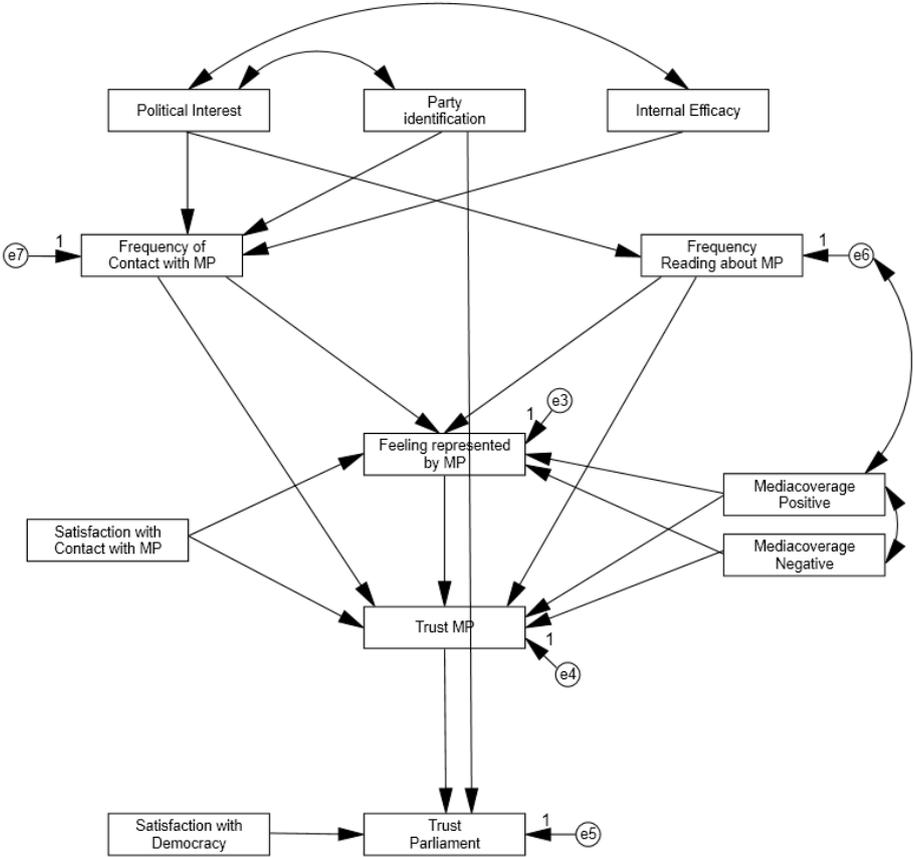


Table 7: Comparison of structural equation models

	GFI	RMR	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE	AIC	Chi square	df
Models for subsample without knowledge of MP (and therefore no contact with MP)									
Baseline Model Germany	.937	.008	.816	.832	.120	.000	153,241	127,241	15
Configural Model Germany	.985	.005	.958	.976	.049	.486	59.285	29,285	13
Baseline Model France	.952	.008	.832	.870	.092	.005	80.013	54.013	15
Configural Model France	.985	.005	.948	.984	.036	.005	80.013	16.760	12
simultaneous estimations									
Configural Model	.980	.006	.943	.968	.038	.923	117.380	57.380	26
Complete Invariance Model	.977	.006	.932	.963	.036	.971	114.693	68.693	33
Final Constrained Model	<i>no significantly inferior fit of the invariance model against the configural model</i>								
Models for subsample with knowledge of MP but without contact with MP									
Baseline Model Germany	.912	.009	.640	.684	.114	.000	190.273	144.273	32
Configural Model Germany	.971	.004	.898	.961	.044	.626	96.929	40.929	27
Baseline Model France	.928	.009	.676	.748	.092	.001	138.815	92.815	32
Configural Model France	.958	.007	.821	.908	.058	.277	103.218	51.218	29
simultaneous estimations									
Configural Model	.965	.005	.866	.939	.036	.963	200.154	92.154	56
Complete Invariance Model	.957	.006	.832	.926	.036	.982	193.327	115.327	71
Final Constrained Model	.960	.006	.841	.727	.034	.990	189.093	109.093	70
Models for subsample with knowledge of MP and contact with MP									
Baseline Model Germany	.854	.012	.656	.722	.120	.000	209.222	145.222	46
Configural Model Germany	.922	.009	.819	.903	.074	.069	148.507	76.507	42
Baseline Model France	.836	.015	.630	.702	.133	.000	198.962	134.962	46
Configural Model France	.911	.011	.808	.899	.083	.053	146.215	70.215	40
simultaneous estimations									
Configural Model	.917	.010	.814	.901	.055	.265	294.740	146.740	82
Complete Invariance Model	.899	.010	.771	.882	.054	.299	286.530	180.530	103
Final Constrained Model	.901	.010	.782	.892	.052	.385	281.870	171.870	101

Notes: Complete invariance models are constraint on all structural paths and covariances except for differences detected in the consecutive fitting of the configural models for Germany and France independently. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

Table 8: Regression weights - Respondents not knowing MP

		unstandardized		standardized		SE		Sig.	
		G	F	G	F	G	F	G	F
Feeling respresented	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	.27		.30	.29	.03			***
Trust MP	<--- Feeling respresented	.44		.43	.48	.03			***
Trust MP	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	.20		.22	.04				***
Trust Parl.	<--- Partyidentification	.02		.03	.03	.01			n.s.
Trust Parl.	<--- Trust MP	.55		.54	.54	.03			***
Trust Parl.	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	.25		.27	.28	.03			***
Chi ² = 68.693***, 33 degrees of freedom. GFI: .977 /RMR: .006 / CFI: .963 / RMSEA: .036 / AIC: 114.693									

Notes: * p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

Table 9: *Regression weights - Respondents knowing MP but not having had contact*

		unstandardized		standardized		SE		Sig.	
		G	F	G	F	G	F	G	F
Freq. Reading about MP	<--- Pol. Interest	,20		,18	,16		,05		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Freq. Reading about MP	,09		,13	,12		,03		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Mediacoverture positive	,02		,04	,03		,03		n.s.
Feeling respresented	<--- Mediacoverture negative	-,11		-,13	-,15		,04		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	,23		,24			,05		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Partyidentification	,08		,17			,03		***
Trust MP	<--- Feeling respresented	,43		,40	,43		,04		***
Trust MP	<--- Freq. Reading about MP	,00	,15	,01	,20	,04	,04	n.s.	***
Trust MP	<--- Mediacoverture positive	,06		,11	,09		,03		**
Trust MP	<--- Mediacoverture negative	-,08		-,09	-,11		,03		**
Trust Parl.	<--- Partyidentification	,07		,16	,16		,02		***
Trust Parl.	<--- Trust MP	,36		,38	,43		,03		***
Trust Parl.	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	,27		,29	,33		,03		***

Chi² = 109.093***, 70 degrees of freedom. GFI: .960 / RMR: .006 / CFI: .727 / RMSEA: .034 / AIC: 189.093

Notes: * p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

Table 10: *Regression weights - Respondents knowing MP and having had contact*

		unstandardized		standardized		S.E.		Sig.	
		G	F	G	F	G	F	G	F
Contact with MP	<--- Internal Efficacy	,03		,02	,02		,10		n.s.
Contact with MP	<--- Partyidentification	,00		-,01	-,01		,04		n.s.
Contact with MP	<--- Pol. Interest	,11		,11	,12		,06		*
Freq. Reading about MP	<--- Pol. Interest	,31		,26	,26		,06		***
Freq. Reading about MP	<--- Contact with MP		,33		,27		,10		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Freq. Reading about MP	,04		,05	,05		,04		n.s.
Feeling respresented	<--- Mediacoverture positive	,06		,12	,11		,03		**
Feeling respresented	<--- Mediacoverture negative	-,09		-,06	-,11		,05		*
Feeling respresented	<--- Contact with MP	,07	-,13	,08	-,15	,06	,06	n.s.	**
Feeling respresented	<--- Satisfaction with Contact	,53		,52	,62		,04		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	,23		,26			,06		***
Feeling respresented	<--- Partyidentification		,10		,16		,04		**
Trust MP	<--- Feeling respresented	,55		,61	,58		,05		***
Trust MP	<--- Freq. Reading about MP	,04		,06	,06		,03		n.s.
Trust MP	<--- Mediacoverture positive	,06		,13	,11		,02		**
Trust MP	<--- Mediacoverture negative	,05	-,12	,04	-,15	,09	,06	n.s.	**
Trust MP	<--- Contact with MP	,02		,02	,02		,04		n.s.
Trust MP	<--- Satisfaction with Contact	,07		,08	,08		,05		n.s.
Trust Parl.	<--- Partyidentification	,03		,05	,05		,03		n.s.
Trust Parl.	<--- Trust MP	,38		,37	,44		,05		***
Trust Parl.	<--- Satisfaction with Democracy	,24		,29	,37		,04		***

Chi² = 171.870***, 101 degrees of freedom. GFI: .901 / RMR: .010 / CFI: .892 / RMSEA: .052 / AIC: 281.870

Notes: * p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01. Source: Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany, 2010.

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