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Media Framing and Its Effects on Voter (De)Mobilization: The Impact of Generic Media Framing on Campaign Attention and Voting Turnout in the 2008 Austrian Parliamentary Elections

Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of press and TV news coverage on campaign attention and voting turnout in the 2008 Austrian Parliamentary elections. More specifically, this study focuses on media framing effects representing the levels of “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity” on the (de)mobilization of voters. This study is based on the analytical linkage between a media content analysis of the most important Austrian daily newspapers and TV evening newscasts and a national post election survey comprising the Austrian electorate in 2008. By applying multi-level logistic regression analyses, we find - partially dissonant to earlier research and our expectations - that entertainment framing shows no or even demobilizing effects on voters. Game framing by the media, as one dimension of entertainment in electoral reporting, has a reversed effect on voting turnout by turning voters off. General exposure to political news and exposure to “confrontational negativity” in the news hold a moderate mobilizing power regarding campaign attention and voting turnout.

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Introduction

Over the past decades, the number of undecided voters is constantly on the rise and voting behavior becomes increasingly short-term oriented and volatile (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000; Norris, LeDuc & Niemi 2010). Additionally, “campaigns are now largely media events” (Dalton 2002: 39) and the “use of communication channels is commonly regarded as most important for the process of mobilizing voters, particularly for generating attention and turnout” (Norris 2006: 214). Against this background, it is widely assumed that ephemeral campaign and media effects as determinants of electoral behavior become more important (e.g., Ridout 2004). Furthermore, mass mediated communication constitutes and remains the primary source of political and electoral political information (Norris 2000; Plasser & Plasser 2002). In line with these driving forces, the focus on the potential impact of media usage and coverage on voters has increasingly moved to the center of political and communication research. The prominent role of the media in supplying electoral and campaign information to the electorate is an indication that some elections might be portrayed and consequently perceived as being more mobilizing than others. Thus, voter mobilization is not only “about how people *approach* elections; rather, it is mainly about how elections *appear* to people” (Franklin 2004: 6). Thereby, the appearance of elections to the people is mainly coined by the portrayal of election campaigns conveyed and transformed by the mass media. Consequently, media use for political information and the associated portrayals of electoral campaigns may critically contribute to the perceptual and actual levels of voter participation. In this context, content-related phenomena of media entertainment and negativity and thus levels of game-centeredness, episodic reporting, negativity or conflict-centeredness in the electoral coverage (Bennett 2009; Cappella & Jamieson 1997; Iyengar 1991; Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992; Patterson 1993, 2000) and their (de)mobilizing potential are increasingly a matter of particular scientific attention. We conceive entertainment-, conflict- and negativity-centered news framing as being potentially attractive to the audience. Consequently, these news frames may also function as engaging and activating impulses towards the voters. “Engaging campaign coverage can increase citizens’ interest in the campaign, which can improve voter turnout” (Johansson 2006: 2).

Nevertheless, (de)mobilizing effects of news framing in general and generic news framing in particular are still underresearched and the empirical evidence remains as fragmented as ambiguous (Martin 2008; Schuck & de Vreese 2009; Schuck, Vliegenthart & de Vreese 2011, de Vreese & Semetko 2002, de Vreese & Tobiasen 2007). The lack of media-content related effect studies is even strengthened by the fact that earlier campaign effect research has predominantly focused on campaigning advertisements, but less on media content (e.g., Ansolabehere, Iyengar & Simon 1999; Goldstein & Freedman 2002; Wattenberg & Brians 1999).

To formulate hypotheses predicting news effects in election campaigns it might be fruitful to investigate media framing effects (Shah et al. 2002), in particular the impact of generic media frames (de Vreese 2005). Generic frames like conflict, game-centeredness or horse race are relevant characteristics of contemporary media portrayal of politics and may impinge the perception of and reaction to election campaigns on a rather general and holistic level. Most recent framing research shows that not only issue-specific framing might have an impact on voter mobilization, but also generic framing (e.g., Schuck, Vliegenthart & de Vreese 2011). Referring to the complexity of the interplay between media usage, news framing and citizens’ involvement in political and civic life, Delli Carpini (2004) notes that “the impact of the media is tied in part to the tone and content of the information provided” (p. 398). Consequently, to examine convincing explanations of media effects on political attitudes and behavior, it is necessary to measure actual media content and link it to its individual exposure (Slater 2004; Elenbaas & de Vreese 2008; Schuck, Vliegenthart & de

Vreese 2011). Whereas earlier studies on (de)mobilizing effects of the media vastly rest on media exposure only or on aggregate data levels (e.g., Norris 2000), our analysis expands the focus to the individual exposure to specific contentual features (generic frames) of media coverage (see also de Vreese & Semetko 2002; Schuck, Vliegenthart & de Vreese 2011).

This study builds on evidence from a media content analysis of newspaper and TV election coverage of six weeks prior to the election day and a representative post-election survey among Austrian voters. These instruments allow us to analytically combine the salience of media frames (content analysis) and news exposure of voters (post-election survey) and contrast this with their levels of campaign attention and voting turnout. This procedure enables us to test to what extent the individual exposure to media content is in fact a reliable predictor of voter (de)mobilization on individual data levels. Thereby, we investigate the (de)mobilization effects of generic media framing on two levels – the voters' attitudes (campaign attention) and their behavior (voting turnout). The central question of this paper is: Does the intensity of exposure to news in general and to specific news framing in particular raise or lower voters' (de)mobilization on the attitudinal and behavioral level? Does news exposure and news frame exposure turn voters rather on or off?

Empirical evidence on explaining voting turnout in general (e.g., Powell 1986) and effects of media use in particular (e.g., Plasser & Seeber 2009) in the Austrian electoral context is rather scarce. This is even more remarkable when considering the idiosyncracies of the Austrian media-politics relation. The uniquely leading tabloid newspaper "Kronen Zeitung" (daily reach 42 percent) is widely ascribed high political power by journalists, politicians and the electorate likewise (Plasser & Lengauer 2009a: 93). Additionally, as in other media-centered democracies, most of what citizens learn about the Austrian National election campaign is carried by mass media, predominantly by television and newspapers (Plasser & Lengauer 2009b: 26). It has already been shown that the exclusive readership of the "Kronen Zeitung" had a statistically significant effect on party choice in the Austrian 2008 Parliamentary elections (Plasser & Seeber 2009: 303).

This paper designs innovative measures to empirically explore and outline patterns of generic news frames in the electoral coverage and investigates the relevance of generic news framing effects for campaign attention and electoral turnout in the 2008 Austrian Parliamentary Elections in binary logistic regression models. By doing so, this paper proposes a media framing model containing two basic dimensions that build a framework of "instant entertainment" (episodic framing, game-centeredness) and "confrontational negativity" (conflict, negativity) that may dissimilarly affect the (de)mobilization of the electorate. Our particular interest is the role of the media as either mobilizer or demobilizer of the electorate. This study is part of the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES), funded by the Austrian Science Foundation.

The Predictors of Voter (De)Mobilization

When investigating reliable predictors of voter mobilization the central question is "why people tune in or off politics" (Blais 2007: 633). The question to be examined is why some individuals vote and others do not and why some people pay more attention to the campaign than others. By doing so, we particularly look at the impact of news exposure and content on the mobilization of voters.

A contested and controversial subject concerning explanatory concepts of voter mobilization and activation is the selection of independent variables and consequently the fact how much of the variation in voting turnout or the attention that is paid to the campaign can be explained by the applied models (e.g., Matuska & Palda 1999). Previous research, primarily focusing on turnout, has revealed a number of affective individual- and system-level factors regarding voter mobilization (Franklin 2004; Wattenberg 2002; Dalton 2002; Seeber

& Steinbrecher 2011). As our dependent variables “campaign attention” and “voting turnout” both refer to voter mobilization (one on the attitudinal and the other on the behavioral level), we design similar models containing corresponding independent variables. Here, we mostly refer to turnout, as campaign interest or attention are rather commonly applied as a independent variable in explaining voting behavior, however they are only rarely utilized as dependent variables (e.g., Bartels and Vavreck 2000; Drew & Weaver 2006; Norris 2006).

Individual level factors referring to sociodemographic characteristics and predispositions are predominantly relevant for our investigation. Regarding political predispositions, Brady, Verba & Schlozman (1995: 283) stated that “what matters most for going to the polls is not the resources at voters’ disposal but, rather, their civic orientations.” Earlier research has shown that amongst the most reliable predictors of voter mobilization are besides political interest and party identification, also sociodemographics such as age, education or gender (Franklin, 2004; Norris 2004; Seeber & Steinbrecher 2011).

Sociodemographics

Sociodemographic characteristics have long been known to affect voter mobilization (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Blais (2000) conducted a comparative analysis, focusing on survey results in nine democratic countries and reports that age and education are the two most significant factors to go to the polls. Turnout is lower among the most recent cohorts and the probability of voting increases as one gets older (Franklin 2004). Voting turnout is also significantly higher among better educated people (Blais 2007: 630-631). Additional research has demonstrated that gender also matters, such as that females are less likely to vote than males (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993). However, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of sociodemographics on voter mobilization regarding Austria differs. Powell (1986) comparatively investigated turnout in nine Western democracies and found that the educational level and gender had no significant effect on voting turnout in Austria (p. 30). Only age showed modest significant effects: Older Austrians are more likely to go the polls than younger ones.

Regarding campaign attention, sociodemographics such as age, gender or education appear to be only weak predictors of attentiveness and involvement toward the campaign (Drew & Weaver 2006). However, drawing back on earlier research we include age, gender and education as basic sociodemographics in our models explaining voter mobilization.

Civic Orientations

Primarily following the socio-psychological approach we identify individual civic orientations that may crucially impinge the propensity to vote (Aldrich & Simon 1986; Campbell, Gurin & Miller 1954). Individual predispositions of voters relate to the psychological engagement and suggest that it does matter whether people care about politics and whether they have developed a constructive or a destructive relationship to politics. It is postulated that the higher the affirmative ties to the political system and politics, the higher the mobilization level. Such relatively stable civic orientations, exemplarily, reflect the levels of party identification, political involvement, trust in politics or political efficacy (Caballero 2005: 345).

The concept of *political efficacy* is strongly correlated with political participation (Abramson & Aldrich 1982; Almond & Verba 1963; Powell 1986; Rosenstone & Hansen 1993; Shaffer 1981). Inspired by the rational choice theorem (Downs 1957), we assume that people who think that their vote actually does make a difference are more likely to go to the polls and pay more attention to the campaign. Political efficacy was also applied as an independent variable by previous studies investigating media framing effects (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko 2002). Besides perceptions of political efficacy, *trust in politics and political institutions* appear to be another decisive dimension of affirmative civic orientations (Shaffer

1981) that may also impinge voter mobilization. For example, Grönlund and Setälä (2007) analyzed European Social Survey data in 22 countries and found that trust in national parliaments has a positive impact on turnout (see also Cox 2003). Earlier research also underscores that *party identification* is directly linked to voter mobilization (Campbell et al. 1960; Seeber & Steinbrecher 2011; Shaffer 1981). Exemplarily, the nine-country comparison of turnout in Western democracies by Powell (1986: 30) showed a statistically significant and positive impact of party identification on voting turnout in Austria as well as in all other investigated countries. Here, we install *government approval* as a further dimension reflecting the satisfaction with the performance of the political system and as such as a measure of affirmative civic orientations. This is based on the notion that voters may not only base their vote choices on their experiences during the latest period of government (Key 1966) which is predominantly linked to party choice, but that government approval or disapproval is also a dimension of satisfaction with the performance of the political system as such. Thus, we might expect a two-sided mobilization effect by government approval ratings: High approval rates may be just as mobilizing as high disapproval rates. For the United States studies analogously showed that voter participation in the period between 1960 and 1997 had been affected by both public approval and disapproval rates toward the incumbent President (Cebula 2005). There is also substantial evidence that *political interest* in general is closely associated with the mobilization levels of voters (e.g., Powell 1986; Shaffer 1981). “The more interested one is, the more likely one is to vote” (Blais 2007: 631). In the style of Blais (2007), we postulate that those who have developed a “constructive taste for politics” pay more attention to the campaign and are more likely to vote than those who have no or a “destructive taste of politics.” We might expect a positive relation between political and campaign interest and voter mobilization. As our survey data outlines a vast collinearity between political interest and attention towards the 2008 campaign, we decided to include only the more immediate, specific and campaign-centered variable “campaign attention” in our testing model regarding voting turnout (see also de Vreese & Semetko 2002; Wattenberg & Briens 1999 – they applied “interest in the campaign”). Seeber & Steinbrecher (2011) found for the 2009 European Election that people who are interested in the campaign are more likely to actually go to the polls. Additionally, for the 2004 (Drew & Weaver 2006) and 2008 US Presidential Elections (Winneg 2011) studies show that campaign interest is, among others, a reliable and strong predictor for voting turnout. The higher the interest in the campaign, the higher the likelihood to actually go to the polls. Since interest in the campaign was not surveyed in the 2008 Austrian post election survey, we have to draw on campaign attention instead. In our testing models with “campaign attention” as the dependent variable, we include general political interest as the corresponding independent variable.

Political News Exposure

Finally, we turn to variables that are at the core of interest in our analysis – the media-related variables that potentially and additionally help to explain levels of voter mobilization in the 2008 Austrian elections. First, we implement the individual intensity of exposure to political news into our testing models. The existing empirical evidence regarding the mobilization effects of media and news exposure in general is rather ambiguous. For the 2004 US Presidential Elections Drew & Weaver (2006) found no significant effects of newspaper or TV news exposure on voting turnout and campaign interest among surveyed voters from Indiana. However, some evidence points, at least partially, to a positive relation between media-centered public affairs exposure and political participation. For example, Norris (2000) reported a positive relation between TV and newspaper usage in European Elections and voting turnout. For the US in 1994, Pinkleton, Austin & Fortman (1998) showed that mass media use positively predicts voting behavior. Newton (1999) found that exposure to broadsheet papers and television news was positively associated with political mobilization,

while tabloid-reading and general television use was associated with lower levels of mobilization. Additionally, de Vreese and Boomgarden (2006) showed that news media exposure to outlets with high levels of political information increases the propensity to vote. Most recently, Schuck, Vliegthart and de Vreese (2011) found that general news exposure had a moderate positive effect on voting turnout in the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections. As we also expect a high correlation between media usage and interest in and attentiveness towards the campaign, we expect news exposure to be positively related to our second mobilization indicator, the attention towards the campaign.

Hypothesis 1: The higher the exposure to political news, the higher the likelihood to be attentive towards the electoral campaign and to turn out to vote.

For further investigating the question of “how” and “under what conditions” media exposure matters, we now have to turn to the specific composition of media content, in this case to the allegedly engaging dimensions of news framing representing “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity.”

News Frames

The effects of news framing on the audience are increasingly at the center of interest in political and communication science. Instead of issue-framing, here we focus on generic framing that “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts” (de Vreese 2005: 54). From a framing research approach, characteristics of game- and conflict-centeredness, episodic reporting or negativity can be categorized as generic frames. They do not exclusively refer to specific issues, events or actors, but to the context in which objects or object clusters (e.g., events, topics, actors, election campaigns) are displayed (Lengauer 2007; see also Iyengar 1991: 2). Even though generic frames are similar to news values (e.g., conflict), they are not inherent and bound to objective characteristics of events but refer to how any object may be subjectively framed by journalists. Such generic frames may create an overall “campaign mood” on a meta-issue level and such a prevailing mood may also trigger (de)mobilizing effects among the electorate.

A few most recent studies combine content analysis and survey instruments to investigate correlations between generic media framing and political attitudes and behavior (e.g., Schuck, Vliegthart & de Vreese 2011), however, in total, consistent evidence and conclusions on media framing effects on voter mobilization remains rather scarce. Most of earlier research focused on strategy or conflict framing as independent and political cynicism as the most common dependent variable (Cappella & Jamieson 1997; de Vreese & Semetko 2002, 2004; Elenbaas & de Vreese 2008). In their study investigating the effect of conflict framing on turnout and anti-integrationist voting in the Danish 2004 Elections for the European Parliament, de Vreese and Tobiasen (2007) raise the question “what media content may then be ‘mobilizing’?” Consequently, our analysis focuses on a set of media frame indicators to model the “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity” (Lengauer 2007) aspects of campaigns and to test their impact on voter mobilization. We assume that the media apply these framing devices to attract more readers and transfer this notion to voter mobilization. We expect “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity” to be more attractive to the audience and voters than their antitheses. Consequently, we expect a mobilizing and engaging effect driven by these generic media frames. Our two-dimensional and selective approach is based on generic frames that have been discussed and empirically validated in earlier research and on a factor analysis that was conducted in the preliminary stages of this study. As an outcome, we focus on four central generic frames regarding election campaigns. Generic frames depicting game-centeredness (Kerbel, Apee & Ross

2000; Patterson 1993, 2000; Lawrence 2001; Cappella & Jamieson 1997; Plasser, Pallaver & Lengauer 2009), episodic framing (Iyengar 1991; Porto 2001), conflict (Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992; Canel, Holtz-Bacha & Mancini 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000; de Vreese & Tobiasen 2007), and negativity (Benson & Hallin 2007; Patterson 1993; Plasser, Pallaver & Lengauer 2009) serve as our conceptual as well as analytical framework. For establishing these four elements as valid indicators of entertainment and negativity, we initially conducted a factor analysis, comprising the four coded indicators, to outline their interrelationship and distinctiveness likewise (Table 1).

Table 1: Factor Analysis of Generic News Frames in the 2008 Election Coverage

Frame Indicator	Factor 1	Factor 2
Game Framing	.082	.776
Episodic Framing	-.037	.787
Negativity Framing	.819	.003
Conflict Framing	.823	.044
Factor Label	<i>Confrontational Negativity</i>	<i>Instant Entertainment</i>

Note: Coded indexes range from -1 to +1 (e.g., policy-centered vs. game-centered reporting). Two components extracted. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in three iterations. Total cumulative variance explained (Eigenvalue above 1) by the factors is 64.5 percent.

The factor analysis outlines the emergence of two rather distinct dimensions each consisting of two of the here investigated and applied generic frames. Factor 1 provides common activation levels of negativity and conflict and their antitheses in news reports. Derived from this we categorize this factor as the “confrontational negativity” dimension of news coverage. It measures the levels of constructiveness and destructiveness in the depictions of politics. The loading of factor 1 also shows that stories that predominantly focus on negative and conflictual news are less likely to be episodic and hardly linked to game-centeredness. In contrast, factor 2 shows that levels of game-centeredness and episodic framing extensively correspond in the news coverage, whereas the loading and activation of these generic frames is almost independent of the activation of the levels of negativity or conflict. As this factor represents the levels of incident- and horse race-centered, anecdotal, immediate and de-contextualized reporting, we label this as the “instant entertainment” dimension of electoral news. Factors 1 and 2 appear as distinct and complementary, however still selective, dimensions of electoral communication we will draw on in this news effect study. Now, we turn to the indicators of these two selected dimensions in electoral reporting that are applied to test the media’s function to engage the electorate.

As a point of departure we take a look at Johansson (2006), who developed a descriptive framework in which Swedish election coverage was characterized along the complementary dimensions “informative” and “engaging.” As, according to Johansson (2006), engaging campaign coverage may increase citizens’ interest in the campaign, which again may improve voter turnout, we focus here primarily on the “engaging” function of electoral coverage. We introduce a two dimensional model representing “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity” that may stimulate attention towards the campaign and voting turnout. We differentiate between levels of episodic and game-centered reporting, and the levels of conflict-centeredness and negativity in the electoral coverage.

“Instant Entertainment” in Campaign News

First, we turn to game-centered reporting or horse race journalism that is widely described as being a potential factor for attracting the audience (Iyengar, Norpoth & Hahn 2004) and thus may consequently make people more attentive towards the campaign and engage voters (Johansson 2006). Game framing is one of the most prominent indicators of the electoral media logic that can be extracted from previous research (Esser & Hemmer 2008; Patterson 1993, 2000; Lawrence 2001). It shares a great deal of common ground with the sometimes even changeably applied concepts of horse race framing (Schuck, Vliegenthart & de Vreese 2001; Strömbäck & Dimitrova 2006) or strategy framing (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Jamieson 1992; Elenbaas & de Vreese 2008). The area of overlap among these concepts, on which we focus here and which we label “game framing”, describes a portrayal of politics in a depoliticized way, lacking policy relevance and substance. Game-centered reporting is predominantly “structured around the notion that politics is a strategic game [in which] candidates compete for advantage” (Patterson 1993: 57-58).

In our understanding game-centered stories predominantly focus on aspects of political competition, horse race, strategies, tactics, and odds. Thereby, politics is portrayed as a competitive game or horse race by mostly applying sports metaphors of winners and losers and their odds in the favor of voters and their target groups. The empirical evidence towards the effects of this form of media coverage with above average audience appeal is however highly ambiguous. It has usually been linked to cynical and disaffected attitudes towards politics and election campaigns (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson 1997; Valentino, Beckmann & Buhr 2001). By narrowly conceptualizing and operationalizing game framing as references to opinion polls predicting the outcome, Schuck, Vliegenthart & de Vreese (2011), however, showed that it had no significant effect on turnout in the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections.

Here, we exclusively focus on the mobilizing effects of a more extensive notion of game framing and base our hypothesis on the heightened attractiveness of game-centered reports. Consequently, we hypothesize that game framing functions as a potential mobilizing factor that fosters the entertaining characteristics of campaigns and activates the immediate contest character. Thereby, it may invigorate the attentiveness of the electorate and encourage voters to go to the polls by suggesting that elections are a contested race and every single vote may make a difference.

HYPOTHESIS 2: The more voters are exposed to game framing in the news, the more likely they perceive the campaign as entertaining and contested and will consequently be more attentive towards the campaign and more willing to turn out to vote.

Our second indicator of “instant entertainment” is episodic framing. This indicator mainly refers to the depiction of politics as decontextualized, fast moving and instant episodes and anecdotes. This depiction may foster the notion of immediacy, instancy and currentness and thus may also heighten the attentiveness and the mobilization of voters, in contrast to more contextualized, complex, continuous and drawn-out issue debates. De Vreese (2005) identified episodic vs. thematic framing as a generic framing device that is applicable to different issues, clusters of issues or even more so “to more general features of news coverage such as journalistic conventions, norms, and news values“ (p. 56). Iyengar (1991), the pioneer of research on episodic framing, claimed that the prevalent episodic frame manifests the “hegemonic model of public communication” (p. 137) by taking “the form of a case study or event-centered report” that “depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances” (p. 14). By contrast, thematic framing contextualizes public issues and “takes the form of a ‘takeout’ or ‘backgrounder’ report” (Iyengar 1991: 14). Similar to Iyengar (1991), we define and operationalize this frame as a bipolar device ranging from “thematic” to “episodic” framing. Bennett (2009) refers to episodic framing as one of the four information biases that matter in contemporary political journalism and calls it “fragmentation” (p. 42). „As a result, the news

generally comes to us in sketchy, dramatic capsules“ (Bennett 2009: 43). Whereas episodic framing portrays politics as instant, anecdotal, and incident-centered evidence, thematic framing focuses more on the contextual understanding of public affairs. However, here we do not intend to evaluate the quality of episodic and thematic framing for the electoral process. We postulate, however, that as the nature of episodic framing reflects immediacy and recentness, we expect episodic framing to trigger attentiveness and even mobilize voters to actually go to the polls.

HYPOTHESIS 3: The more voters are exposed to episodic framing in the news, the more likely they perceive the immediate currentness of the campaign and will consequently be more attentive towards the campaign and more willing to turn out to vote.

“Confrontational Negativity” in Campaign News

Now we turn to the dimension of “confrontational negativity” which displays references to conflict or consent and good news or bad news in the depiction of election campaigns. The level of negativity refers to the overall tone of the message and capture whether the story told is thought on the whole to be intersubjectively in the good news or bad news camp (Patterson 2000; Plasser, Pallaver & Lengauer 2009). Thereby, indications of negativity are depictions of political failure, crisis, frustration, denial, neglect, deterioration, resignation, skepticism, threats, disappointment or pessimistic views. Indications of positivity are respectively depictions of political success, achievement, improvement, prosperity, enthusiasm, political assets or optimistic views (Lengauer, Esser & Berganza 2011).

The elevated appeal of negativity has been widely demonstrated in the field of cognitive psychology. People pay more attention and give more consideration to negative than to positive news (e.g. Baumeister et al. 2001; Mutz and Reeves 2005). The phenomenon that losses loom larger than gains is also documented for political psychology and political behavior (Althaus and Kim 2006; Lau 1985). What has been widely investigated in earlier research is the effect of negative campaign advertising on voting turnout (e.g., Freedman & Goldstein 1999; Goldstein & Freedman 2002; Wattenberg & Brians 1999). For the US context, by a majority these studies found a mobilizing effect of negative ads on the likelihood to turn out to vote. Referring to negative campaigning, in a survey-based study, Finkel and Geer (1998) additionally conclude that negative campaign tone is associated with greater concern about the election outcome. Although earlier media content research repeatedly and empirically refer to the prevailing status of negative reporting of politics and election campaigns (Patterson 1993, 2000; Plasser, Pallaver & Lengauer 2009), there only exist a slim body of empirical evidence on the effect of negativity in the news on voters’ electoral attitudes and behavior (e.g. Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof & Oegema 2006; Sanders & Norris 1997). Focusing on the US Senatorial race in 1990, Kahn & Kenney (1999) found that both the negativity of candidates’ commercials and of the press coverage had a mobilizing impact on voting turnout. “People are more likely to vote as the proportion of negative information in the candidates’ ads increases and as the proportion of media criticism of the candidates escalates” (p. 883). Focusing on negativity in the media, Martin (2008) exemplarily show for the 1974 US Presidential election that the proportion of negative stories increases problem awareness as well as political interest. In conjunction with the expectation that negative news attract more attention, we assume that negative news functions as a voters’ mobilizer.

HYPOTHESIS 4: The more voters are exposed to negative framing of politics in the news, the more likely they perceive the campaign as arousing and will consequently be more attentive towards the campaign and more willing to turn out to vote.

The second dimension of “confrontational negativity” investigated here is the level of conflict-centeredness in the electoral coverage in newspapers and TV. This indicator primarily asks the question: “How confrontational is the electoral race and the contest of ideas?” A news story is considered as conflict-centered when controversies or conflicts are stressed explicitly and these references are more salient than references to consensus and cooperation. Conflict-centered reporting relates to the depiction of disputes, controversies, disagreement, discordance or confrontation, whereas the consensus dimension captures portrayals of (potential) accordance, consonances, conformities, dispute settlements, agreement, willingness of cooperation, compromise and approval or reconciliation (Lengauer, Esser & Berganza 2011). Previous empirical research in media framing has impressively demonstrated that conflict is a dominant and vital frame indicator in displaying politics (Canel, Holtz-Bacha & Mancini 2007; Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000; Strömbäck & Dimitrova 2006; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden & Boumans 2011). A series of national and transnational media analyses, also for recent Austrian campaigns, show that conflict-centered reporting clearly dominates over consensus (Plasser, Pallaver & Lengauer 2009 for Austria, Italy, Germany, and the US; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden & Boumans 2011 for Netherlands and UK). De Vreese (2006) gives insights that news focus on disagreement, conflict and diverging opinions and positions provide a form of potentially mobilizing media content. Controversy and conflict framing heat up the contest and may boast the notion that something is at stake as positions apparently differ. Referring to effects of conflict framing, de Vreese and Tobiasen (2007) report significant positive effects of exposure to news media that portrayed the European elections as a conflict-laden contest on turnout for the Danish 2004 EP Elections. Additionally, Schuck, Vliegenthart & de Vreese (2011) have shown for the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections in 21 member states that conflict framing held a mobilizing effect on voters. In line with these earlier findings, we assume that conflict has positive effects on the mobilization of the electorate. It may foster the attention toward the campaign as well as voting turnout. As conflict reflects a strong contest aspect, it is expected to foster the notion that there is something at stake in the election and consequently, people may draw more attention to the campaign and may also be more likely to turn out.

HYPOTHESIS 5: The more voters are exposed to conflict framing in the news, the more likely they perceive the campaign as contested and will consequently be more attentive towards the campaign and more willing to turn out to vote.

Study Design and Method

This study applied a multi-method research design including an extensive content analysis of the political newspaper and TV coverage during the final six weeks of the 2008 Austrian election campaign as well as a representative post election survey among eligible voters. In our basic explanatory models (model 1) regarding turnout and campaign attention, we included all eligible voters. In the stepwise, explanatory models we only included respondents who actually gathered political information from media outlets we covered in our content analysis. By doing so, we are able to concurrently investigate and contrast the potential effects of general exposure to political news and the established indicators of media framing: game, episodic framing, negativity, and conflict.

Post Election Survey

In order to establish a direct link between political media content and individual exposure to this content, we utilize the post election survey that was conducted in the aftermath of the 2008 Austrian Parliamentary Elections. The post election survey was directed by the Demand Side Team of the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES). The fieldwork of the survey was conducted as face-to-face interviews (CAPI) by GfK-Austria and comprised 1,165 people

from the Austrian electorate. The sample was weighted to display an appropriate distribution of gender, age, education, occupation, province and city-size. A well documented problem of turnout questions in election surveys is the over-reporting and a turnout bias (e.g. Duff et al. 2007). However, the results of our study are not genuinely biased by over-reporting, as the surveyed turnout lies by 85.4 percent, which is equivalent to a moderate level of over-reporting of 4.5 percentage points (80.9 percent of votes cast).

Media Content Analysis

The applied media content analysis comprises six major Austrian daily, national newspapers with the highest readership (Kronen Zeitung, Kleine Zeitung, Kurier, Österreich, Der Standard, Die Presse) and the two major TV evening newscasts in the private and public service segment with the highest viewership (ATV Aktuell 19:20 Uhr; ORF Zeit im Bild 19:30 Uhr). The analysis includes all news reports, interviews, editorials and letters to the editor on Austrian domestic and foreign politics. The selection criterion is exclusively topic-driven and no sectional restrictions are applied. This content analysis focuses on the final six weeks of the 2008 Austrian election campaign (Sunday, August 17 to Saturday, September 27, 2008). In total, 6,773 news items have been identified and coded.¹ The validity test regarding the applied media frame variables showed an average researcher-coder concordance of 0.84. The average Holsti measure for intercoder reliability of the applied framing variables varied from 0.72 (episodic), 0.76 (conflict), 0.77 (negativity) to 0.78 (game). The media content analysis was conducted by the Media Analysis Team of the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES).

Exposure Measures

Levels of game-centeredness, episodic reporting, conflict and negativity were each coded on a tripartite Likert-scale ranging from -1 (predominantly policy-centered; thematic, consensus-centered, positive in tone), 0 (ambivalent or not applicable) to +1 (predominantly game-centered, episodic, negative in tone, conflict-centered). These absolute measures are the point of departure for establishing an integrative measure which weights actual media content with individual exposure to this content. Thereby, the individual exposure to political news regarding the eight analyzed media outlets is compiled for each respondent and transferred into a score ranging from 0 (never) to 1 (on a daily basis). This results in an additive, individual political news exposure score that is the basis for the media framing measures. For the binary logistic regression models including framing exposure scores (models 3-6), we computed a weighted additive index of framing exposure. By doing so, the news outlet scores (for all eight investigated outlets) ranging from -1 to +1 on conflict, negativity, episodic framing and game-centeredness were weighted by the individual exposure levels to political news in the eight analyzed media outlets. The result is a single and individual measure for the actual and individual exposure to game (game exposure score - GES), episodic reporting (episodic exposure score - EES), negativity (negativity exposure score - NES), and conflict (conflict exposure score - CES) (see calculation example in Table 5 in the Appendix).

Hypothesis Testing Logic

Starting from there, we computed multilevel binary logistic regression models with turnout (yes=1/no=0) and attention to the campaign (high=1/low=0) as the dependent variables. Our models follow a stepwise procedure (see Seeber & Steinbrecher 2011). In our first and basic model (Model 1), we explain voting turnout and the campaign attention by including sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age and education) as well as individual political

¹ Kronen Zeitung (N=1217); Kleine Zeitung (N=876); Kurier (N=977); Österreich (N=968); Der Standard (N=1113); Die Presse (N=1207); ATV Aktuell (N=131); ORF Zeit im Bild (N=284).

predispositions (political efficacy, government approval, party identification and trust in politics) as well as the attention towards the election campaign (for the turnout model) and the interest in politics (for the campaign attention model). All nominal and ordinal variables have been converted into dichotomous dummy variables. Due to survey data limitations we have to rely on a single-item question regarding political efficacy which asked whether people think who they vote for does or doesn't make a big difference on a scale from 1 to 5 which was dichotomized (see Appendix). We also control for government approval, which might be a specific proxy for satisfaction with politics. Government approval rates were dichotomized into a two-dimensional measure (with the reference group 1 – approval; and 0 – disapproval). For measuring party identification, the respondents were asked if they usually think of themselves as being close to any particular political party (1=yes, 0=no). The applied measure of trust in politics consists of a four-item trust index containing reported levels of trust toward the national parliament, the government, political parties and politicians. Finally, the original four- and five-point scales measuring campaign attention and interest in politics were dichotomized to “closely” (1; reference group) and “not closely” (0) for campaign attention and to “high interest” (1; reference group) and “low interest” (0) for political interest.

The core independent variable regarding media effects in model 2 is exposure to political news. Respondents indicated for all possible newspapers, news magazines, TV newscasts and radio news shows how frequently they use any of these in an average week to retrieve political news (daily, several times a week, rarely, never). We recoded these answers in a normalized index from 0 (never) to 1 (daily). For this unweighted exposure to political news we computed a simple additive political news exposure score (*PES*) representing the normalized indices for all reported news outlets the respondents used for gathering political information. In the subsequent models 3 to 6 we comparatively investigate to what extent specific media framing exposure (*GES*, *EES*, *NES*, and *CES*) leads to an increase of the explanatory power of our regression models referring to turnout and campaign attention.

Findings

We start with the descriptive analysis of our media content analysis, as these data provide the basis for our media effects model. As Table 2 illustrates, political news in national newspapers and TV evening newscasts in the 2008 election campaign is clearly dominated by an episodic focus instead of a contextualized, thematic focus (episodic score=.434). Negativity as well as conflict-centeredness also prevails over positive or consensus-centered media framing (negativity score=.399; conflict score=.270). Thus, “confrontational negativity” is a dominant and prevailing feature of campaign coverage in Austria in all investigated media outlets. The same holds true for episodic framing, whereas game framing is only prevalent in the tabloid paper Österreich (game score=.214) and the private TV newscast ATV Aktuell (game score=.298). In all other investigated media outlets policy-centered reporting prevails over game-centered reporting. Whereas the dominant levels of “confrontational negativity” are comparable for all investigated media segments (quality press vs. tabloid press; private vs. public service TV) and formats (TV and newspapers), we find the lowest “instant entertainment” scores in the national quality papers (Die Presse, Der Standard) and the public service TV news (ORF Zeit im Bild) and the highest scores in the tabloid paper Österreich and the private TV newscast ATV Aktuell.

Table 2:
 “Instant Entertainment” and “Confrontational Negativity” in the 2008 Campaign Coverage

Media Framing Scores (-1 to +1)		“Instant Entertainment”		“Confrontational Negativity”	
		Game Score	Episodic Score	Negativity Score	Conflict Score
All Media Outlets (total)		-.070	.434	.399	.270
Newspapers	Kronen Zeitung	-.023	.619	.501	.325
	Österreich	.214	.614	.344	.293
	Kurier	-.094	.427	.377	.210
	Kleine Zeitung	-.026	.614	.414	.243
	Der Standard	-.233	.188	.373	.273
	Die Presse	-.223	.225	.368	.281
TV	ORF Zeit im Bild 19:30 Uhr	-.162	.317	.359	.208
News	ATV Aktuell 19:20 Uhr	.298	.489	.519	.221

These outlined levels and differentiations regarding “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity” framing in the Austrian news lay the ground for investigating their impact on voting turnout and campaign attention. Consequently, we build these reported framing scores into our survey measure of individual political news exposure in order to appropriately assess the impact of news framing on the individual propensity to vote and the attention in the campaign. In Table 3 the stepwise, multilevel binary regression models explaining campaign attention (dependent variable) are outlined. Model 1 represents the basic explanatory configuration of socio demographics and individual civic orientations (independent variables). Model 2 additionally includes the general exposure to political news in mass media (radio, television, newspapers). Models 3 to 6 refer to media content related and individual frame exposure regarding the levels of game-centeredness, episodic reporting, negativity, and conflict-centeredness.

Table 3:
Multilevel Binary Logistic Regression Models Explaining News Framing Effects on Campaign Attention

Dependent Variable: Campaign Attention (1 = high; 0 = low)		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
		(SE)	(SE)	(SE)	(SE)	(SE)	(SE)
Constant		- 1.589*** (.264)	4.515*** (.992)	-1.470*** (.267)	- 1.919*** (.317)	- 1.914*** (.317)	- 1.917*** (.315)
Socio Demo- graphics	Age	.001 (.004)	.005 (.004)	.001 (.004)	.001 (.004)	.001 (.004)	.001 (.004)
	Gender	-.064 (.144)	.026 (.148)	-.123 (.147)	-.111 (.147)	-.108 (.147)	-.107 (.147)
	Education	.107 (.162)	.154 (.166)	.034 (.173)	.135 (.166)	.097 (.166)	.091 (.166)
Civic Orient- ations	Political Efficacy	.302 (.179)	.327 (.183)	.255 (.182)	.320 (.183)	.307 (.182)	.305 (.182)
	Government Approval	-.010 (.157)	-.089 (.161)	.035 (.161)	.022 (.161)	.029 (.161)	.031 (.161)
	Party Identi- fication	.973*** (.148)	.980*** (.152)	1.002*** (.152)	1.017*** (.152)	1.023*** (.152)	1.019*** (.152)
	Trust in Politics	.032 (.146)	.015 (.149)	.022 (.150)	.015 (.150)	.006 (.150)	.009 (.150)
	Interest in Politics	1.569*** (.152)	1.462*** (.156)	1.497*** (.156)	1.466*** (.156)	1.447*** (.157)	1.445*** (.157)
News Exposure	Political News Exposure (PES)		.058*** (.009)				
News Framing Exposure	Game Exposure (GES)			-.790 (.573)			
	Episodic Exposure (EES)				.421** (.160)		
	Negativity Exposure (NES)					.501** (.192)	
	Conflict Exposure (CES)						.806** (.303)
Adjusted R-Square (Nagelkerke)		.275	.318	.275	.280	.280	.280
Incremental R-Square			+4.3%** *	+/-0%	+0.5%**	+0.5%**	+0.5%**

Log Restricted-Likelihood	1205.636	1162.851	1156.318	1151.312	1151.413	1151.124
Number of Valid Cases	1,055	1,055	1,011	1,011	1,011	1,011

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ level.

The basic model 1 is our point of departure for explaining campaign attention. It includes sociodemographic characteristics and civic orientations. These predictors almost explain 28 percent of the variance regarding campaign attention in the 2008 Austrian parliamentary elections. The most influential and statistically significant predictors of campaign attention in this starting model are interest in politics and party identification. All other civic orientations and sociodemographics tested remain ineffective in reliably predicting campaign attention. The more voters in Austria are interested in politics and see themselves as close to a political party, the more they are attentive towards the campaign. This also holds true for the extended models 2 to 6, which additionally incorporate news exposure and news frame exposure effects. Model 2, additionally considering the individual exposure to political news in mass media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines), shows that the intensity of news exposure is moderately, however positively, related to the attention in the campaign. The more intensely Austrian voters expose themselves to political news in mass media, the more they are interested in the campaign. This positive correlation seems to be rather self-evident and reciprocal in nature. Hypothesis 1, postulating that news exposure increases campaign attention, is confirmed. The explanatory power of the model regarding attention in the campaign increases by 4.3 percent when we additionally consider the intensity of news exposure. Referring to the media variables tested in models 2 to 6, the intensity of news exposure is the most influential media predictor of campaign attention. Models 3 to 6 show that news frames regarding instant entertainment and confrontational negativity hold only moderate and partial power to influence campaign attention.

Model 3 outlines that exposure to game framing has no significant impact on the attention devoted to the campaign. Austrian voters are insensitive to news impulses of game-centered reporting when it comes to their attention in the campaign. Thus, hypothesis 2, postulating that game framing increases the attention toward the campaign, has to be refuted. Exposure to game-centered reporting does neither increase nor decrease campaign attention.

Different from that, exposure to episodic, negative and conflict framing increases the attention in the campaign on a statistically significant level (models 4 to 6). The explanatory power of these models regarding the campaign attention increases slightly by 0.5 percent. Consequently, hypotheses 3 to 5, postulating that episodic, negative and conflict framing increase the attention toward the campaign, are moderately confirmed. To summarize, we find that framing indicators representing “confrontational negativity” have a positive impact on the attentiveness towards the campaign, whereas “instant entertainment” only partially holds the potential to boost the attention in the campaign. Anecdotal episodes, negativity, and controversies obviously stimulate voters, whereas horse race and strategy reporting (game) is neither effective in stimulating nor de-stimulating the attention of Austrian voters.

Having outlined the effects of news exposure and news framing on the attention in the campaign on the attitudinal level, we now turn to potential news effects on the behavioral level and look at the predictors of voting turnout in the 2008 Austrian national elections. In Table 4 the stepwise, multilevel binary regression model, explaining voting turnout, is outlined. The dependent variable of these models is voting turnout (yes/no). Again, the starting model 1 comprises sociodemographic characteristics, individual civic orientations and campaign attention. It explains 28 percent of the variance in voting turnout in Austria in 2008.

The most influential (positive) predictors of voting turnout in this basic explanatory model are party identification, campaign attention, trust in politics and political efficacy. The closer Austrian voters are to political parties, the more attentive they are towards the campaign, the more they trust political institutions, and the more they think that it does make a difference whom to vote for, the more they are willing to actually go to the polls. From this statistical point of view, sociodemographics are non-factors in explaining voting turnout in Austria, but civic orientations are decisive.

Table 4:
Multilevel Binary Logistic Regression Models Explaining News Framing Effects on Voting Turnout

Dependent Variable: Voting Turnout - yes (1), no (0)		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
		(SE)	(SE)	(SE)	(SE)	(SE)	(SE)
Constant		-.182 (.355)	3.251* (1.575)	-.120 (.375)	-.633 (.434)	-.781 (.430)	-.739 (.432)
Socio Demo- graphics	Age	.007 (.006)	.009 (.006)	.002 (.007)	.007 (.007)	.007 (.007)	.007 (.007)
	Gender	-.177 (.208)	-.167 (.209)	-.092 (.219)	-.097 (.219)	-.079 (.220)	-.076 (.220)
	Education	.143 (.239)	.085 (.241)	-.013 (.261)	.160 (.251)	.092 (.253)	.088 (.254)
Civic Orien- tations	Political Efficacy	.818*** (.213)	.807*** (.215)	.792*** (.223)	.833*** (.225)	.841*** (.225)	.833*** (.225)
	Government Approval	.103 (.253)	.027 (.255)	.274 (.276)	.240 (.276)	.226 (.277)	.234 (.276)
	Party Identificatio n	1.496*** (.289)	1.498*** (.289)	1.442*** (.301)	1.488*** (.299)	1.502*** (.300)	1.497*** (.300)
	Trust in Politics	.912*** (.219)	.897*** (.220)	1.135*** (.235)	1.118*** (.235)	1.093*** (.236)	1.102*** (.236)
Campaig n Attention	Attention towards the Campaign	1.246*** (.266)	1.156*** (.269)	1.186** (.277)	1.175*** (.277)	1.154*** (.278)	1.157*** (.277)
News Exposure	Political News Exposure (PES)		.031* (.014)				
News Framing Exposure	Game Exposure (GES)			-2.035* (.865)			
	Episodic Exposure (EES)				.440 (.242)		
	Negativity Exposure (NES)					.750* (.297)	
	Conflict Exposure (CES)						1.097* (.475)
	Adjusted R-Square (Nagelkerke)	.282	.290	.307	.303	.308	.307
Incremental R-Square		+0.8%*	+2.5%*	+2.1%	+2.6%*	+2.5%*	
Log Restricted- Likelihood	625.784	620.484	569.515	571.731	568.492	569.595	

Number of Valid Cases	1,049	1,049	1,005	1,005	1,005	1,005
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Note: ***p<0.001; **p<0.01, *p<0.05 level.

Now we proceed to model 2, which additionally includes individual political news exposure levels (political news exposure scores – PES). This model has an increased explanatory power for turnout of 0.8 percent. Consequently, hypothesis 1, postulating that voting turnout is increased by higher levels of news exposure, is moderately confirmed. As the sheer exposure level to political news as such does not account for a big difference referring to voting turnout, we expand our search for news effects to a more sophisticated and specific level – the level of actual content characteristics of the electoral coverage. Again, we turn our focus to the framing of politics along the dimensions of “instant entertainment” and “confrontational negativity.” To avoid multicollinearity problems, we decided not to simultaneously include all media framing exposure variable at once in the model. Instead, we contrast them in a stepwise and thus competing way. In model 3, we add the individual game exposure score (GES) as an explanatory variable to our basic model. It shows that, in contrast to general political news exposure, game framing exposure is clearly negatively associated with voting turnout in Austria. The more voters are exposed to game-centered reporting in the Austrian newspapers and on TV news, the more they abstain from voting. The explanatory power of this model increases by 2.5 percent in comparison to our model resting on sociodemographics and civic orientations only. Therefore, hypothesis 2, postulating a positive relationship between game framing and voting turnout, has to be rejected, as game framing appears to even be a demobilizer regarding voting turnout.

The second dimension of “instant entertainment”, episodic framing, reveals no significant impact on voting turnout (see model 4). Hypothesis 3, assuming that episodic framing would higher levels of turnout, has to be refuted as well. Finally, we test the effects of framing regarding “confrontational negativity” in models 5 and 6. Model 5 adds the individual negativity exposure score (NES) as an explanatory factor. This model considering negative framing exposure gains an increase of explanatory power regarding turnout of 2.6 percent. People who are more heavily exposed to negative news on politics during the election campaign, prove to be more willing to go to the polls. Media negativity turns out to be an effective mobilizer in Austrian election campaigns. So does conflict-centered reporting. Considering the exposure to conflict framing increases the explanatory power of model 6 regarding turnout by 2.5 percent. Hypotheses 4 and 5 are thus confirmed in regard to voting turnout. Both indicators of “confrontational negativity” in the news are mobilizing factors when it comes to voting turnout.

To summarize, we find that news frames representing “confrontational negativity” clearly mobilize voters. On the other hand, news frames, here representing “instant entertainment” tend to even demobilize voters as game framing shows a reverse effect on voting turnout and episodic framing is non-effective regarding turnout. Additionally, the effects of the exposure to specific news frames are more significant than the effects of general news exposure in regard to voting turnout.

Taking the results referring to the campaign attention and voting turnout together, we can state that general exposure towards political news appears to moderately turn voters on, whereas exposure to game framing turns voters off. While episodic framing marginally increases the attention toward the campaign, it is non-effective regarding turnout. Concluding, regarding the elements of “instant entertainment” in the media coverage we find ambiguous evidence. Whereas game framing is a demobilizer on the behavioral level, episodic framing holds the power to moderately mobilize on the attitudinal level of campaign attention. Concerning the elements of “confrontational negativity”, we find clear indications that both indicators, negativity and conflict-centeredness, are mobilizers on both levels, the attitudinal and the behavioral level. The more negative and conflict-centered the coverage, the more people pay attention and the more they are willing to actually go to the polls.

Conclusion and Discussion

The here presented study investigated news effects on the (de)mobilization of the electorate in the 2008 Austrian Parliamentary Elections on two different levels: Firstly, the general exposure to political news; secondly, the specific content characteristics that refer to instant entertainment and confrontational negativity. We hypothesized that such framing devices would rather engage voters than turning them off by connoting the currentness of the campaign, that “something is at stake,” that the campaign is entertaining, arousing and contested. Indeed, we find mobilizing effects on the attitudinal as well as on the behavioral level as far as conflict and negative framing of political news are concerned. However, our results also show that entertaining and decontextualizing elements of game and episodic framing do not hold mobilizing power, but rather turn voters off. Our study enhances empirical evidence on media effects by applying an exposure-weighted and content-related measure of news effects and by showing that the media hold mobilizing and demobilizing power at the same time. Whereas general political news exposure holds robust but moderate engaging potential, the effectiveness of news framing exposure is highly dependent on the specific content-related stimulus.

These results hold some relevant implications for political and electoral communication. We may conclude that framing campaigns as confrontational and negative may work not only for the media to attract audience, but also for democracy as it stimulates and activates voters. On the other hand, media framing regarding instant entertainment may also work for the media to maximize their audiences, however, these framing devices do not work for democracy, as they potentially turn voters off. Above all, media’s framing of politics as a strategic game and horse race potentially contributes to the erosion of political activation and participation.

Our study is, however, characterized by some limitations. It has a static analytical focus and is not able to depict changes of the propensity to vote and of the attention that is devoted to the campaign over time. Further research on media framing should apply dynamic panel designs to enhance the focus on changes over time. Additional investigations on media framing exposure and thus research designs that combine content analyses and surveys are needed to enhance and broaden the empirical evidence in different electoral and national settings. Future research may also further intensify investigations on actual and specific content of political and campaign coverage in the media as a vital factor for explaining variations in voting turnout or other areas of political participation. Other prevalent phenomena of contemporary campaign coverage, such as personalization or dramatization should also be tested for their effectiveness in stimulating and de-stimulating voters.

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Appendix

Calculation Example for the Individual Game Exposure Score (GES):

Voter A reads “Kronen Zeitung” on a daily basis (score 1), “Österreich” only rarely (score 0.33), Kurier also only rarely (score 0.33), Kleine Zeitung never (score 0), “Der Standard” never (score 0), “Die Presse” never (score 0), ORF Zeit im Bild on a daily basis (score 1) and ATV Aktuell rarely (score 0.33). These individual outlet exposure scores are weighted with and thus multiplied by the news outlet specific game framing scores displayed in Table 2. The sum of these weighted scores results in the individual game exposure score (GES). For example, the individual game exposure score (GES) for voter A is -0.047 (see Table 5). This individual game exposure score is then integrated into the post election survey data set, which builds the basis for all regression analyses, explaining media effects on voting turnout.

Table 5: Calculation Example for Game Exposure Score (GES)

Voter A	Media Outlet	Outlet Exposure	Outlet Game Framing Score	Game Exposure Score Addends
	Kronen Zeitung	1	-0.023	-0.023
	Österreich	0.33	+0.214	+0.071
	Kurier	0.33	-0.094	-0.031
	Kleine Zeitung	0	-0.026	+/-0
	Der Standard	0	-0.233	+/-0
	Die Presse	0	-0.223	+/-0
	ORF Zeit im Bild	1	-0.162	-0.162
	ATV Aktuell	0.33	0.298	+0.098
Game Exposure Score for Voter A				-0.047

Overview of Survey Variables

Turnout: Variable indicating if respondent voted; 1=yes, 0=no

Campaign Attention: A four-point scale recoded into two categories indicating how closely the respondents followed the campaign; 1=high, 0=low.

Age: measured in years

Gender: male =1; female =0

Education: Multi-item nominal scale dichotomized in “A level education or university degrees” (1) and “lower education levels” (0)

Political efficacy: A single-item indicating whether people think who they vote for makes a difference or not reaching from 1 (makes a big difference) to 5 (doesn't make any difference). Dichotomized to 1 (makes a difference) and 0 (makes no difference).

Government approval: A single item indicating whether respondents think the coalition did a good job or a bad job reaching from 1 (very good job) to 4 (very bad job). Recoded into a two-dimensional measure of Government approval; 1 =approval, 0 = disapproval.

Party Identification: One item indicating if respondents usually think of themselves as being close to any particular political party; 1=yes, 0=no.

Trust in politics: A four-item trust index containing levels of trust toward the national parliament, the government, political parties and politicians reaching from 1 (no trust at all) to 11 (complete trust). Dichotomized in 1 (high trust) and 0 (low trust).

Interest in politics: A five-item question ranging from 1 (very high interest) to 5 (no interest). Dichotomized in 1 (high) and 0 (low).

Political News Exposure (PES): A twelve item index indicating how often respondents read newspapers reaching from 1 (daily) to 4 (never). Recoded in a normalized index from 0 (never) to 1 (daily) and computed into an additive political news exposure score (PES) by adding up the normalized indices of each used news outlet.