

# The Effects of Face-To-Face Conversations on Polarization: Evidence from a Quasi-Experiment

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## Abstract

Do conversations between like-minded individuals exacerbate political polarization whereas conversations between contrary-minded individuals reduce it? We examine this question by exploiting a quasi-experiment in Germany, in which strangers were paired for unobserved in-person meetings based on their political views. We find that meeting a person with a similar political opinion leads to more extreme political views. In contrast, talking to a contrary-minded person reduces negative attitudes towards those with opposing political opinions and improves the perception of social cohesion. However, political views remain unaffected. Together, the results suggest that political in-person conversations among like-minded individuals may increase polarization of views and thus widen the gap between ideological groups, while conversations among contrary-minded individuals can reduce affective but not ideological polarization.

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# 1 Introduction

Political polarization has grown in many countries over recent years: Societies have become increasingly divided into distinct ideological groups (Gentzkow, 2016; PEW, 2014) and animosity between these groups has risen to a very high level (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Boxell et al., 2020). Besides this hostility being detrimental in itself, these trends additionally endanger social cohesion, the functioning of democracy and even labor markets (Iyengar et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding what causes and how to counteract them is crucial. One frequently mentioned candidate is interpersonal interaction: On the one hand, there is the long-standing hypothesis that staying among like-minded individuals and only exchanging only one-sided views lead to mutual reconfirmation and thus more polarization (Sunstein, 2009). On the other hand, there is the hope that polarization can be counteracted when people step out of their like-minded peer group and meet individuals who hold opposing views.

A related dynamic is investigated by a strand of research on echo chambers in (social) media. This literature thoroughly examines the impact of disproportionally consuming like-minded in contrast to contrary-minded views on polarization (e.g., Levy, 2021; Peterson et al., 2021). However, we still lack rigorous evidence on the effects of in-person conversations between like-minded and contrary-minded persons. Extending the analysis to personal interactions seems crucial, in particular in light of the sheer amount of in-person conversations in daily life and their great impact on behavior, preferences and beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper we therefore study the effects of face-to-face conversations among politically like- and among politically contrary-minded individuals using a quasi-experimental field setting. We analyze the impact on different dimensions of political polarization and social cohesion: (i) ideological polarization, defined as polarization towards more extreme political views; (ii) affective polarization, defined as the animosity towards those with opposing political views; and (iii) the general perception of social cohesion. To estimate the effects, we leverage the structure of a nationwide newspaper initiative called *Germany Talks* and complement it with survey data. Based on political preferences, two strangers are matched for a private face-to-face meeting.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For example, there is a long tradition of work on the effects of intergroup interaction following Allport (1954). See Paluck et al. (2019) and Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) for overviews. Other illustrations of the impact of personal interactions are Pons (2018) and Broockman and Kalla (2016) who show that even very short conversations in the context of door-to-door canvassing lead to changes of political preferences and stereotypes.

<sup>2</sup>Since its launch in Germany in 2017, the program *My Country Talks* has expanded worldwide. To date, there have been interventions of the same form in many countries and regions, among others the USA (*America*

These conversations are not moderated and no topics of discussion are predefined, allowing the meetings to develop freely. We measured survey outcomes one week after the conversations.

To identify the effects of having a face-to-face conversation, we exploit a plausibly exogenous variation in meeting availability. After registration, an algorithm matched two participants based on their political views. Subsequently, participants received an email in which their proposed partner was introduced. As soon as one participant accepted the proposed match, the partner was notified. If both participants accepted, contact was established and they could arrange their meeting. If at least one person did not accept, contact was not established and no meeting took place. The identification relies on two steps: First, we restrict the analysis to those participants who accepted their partner first (*first-accepters*). This circumvents self-selection into meetings as not the first-accepters themselves but their partners decide whether contact is established and a meeting can be arranged (treatment) or no contact is established and no meeting takes place (control). Second, in order to ensure the partner's decision does not depend on the first-accepter, we exploit the fact that all information the partner had about the first-accepter when taking the decision is contained in the introductory email. Thus, controlling for the information about the first-accepter included in the email achieves conditional random assignment of the first-accepters to treatment and control group. This approach identifies the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect of a face-to-face conversation.

To distinguish between the effects of in-person conversations with like-minded and with contrary-minded partners, we consider two treatment conditions and estimate respective ITT effects separately. Assignment to the two conditions is determined by the partners' difference in political views that were used for the matching.<sup>3</sup> The like-minded treatment and control groups contain those first-accepters in the sample, who were matched with a like-minded partner with similar political views. The contrary-minded treatment and control groups are composed of those who were matched with a contrary-minded partner with opposing political views. Our sample comprises 775 participants with a like- and 748 participants with a contrary-minded partner.

This paper has three main results. The first set of findings considers the effect on ideological *Talks*) and Europe (*Europe Talks*). Further countries are: Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

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<sup>3</sup>Conceptually, there are two distinct treatment and control groups within the same "framework" as the non-random matching to the partner was before the (conditionally exogenous) assignment to treatment and control.

polarization, defined as polarization in political views towards more extreme positions.<sup>4</sup> We find that in-person conversations with like-minded partners increase ideological polarization, while there is no effect for contrary-minded partners. We construct two ideological polarization measures that both consider change in the overall political opinion - defined as a vector of eleven single political attitudes - towards more extreme views: the first one captures the change towards extreme views in terms of *absolute* (dis-)agreement levels on the eleven policy statements. The second one measures the change towards extreme views *relative* to the population, defined as movement away from the average opinion of the respective sample. The ITT effects of having a conversation with a like-minded partner are 0.286 standard deviations more absolute and 0.279 standard deviations more relative extreme answers. By contrast, deliberating with a contrary-minded person does not affect ideological polarization. Further analysis shows that these null effects for contrary-minded conversations do not hide opposing polarizing ("backlash") and depolarizing adjustments that cancel each other out. Further, we detect no sign that the non-adjustment is driven by avoidance of contentious topics or shorter meeting durations. Instead, disagreement on a topic increases the likelihood of discussion and the duration of contrary-minded meetings is 20% (30 minutes) longer. Thus, contrary-minded partners discuss topics on which they disagree, but do not react to this by adapting their own opinion.

Our second set of results deals with the effect on affective polarization. In contrast to the finding on ideological polarization, we find that face-to-face conversations with contrary-minded partners reduce affective polarization while meeting a person with similar views does not have any significant impact. While affective polarization is usually defined as the animosity towards partisans of the opposing party, Orr and Huber (2020) show that partisan aversion mostly reflects hostility between people with different policy views, and not hostility based on partisanship per se.<sup>5</sup> In line with this, we measure affective polarization by considering aversion towards people who have very different policy views in the form of stereotypes and willingness to engage in personal contact. Using a principal component analysis on all stereotypes, we find a significant reduction by 0.39 standard deviations for those who met a contrary-minded

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<sup>4</sup>In some cases, the term *issue polarization* is used when investigating changes in views (e.g., Mason, 2015; Allcott et al., 2020).

<sup>5</sup>First, Orr and Huber (2020) find that differences in policy preferences generally lead to stronger aversion than differences in partisanship. Second, when additionally providing alignment in partisanship, aversion based on policy preferences does not change much. By contrast, when providing alignment in policy preferences, aversion based on partisanship strongly declines.

partner. This is associated with a (insignificant) higher willingness to engage in personal contact with a person with opposing views of 0.146 standard deviations. In the case of a like-minded partner, there is a (insignificant) tendency towards reinforcement of stereotypes and a reduction of willingness. When summarizing the impact on all measures into one index, contrary-minded conversations reduce affective polarization by 0.352 standard deviations, while the estimates for like-minded conversations are positive yet insignificant.

Our third set of findings is that conversations with contrary-minded partners improve the perception of social cohesion. Having established the impacts of in-person conversations on attitudes towards contrary-minded individuals, we turn attention to whether these effects extend to the perception of all members of the society. To assess this impact, we estimate the effects on perceptions whether fellow society members are trustworthy and pro-social. The significant ITT estimates for contrary-minded partners are 0.274 and 0.245 standard deviations, respectively. Meetings with like-minded partners show a similar, albeit weaker and insignificant tendency.

Combined, the results paint a coherent picture and provide important insights about the role of in-person conversations with respect to political polarization. On the one hand, we find that meetings with like-minded partners lead to more extreme views while they do not reduce affective polarization or bolster the perception of social cohesion. These findings suggest that the geographical clustering of people who have similar views - as reported by Brown and Enos (2021) and Bishop (2009) - may widen the ideological gap between political groups further.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, this paper also offers a potential solution to fight this vicious polarizing circle. We show that conversations with contrary-minded partners reduce affective polarization and improve the perception of social cohesion, although they do not decrease ideological polarization. Thus, providing people with the possibility to meet a contrary-minded person can reduce hostility across ideological groups, but does not narrow the ideological gap.

This paper relates to three strands of literature in economics. First, we contribute to research investigating the concept of echo chambers and one-sided information provision in the context of (social) media (see e.g., Pariser, 2011; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2011; Prior, 2013; Flaxman et al., 2016; Halberstam and Knight, 2016; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017; Sunstein, 2018; Beam et al., 2018; Bail et al., 2018; Eady et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2021; Levy, 2021). In a recent

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<sup>6</sup>Moreover, the tendency towards a lesser willingness for personal contact with contrary-minded individuals suggests that even the unwillingness to cross that ideological gap to interact with those who have different opinions may become greater.

paper, Allcott et al. (2020) show that the deactivation of Facebook leads to a reduction of ideological, but not affective polarization. By contrast, Levy (2021) finds that exposure to counter-attitudinal news on Facebook reduces affective polarization, but does not shift political opinions. Bail et al. (2018) even find a "backlash" effect of opinions when being confronted with opposing views on social media. We contribute to this literature by extending the analysis from (social) media to in-person information exchange within and across political groups.

Second, we contribute to research exploring interventions against political polarization. Most closely related, there is research on the impact of deliberative polls that gather individuals to participate in a mini-public for structured group deliberations (Fishkin et al., 2021; Schkade et al., 2007).<sup>7</sup> Further related interventions use priming of national identity (Levendusky, 2018), correction of misperceptions (Voelkel et al., 2021), meditation (Simonsson and Marks, 2020), making outparty friendships more salient (Voelkel et al., 2021) or narrative writing (Warner et al., 2020). We advance the literature by being the first to study the impact of one-on-one in-person discussions that are not guided or observed but in a natural environment, which is an important feature as the way in which conversations are held matters (Kalla and Brookman, 2020). In comparison to deliberative pollings, the conversations are more similar to every-day conversations. In addition, our design enables us to compare in-person conversations among contrary- and like-minded individuals within one quasi-experimental setup.

Finally, the paper contributes to the literature investigating whether interaction reduces inter-group prejudice. This research builds up on the contact hypothesis by Allport (1954), finding extensive evidence on the power of inter-group contact for various types of segregation. For example, Rao (2019) and Lowe (2021) study the effect of contact between different castes in India.<sup>8</sup> Meta analyses by Paluck et al. (2019) and Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) find that contact generally reduces prejudice. However, none of these studies investigate the effect of *ideological* segregation. Moreover, Paluck (2016) points out that there is a scarcity of studies that use real-world interventions with adults to test the causal effect of inter-group contact.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we briefly introduce the intervention *Germany Talks* and the political situation when it took place. Section 3 describes the quasi-experimental setting and our sample. In Section 4 we present the empirical strategy.

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<sup>7</sup>More generally, these studies explore the concept of deliberative democracy (e.g., Habermas, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>Other studies estimating the effect of inter-group contact include Boisjoly et al. (2006), Burns et al. (2015), Finseraas and Kotsadam (2017), Scacco and Warren (2018), or Carrell et al. (2015).

Sections 5, 6 and 7 report our results, before Section 8 concludes.

## 2 Background

This study focuses on in-person conversations that took place within the scope of the intervention *Germany Talks* in 2018. In this section, we briefly describe the political situation in Germany in 2018 and introduce the intervention *Germany Talks*.

**Political Situation.** In 2018 the political divide was perceived as large in Germany. With the strong increase of asylum seekers 2015/16, the 2013 founded right-wing party "Alternative für Deutschland" (translation: Alternative for Germany) had quickly gained popularity and received with 12.6% the third highest vote in the federal election 2017. For the first time since WWII, a party that was more right-leaning than the established parties, such as the socially conservative Christian Democratic Union or the libertarian Free Democratic Party, had entered the German parliament, leading to a perceived overall shift to the right. Likewise, similar to other countries like the US (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015), animosity between partisans was at an alarming level, even exceeding aversion based on nationality (Helbling and Jungkunz, 2020). This caused the federal president of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, to state in his yearly Christmas address: "Wherever you look - especially on social media - we see hate; there is shouting and daily outrage. I feel that we Germans are spending less and less time talking to each other. And even less time listening to each other."

**Germany Talks** *Germany Talks* was initiated by Germany's largest weekly newspaper DIE ZEIT in 2017 as a response to the contemporary political situation in Germany. The intention behind the intervention was to enable interpersonal conversations across political camps. Since its foundation, it has established itself as a yearly conducted institution with thousands of people talking to each other. Even though it has its roots in Germany, the *My Country Talks* program has since expanded to other regions and countries all over the world, among others the USA (*America Talks*) and Europe (*Europe Talks*). In total, the intervention has taken place in more than 30 countries with more than 170,000 participants until today.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Source: <https://www.mycountrytalks.org>, on September 16 2021

The basic mechanism of *Germany Talks* is simple: Based on their political views, participants are matched to a partner. If both partners agree to the match, contact details are exchanged and the pair can arrange a meeting. The conversations are held in private.

### 3 Setting

#### 3.1 Design

We complemented the program *Germany Talks* by sending out a base- and an endline survey to all participants. See Figure 1 for an overview of the experimental design. The subsequent details in this section track the timeline carefully.

**Recruitment** In 2018 *Germany Talks* was conducted in cooperation with a broad set of German news outlets. Together, the participating partners had considerable outreach ranging from large daily and weekly newspapers and their online platforms, over pure online media to major public television. With respect to political orientation, the participating news outlets reflected a broad political spectrum with a focus around center-left.<sup>10</sup> The intervention was promoted on these platforms and participants could register either online on the respective websites or by post. 19,365 participants were successfully recruited. As shown in Figure ??, they came from all over Germany.

**Registration** In order to register for the program, individuals had to answer seven binary political questions. Table A1 lists all seven questions, henceforth referred to as *political registration questions*. These political registration questions were chosen carefully by the organizers to capture contemporary political controversies. In addition to these questions, applicants had to state their name, age, gender, place of residence and answer five non-political free response questions.<sup>11</sup>

**Variation in Political Distance: Assignment of Treatment Condition** After registration people were assigned a partner based on their political views and place of residence. The main objective of the algorithm was to match as many participants as possible, while fulfilling

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<sup>10</sup>The organizing news outlet DIE ZEIT is considered as center-left. Generally, the main German media are perceived around the middle of a left-right spectrum (PEW, 2018).

<sup>11</sup>The five free response questions were about the participants, their hobbies and dislikes. See Table A2.



the following two conditions: First, the matched partner had to be located in a 20 kilometer perimeter. Given the fulfillment of the first condition, the *political distance* between the partners, defined as the number of differently answered political registration questions, was maximized. The algorithm was executed exactly one time. Thus, there was no chance of changing partners or being matched to another partner later on.

We divide participants into two treatment conditions based on political distance to their partner. (i) *Contrary-minded Partners (CM)*: To this group belong those participants who were matched with a partner who had answered more than half (i.e., 4 or more) of the political registration questions differently. It consists of 46% of all matched participants. (ii) *Like-minded Partners (LM)*: This group consists of participants who were matched with a partner who answered less than half (i.e., 3 or less) of the political registration questions differently. It includes 54% of the matched participants.<sup>12</sup>

**Variation in Meeting Availability: Assignment to Treatment and Control** Each successfully paired individual received an email introducing the matched partner. This email contained a list of the political registration questions the partner had answered differently, the partner’s first name, age, gender and the answers to the non-political free response questions. Based on this information, the participants could decide whether they wanted to accept the suggested partner or not. As soon as one participant within a pair accepted, the remaining partner was notified. If and only if both partners confirmed the match, contact was established by giving out the respective email addresses.

Leveraging this structure, we restrict our analysis to those participants who accepted their partner *first*, before the partner did. This leads to the fact that the (second) partner, who had not accepted (yet), essentially decided whether the first-accepter was going to have a meeting or not. We exploit this feature by defining treatment and control groups in the following way: *Treated participants* are those first-accepters whose partner accepted as well. In these cases, contact was established and the partners could arrange their meeting. *Control participants* are those first-accepters whose partner did not accept. In this case, no contact was established and there was no chance of meeting or communicating with the partner. Table 1 summarizes the four resulting combinations of treatment conditions LM and CM (like- vs. contrary-minded

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<sup>12</sup>Throughout the paper we show that the results are robust to alternative sample splits into like- and contrary-minded partners.

partner) and meeting availability (treatment group vs. control group).

There are two key points for this paper. First, the partners of the first-accepters assign the first-accepters to treatment and control group. First-accepters do not select themselves into treatment and control group. Second, the partners could base their decision on whether to accept as well or not merely on the information about the first-accepters from the introductory email. Thus, conditional on that information the decision was independent of the first-accepter.

**Meetings** After contact had been established, the organizers of *Germany Talks* played no further role and participants had to organize the exact time and location of the meetings themselves. Meetings were not observed, nor moderated or guided in any way. They mostly took place in natural settings like cafes, parks, or in peoples' homes. As shown in Figure 3, conversations centered around the topics of the seven political registration questions. On average, conversations lasted 140 minutes and an overwhelming majority of the participants reported that it was a pleasant experience.

**Surveys** Base- and endline surveys were sent out by the organizers of *Germany Talks*. Unfortunately, the baseline survey was distributed more than a week after the introductory emails had been sent. Therefore, first-accepters' assignments to the partner (treatment condition), acceptance decisions and assignments to treatment (acceptance decision of the partner) had already taken place before most participants filled out the baseline survey. In fact, by that point in time 98% of the treated participants had already learned that the partner had accepted as well.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, measures that were elicited in the baseline survey may potentially be affected by first email contact between partners or expectations. For this reason, we only use measures from the baseline survey which are robust.<sup>14</sup>

Basic information about the participants like socio-demographics was only elicited in the baseline survey. It was sent out 5 days prior to the meetings and required on average 14 minutes to answer. The endline survey contained, besides the outcome measures, questions about the meetings - if they had taken place. Average response time was 12.5 minutes. It was sent out one week after the conversations. 2,645 participants completed both surveys.

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<sup>13</sup>Participants had time to accept until the day the meetings took place. Thus, in principle, first-accepters had the chance of becoming a member of the treatment group until that moment.

<sup>14</sup>In particular, we do not use any sensitive "social measures" like stereotypes or perception of social cohesion. We solely utilize time-invariant measures and political attitudes.

### 3.2 Sample

In our study, we focus on first-accepters who filled out both surveys. Table 3 describes the composition of the resulting sample, which is composed of 1523 participants. Compared to the German population (column 1), our sample (column 2) is similar in terms of age, income and place of residence, but more educated, male, politically left-leaning and with less migration background.<sup>15</sup> While the sample is left leaning *on average*, it is not clear how this translates to the existence of distinct ideological groups within the sample. Are all participants from one "left" political camp, or are there still a left and a right group represented in the sample? As shown in Table 3, party preferences and self-classified ideology suggest the existence of a large left camp and a small right camp. To further explore this heterogeneity, we investigate correlational patterns of the answers to the political registration questions. The organizers of *Germany Talks* carefully picked them in a way that there is typically a more "left" and a more "right" answer.<sup>16</sup> Thus, we should expect that one group gathers around left answers while another group chooses predominantly right answers - if there actually are members of the two distinct camps within our sample. To check this, we use latent class analysis.<sup>17</sup> LCA endogenously creates classes with specific answer patterns and assigns each participant a likelihood of membership in each class. Applying it to all registered participants, we see a bipolar distribution, i.e. participants belong to either one or the other class with high probability (see Figure A1). Assigning participants to classes according to the probabilities, we find a large group to which 82% and a small group to which 18% of the participants belong. The answer patterns of both groups, shown in Figure A2, confirm the hypothesized distinction into a (large) ideologically left and a (small) ideologically right group. Membership in the left group predicts agreement to

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<sup>15</sup>There are two potential reasons for these differences. On the one hand, different types of people may differ in their willingness to participate in a program promoting political discussion. For example, conservatives may be less willing to have such a discussion. This case may be partly seen as a feature of our study as voluntary participation - in contrast to "forced" or paid interpersonal conversations - is an important requirement for the success of such policies in real life. On the other hand, the specificity of the sample may also reflect the reader-/viewership of the participating news outlets. We cannot clearly differentiate which of the two factors plays how much of a role, but it is likely to be a mixture of both.

<sup>16</sup>There are questions like "Should Germany increase its border control?" which represent typical left vs right topics, in this case migration. Other questions, like "Is Donald Trump good for the USA?" do reflect less classic left-right topics, but nevertheless yield predictions about what conservatives and liberals would answer.

<sup>17</sup>LCA is related to factor analysis as both explore the relationship among variables. But, in contrast to FA, LCA assumes a categorical latent variable with a multinomial distribution instead of a continuous normal-distributed variable. This method does not demand any a priori assumptions about the correlations between the questions (i.e. which answers should belong in which group). Instead, it takes the data and checks whether there are latent classes whose members have specific answer patterns.

more liberal notions and clear disagreement to more conservative viewpoints. Likewise, members of the right group show a rather conservative answer pattern.<sup>18</sup> A t-test using self-stated left-right classification confirms the interpretation with the members of the large group being significantly more left ( $p < 0.01$ ). To further support this finding, Table A3 reassuringly shows that we find nearly identical groups if we use k-means clustering instead of LCA. Focussing on the sample we use, it is representative of all registered participants in terms of class membership (83% and 17%). Taken all facts together, our sample consists of a majority of left- and a minority of right-leaning participants.

**Subsamples** Table 3, columns 3 and 4 provide descriptive statistics of the subsamples of like-minded and contrary-minded first-accepters. Subsample sizes are of similar size with 775 participants in the like-minded and 748 in the contrary-minded condition. Both subsamples are comparable, except for political preferences. The like-minded sample is less conservative. The reason for these political differences lies in the mechanics of *Germany talks*: With a large part of the registered participants being from the left ideological camp and the matching algorithm aiming to maximize political distance between partners, conservatives were predominantly matched with left participants. Analogously, liberals often ended up being matched to fellow liberals due to excess supply. As a consequence, the like-minded subsample contains left but no right people, while the contrary-minded subsample comprises left and right people.

### 3.3 Treatment Conditions: Like-Minded and Contrary-Minded Partners

The treatment conditions differ in the political views of the partners who are by construction like- or contrary-minded to the first-accepters. Table A4 provides descriptive statistics of the partners. It shows that in the like-minded condition they are younger, more female and more left than in the contrary-minded condition, as would be expected following the rationale about pair compositions above.

To assess to what extent the treatment conditions actually reflect politically like- and contrary-mindedness within pairs, we compare them to an alternative way of defining of whether

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<sup>18</sup>For example, membership in the left group predicts disagreement with the demand of stricter border control, and agreement to the notion that #metoo had some positive effects. Membership in the right group predicts agreement to stricter border control, but shows otherwise a less differentiating pattern. This is not surprising as many of the conservative answer options are rather extreme opinions. For example, disagreement to the statement that the #metoo movement and the debate about sexual harassment had *some* positive effects reflects arguably a far right position.

a person met a like- or a contrary-minded partner. As each participant of *Germany Talks* can be assigned one ideological class found by the LCA, this allows us to use the overlap of ideological classes within pairs to define like- and contrary-mindedness. As shown in Table A4, there is great congruence of our treatment conditions and the overlap of ideological classes within pairs. This gives further substantial foundation to our treatment condition definitions. For robustness, we also report results using the overlap of ideological classes to define treatment conditions.

## 4 Empirical Strategy

**Specification** Our approach identifies the ITT of having an in-person conversation with either a like-minded or a contrary-minded person. Recall that the partner assigns the participant who accepted the match first (first-accepter) to treatment and control by choosing to accept or not, based only on the information from the introductory email. Thus, by controlling for the information from the introductory emails the assignment is conditional independent of the first-accepter. While we are able control for most of the content from the mails, we have to use proxies for the surname and the answers to the open questions from the participants.<sup>19</sup>

For both treatments LM and CM separately, we estimate the following ITT specification by OLS:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta * Treat_i + \gamma * BasicInfo_i + \delta * AddInfo_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $Y_i$  denotes our outcome variable from the endline survey. The dummy  $Treat_i$  indicates whether first-accepter  $i$  was accepted by the partner or not and  $\epsilon_i$  is an individual specific error term.  $\beta$  measures the intent-to-treat effect of a political face-to-face discussion.  $BasicInfo_i$  and  $AddInfo_i$  are sets of fixed effects capturing the information from the introductory mails.  $BasicInfo_i$  contains basic information (hard facts) about participant  $i$  that we observe (age intervals, gender, region on NUTS level, combinations of answers to political registration questions) and proxies for surname (migration background, and education and income). The set of dummies  $AddInfo_i$  accounts for the fact that the answers to the open questions were un-

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<sup>19</sup>We know age, gender, answers to the political registration questions, and region. Due to data protection, we did not receive surname nor the answers to the open questions from the organizers of *Germany Talks*.

observed by capturing potentially visible information. It consists of political self-classification (left to right), party, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status and number of politically contrary-minded people in one’s social environment. Appendix A.1 describes the controls in more detail.

The main identifying assumption is that we achieve conditional independence of treatment assignment and respective outcome variable by controlling for *BasicInfo<sub>i</sub>* and *AddInfo<sub>i</sub>*. This would be violated if, for example, some attitudes of the participants shine through in the introductory mail, as a consequence affect the partners’ decisions and, importantly, also have an impact on the outcome variable.

For robustness, we also report estimates from OLS regressions without *AddInfo<sub>i</sub>* and for the post-double-selection (PDS) method (Belloni et al., 2014). Out of the vector of all potential controls, PDS chooses the right set via a three-step "double-lasso" procedure: Using two lasso regressions, it selects a set of controls that is predictive of treatment status *Treat<sub>i</sub>* and a set of controls which predicts outcome *Y<sub>i</sub>*. In a third step, the union of both sets of control variables is used to estimate the treatment effect. The conclusions from all the three specifications are very similar. If anything, the smaller standard errors of PDS yield more precise (and thus more significant) estimates.

**Potential Challenges** Table 4 suggests conditional random assignment to treatment and control groups in both conditions LM and CM is achieved. Neither is any of the coefficients which are not affected by the treatment significant in one of the treatment conditions LM and CM, nor is the F-Test of joint significance. Table A5 shows that treatment and control groups are even conditionally balanced if we use the more conservative approach of conditioning only on the basic set of controls.

Table A6 tests for conditional selective attrition between base- and endline survey. Note that income (part of the basic controls *BasicInfo*) and marital status (part of the additional controls *AddInfo*) are not controlled for because we (only) elicited them in the endline survey. Thus, we should interpret the findings with caution. We find very small and insignificant differences between treatment and control groups in both conditions LM (column 1) and CM (column 2). Mean attrition is in both cases 49%.

As many participants already knew their treatment status before the baseline survey was

sent, people may have selected differently into our panel depending on treatment condition. Table A7 tests for selective response rates to both surveys between the treatment conditions. Note that, as none of controls from the surveys can be used (because the surveys are part of the test), assignment to treatment and control is not conditionally exogenous. Thus, the findings are only suggestive and should be interpreted cautiously. There are significant, yet small differences between treatment and control groups in both treatment conditions (6.7% and 7.2%). 18.9 and 21.5% of all participants fill out both surveys in the LM and CM condition, respectively.

To assess to what extent the intent-to-treat effect captures the real effect of a face-to-face meeting, we look at compliance with treatment assignments. Since contact was only established if both partner had accepted, non-compliance is by construction only one-sided. Participants in the control group had no chance to meet their partner.<sup>20</sup> Compliance with treatment status is very similar across both treatment conditions, 87.2% for LM and 86.8% for CM. Thus, the high compliance rates of 100% (control) and 87% (treatment) suggest that the average effects of the meetings are close to our ITT estimates. Presumably, they are even slightly larger, as the ITT likely provides a lower bound with some participants in the treatment group not having a meeting.

One potential challenge to the interpretation of our study is that we estimate the effects separately in two subsamples of different (political) compositions. Differences in effects may partly be rooted in the differences between subsamples instead of being caused by the treatments.<sup>21</sup> To assess the extent of the concern, we look at the selection into the different subsamples in more detail. Table A8 shows that we do not see any signs that the willingness to accept the partner first varied with political distance. Thus, together with the discussion on subsample differences from the previous section, it seems that the subsamples are in large parts comparable except for political orientation (see Table 3). To account for the observed differences in political attitudes, we re-weight our contrary-minded sample to match the like-minded sample means using the entropy weighting procedure (Hainmueller, 2012). We find the same pattern. This suggests that it is unlikely that the differences in effects are only found due to the dissimilarity of the subsamples.

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<sup>20</sup>There were two participants who stated that they met a partner even though the partner did not accept them. We do not know whether they lied on purpose or accidentally stated that they met their partner. We drop them from our analysis, but including them in our analysis does not change our results.

<sup>21</sup>Note that this does not concern the identification of the ITT of like- vs contrary-minded meetings.

## 5 Effects on Ideological Polarization

Scholars like Habermas argue that deliberations among citizens lead to more agreement within the society. However, there is the concern that discussions can yield the exact opposite. Like-minded people may confirm and reinforce each other’s opinion (Sunstein, 2009) leading to more polarized views. Even if confronted with contrasting viewpoints, it is unclear what to expect as discussions may result in a "backfire" effect (Bail et al., 2018; Wojcieszak, 2011). In this section, we therefore explore the heterogeneity in effects of interpersonal deliberation on political opinion.

**Measures** To measure polarization in political opinions, we elicited agreement to eleven different political viewpoints in the base- and the endline survey. See Table 2 for an overview. Seven out of the eleven viewpoints were those that were used by *Germany Talks* to match partners. The remaining four viewpoints capture other typical left-right topics, such as same-sex marriage. We define the overall political opinion as the vector of all eleven opinions. We construct two measures that each capture one facet of ideological polarization. The first measure is the change towards a more extreme opinion in terms of *absolute* (dis-)agreement to the viewpoints. More precisely, it is defined as the change in the Euclidean distance to the center of the scale between end- and baseline. The second measure is the change towards a more extreme opinion *relative* to the population average. Thus, it reflects the extent to which the opinion is aligned with the average opinion of the population. It is constructed in an analogous way to the first measure and defined as change away from the average pre-meeting opinion of the subsample. Both outcome measures are standardized by subtracting the respective control group means and dividing by the control standard deviations. Note that we use data from the baseline survey to construct our measures. Hence, the analyses are only valid under the assumption that political attitudes are not affected by either learning the treatment assignment or first email contact to arrange the meeting and should thus be looked at with this in mind. For more information on construction of the outcome measures see Appendix A.

**Findings** Figure ?? presents ITT effects for both ideological polarization measures. It shows that the conversations significantly polarized those participants who met a like-minded partner but not those who met a contrary-minded partner. The ITT effects on the two measures are



0.286 and 0.279 standard deviations in the like-minded treatment condition. For those who met a contrary-minded partner both point estimates are negative, yet insignificant. In particular, we do not find any sign of backlash effects.

Tables A9 and A10 additionally provide the estimation results for the post double selection method (PDS) and a smaller set of covariates. The results are very similar. Tables A11 and A12 test whether results are robust to an alternative treatment condition definition that is based on membership to the ideological classes found by the latent class analysis: Instead of defining whether a person met a like- or a contrary-minded person by using the number of different answers to the partner, this approach uses the alignment of class memberships of the partners. Results do not change. Table A13 confirms the findings if treatment condition definitions are varied by splitting participants into like- and contrary-minded based on alternative cut-offs: Participants are assigned to the like-minded condition if they coincide with their partner in three or more and five or more political registration questions, respectively (instead of four or more). The definition of the contrary-minded treatment condition is varied analogously. Tables A14, A15, A16 and A17 provide the results when alternative distances measures, Manhattan distance and Mahalanobis distance, are used to construct our variables instead of Euclidean distance. We find largely the same pattern. Table A18 tests whether results change when like-minded regressions are reweighted to match contrary-minded means in political preferences (party affiliation, self-reported left-right classification), gender and age. Likewise, contrary-minded regressions are reweighted to match the like-minded sample. Results are very similar suggesting that the differences between like-minded and contrary-minded effects are not only found because their different (political) compositions.

One potential reason for the null effect in the contrary-minded condition is that it masks heterogeneity as found in other persuasion studies (Baysan, 2021). In this case, polarizing (backfire) and de-polarizing (intended) effects would cancel each other out. This may happen for different attitudes within one person, or, alternatively, for different persons. To shed light on this, we look at the general overall change defined by the mere Euclidean distance between base- and endline political opinion. This measure focuses on the amount of change and ignores its "direction". Figure A3 plots the corresponding ITT effects and shows that in general only conversations with like-minded partners lead to a substantial adjustment of the own political opinion.

Why is there no adjustment for contrary-minded? The findings by Chen and Rohla (2018), who show that Thanksgiving dinners are significantly shorter when residents from opposing-party precincts attend, suggests that participants may avoid contentious topics. In contrast to this hypothesis, the meetings among contrary-minded partners were significantly longer than those among like-minded partners, with median durations of 150 and 120 minutes, respectively ( $p < 0.01$ ). Figure 5 plots the probabilities that contrary-minded partners talked about a specific topic depending on whether a pair agreed or disagreed on it. The graph shows that disagreement clearly increases the likelihood to discuss a particular topic. The results suggest that the effects are not driven by the avoidance of topics between contrary-minded partners. In contrast, participants particularly discuss contentious topics and learn about the partners viewpoint, but do not alter their own opinion due to it.

Are the ITT effects for like-minded meetings large? As one benchmark, we can compare the effect sizes to those of related interventions. Allcott et al. (2020) study the impact of a four week long deactivation of Facebook on political polarization in the US. They find a reduction in their index of issue polarization of approximately 0.1 standard deviations. Both our effect sizes are more than 2.5 times larger. Further, we can follow Allcott et al. (2020) and set our estimates in relation to the change in a different index of several political polarization measures in the US (Boxell, 2020). The author finds an increase of 0.38 standard deviations between 1996 and 2016. With 0.286 and 0.279 of a standard deviation, our ITT estimates are about 75 percent of that increase.<sup>22</sup>

## 6 Effects on Affective Polarization

Beyond the effect on ideological polarization, political discussions may have an impact on affective polarization. Independent of the change of their political opinion, people may adjust their view about those who have different opinions. Indeed, related research on prejudice reduction through interaction suggests that interpersonal conversations between contrary-minded persons may lead to a reduction of stereotypes (Allport, 1954; Fishkin, Siu, Diamond, and Bradburn, Fishkin et al.; Kalla and Broockman, 2020). In this section, we therefore turn attention to

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<sup>22</sup>Of course, these benchmarking exercises need to be interpreted with caution: For example, the samples of our study are very different from those by Allcott et al. (2020) and (Boxell, 2020). In particular, both papers look at US residents while our study took place in Germany. Furthermore, the measures of issue and political polarization of Allcott et al. (2020) and (Boxell, 2020) differ from our measure of ideological polarization.

estimating the impact of face-to-face discussion with members of the own, and members from the other political camp on affective polarization.

**Measures** To assess the effect on affective polarization we use two measures, stereotypes about and preference for personal contact with contrary-minded persons. We defined such contrary-minded persons as someone who has opposing political views on the seven political registration questions.<sup>23</sup> We elicited stereotypes about contrary-minded persons that were communicated by former participants of *Germany Talks*. These were the prejudice that contrary-minded individuals are cognitively less capable, poorly informed, have different moral values and lead completely different lives. We reduce dimensionality by implementing a principal component analysis (PCA). We use the first principal component which is the convex combination of the four stereotypes that accounts for the largest possible variation in the data, as our overall stereotype measure. Table A21 provides the respective loadings (weights). To get a broader picture, we additionally measured the preference for close interpersonal contact with opposing political views. More precisely, we elicited participants' willingness to have a contrary-minded person in their social environment. See Table 2 for a detailed overview of the outcome measures.

**Stereotypes** Figure 6 shows that interpersonal conversations with contrary-minded partners significantly reduced stereotypes. The point estimate is -0.379 standard deviations. Figure A4 estimates the ITT effects on each stereotype separately. The reduction is largest for the belief that contrary-minded persons are of low cognitive ability, while we do not see any decrease in whether contrary-minded persons lead a completely different life. Meeting a person from the own political camp does not have any effect on stereotypes about contrary-minded individuals. The positive point estimate of 0.087 standard deviations suggests that if anything conversations with like-minded partners tend to slightly increase stereotypes. However, none of the effects is significant, neither for the overall nor for the single stereotypes.

Tables A20, A24, A25, A23 and A22 show robustness to dropping controls, and running PDS regressions for the overall and the single stereotypes. Tables A13 and A26 show that effects are similar if treatment conditions definitions are altered by varying the cut-off and using alignment of ideological classes, respectively. Table A27 provides results when like-minded regressions are

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<sup>23</sup>Note that we did not elicit beliefs and attitudes towards the partner, but towards some arbitrary person with opposing views.

reweighted to match the contrary-minded sample, and vice-versa. We find the same pattern.<sup>24</sup>

**Willingness for Personal Contact** Table 5 presents the effect of the conversation on willingness for personal contact with a contrary-minded person. In line with the previous finding, the point estimate for meetings with a contrary-minded partner is 0.146 of a standard deviation meaning a higher willingness for personal contact, yet insignificant (column 5). Analogously, the coefficient for like-minded meetings is -0.0993 and insignificant. Dropping the set of additional controls (columns 1 and 4) and post-double selection (columns 3 and 6) yield the same pattern. In the latter case, the estimate of contrary-minded conversations is of similar size (0.176 standard deviations) but significant at a 5% level due to a smaller standard error. Similarly, the coefficient for like-minded partner is -0.137 standard deviations and significant at a 10% level. Varying the definition of like- and contrary-minded partners produces very similar results (see Tables A13 and A28). Table A27 shows robustness towards reweighting the subsamples.

**Interpretation** The results for stereotypes and willingness for personal contact paint a coherent picture. To estimate the overall effect on affective polarization we conduct a principal component analysis with all five affective polarization measures, the four stereotypes and willingness for personal contact. Hence, the resulting overall measure is a weighted index of the five measures capturing aversion towards contrary-minded individuals.<sup>25</sup> Using one measure yields effect sizes that usefully summarize the overall impact of the conversations and allows us to benchmark effect sizes. Figure 6 provides ITT estimates for both treatment conditions. The estimates for like-minded partners are insignificant, but positive (0.099 standard deviations) while conversations with contrary-minded partners reduce affective polarization by 0.352 standard deviations ( $p < 0.01$ )

To put the effect magnitude in perspective, we use two different benchmarks. First, we follow Lowe (2021) and compare our estimates with effects of intergroup contact from a recent meta-analysis by Paluck et al. (2019). The meta-analytic effect of 0.39 standard deviations is very close to our estimate. Second, Broockman and Kalla (2016) show that a 10-minute face-to-face conversation with transgender/gender non-conforming canvassers leads to an increase of

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<sup>24</sup>The effect sizes of like-minded meetings are even slightly larger. This suggests that the effect may partly be driven by left leaning individuals.

<sup>25</sup>Table A29 provides the loadings on the overall measure. With positive signs for the single stereotypes and a negative sign for willingness for personal contact, it confirms the interpretation of an overall measure for animosity towards contrary-minded individuals.

tolerance. The effect sizes are 0.45 standard deviations after 3 days and 0.3 standard deviations after 3 weeks, respectively. Our effect consistently ranks between both the two points in time of elicitation (the endline survey being sent out 7 days after the conversations took place), and the two effect sizes. The fact that Broockman and Kalla (2016) found very long lasting effects after a 10-minute conversation may give hope that our conversations with a median duration of 150 minutes reduced affective polarization lastingly.

## 7 Effects on the Perception of Social Cohesion

One fear associated with the rising levels of affective and ideological polarization is the threat to society as a whole (Iyengar et al., 2019). The increasing gaps and animosity between contrary-minded individuals may threaten social cohesion by changing how society members are perceived. Although the contact hypothesis predicts improved attitudes towards contrary-minded persons, it is less clear whether these effects also transfer to general levels of beliefs and attitudes. Related evidence by Rao (2019) finds an increase of general pro-sociality after contact, while Lowe (2021) observes a reduction of general trust.<sup>26</sup> In this section, we hence shed light on the effect of interpersonal conversations on perceptions of trustworthiness and pro-sociality of fellow society members.

To explore the heterogeneous impact of interpersonal conversations, we elicited two beliefs: first, the belief about how trustworthy fellow citizens generally are, and second, the belief about to which extent German citizens generally care about the wellbeing of others (see Table 2).

**Findings** Figure 7 provides the ITT effects on the two beliefs. For both types of conversations the point estimates are positive for both measures, though in the case of like-minded conversations they are small and insignificant. Coefficients for contrary-minded meetings are 0.274 (trustworthiness) and 0.245 (pro-sociality) standard deviations and significant.

Tables A30 and A31 provide estimates for the PDS regressions and if the set of additional controls is dropped. The results are similar, though the PDS effect on trustworthiness for meetings between like-minded partners is also significant due to a slightly larger coefficient and smaller standard error. Tables A13, A32 and A33 show robustness towards varying the definition of treatment conditions. Table A34 provides reweighted results and finds largely the

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<sup>26</sup>Similarly, Dinesen et al. (2020) show that ethnic diversity is generally negatively related to generalized trust.

same pattern.

The findings are in large parts in line with the effects on affective polarization and the idea that the positive intergroup effects extend to attitudes towards a more general population. Conversations among contrary-minded individuals reduce affective polarization and have a positive impact on the perceptions of general trustworthiness and pro-sociality. However, the (insignificant) tendencies for like-minded conversations are not consistent with the hypothesis. Even though affective polarization tends to increase, trust and perception of general pro-sociality both tend to improve as well.

**Alternative Explanation: Disappointment** One potential alternative explanation of our findings on affective polarization and social cohesion may be that disappointment of not being accepted by the proposed contrary-minded partner drive the effects. To assess this concern, we compare the time trends of the two control groups. If disappointment of not being accepted by the contrary-minded partner is actually increasing affective polarization we should see different time trends for the contrary-minded and the like-minded control group as the latter was not rejected by contrary-minded partners. Table A35 finds no sign for different time trends.<sup>27</sup> This suggest that disappointment does not explain the effects for affective polarization and perception of social cohesion for contrary-minded partners.

## 8 Conclusion

This study exploits a natural experiment to estimate the impact of political face-to-face conversations on political polarization. It provides evidence that in-person communication among people who hold similar political views fortifies these opinions further. As a consequence, already existing opinion difference between different political camps are magnified making people even more unequal in their opinion how policy should be shaped. One could argue that differences in policy views are not bad by themselves because a healthy democracy "is designed" to handle such disagreements. But as soon as people condition their attitudes and behavior on other peoples' political opinions, this argument begins to fall apart. In this respect, the paper provides evidence that communication across political camps can help. It shows that

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<sup>27</sup>Note that the comparison make use of the baseline data, which we carefully avoided in our analysis. Even though the concern may be smaller when comparing participants who did not have contact to their partner prior to the baseline survey, the results should be interpreted carefully.

talking to someone who holds contrasting political views reduces negative attitudes towards contrary-minded individuals and improves the perception of social cohesion. Therefore, the study provides clear policy implications. It shows that lowering obstacles to communicate with contrary-minded people and facilitating interaction between different political camps can be an effective countermeasure against affective polarization. One possibility to do so may be interventions like "My Country Talks". However, these interventions should focus on interactions between groups. More generally, our findings support any effort to bring together those who hold different views to talk. People may understand each other better, without having to give up own convictions.

This study explores the effects of one single in-person conversation. It therefore provides a benchmark for what the effects of echo chambers may be. At the same time, it serves as a proof of concept that, given the right circumstances, interpersonal communication is a powerful tool.

One limitation of this study is that, due to the quasi-experimental constraints, it does not explore long-term effects on polarization. Further, it would be interesting to explore whether the observed effects are also reflected in behavioral changes. Another weakness is rooted in the nature of our sample being a selection of people who want to deliberate on politics. The impact of conversations, in particular with contrary-minded partners, may differ for those who have a lower willingness to do so. However, from a policy perspective, the sample at hand may be the right one to look at as these type of persons can actually be reached via relatively simple policies.

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Figure 1: Quasi-experimental Setting

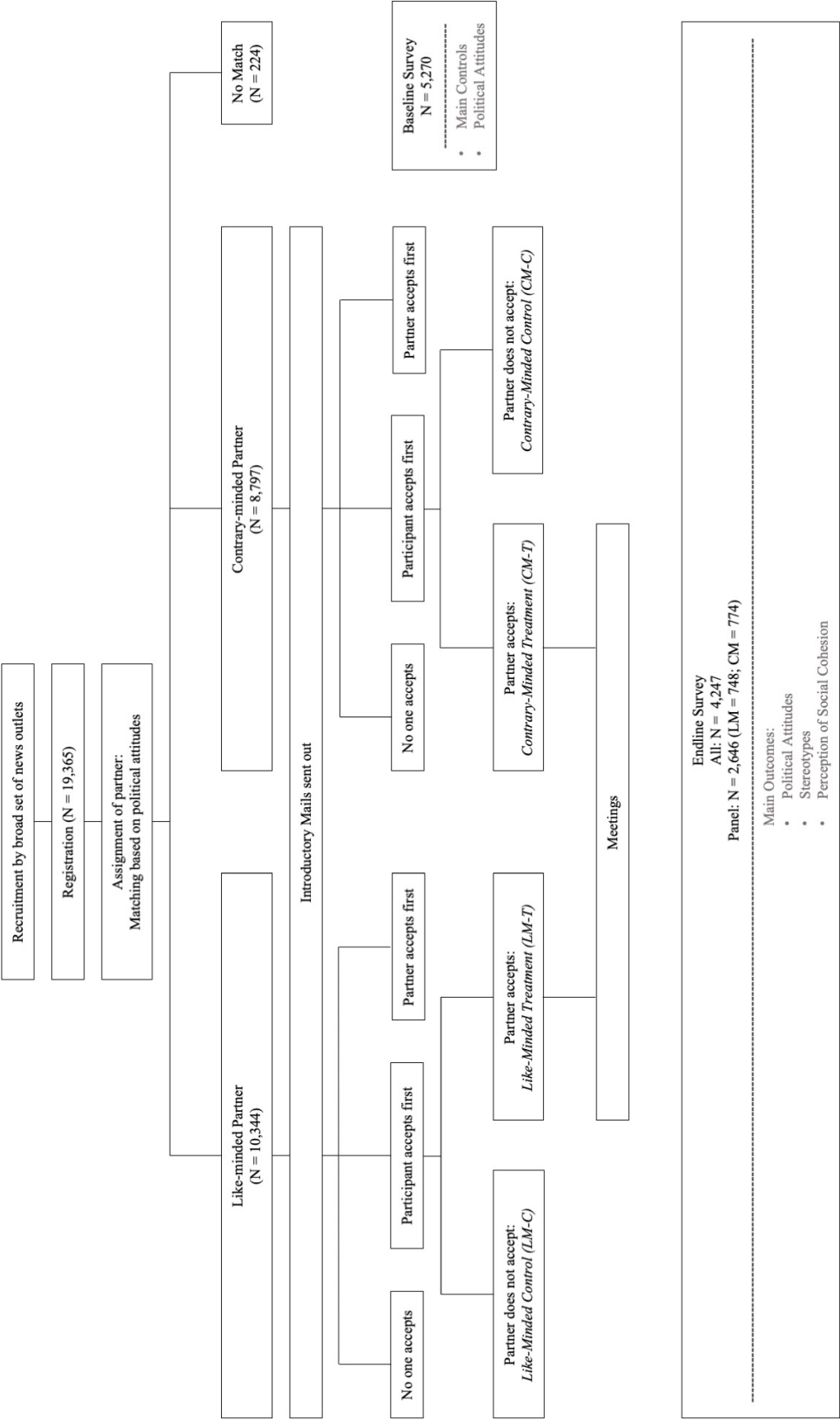
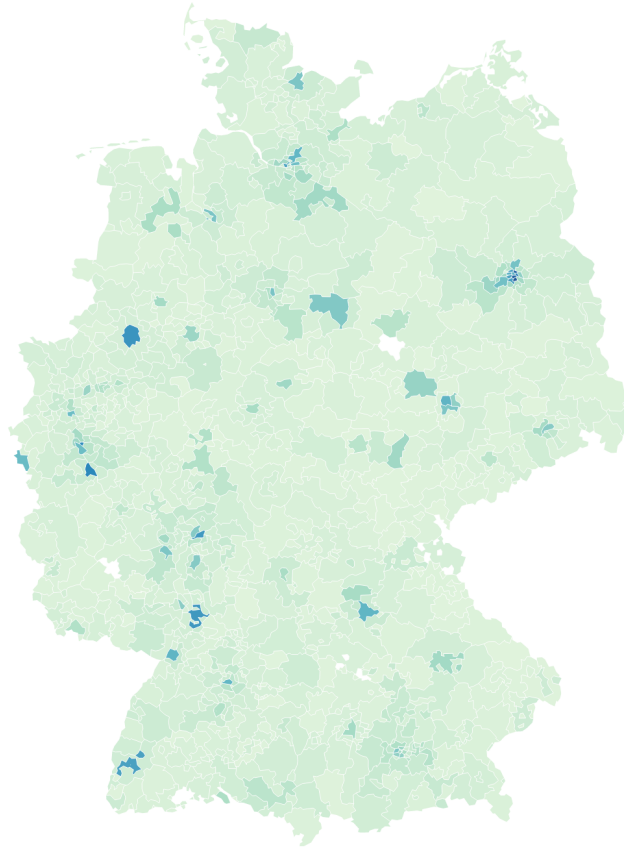


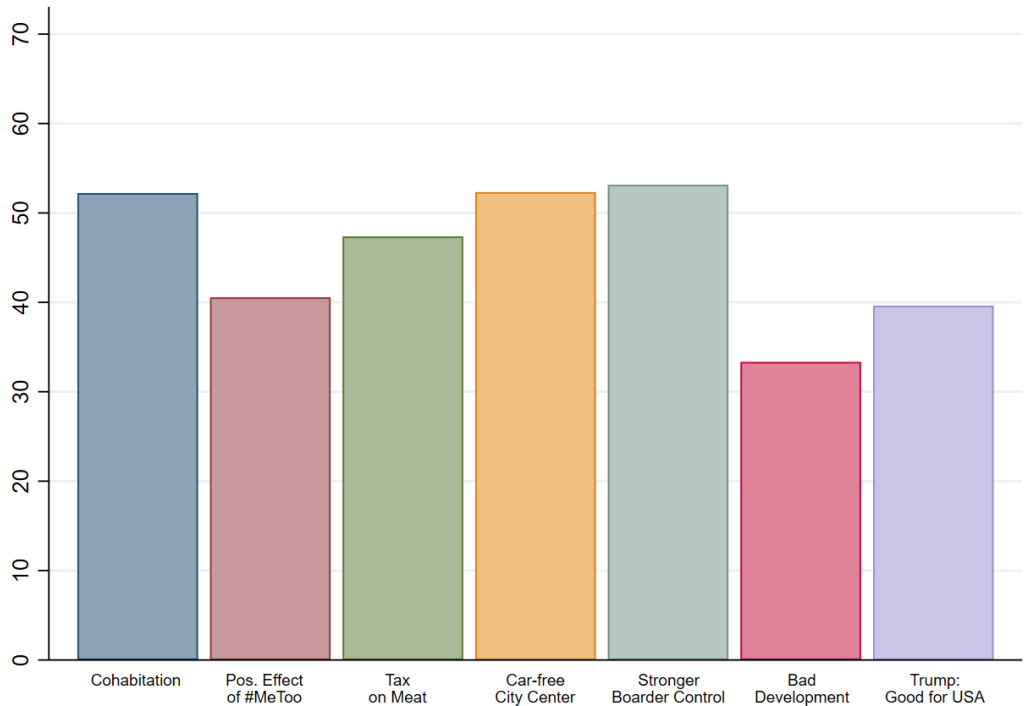
Figure 2: Registered Participants of Germany Talks

**Participants Germany Talks**



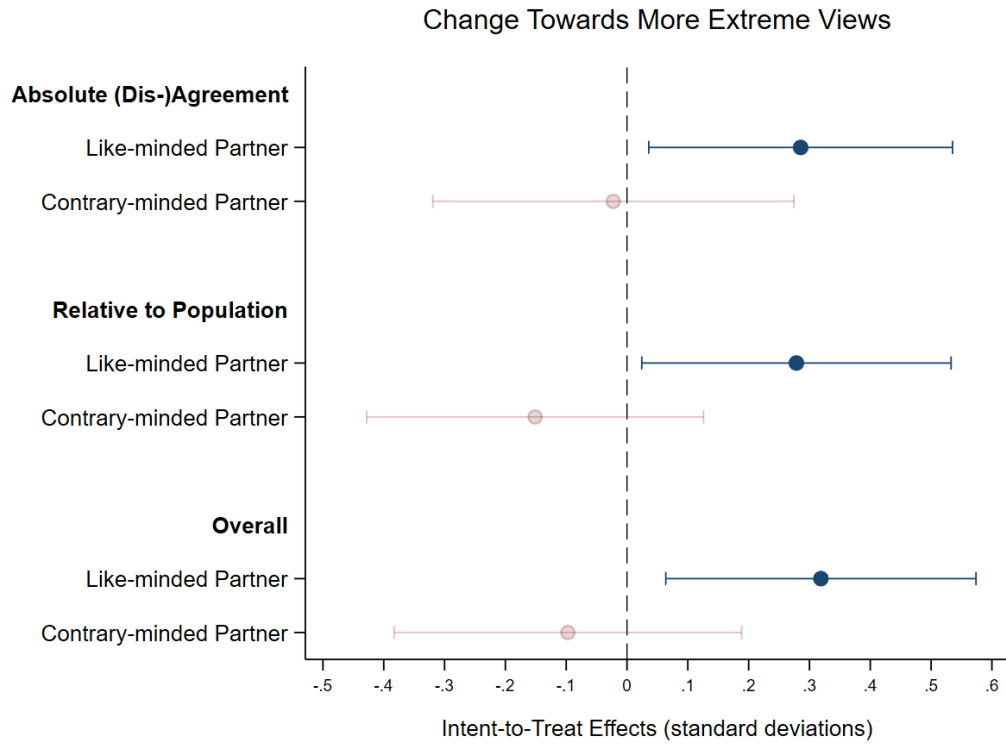
**Notes:** Map of Germany showing the places where participants registered for *Germany Talks*. Level of visualization are NUTS regions. Blank areas depict NUTS regions where no participant registered.

Figure 3: Topics of the Conversations



**Notes:** The Figure shows which of the political registration questions were discussed during the conversations. The y-axis on the graph denotes the frequency in %.

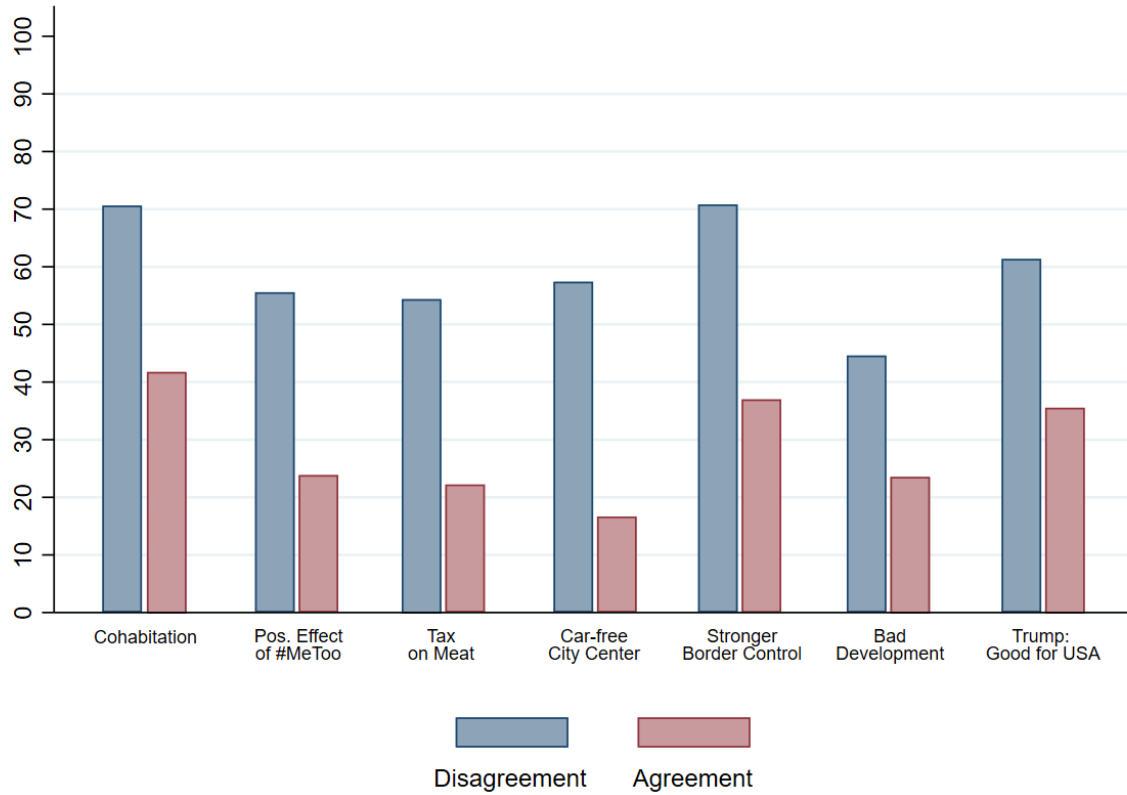
Figure 4: Effect of the Conversations on Ideological Polarization



**Notes:** This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized change of the overall political opinion towards more extreme views. It plots the impacts on the change towards a more extreme opinion in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement to policy views. Below, it plots the effects on the change towards more extreme views relative to the population. Last, it plots the effect on standardized overall ideological polarization being the first principal component of the two measures. The outcome measures are described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. 95% confidence intervals are included.

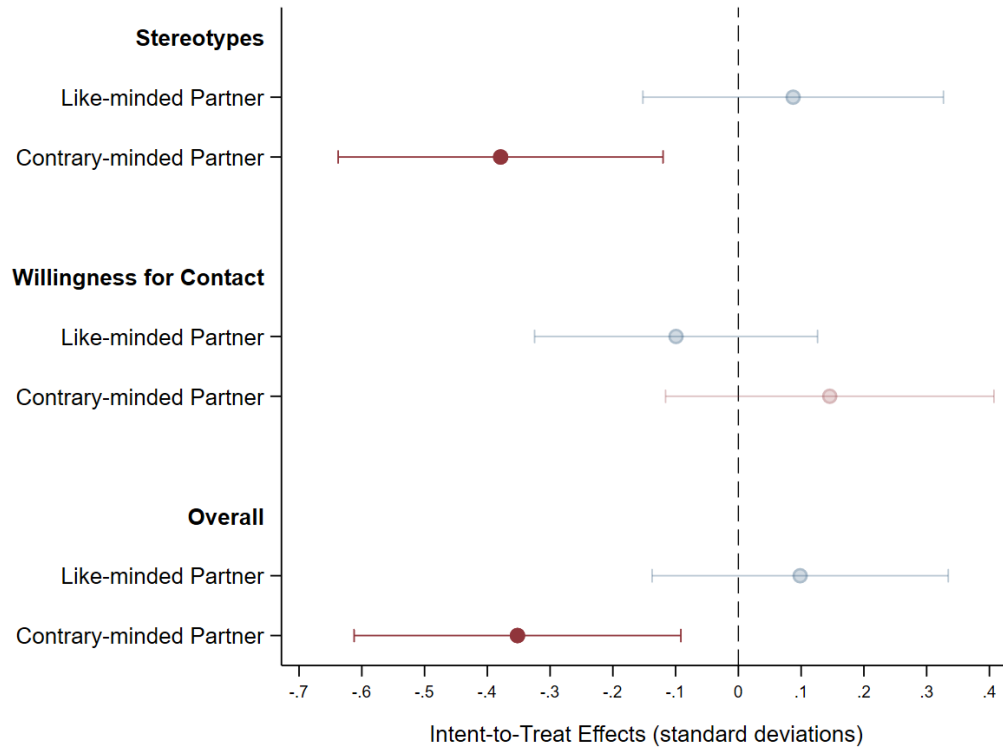


Figure 5: Conversational Topics: Agreement vs Disagreement (CM)



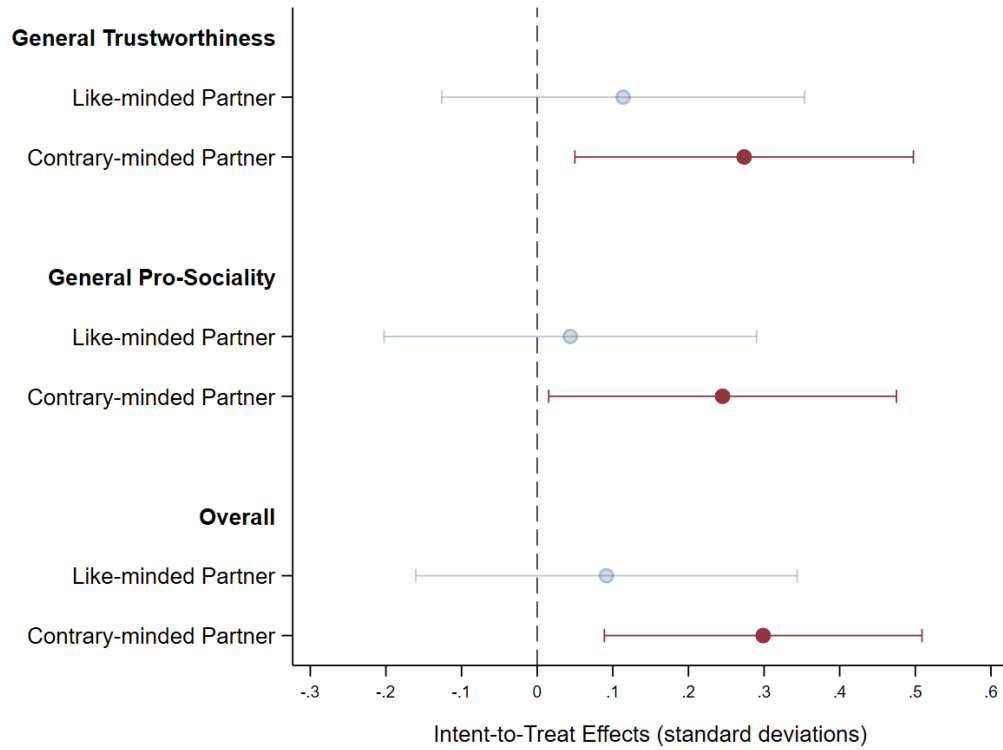
**Notes:** The Figure plots probabilities of discussion for the seven political registration questions in the contrary-minded treatment condition, depending on whether the partners agreed or disagreed on the topic. The Y-axis indicates the share of pairs that discussed the respective topic. Table A1 shows the political registration questions.

Figure 6: Effect on Affective Polarization



**Notes:** This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized overall stereotypes about a person with opposing political views, willingness for personal contact with a person with opposing political views, and the overall affective polarization measure. The overall stereotype is defined as the first principal component of all four elicited stereotypes. The overall measure is defined as the first principal component of all four elicited stereotypes about, and the willingness for personal contact with a person who has opposing political views. The measures are described in Section 6 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. 95% confidence intervals are included.

Figure 7: Effect of the Conversations on the Perception of Social Cohesion



**Notes:** This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized perception of social cohesion. The two coefficients plot the impacts on the perception that fellow citizens are generally trustworthy. Higher values denote higher perceptions of trustworthiness. The second set plots the effects on the perception to what extent fellow citizens generally care about the well-being of others. A higher values is associated with a higher perception of pro-sociality. The last two estimates report the overall effect on the perception of social cohesion. The outcome measures are described in Section ?? and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. Error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1: Overview Treatment & Control Groups

	Like-minded Partner (LM)	Contrary-minded Partner (CM)
Treatment (Meeting)	First-accepters, assigned to a like-minded partner who accepted as well.	First-accepters, assigned to a contrary-minded partner who accepted as well
Control (No Meeting)	First-accepters, assigned to a like-minded partner who did not accepted	First-accepters, assigned to a contrary-minded partner who did not accepted.

**Notes:** This table summarizes the different treatment and control groups. Treatment conditions LM and CM are shown in columns, while the rows differentiate between whether the first-accepters could arrange a meeting or not.

Table 2: Outcome Variables

Variable	Statement
<b>Political Views</b>	
<i>Overall Political Opinion</i>	
Cohabitation	Muslims and Non-Muslims cohabit well in Germany.
#metoo	The public debate about sexual harassment and #metoo had some positive effects.
Tax Meat	Meat should be taxed higher in order to reduce its consumption.
Car-free City Centers	German city centers should be car-free.
Border Control	Germany should implement stricter border controls.
German Development	Germans are worse off today than 10 years ago.
Trump	Donald Trump is good for the USA.
Same-Sex Marriage	Marriage should only be allowed between a man and a woman.
Cooperation within EU	Germany should deepen its cooperation with other EU countries.
Income Tax	To reduce the gap between rich and poor, the tax rate for top earners should be increased.
Trustworthiness Media	Altogether, German media are trustworthy.
<b>Affective Polarization</b>	
<i>Overall Stereotype</i>	
Cognitive Abilities	This person is incapable of understanding complex contexts. (rev.)
Poorly Informed	This person is poorly informed.
Moral Values	This person has completely different moral values.
Way of Life	This person leads a completely different life.
<i>Willingness for Personal Contact</i>	I would like this person to be in my personal environment. (rev.)
<b>Perception of Social Cohesion</b>	
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	One can trust most people in Germany.
<i>Pro-Sociality</i>	Most people in Germany do not care about the wellbeing of others.

**Notes:** The table shows all elicited variables that we use to construct our outcome measures. *Overall Political Opinion* is a vector consisting of the eleven single political views. Out of this vector we construct both ideological polarization measures. See Section 5 for more details. *Overall Stereotype* is the first principal component of a PCA of all four stereotypes as detailed in Section 6. To elicit the affective polarization measures, we asked participants to picture some person that gave *very different* answers to the seven political attitude questions. The last column shows the corresponding scales. Some variables, denoted by (rev.), are reversed for interpretational reasons. Participants had to state their agreement to the statements (political attitudes, perception of social cohesion) and the extent to which they apply (stereotypes) on 7-point-Likert-Scales.

Table 3: Summary Statistics

	German Population (%)	Sample (%)		
		All	LM	CM
<b>Age</b>				
18 - 34	24	25	27	23
35 - 54	32	37	35	39
55 or older	43	38	37	39
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	49	37	42	32
<b>State</b>				
Baden Württemberg	13	13	13	14
Bayern	16	14	14	14
Berlin	4	13	16	11
Brandenburg	3	2	2	3
Bremen	1	1	1	0
Hamburg	2	6	7	5
Hessen	8	8	8	9
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	2	1	0	2
Niedersachsen	10	10	11	9
Nordrhein-Westfalen	22	17	16	18
Rheinland-Pfalz	5	3	3	3
Saarland	1	1	1	1
Sachsen	5	5	5	5
Sachsen-Anhalt	3	1	1	1
Schleswig-Holstein	3	4	4	3
Thüringen	3	1	0	2
<b>Migration background</b>				
Yes	23	10	10	10
<b>Education</b>				
No Education	2	0	0	0
Lower Sec. Education	24	1	1	1
Middle School	30	7	6	7
Advanced technical certificate	6	6	7	6
High School	10	17	17	17
University	27	67	68	66

Table 3: (continued)

	German Population	Sample		
		All	LM	CM
Other	0	1	1	2
<b>Income (monthly; EUR)</b>				
0-800	19	10	0.11	0.08
800-1499	25	13	0.13	0.13
1500-2199	23	20	0.21	0.20
2200-3299	17	23	0.26	0.21
3300 or more	17	27	0.24	0.30
<b>Political spectrum left-right</b>				
Far-left	3	4	4	3
Left	18	25	29	21
Centre-left	30	40	44	34
Centre	28	20	18	21
Centre-right	16	9	4	15
Right	3	2	0	4
Far right	1	1	0	1
<b>Party</b>				
Die Linke	10	14	14	12
Bündnis/90 Die Grüne	16	50	54	39
SPD	17	11	12	9
CDU/CSU	28	7	5	8
FDP	9	7	5	9
AfD	15	7	0	13
Other	5	5	3	5
Don't Vote/Don't know	31	2	1	2
<b>Ideological Class</b>				
Left Ideology		83	98	67
Right Ideology		17	2	33
Observations		1,523	775	748

**Notes:** The table presents characteristics of the German adult population, our sample, the subsamples LM and CM. Measures for the German population are taken from the German Microcensus (age, gender, marital status), German Allbus 2018 (education, migration background, income, religious confession, religiousness), the CSES 2017 (left-right), and an election poll by Forsa from the week prior to DS (Party). To allow for comparisons, some variables were transformed by collapsing several subcategories into one supercategory.

Table 4: Balance Checks

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
<b>Political Views</b>		
Border Control	0.0969 (0.137)	-0.0922 (0.139)
#metoo	-0.191 (0.127)	-0.103 (0.148)
Meat Tax	0.00334 (0.140)	-0.0752 (0.189)
Car free inner-cities	-0.163 (0.132)	-0.0806 (0.158)
Cohabitation (Non-)Muslims	-0.0415 (0.114)	0.0486 (0.149)
Development Germany	-0.00698 (0.157)	0.0500 (0.169)
Trump	-0.0387 (0.0981)	0.0764 (0.126)
Same-sex marriage	-0.118 (0.122)	-0.161 (0.153)
Cooperation within EU	-0.114 (0.0973)	0.172 (0.122)
Income Tax	0.118 (0.160)	-0.0373 (0.172)
Trustworthiness Media	0.0310 (0.160)	-0.148 (0.169)
<b>Importance</b>		
Importance: Border Control	0.0357 (0.222)	0.219 (0.232)
Importance: #metoo	0.0737 (0.178)	-0.152 (0.204)
Importance: Meat Tax	-0.0495 (0.177)	0.150 (0.196)
Importance: Car free inner-cities	0.0474	0.184



Table 4: (continued)

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
	(0.178)	(0.192)
Importance: Cohabitation (Non-)Muslims	0.161	0.0729
	(0.157)	(0.172)
Importance: Development Germany	0.326	0.182
	(0.216)	(0.222)
Importance: Trump	0.285	0.186
	(0.224)	(0.235)
<b>Beliefs</b>		
Number applications for asylum	-16641.0	-8822.1
	(33678.8)	(41681.3)
Share Muslims in Population	-0.177	0.107
	(0.601)	(0.741)
F-Test	0.95	0.71
P-Value	0.52	0.82

**Notes:** The table reports the treatment coefficients of the balance checks. Dependent variables are measures from the baseline survey: Baseline political views, subjective evaluation of importance of political topics, and baseline beliefs about the share of muslims in Germany and number of asylum seekers in Germany. Each of these variables is regressed on the treatment dummy and the sets of basic and additional controls. The respective dependent variable is listed in the first column. Column (1) reports the results for the like-minded and column (2) for the contrary-minded individuals. F-Tests are calculated by regressing the treatment on all those variables and the sets of basic and additional controls. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 5: Effect on Willingness for Personal Contact

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	-0.113 (0.110)	-0.0993 (0.115)	-0.137* (0.0799)	0.131 (0.122)	0.146 (0.133)	0.176** (0.0779)
Constant	0.733 (1.196)	-0.563 (1.104)		1.149 (0.991)	0.211 (1.482)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	755	755	755	727	727	727
R <sup>2</sup>	0.394	0.501		0.529	0.582	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized willingness for personal contact. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): Various combinations of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. The specifications are described in more detail in Section 4. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

# Appendix

## A Measures

Our analysis relies on two datasets: data from the intervention *Germany Talks* and self-reported survey data. The primary dataset consists of all 19,134 registered participants and includes age, gender, zip-code, answers to the seven political registration questions and the matched participant. The latter dataset consists of information elicited in the baseline or the endline survey. In the following section we describe in detail the measures we use and construct from the two datasets.

### A.1 Controls

In our analysis we condition on a variety of control dummies that stem from both datasets, the *Germany Talks* and the survey dataset. In the baseline survey, we gathered information about participants' demographics like education, migration background, and religion, the political heterogeneity of their social environments, i.e. how many politically contrary-minded people they have in their social environment, and their political preferences, which includes a position on a political self-classification and the party they would vote for. In the endline survey we elicited income and marital status. The following paragraphs list the relevant controls and how we construct them.

**Set of Basic Info** The set of dummies *BasicInfo* contains basic information (hard facts) about the participant that we observe (age intervals, gender, region on NUTS level, combinations of answers to political registration questions) and proxies for surname (migration background, and education and income). More precisely, we divide age into following six intervals: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 65+. Gender is a binary variable indicating whether a person identifies as male, female or nonbinary. Instead of including 1531 five-digit zip codes in our analysis, we construct dummies based on the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) to increase power. NUTS (level 3) is a geocode standard that is developed and regulated by the European Union and divides Germany into 401 regions. We include all combinations of the seven binary political registration questions to control for policy view patterns. From our baseline survey, we include variables for the participants' education, income, and migration

background. Education is an ordinal variable with seven categories from "No school leaving certificate" to "Ph.D". We include dummies for each category. Migration background is a binary dummy, where we define a person with a migration background as someone who either was not born in Germany or has parents who were born in a different country. Income is an ordinal variable that captures the net income per month of the respondents. It contains five categories, from "0-800 Euro" to "3300+ EUR" and an option for participants that don't know their monthly income. All variables additionally have a category "Not specified".

**Set of Additional Info** The set of dummies *AddInfo* accounts for the fact that the answers to the open questions were unobserved by capturing potentially visible information. We did not receive that information (and the surname) by the organizers of *Germany Talks* due to data protection. Thus, we use proxies to capture potential topics as well as possible. Table A2 shows the five open questions. *AddInfo* consists of *dummies* for each category of the measures party preference, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and the number of politically contrary-minded people in their social environment. Party preference indicates the party that the respondents would vote for. It is a nominal variable with nine categories including all five parties represented in the 19th Bundestag (German parliament) and the categories "Other party", "I don't know", and "I do not vote". Political self-classification is an ordinal variable with seven values from "Very liberal" to "Very conservative". Political engagement contains different forms of political engagement that participants have been part of or not: "Participation in civic initiatives", "Attending demonstrations", "Being an active member of a party", and "Being an active member of a trade union". Religion is a nominal variable indicating religious affiliation (7 categories). Religiousness is an ordinal variable eliciting how often participants visit a place of worship. It has six categories from "Never" to "More than once per week". Marital status dummies are "Single", "Divorced", "Widowed", "Registered partnership", "Married and living separately", "Married and living with a spouse". The number of contrary-minded people in the participants' social environment contains seven categories from "None" to "All". For all variables, we add a dummy indicating a missing value.

## A.2 Outcome Measures

Outcome measures were elicited in the endline survey. Only in the case of political views, we also use values from the baseline survey to construct our measures. All outcome measures are standardized by subtracting the (respective) control group mean and dividing by the control group standard deviation.

**Political Views** Participants were asked to state the extent to which they agree with different political statements on a seven-point Likert scale. Apart from the transformation from questions into statements and the change of scales, the first seven of the eleven statements were identical to the political registration questions. In addition to the seven questions, we elicited four other, more general political attitudes. See Table 2 for an overview. Based on these attitudes, we create outcome measures for our analysis. The underlying idea is to take all eleven attitudes together and interpret the eleven-dimensional vector as the overall political opinion. In contrast to the measures of affective polarization and perception of social cohesion, we use data from the baseline survey as political views are not as easily affected by either learning the treatment condition (like- or contrary-minded partner) or first email contact with the partner. Importantly, looking at individual changes enables us to do a more precise analysis.

*Change towards More Extreme Views: Absolute (Dis-)Agreement* We construct two measures of ideological polarization. The first measure indicates to what extent a person shows stronger (dis-)agreement to the topics after the meeting. More precisely, we construct one measure that indicates whether someone moved towards or away from the midpoint of our scale (a vector of 3s), denoting neither disagreement nor agreement. The measure is defined as follows:

$$ExtremeViewsAbsolute_i = \sqrt{\sum_{s=1}^{11} (Y_{si2} - 3)^2} - \sqrt{\sum_{s=1}^{11} (Y_{si1} - 3)^2}$$

where  $Y_{sit}$  denotes individual  $i$ 's level of agreement to statement  $s$  in the endline ( $t=2$ ) and the baseline ( $t=1$ ) survey. The eleven statements are the political attitudes from Table 2. The first term is the Euclidean distance between  $i$ 's agreement and the center point (vector of 3s) in the endline survey ( $t=2$ ), while the second term is the respective Euclidean distance in the baseline survey ( $t=1$ ). Thus,  $ExtremeViewsAbsolute_i$  indicates the change in the distance to the

midpoint of our scale. A positive realization of this variable indicates that individual  $i$  moved "towards the boundary of our scale", whereas a negative realization implies that  $i$ 's attitudes changed "in the direction of the center". If the variable equals zero, participants moved neither closer nor further away from the center.

*Change towards More Extreme Views: Relative to Population* The second measure of ideological polarization reflects the change in the extent to which an individual's overall opinion aligns with the average overall opinion in the respective subsample (treatment condition):

$$ExtremeViewsRelative_i = \sqrt{\sum_{s=1}^{11} (Y_{si2} - \bar{Y}_{s1c})^2} - \sqrt{\sum_{s=1}^{11} (Y_{si1} - \bar{Y}_{s1c})^2}$$

where  $Y_{sit}$  denotes individual  $i$ 's level of agreement to statement  $s$  in the endline ( $t=2$ ) and the baseline ( $t=1$ ) survey. The eleven statements are the political attitudes from Table 2.  $\bar{Y}_{s1c}$  is the average level of agreement to statement  $s$  of all participants in the treatment condition  $c$  in the baseline survey. The two terms reflect the distance to the average pre-meeting opinion after and before the meeting took place. In sum,  $ExtremeViewsRelative_i$  denotes whether someone moved towards ( $ExtremeViewsRelative_i < 0$ ) or away from ( $ExtremeViewsRelative_i > 0$ ) the average pre-meeting opinion or none of the two.

*General Change of Political Opinion* To measure the general adjustment of the political opinion we construct a measure that disregards any direction, but focuses on the mere amount of change. More precisely, we define general change as the Euclidean distance between end- and baseline survey:

$$GeneralChange = \sqrt{\sum_{a=1}^{11} (Y_{si2} - Y_{si1})^2}$$

where  $Y_{asit}$  denotes individual  $i$ 's level of agreement to statement  $s$  in the endline ( $t=2$ ) and the baseline ( $t=1$ ) survey. The eleven statements are the political attitudes from Table 2.

**Affective Polarization** To study how the conversations’ affected stereotypes about individuals with contrasting political views and participants’ willingness to have personal contact with these individuals, participants had to picture a person that gave opposing answers to the seven political registration questions. We then elicited participants’ beliefs about this person by asking them to which extent they agree with different statements about the contrary-minded person on a seven-point Likert scale. Importantly, we did not elicit beliefs and attitudes towards the matched partner but some generic person that hold opposing views. The elicited stereotypes were communicated by previous participants of *Germany Talks*.

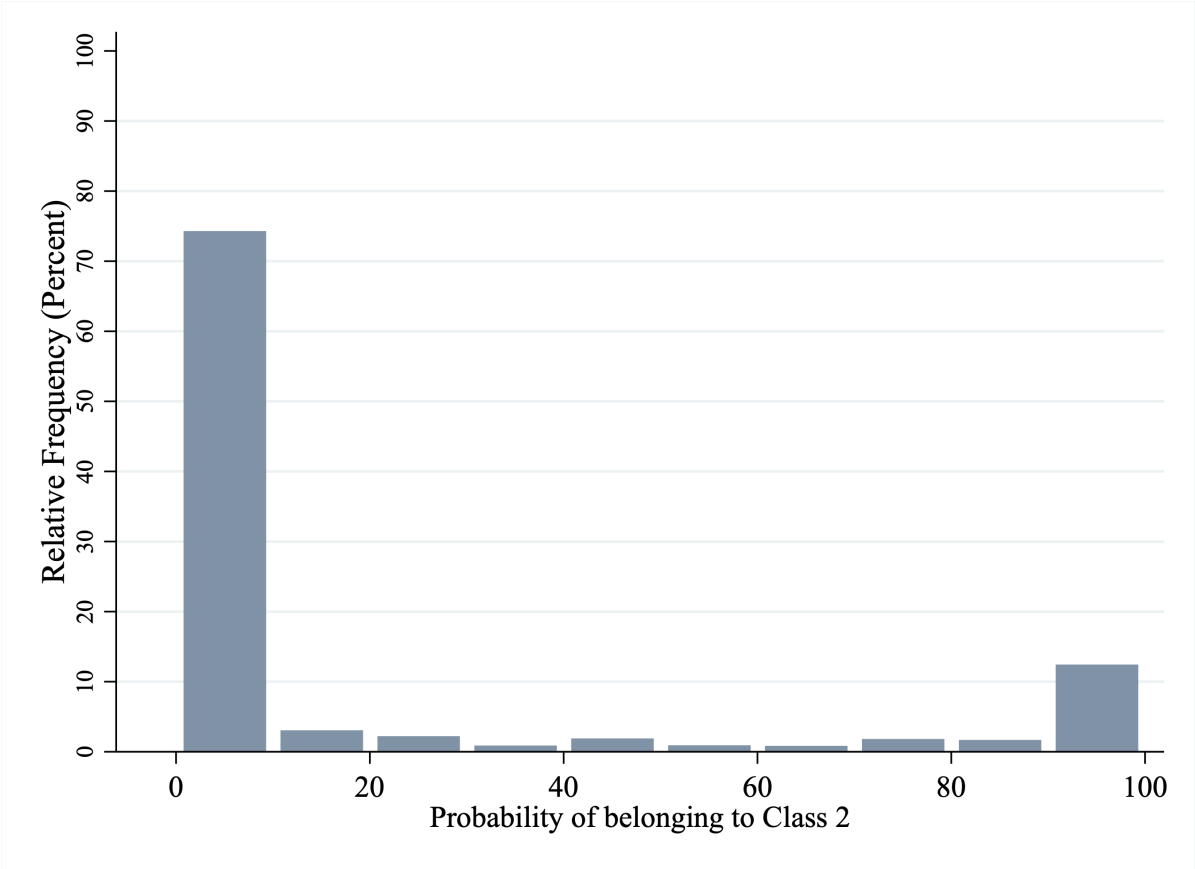
*Stereotypes* - We elicited four stereoytpes. These were the beliefs that contrary-minded persons have low cognitive abilities, are poorly informed, have different moral values and lead a different life. Table 2 shows the exact wordings. We condense these questions by conducting a principle component analysis. We use the first principle component as our overall *stereotype* measure. A higher value of our *Stereotypes* measure is associated with larger stereotypes about contrary-minded individuals. Table A21 provides the loadings of the first principle component.

*Willingness for personal contact* We elicited participants’ *Willingness for personal contact* by asking participants to state their level of agreement to the statement that they do not want to have a person with opposing views in their social environment. For our analysis, we reverse the scale. See Table 2 for the exact wording.

**Perception of Social Cohesion** To assess the effect on participants’ perceptions of social cohesion in Germany, we elicited two beliefs. First, we asked how trustworthy the fellow citizens in Germany are (*Perception of General Trustworthiness*). Second, we measured participants’ *Perception of General Pro-Sociality* by asking to what extent German citizens generally care about the wellbeing of others. The two questions are listed in Table 2.

B   Figures

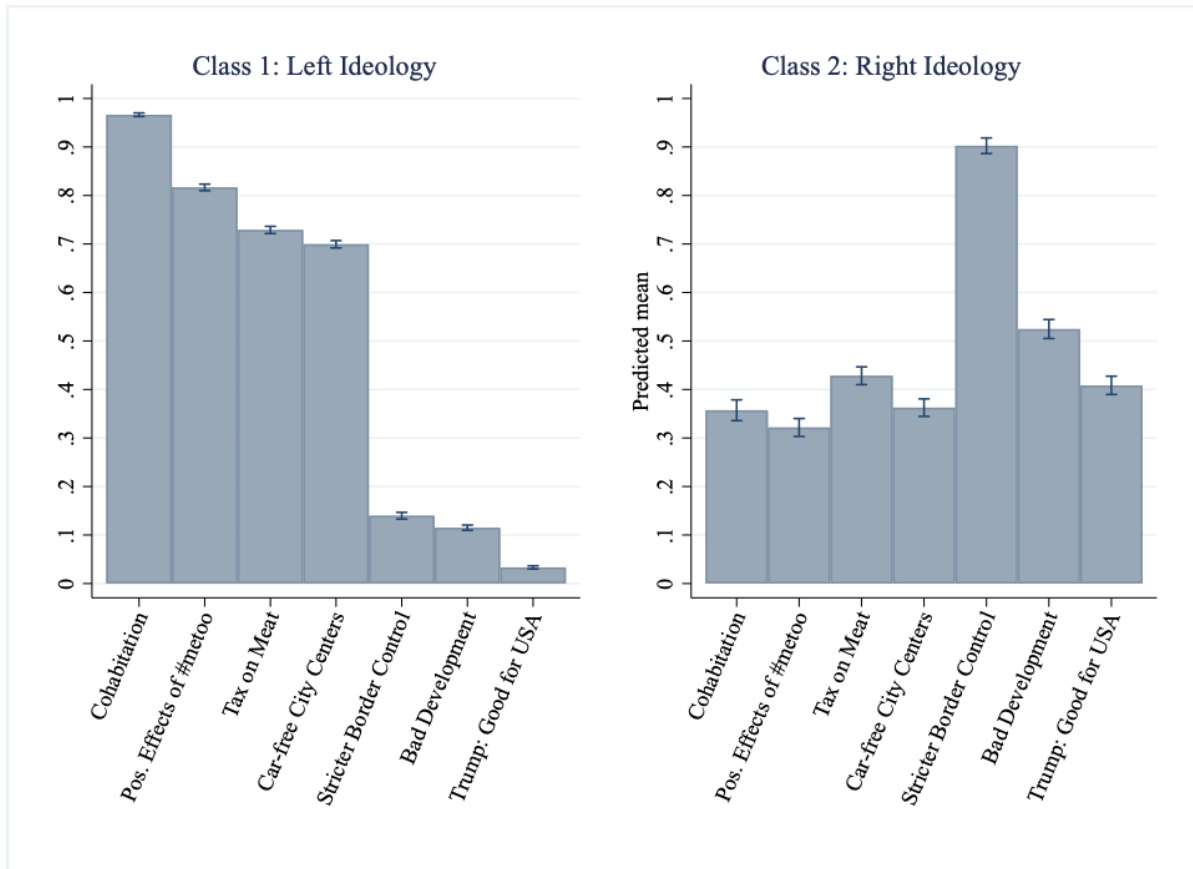
Figure A1: LCA: Likelihood of Class 1 Membership



**Notes:** The Figure plots the distribution of probabilities to belong to class 1 from the Latent class analysis. The LCA is described in Section 3.

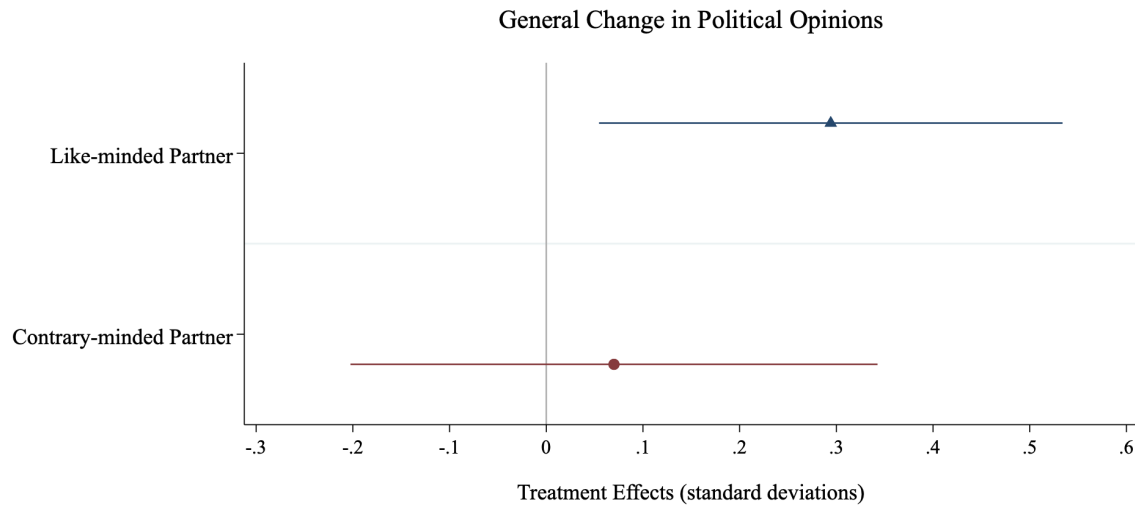


Figure A2: LCA: Conditional Likelihood of Agreement



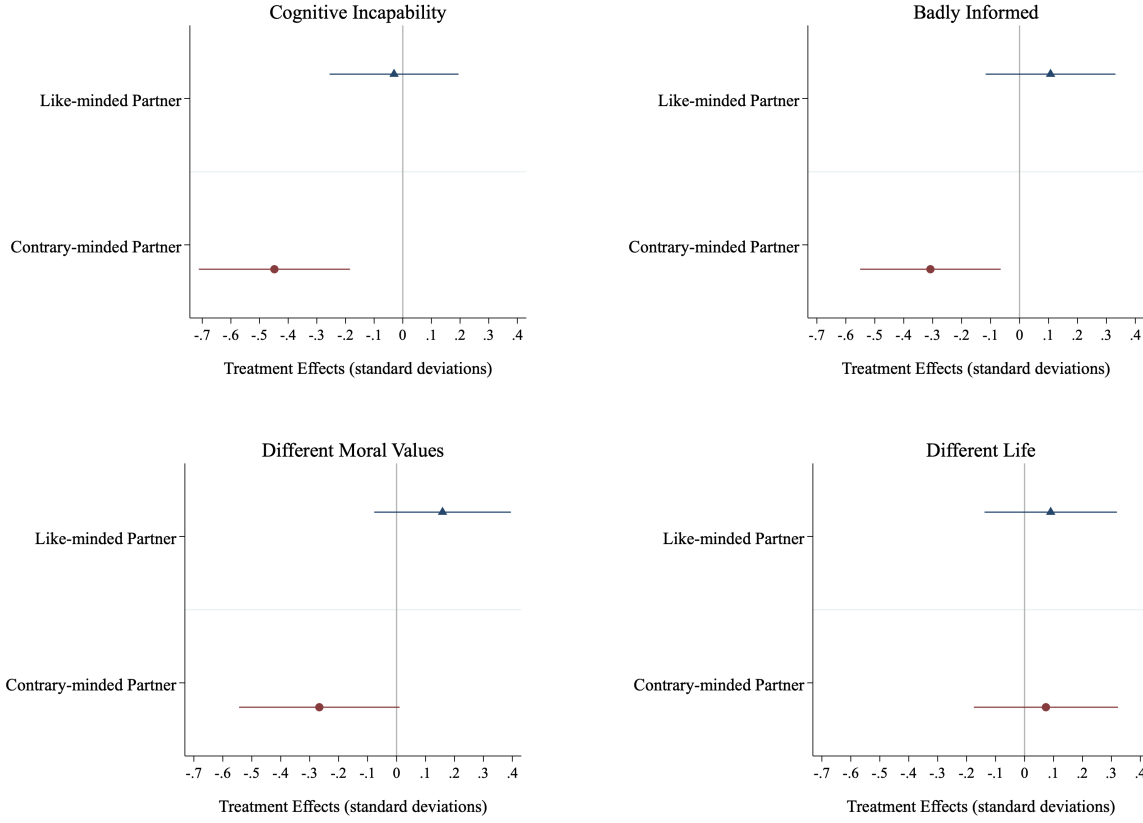
**Notes:** The Figure plots the probabilities of agreeing to the binary political registration questions conditional on LCA class membership. The political registration questions are shown in Table A1 and the LCA is described in Section 3. Error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals.

Figure A3: Effect on General Change of Political Opinion



**Notes:** This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized general change of the overall political opinion. A higher value denotes higher change. The general change of the overall political opinion is defined as the Euclidean Distance between the overall opinion before and after the meeting. The measure is described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. 95% confidence intervals are included.

Figure A4: Effect on Stereotypes (Separate)



**Notes:** The figure shows the ITT effect of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized stereotypes. Higher values denote higher stereotypes. The first panel shows the effect on the stereotype that contrary-minded individuals are cognitively less capable. The second panel plots the effect on the stereotype that contrary-minded individuals are poorly informed. The third and fourth panel show the effects on the stereotypes that contrary-minded individuals have different moral values and live completely different lives, respectively. The measures are described in Section 6 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4.

## C Tables

Table A1: Political Registration Questions

Question	Abbreviation
Do Muslims and Non-Muslims cohabit well in Germany?	Cohabitation
Did the public debate about sexual harassment and #metoo have any positive effects?	Pos. Effects of #metoo
Should meat be taxed higher in order to reduce its consumption?	Tax on Meat
Should German city centers become car-free?	Car-free City Centers
Should Germany implement stricter border controls?	Stricter Border Control
Are Germans today worse off than 10 years ago?	Bad Development
Is Donald Trump good for the USA?	Trump: Good for USA

**Notes:** The table lists all seven political registration questions. The answers were elicited during registration and served as the basis for the matching with the partners. The answer scale was binary.

Table A2: Five Open Questions

Question / Statement
What do you do for a living?
You are a friend of....
What do you do in your free time?
How would you describe yourself?
What are your dislikes?

**Notes:** The table shows the five open questions elicited during registration for *Germany Talks*.

Table A3: Membership of Participants of *Germany Talks* to "Left" and "Right" Class

	Class 1: Left Ideology (kmeans)	Class 2: Right Ideology (kmeans)
Class 1: Left Ideology (LCA)	15,721	0
Class 2: Right Ideology (LCA)	377	2997

**Notes:** This table shows the number of participants of *Germany Talks* who belong to either the "left" or the "right" class, identified by LCA (rows) and k-means clustering (columns), respectively. The LCA is discussed in Section 3.

Table A4: Like-minded vs contrary-minded Partners

	Like-minded Partner (%)	Contrary-minded Partner(%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	38	21
Male	62	79
<b>Age</b>		
18 - 34	46	33
35 - 54	34	38
55 or older	21	29
<b>Ideological Class</b>		
Left Ideology	98	57
Right Ideology	2	43
<b>Ideological Class: Overlap</b>		
Same Ideological Class	97	26
Different Ideological Class	3	74

**Notes:** This table summarizes the characteristics of the partners in the like-minded LM (column 1) and the contrary-minded CM treatment condition (column 2). As most partners did not fill out the surveys, only age, gender and ideological (LCA) classes are available. Class membership is defined by the answers to the political registration questions. The last two rows indicate whether the two partners within one pair belong to the same class or not. The LCA is described in Section 3.

Table A5: Balance Checks

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
<b>Political Attitudes</b>		
Border Control	0.137 (0.131)	-0.0270 (0.138)
#metoo	-0.151 (0.121)	-0.212 (0.145)
Meat Tax	0.00334 (0.140)	-0.0752 (0.189)
Car free inner-cities	-0.174 (0.130)	-0.170 (0.160)
Cohabitation (Non-)Muslims	-0.0590 (0.110)	0.0679 (0.149)
Development Germany	0.0688 (0.144)	0.147 (0.168)
Trump	-0.0204 (0.103)	0.149 (0.122)
Same-sex marriage	-0.0505 (0.140)	0.0666 (0.170)
Cooperation within EU	-0.0733 (0.0886)	0.114 (0.120)
Income Tax	0.0764 (0.160)	-0.0690 (0.181)
Trustworthiness Media	0.0547 (0.153)	-0.257 (0.161)
<b>Importance</b>		
Importance: Border Control	0.0639 (0.209)	0.193 (0.220)
Importance: #metoo	0.0827 (0.163)	-0.141 (0.195)
Importance: Meat Tax	0.0190 (0.165)	0.0870 (0.184)
Importance: Car free inner-cities	0.0349 (0.167)	0.0444 (0.191)
Importance: Cohabitation (Non-)Muslims	0.169 (0.151)	0.142 (0.156)
Importance: Development Germany	0.351* (0.207)	0.163 (0.203)
Importance: Trump	0.305 (0.210)	-0.0309 (0.222)
<b>Beliefs</b>		
Number applications for asylum	-16025.4 (32060.3)	-6738.0 (37974.5)



Table A5: (continued)

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
Share Muslims in Population	-0.0148 (0.562)	0.125 (0.696)
<b>Political Engagement</b>		
Participation in citizens' initiative	0.0284 (0.0272)	-0.0148 (0.0313)
Participation in demonstration	-0.0905* (0.0528)	-0.0102 (0.0500)
Work for party	0.0460 (0.0358)	0.00946 (0.0448)
Work for union	0.0183 (0.0215)	-0.00592 (0.0261)
None	0.00981 (0.0523)	0.00447 (0.0573)
Not specified	-0.0119 (0.0158)	0.0170 (0.0157)
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	0.00486 (0.0419)	-0.0288 (0.0450)
Single, in relationship	-0.00394 (0.0417)	0.0225 (0.0501)
Life Partnership	-0.00686 (0.0109)	-0.00538 (0.00768)
Married	-0.0614 (0.0472)	-0.00108 (0.0536)
Married, living separately	0.0308 (0.0215)	-0.00321 (0.0167)
Divorced	0.0261 (0.0216)	0.0131 (0.0334)
Widowed	-0.00449 (0.0139)	0.00783 (0.0146)
Not specified	0.0137 (0.0160)	-0.00495 (0.0120)
<b>Social Environment</b>		
No one	0.0208* (0.0122)	-0.00855 (0.00569)
Almost no one	-0.0572 (0.0348)	-0.0137 (0.0411)
Some	-0.0100 (0.0543)	0.102* (0.0607)
Approx. half	0.0635 (0.0431)	-0.0442 (0.0535)

Table A5: (continued)

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
Many	-0.0326 (0.0339)	-0.0422 (0.0389)
Almost everyone	0.00731 (0.00593)	0.00310 (0.0143)
<b>Religion</b>		
None	-0.0521 (0.0522)	-0.0122 (0.0563)
Christian	0.0313 (0.0515)	0.0171 (0.0539)
Other	-0.00654 (0.0149)	0.00755 (0.0174)
Not Specified	0.0274* (0.0154)	-0.0125 (0.0168)
<b>Religiousness</b>		
Never	-0.0602 (0.0517)	-0.0485 (0.0600)
Less than several times per year	0.00396 (0.0550)	0.0203 (0.0592)
Several times per year	0.0519 (0.0415)	0.0144 (0.0410)
One to three times per month	0.0106 (0.0217)	-0.00417 (0.0264)
Once per week	-0.0100 (0.0164)	0.0238 (0.0151)
Several times per week	-0.00836 (0.0169)	0.00920 (0.0120)
Not specified	0.0121 (0.0102)	-0.0150 (0.0146)
<b>Political spectrum left-right</b>		
Far-left	-0.0349 (0.0212)	0.00198 (0.0248)
Left	0.0226 (0.0515)	-0.0419 (0.0476)
Centre-left	-0.00872 (0.0544)	0.0395 (0.0569)
Centre	0.0627 (0.0384)	-0.0103 (0.0466)
Centre-right	-0.0317 (0.0220)	0.0224 (0.0352)
Right	-0.0000269 (0.00119)	-0.00797 (0.0185)

Table A5: (continued)

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
Far right	0.00128 (0.00228)	0.00814 (0.0131)
Not specified	-0.0113 (0.0121)	-0.0119 (0.0112)
<b>Party</b>		
CDU/CSU	-0.0273 (0.0208)	0.00295 (0.0292)
SPD	0.0564* (0.0325)	-0.0197 (0.0356)
Bündnis/90 Die Grüne	-0.0145 (0.0536)	-0.0413 (0.0561)
FDP	0.0247 (0.0234)	0.00427 (0.0349)
Die Linke	-0.0653 (0.0396)	-0.0206 (0.0402)
AfD	-0.000179 (0.00153)	0.0518** (0.0230)
Other party	0.0154 (0.0185)	0.0162 (0.0287)
Don't Vote	0.000221 (0.00632)	-0.000299 (0.00877)
Not specified	0.0107 (0.0215)	0.00673 (0.0270)
F-Test	1.11	1.12
P-Value	0.28	0.27

**Notes:** The table reports the treatment coefficients of the balance checks if only the set of basic controls is conditioned on. Dependent variables are measures from the baseline survey: Baseline political views, subjective evaluation of importance of political topics, baseline beliefs about the share of muslims in Germany and number of asylum seekers in Germany, and baseline values of the additional set of controls. Each of these variables is regressed on the treatment dummy and the sets of basic controls. The respective dependent variable is listed in the first column. Column (1) reports the results for the like-minded and column (2) for the contrary-minded individuals. F-Tests are calculated by regressing the treatment on all those variables and the sets of basic controls. Robust standard errors in parentheses.\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A6: Attrition

	Like-minded Condition (LM)	Contrary-minded Condition (CM)
	(1)	(2)
Treat	-0.0162 (0.0345)	-0.0228 (0.0357)
Constant	0.845** (0.365)	0.640 (0.393)
Basic Controls (no income)	Yes	Yes
Add. Controls (no marital st.)	Yes	Yes
Outcome Mean	0.49	0.49
Observations	1489	1412

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is a dummy variable equal to one if the participant filled out the baseline survey but did not complete the endline survey. It is equal to zero if only the baseline was completed. Column (1) shows the results for the like-minded treatment condition, column (2) for the contrary-minded treatment condition. Income and marital status were elicited in the endline survey and thus not conditioned on. As the specification used here differs from the specification discussed in Section 4, results should be interpreted cautiously with respect to the existence of selective attrition. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A7: Selective Response Rate (Panel)

	Like-minded Condition (LM)	Contrary-minded Condition (CM)
	(1)	(2)
Treat	0.0669*** (0.0126)	0.0715*** (0.0155)
Constant	-0.0449 (0.0685)	0.494*** (0.152)
Basic Controls (in parts)	Yes	Yes
Outcome Mean	0.189	0.215
Observations	4032	3391

**Notes:** Regression estimates. Dependent variable is a dummy variable equal to one if the participant filled out both surveys and equal to zero if no survey was completed. Column (1) shows the results for like-minded treatment condition, column (2) for the contrary-minded treatment condition. Treat is a dummy that equals to one if the first-accepter and the partner accepted, and zero otherwise. Income, education, migration background (basic controls) and all additional controls were elicited in the endline survey and thus not conditioned on. As the specification used here differs very much from the specification discussed in Section 4, results should be interpreted cautiously with respect to the existence of selective response. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A8: Political Distance Dependent Selection

	All Participants	Panel
	(1)	(2)
Contrary-minded	-0.00553 (0.00721)	0.0157 (0.0187)
Constant	0.446*** (0.00488)	0.633*** (0.0131)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.0000307	0.000267
Observations	19135	2646

**Notes:** The table reports OLS estimates. The dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if a person accepted first and zero if she did not accepted or accepted second. *Contrary-minded* is 1 if the participant was assigned to a contrary-minded partner. The first column contains all available observations while in column (2) the sample is restricted to people who answered both surveys. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A9: Change towards Extreme Views: Absolute (Dis-)Agreement

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.283** (0.123)	0.286** (0.127)	0.281*** (0.0810)	-0.0645 (0.140)	-0.0225 (0.151)	-0.00911 (0.0827)
Constant	0.615 (0.575)	0.927 (1.133)		-2.226** (0.924)	-1.309 (1.777)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.386	0.447		0.521	0.582	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement. Positive coefficients mean a change towards more extreme views. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. The outcome measure is described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A10: Change towards Extreme Views (Relative to Population)

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.232* (0.130)	0.279** (0.129)	0.199** (0.0834)	-0.156 (0.131)	-0.151 (0.141)	-0.112 (0.0797)
Constant	1.505** (0.738)	1.256 (1.255)		-2.404** (0.959)	-4.168** (1.664)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.381	0.448		0.540	0.585	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views relative to the population. Positive coefficients indicate a change towards more extreme views. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): One combination of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. The outcome measure is described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A11: Effect on Ideological Polarization (Extreme Views): Ideological Classes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.258** (0.111)	0.276** (0.114)	0.243*** (0.0751)	-0.122 (0.176)	-0.00411 (0.200)	0.00523 (0.0912)
Constant	-0.632 (0.573)	-0.268 (1.166)		-2.321** (0.909)	-0.556 (2.038)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	876	876	876	540	540	540
R <sup>2</sup>	0.309	0.368		0.596	0.694	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement. Treatment conditions are defined by using overlap of ideological classes (see Section 3). Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: . The outcome measure is described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



Table A12: Effect on Ideological Polarization (Non-average Views): Ideological Classes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.226** (0.108)	0.286** (0.111)	0.187** (0.0738)	-0.221 (0.174)	-0.102 (0.184)	-0.171* (0.0916)
Constant	-0.220 (0.602)	-0.763 (1.158)		-2.750*** (0.995)	-2.789 (1.943)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	876	876	876	540	540	540
R <sup>2</sup>	0.322	0.385		0.651	0.734	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized ideological polarization towards non-average views. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Treatment conditions are defined by using overlap of ideological classes (see Section 3) Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: . The outcome measure is described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A13: Alt. Treatment Conditions: Comparison of Different Cut-Offs

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	(1) Standard LM	(2) Weak LM	(3) Strict LM	(4) Standard CM	(5) Strict CM	(6) Weak CM
Abs. (Dis-)Agreement	0.286** (0.127)	0.344** (0.159)	0.270** (0.106)	-0.0225 (0.151)	0.0658 (0.118)	-0.127 (0.272)
Rel. to Population	0.279** (0.129)	0.323* (0.179)	0.245** (0.110)	-0.151 (0.141)	-0.0331 (0.112)	-0.256 (0.230)
Stereotypes	0.0873 (0.122)	0.185 (0.165)	0.0554 (0.0960)	-0.379*** (0.132)	-0.237** (0.0966)	-0.552** (0.230)
Willingness for Contact	-0.0993 (0.115)	-0.0994 (0.147)	-0.114 (0.0906)	0.146 (0.133)	0.0208 (0.101)	0.160 (0.212)
Trustworthiness	0.114 (0.122)	0.0366 (0.168)	0.159* (0.0897)	0.274** (0.114)	0.253*** (0.0872)	0.400* (0.204)
Pro-Sociality	0.0438 (0.125)	0.0412 (0.175)	0.0629 (0.0939)	0.245** (0.117)	0.176* (0.0943)	0.208 (0.226)

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. Treatment coefficients are reported. The dependent variable are standardized change towards extreme views (rows 1 and 2), stereotypes and willingness for personal contact (rows 3 and 4), and the beliefs of trustworthiness and pro-sociality (rows 5 and 6). Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1) and (4) show the results for the standard split into the like- and contrary-minded condition. Columns (2) and (5) report the results if first-accepters are assigned to the like-minded (contrary-minded) condition only if they answered 2 (3) or less (more) of the political registration questions differently. Columns (3) and (6) report the results if first-accepters are assigned to the like-minded (contrary-minded) condition only if they answered 4 (2) or less (more) of the political registration questions differently. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A14: Change towards Extreme Views: Abs. (Dis-)Agreement - Manhattan Dist.

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.262** (0.121)	0.264** (0.129)	0.237*** (0.0819)	-0.0908 (0.137)	-0.0392 (0.145)	-0.0663 (0.0823)
Constant	0.442 (0.705)	1.129 (1.217)		-2.792*** (0.886)	-2.558 (1.691)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.376	0.437		0.532	0.599	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement, measured with the Manhattan Distance. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A15: Change towards Extreme Views: Abs.(Dis-)Agreement - Mahalanobis Dist.

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.181 (0.117)	0.213* (0.120)	0.232*** (0.0799)	-0.0402 (0.152)	-0.0278 (0.163)	-0.0455 (0.0846)
Constant	0.137 (0.592)	-0.533 (1.163)		-2.455** (1.110)	-3.181* (1.902)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	X
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.412	0.478		0.492	0.562	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement, measured with the Mahalanobis Distance. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A16: Change towards Extreme Views (Rel. to Population) - Manhattan Dist.

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.201 (0.126)	0.233* (0.128)	0.173** (0.0830)	-0.173 (0.126)	-0.152 (0.132)	-0.160** (0.0792)
Constant	1.930* (1.046)	1.967 (1.332)		-2.416*** (0.860)	-3.793** (1.600)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.381	0.443		0.565	0.612	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views relative to the population, measured with the Manhattan Distance. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the average opinion, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): One combination of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A17: Change towards Extreme Views (Rel. to Population) - Mahalanobis Dist.

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.145 (0.131)	0.200 (0.134)	0.148* (0.0839)	-0.131 (0.128)	-0.139 (0.138)	-0.0989 (0.0809)
Constant	1.255 (0.862)	0.516 (1.216)		-2.560*** (0.964)	-4.447** (1.879)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.382	0.449		0.567	0.613	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized change towards more extreme views relative to the population, measured with the Mahalanobis Distance. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the average opinion, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): One combination of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A18: Effect on Ideological Polarization (Reweighted)

	Like-minded				Contrary-minded			
	Absolute		Relative		Absolute		Relative	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Treat	0.286** (0.127)	0.282** (0.134)	0.279** (0.129)	0.262* (0.137)	-0.0225 (0.151)	-0.0614 (0.166)	-0.151 (0.141)	-0.234 (0.156)
Constant	0.927 (1.133)	1.271 (1.090)	1.256 (1.255)	1.408 (1.320)	-1.309 (1.777)	-0.900 (1.916)	-4.168** (1.664)	-4.919** (2.175)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reweighted	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	721	721	721	721	695	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.447	0.568	0.448	0.571	0.582	0.592	0.585	0.591

**Notes:** The table reports ITT effects of in-person conversations on the two standardized ideological polarization measures, change towards extreme views in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement (columns 1, 2, 5, 6) and relative to the population (columns 3, 4, 7, 8). Columns (1), (3), (5) and (7) show the estimates using equal weights. These columns are the same as columns (2) and (5) in Table A9 and Table A10, respectively. Columns (2) and (4) reweight the like-minded subsample to match the contrary-minded subsample on the following covariates: mean age, share of males, females and non-binary, party shares, and self-reported left-right classification. Analogously, Columns (6) and (8) reweight the contrary-minded subsample to match the like-minded subsample on the these covariates. This analysis is discussed in Section 4. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A19: Effect on Attitudes: General Adjustment

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.303*** (0.115)	0.294** (0.122)	0.216*** (0.0818)	0.0998 (0.143)	0.0700 (0.138)	0.167** (0.0790)
Constant	0.664 (0.791)	0.373 (1.379)		-0.738 (1.167)	-4.155** (2.037)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	X
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R <sup>2</sup>	0.405	0.459		0.535	0.615	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized general change. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Two combinations of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE. Column (6): One combination of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE, one social environment dummy. The outcome measure is described in Section 5 and regression specifications are detailed in Section 4. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



Table A20: Effect on Stereotypes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.0847 (0.117)	0.0873 (0.122)	0.0303 (0.0814)	-0.292** (0.120)	-0.379*** (0.132)	-0.305*** (0.0798)
Constant	-2.542** (1.196)	-2.519* (1.412)		-2.496** (0.982)	-2.421 (1.489)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	747	747	747	720	720	720
R <sup>2</sup>	0.388	0.470		0.561	0.618	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized stereotypes about contrary-minded. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions, two NUTS FE..\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A21: PCA: Loadings Stereotypes on Principal Component

Stereotype	Loadings
Different Way of Life	0.36
Different Moral Values	0.33
Low Cognitive Abilities	0.61
Poorly Informed	0.62

**Notes:** The table presents the loadings of the principal component analysis of all four stereotypes on the first principal component. The first component is the linear combination of the four stereotypes with the respective loadings as weights.

Table A22: Effect on Stereotypes: Different Way of Life

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.150 (0.107)	0.0903 (0.116)	0.113 (0.0752)	0.0853 (0.125)	0.0738 (0.127)	-0.0552 (0.0799)
Constant	-1.927*** (0.557)	-1.788* (1.039)		-1.301 (0.838)	-1.012 (1.609)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes	X	No	Yes	X
Observations	755	755	755	725	725	725
R <sup>2</sup>	0.420	0.479		0.536	0.616	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized belief that contrary-minded lead a different way of life. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): One combination of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE, one education dummy. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions, one NUTS FE, one social environment dummy. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A23: Effect on Stereotypes: Different Moral Values

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.142 (0.111)	0.159 (0.120)	0.0897 (0.0765)	-0.214 (0.130)	-0.267* (0.141)	-0.234*** (0.0797)
Constant	-0.704 (0.903)	-0.370 (1.215)		-1.718* (0.969)	-0.796 (1.741)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	753	753	753	725	725	725
R <sup>2</sup>	0.368	0.439		0.503	0.570	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized belief that contrary-minded individuals have different moral values. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE. Column (6): One combination of the political registration questions, one NUTS FE. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A24: Effect on Stereotypes: Low Cognitive Abilities

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	-0.0414 (0.110)	-0.0305 (0.115)	-0.0595 (0.0765)	-0.366*** (0.124)	-0.448*** (0.134)	-0.341*** (0.0809)
Constant	-1.819* (1.039)	-2.095* (1.202)		-1.594 (1.000)	-1.327 (1.557)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes	X	No	Yes	
Observations	753	753	753	725	725	725
R <sup>2</sup>	0.372	0.439		0.529	0.586	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized belief that contrary-minded individuals have low cognitive abilities. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE, one education dummy. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A25: Effect on Stereotypes: Poorly Informed

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.0733 (0.110)	0.107 (0.114)	0.0246 (0.0771)	-0.228* (0.116)	-0.308** (0.123)	-0.144* (0.0784)
Constant	-2.410** (1.213)	-2.355 (1.454)		-1.987** (0.967)	-2.777** (1.345)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes	X	No	Yes	X
Observations	753	753	753	726	726	726
R <sup>2</sup>	0.380	0.464		0.562	0.626	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized belief that contrary-minded individuals are poorly informed. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): Various NUTS FE, one party dummy. Column (6): One combination of the political registration questions, two NUTS FE, one income dummy. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A26: Effect on Stereotypes: Ideological Classes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.0563 (0.0938)	0.0426 (0.0970)	0.00151 (0.0709)	-0.341** (0.162)	-0.388** (0.177)	-0.328*** (0.0930)
Constant	-3.424*** (0.585)	-3.943*** (0.955)		-2.194** (1.091)	-1.107 (1.714)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	910	910	910	557	557	557
R <sup>2</sup>	0.383	0.450		0.643	0.716	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized overall stereotype measure. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: . \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A27: Effect on Affective Polarization (Reweighted)

	Like-minded				Contrary-minded			
	Stereotypes		Willingness		Stereotypes		Willingness	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Treat	0.0873 (0.122)	0.120 (0.122)	-0.0993 (0.115)	-0.0929 (0.117)	-0.379*** (0.132)	-0.469*** (0.141)	0.146 (0.133)	0.240* (0.137)
Constant	-2.519* (1.412)	-2.572* (1.385)	-0.563 (1.104)	-0.822 (1.072)	-2.421 (1.489)	-2.876 (1.769)	0.211 (1.482)	-0.0932 (1.802)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reweighted	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	747	747	755	755	720	720	727	727
R <sup>2</sup>	0.470	0.567	0.501	0.609	0.618	0.629	0.582	0.611

**Notes:** The table reports ITT effects of in-person conversations on the two standardized affective polarization measures, overall stereotypes (columns 1, 2, 5, 6) and willingness for personal contact (columns 3, 4, 7, 8). Columns (1), (3), (5) and (7) show the estimates using equal weights. These columns are the same as columns (2) and (5) in Table A20 and Table 5, respectively. Columns (2) and (4) reweight the like-minded subsample to match the contrary-minded subsample on the following covariates: mean age, share of males, females and non-binary, party shares, and self-reported left-right classification. Analogously, Columns (6) and (8) reweight the contrary-minded subsample to match the like-minded subsample on the these covariates. This analysis is discussed in Section 4. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



Table A28: Willingness for Personal Contact: Ideological Classes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	-0.150 (0.0918)	-0.166* (0.0952)	-0.129* (0.0682)	0.219 (0.152)	0.235 (0.165)	0.232** (0.0927)
Constant	-0.596 (0.553)	-0.944 (0.852)		-0.0648 (1.009)	-1.821 (1.673)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	918	918	918	564	564	564
R <sup>2</sup>	0.336	0.418		0.649	0.696	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized overall stereotype measure. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: . \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A29: PCA: Loadings Stereotypes and Willingness for Personal Contact on First Principal Component

Stereotype	Loadings
Different Way of Life	0.34
Different Moral Values	0.32
Low Cognitive Abilities	0.54
Poorly Informed	0.55
Willingness for Personal Contact	-0.43

**Notes:** The table presents the loadings of the principal component analysis of all four stereotypes and willingness for personal contact on the first principal component which denotes our measure for overall affective polarization. The first component is the linear combination of the four stereotypes and willingness with the respective loadings as weights. The loadings are consistent with an interpretation of the component as an overall affective polarization measure as the signs of the loadings are positive for stereotypes and negative for willingness.

Table A30: Effect on Perception of General Trustworthiness

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.0963 (0.114)	0.114 (0.122)	0.163** (0.0768)	0.229** (0.109)	0.274** (0.114)	0.155** (0.0761)
Constant	-1.259 (1.259)	-2.196 (1.413)		-0.502 (0.889)	-0.948 (1.852)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	757	757	757	726	726	726
R <sup>2</sup>	0.356	0.430		0.655	0.698	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized perception of general trustworthiness. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): One combination of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE, one income dummy. Column (6): Two combinations of the political registration questions, various NUTS FE, one income dummy, two political party dummies. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A31: Effect on Perception of General Pro-Sociality

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.0211 (0.114)	0.0438 (0.125)	0.0585 (0.0786)	0.255** (0.109)	0.245** (0.117)	0.217*** (0.0746)
Constant	-1.078 (1.248)	-0.107 (1.037)		0.960 (0.815)	1.566 (1.536)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	X
Observations	759	759	759	727	727	727
R <sup>2</sup>	0.384	0.456		0.595	0.657	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized perception of general pro-sociality. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: Column (3): One combination of the political registration questions, two NUTS FE, one education dummy. Column (6): Various combinations of the political registration questions, two NUTS FE, one political party dummy.\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A32: Effect on Perception of General Trustworthiness: Ideological Classes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.101 (0.0858)	0.131 (0.0887)	0.132** (0.0644)	0.309** (0.151)	0.252 (0.166)	0.201** (0.0946)
Constant	-1.283* (0.722)	-0.701 (1.244)		-0.494 (1.143)	-0.722 (2.287)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	921	921	921	562	562	562
R <sup>2</sup>	0.321	0.376		0.690	0.738	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized perception of trustworthiness. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: . \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A33: Effect on Perception of General Pro-Sociality: Ideological Classes

	Like-minded Partner (LM)			Contrary-minded Partner (CM)		
	OLS	OLS	PDS	OLS	OLS	PDS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treat	0.0612 (0.0897)	0.0753 (0.0934)	0.0839 (0.0659)	0.310** (0.146)	0.273* (0.161)	0.218** (0.0895)
Constant	-2.020*** (0.554)	-1.417 (1.106)		1.516* (0.858)	2.828 (1.858)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	923	923	923	563	563	563
R <sup>2</sup>	0.356	0.428		0.631	0.692	

**Notes:** Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the standardized belief about general pro-sociality. Positive coefficients mean adjustment away from the center towards the boundary, negative coefficients the opposite. Columns (1) - (3) report the results for those with like-minded partners (LM), columns (4) - (6) for those with contrary-minded partners (CM). Columns (1), (2), (4) and (5) present OLS and columns (3) and (6) PDS regressions. Basic controls include dummies for age intervals, gender, NUTS regions, combinations of seven political registration questions, education, income and migration background. Additional controls consist of dummies for political parties, political self-classification, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status, and number of politically contrary-minded people in social environment. Variables selected by the PDS procedure (denoted by "X") are: . \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A34: Effect on Perception of Social Cohesion (Reweighted)

	Like-minded				Contrary-minded			
	Trustworthiness		Pro-Sociality		Trustworthiness		Pro-Sociality	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Treat	0.114 (0.122)	0.0731 (0.132)	0.0438 (0.125)	-0.0234 (0.125)	0.274** (0.114)	0.186* (0.108)	0.245** (0.117)	0.166 (0.124)
Constant	-2.196 (1.413)	-2.748* (1.404)	-0.107 (1.037)	-0.163 (0.979)	-0.948 (1.852)	-1.496 (2.378)	1.566 (1.536)	0.367 (2.300)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reweighted	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	757	757	759	759	726	726	727	727
R <sup>2</sup>	0.430	0.493	0.456	0.553	0.698	0.676	0.657	0.643

**Notes:** The table reports ITT effects of in-person conversations on standardized perceptions of general trustworthiness (columns 1, 2, 5, 6) and general pro-sociality (columns 3, 4, 7, 8). Columns (1), (3), (5) and (7) show the estimates using equal weights. These columns are the same as columns (2) and (5) in Table A30 and Table A31, respectively. Columns (2) and (4) reweight the like-minded subsample to match the contrary-minded subsample on the following covariates: mean age, share of males, females and non-binary, party shares, and self-reported left-right classification. Analogously, Columns (6) and (8) reweight the contrary-minded subsample to match the like-minded subsample on the these covariates. This analysis is discussed in Section 4. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A35: Disappointment: Comparison of Time Trends

	Affective Polarization				Social Cohesion			
	Stereotypes		Willingness		Trustworthiness		Pro-Sociality	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Time $\times$ CM	0.0298 (0.0999)	0.0112 (0.121)	-0.0641 (0.120)	-0.0316 (0.145)	-0.0139 (0.0916)	-0.0336 (0.110)	-0.231* (0.120)	-0.207 (0.146)
CM	0.000499 (0.129)	-0.0697 (0.182)	0.228 (0.140)	-0.0191 (0.209)	-0.257** (0.112)	-0.0563 (0.152)	-0.343*** (0.125)	0.00309 (0.180)
Time	0.190** (0.0734)	0.188** (0.0894)	-0.198** (0.0879)	-0.212** (0.107)	0.271*** (0.0679)	0.290*** (0.0819)	0.166** (0.0841)	0.173* (0.102)
Constant	-0.204** (0.0909)	-1.257 (1.430)	3.448*** (0.100)	4.039** (1.585)	4.089*** (0.0795)	-0.217 (1.409)	3.460*** (0.0893)	2.810* (1.436)
Basic Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Additional Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1090	1075	1098	1083	1098	1083	1100	1085

**Notes:** The table tests for different time trends between the control groups. It shows regression results of the non-standardized outcome variables on the dummy *time*, the dummy *CM* and their interaction. *CM* denotes whether a person was matched to a like- or a contrary-minded partner. Standard errors are clustered at participant level. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , and \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$