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.

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 high level (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Boxell et al., 2020). These trends 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.

According to a long-standing idea, social interactions play an important, yet two-sided role. On the one hand, there are concerns that interactions between *like-minded* individuals increase polarization as they lead to mutual reconfirmation and thus more extreme views (Sunstein, 2009). On the other hand, there is hope that interactions between *contrary-minded* individuals reduce polarization as people step out of their like-minded peer group and get to know those individuals who hold opposing views and their opinions. This idea has received substantial attention in the context of echo chambers in social media (e.g., Allcott et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2021). However, we still lack rigorous evidence on the effects of "real" face-to-face conversations between like-minded and contrary-minded persons. Understanding the impacts of in-person interactions seems crucial, in particular in light of the sheer amount of face-to-face conversations in daily life and their great impact on behavior, preferences and beliefs.[1]

In this paper, we study the effects of face-to-face conversations among politically like- and among politically contrary-minded individuals in 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.[2]

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[1] In particular, in-person interactions have strong effects on political preferences (e.g., Pons, 2018; Green et al., 2003; Gerber and Green, 2000; Kalla and Broockman, 2020) and intergroup prejudices (e.g., Broockman and Kalla, 2016; Paluck et al., 2019; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

[2] 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 Talks*) and Europe (*Europe Talks*). Further countries are: Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

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

To identify the effects of having a face-to-face conversation, we exploit 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. To estimate the effects of a meeting, 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). However, a potential concern is that the partners' decisions depend on the first-accepters. To address this issue, 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.[3] The like-minded treatment and control groups contain those first-accepters in the sample, who were matched with a partner with similar political views. The contrary-minded treatment and control groups are composed of those who were matched with a 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 polarization, defined as polarization in political views towards more extreme positions.[4] We

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[3] 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.

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

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. When condensing the two individual measures into one overall measure by conducting a PCA, like-minded meetings increase ideological polarization by 0.319 standard deviations. The estimates for contrary-minded conversations are negative, yet small and insignificant. As a benchmark, prior work by Allcott et al. (2020) have found that a four week long deactivation of Facebook in the US reduced their index of polarization of views by 0.1 standard deviations.

Further analysis shows that the null effects for contrary-minded conversations do not hide opposing polarizing ("backlash") and depolarizing adjustments that cancel each other out. Moreover, 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.[5] In line with this, we measure affective polarization by considering aversion

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[5]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.

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 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 to engage in personal contact. 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. As a point of comparison, a recent meta-study on the effect of inter-group contact on tolerance has found a pooled estimate of 0.39 standard deviations (Paluck et al., 2019). Additionally, Broockman and Kalla (2016) showed that a face-to-face conversation with transgender/gender non-conforming canvassers increased tolerance by 0.45 (0.3) standard deviations three days (three weeks) after the conversations.

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.[6] 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

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[6]Moreover, the tendency towards a lesser willingness to engage in 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.

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). In a recent 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 conversations 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 and moderated group deliberations (Fishkin et al., 2021; Schkade et al., 2007).[7] 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 take place in a natural environment, which is an important feature as the way in which conversations are held matters (Kalla and Broockman, 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.

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[7]More generally, these studies explore the concept of deliberative democracy (e.g., Habermas, 2015).

For example, Rao (2019) and Lowe (2021) study the effect of contact between different castes in India.[8] 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. 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 in 2015/16, the 2013 founded right-wing party "Alternative für Deutschland" (translation: Alternative for Germany) had quickly gained popularity and with 12.6% received the third highest voting share 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 prompted 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."

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[8]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).

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. Although 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*). Overall, the intervention has taken place in more than 30 countries with more than 170,000 participants to date.[9]

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 baseline 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 the center-left.[10] 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 regis-*

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[9]Source: https://www.mycountrytalks.org, on September 16 2021

[10]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).

tration 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.[11]

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 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)*: This group includes those participants who were matched with a partner who had answered more than half (i.e., four or more) of the political registration questions differently. It comprises 46% of all matched participants. (ii) *Like-Minded Partners (LM)*: This group includes participants who were matched with a partner who answered less than half (i.e., three or fewer) of the political registration questions differently. It includes 54% of the matched participants.[12]

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

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[11]The five free response questions were about the participants, their hobbies and dislikes. See Table A2.

[12]Throughout the paper, we show that the results are robust to alternative sample splits into like- and contrary-minded partners.

partner *first*, before the partner did. This leads to the fact that the (second) partner, who had not (yet) accepted, 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 also accepted. In such 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 partner) and meeting availability (treatment group vs. control group).

There are two key points for this paper. First, rather than first-accepters selecting themselves into the treatment and control group, the partners of the first-accepters assign the first-accepters to the treatment and control group. Second, the partners could base their decision on whether to also accept 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 people's 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   Baseline and endline surveys were sent out by the organizers of *Germany Talks*. Unfortunately, the baseline survey was distributed more than one 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 also

accepted.[13] Consequently, 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 that are robust.[14]

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

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 comprises 1,523 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.[15] 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 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.[16] Thus, we should expect that one group gathers around left answers while another group chooses predominantly right answers, if there are actually members of the two distinct camps within our

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

[14]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.

[15]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.

[16]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.

sample. To check this, we use latent class analysis.[17] 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 a 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 the two 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 with more liberal notions and clear disagreement with more conservative viewpoints. Likewise, members of the right group show a rather conservative answer pattern.[18] 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 that we use, it is representative of all registered participants in terms of class membership (83% and 17%). Taking all facts together, our sample comprises a majority of left- and a minority of right-leaning participants.

Subsamples Columns 3 and 4 of Table 3 provide descriptive statistics of the subsamples of like-minded and contrary-minded first-accepters. Subsample sizes are similar with 775 participants in the like-minded and 748 in the contrary-minded condition. The two subsamples are comparable, except for political preferences, with the like-minded sample being 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 with

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[17]LCA is related to factor analysis as both explore the relationship among variables. However, 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.

[18]For example, membership in the left group predicts disagreement with the demand of stricter border control, and agreement with the notion that #metoo had some positive effects. Membership in the right group predicts agreement with stricter border control, but shows otherwise a less differentiating pattern. This is unsurprising as many of the conservative answer options are rather extreme opinions. For example, disagreement with the statement that the #metoo movement and the debate about sexual harassment had *some* positive effects arguably reflects a far right position.

fellow liberals due to excess supply. Consequently, 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- 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 the extent to which the treatment conditions actually reflect politically like- and contrary-mindedness within pairs, we compare them with an alternative way of defining of whether a person met a like- or 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 strong 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- or 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.[19]

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

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[19]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*.

OLS:

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

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 ϵ_i is an individual-specific error term. β 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 at the 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 unobserved by capturing potentially visible information. It comprises political self-classification (left to right), party, political engagement, religion, religiousness, marital status and the 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 the respective outcome variable by controlling for $BasicInfo_i$ and $AddInfo_i$. This would be violated if, for example, some attitudes of the participants shine through in the introductory mail, consequently affect the partners' decisions, and importantly also have an impact on the outcome variable.

For robustness, we also report estimates from OLS regressions without $AddInfo_i$ 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 $Treat_i$ and a set of controls that predicts outcome Y_i. In a third step, the union of both sets of control variables is used to estimate the treatment effect. The conclusions from all 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 the treatment and control groups in both conditions LM and CM is achieved. None of the coefficients that are not

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affected by the treatment are significant in one of the treatment conditions LM and CM, nor is the F-Test of joint significance. Table A5 shows that the 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 the baseline 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 the treatment and control groups in both the LM (column 1) and CM (column 2) conditions. Mean attrition is 49% in both cases.

As many participants already knew their treatment status before the baseline survey was sent, people may have selected differently into our panel depending on the 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 the 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 the extent to which 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 partners had accepted, by construction non-compliance is only one-sided. Participants in the control group had no chance to meet their partner.[20] Compliance with treatment status is very similar across both treatment conditions, at 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. They are presumably 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 sep-

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[20]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.

arately 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.[21] 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, which suggests that it is unlikely that the differences in effects are only found due to the dissimilarity of the subsamples.

5   Effects on Ideological Polarization

Many scholars argue that deliberations among citizens lead to more agreement within 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 with eleven different political viewpoints in the baseline and endline survey. See Table 2 for an overview. Seven out of the eleven viewpoints were those 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 with the viewpoints. More precisely, it is defined as the change in the Euclidean distance to the center of the scale between the 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

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[21]Note that this does not concern the identification of the ITT of like- vs contrary-minded meetings.

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 4 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, respectively. 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 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. The 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 using alternative distances measures, Manhattan distance and Mahalanobis distance 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 the 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 one's own political opinion.

Why is there no adjustment in contrary-minded conversations? 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 of discussing a particular topic. The results suggest that the effects are not driven by the avoidance of topics between contrary-minded persons. By contrast, participants particularly discuss contentious topics and learn about their partner's viewpoint, but do not alter their own opinion due to it.

To estimate the overall effect on ideological polarization, we condense the two ideological polarization measures into one measure using a principal component. Using one measure yields effect sizes that usefully summarize the overall impact of the conversations on ideological polarization and allows us to benchmark effect sizes. Figure 4 provides ITT estimates for both treatment conditions. The point estimate for like-minded meetings being 0.319 standard deviations is slightly larger than in the case of the two individual measures.

Is the ITT effect for like-minded meetings large? As one benchmark, we can compare the effect size 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. Our overall effect size is more than 3 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 0.319 of a standard deviation, our ITT estimates is about 84 percent of that increase.[22]

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 estimating the impact of face-to-face discussions with members of one's own and the other political camp on affective polarization.

Measures To assess the effect on affective polarization, we use two measures, namely 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.[23] We elicited stereotypes about contrary-minded persons that were communicated by former participants of *Germany Talks*. These were the prejudices 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

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[22]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.

[23]Note that we did not elicit beliefs and attitudes towards the partner, but towards some arbitrary person with opposing views.

gain 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 persons significantly reduced stereotypes. The point estimate is -0.379 standard deviations. Figure A4 estimates the ITT effects on each stereotype separately. The reduction is strongest 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 one's own political camp does not have any effect on stereotypes about contrary-minded persons. 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, for neither the overall nor for the individual stereotypes.

Tables A20, A24, A25, A23 and A22 show the robustness of the results to dropping controls, and running PDS regressions for the overall and individual stereotypes. Tables A13 and A26 show that the effects are similar if treatment conditions definitions are altered by varying the cut-off and using alignment of ideological classes, respectively. Table A27 provides the results when like-minded regressions are reweighted to match the contrary-minded sample, and vice-versa. We find the same pattern.[24]

Willingness to Engage in Personal Contact Figure 6 presents the effect of the conversation on willingness to engage in 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 stronger willingness to engage in personal contact, yet insignificant. Analogously, the coefficient for like-minded meetings is -0.0993 and insignificant. Table 5 shows that 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 a similar size (0.176 standard deviations) but significant at the 5% level due to a smaller standard error. Similarly, the coefficient for like-minded partner is -0.137 standard

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

deviations and significant at the 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 to engage in personal contact paint a coherent picture. To estimate the overall effect on affective polarization, we conduct a PCA with all five affective polarization measures, the four stereotypes and willingness to engage in personal contact. Hence, the resulting overall measure is a weighted index of the five measures capturing aversion towards contrary-minded persons.[25] This usefully summarizes the overall impact on affective polarization and allows benchmarking 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 persons 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 inter-group 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 ten-minute face-to-face conversation with transgender/gender non-conforming canvassers leads to an increase in tolerance. The effect sizes are 0.45 standard deviations after three days and 0.3 standard deviations after three weeks, respectively. Our effect consistently ranks between both the two points in time of elicitation (the endline survey being sent out seven 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 ten-minute conversation may give hope that our conversations with a median duration of 150 minutes lastingly reduced affective polarization.

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 per-

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[25]Table A29 provides the loadings on the overall measure. With positive signs for the individual stereotypes and a negative sign for willingness to engage in personal contact, it confirms the interpretation of an overall measure for animosity towards contrary-minded persons.

ceived. 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.[26] 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 the extent to which German citizens generally care about the well-being 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, although 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, although 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 the robustness of the results towards varying the definition of treatment conditions. Table A34 provides reweighted results and finds largely the same pattern.

To assess the overall impact of the conversations on the perception of social cohesion, we summarize both perceptions into one measure by using a PCA. Figure 7 plots the corresponding ITT effects. In line with the effects on the individual measures, the estimate for contrary-minded meetings is 0.299 standard deviations. The like-minded coefficient is positive, yet insignificant.

The findings are in large parts in line with the effects on affective polarization and the idea that the positive inter-group 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.

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[26]Similarly, Dinesen et al. (2020) show that ethnic diversity is generally negatively related to generalized trust.

Although affective polarization tends to increase, trust and perception of general pro-sociality both also tend to improve.

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 drives the effects. To assess this concern, we compare the time trends of the two control groups. If disappointment with not being accepted by the contrary-minded partner is actually increasing affective polarization, we should see different time trends for the contrary- and the like-minded control group as the latter were not rejected by contrary-minded partners. Table A35 finds no sign for different time trends.[27] 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 further fortifies these opinions. As a consequence, existing differences in opinions 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 negative by themselves given that a healthy democracy "is designed" to handle such disagreements. However, as soon as people condition their attitudes and behavior on other people's 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 talking to someone who holds contrasting political views reduces negative attitudes towards contrary-minded persons and improves the perception of social cohesion. Therefore, the study provides clear policy implications. It shows that reducing obstacles to communicating with contrary-minded people and facilitating interaction between different political camps can be an effective countermeasure against affective polarization. One possibility to achieve this may be interventions like "My Country Talks". However, these interventions should focus on interac-

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[27]Note that the comparison makes 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 with their partner prior to the baseline survey, the results should be interpreted carefully.

tions between groups. More generally, our findings support any effort to bring together to talk those who hold different views. People may understand each other better without having to give up their own convictions.

This study explores the effects of one single in-person conversation. It therefore provides a benchmark for the possible effects of echo chambers. 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 contraints, 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 persons, 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 types of persons can actually be reached via relatively simple policies.

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Figure 1: Quasi-experimental Setting

Recruitment by broad set of news outlets

Registration (N = 19,365)

Assignment of partner:
Matching based on political attitudes

Introductory Mails sent out

Like-minded Partner
(N = 10,344)

Contrary-minded Partner
(N = 8,797)

No Match
(N = 224)

No one accepts

Participant accepts first

Partner accepts first

Participant accepts first

No one accepts

Partner accepts first

Partner does not accept:
Like-Minded Control (LM-C)

Partner accepts:
Like-Minded Treatment (LM-T)

Partner accepts:
Contrary-Minded Treatment (CM-T)

Partner does not accept:
Contrary-Minded Control (CM-C)

Meetings

Baseline Survey
N = 5,270
• Main Controls
• Political Attitudes

Endline Survey
All: N = 4,247
Panel: N = 2,646 (LM = 748; CM = 774)

Main Outcomes:
• Political Attitudes
• Stereotypes
• Perception of Social Cohesion

Figure 2: Registered Participants of Germany Talks

Participants Germany Talks

1   279
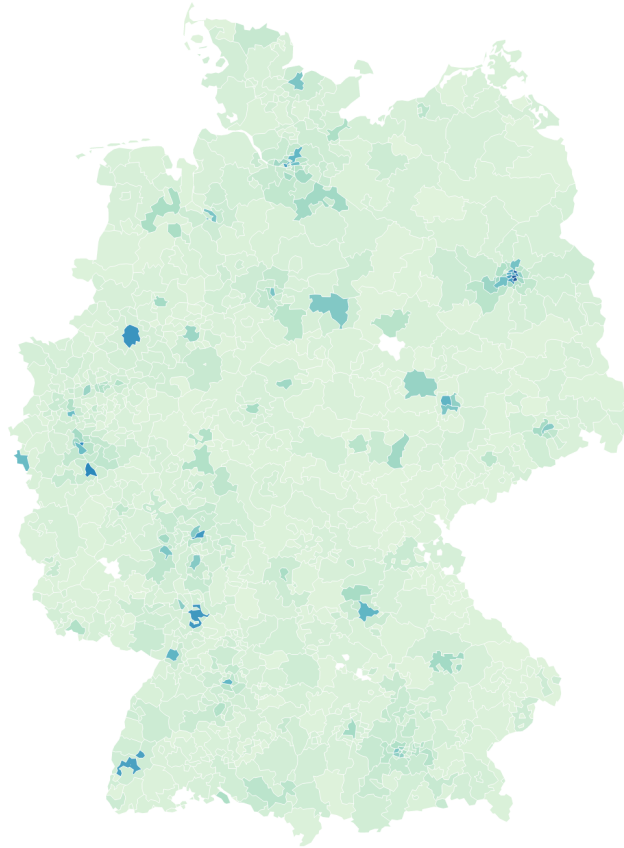
Notes: Map of Germany showing the places where participants registered for *Germany Talks*. Level of visualization are NUTS regions. Blank areas depict NUTS regions where no participant registered.

Figure 3: Topics of the Conversations
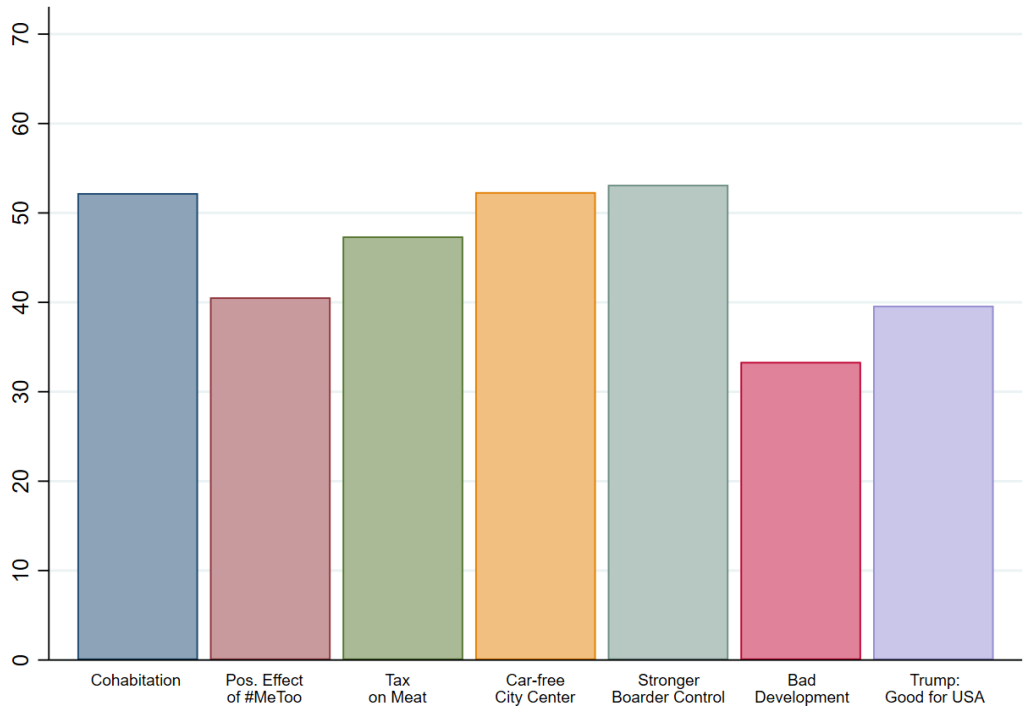
Notes: Theis figure plots which of the political registration questions were discussed during the conversations. The y-axis of the graph denotes the frequency in %.

Figure 4: Effect of the Conversations on Ideological Polarization
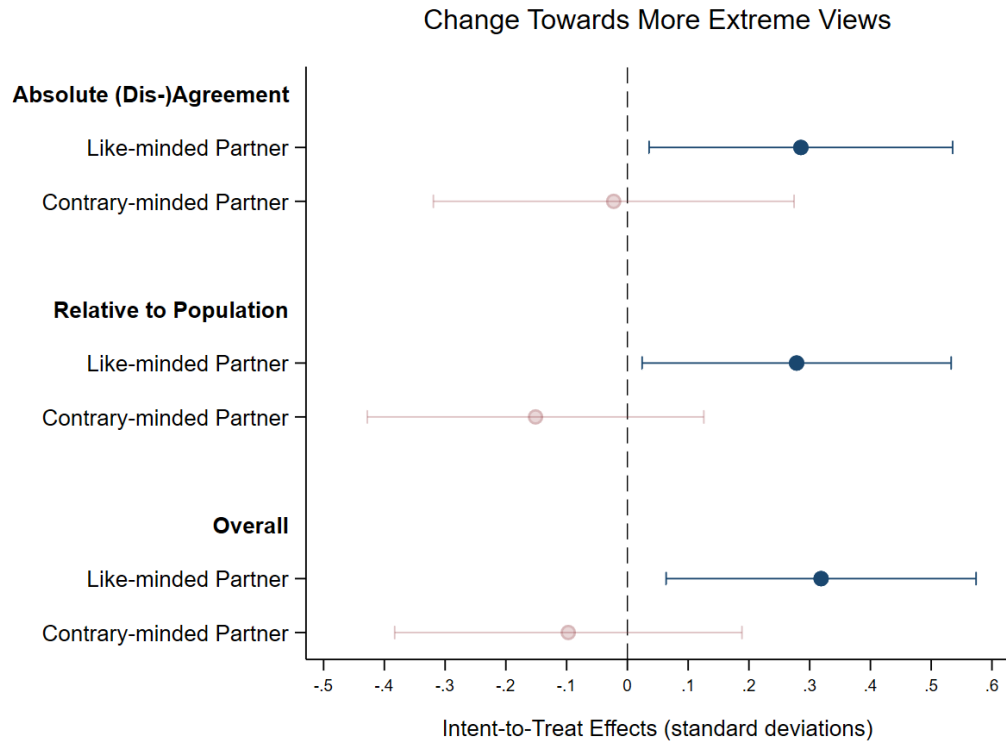
Notes: This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized change of the overall political opinion towards more extreme views. It plots the effects on the change towards a more extreme opinion in terms of absolute (dis-)agreement to policy views, the change towards more extreme views relative to the population and overall ideological polarization. The later is defined as the first principal component of the two other 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)
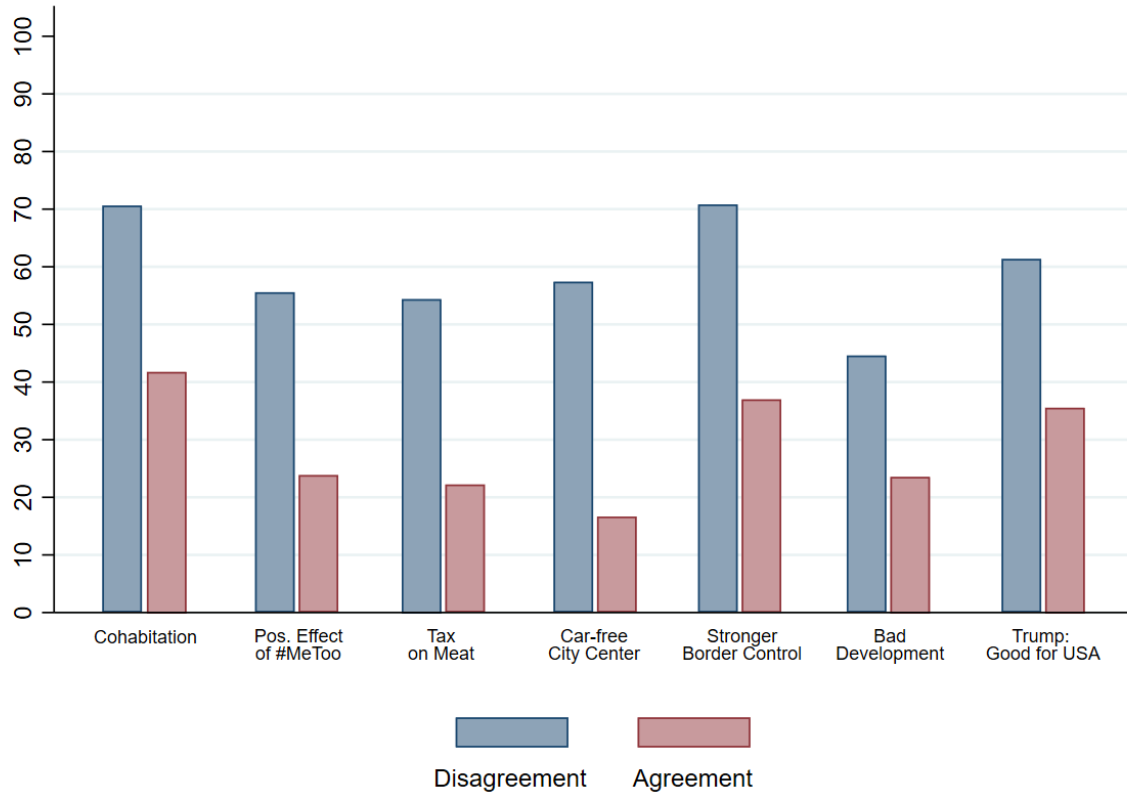
Notes: The figure plots probabilities of discussion for the seven political registration questions in the contrary-minded treatment condition, depending on whether the partners agreed or disagreed on the topic. The Y-axis indicates the share of pairs that discussed the respective topic. Table A1 shows the political registration questions.

Figure 6: Effect on Affective Polarization
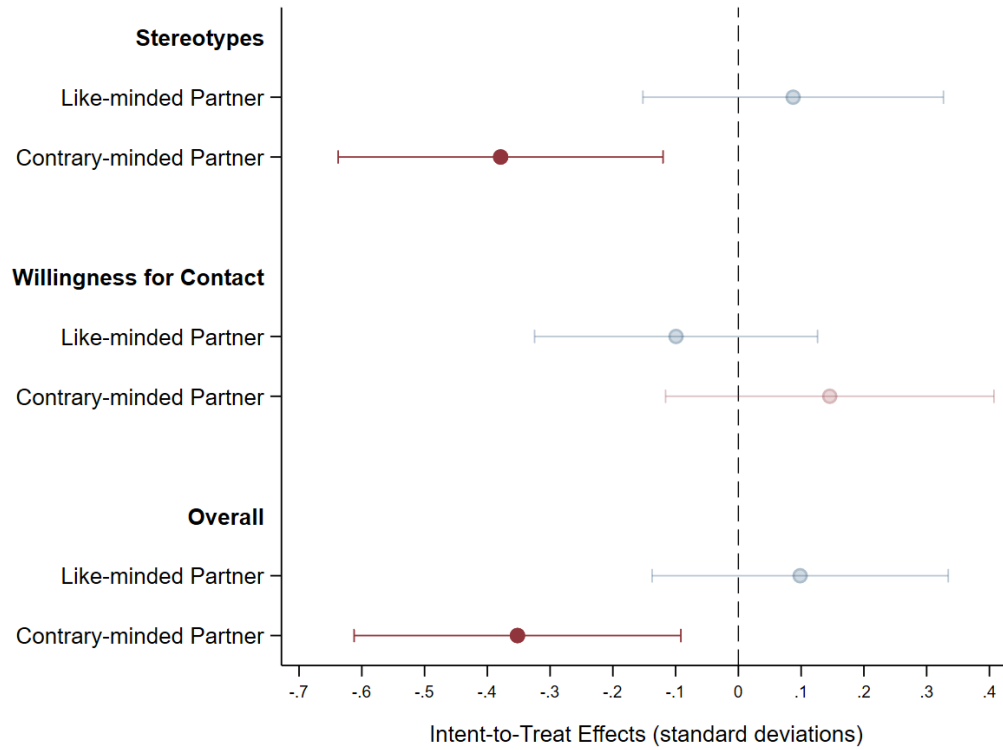
Notes: This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized overall stereotypes about a person with opposing political views, willingness to engage in personal contact with a person with opposing political views, and the overall affective polarization measure. The overall stereotype is defined as the first principal component of all four elicited stereotypes. The overall affective polarization measure is defined as the first principal component of all four elicited stereotypes about and the willingness to engage in personal contact. 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
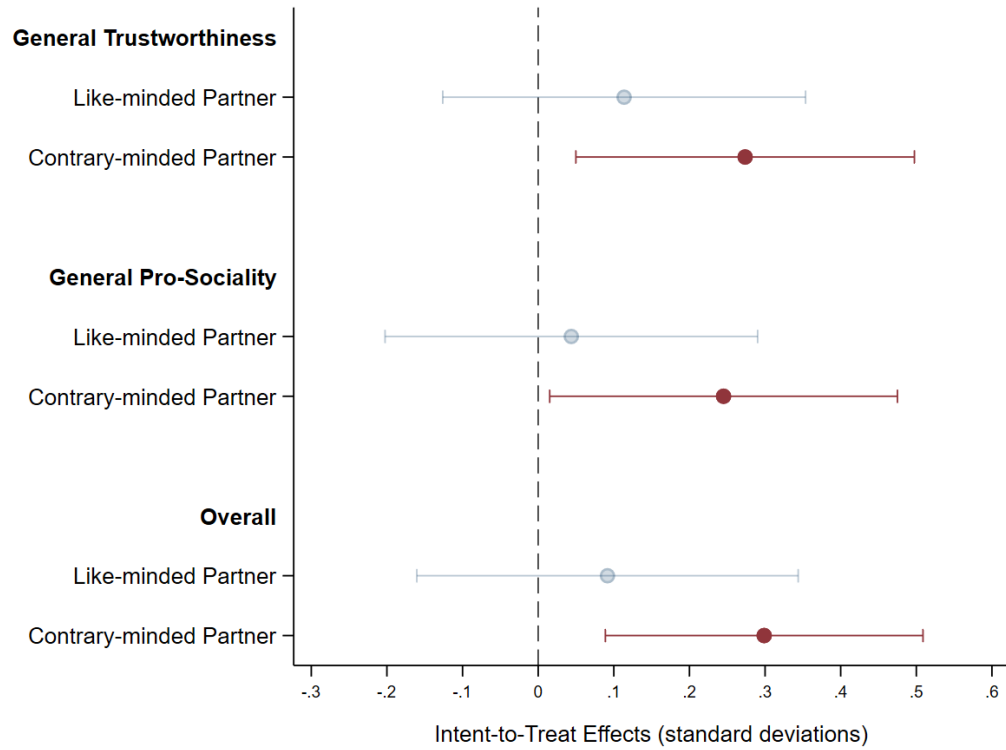
Notes: This figure shows the ITT effects of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized perception of social cohesion. It plots the impacts on the perception that fellow citizens are generally trustworthy, the perception to what extent fellow citizens generally care about the well-being of other and the overall effect on the perception of social cohesion. The latter is defined as the first principal component of the two primer measures. 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
Political Views	
Overall Political Opinion	
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.
Affective Polarization	
Overall Stereotype	
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.
Willingness to Engage in Personal Contact	I would like this person to be in my personal environment. (rev.)
Perception of Social Cohesion	
Trustworthiness	One can trust most people in Germany.
Pro-Sociality	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
Age				
18 - 34	24	25	27	23
35 - 54	32	37	35	39
55 or older	43	38	37	39
Gender				
Female	49	37	42	32
State				
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
Migration background				
Yes	23	10	10	10
Education				
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

	German Population	Sample		
		All	LM	CM
Other	0	1	1	2
Income (monthly; EUR)				
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
Political spectrum left-right				
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
Party				
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
Ideological Class				
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.

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

	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)
Beliefs		
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 to Engage in 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	-0.0993	-0.137*	0.131	0.146	0.176**
	(0.110)	(0.115)	(0.0799)	(0.122)	(0.133)	(0.0779)
Constant	0.733	-0.563		1.149	0.211	
	(1.196)	(1.104)		(0.991)	(1.482)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	755	755	755	727	727	727
R^2	0.394	0.501		0.529	0.582	

Notes: Regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is standardized willingness to engage in 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):

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

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. $\overline{Y}_{s1c}$ 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 to Engage in Personal Contact We elicited participants' *willingness to engage in 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
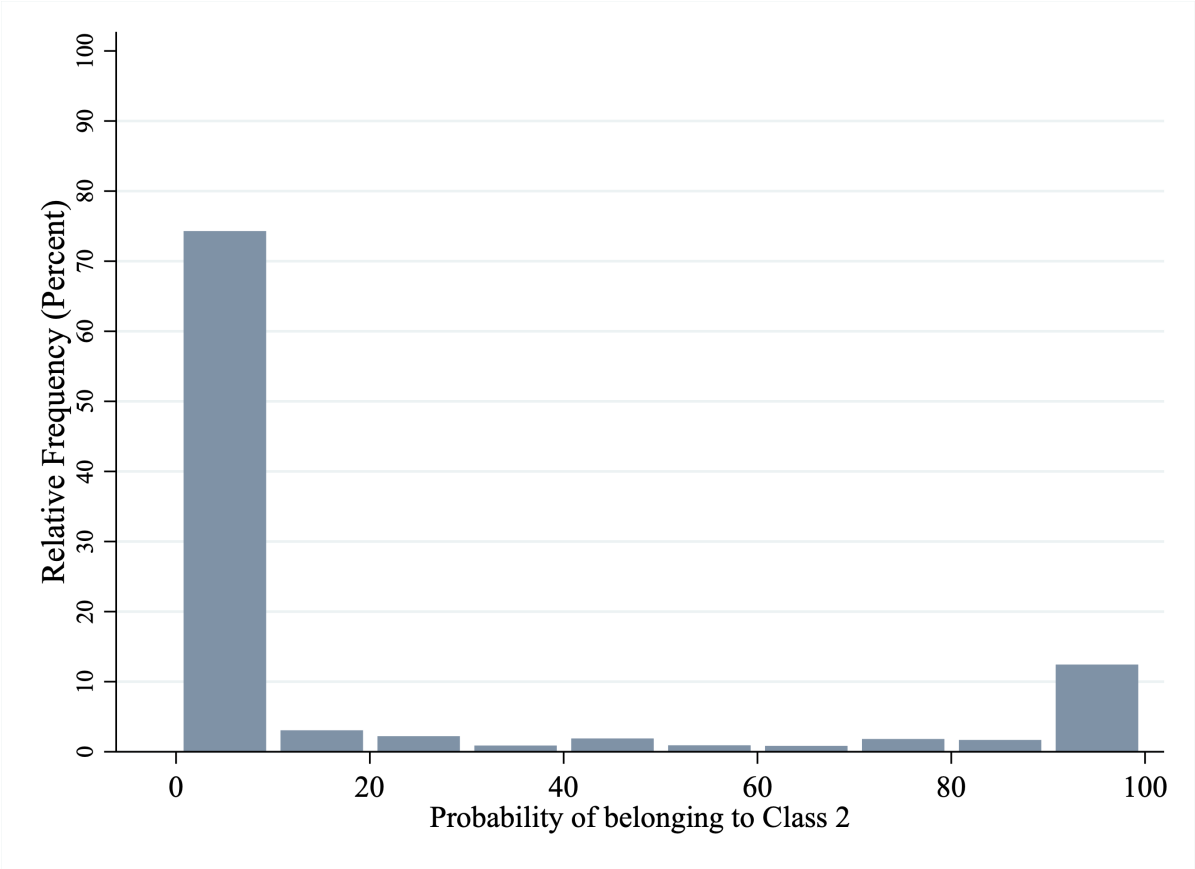
Notes: The Figure plots the distribution of probabilities to belong to class 1 from the Latent class analysis. The LCA is described in Section 3.

Figure A2: LCA: Conditional Likelihood of Agreement
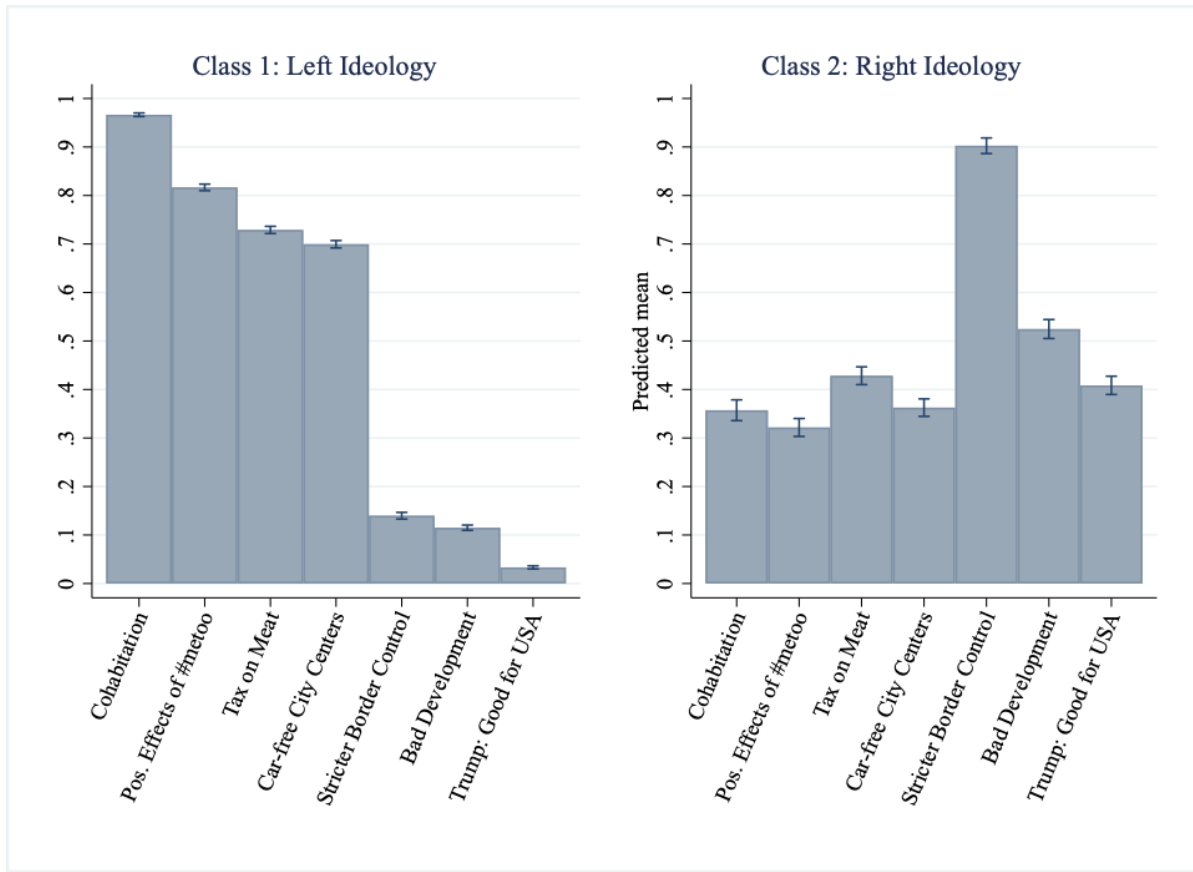
Notes: The Figure plots the probabilities of agreeing to the binary political registration questions conditional on LCA class membership. The political registration questions are shown in Table A1 and the LCA is described in Section 3. Error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals.

Figure A3: Effect on General Change of Political Opinion
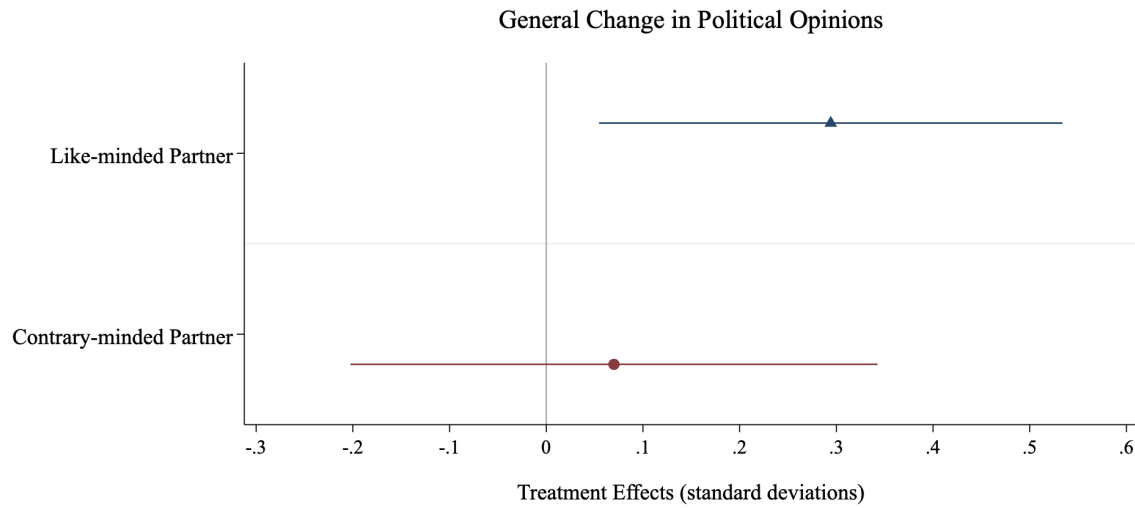
General Change in Political Opinions

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)
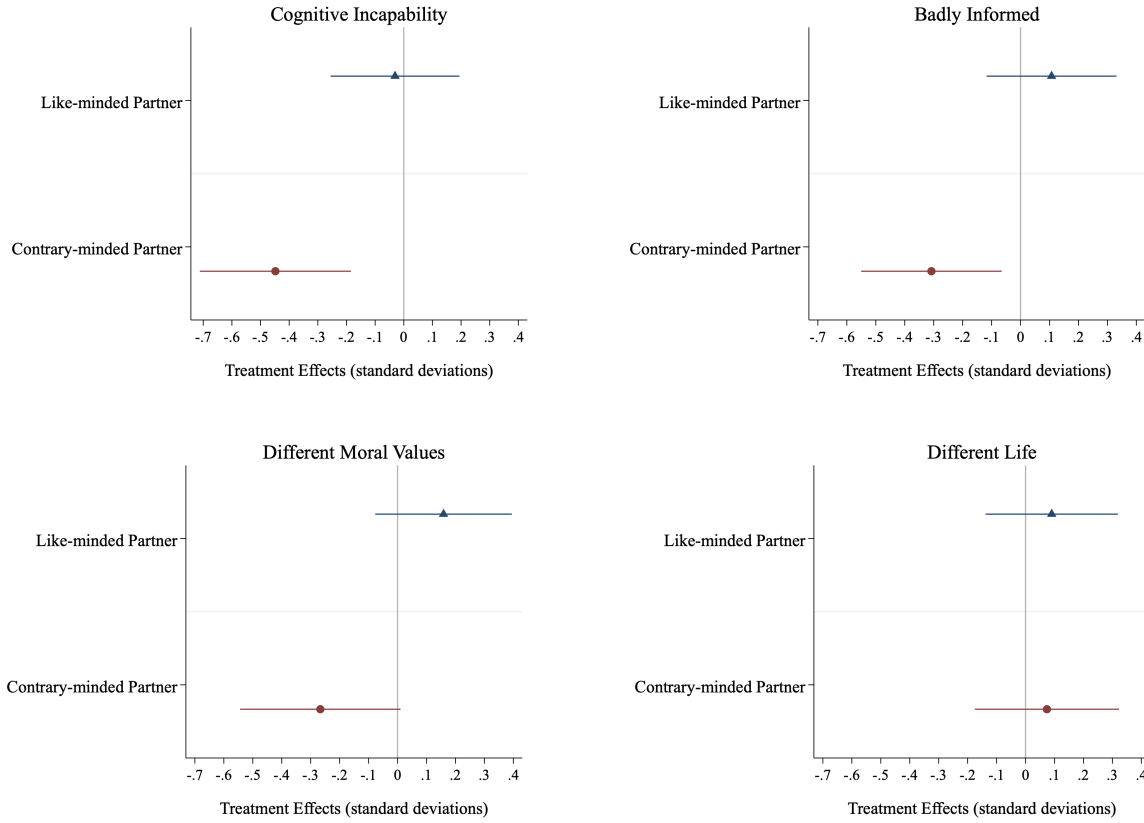
Notes: The figure shows the ITT effect of the like- and contrary-minded treatments on standardized stereotypes. Higher values denote higher stereotypes. The first panel shows the effect on the stereotype that contrary-minded individuals are cognitively less capable. The second panel plots the effect 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 lifes, 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(%)
Gender		
Female	38	21
Male	62	79
Age		
18 - 34	46	33
35 - 54	34	38
55 or older	21	29
Ideological Class		
Left Ideology	98	57
Right Ideology	2	43
Ideological Class: Overlap		
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
Political Attitudes		
Border Control	0.137	-0.0270
	(0.131)	(0.138)
#metoo	-0.151	-0.212
	(0.121)	(0.145)
Meat Tax	0.00334	-0.0752
	(0.140)	(0.189)
Car free inner-cities	-0.174	-0.170
	(0.130)	(0.160)
Cohabitation (Non-)Muslims	-0.0590	0.0679
	(0.110)	(0.149)
Development Germany	0.0688	0.147
	(0.144)	(0.168)
Trump	-0.0204	0.149
	(0.103)	(0.122)
Same-sex marriage	-0.0505	0.0666
	(0.140)	(0.170)
Cooperation within EU	-0.0733	0.114
	(0.0886)	(0.120)
Income Tax	0.0764	-0.0690
	(0.160)	(0.181)
Trustworthiness Media	0.0547	-0.257
	(0.153)	(0.161)
Importance		
Importance: Border Control	0.0639	0.193
	(0.209)	(0.220)
Importance: #metoo	0.0827	-0.141
	(0.163)	(0.195)
Importance: Meat Tax	0.0190	0.0870
	(0.165)	(0.184)
Importance: Car free inner-cities	0.0349	0.0444
	(0.167)	(0.191)
Importance: Cohabitation (Non-)Muslims	0.169	0.142
	(0.151)	(0.156)
Importance: Development Germany	0.351*	0.163
	(0.207)	(0.203)
Importance: Trump	0.305	-0.0309
	(0.210)	(0.222)
Beliefs		
Number applications for asylum	-16025.4	-6738.0
	(32060.3)	(37974.5)

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

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

	Like-minded Partner	Contrary-minded Partner
Far right	0.00128	0.00814
	(0.00228)	(0.0131)
Not specified	-0.0113	-0.0119
	(0.0121)	(0.0112)
Party		
CDU/CSU	-0.0273	0.00295
	(0.0208)	(0.0292)
SPD	0.0564*	-0.0197
	(0.0325)	(0.0356)
Bündnis/90 Die Grüne	-0.0145	-0.0413
	(0.0536)	(0.0561)
FDP	0.0247	0.00427
	(0.0234)	(0.0349)
Die Linke	-0.0653	-0.0206
	(0.0396)	(0.0402)
AfD	-0.000179	0.0518**
	(0.00153)	(0.0230)
Other party	0.0154	0.0162
	(0.0185)	(0.0287)
Don't Vote	0.000221	-0.000299
	(0.00632)	(0.00877)
Not specified	0.0107	0.00673
	(0.0215)	(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	-0.0228
	(0.0345)	(0.0357)
Constant	0.845**	0.640
	(0.365)	(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 onn. 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***	0.0715***
	(0.0126)	(0.0155)
Constant	-0.0449	0.494***
	(0.0685)	(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	0.0157
	(0.00721)	(0.0187)
Constant	0.446***	0.633***
	(0.00488)	(0.0131)
R^2	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**	0.286**	0.281***	-0.0645	-0.0225	-0.00911
	(0.123)	(0.127)	(0.0810)	(0.140)	(0.151)	(0.0827)
Constant	0.615	0.927		-2.226**	-1.309	
	(0.575)	(1.133)		(0.924)	(1.777)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R^2	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*	0.279**	0.199**	-0.156	-0.151	-0.112
	(0.130)	(0.129)	(0.0834)	(0.131)	(0.141)	(0.0797)
Constant	1.505**	1.256		-2.404**	-4.168**	
	(0.738)	(1.255)		(0.959)	(1.664)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R^2	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**	0.276**	0.243***	-0.122	-0.00411	0.00523
	(0.111)	(0.114)	(0.0751)	(0.176)	(0.200)	(0.0912)
Constant	-0.632	-0.268		-2.321**	-0.556	
	(0.573)	(1.166)		(0.909)	(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^2	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**	0.286**	0.187**	-0.221	-0.102	-0.171*
	(0.108)	(0.111)	(0.0738)	(0.174)	(0.184)	(0.0916)
Constant	-0.220	-0.763		-2.750***	-2.789	
	(0.602)	(1.158)		(0.995)	(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^2	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)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Standard LM	Weak LM	Strict LM	Standard CM	Strict CM	Weak CM
Abs. (Dis-)Agreement	0.286**	0.344**	0.270**	-0.0225	0.0658	-0.127
	(0.127)	(0.159)	(0.106)	(0.151)	(0.118)	(0.272)
Rel. to Population	0.279**	0.323*	0.245**	-0.151	-0.0331	-0.256
	(0.129)	(0.179)	(0.110)	(0.141)	(0.112)	(0.230)
Stereotypes	0.0873	0.185	0.0554	-0.379***	-0.237**	-0.552**
	(0.122)	(0.165)	(0.0960)	(0.132)	(0.0966)	(0.230)
Willingness Contact	-0.0993	-0.0994	-0.114	0.146	0.0208	0.160
	(0.115)	(0.147)	(0.0906)	(0.133)	(0.101)	(0.212)
Trustworthiness	0.114	0.0366	0.159*	0.274**	0.253***	0.400*
	(0.122)	(0.168)	(0.0897)	(0.114)	(0.0872)	(0.204)
Pro-Sociality	0.0438	0.0412	0.0629	0.245**	0.176*	0.208
	(0.125)	(0.175)	(0.0939)	(0.117)	(0.0943)	(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 to engage in 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**	0.264**	0.237***	-0.0908	-0.0392	-0.0663
	(0.121)	(0.129)	(0.0819)	(0.137)	(0.145)	(0.0823)
Constant	0.442	1.129		-2.792***	-2.558	
	(0.705)	(1.217)		(0.886)	(1.691)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R^2	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	0.213*	0.232***	-0.0402	-0.0278	-0.0455
	(0.117)	(0.120)	(0.0799)	(0.152)	(0.163)	(0.0846)
Constant	0.137	-0.533		-2.455**	-3.181*	
	(0.592)	(1.163)		(1.110)	(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^2	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	0.233*	0.173**	-0.173	-0.152	-0.160**
	(0.126)	(0.128)	(0.0830)	(0.126)	(0.132)	(0.0792)
Constant	1.930*	1.967		-2.416***	-3.793**	
	(1.046)	(1.332)		(0.860)	(1.600)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R^2	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	0.200	0.148*	-0.131	-0.139	-0.0989
	(0.131)	(0.134)	(0.0839)	(0.128)	(0.138)	(0.0809)
Constant	1.255	0.516		-2.560***	-4.447**	
	(0.862)	(1.216)		(0.964)	(1.879)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	721	721	721	695	695	695
R^2	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**	0.282**	0.279**	0.262*	-0.0225	-0.0614	-0.151	-0.234
	(0.127)	(0.134)	(0.129)	(0.137)	(0.151)	(0.166)	(0.141)	(0.156)
Constant	0.927	1.271	1.256	1.408	-1.309	-0.900	-4.168**	-4.919**
	(1.133)	(1.090)	(1.255)	(1.320)	(1.777)	(1.916)	(1.664)	(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^2	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***	0.294**	0.216***	0.0998	0.0700	0.167**
	(0.115)	(0.122)	(0.0818)	(0.143)	(0.138)	(0.0790)
Constant	0.664	0.373		-0.738	-4.155**	
	(0.791)	(1.379)		(1.167)	(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^2	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	0.0873	0.0303	-0.292**	-0.379***	-0.305***
	(0.117)	(0.122)	(0.0814)	(0.120)	(0.132)	(0.0798)
Constant	-2.542**	-2.519*		-2.496**	-2.421	
	(1.196)	(1.412)		(0.982)	(1.489)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	747	747	747	720	720	720
R^2	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	0.0903	0.113	0.0853	0.0738	-0.0552
	(0.107)	(0.116)	(0.0752)	(0.125)	(0.127)	(0.0799)
Constant	-1.927***	-1.788*		-1.301	-1.012	
	(0.557)	(1.039)		(0.838)	(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^2	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	0.159	0.0897	-0.214	-0.267*	-0.234***
	(0.111)	(0.120)	(0.0765)	(0.130)	(0.141)	(0.0797)
Constant	-0.704	-0.370		-1.718*	-0.796	
	(0.903)	(1.215)		(0.969)	(1.741)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes		No	Yes	
Observations	753	753	753	725	725	725
R^2	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	-0.0305	-0.0595	-0.366***	-0.448***	-0.341***
	(0.110)	(0.115)	(0.0765)	(0.124)	(0.134)	(0.0809)
Constant	-1.819*	-2.095*		-1.594	-1.327	
	(1.039)	(1.202)		(1.000)	(1.557)	
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	X	Yes	Yes	X
Additional Controls	No	Yes	X	No	Yes	
Observations	753	753	753	725	725	725
R²	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	0.107	0.0246	-0.228*	-0.308**	-0.144*
	(0.110)	(0.114)	(0.0771)	(0.116)	(0.123)	(0.0784)
Constant	-2.410**	-2.355		-1.987**	-2.777**	
	(1.213)	(1.454)		(0.967)	(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^2	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	0.0426	0.00151	-0.341**	-0.388**	-0.328***
	(0.0938)	(0.0970)	(0.0709)	(0.162)	(0.177)	(0.0930)
Constant	-3.424***	-3.943***		-2.194**	-1.107	
	(0.585)	(0.955)		(1.091)	(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^2	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	0.120	-0.0993	-0.0929	-0.379***	-0.469***	0.146	0.240*
	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.115)	(0.117)	(0.132)	(0.141)	(0.133)	(0.137)
Constant	-2.519*	-2.572*	-0.563	-0.822	-2.421	-2.876	0.211	-0.0932
	(1.412)	(1.385)	(1.104)	(1.072)	(1.489)	(1.769)	(1.482)	(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^2	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 to engage in 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 to Engage in 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	-0.166*	-0.129*	0.219	0.235	0.232**
	(0.0918)	(0.0952)	(0.0682)	(0.152)	(0.165)	(0.0927)
Constant	-0.596	-0.944		-0.0648	-1.821	
	(0.553)	(0.852)		(1.009)	(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^2	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 to Engage in 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 to Engage in Personal Contact	-0.43

Notes: The table presents the loadings of the principal component analysis of all four stereotypes and willingness to engage in 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	0.163**	0.229**	0.274**	0.155**
	(0.114)	(0.122)	(0.0768)	(0.109)	(0.114)	(0.0761)
Constant	-1.259	-2.196		-0.502	-0.948	
	(1.259)	(1.413)		(0.889)	(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^2	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	0.0438	0.0585	0.255**	0.245**	0.217***
	(0.114)	(0.125)	(0.0786)	(0.109)	(0.117)	(0.0746)
Constant	-1.078	-0.107		0.960	1.566	
	(1.248)	(1.037)		(0.815)	(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^2	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	0.131	0.132**	0.309**	0.252	0.201**
	(0.0858)	(0.0887)	(0.0644)	(0.151)	(0.166)	(0.0946)
Constant	-1.283*	-0.701		-0.494	-0.722	
	(0.722)	(1.244)		(1.143)	(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^2	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	0.0753	0.0839	0.310**	0.273*	0.218**
	(0.0897)	(0.0934)	(0.0659)	(0.146)	(0.161)	(0.0895)
Constant	-2.020***	-1.417		1.516*	2.828	
	(0.554)	(1.106)		(0.858)	(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^2	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	0.0731	0.0438	-0.0234	0.274**	0.186*	0.245**	0.166
	(0.122)	(0.132)	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.114)	(0.108)	(0.117)	(0.124)
Constant	-2.196	-2.748*	-0.107	-0.163	-0.948	-1.496	1.566	0.367
	(1.413)	(1.404)	(1.037)	(0.979)	(1.852)	(2.378)	(1.536)	(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^2	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 Coehsion			
	Stereotypes		Willingness		Trustworthines		Pro-Sociality	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Time × CM	0.0298	0.0112	-0.0641	-0.0316	-0.0139	-0.0336	-0.231*	-0.207
	(0.0999)	(0.121)	(0.120)	(0.145)	(0.0916)	(0.110)	(0.120)	(0.146)
CM	0.000499	-0.0697	0.228	-0.0191	-0.257**	-0.0563	-0.343***	0.00309
	(0.129)	(0.182)	(0.140)	(0.209)	(0.112)	(0.152)	(0.125)	(0.180)
Time	0.190**	0.188**	-0.198**	-0.212**	0.271***	0.290***	0.166**	0.173*
	(0.0734)	(0.0894)	(0.0879)	(0.107)	(0.0679)	(0.0819)	(0.0841)	(0.102)
Constant	-0.204**	-1.257	3.448***	4.039**	4.089***	-0.217	3.460***	2.810*
	(0.0909)	(1.430)	(0.100)	(1.585)	(0.0795)	(1.409)	(0.0893)	(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 *** $p < 0.01$