

9 Appendix

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Online Repository

The Online Repository associated with this article contains:

- Pre-registration plans (1, 2)
- Reproduction material (upon acceptance)
- Questionnaires
- The stimulus slides we used in the democratic persuasion town halls
- Unipark files to import W1 and W3 survey waves in Questback/ Unipark/ Tivian

9.1 Attitudes towards democracy: Sampling and prior attitudes

The V-DEM Resource guide for sustaining democracy (V-DEM 2020) characterizes ‘wavering democrats’ as potentially susceptible to democratic persuasion. The group of wavering democrats comprises those segments of the population whose attitudes on democracy lie between anti-democratic extremists and satisfied democrats. Wavering democrats express concerns about democratic politics or democratic principles but have not yet given up on the democratic idea altogether. Therefore, in recruiting a sample for the experiment, we pursued the goal of reaching a sizable number of wavering democrats.

Another aspect of our sampling recruitment strategy also followed from the V-DEM Resource guide for sustaining democracy (V-DEM 2020). We made the deliberate choice to exclude militant anti-democrats from the town hall meetings. During the recruitment survey, we filtered out respondents who met the following criteria:

- Strongly agreed that the government is hiding important information on the Covid-19 pandemic AND
- Strongly agreed that democracies are weak in making decisions AND
- Strongly disagreed that democracy may have its problem but is better than any other form of government.





















We filtered out 6 survey respondents with this combination of attitudes who therefore were not invited to the town hall meetings. While we generally encouraged critical debate, we presumed that militant anti-democrats might have impoverished the discussion climate. We further believed that attempts of democratic persuasion might be futile among this group of citizens.

To assess the participants’ pre-treatment attitudes, the table below reports the participants’ stances on democracy and the government’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. All attitudes were measured before the respondents participated in the town hall meetings. Variables are coded so that higher values indicate higher support for the current democratic order.

The vast majority of respondents supports the idea of self-governance. Considering democracy as the best form of government is an almost universally held position among the participants. Hence, attitudes towards the democratic system are overwhelmingly positive when queried on an abstract level which is in line with existing public opinion research (Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020). Still, some respondents endorse populist views on politics and some respondents do not fully support pluralist principles. But these views are only held by minorities. Yet, when it comes to the specifics of democratic practice, negative evaluations of democracy are not confined to small segments of the population. In the context of Covid-19, dissatisfaction with democracy was widespread. Hence, we succeeded in recruiting a sample including a sizable number of citizens who held concerns about democratic principles and the democratic process.

Against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, one important predictor of attitudes towards the democratic system are citizen perceptions’ of how the government handles the pandemic. The data show ample variation in attitudes towards Covid-politics. Some respondents were very satisfied and some were very dissatisfied with the government’s handling of the pandemic. We also observe notable variation across the entire response scale on whether respondents feel concerned about the infringement of their democratic

Table A1: Pre-treatment attitudes

	Min	Max	Mean	Histogram	Boxplot
Trust in Covid Politics	1.00	5.00	2.47		
Gov is hiding info on Covid (r)	1.00	5.00	3.33		
Covid policies: Harm outweighs good (r)	1.00	7.00	4.73		
Concerned about democratic rights (r)	1.00	5.00	2.64		
Satisfaction with democracy	1.00	5.00	3.09		
Pluralism	1.00	4.00	3.34		
Populist attitudes (r)	0.00	12.00	5.61		
Democracy: best form to govern	1.00	5.00	4.65		
Democracy: weak decisions (r)	1.00	5.00	4.07		
Democracy: cannot maintain order (r)	1.00	5.00	4.19		

rights. Moreover, a substantial share of participants agrees with the conspiratorial notion that “the government is hiding important information on the Covid-19 pandemic”. All things considered, with regards to the Covid-19-pandemic and its ramifications for democracy, our sampling strategy succeeded in recruiting a sizable group of respondents with critical and very critical attitudes to democracy or democracy’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

9.2 Respondents’ choice of town halls

When signing up to our academic study and the town hall meeting, respondents could choose which town hall to attend. For each town hall on a particular date, respondents were given the name of the participating politician along with the location of the politician’s electoral district. Respondents were blinded as to whether a town hall would feature democratic persuasion or not. Even though no information was given on the party affiliation of the politicians, participants might have known or looked up which parties the politicians belonged to and participants might have been more likely to sign up for liked-minded politicians.

To test whether respondents were evenly distributed among town hall meetings, we examine how party identifiers self-selected into town hall meetings. Examining all respondents who signed up for a town hall meeting, Table A2 shows the number and share of party identifiers in each town hall meeting, grouped by the party affiliation of the participating politician. The table shows some, but no strong selection into town halls, based on which party the legislator belonged to. It is important to emphasize that these selection effects are orthogonal to treatment assignment, since participants did not know if they attended a democratic persuasion or a standard town hall.

Table A2: Choice of town hall by PID

Characteristic	CDU/CSU, N = 62	SPD, N = 172	FDP, N = 109	Left, N = 118	Greens, N = 68
Party ID, n (%)					
CDU/CSU	9 (31%)	6 (8.0%)	7 (16%)	5 (9.3%)	1 (2.9%)
SPD	2 (6.9%)	22 (29%)	4 (9.1%)	7 (13%)	6 (18%)
AfD	0 (0%)	3 (4.0%)	2 (4.5%)	2 (3.7%)	0 (0%)
FDP	5 (17%)	6 (8.0%)	9 (20%)	6 (11%)	2 (5.9%)
Left	2 (6.9%)	11 (15%)	4 (9.1%)	13 (24%)	8 (24%)
Greens	6 (21%)	15 (20%)	13 (30%)	14 (26%)	14 (41%)
other	5 (17%)	12 (16%)	5 (11%)	7 (13%)	3 (8.8%)

9.3 Questionnaire

Here we list the question wordings of the outcome measures in wave 2. The questionnaire was implemented via Zoom poll. The complete wave 1, wave 2 and wave 3 questionnaires in German and English will be made available as Supplementary Material upon acceptance.

Covid measures Various measures are being discussed in Germany to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. We would now like to know from you what you think of the measures that have already been decided and of possible future measures. Which of the following measures do you consider appropriate in the current situation?

- (A) Closure of public institutions (e.g. universities, schools and kindergartens)
- (B) Prohibition of demonstrations in which the minimum distance is not observed
- (C) Mask requirement in public spaces
- (D) General contact limitations
- (E) Postpone elections until the pandemic is over
- (F) I do not consider any of these measures to be appropriate in the current situation.

Trust government on Covid Do you trust the government's strategy in the Covid pandemic?

- (1) do not trust at all
- (2) tend not to trust
- (3) partly
- (4) mostly trust
- (5) trust fully

Trust politician To what degree did you get the impressions you could trust the member of parliament in this town hall meeting?

- (1) do not trust at all
- (2) tend not to trust
- (3) partly
- (4) mostly trust
- (5) trust fully

Populism and democracy Here are some political and social statements that some people agree with and others disagree. Please select all statements you fully agree with.

- (A) Under the current circumstances I am concerned for my democratic rights.
- (B) Democracy may have problems but it is definitely better than any other form of government.
- (C) Most politicians don't care much about what people like me think. (Anti-elitism)
- (D) The people, not the politicians, should make the most important political decisions. (Sovereignty)
- (E) The Germans are a cohesive unit and not just a bunch of individual people. (Homogeneity)
- (F) I do not agree with any of these statements

Satisfaction with democracy On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Germany?

- (1) very satisfied
- (2) fairly satisfied
- (3) neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- (4) not very satisfied
- (5) not at all satisfied

Pluralism For a last time, we are interested in your political opinion. Please select all statements you agree with.

Politicians often find themselves in a situation in which they cannot fulfill all legitimate wishes at the same time and have to balance priorities.

Political decisions are above all a choice between good and bad.

When making political decisions, the interests and values of different social groups often conflict with one another.

What is called a compromise in politics is just a betrayal of principles.

I do not agree with any of these statements.

Manipulation check To conclude: What was particularly important to the member of parliament and the organizers of the town hall meeting?

- Stressing that the Covid-19 Virus is airborne
- Look at political issues from multiple perspective and balance them
- Step up for the value of liberal democracy
- Stressing the laudable role of Germany's Covid-19 policies
- None of the statements apply

9.4 Deviations from pre-analysis plan

For this study, we pre-registered the theoretical arguments, hypotheses, power analysis and the analysis syntax (blinded link to pre-registration). Here, we document and explain deviations from the pre-analysis plan and other peculiarities.

Updated pre-analysis plan The original pre-analysis plan with hypotheses, analysis syntax and power analysis was pre-registered on Nov 16th before the first town hall meeting was conducted. A few days later, we noticed minor mistakes in the analysis syntax and registered an updated pre-analysis plan in the same project with no changes other than the following:

- coding errors that prohibited the markdown file from rendering were fixed
- we have added a regional dummy (east/west) as additional covariate
- corrected the direction of one one-sided hypothesis test that had been coded in reverse

Outcome: trust in politician Due to last-minute changes to the pre-analysis plan there is an inconsistency in the list of primary outcomes in the registered material. The verbal pre-registration plan (.rmd, .pdf) lists “trust in politician” as a primary outcome and it is mentioned in the pre-registered hypothesis. Yet, this variable was removed as primary outcome from the pre-registered analysis script.

We decided not to report this variable as primary outcome prominently in the main text but we report inline results in the main text. Substantively, the variable is not closely related to our main research question on citizen commitment to democracy. The estimated treatment effect of democratic persuasion on trust in the politician who attended the respective town hall meeting is -0.01 with $p=0.484$.

Town hall hypothesis The pre-analysis plan lists two types of hypotheses. The democratic persuasion hypothesis (formerly labelled democratic talk hypothesis) and town hall hypotheses. The former refers to effects of the experimental stimulus (democratic persuasion). The latter refers to participation in the town hall per se. We suspected that participation in the town halls could on its own strengthen citizen commitment to democracy and support for the government’s Covid-19 response.

As stated in the PAP’s abstract, our primary interest for this project concerned the effects of our experimental manipulation to assess whether democratic persuasion is a viable means to strengthen citizen commitment to democracy. Yet, we also pre-registered analyses on whether participation in the town halls per se might have effects on citizen attitudes, irrespective of whether democratic persuasion was employed or not. However, our project is not designed to answer this question which is why in the PAP we declared this question as being of secondary interest (“*The causal identification strategy for the town hall effect requires additional assumptions compared to the democratic talk hypothesis, namely the no time-variant confounder assumption usually imposed in panel studies. Therefore, we consider results on the town hall effects as secondary.*”)

The main problem regarding our identification strategy for the town hall effects is that attitudinal changes between survey waves 1 and 2 may reflect effects of the town halls but they may also reflect any other influence (e.g. political events) that affected participants’ attitudes between the survey waves. This is particularly problematic as our

town hall meetings took place in the midst of the second Covid-19 wave. The second wave might have influenced attitudes towards democracy and the government’s Covid-response because it was widely believed that the government reacted too late to the burgeoning wave of new cases. Hence, it is unlikely that the town hall meetings were the only relevant event that may have shaped attitudes between survey waves. As a consequence, from the given data it is impossible to disentangle the various factors that underlie the observed dynamics in attitudes. We decided not to report results on the town hall effects in the main text but report the results in Appendix 9.11.

Second outcome wave All analyses in our pre-analysis plan refer to the outcomes that were measured that after the townhall sessions. We had not pre-registered to conduct and analyze another post-treatment wave several weeks after the townhalls. We analyze data from that second post-treatment wave following the pre-registered analysis plan for the first post-treatment wave.

9.5 Primary outcomes

Table A3 tabulates the effects (reported visually in the main text) on the primary outcomes. The first row reports results on the manipulation check.

Table A3: Primary Outcomes

Outcome	ITT	P-value	Cov-adj ITT	P-value	N
Topic: Strengthen liberal democracy	0.265	0.004	0.243	0.004	185
Satisfaction with democracy	0.347	0.031	0.217	0.066	185
Pluralism	0.185	0.070	0.099	0.105	185
Worried about democratic rights	-0.148	0.117	-0.131	0.086	185

Table A4 shows entire regression tables for the primary outcomes using `lm_robust` from the `estimatr` package. Note that, as pre-registered, in the main text we compute treatment effects using randomization inference from the `estimatr` package but this method only outputs treatment effects and no information on the included covariates. Here, we report results using the `lm_robust` function from the same package to give information on the associations between outcomes and covariates that were included in analysis. Table A4 shows standardized regression coefficients and standard errors.

Table A4: Regression tables

Variable	Stsfctn	Stsfctn SE	Plur Est.	PlurSE	Dem Rights	Dem Rights SE
Intercept	1.708	0.389	2.378	0.563	0.856	0.230
Treatment	0.249	0.125	0.094	0.070	-0.148	0.082
Pre_Score	0.583	0.090	0.356	0.079	-0.212	0.088
Age Group 2	0.298	0.264	-0.201	0.139	0.031	0.279
Age Group 3	0.217	0.326	-0.215	0.224	0.132	0.090
Age Group 4	0.694	0.245	-0.192	0.290	0.123	0.087
Age Group 5	0.466	0.295	-0.213	0.138	0.007	0.121
Age Group 6	0.490	0.271	-0.280	0.098	0.035	0.186
Uni	0.681	0.219	-0.458	0.450	-0.070	0.031
Left-Right	-0.241	0.240	0.084	0.227	0.042	0.048
East	-0.194	0.158	0.009	0.042	0.028	0.174
Pid 1	-0.016	0.030	-0.031	0.191	0.064	0.134
Pid 2	0.102	0.294	0.121	0.138	0.112	0.140
Pid 3	-0.524	0.302	-0.239	0.206	0.021	0.120
Pid 4	-0.211	0.358	-0.301	0.260	0.051	0.117
Pid 5	-0.545	0.356	-0.313	0.226	0.160	0.125
Pid 6	-0.253	0.325	-0.010	0.137	0.209	0.088
Pid 7	-0.255	0.426	-0.050	0.249	0.110	0.025

All analyses reported in the main text were conducted using randomization inference by the `ri2` package. Here we report the randomization inference plots that show the results on testing whether we can reject the sharp null hypothesis of no positive effect for any subject, using the unadjusted models.

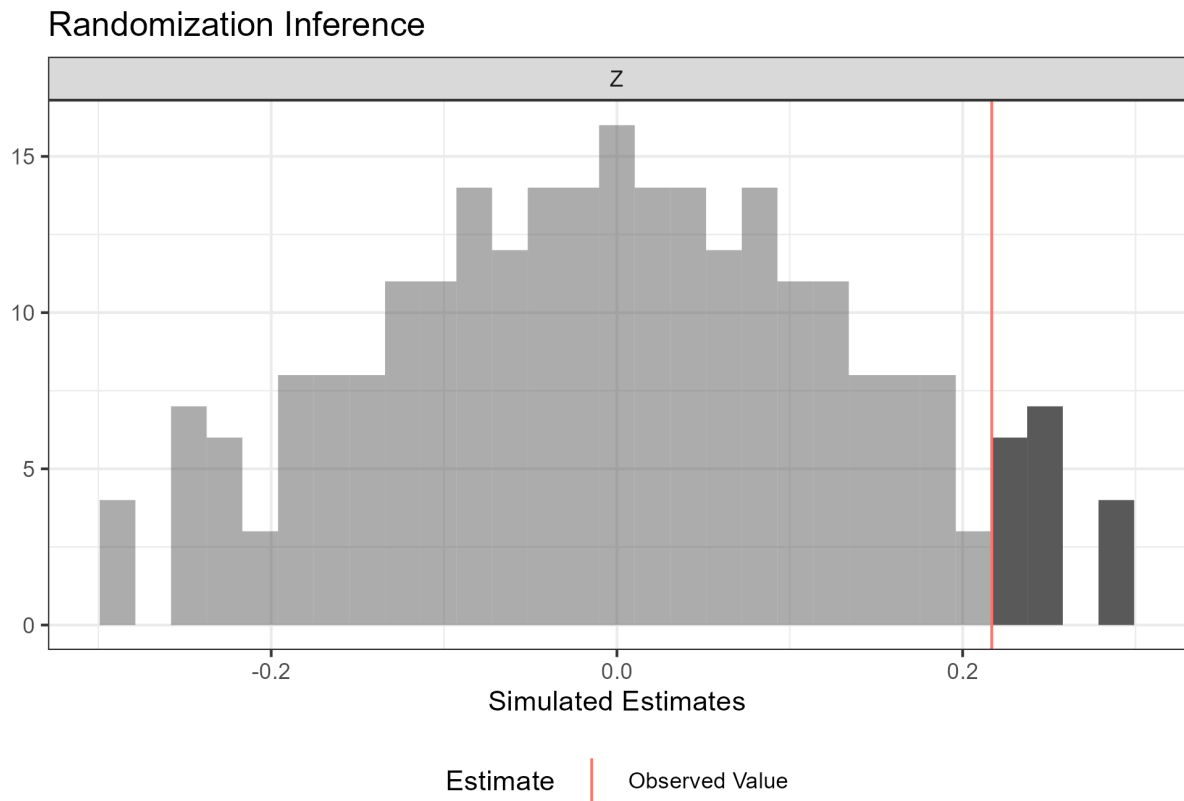


Figure A5: Effects on satisfaction with democracy

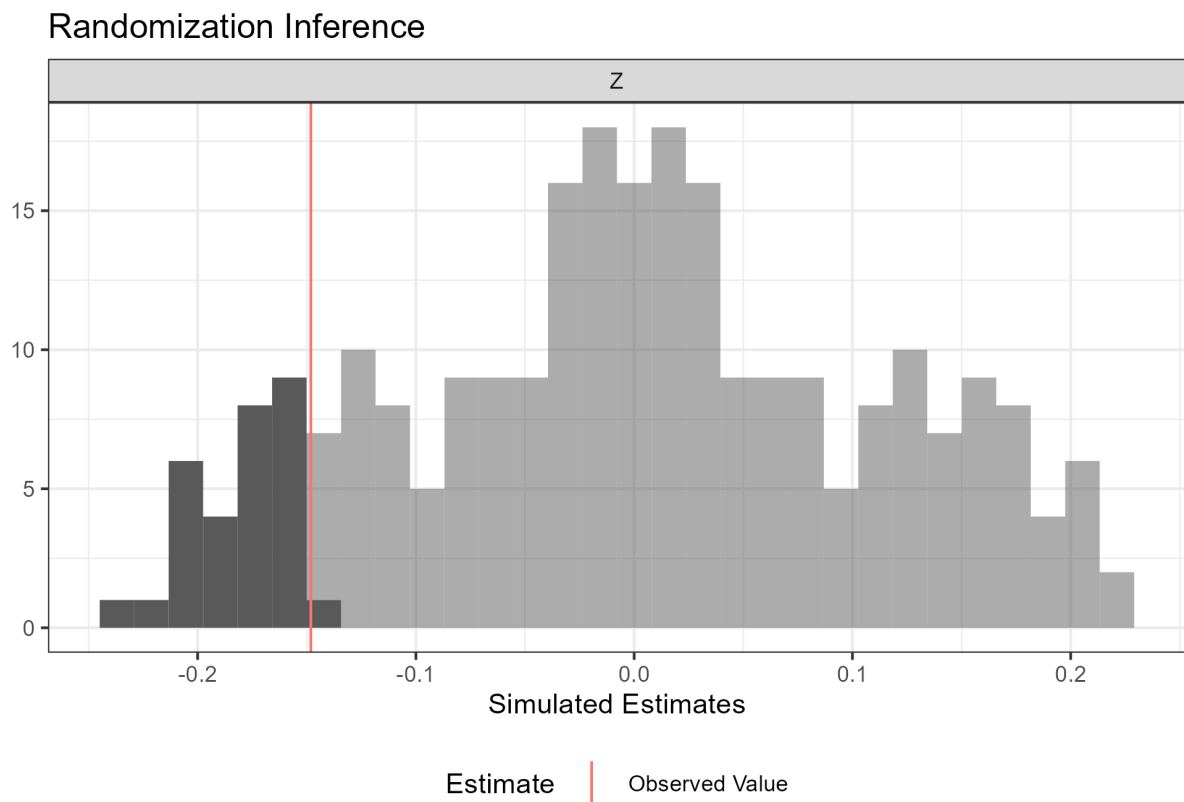


Figure A6: Effects on concerns with democratic rights

Randomization Inference

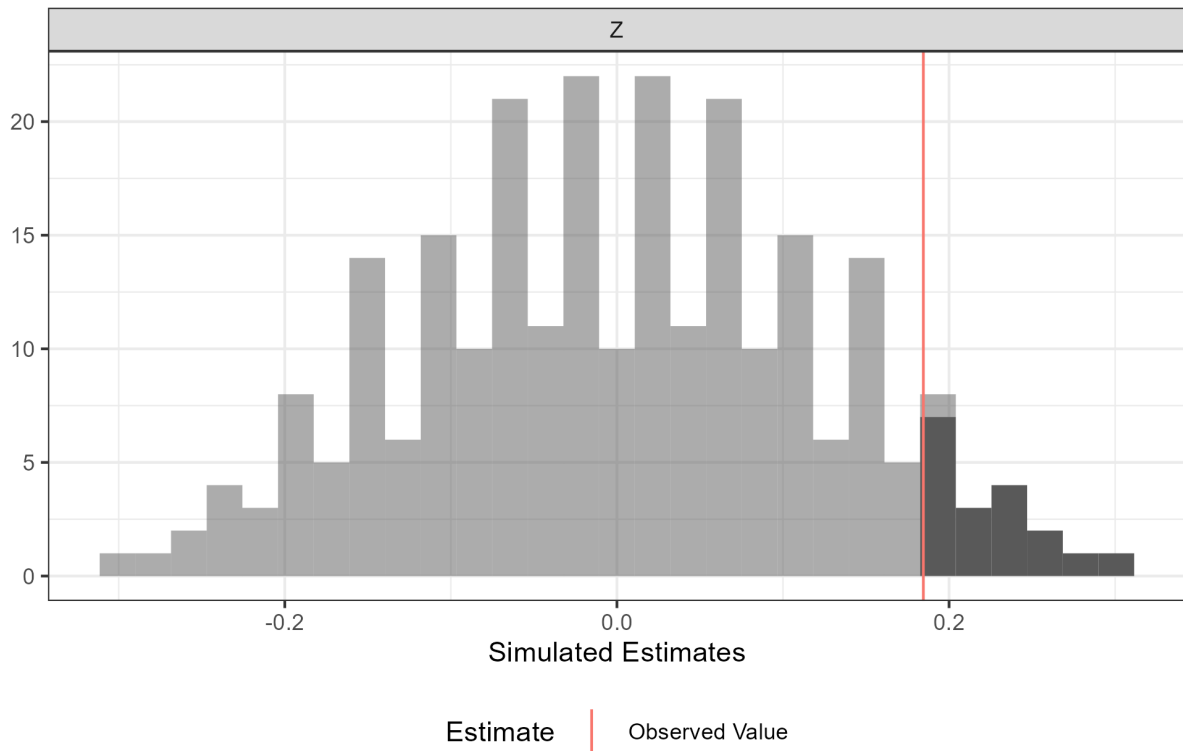


Figure A7: Effects on pluralism

9.6 Behavioral scale

The main text shows results on a composite index of three behavioral indicators. In a follow-up email that we sent to participants right after the town hall meeting, we offered multiple options to “take further action”. To assess whether respondents in the democratic persuasion condition were more likely to get engaged for democracy we offered three behavioral options: Sign a petition on the defense of liberal democracy, sign a petition to hold elections despite the pandemic and to register for a newsletter on democracy. Table A5 shows the 3 actions broken down separately. No statistically significant differences emerge between the standard and the democratic persuasion town halls.

Table A5: Behavioral Outcomes

Outcome	ITT	P-value	Cov-adj ITT	P-value	N
Behavioural Scale	-0.055	0.703	-0.056	0.684	213
Liberal Democracy Petition	0.036	0.152	0.026	0.219	213
Election Petition	0.002	0.477	-0.006	0.562	213
Newsletter	-0.093	0.902	-0.076	0.836	213

9.7 Ethical considerations

The study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee at (Anonymized University) under Ref: 11146.

All participants in the town hall meetings were fully aware and gave their consent that they participated in an academic study. On the first page of the survey that was used for registering town hall participants, participants were informed about the research project and gave their consent to participate in the study, have their data processed and recorded and to a video recording of the town hall meetings. Moreover, at the beginning of each town hall meeting, we reminded participants of these conditions. Hence, we tried to be as clear as possible that these town hall meetings were embedded in an academic study.

Participants were not fully aware of one aspects of the research project. In particular, participants were not informed about how the two experimental conditions that they were assigned to differed from each other. We decided to withhold this information for two reasons. First, we wanted to conduct the experiment in as natural an environment as possible, where the focus of the discussion was on the substantive topic. Second, we were worried that participants would change their responses on the outcome survey if they were told that we were studying how they respond to democratic persuasion. However, at all times, we kept the level of deception employed to an absolute minimum.

One may object that holding back this information limited participants' autonomy to choose a town hall meeting based on all available information as participants took part in a town hall meetings that would have been conducted somewhat differently if they had chosen a town hall meeting in the other experimental condition. It is important to stress that participants were not deceived with false pre-tense into participating in a town hall meeting that did not occur as advertised. Respondents were invited to town hall meetings to discuss Covid-19 politics with a member of parliament and participants in both experimental conditions participated in a town hall meeting with members of parliament on Covid-19 politics with the only difference that politicians in the democratic persuasion town halls talked more about the democracy-related aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the standard town halls.

Another potential ethical concern could be that participants were exposed to persuasive influences, which speaks to the impact principle highlighted in the APSA ethics guidelines. While it is true that our project was designed to ultimately affect citizens' attitudes, we believe to have employed persuasion for a just cause (fostering commitment to liberal democracy) and the treatment was implemented by legitimate political actors, elected democratic representatives. By selecting 4 legislators who belonged to government parties and 4 legislators who belonged to opposition parties, we tried to ensure that no democratic party gained a partisan advantage. Most importantly, by participating in a town hall meeting with a politician to discuss political issues, citizens were likely aware and prepared that they politicians will attempt to persuade them. The small scale of the town halls, that were designed to meet the requirements of statistical power, while minimizing aggregate political impact, as well as Germany's proportional electoral system, ensured that no aggregate political outcomes could reasonably have been affected by the study.

The treatment was designed to minimize the potential for negative individual experiences during the town hall. To assess whether the experiment could have negatively affected individual experiences, we fielded a questionnaire after the town hall to assess

how participants rated the town halls. The results show that 63% of the participants liked the town hall a lot, 33% liked them somewhat and only 4 % did not like the town hall meetings. Moreover, the qualitative feedback we received during the town halls and via email was extraordinarily positive and emphasized that participants were grateful for the chance to get in touch with legislators.

9.8 Comparison to general population

This appendix compares the audience of the town hall meetings with the general population in Germany. Our goal in recruiting the sample was not a random draw from the general population. This goal is not feasible for several reasons including self-selection biases. Because participation comes with a substantial investment of time, we expected that, compared to the general population, citizens with higher levels of formal education or political interest would be overrepresented among the town hall participants. In that regard, we did not expect our sample to represent the general population. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that these biases represent natural selection processes. In other words, town halls meetings that were not organized by academics but by practitioners or the politicians themselves would likely be subject to similar selection processes.

Our goal in sample recruiting was to attract a mix of participants that would not be strongly skewed in any ideological direction. Even more important to our project is the distribution of democracy-related attitudes. Due to their lower levels of external political efficacy and lower levels of trust in political and academic elites, citizens with doubts about the democratic process might be more reluctant to join the town halls compared to highly satisfied and trusting citizens. To avoid preaching to the converted, our goal was to minimize this kind of bias and to attract a sizable number of wavering democrats.

Table A6 compares the distribution of attitudes and sociodemographic characteristics in the recruited sample with the general population. As data source for comparison with the general population we use ALLBUS 2018 (“German General Social Survey - ALLBUS 2018” 2019) which is one of the highest quality survey data on political attitudes of German citizens. ALLBUS is a bi-annual survey with respondents that were drawn in a two stage disproportionate random sample. In the first sample stage, municipalities were selected with a probability proportional to their number of adult residents; in the second sample stage, individual persons were selected at random from the municipal registers of residents. The sample universe includes all persons who resided in private households in Germany and were born before 1 January 2000.

Note that among town hall participants we measured satisfaction with democracy on a 5-point scale whereas ALLBUS measured satisfaction with democracy on a 6-point scale (which we recoded to a scale from 1 to 5). We measured ideology on an 11-point scale whereas ALLBUS measured ideology on a 10-point scale (which we recoded to a scale from 1 to 11). We report both dataset without survey weights.

Table A6 shows that our sample closely resembles the general population on an indicator of support for democracy. The mean level of satisfaction with democracy among town hall participants (column 2) is on a similar but slightly lower level compared to the general population (column 1). In other words, we succeeded in attracting participants with reservations about the democratic process. Regarding ideological self-placement, the differences are slightly more pronounced as the town hall participants are more left-wing compared to the general population.

Regarding sociodemographic variables, Table A6 shows substantial differences between the two samples along the expected lines. Men are overrepresented among town hall participants. Moreover, citizens with high levels of educations are overrepresented in the sample of participants compared to the general population. Finally, compared to the general population, fewer citizens attended the town halls who were very young or very old.

Table A6: Comparison of town hall participants with general population

Characteristic	1, N = 3,477	2, N = 183	p-value ¹
Satisfaction with democracy			<0.001
Mean, (Min–Max)	3.63, (1.00–5.00)	3.12, (1.00–5.00)	
Ideology (Left-right)			<0.001
Mean, (Min–Max)	5.43, (1.10–11.00)	4.29, (1.00–9.00)	
Higher education, n (%)	1,075 (31%)	111 (80%)	<0.001
Female, n (%)	1,704 (49%)	53 (38%)	0.012
Age, n (%)			<0.001
1	475 (14%)	10 (7.2%)	
2	511 (15%)	36 (26%)	
3	532 (15%)	22 (16%)	
4	727 (21%)	32 (23%)	
5	641 (18%)	29 (21%)	
6	586 (17%)	10 (7.2%)	

¹Wilcoxon rank sum test; Pearson’s Chi-squared test

9.9 Balance and randomization

Table A7 compares the distribution of relevant socio-demographic characteristics and outcomes variables in the control and treatment groups.

Table A7: Descriptive statistics

Characteristic	Control, N = 104	Treatment, N = 79	p-value ¹
Female, n (%)	34 (43%)	19 (32%)	0.22
Higher education, n (%)	60 (75%)	51 (86%)	0.10
Satisfaction with democracy			0.35
Mean, (Min–Max)	3.05, (1.00–5.00)	3.22, (1.00–5.00)	
Pluralism			0.15
Mean, (Min–Max)	3.38, (1.00–4.00)	3.63, (2.00–4.00)	
Democracy: Best Form of Gov			0.66
Mean, (Min–Max)	4.60, (1.00–5.00)	4.66, (2.00–5.00)	
Ideology (Left-right)			0.83
Mean, (Min–Max)	4.35, (1.00–9.00)	4.20, (1.00–8.00)	
Corona: Trust in Gov			0.19
Mean, (Min–Max)	2.48, (1.00–5.00)	2.75, (1.00–5.00)	

¹Pearson’s Chi-squared test; Wilcoxon rank sum test

Table A8 below shows balance statistics for all covariates that are used in the analysis. For each regression, we include sex, age, education, ideology, East/West dummy, PID and a pre-treatment measure of the respective outcome.

Table A8: Balance table

Characteristic	Control, N = 104	Treatment, N = 79	p-value ¹
Age, n (%)			0.022
1	6 (7.5%)	4 (6.8%)	
2	28 (35%)	8 (14%)	
3	14 (18%)	8 (14%)	
4	11 (14%)	21 (36%)	
5	16 (20%)	13 (22%)	
6	5 (6.3%)	5 (8.5%)	
Education, n (%)	60 (75%)	51 (86%)	0.087
Ideology (Left-right)			0.64
Mean, (Min–Max)	4.35, (1.00–9.00)	4.20, (1.00–8.00)	
East Germany, n (%)	7 (6.7%)	13 (16%)	0.048
Party ID, n (%)			0.10
1	10 (13%)	5 (8.5%)	
2	7 (8.8%)	11 (19%)	
3	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.7%)	
4	8 (10%)	5 (8.5%)	
5	8 (10%)	7 (12%)	
6	15 (19%)	18 (31%)	
7	7 (8.8%)	5 (8.5%)	
9	24 (30%)	7 (12%)	
Satisfaction with democracy			0.36
Mean, (Min–Max)	3.05, (1.00–5.00)	3.22, (1.00–5.00)	
Concern Dem. Rights			0.41
Mean, (Min–Max)	2.80, (1.00–5.00)	3.02, (1.00–5.00)	
Pluralism			0.044
Mean, (Min–Max)	3.38, (1.00–4.00)	3.63, (2.00–4.00)	

¹Welch Two Sample t-test

Table A8: Balance table

Characteristic	Control, N = 104	Treatment, N = 79	p-value ¹
Democracy: Best Form of Gov			0.61
Mean, (Min–Max)	4.60, (1.00–5.00)	4.66, (2.00–5.00)	
Populism			0.040
Mean, (Min–Max)	9.38, (3.00–15.00)	8.54, (3.00–15.00)	
Attitudes Covid			0.24
Mean, (Min–Max)	1.15, (0.00–3.00)	1.39, (0.00–3.00)	
Corona: Trust in Gov)			0.20
Mean, (Min–Max)	2.48, (1.00–5.00)	2.75, (1.00–5.00)	
blocks, n (%)			0.13
1	5 (4.8%)	8 (10%)	
2	19 (18%)	16 (20%)	
3	14 (13%)	8 (10%)	
4	8 (7.7%)	10 (13%)	
5	15 (14%)	10 (13%)	
6	14 (13%)	14 (18%)	
7	16 (15%)	7 (8.9%)	
8	13 (13%)	6 (7.6%)	

¹Welch Two Sample t-test

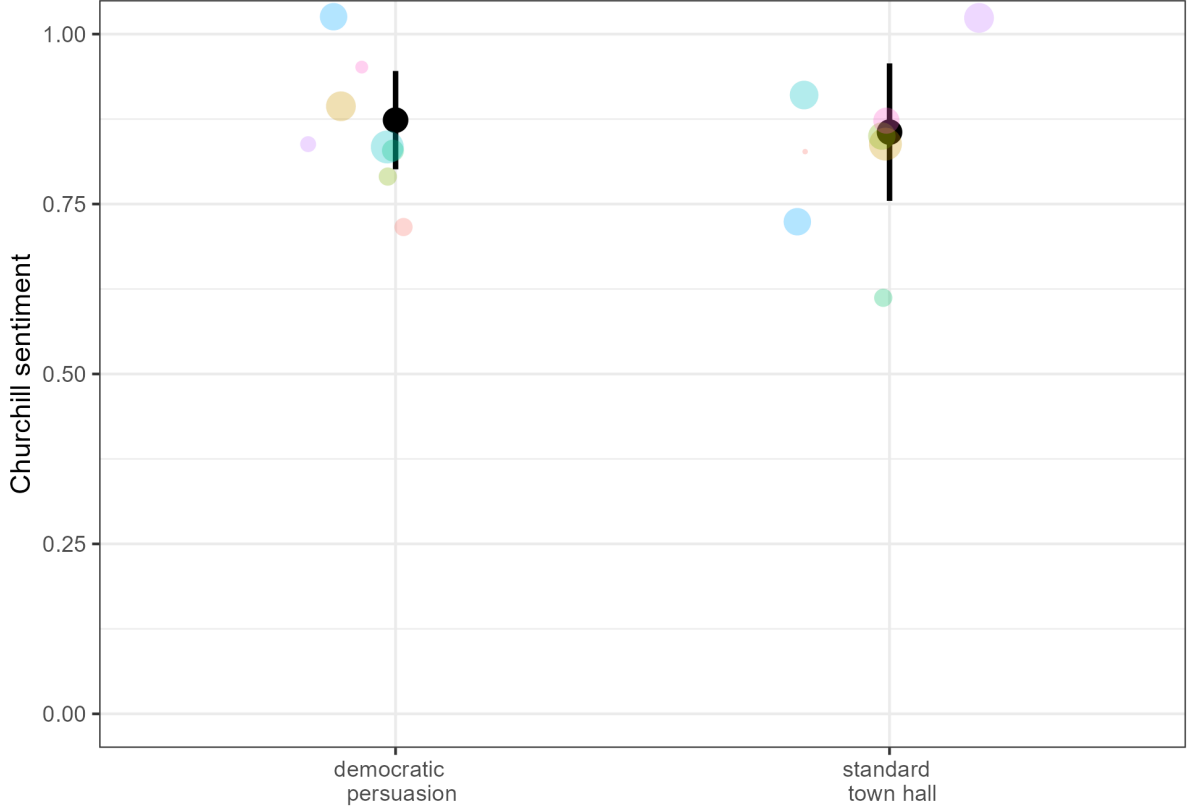


Figure A8: Despite faults, democracy is best form of government

9.10 Secondary outcomes

Table A9 displays effects of democratic persuasion on the pre-registered secondary outcomes. One reason why we declared these variables as secondary in the pre-analysis plan was that we anticipated difficulties to find significant effects due to floor and ceiling effects as both variables are severely skewed (see table on distributions in main text).

Effects on both variables go in the expected directions. Compared to the standard town hall, respondents in the democratic persuasion town halls expressed stronger support for democracy (“Churchill sentiment”) and they were less likely to express populist attitudes. Yet, none of the differences between the experimental groups are statistically significant.

Table A9: Secondary Outcomes

Outcome	ITT	P-value	Cov-adj ITT	P-value	N
Churchill sentiment	0.018	0.355	0.033	0.273	181
Populism	-0.106	0.199	0.026	0.602	181

The following plots display the averages in treatment and control town halls for our secondary outcomes.

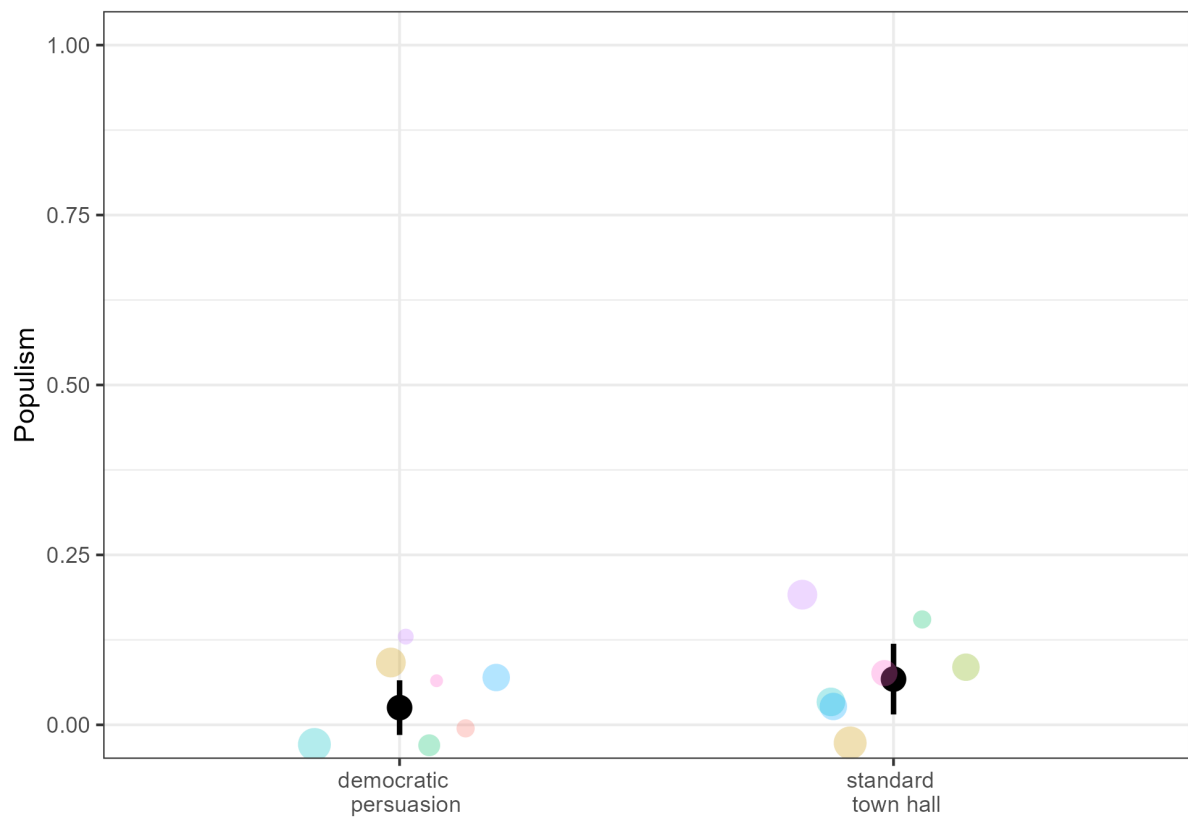


Figure A9: Populist attitudes

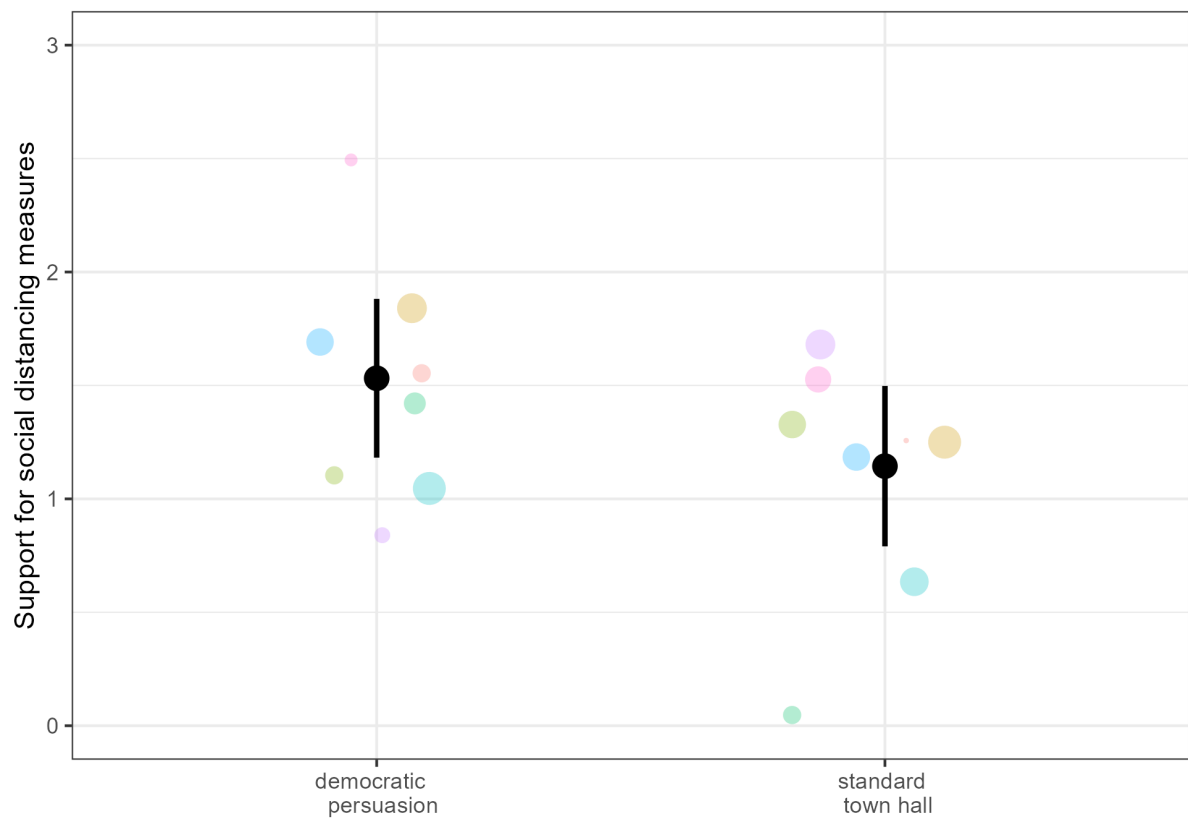


Figure A10: Support for measures of social distancing

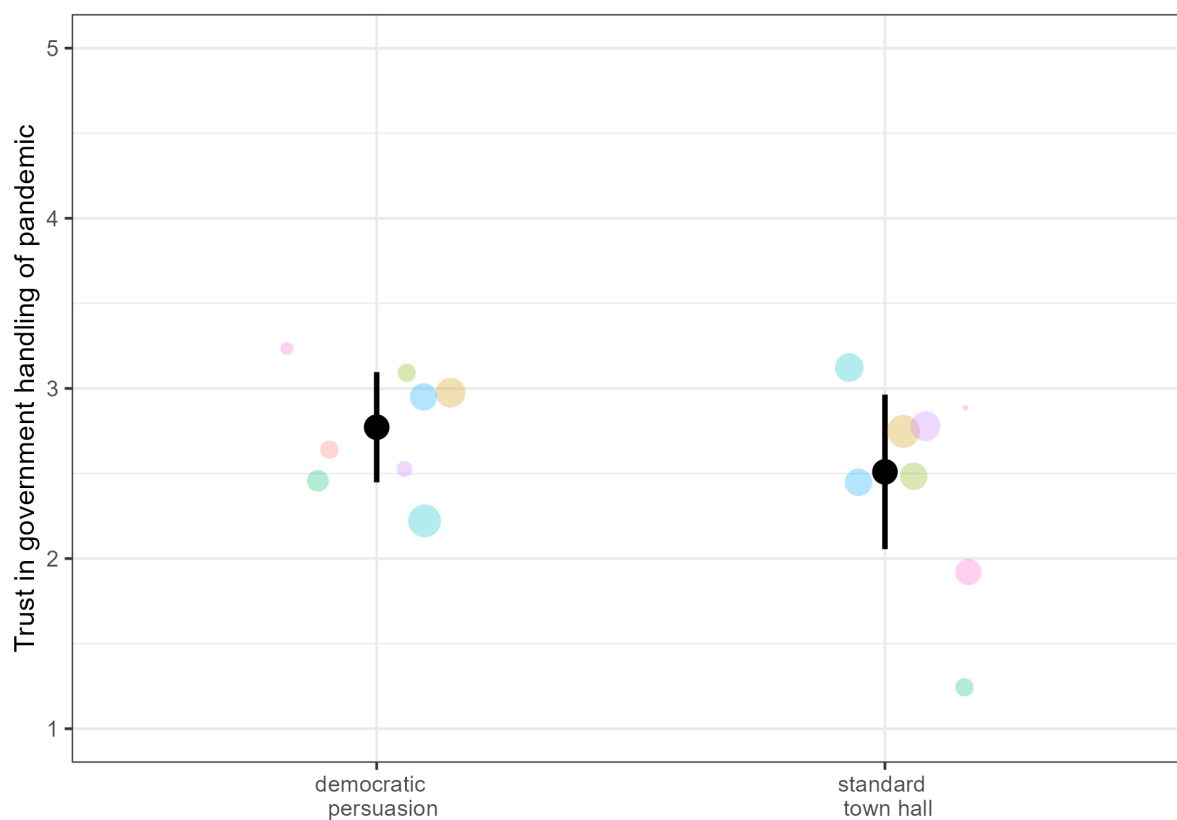


Figure A11: Trust in government handling of Corona pandemic

Table A10: COVID-related Outcomes

Outcome	ITT	P-value	Cov-adj ITT	P-value	N
Support COVID Measures	0.387	0.051	0.268	0.078	181
Trust in Government	0.263	0.172	0.152	0.324	181

Table A11: Manipulation Check

Outcome	ITT	P-value	Cov-adj ITT	P-value	N
COVID airborne	-0.038	0.898	-0.039	0.930	181
Germany model in pandemic	-0.052	0.855	-0.025	0.715	181

9.11 Effects of participating in any town hall

For many of the participants, the town hall meeting was the first time they could publicly discuss views on Covid-19 politics, which many experienced as pressing, personal and polarizing issue. Hence, it is conceivable that, irrespective of treatment assignment, participation in the town hall meetings alone might have had effects on citizen attitudes. However, as discussed in Appendix 9.4 our project was not designed to identify these effects.

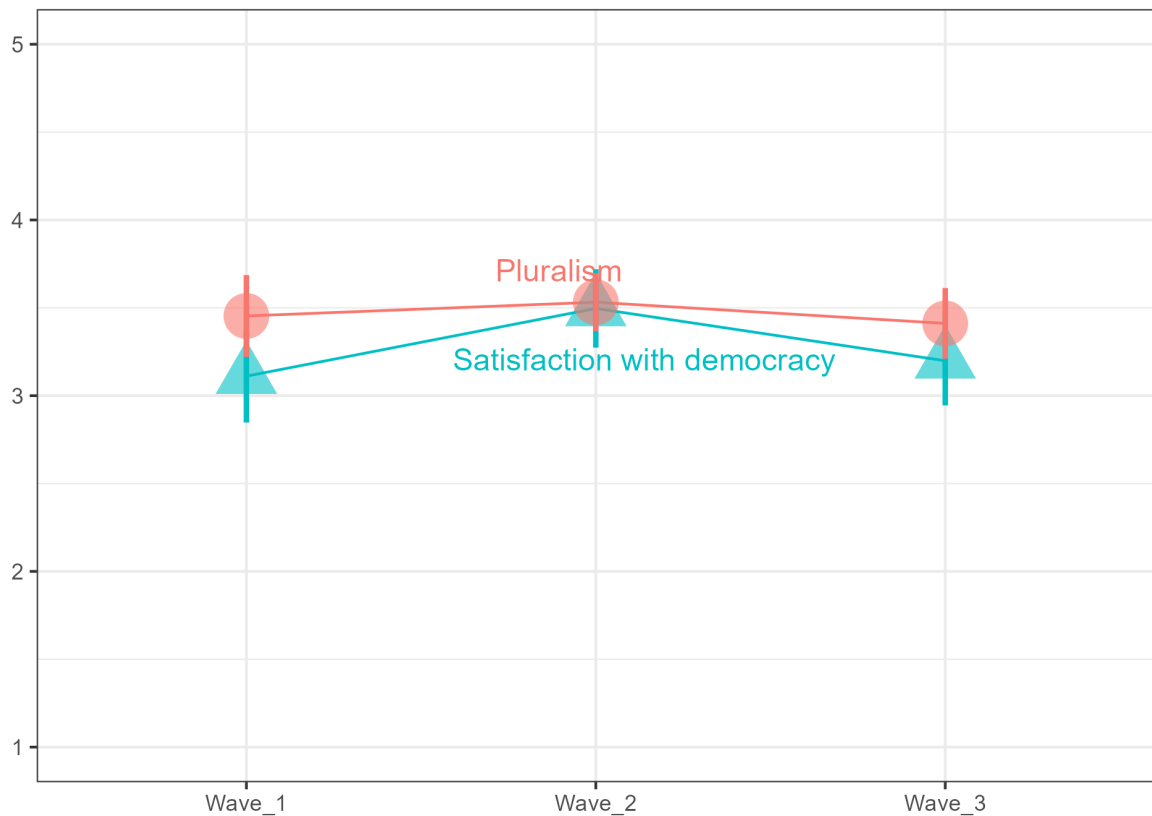


Figure A12: Town hall effect

In this appendix, we report attitudinal dynamics between the survey waves. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that town hall participation is only one factor of several that drive these dynamics. Other factors also play a role in shaping attitudes between survey waves as the town hall meetings took part amid the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Germany (see Appendix 9.4). Therefore, readers should be hesitant to give the the estimates reported in this appendix a causal interpretation.

Figure A12 shows trends in democracy-related attitudes among respondents who responded to all three panel waves: a few weeks before the town hall meeting, immediately after the town hall, and about four weeks after the town hall. Support for pluralist values remained fairly stable across all three survey waves. Satisfaction with democracy exhibits more fluctuation. Average levels increased after the town hall meetings and reverted to initial levels a few weeks later.

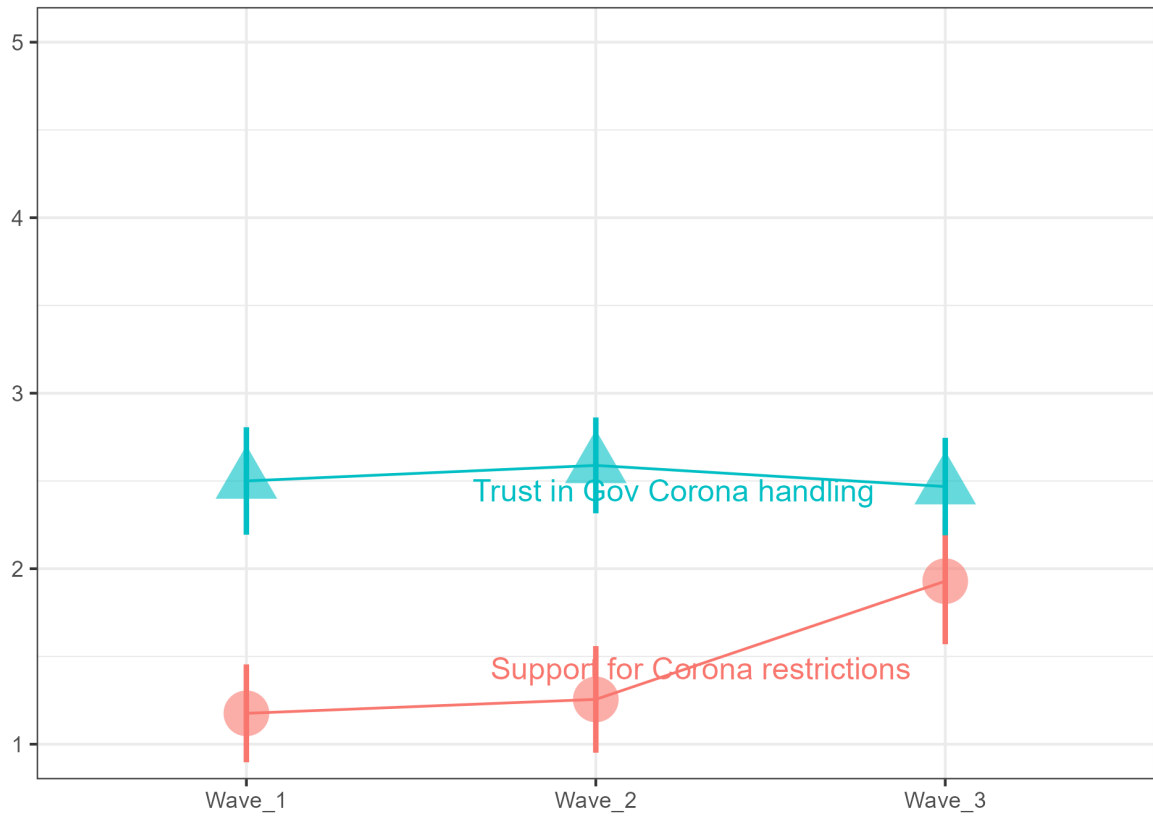


Figure A13: Town hall effect

Figure A13 shows the development of attitudes towards an index of support for several Covid-19 restrictions and trust in the government's Covid-19 response. Trust in the government's Covid-19 response is fairly stable across waves, whereas support for Covid-19 restrictions increased between survey waves 2 and 3, presumably reflecting the increasing number of infections during that time period.

Table A12: Moderating effect of partisan alignment

	Satisfaction	Pluralism	Concerns
(Intercept)	3.49*** (0.40)	3.40*** (0.19)	0.48** (0.17)
alignment	0.34 (0.27)	0.10 (0.19)	0.10 (0.12)
treatment	0.29 (0.18)	0.14 (0.09)	-0.12 (0.11)
alignment \times treatment	0.23 (0.33)	0.12 (0.20)	0.01 (0.20)
Num.Obs.	183	183	183
R2	0.209	0.212	0.124
R2 Adj.	0.127	0.131	0.034
AIC	507.0	402.7	270.0
BIC	568.0	463.7	330.9
RMSE	0.87	0.66	0.46
Std.Errors	by: clusters	by: clusters	by: clusters

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

9.12 Effect heterogeneity

In this appendix, we examine whether persuasive effects depend on the alignment between the respondent's and the politician's party affiliation and whether the politician belongs to a federal opposition party. For the first analysis, we used pre-treatment information on the respondent's self-reported party identification to generate a binary variable which indicates whether the respondent's and the politician's party affiliation align or not. For the second analysis, we test if the effect of the treatment is stronger when delivered by a politician who belongs to one of the federal opposition parties. Effect heterogeneity conditional on party alignment and opposition/government party affiliation could provide us with tentative evidence on the mechanisms through which persuasive effects materialize. If respondents are more susceptible to persuasive influence from like-minded politicians this could indicate the role of source cues (instead of message characteristics). If respondents are more susceptible to persuasive influence from opposition politicians, this could indicate that the intervention needs opposition buy-in to succeed.

The results shows no moderating effect of partisan alignment on how strongly the treatment affects satisfaction with democracy, endorsement of pluralism or concerns about democratic rights. Hence, there is no evidence of sources cues at play.

Table A13: Moderating effect of opposition party

	Satisfaction	Pluralism	Concerns
(Intercept)	3.32*** [3.04, 3.60]	3.30*** [3.09, 3.50]	0.48*** [0.26, 0.69]
opposition	-0.68 [-1.80, 0.44]	-0.29 [-0.66, 0.08]	0.26 [-0.36, 0.87]
treatment	0.36* [0.04, 0.67]	0.15 [-0.07, 0.36]	-0.03 [-0.12, 0.07]
opposition \times treatment	0.10 [-0.60, 0.79]	0.14 [-0.22, 0.51]	-0.29 [-0.72, 0.14]
Num.Obs.	183	183	183
R2	0.105	0.108	0.085
R2 Adj.	0.059	0.062	0.037
AIC	513.6	409.3	262.0
BIC	548.9	444.6	297.3
RMSE	0.93	0.70	0.47
Std.Errors	by: clusters	by: clusters	by: clusters

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$