Constituent Communication through Telephone Town Halls
A Field Experiment Involving Members of Congress

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April 17, 2019

Forthcoming in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*

Abstract. Telephone town halls are an increasingly prevalent method for Members of Congress (MCs) to communicate with constituents, even while garnering popular criticism for failing to facilitate engagement and accountability. Yet scholars have paid little attention to the events and their effects, and even less to how they might be improved. To remedy this problem, we report on a field experiment in which four MCs joined their constituents in telephone town halls. Overall, participation in an event improved constituents' evaluations of the format in general, and of the MC in particular. Furthermore, we studied how these events might be improved by evaluating a reform—a single topic focus with pre-distributed briefing materials—designed to enhance deliberative interaction. This reform enhanced effects on opinions of the format without significantly altering effects on attitudes toward the MC. Our results suggest that telephone town halls hold promise for constituents, officeholders, and democratic practice.

Acknowledgements. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 2017 meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2018 meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, and 2018 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. We thank Christopher Donnelly, Lisa Hager and Robert Van Houweling for helpful comments. This project was supported by generous grants from the Democracy Fund, the Hobby School of Public Policy, and the Templeton Foundation. The authors gratefully acknowledge the collaboration with the Congressional Management Foundation for recruiting Congressional offices to participate, contributing to every aspect of the telephone town hall research design, and taking the lead on implementing the study; in particular, we thank Brad Fitch, Kathy Goldschmidt, Nicole Folk-Cooper, Kelsey Tokunaga, and Beverly Bell. We also acknowledge ShoutPoint (http://shoutpoint.com/) for allowing us to use their telephone town hall platform and L2 (https://www.l2inc.com/) for providing contact lists of residents in the congressional districts. Finally, we thank Representatives Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA 11th), Mark Takano (D-CA 41st), Rick Larsen (D-WA 2nd), and Seth Moulton (D-MA 6th) and their staff, who generously volunteered for this study. Any opinions and all errors belong to the authors. Replication materials are available in the LSQ Data Archive on Dataverse (https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/lsq).

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The town hall has been a defining feature of American democracy for centuries. In its ideal form, the term conjures Rockwellian images of public officeholders standing before their constituents, listening earnestly and responding thoughtfully to questions and comments in a substantive, reason-giving, deliberative exchange. The town hall is perhaps the most direct way for constituents to provide input on legislation and hold representatives accountable for their actions. Members of the U.S. Congress have long held town halls in their districts, and, whether or not members meet these ideals, the town hall remains a cornerstone of constituent communication and the cultivation of legislators' home style (Fenno 1978).

Technology, however, is changing how members engage with their constituents (Bimber 2003; Fountain 2001). In particular, members of Congress (MCs) increasingly rely on telephone town halls. A telephone town hall is hosted on a software platform enabling the MC to dial out to a large volume of phone numbers, and host an interactive conference call with constituents, potentially vastly more than could attend an in-person event.[1] In principle, therefore, telephone town halls offer substantially broadened and accessible opportunities for communication, increasing contact between members and constituents. And their use is growing. MCs participated in over 300 such events in the first six months of 2017 alone (Bethea 2017).

Despite their increasing prevalence, press coverage of telephone town halls paints them as frustrating events that leave participants with poor impressions of their utility for engaging with members and holding them accountable, core elements of representation.[2] For example, in an essay for the *New Yorker*, Charles Bethea writes that in a typical telephone town hall, constituents "listen to their representative recite talking points from a D.C. office in response to a

[1] The term "tele-town halls" is the trade name of a product from one vendor. The general term is "telephone town halls."

[2] E.g., http://www.theintell.com/opinion/letters/fitzpatrick-s-constituents-want-many-town-halls/article_4a15a394-cd5e-5c97-bf6e-3f7df353c5fe.html, last accessed March 13, 2019.

small number of accepted, pre-screened questions. Many of these are softballs" (Bethea 2017). Others characterize the events as not merely unhelpful, but actively harmful. The Indivisible Project describes them as "sham" events where members manufacture perceptions of listening while addressing easy questions from strong supporters. Indivisible's website even featured a video of former Labor Secretary Robert Reich offering guidance on how to disrupt them.[3]

In contrast to the din of negative popular reports on telephone town halls, the scholarly literature is most notable for its near silence on the subject.[4] Despite their ubiquity, there is surprisingly little political science research on town halls of any kind.[5]

In this paper, we focus on how telephone town halls contribute to representation, and more specifically ongoing democratic accountability (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018). We address two sets of questions. First, we assess the effects of participating in a telephone town hall—as currently practiced—on evaluations of the events and the MC who hosts. Our measures of platform-specific attitudes include whether constituents perceive the events to be a good way for MCs to hear constituent views, communicate positions, and explain actions. Positive attitudes toward events are necessary for constituents to want to attend, meaning they are instrumentally important for representation. Representation further depends on whether constituents trust and approve of their MCs, and so we estimate the effects of participation on

[3] https://www.indivisibleguide.com/resource/tips-tele-town-halls/, last accessed August 28, 2018. This page has been taken down, but the video can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoSfHWHSp8k, last accessed March 13, 2019.

[4] To our knowledge, the only existing study of constituent reactions to telephone town halls comes from a 2007 research report from the Congressional Institute (Congressional Institute 2007). This report describes results from surveys and focus groups conducted with registered voters in six congressional districts. Respondents who self-reported as participants in these events reported greater satisfaction with their MC's job performance than non-participants.

[5] A search of the literature turned up essentially no research on in-person town halls beyond Fenno (1978). Etzioni (1972) proposed the potential of remote town halls with audio and visual communication via television- and telephone-conferencing technology, but this project yielded only a single publication (Etzioni, Laudon, and Lipson 1975).

measures of both. Finally, we track legislators' "presentation of self," which Fenno (1978) argues is central to home style, using a novel battery of questions derived from Fenno's list of characteristics that MCs seek to cultivate.

Second, we probe whether reforms might improve these evaluations. Current practice in telephone town halls is to hold a wide-ranging discussion open to any topic, and invite constituents into the events cold, without preparation. We study the effects of a counterfactual design that alters both aspects of current practice, limiting discussion to a single-topic and providing participants with briefing materials before the meeting. Focusing on a single issue allows discussion to go in-depth and forces elites to move beyond talking points, and briefing materials provide a common basis for discussion, compensating for the fact that most citizens do not have in-depth knowledge about policy issues. Although research on counterfactual institutional design is rare in legislative studies, it is common in other areas of academic research, including empirical deliberative democracy (e.g., Baccaro et al. 2014; Gastil et al. 2008; and Morrell 1999). This scarcity in the literature is lamentable, because understanding how the representative link relationship between officeholders and constituents can be improved is vital for the health of democracy (Neblo et al. 2017).

To answer these questions, we conducted a field experiment in collaboration with the Congressional Management Foundation,[6] who recruited four sitting MCs to participate. Each MC agreed to conduct a pair of telephone town halls: one closely replicating current practice, and a second with our counterfactual design.[7] We recruited constituents from each congressional

[6] The Congressional Management Foundation (http://www.congressfoundation.org/) is a non-partisan organization that works directly with members of Congress and congressional staff to improve office operations and enhances interactions with constituents.

[7] CMF worked with us to develop the research design and manage the telephone town hall platform, taking the lead in implementing the research in the field. We were able to host these

district into the eight events, administering surveys before and after each event. We analyze responses using a before-and-after design to estimate the effects of standard telephone town halls, and difference-in-differences to estimate the effects of the counterfactual design.

We find that participating in telephone town halls causes statistically significant improvements in constituents' evaluations of both the platform and MCs. Further, we find that our counterfactual design, in which telephone town halls focus on a single topic with briefing materials, improved attitudes toward the platform compared to the standard design. The two designs yielded largely similar effects on attitudes toward MCs. We conclude that telephone town halls improve representation and constituent communication, and that the technology may be open to improvements both valued by constituents and beneficial for democracy.

Telephone Town Halls and Constituent Communication

Under current practice, telephone town halls resemble radio call-in shows (Evans and Hayden 2017, chap. 7), with the MC hosting and facilitating the conversation herself. Constituents are often contacted and invited into the event without advance notice, through a cold call that dials out to tens of thousands of phone numbers from a preloaded list. These lists are typically drawn from marketing databases rather than from lists of constituents who expressed interest in participating. Once connected, constituents may follow dialing instructions to enter a queue and ask the member a question on any topic. Since they are contacted through a cold call, participants cannot prepare, and their questions are generally top-of-the-head thoughts on a wide variety of local and national topics. The member's staff screens questions and sets the order in which questions will be presented to the member. Since telephone town halls can include

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events with generous funding from the Democracy Fund, and the cooperation of two commercial vendors who work with MCs to recruit participants and host telephone town halls.

thousands of constituents, many of whom place questions in the hopper, staff have considerable discretion over which questions are selected. In a typical, hour-long call, the member is only about to respond to about a dozen questions. These design elements, which typify telephone town halls, shape the experience that members and constituents have in these forums.[8]

Both MCs and constituents are likely to find these events attractive for several reasons. First, virtual events including telephone town halls accommodate thousands of participants, permitting MCs to reach larger proportions of their constituency than they could with many other formats, including in-person town halls. They are also convenient, as constituents can participate without traveling to a specific location. Online town halls, which are also virtual events, are popular with both constituents and members (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018), and so there is good reason to suspect that telephone town halls might be as well.

Second, telephone town halls enable MCs to speak directly to constituents even when the member is not physically in the district. This feature may be especially attractive to MCs with districts geographically far from DC. But all members would value this communication tool if it helps them to earn their constituents' trust and approval (Grimmer 2013). Trust, in particular, depends heavily on constituents' perceptions of common interest with their MC (Bianco 1994). To the extent that telephone town halls foster such perceptions, MCs and constituents may both find them beneficial. Even when policy positions between MCs and their constituents do not align, communication between the two can bring the constituents' views closer to those of their MC and increase approval (Broockman and Butler 2017; Cover and Brumberg 1982).

Third, beyond trust and approval, telephone town halls give MCs an opportunity to fine-tune their presentation of self (Fenno 1978). Citing Goffman (1959), Fenno defines

[8] For a sample transcript, see http://www.nj11thforchange.org/june_27_2017_tele_town_hall, last accessed September 24, 2018.

"presentation of self" as the use of verbal and nonverbal expressions to convey—even manipulate—an impression in one's audience. For MCs, the desirable impressions can be summarized as "trust," but go further to include the sense that a representative is qualified for her job, identifies with her constituents, and empathizes with their problems and needs. The telephone town hall mostly eliminates nonverbal channels. But in so doing, these events actually increase a MC's degree of control. In fact, MCs often engineer even more precision in these virtual events than they can with in-person town halls, for example, by selecting questions that emphasize the member's best characteristics. This capacity for finesse is not dissimilar to the choices in self-presentation on Congressional web sites (Adler et al. 1998).

Finally, telephone town halls are inexpensive. Indeed, cost—in terms of dollars, staff time, and the member's time—may be the single most important factor in the increasing prevalence of the events. In general, the willingness of MC's to expend resources on constituent communication depends on many underlying characteristics, both personal and systematic. Different legislators develop different legislative styles (Bernhard, Sewell, and Sulkin 2017), and some—district advocates, for example—may be more likely than others to reach out to constituents regardless of cost. Beyond style, electorally insecure members also spend more resources on constituent communication, with increasing urgency as elections approach (Peskowitz 2018). Thus, the relative value of telephone town halls will vary, and the events will likely be more common for some members, in some districts, at some times. But all MCs operate with limited resources, and telephone town halls can be both attractive and affordable.

Surveys of congressional staff indicate that MCs find these forums valuable as information resources and as opportunities for communication. The Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) reports that 41% of congressional staff members consider telephone towns

halls to be a "very important" tool for understanding constituents' views and 45% view telephone town halls as a "very important" way to communicate the MC's positions and activities to constituents (Goldschmidt, Cooper, and Fitch 2011). Additionally, staff members suggest that the comments made during telephone town halls are given weight in MC's decision-making. About 17% of staff say that comments from telephone town halls have "a lot of influence" on the MC's decision on issues where they have not already staked out a position, which is comparable to the level of influence staffers attribute to phone calls, individualized emails, and individualized letters (Goldschmidt, Cooper, and Fitch 2011). MCs and staff view telephone town halls as important contributions to different facets of their work in Congress. Given that legislators' perceptions of constituent beliefs inform their legislative behavior (Butler and Nickerson 2011), telephone town halls may be an important part of the legislative process.

Yet some of the qualities that make telephone town halls attractive to MCs—the large number of constituents reached and the level of control over the questions—may also limit their effectiveness as a tool to advance important goals of representative democracy. For example, when staff curate the questions that MCs answer, they inadvertently cultivate the perception that telephone town halls function more as public relations than as a conduit for citizen concerns—less a town hall than an infomercial. Rather than offering deep engagement with questions about challenging issues, constituents may perceive the events for what they often are: opportunities for MCs to address only questions that staff select to put them in the most favorable light. In addition, the cold calls that bring participants into the calls limit constituents' ability to prepare for the call and develop thoughtful questions. Being one of thousands of participants on a call where only a dozen questions will be answered means most participants must remain passive, without the chance to interact directly with the MC. Ultimately, there is reason to expect that

telephone town halls as currently practiced might actually leave constituents with overall negative attitudes about the platform and their representatives (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2004).

Democratic Desiderata and Counterfactual Deliberative Institutions

In many respects, citizens are the arbiters of democratic legitimacy. Well-designed democratic institutions should engender the justified perception among citizens that the platform enhances opportunities for accountability and communication, and that members use the platform effectively. Our research design therefore measures perceptions regarding telephone town halls as an institution and their use within democratic representation. In this way, we assess the normative merits of telephone town halls by relying on constituents' perceptions regarding their experience rather than an external metric (Steiner et al. 2004). Furthermore, we not only assess telephone town halls as currently practiced, but also explore whether there are counterfactual designs to the institution—designs not currently used in practice—that could enhance constituents' experience and satisfy democratic desiderata beyond any potentially attributable to current practices (Neblo et al. 2017).

To develop the counterfactual design for telephone town halls, we follow the approach to designing town halls from the Connecting to Congress (C2C) study, which had MCs interacting with their constituents on an experimental online platform (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018). The C2C study demonstrates that a well-designed town hall induces communication and participation, better approximating deliberative democratic ideals (Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer 2011; Minozzi et al. 2015; Neblo et al. 2010).

The C2C study simultaneously varied many design elements of town halls. In this first foray into studying telephone town halls, we make only two changes to the standard institutional

design. First, instead of having an open-ended conversation, our counterfactual town halls focused in-depth on one specific policy topic. We allowed the participating MCs to decide the topic for their experimental, single-topic town hall. Second, for these single-topic town halls, we distributed balanced, non-partisan, factual reading material on that topic.

Focusing on a single topic and providing background materials may induce more constructive discourse than typical open-ended telephone town halls, since these reforms enable constituents and MCs to make connections between policy ideas and discuss the topic in greater depth. With more constructive conversation, constituents may view the platform more positively as a contribution to democratic practice. In addition, focusing for an hour on a single policy topic could allow MCs to demonstrate their knowledge of the topic, developing a more positive presentation of self and, in turn, possibly enhancing constituents' trust and approval of their MC. Alternatively, the reforms could backfire on the MC, as constituents may become frustrated when they are discouraged from asking about the topics of most interest to them.

Research Questions and Study Design

We seek to answer two sets of questions. First, what is the effect of participating in a telephone town hall on constituent attitudes toward the platform and their MC? And second, does our counterfactual institution—the single topic design and provision of background materials—blunt these effects, enhance them, or make no difference at all?

To answer these questions, we designed and implemented a field experiment. Four MCs agreed to participate in two telephone town halls with their constituents.[9] The *control* group of

[9] MCs were recruited by the Congressional Management Foundation as part of their Congress 3.0 project. We attempted to recruit from a variety of ideological backgrounds and geographic locations. Our four participants ended up being all Democrats and from coastal states. They were Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA 11th), Mark Takano (D-CA 41st), Rick Larsen (D-WA 2nd), and Seth

constituents participated in an event modeled closely on the prevailing standard telephone town hall format, in which callers are not directed to focus on a single topic and no briefing materials were provided beforehand. In contrast, the *treatment* group participated in a single-topic town hall and, before the event, they received short (2-page) briefing materials based on Congressional Research Service reports.[10] Each participating MC hosted one standard, control telephone town hall and one modified, treatment telephone town hall. Using the language of clinical trials, our research design compares the "experimental treatment" to the "standard treatment," rather than to a true control group, and such a design typically yields smaller treatment effects.

To recruit participants, we sent out email invitations to a large number (tens of thousands) of adult residents in each congressional district about two weeks prior to the first session in that district. The invitation listed the dates and times of two upcoming telephone town halls with the member and allowed the constituent to self-select one or the other of the two sessions.[11] Each pair of events was scheduled close together, on similar dates and times, so that selection among the two sessions was likely to be arbitrary and unrelated to the treatment effect, thus limiting the differences between those assigned to the treatment and the control conditions.[12]

Moulton (D-MA 6th). These four Democratic members are not representative of the full Congress, but their participation greatly enhances external validity. Additionally, while there are profound political differences between constituents in the study districts and constituents from other regions, we are unaware of any theoretical reason to expect differences in constituents' responses to these events in other congressional districts.

[10] Briefing materials appear in the Online Appendix (pp. 12–16). These materials were written by CMF, which is nonpartisan. Most attendees were not study participants and thus did not have access to these materials ahead of time. The MCs selected the topics. In three cases, the topic was health care, and in the fourth case, the topic was energy and the environment.

[11] Constituents were recruited for participation primarily through email using a commercially available list of residents within the MC's district, with the list of email addresses provided by a political microtargeting firm. The emails were linked to a form that asked them for their availability for one of the two town halls and administered a short pretest survey.

[12] Because the treatment condition relied on information provision prior to participation and because we wanted to keep registration open for as long as possible, we were not able to randomize participants to treatment and control condition. We therefore relied on the similarity

For example, if a MC held their first (regular) session on a Tuesday at 5pm, their second (treatment) session would be Tuesday of the following week at the same time.[13] Participants had until two days before the actual session to sign up, at which point they were given the pre-test.[14] Three days before their assigned session participants were sent a reminder, and, for the treatment group, told that the town hall would be about a single topic and provided with briefing materials.

For each of the four MCs, more than 100 constituents from the corresponding congressional district pre-registered for a telephone town hall scheduled to be hosted by their MC.[15] At the time of the scheduled session, the telephone town hall software platform dialed all the registered participants at the phone numbers they provided. To ensure that the number of participants in these events mirrored those in a normal telephone town hall, we conducted additional random call-outs using the recruitment list. After these random call-outs, the peak number of participants, on average, for the eight different telephone town hall sessions hosted

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of telephone town hall times to support our ignorable assignment strategy. Since town halls were held at the same time in similar days of the week, we expect that the overwhelming factor driving which of the two sessions a person signs up for will be their personal schedule, which is likely not linked to political attitudes. While this is suboptimal compared with randomization, it does provide a *prima facie* level of ignorability. Since the two sessions were never at the same date and time, however, it is possible that one selection variable would be a tendency to procrastinate or put things off, but it is unclear how that personality trait would be correlated with the outcomes we describe below.

[13] The one exception to this was the Moulton sessions. The first session, in this case, took place on a Thursday and the second session took place two weeks later on a Wednesday. Both were held during the same time of day (6pm EST).

[14] The one exception was the Takano sessions, which had been scheduled for March of 2016 but then an error in the software erroneously excluded study participants from the session. As a result, we reschedule the session for May of 2016, but kept the registrations and pretest surveys from the March session. This affected only a small fraction of our respondents. For the full distribution of time lapses between pre- and post-test, plus a discussion of the effect of this software error, see Appendix Figure A1.

[15] The number of pre-registered participants varied across the four MCs: DeSaulnier (429), Larsen (146), Moulton (128), and Takano (237). Participants could indicate they were available for both sessions scheduled for their district, and these were randomized into a session.

was 491 constituents.[16,17] We did not label the registered participants, so that those conducting the town hall were not aware of who was registered and who was not, and, therefore, could not give registered participants special treatment.

Of those we contacted, 1,005 constituents consented to participate in the study, were enrolled, and responded to the pre-test survey. To better capture the natural setting of a telephone town hall, we did not offer monetary incentives, which are usually important to ensure high rates of completion in later waves on panel surveys. Therefore, most of these respondents did not attend the telephone town halls or complete the post-test survey. Compared to high quality, well compensated panel surveys, attrition in our case was high, about 78%. Ultimately, we analyze the set of respondents who completed the pre- and post-test surveys, a total of 222 individuals, with sample sizes of 98 in the treatment group and 124 in control.[18]

Each town hall lasted one hour. The calls began with an announcement by the host, a member of the research team, who stated that CMF was convening the town hall as part of a research project aimed at improving the practice of telephone town halls. The host then opened a mini-poll, to which participants could respond by pressing buttons on their phone. The mini-poll question simply deepened engagement for respondents who entered early, as the remaining

[16] The peak participation levels varied substantially across the sessions, from a low of 182 participants in DeSaulnier's treatment telephone town hall session to a high of 897 participants in Larsen's control telephone town hall session.

[17] While each telephone town hall session had several hundred callers at its peak, not all were participants in the study. The numbers of enrollees who completed portions of the pre- and post-surveys by MC were DeSaulnier (116), Larsen (47), Moulton (17), and Takano (42).

[18] To test whether attrition was correlated with covariates, we used pre-test responses to estimate a model of attrition and reporting (see Appendix Table A1). Only three of the 13 pre-test values of outcome variables were significant. Moreover, the directions of these three coefficients were incoherent; higher approval and lower evaluations of dishonesty were associated with decreased likelihood of attrition and reporting, while higher evaluations of whether the MC "understands people like me" was associated with higher likelihood. The model is weakly predictive; the in-sample area under the ROC curve is only 0.69. We interpret these analyses to suggest there may be at most small differences between enrollees and attendee-reporters.

participants dialed into the session.[19] These announcements were followed by a brief opening statement by the MC. The member then led a question-and-answer session for 45 minutes.

Participants asked questions by pressing 0 on their phones. They were placed into a conversation with one of the town hall staff, most of whom were research staff rather than congressional office staff. These town hall staff members asked the constituents to state their first name, the city or town where they lived, and their question. The staff member then typed a one sentence summary of the question in the telephone town hall software "back office," placing the name, town, and question on a line in the queue not visible to constituents. Questions were screened by the research team only for profanity, which did not occur. We used a simple rating system, where participants were given 5 stars if they asked a coherent question, and 1 star if they did not. Other rating categories were not used. Finally, a member of the MC's staff observed the list of one-sentence summaries of questions, the ratings, and the residence of the caller, after which they determined the order of the questions.

Just prior to the end of the session, the host announced the mini-poll results, the MC gave a closing statement, and registered participants were reminded to take the post-test survey. The link to complete the post-test survey was distributed to registered participants by email immediately following the end of the telephone town hall. While the vast majority of registered participants finished the post-test survey immediately after the session, reminders were sent out and some responses came in as much as seven days later.

[19] For open-topic sessions, the poll question was, "All in all, do you think things in the nation are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel things are off on the wrong track?" (Press 1 for yes, you think our country is headed in the right direction; 2 for no, you think our country is on the wrong track; 3 for if you're unsure, or have mixed feelings). For the sessions on health care, "Where do you stand on the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare?" (Press 1 if you oppose it and want it repealed; 2 if you support it or want it improved; 3 if you're unsure/don't know or have mixed feelings). For the energy and environment sessions, "How important do you think it is for the government to address climate change?" (Press 1 for Very Important, 2 for Somewhat Important, 3 for Not Important).

As this description indicates, other than the single-topic focus and background materials modification in the treatment condition, both versions of the telephone town halls were conducted in a manner similar to current practice. However, to implement a systematic study in the natural setting of telephone town halls, we did deviate from traditional telephone town hall design in minor ways in both control and treatment conditions. All participants in both conditions knew that our research team was hosting the town hall rather than the member, as would be the case in a typical town hall. In addition, while the member led the discussion, a member of CMF's staff served as the host. The research team's convening of the town hall and CMF's role as host might have an impact on the prospects for external validity, although the events did closely reflect the circumstances of telephone town halls hosted by third parties. Lastly, the recruitment emails, sent to constituents in advance of the scheduled telephone town halls to ensure that we had sufficient numbers of participants, allowed constituents to sign up and pre-register for a telephone town hall session, a departure from typical practice where constituents are cold-called without advance notice.

These deviations from current practice helped structure a systematic study of telephone town halls. In fact, the deviations do not substantially change the telephone town hall experience or structure—the treatment and control conditions both very closely approximate the typical telephone town hall. In particular, the host only lightly moderated. In each case, the member was the one to engage with constituents and was almost the only one to speak after the opening statement. Additionally, the member's staff had full control over question selection and order.

Measurement and Statistical Methods

The surveys fielded before and after the telephone town halls featured several identically worded questions, including three sets of questions from which we derive outcome variables. The first set focuses on whether telephone town halls were perceived as a good way to communicate with MCs. To develop these questions we rely on the concept of directly representative democracy (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018), which emphasizes the importance of two-way conversations between members and constituents, and the need to develop and reinforce institutions to reconnect citizens to representative government. We fielded three questions, each on a seven-point scale ranging from "Strong Disagreement" to "Strong Agreement":

> **Good to Hear Views:** "Telephone town halls are a good way for Members of Congress to hear the views of their constituents."
>
> **Good for Communicating Positions:** "Telephone town halls are a good way for Members of Congress to communicate their policy positions to constituents."
>
> **Good for Explaining Actions:** "Telephone town halls are a good way for Members of Congress to explain their actions in Washington, D.C."

Our other sets of questions focused on the MCs themselves. The second set includes standard items to assess levels of trust and approval toward the MC:

> **Trust MC:** "How much of the time do you think you can trust [MC], your member of Congress, to do what is right?" ("Always," "Most of the Time," "Some of the Time," "Not at All")
>
> **Approve of MC:** "Do you approve or disapprove of the way that [MC] is handling his job as a Congressperson?" (Five-point scale ranging from "Strongly Approve" to "Strongly Disapprove")

Finally, following Fenno (1978), our last set of questions asked respondents the degree to which a range of characteristics typified their MC. We derived each item from Fenno's list of characteristics members seek to cultivate with their presentation of self. Participants were asked:

Presentation of Self: "Thinking about [MC], in your opinion, how well do each of the following words describe [him/her]:

Respondents were presented with the characteristics Fenno (1978) lists as essential: "compassionate," "dishonest," "fair," "knowledgeable," "weak," "accessible," "qualified," and "understands people like me," and for each characteristic, responses possible included "Extremely Well," "Quite Well," "Not Too Well," and "Not Well at All," along with a "Don't Know" option. On the pretest, "Don't Know" was a very common response for these items. We therefore coded these items so they were either 0 or 1, where 1 meant a positive evaluation and 0 meant a negative evaluation or "Don't Know".[20] This measure effectively reverse codes the negative evaluations ("dishonest" and "weak"), so that all the resulting variables have the same orientation.

The pretest survey included questions to tap important covariates, and therefore enable a balance test between experimental conditions. Our experiment was meant to hew as closely to the natural experience of attending a telephone town hall. As such, we did not offer monetary incentives to participants. Consequently, we were forced to limit our surveys as much as possible, to limit non-participation and roll-off. That said, we did include two questions that we expected to be strong predictors of both enrollment in and completion of the study: (1) a standard branching question to measure participants' party ID, and (2) a four-point measure of political interest. Balance on these covariates and the pretest values of all outcome variables was excellent across the board (see Appendix Table A2).

[20] Results are robust if we exclude the Don't Knows as missing and use the scale as it is.

To estimate the effects of attendance and the moderating effects of our modified design, we estimated a set of multilevel regression models.[21] Each model focuses on a different set of questions: one for attitudes toward telephone town halls, another for trust and approval, and a third for evaluations of members' presentation of self. In each case we have multiple questions, 13 total, raising the risk of multiple comparisons problems. Multilevel models are appropriate in these circumstances, as they partially pool responses together, reducing the risks of false positives due to sampling variability (Gelman, Hill, and Yajima 2012).[22] Specifically, we estimate the multilevel model

$$y_i \sim \alpha_i + \beta_1\, treatment_i + \beta_2\, post_i + \beta_3\, treatment_i \times post_i$$

$$\alpha_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_{MOC[i]} + \alpha_{question[i]} + \alpha_{respondent[i]},$$

where i is an observation, y_i is a survey response for a given question, and $treatment_i$ and $post_i$ are both dichotomous indicators. In particular, $post_i$ equals 0 for responses on the pretest survey, and 1 for responses on the posttest. Similarly, $treatment_i$ equals 0 for the open-topic telephone town halls that did not include briefing materials, and 1 for the single-topic events for which materials were provided. The dataset has a multilevel structure, with observations grouped together by MC, question, and respondent, so we include random intercepts at each level (Gelman and Hill 2006, 484–5).[23]

[21] The results we report are robust to models including fixed effects for respondents and questions. We omit the treatment indicator and member fixed effects because of collinearity. See Table A4.

[22] This modeling framework also permits us to use all responses provided by participants, even in the case of partial missingness.

[23] All models were estimated with the *rstanarm* package developed by the Stan Development Team (2016) in the **R** statistical computing environment, with four chains, 1000 warmup iterations, and 1000 sampling iterations for each model. Relevant statistics indicate that all three models converged.

Our *Attitudes toward Town Halls* model combines three questions, the *Trust and Approval* model includes two, and the *Presentation of Self*, eight. Below we refer to the parameter α_0, which is the intercept of the α_i equation, as the "overall mean" that summarizes all respondents' pretreatment attitudes on the relevant set of items. In the difference-in-differences framework, β_2 is the *post – pre* change in attitude on the relevant item set among the control participants; and $\beta_3$is the difference-in-differences estimand for that set of items. Note that β_3 is the coefficient on an interaction term and so estimates the *difference* between the averages of attitudes in the treatment and control conditions, but the total pre-post change for those in the treatment group is given by the sum $\beta_2 + \beta_3$ (Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006). So for example, if β_2 is large and positive, and β_3 small and negative, this would mean that participants in both conditions increased their attitudes on that measure, but the effect was less positive for the treatment group.[24]

We use these models to answer both of our sets of questions. First, we focus on estimates of the coefficient on $post_i$, which we interpret as the effect of participation in a telephone town hall for members of the control group, who attended events emulating current practice. Although this coefficient is not often interpreted causally in differences-in-differences designs, such an interpretation is plausible in our case based on a before-and-after design. To justify such an interpretation, we assume there were no events between the pretest and posttest that affected

[24] To explore whether attendance or the modified condition had pronounced effects for different questions within a model, we also estimated models with question-level random slopes on treatment, post, and their interaction. None of the estimated random slopes had a large magnitude, and the estimates of overall means were virtually identical to the models without random slopes. These findings indicate that effects were distributed in a similar way within each set of questions and that our theoretically informed categorizations were appropriate.

outcomes, except for participation in the telephone town hall itself.[25] Based on this assumption, we interpret this coefficient as the causal effect of participation in telephone town halls for the control group.

This assumption is facially plausible for two reasons. The two measurement points were close together—participants completed the pretest survey a maximum of three weeks[26] before the event itself and completed the posttest survey immediately following the events. The median time between pre-test and post-test completion was 12 days (9 for the control group and 14 for the treatment group). It is unlikely that other events affecting participants' attitudes toward telephone town halls or MCs occurred within this short window. Moreover, given that the events were held at different times for each MC, it is unlikely that outside events would change opinions consistently across sessions. Thus, from an *a priori* perspective, it seems plausible that this design would yield well identified causal estimates.

Nevertheless, this assumption could be still violated in practice. For example, this effect would be confounded if, between the survey waves, negative media coverage of an MC led to negative attitudes, even spilling over to the telephone town hall survey items. Therefore, to validate this assumption, we conducted an analysis of Google searches during the time of the study. The results of this show that no member had search volumes more than 17% of their five-year maximum (Figures A2 and A3), and that overall search volumes were not above average for any of the members (Table A11). We also searched Lexis-Nexis for all news articles including the MCs. Of the 829 we found, only 37 were in national outlets likely to have a substantial following, and almost all of them dealt with broader political context, rather than focusing on the

[25] A second possible confound would arise if participants experience demand effects, such as a Hawthorne effect from participating in the experiment. The potential for demand effect is present in any randomized experiment and is inherent to the design.

[26] The only exception was a few participants in the Takano sessions that we describe in footnote 15 above and Appendix Figure A1.

actions of the particular MC (Figure A4 and Table A12). The upshot of this analysis is that there is little evidence of negative media coverage that might confound our identification.

We also use these models to assess how the single-issue and background material intervention enhanced the effects of telephone town halls on constituent attitudes. To answer this question, we focus on the coefficient β_3 on $treatment_i \times post_i$, the standard estimator for the difference-in-differences estimand (Angrist and Pischke 2008). We interpret this coefficient as causal under the parallel paths assumption, which requires that the untreated potential outcomes for the treatment group have similar trends as they had in the control group. Parallel paths is a strong assumption; however, our design is based on an intervention, and subjects did not know about the details of their session upon preregistration. Therefore, we assume that selection into treatment is ignorable, and hence that the parallel path assumption is plausible.

Our findings are local to constituents who select into a telephone town halls and the kind of MCs who participated in our study. Under our design, we can evaluate the reactions to the telephone town halls among those who accepted our invitation to participate and so may be predisposed to believe the events worthwhile. Indeed, pre-telephone town hall survey responses indicated high baseline levels of support for telephone town halls as good ways for members to communicate their views and to hear about the views of their constituents. We cannot evaluate reactions among those who did not participate, and non-participants may hold generally negative views about telephone town halls, possibly seeing them as controlled platforms that can filter out dissenting views. In future research we plan to try to address this important question. That said, our self-selected sample remains meaningful, as it is possible that those who attend might end up being disappointed with the experience.

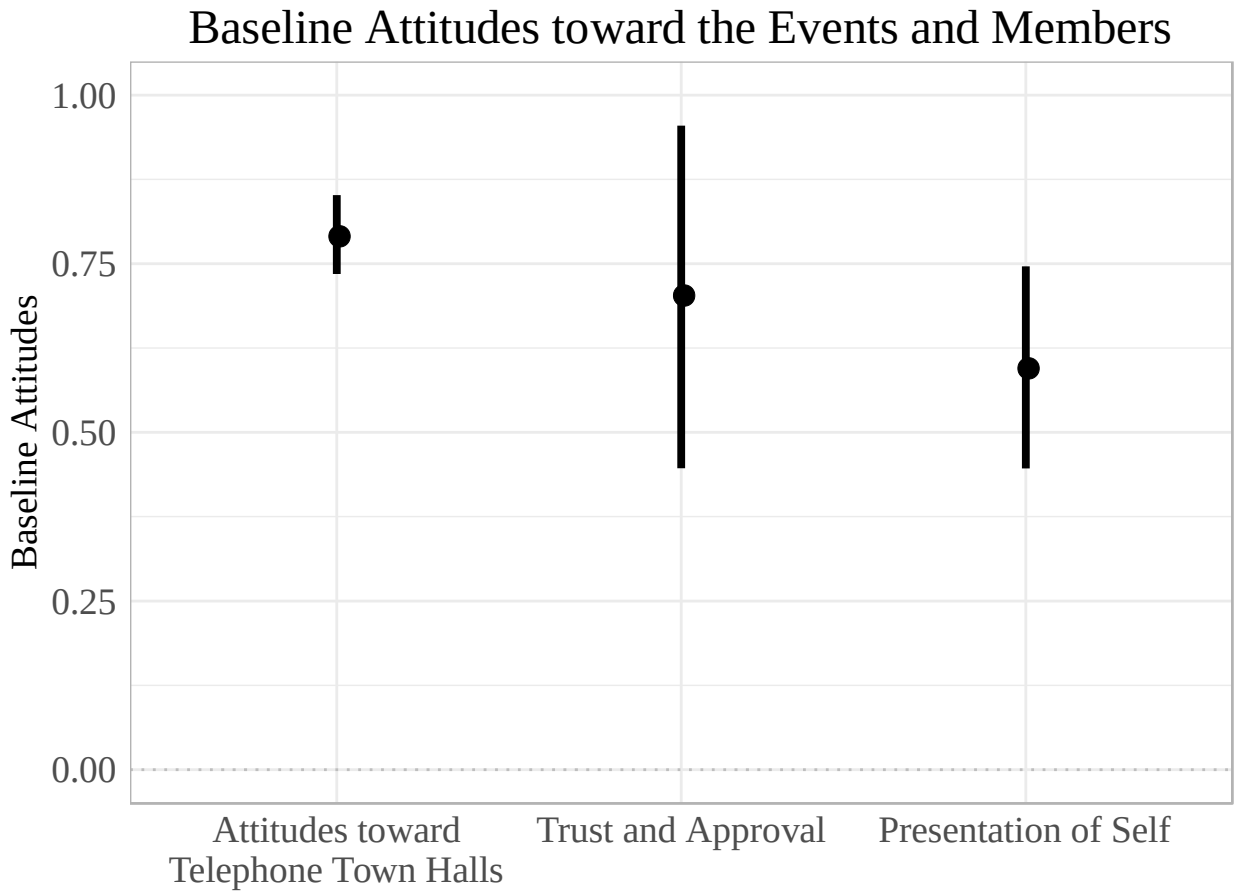

Figure 1: Baseline attitudes toward events and members, as measured by intercepts from regression models. In all three cases, the baseline attitudes exceed the 50% mark. The figure displays means and 95% intervals. All outcome variables range from 0 to 1. Details for models appear in Appendix Table A3.

The Consequences of Participating in Standard Telephone Town Halls

We start by presenting the baseline approval for the MCs and towards telephone town halls. To estimate these baselines, Figure 1 plots the overall means for each question group based on our three models. These estimates reflect attitudes prior to the events having occurred. Participants in telephone town halls already have high levels of reported satisfaction with telephone town halls, even before participating. They are also mostly positively disposed toward the MC. We observed this tendency qualitatively during the telephone town hall sessions, where the questions

posed by constituents were generally supportive of the MC's positions. This finding is not too surprising, since participants are unlikely to select into the study unless they believed their time would be well spent.

We next look at the overall impact of participation in town halls on citizen attitudes, both about the town halls as a platform for communication and about the participating MC. Here we are conducting the simple difference analysis for the control group. We find significant, and generally positive outcomes from participating in the telephone town halls. Figure 2 displays the before-and-after comparisons for the control group, who participated in the standard town hall, as estimated by β_2. In all three cases—for telephone town halls, trust in and approval of the member, and the presentation-of-self items—we see positive, statistically significant results.

All outcomes variables range from 0 to 1, so these estimates can be interpreted as increased fractions of the scale. The average difference between respondent attitudes toward telephone town halls before and after the event is a rise of about 6% of the scale, which is not insubstantial given, as we showed in Figure 1, that the distribution of pretest responses was substantially right skewed. For trust and approval, the effect was smaller, about 4%, but for presentation-of-self items, was substantially larger, at about 14%. These effects are moderately sized for attitudes toward the institution (Cohen's d = 0.32), small for trust and approval (0.14), but relatively large for the presentation-of-self items (0.50). Details on the regressions appear in Appendix Table A3.[27]

[27] Results are robust to the use of fixed effects models; see Appendix Table A4 for details.

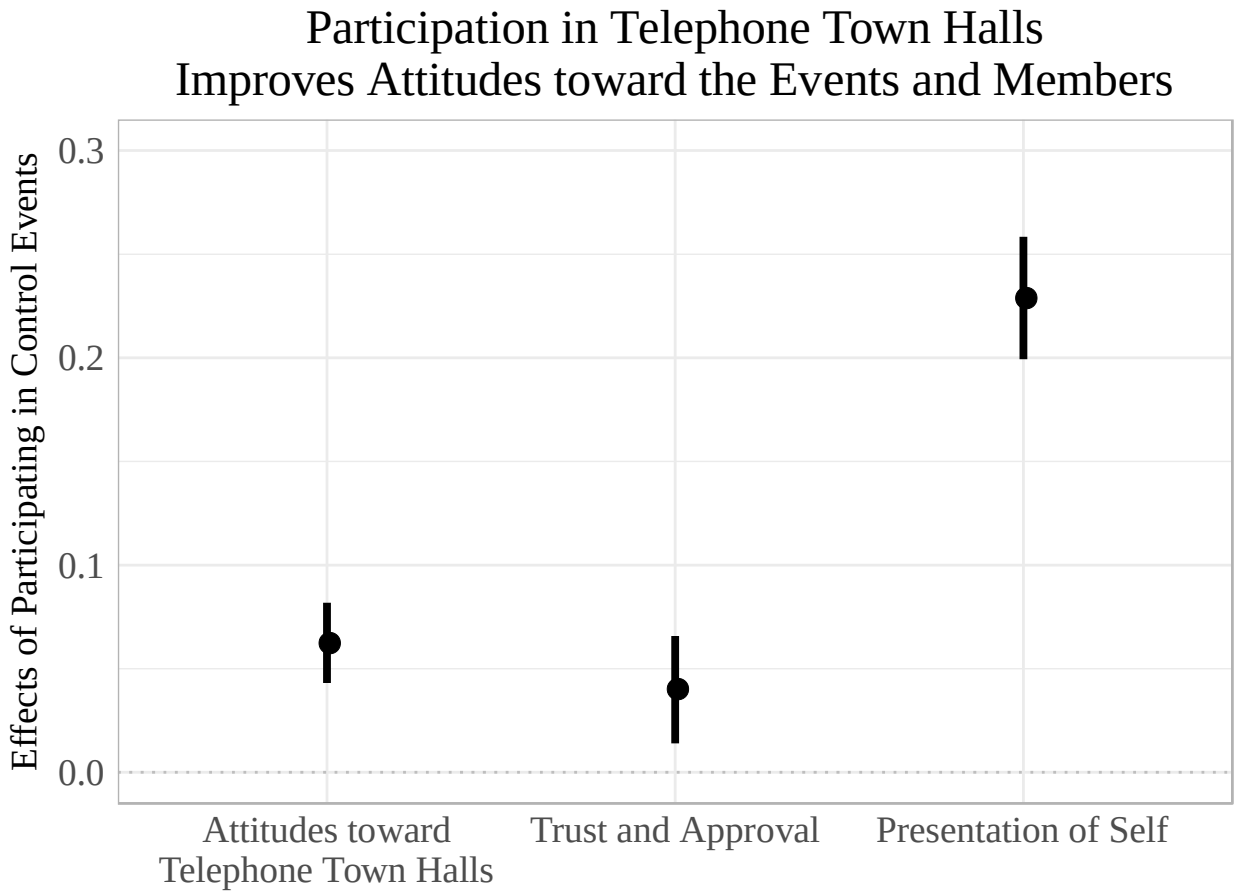

Figure 2: The figure depicts average differences between pretest and post-test among participants in standard telephone town halls. The figure displays means and 95% intervals. All outcome variables range from 0 to 1. Details for models appear in Appendix Table A3.

Thus, in spite of their generally bad reputation in the media, telephone town halls as they are currently practiced appear to generally be approved of—at least by the kinds of constituents who currently participate and for the sort of MCs recruited for this study—and participation increases their satisfaction. We see a similar pattern for attitudes toward the member. The results for both sets of measures suggest that, rather than these forums frustrating this type of constituent, telephone town halls enhance evaluations of the MC.

However, the high baseline evaluations we observed in Figure 1 suggest caution. Whether these results would be the same for those who start less supportive of the MC or

whether this was primarily a result of the well-known tendency for people in Congressional districts to like their particular MC (even as they generally disapprove of Congress), remains an open question. During the email recruitment for each session, many respondents wrote back to us to state they would not engage in a telephone town hall with a representative with the opposite party. That we see such high approval on the pretest confirms that constituents tend to self-select into telephone town halls based on their previous support of the member.

To shed some light on whether telephone town halls have the potential to win over less supportive constituents, we fit three auxiliary linear models, restricting the sample to only those respondent-question pairs where pre-test attitudes were in the bottom half of the scale.[28] In all three cases, the point estimates from these subsample regressions more than double those from the full sample. The estimates for presentation-of-self are larger by a factor of 3, and attitudes toward telephone town halls are larger by a factor of 5. While we do not suggest that this is dispositive evidence that those constituents who start less supportive of MCs or events will necessarily see such increases—this group of respondents did agree to attend these events, despite their pretest responses, after all—we do take this as suggestive evidence that these positive changes may generalize.[29]

[28] For details on models, see Appendix Table A5.

[29] In a previous study modifying town halls for an online forum, Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer (2018) also find that trust and approval of members of Congress increases among participants in their online town halls. Their constituent samples in the study were more broadly representative than the self-selected samples here, suggesting the possibility that the increased approval and trust among telephone town hall participants may also hold for constituents who view their members less favorably.

The Enhanced Effects of the Single Topic Design

In this section we examine the impact of our intervention, which modifies the standard telephone town hall to focus on a single topic and included briefing materials. As we noted above, our evaluation of the intervention is based on a differences-in-differences design—we rely on scheduling similarity to ensure assignment is unrelated to potential outcomes. Changes attributable to the modified design are thus enhancements to the effects of attending these events.

Returning to general opinions of the telephone town hall, Figure 3 indicates positive and statistically significant effects of our intervention, increasing the effects of attending a standard event. Constituents seemed to prefer the single-topic focus and briefing materials to the standard open-topic format, with an increase of about 5% of the response scale. This effect is small-to-moderate, with a Cohen's *d* of 0.25. This finding suggests that critics of telephone town halls are not entirely wrong; constituents seem on average to prefer events that hew more closely to more democratically appealing criteria (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018), even when that means their questions and comments are constrained to focus on a pre-arranged topic.

In contrast, we observe negative, small, statistically insignificant effects for attitudes toward the MCs. For both general trust and approval, and detailed presentation-of-self items, the intervention caused at most very small declines in evaluations compared to the standard town hall, on the order of about 0.02 on the 0-1 scale. Importantly, this result compares differences between designs; *both designs improved constituents' perceptions of their members*. Attendance at either standard or modified events yielded statistically significant increases in evaluations of the member, with the sole exception of modified townhalls and trust/approval of the member.

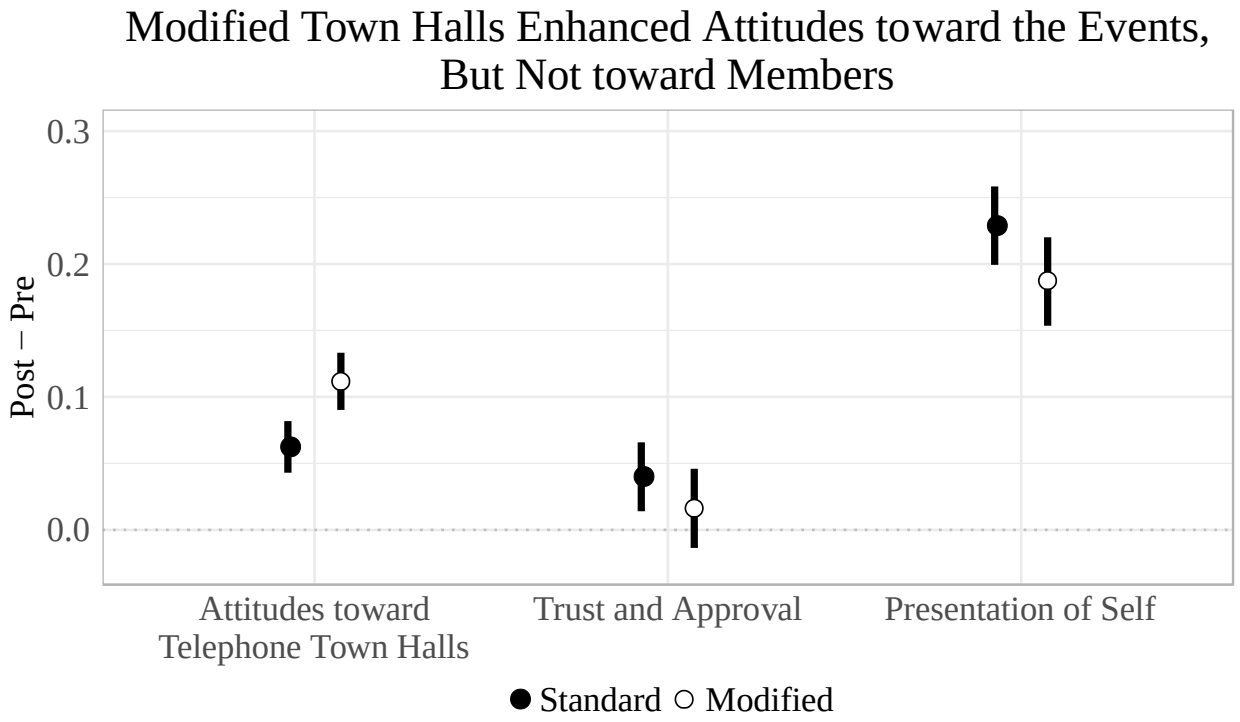

Figure 3: The single topic/briefing materials ("Modified") intervention significantly increased the pre-post difference in evaluations of telephone town halls themselves, but did not affect the effects on attitudes toward the members. All pre-post differences are statistically significant except for the change in Trust and Approval for the modified telephone town halls. Outcome variables range from 0 to 1, and the figure displays means and 95% intervals of *Post – Pre*. Details for models appear in Appendix Table A3.

We interpret these findings to mean that constituents' attitudes about MCs do not depend significantly on the institutional framework in which they interact. In retrospect this point makes sense. Focusing on a single topic likely makes the conversation more coherent and thorough and hence increases constituents' satisfaction with the event's design. Moreover, members have opportunities to engage in effective presentation-of-self in both cases, whether displaying breadth by answering questions on a variety of topics, or depth by answering probing questions on a single topic. Indeed, the null findings serve as a reassuring test of the design itself, as the mechanisms that connect the treatment to the member-centric outcomes are less obvious than

those that connect the treatment to attitudes about telephone town halls themselves. That we found insignificant effects of the single-topic treatment on attitudes toward the member implies the plausibility of the identifying assumptions that warrant causal inferences.

When considering the prospects for members to adopt our alternative design, this pattern of results might be taken two ways. On the one hand, it would seem that there is no especially compelling reason for MCs to adopt these reforms, unless they would appeal more to those who do not currently select into standard events. On the other hand, there seems to be no apparent disadvantage for members to adopt reforms like the single-topic town hall, and they might attract new constituents into the process. To the extent that such reforms are democratically desirable, and might even mollify critics, MCs may benefit from adopting them.

Robustness and Moderation by Party ID

We performed some auxiliary analyses to probe the robustness of our findings. First, we re-estimated all models using fixed effects (see Appendix Table A4), finding broadly similar results to those shown in the figures above. We also used fixed effects models to estimate the effects of attendance and treatment on a question-by-question basis (see Appendix Table A6). There was limited variation in point estimates within each question group. For example, estimates for the items measuring attitudes toward telephone town halls ranged from 0.05 to 0.08. Similarly limited ranges emerged for each question group, and for treatment effect estimates.[30] Random slopes models confirm this limited variation by question, suggesting that our theoretically informed categorization of questions was appropriate.

[30] Because we have so many comparisons (26 in total), naïve interpretation of *p*-values from separate models risks multiple comparison problem; similar reasoning motivates our preference for multilevel models (Gelman, Hill, and Yajima 2012). We therefore refrain from reporting *p*-values for these robustness checks.

There may also be differences in attendance and treatment effects based on respondents' party identification, although we did not develop and do not test hypotheses here. All participating MCs were Democrats, and so we re-estimated our multilevel models for the subsample of respondents who were Democratic identifiers (including leaners) and for the subsample of Republicans. Results appear in Appendix Tables A7 and A8.[31] Interestingly, there was widespread similarity in inferences across the groups. Only two differences appeared between subsamples. The effect of attendance on trust and approval seems limited to co-partisans; in fact, there was a negative point estimate for this effect among Republicans. And the treatment effect on attitudes toward telephone town halls seems concentrated among Democrats; here, too, the effect for Republicans was negative. There are good reasons, however, for caution in interpreting these moderated effects. Not only did we lack theoretical predictions for either effect, the sample of Republican participants was small (n = 35). Future work should explore the interplay between party similarity and modes of constituent communication.

Discussion and Conclusion

Telephone town halls increasingly dominate the conversations that representatives have with their constituents, and, in retrospect at least, it is easy to see why. The results of this study should be interpreted with caution—given the small numbers of MCs and sessions, and the less-than-optimal sample and randomization process we can only state the local effect of exposure to telephone town halls local to these members who agreed to work with us and the participants who selected into the town halls. Nevertheless, our field experiment has revealed that constituents who currently select into telephone town halls find them to be a useful communication platform, and they develop more positive evaluations of their representatives

[31] Fixed effects versions of the models appear in Appendix Tables A9 and A10.

after participating. These results suggest why telephone town halls are so popular among MCs; they are an effective platform for MCs to reach many constituents at once *and* cultivate trust, approval, and positive impressions of MCs among participants. Adding more deliberative elements seems to further improve the perceived utility of telephone town halls as a communication platform, and at essentially no cost to the MC herself.

There are a number of future directions for this research. First, expanding this research to test if the relationships observed herein hold up in more powerful studies is critical. The ideal design would include a true control group, where some participants who volunteered to participate are randomly excluded from the telephone town halls. Such a design would help to rule out confounds from external events, such as the vagaries of media attention.

Second, different methods of recruiting for telephone town halls should be utilized in experiments. One of the largest challenges we faced in implementing this project was recruiting constituents to participate in the sessions. Participating offices and our collaborating organizations suggested that the difficulties we had with recruiting were unusual, but we could not identify why this was the case. Further research focused on recruitment may help both in future studies and in MC's efforts to attract broad audiences for their own telephone town halls.

Third, further efforts should be made to understand the extent to which our results are local to the sorts of constituents who attended and MCs we recruited. The citizens who chose to attend these telephone town halls were likely predisposed to believe the events were worthwhile. There likely were many citizens, both those who identify with the political party of the legislator and perhaps especially those who do not, who did not participate out of the assumption that the event would not be worth their while, and would not provide sufficient opportunities for disagreement and dissent. Relatedly, our MCs were all Democrats from coastal areas who were

interested in participating. We have no theoretical reason to expect effects to depend on partisanship or geography, but it seems plausible that legislative style would moderate the effects of these events. We conjecture that district advocates, in the sense of Bernhard, Sewell, and Sulkin (2017), will be especially effective, and future research should address this question.

Finally, virtual town halls should be used to explore more counterfactual institutions for citizen engagement and interaction with MCs (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018). As we have shown, telephone town halls provide an interesting mechanism for studying different designs to facilitate deliberation and communication. Experiments should also be conducted using different technologies and tools. Some remote town hall providers have begun linking the town halls into Facebook and other video formats. The challenge going forward is to design and test platforms fostering inclusion, rational discourse, and perceptions of legitimacy.

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Supporting Information for
Constituent Communication through Telephone Town Halls
A Field Experiment Involving Members of Congress

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Contents

Table A1: Multilevel Model of Attrition

	DV = Attrition
Party ID	–0.02
	(0.05)
Political Interest	–0.09
	(0.61)
TTHs Good to Hear Views	0.93
	(0.59)
TTHs Good to Communicate	–1.20
	(0.85)
TTHs Good to Explain Actions	–0.30
	(0.82)
Approve of MOC	–1.08*
	(0.52)
Trust MOC	0.30
	(0.50)
MOC Compassionate	0.04
	(0.27)
MOC Dishonest (rev.)	–0.04
	(0.25)
MOC Fair	0.22
	(0.29)
MOC Knowledgeable	–0.39
	(0.35)
MOC Weak (rev.)	–0.39
	(0.27)
MOC Accessible	–0.27
	(0.22)
MOC Qualified	–0.19
	(0.33)
MOC Understand People Like Me	0.55*
	(0.25)
Intercept	0.05
	(0.29)
Error terms	
MOCs	0.69

The table presents a multilevel model of attrition (i.e., enrollment in, but non-completion of the study). The model also included indicators for missingness on each variable; missing values are imputed to medians. Cells report posterior sampling means and standard deviations. *= 95% interval excludes zero. n_{obs} = 1005, n_{MOC} = 4.

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics and Balance

Pretest Variable	Control Mean	Treatment Mean	*p*	*SD*	*N Missing*
Party ID	0.74	0.75	0.97	0.32	1
Political Interest	0.89	0.92	0.22	0.15	5
Telephone Town Halls are Good to…					
Hear Views	0.75	0.77	0.38	0.21	1
Communicate Positions	0.78	0.80	0.42	0.19	1
Explain Actions	0.78	0.79	0.74	0.19	1
Summary Evaluations					
Approve of MC	0.83	0.77	0.61	0.27	35
Trust MC	0.67	0.63	0.27	0.24	39
MC's Presentation of Self					
Compassionate	0.57	0.60	0.71	0.49	0
Dishonest (rev.)	0.60	0.57	0.66	0.49	0
Fair	0.60	0.58	0.75	0.49	0
Knowledgeable	0.72	0.65	0.26	0.47	0
Weak (rev.)	0.65	0.57	0.22	0.49	0
Accessible	0.56	0.54	0.76	0.50	0
Qualified	0.74	0.67	0.22	0.46	0
Understand People Like Me	0.45	0.43	0.75	0.50	0

n = 222. For the purpose of balance tests, missing values are imputed to the median of the group. The original Presentation of Self items were on a four point scale; they have been recoded to be 0 for missing, Don't Know, or negative evaluations; 1 for positive evaluations.

Table A3: Multilevel Models of Outcomes

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Treatment	–0.02	0.01	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Post	0.06*	0.04*	0.23*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Treatment × *Post*	0.05*	–0.02	–0.04
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Intercept	0.79*	0.70*	0.59*
	(0.03)	(0.13)	(0.08)
n Observations	1323	807	3552
n Respondents	222	220	222
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8
Error terms			
Respondents	0.14	0.24	0.29
MOCs	0.03	0.06	0.12
Questions	0.04	0.18	0.10
Residual	0.13	0.14	0.34

The table presents three multilevel models of survey responses, separately by question group, with random intercepts for respondents, MOCs, and questions. Cells report posterior sampling means and standard deviations. *= 95% interval excludes zero. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A4: Fixed Effects Models

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Post	0.06*	0.04	0.23*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)
Treatment × *Post*	0.05*	–0.02	–0.04
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)
n Observations	1308	688	3552
n Respondents	218	172	222
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8

The table presents three fixed effects regression models of survey responses, separately by question group, with fixed effects for respondents and questions (we omit the treatment indicator and member fixed effects because of collinearity). The samples are limited to respondents without missingness. Cells report coefficients and two-way cluster-robust standard errors for MOCs and questions. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A5: Multilevel Models for Low Pretest Respondents

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Treatment	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)
Post	0.31*	0.08*	0.61*
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Treatment × *Post*	0.03	0.02	–0.04
	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.03)
Intercept	0.44*	0.32*	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.05)
n Observations	238	163	1446
n Respondents	57	56	160
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8
Error terms			
Respondents	0.11	0.18	0.15
MOCs	0.05	0.07	0.08
Questions	0.05	0.13	0.07
Residual	0.13	0.17	0.31

The table presents three multilevel models of survey responses, separately by question group, with random intercepts for respondents, MOCs, and questions. Samples are limited to just those respondent-question pairs in which the response on the pre-test were in the lower half of the scale. Cells report posterior sampling means and standard deviations. * 95% interval excludes zero. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A6: Question-by-Question Fixed Effects Models

Outcome Variable	*Post*	*Treatment × Post*
Telephone Town Halls are Good to…		
Hear Views	0.079	0.043
	(0.041)	(0.018)
Communicate Positions	0.050	0.055
	(0.026)	(0.034)
Explain Actions	0.058	0.049
	(0.031)	(0.030)
Summary Evaluations		
Approve of MC	0.018	–0.001
	(0.014)	(0.019)
Trust MC	0.055	–0.042
	(0.027)	(0.046)
MC's Presentation of Self		
Compassionate	0.274	0.032
	(0.109)	(0.133)
Dishonest (rev.)	0.210	–0.087
	(0.047)	(0.011)
Fair	0.218	–0.075
	(0.103)	(0.075)
Knowledgeable	0.250	–0.066
	(0.042)	(0.021)
Weak (rev.)	0.266	–0.123
	(0.092)	(0.047)
Accessible	0.234	0.001
	(0.074)	(0.137)
Qualified	0.185	–0.073
	(0.080)	(0.075)
Understand People Like Me	0.194	0.062
	(0.077)	(0.092)

The table presents fixed effects regression models of survey responses separately by question, with fixed effects for respondents. The samples are limited to respondents without missingness. Cells report coefficients and cluster-robust standard errors for MOCs. Sample sizes appear in Table A5. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A7: Multilevel Models
(Democratic Party Identifiers)

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Treatment	–0.02	0.02	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Post	0.08*	0.06*	0.24*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Treatment × *Post*	0.06*	–0.02	–0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Intercept	0.78*	0.77*	0.65*
	(0.04)	(0.13)	(0.07)
n Observations	963	591	2592
n Respondents	162	160	162
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8
Error terms			
Respondents	0.13	0.14	0.25
MOCs	0.03	0.05	0.10
Questions	0.05	0.18	0.08
Residual	0.13	0.12	0.32

The table presents three multilevel models of survey responses, separately by question group, with random intercepts for respondents, MOCs, and questions. Cells report posterior sampling means and standard deviations. *= 95% interval excludes zero. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A8: Multilevel Models
(Republican Party Identifiers)

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Treatment	0.06	–0.03	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Post	0.08*	–0.06	0.23*
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Treatment × *Post*	–0.04	0.05	–0.12
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Intercept	0.74*	0.44*	0.38*
	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.13)
n Observations	210	125	560
n Respondents	35	35	35
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8
Error terms			
Respondents	0.18	0.31	0.31
MOCs	0.07	0.11	0.15
Questions	0.04	0.12	0.14
Residual	0.13	0.16	0.38

The table presents three multilevel models of survey responses, separately by question group, with random intercepts for respondents, MOCs, and questions. Cells report posterior sampling means and standard deviations. *= 95% interval excludes zero. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A9: Fixed Effects Models
(Democratic Party Identifiers)

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Post	0.081	0.053	0.241
	(0.030)	(0.024)	(0.074)
Treatment × *Post*	0.065	–0.015	–0.010
	(0.037)	(0.023)	(0.053)
n Observations	948	516	2592
n Respondents	158	129	162
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8

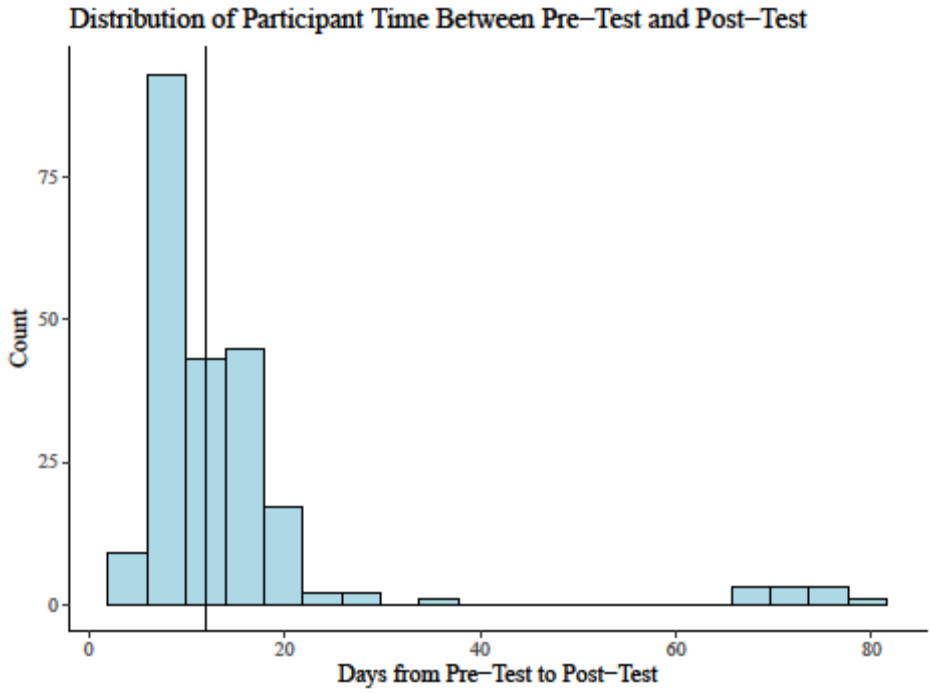
The table presents three fixed effects regression models of survey responses, separately by question group, with fixed effects for respondents and questions. The samples are limited to respondents without missingness. Cells report coefficients and two-way cluster-robust standard errors for MOCs and questions. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Table A10: Fixed Effects Models
(Republican Party Identifiers)

	Telephone Town Halls	Trust & Approval	Presentation of Self
Post	0.077	–0.054	0.229
	(0.089)	(0.010)	(0.025)
Treatment × *Post*	–0.041	–0.023	–0.119
	(0.107)	(0.050)	(0.064)
n Observations	210	100	560
n Respondents	35	25	35
n MOCs	4	4	4
n Questions	3	2	8

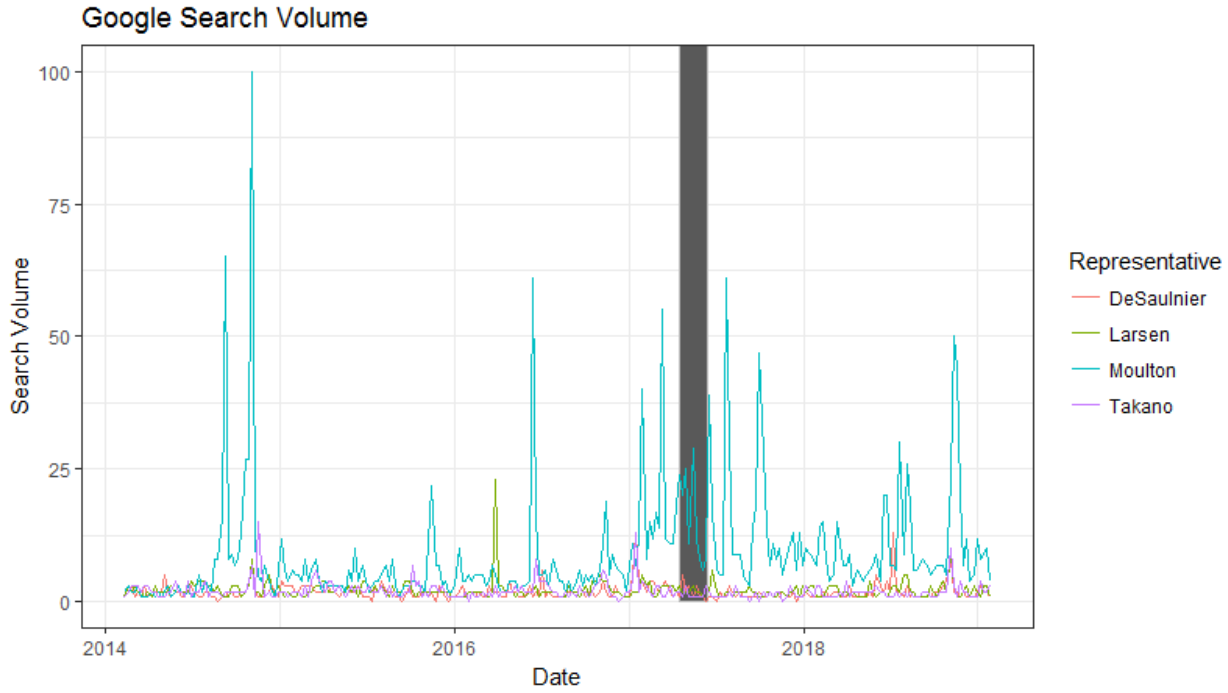
The table presents three fixed effects regression models of survey responses, separately by question group, with fixed effects for respondents and questions. The samples are limited to respondents without missingness. Cells report coefficients and two-way cluster-robust standard errors for MOCs and questions. The coefficient for the *Treatment* × *Post* term is the difference in average responses among participants who attended an experimental town hall versus a standard town hall. As we describe in the text, the overall evaluation of participants in the treatment group is given by the sum of coefficients for the *Post* and *Treatment* × *Post* terms.

Figure A1: Distribution of Days Between Pre-Test and Post-Test for all Participants



The median number of days (marked by the vertical line) is 12 days, with 9 days for the control group and 14 days for the treatment group. The right-skew is primarily due to a technical glitch that moved some participants in the Takano session to a later time than originally scheduled (see fn. 15 in main paper). The median number of days for the Takano participants was, however, similar to that for other groups (15 for Takano, compared to 10 for Moulton, 13 for Larsen, and 9 for DeSaulnier).

Figure A2: Google Search Volume for Participating Representatives, 2014-2019



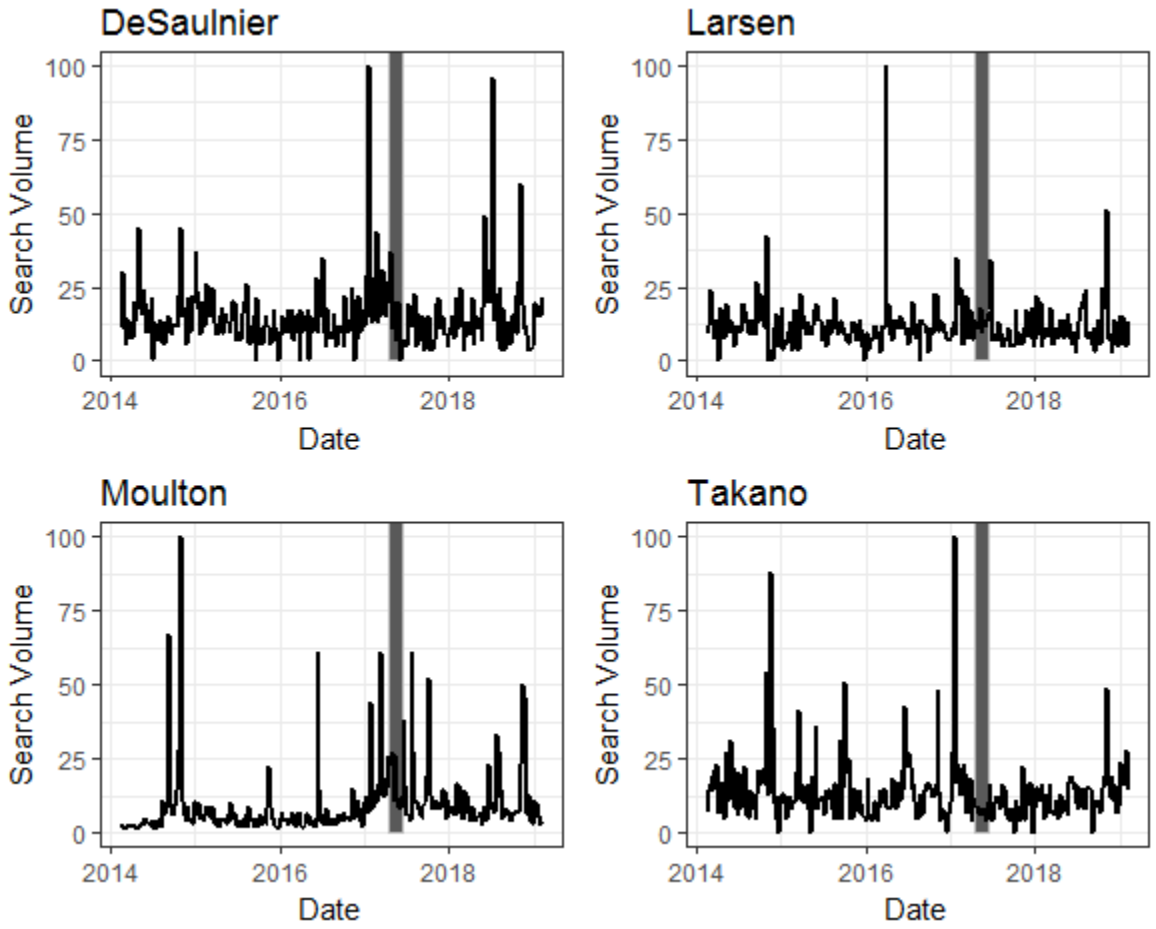
The time period of our study is shaded in gray. Data gathered from Google Trends (trends.google.com). Several important notes can be taken from this figure. (1) Of the four participating MOCs, Moulton has, by far, the most attention over the past five years. (2) Even for Moulton, the level of attention during this period is relatively low compared to his peak. (3) Similarly, for the other three MOCs, the levels observed are well below their peaks over this five year period.

Table A11: Google Search Volumes for Representatives

	2014-2019 Average	2014-2019 SD	2017 Average	2017 SD	Study Period Average	Study Period SD
DeSaulnier	1.94	1.49	2.04	1.96	1.89	1.54
Larsen	2.28	1.71	2.13	1.00	2.22	0.667
Moulton	9.16	11.5	15.4	12.7	15.9	8.65
Takano	2.15	1.67	1.83	1.83	1.56	0.882

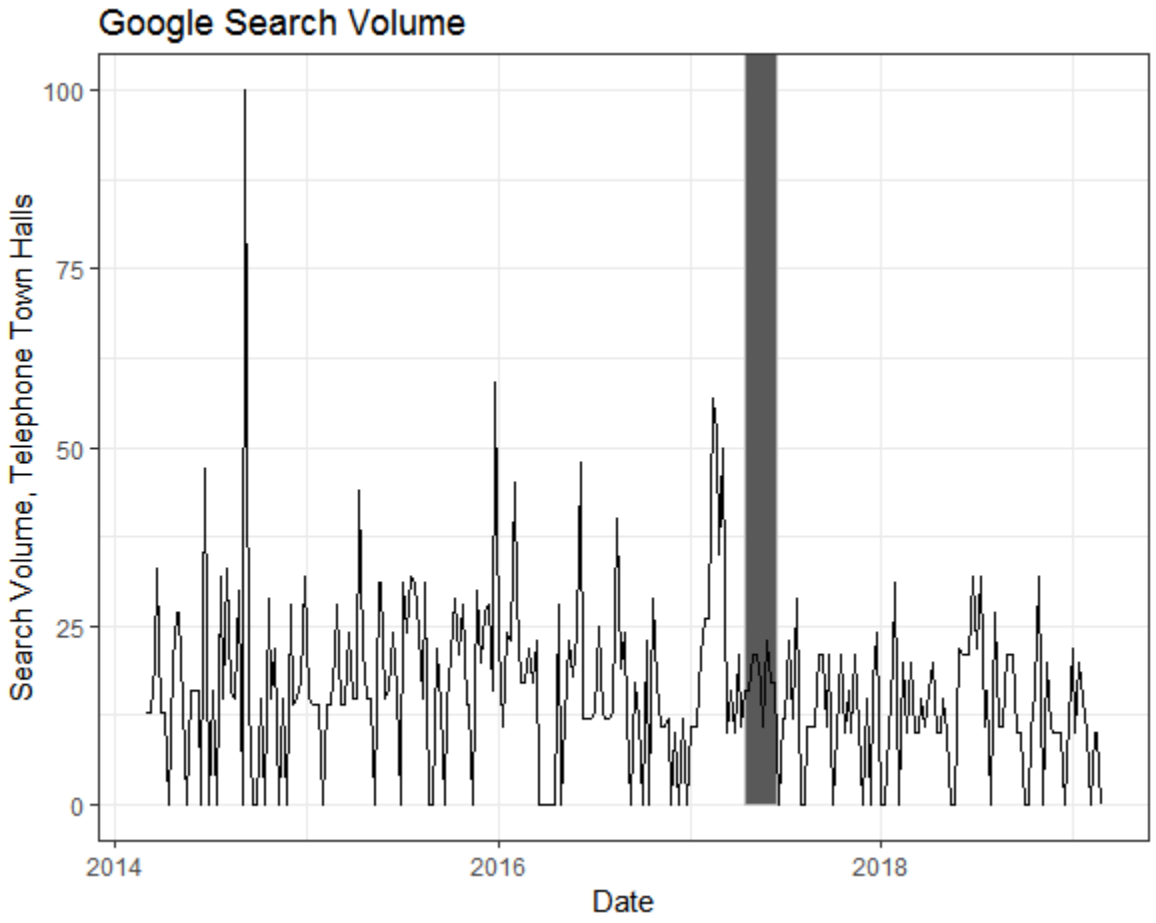
The table shows compares the average search volume during our study period to the five year period from 2014-2019 and during 2017. For DeSaulnier and Takano, the volume during this period was lower than both the five year and 2017 average. For Larsen, it was slightly lower than the five year average, but slightly higher than the 2017 average, though these are very close. For Moulton, the search volume is larger than the five year average, but very close to his 2017 average.

Figure A3: Google Search Volume Normalized by Representative



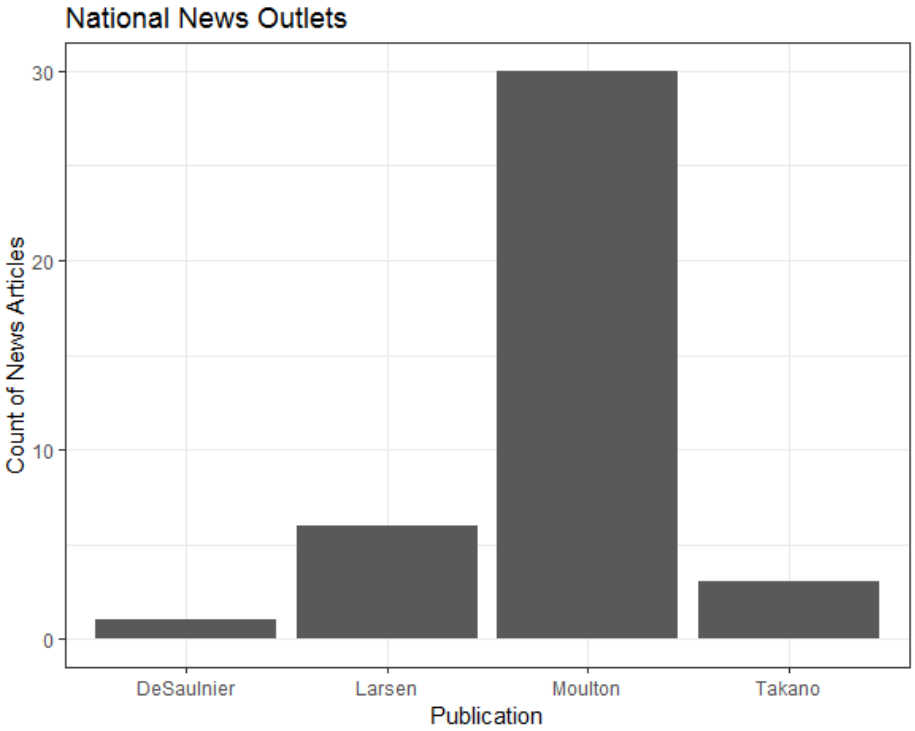
The timeperiod studied is shaded in gray. Data gathered from Google Trends (trends.google.com). The graphs show the proportion of the MOC's peak search level. Average search volume for 14.4% of his five year peak for DeSaulnier, 13.2% for Larsen, 17.1% for Moulton, and 7.22% for Takano.

Figure A4: Google Search Volume for "Telephone Town Halls", 2014-2019



The time period of our study is shaded in gray. Data gathered from Google Trends (trends.google.com). We notice no aberrant spikes in searches for telephone town halls during the period of the study. The highest search volumes reach during this period is 23% of its peak in September 2014.

Figure A5: News Articles from Lexis-Nexis Between Pre-Test and Post-Test



Search results from national news outlets (e.g. CNN, NBC, The New York Times, and their online counterparts, e.g. CNN.com) for articles containing the MOC's full name. Our initial search included all news outlets and produced 829 articles. For all of the MOCs except Takano, we searched for headlines in the period between when the pre-test started to when the last session finished. For Takano, who, for reasons discussed above, had a longer period between some of his pre-test and post-test participants, we searched for a month prior to his final session. Of those headlines we found, most were from government news services and office press releases (e.g. *Congressional Documents and Publications*, *Federal NewsFeed*). When filtered to only include national news services with a broad audience, there were 37 articles, mostly about Moulton. Most articles quoted the MOCs in the context of larger stories (e.g. "Democrats look for silver lining after narrowly losing Georgia election"). There were some articles that discussed Moulton within the context of 2020 potential presidential candidates (e.g. "The Trump effect: Everyone's thinking of running for president" or "Democratic 2020 contenders? Voters haven't heard of them.").

Table A12: National News Headlines for MOCs

MOC	Headline	Publication	Date
Larsen	It seems hardly a week goes by without another viral video reminding us of what an emotional pressure cooker airplane cabins have become lately.	NBC News	5/2/2017
Larsen	G.O.P. Cheers a Big Victory. But Has It Stirred a Hornet's Nest; On Washington	The New York Times	5/5/2017
Larsen	G.O.P. Cheers a Big Victory. Has It Stirred a 'Hornet's Nest'?	The New York Times	5/6/2017
Larsen	How Lawmakers Have Reacted So Far To Trump's Firing Of The F.B.I. Director	The New York Times	5/11/2017
Larsen	Congress again weighs spinoff of 30,000 FAA workers	The Washington Post	5/18/2017
Larsen	Congress again weighs spinoff of 30,000 FAA workers	Washingtonpost.com	5/18/2017
Moulton	Donald Trump is the best 2020 recruiter Democrats could hope for	CNN.com	6/6/2017
Moulton	Aid Coordinator in Yemen Had Secret Job Overseeing U.S. Commando Shipments	The New York Times	6/6/2017
Moulton	Kidnapped Aid Worker Had Secret Military Role	The New York Times	6/7/2017
Moulton	Presidential buzz is building for Democratic field	The Washington Post	6/7/2017
Moulton	Presidential buzz is building for Democratic field	Washingtonpost.com	6/7/2017
Moulton	2020 Vision: Biden's family is serious; Harris stays focused on Trump; Franken cancels on Maher	CNN.com	6/9/2017
Moulton	Exclusive: House Dems to launch new national security task force	CNN.com	6/12/2017
Moulton	Democratic 2020 contenders? Voters haven't heard of them	Politico.com	6/17/2017
Moulton	Democratic 2020 contenders? Voters haven't heard of them	Politico.com	6/19/2017

Moulton	A Sigh of Relief for Republicans; A Big Win for Republicans in Georgia. Aired 10-11p ET	CNN	6/20/2017
Moulton	Coup Under Way Against Trump; Interview With Radio talk Show Host Mark Levin; Location of Documents Related to Unmasking by Obama Administration Examined; Republican Karen Handel Wins Georgia Special Election	Fox News Network	6/20/2017
Moulton	Republicans Continue Crafting Secret Health Care Bill; Interview With Massachusetts Congressman Seth Moulton. Aired 4:30-5p ET	CNN	6/21/2017
Moulton	Democrats Search For Silver Lining After Narrowly Losing Georgia Election	NPR All Things Considered	6/21/2017
Moulton	House Democrat: 'We need new leadership'	CNN.com	6/21/2017
Moulton	Trump Speaking at Iowa Rally; Dems Demand Info on Flynn, Kushner Security Clearances; Ex-DHS Chief: Putin Orchestrated U.S. Cyberattacks. Aired 8-9p ET	CNN	6/21/2017
Moulton	Democratic Chatter Grows About Ousting Nancy Pelosi	The Huffington Post	6/21/2017
Moulton	Republican Karen Handel Wins Georgia Special Election; Press Secretary Does Not Answer Question Regarding President Trump's Belief about Involvement of Russia in Presidential Election; Interview with Republican Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin. Aired 8-8:30a ET	CNN	6/21/2017
Moulton	Trump and Republicans don't want Nancy Pelosi to go	CNN.com	6/21/2017
Moulton	What The Democratic Loss in Georgia Means For The Midterms	NPR All Things Considered	6/21/2017

Moulton	Handel Thanks Trump for Georgia House Win; Ossoff Concedes: "Beginning of Something Much Bigger"; Handel Wins in Georgia After Linking Ossoff to Pelosi; Spicer Unsure if Trump Thinks Russia Meddled. Aired 12:30-1p ET	CNN	6/21/2017
Moulton	Democrats just went 0-4. When will they win?	CNN.com	6/21/2017
Moulton	Democrats Seethe After Georgia Loss: â€˜Our Brand Is Worse Than Trumpâ€™	The New York Times	6/21/2017
Moulton	Georgia And How Voters Are Responding To Trump	NPR Morning Edition	6/21/2017
Moulton	HARDBALL WITH CHRIS MATTHEWS for June 21, 2017	MSNBC	6/21/2017
Moulton	Now to the special election in Georgia to fill the House seat vacated by Tom Price when he joined the Trump cabinet.	CBS News Transcripts	6/21/2017
Moulton	Republican Handel Wins in Georgia; U.S. Weighs Options of Retaliation against North Korea; Uber Founder Kalanick Resigns as CEO; Many Senators frustrated with Closed Door Process; New Dashcam Video of Philando Castile Shooting; Queen Will Officially Open U.K. Parliament Wednesday. Aired 2-3a ET	CNN	6/21/2017
Moulton	Some House Democrats say it's time for Pelosi to go	CNN.com	6/21/2017
Moulton	Terror in the Homeland; GOP Winning Streak; Healthcare Replacement; Democrats Adrift; Russian Election Interference; China under Pressure; Saudi Shake-up; First Day of Summer; Fighting the Opioid Epidemic; Republican Karen Handel Wins Georgia Special Election; President Trump to Hold Rally in	Fox News Network	6/21/2017

	Iowa; President Trump's Tweet about China and North Korea Examined		
Takano	Dems Raise Alarm About What Trumpcare Could Cost 7 Million Vets	The Huffington Post	5/4/2017
Takano	How Lawmakers Have Reacted So Far To Trump's Firing Of The F.B.I. Director	The New York Times	5/11/2017
Takano	In Congress, the Fight for Asian American and Pacific Islander Voices Hasn't Slowed	NBCNEWS.com	5/15/2017
DeSaulnier	UC Berkeley Cites Security Concerns For Cancelling Ann Coulter Appearance; President Obama Blames Social Media Cable News For Partisan Climate; Federal Courts Blocks President Trump's Order That Would Defund Sanctuary Cities; Obama's Iran Deal Deception; Ivanka Trump Jeered and Hissed in Germany; Nordstrom's Dirty Denim; Obama's Executive Orders Criticized by Trump	Fox News Network	4/25/2017

Non-Partisan Policy Overview
Energy & the Environment

This backgrounder was prepared by the Congressional Management Foundation, a non-partisan non-profit organization. Every attempt was made to create a fact-based document to provide participants of this
telephone town hall meeting with a non-partisan overview of this issue.

Humans have relied primarily on fossil fuels for energy production for the past 200 years. Fossil fuels are created from natural resources like coal, petroleum, and natural gas, and we rely on them for the energy we need to sustain our modern way of living. When fossil fuels are used for energy, they emit soot and smog and other pollutants that are referred to as greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases act like a blanket around earth, trapping heat which, over time, can negatively impact agriculture, power, transportation systems, water supplies, the natural environment, and human health and safety, all of which have long-term economic impacts.[1]

Since the oil crisis in the 1970s, energy policy in the United States has focused on three primary goals: maintaining a secure supply of energy, keeping costs low, and protecting the environment. To accomplish these goals, public policy has focused on improving energy efficiency, promoting the production of sources of energy within the U.S., and developing new energy sources.[2] In order to develop effective public policy, Congress must consider both our need for energy to sustain our way of life and the economic, social and health impacts associated both with continuing to create and use energy as we now do and of changing our ways.

Climate Change

Climate change refers to any significant change lasting for an extended period of time. While there is not complete consensus, many scientists believe rising greenhouse gas concentration is contributing to global warming. As temperatures have risen, more extreme weather events have occurred throughout the world, such as floods, droughts, and more frequent and intense heat waves. All of these are projected to occur more frequently in the coming decades, which will present challenges to our society and economy. More greenhouse gases in the atmosphere could mean there is also more making its way into the oceans, causing ocean acidification and glacier melt which are impacting ocean life and human life in coastal areas.

Energy

Fossil fuels provide us with easy, inexpensive sources for the energy on which our economy and way of life depend, but they are nonrenewable resources. Once they are gone, we cannot create more. Renewable resources can be replaced as we use them. Some examples of renewable

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[1] Energy and Environment Policymaking Simulation, Voice of the People, 2016. (http://research.cfrinc.net/vop16128pub/)

[2] *Energy Policy: 114th Congress Issues*, Congressional Research Service, September 30, 2016. (https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R42756.html)

resources are sunlight, water, wind, biomass (organic matter used as fuel), and geothermal heat (heat from deep in the earth). Many renewable energy sources release less pollution and greenhouse gases into the air than fossil fuels. However, at present, it costs more to get energy from renewable resources than nonrenewable ones. As technologies for renewable energy improve, the costs for them will go down. At the same time, as we use up nonrenewable resources, the costs for them will go up. Some argue that investing in research and development of renewable energy now could help to conserve conventional energy sources and promote sustainable development in the future.

Environmental protection and economic growth are often considered conflicting goals. The increasing scarcity of nonrenewable energy sources has raised concerns for environmental policy. As it becomes more difficult to extract nonrenewable resources from the earth there will be greater impact on the environment. However, environmental protection comes at a cost. Moving forward, policy-makers will need to routinely assess the short-term and long-term economic, environmental, and other impacts of renewable and nonrenewable energy sources as supply and demand for each change.[3]

Government Action

Prior to 2017, the Federal government—during both the Bush and Obama administrations—made it an objective to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases the U.S. produces. Over the past 10 years, the Federal government provided financial support for the development, production, and use of new fuels and energy technologies. In recent years Congress considered legislation focused on comprehensive energy policy reform; pollution emissions by power plants; tax incentives for renewable energy production and use; hydraulic fracturing (fracking) to extract natural gas; and other ways of balancing energy production and use against greenhouse gas emissions and environmental concerns.[4]

However, with a new administration comes new objectives and policy priorities. While it is still early into a new administration, and it is unclear what the impacts of early policies might be, President Trump has been adamant in his objective to focus on American jobs and stimulate an "American-focused" economy. The Trump Administration has also stated that it wants to reassess various environmental protections and their costs. Proposed earlier this year, President Trump's "A New Foundation for American Greatness" budget would cut the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budget by 31% to reprioritize spending. [5] In June, President Trump

[3] Energy and Environment Policymaking Simulation, Voice of the People, 2016. (http://research.cfrinc.net/vop16128pub/)

[4] *Energy Policy: 114th Congress Issues*, Congressional Research Service, September 30, 2016. (https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R42756.html)

[5] Ibid.

pulled out of the Paris Accord, which focuses on reducing greenhouse gases internationally. The U.S. will be able to fully remove itself from the agreement in 2020.[6]

Congressional committees are now holding legislative and oversight hearings on the President's budget request and are examining a range of issues related to energy and the environment. Among the topics discussed this year in committee include the American energy infrastructure, offshore drilling, surface mining, federal land management, and emerging energy technologies.

[6] *A Running List of How Trump is Changing the Environment*, National Geographic, June 16, 2017. (http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/03/how-trump-is-changing-science-environment/)

Non-Partisan Policy Overview
Health Care

This backgrounder was prepared by the Congressional Management Foundation, a non-partisan non-profit organization. Every attempt was made to create a fact-based document to provide participants of this
telephone town hall meeting with a non-partisan overview of this issue.

The American Health Care Act (AHCA) was designed to repeal and replace parts of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) by means of the 2017 budget reconciliation process. After a series of hearings in which the bill was considered and amended, the House subsequently passed AHCA on May 4, 2017, by a vote of 217 to 213.

AHCA includes a number of provisions that would repeal or modify aspects of the ACA, but also includes provisions that are not entirely related to parts of the ACA. A comparison between the ACA and AHCA is discussed below.

Individual Mandate
The ACA requires that, with few exceptions, U.S. residents and legal citizens obtain a minimum of health insurance coverage. To make coverage more affordable to those with lower incomes, tax credits are offered based on earnings. Those who do not qualify for an exemption and who choose not to purchase health insurance coverage must pay a tax penalty of 2.5% of their annual household income depending on how much they earn.

The AHCA repeals these mandates so individuals are no longer penalized for not obtaining coverage. This is controversial because of the impact it will have on insurers. Individuals who are sick will enroll in insurance plans, but healthy individuals will not. By not requiring healthy individuals to buy insurance, insurers will be forced to raise rates to stay in business. However, a new provision of the bill would permit insurance companies to charge a one-year 30 percent premium fee for individuals who failed to buy insurance when they could have.

Employer Mandate
The "employer shared responsibility" requirement (often called the employer mandate) does not require a large employer to offer employees health insurance, but it can penalize those that do not or that provide plans that are not affordable or do not provide adequate coverage.[38] Employers with 50 or more full-time employees may be required to make an employer shared responsibility payment to the IRS if even one of their full time employees qualifies for a tax credit under the ACA. Employers with fewer than 50 full-time employees are exempt from the payment and any penalties.[39]

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[38] *Overview of Private Health Insurance Provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA),* Congressional Research Service, April 5, 2016. (https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R43854.html)
[39] *Employer Shared Responsibility Provisions,* Internal Revenue Service, August 5, 2016. (https://www.irs.gov/affordable-care-act/employers/employer-shared-responsibility-provisions)

AHCA eliminates this ACA provision so large businesses are no longer required to provide health insurance to employees working 30 hours or more a week. Under the AHCA, states can apply to the federal government for waivers to alter or completely eliminate their definitions of essential benefits. Therefore, if any one state is able to eliminate its definitions of essential benefits and declare that no benefits are essential, then any large company could use that state's definition and no longer have any cap on what employees pay out-of-pocket for "essential" benefits.[40]

The Insurance Market

The ACA made significant changes to how insurance companies must provide coverage and the AHCA is keeping many of these provisions in place. Insurance companies are still prohibited from increasing premiums based on a person's health. Kids can continue to stay on their parents' health insurance until they turn 26. Insurance marketplaces where people browse for coverage will also remain. Both the ACA and AHCA prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage for a pre-existing health problem. However, AHCA weakens protections for those with pre-existing health conditions which could potentially exclude them from the market or place them in a high-risk pool due to cost.

Changes to Medicaid

The ACA made changes to Medicaid to make it easier to provide health insurance and care to low income Americans. As of January 2017, 19 states have opted against expansion, largely because Medicaid expansion comes with more stringent requirements for how the dollars are used than Medicaid typically imposes and due to sentiment that taxpayer dollars should not be used to support this provision of the ACA.[41]

Most Medicaid disability-related coverage pathways and community-based long-term care services are provided at state option, thus subjecting them to cuts as states adjust to significant federal funding reductions under a per capita cap. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the AHCA will reduce Medicaid spending by $880 billion from 2017 to 2026.[42] The AHCA also would end enhanced federal funding for the ACA's Medicaid expansion. States would also have the option to impose a Medicaid work requirement for anyone who isn't pregnant, disabled or elderly.

Tax Changes

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[40] *Here is how the House GOP Health Care Bill would Affect Employer-Based Insurance*, CBS News, May 9, 2017. (http://www.cbsnews.com/news/here-is-how-the-american-health-care-act-would-affect-employer-based-insurance/)

[41] *Affordable Care Act Medicaid Expansion*, National Conference of State Legislatures, February 14, 2017. (http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/affordable-care-act-expansion.aspx)

[42] *Medicaid Restructuring Under the American Health Care Act and Nonelderly Adults with Disabilities*, Kaiser Family Foundation, March 16, 2017. (http://kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/medicaid-restructuring-under-the-american-health-care-act-and-nonelderly-adults-with-disabilities/)

By taxing wealthier Americans, insurance companies and medical device makers, ACA helped poorer Americans pay for health care coverage. However, AHCA eliminates all those taxes. These tax cuts are of the greatest benefit to individual taxpayers making over $200,000 and couples making over $250,000 who have been paying more in Medicare taxes and another charge called the net-investment tax.[43]

Both ACA and AHCA include tax credits in their approach to help more Americans buy insurance, but the credit amounts are calculated differently. ACA considers family income, local cost of insurance, and age whereas AHCA bases tax credits solely on age, with a phase out for individuals with incomes above $75,000.[44] The AHCA also offers more tax incentives for Health Savings Accounts and makes more health care expenses tax deductible.

[43] *PolitiFact's Guide to the Republican Health Care Bill*, Politifact, March 22, 2017. (http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/mar/22/republican-health-care-bill-cheat-sheet/)

[44] *Premiums and Tax Credits Under the Affordable Care Act vs. the American Health Care Act: Interactive Maps*, Kaiser Family Foundation, April 27, 2017. (http://kff.org/interactive/tax-credits-under-the-affordable-care-act-vs-replacement-proposal-interactive-map/)