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CENTER FOR DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY
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BY THE PEOPLE: JANUARY DELIBERATIVE POLL® RESULTS

Overview

In ten communities around the country, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of California at Berkeley employed scientific random sampling to interview and then invite voters to day-long deliberations held in each community. Their views after deliberation were compared to those from "control groups"--SRC samples of voters in each city who did not deliberate. The experiment is designed to assess the effects on public opinion when people become more engaged and informed.

The experiment in each city was a Deliberative Poll®, a process that begins with a survey of the standard sort. After people in a random sample answer questions from a survey they are invited to attend a face to face deliberation. They are sent carefully balanced briefing materials, and then assigned randomly to small groups with trained moderators. Questions from the small group discussions are directed at panels of competing experts and policymakers in plenary sessions. At the end of the day, the participants fill out a questionnaire including the questions they answered on first contact. At that point their answers can be compared to those from the control group in order to see if opinion after deliberation is the same or different.

Social science research shows that the public has low levels of participation and political information. Furthermore, most people, if they talk about politics or policy, tend to talk to people like themselves--those with similar views and from similar social locations. In addition, technology is making it increasingly easy to customize news sources so that those who pay attention to public affairs can find sources they agree with and avoid those they disagree with. These experiments explore what politics and policy would be like if people considered different points of view and became more informed.

Would their views be any different? Would it make any difference to our politics or policy? On the two issues discussed during the day of deliberation (national security and trade) some key differences emerge after only a day of deliberation.

SAMPLE

725 participants in citizen deliberations invited from random samples in ten communities from around the country were compared to 1580 respondents in "control groups" (random samples from those same communities who did not deliberate but who answered the same questions.) For a small number of questions, participants were asked the question both at the time of their initial recruitment, and after the day of deliberation, in order to provide both "pre" and "post" measures for participants on these questions.

Participants were generally representative of their communities in terms of race, gender, income, religion and occupation.

Demographics:

Race

	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>White</i>	88%	85%
<i>Black</i>	6%	9%
<i>Hispanic</i>	2%	3%
<i>Other</i>	4%	4%

Gender

	<i>Participants</i>
<i>Male</i>	48%
<i>Female</i>	52%

Religion

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group (Pre)</i>
<i>Attends services other than funerals, weddings, etc.</i>	72%	69%

Income

	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Non-Participant</i>
<i>Under 30 thousand</i>	21%	22%
<i>30-60 thousand</i>	33%	33%
<i>60-100 thousand</i>	29%	27%
<i>100 thousand +</i>	18%	19%

But the participants were more highly educated and included fewer Republicans than the control group.

Education

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Elementary</i>	1%	1%
<i>Some High School</i>	1%	2%
<i>High School – GED</i>	15%	24%
<i>Some college</i>	26%	30%
<i>College grad +</i>	58%	44%

Party Affiliation

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Democrat</i>	37%	34%
<i>Republican</i>	28%	33%
<i>Independent/No Preference</i>	34%	33%

IRAQ: Summary

Participants were less concerned than control group members about establishing democracy in Iraq, and more concerned to establish a stable regime there, even if it was not democratic. Only 32% of participants post-deliberation, as compared to 51% of the control group, thought it was “absolutely necessary” or “extremely important” that “a democracy be established in Iraq,” but 83% of participants, compared with only 72% of the control group, thought it “absolutely necessary” or “extremely important” that “a stable government be established in Iraq even if it is not democratic.”

And participants were more concerned than the control group that the war in Iraq may have impeded the war on terror; 52% of participants agreed “strongly” or “somewhat” that “the war in Iraq has gotten in the way of the war on terror,” while only 43% of the control group did so.

Both participants and control group members supported multilateral action in Iraq and were skeptical of the US acting alone in general. 82% of participants and 75% of the control group agreed “strongly” or “somewhat” that “the US should share its control of Iraq with other countries or the UN in return for sharing more of the military burden.” Further, 56% of participants and 50% of the control group *disagreed* “strongly” or “somewhat” with the statement that “in general, the US should be willing to invade other countries we believe pose a serious and immediate threat, even if we don't have a lot of international support.”

IRAQ: Questions and results

Q. How important would you say it is that each of the following conditions be met BEFORE THE U.S. ENDS ITS OCCUPATION OF IRAQ? - How important is it that a DEMOCRACY be established there?

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>“Absolutely necessary” or “Extremely important”</i>	32%	51%

Q. How important would you say it is that each of the following conditions be met BEFORE THE U.S. ENDS ITS OCCUPATION OF IRAQ? - How important is it that a STABLE GOVERNMENT be established there even if it is not democratic?

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>“Absolutely necessary” or “Extremely important”</i>	83%	72%

Q. We'd like to know how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements - or, if you haven't thought about it very much, you can just say so. - "The war in Iraq has got in the way of the war on terror."

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>“Agree strongly” or “somewhat”</i>	52%	43%

Q. We'd like to know how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements - or, if you haven't thought about it very much, you can just say so. - "The US should share its control of Iraq with other countries or the U.N. in return for their sharing more of the military and financial burden."

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>“Agree strongly” or “somewhat”</i>	82%	75%

Q. First, we'd like to know how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement. - "In general, the US should be willing to invade other countries we believe pose a serious and immediate threat, even if we don't have a lot of international support."

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>"Disagree strongly" or "somewhat"</i>	56%	50%

TRADE: Summary

On trade, after their day-long deliberations, the participants supported the idea of free trade but were skeptical it would create many jobs. Participants' opinions about NAFTA's impact on the US economy became somewhat more positive during the day, with the percentage who believed that NAFTA had, so far, helped the American economy "a lot" or "somewhat" increasing from 20% to 39%. This meant that participants felt much more favorably about NAFTA than did the control group, only 21% of whom felt NAFTA had helped the economy. Participants also were more supportive of free trade – without subsidies to protect American industries – than were the control group; when asked to place themselves on a 7-point scale ranging from absolute support for the statement that "the U.S. should use subsidies or tariffs to protect American industries threatened by foreign competition" (1) to absolute support for the statement that "both American and foreign companies should be left free to compete without any special protection" (7), 38% of participants post-deliberation placed themselves on the free competition end of the scale, whereas only 28% of the control group did so.

But participants also became more skeptical during deliberation that free trade would create jobs in America, with the percentage who agreed "strongly" or "somewhat" that "more free trade means more jobs, because we can sell more goods abroad" dropping from 50% to 43%. This meant that participants post-deliberation were much less optimistic about the job-creating possibilities of free trade than was the control group, 54% of whom agreed "strongly" or "somewhat" with the above statement.

TRADE: Questions and results

Q. What sort of impact would you say that NAFTA has had so far on the American economy? Would you say it has..

	<i>Participant Before</i>	<i>Participant After</i>
<i>“Helped a lot” or “somewhat”</i>	20%	39%

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>“Helped a lot” or “somewhat”</i>	39%	21%

Q. Some people feel that the U.S. should use subsidies or tariffs to protect American industries threatened by foreign competition. Suppose these people are at one end of a 7-point scale, at point 1. Other people feel that both American and foreign companies should be left free to compete without any special protection. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. Again people who are exactly in the middle are at point 4.

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Favored “Free competition” end</i>	38%	28%

Q. And how strongly would you agree or disagree with the following statements about trade? - “On the whole, more free trade means more jobs, because we can sell more goods abroad.”

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>“Agree strongly” or “somewhat”</i>	43%	54%

KNOWLEDGE: Summary

Over the course of the day, participants became much more informed about the issues than were control group members. Several questions were asked to determine level of knowledge on the issues of national security and trade, and participants performed better on all of these questions than did control group members. For example, 61% of participants, as compared to only 41% of the control group, correctly identified the allies the US had in the first Gulf War. 85% of participants, compared with only 62% of the control group, correctly rejected the statement that "Iraq's oil revenues are currently paying for the occupation and rebuilding of Iraq." 59% of participants correctly identified the WTO's position on US steel tariffs, whereas only 18% of the control group did so. And 89% of participants correctly identified the parties to NAFTA, while only 43% of the control group did.

KNOWLEDGE: Questions and results

Q. As far as you recall, would you say that the U.S. fought the Iraqis in the first Gulf War in 1991 alone, with only the British as allies, with only the Israelis as allies, with an international force from many countries, or don't you recall much about that?"

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Correctly answered</i>	61%	41%

Q. As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? - "Iraq's oil revenues are currently paying for the occupation and rebuilding of Iraq."

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Correctly answered</i>	85%	62%

Q. As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? - "The WTO supported the US steel tariffs that President Bush recently removed."

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Correctly answered</i>	59%	18%

Q. As far as you know, is NAFTA a trade agreement between Mexico, Canada and the US, between Mexico and the US, between Mexico, Chile and the US, between Canada, Brazil and the US, or haven't you thought much about this?"

	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Control Group</i>
<i>Correctly answered</i>	89%	43%

PROCESS EVALUATIONS: Summary

Participants were also very enthusiastic in their response to the process. On a scale of 0 to 10, participants gave the deliberative process as a whole an 8.18 on how valuable it was in helping them clarify their positions on the issues, and they rated the small group discussions even more highly, at 8.63.

PROCESS EVALUATIONS: Questions and results

Q. On a scale from 0 for "generally a waste of time" to 10 for "extremely valuable," how valuable in helping you clarify your positions on the issues was the Citizen Deliberation as a whole?

	<i>Participant</i>
<i>Average</i>	8.18

Q. On a scale from 0 for "generally a waste of time" to 10 for "extremely valuable," how valuable in helping you clarify your positions on the issues was participating in the small group discussions?

	<i>Participant</i>
<i>Average</i>	8.63