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"Deliberative Poll" Shows Americans' Views on Iraq, Trade

After day-long "Citizen Deliberations," Americans from ten cities across the United States said they believed establishing a democracy in Iraq was less important than ensuring the country has a stable government. They also strongly favored involving the United Nations or other countries in the rebuilding of Iraq and rejected the notion that the United States should be able to unilaterally invade other countries that appear to pose a threat, without international support.

In Green Bay (see results below), the results generally reflected the national trend.

They expressed their views in a unique experiment in civic dialogue that took place Saturday in Baton Rouge, Green Bay, Kansas City, Kearney, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, Rochester, San Diego, Sarasota, and Seattle. In each city, a scientific random sample of the community was invited to consider America's national security and trade policies, while a randomly selected "control group" of citizens receiving no such invitation was asked the same questions. Across the ten cities, the participants numbered 725, and the control group members 1580.

The participants spent the day learning about issues related to America's role in the world and discussing them among themselves and with bipartisan panels of experts. At the end of the day, they were scientifically surveyed via a process called Deliberative Polling. Thus, the contrast between the participants and the control group provides a picture of the ways in which public opinion on these issues might look different if people had more information and spent more time thinking about them. The results were released Sunday by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions' *By the People* project.

On national security, the participants had greater reservations than the control group about current policies in Iraq. They saw more tradeoff with the war on terror: 52%, compared to 43% of the control group thought that "the war in Iraq has gotten in the way of the war on terror." They attached greater importance to involving other countries and/or the UN: 82%, compared to 75% of the control group, agreed that "the US should share its control of Iraq with other countries or the UN in return for their sharing more of the military and financial burden." They had more modest goals. Only 31%, compared to 51% of the control group, thought it was "absolutely or extremely important" that "a democracy be established in Iraq," while 82%, compared to 72% of the control group thought it was "absolutely or extremely important" that "a *stable* government be established [there], even if it is not democratic." And over the course of deliberation, they became uneasy about the cost of the war. Before deliberating, 45% agreed that "by the time we leave Iraq, the results will have been worth the cost in lives

and dollars”; after deliberating only 38% did so. They were also more opposed to unilateralism more generally: Fifty-six percent, compared to 50% of the control group, rejected 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.

On trade, the participants were more open to the idea of free trade than the control group was, even though they recognized that it might cost some jobs. They were more skeptical that more free trade would bring more jobs. Only 43%, compared to 54% of the control group, agreed that "on the whole more free trade means more jobs, because we can sell more goods abroad." But at the same time they took a more favorable view of NAFTA: 39%, compared to only 21% of the control group, thought that NAFTA had helped the American economy "a lot or somewhat." And they gave greater support to free trade in general: 38%, compared to only 28% of the control group, supported the principle of free global competition without special protections (such as subsidies) for American industries.

By the end of the deliberations, the participants were dramatically more informed than the control group. For example, 89%, compared to only 43% of the control group, could correctly identify the parties to NAFTA; 59%, compared to only 43% of the control group, could correctly answer whether the WTO supported the US steel tariffs that President Bush had removed; and 61%, compared to only 41% of the control group, knew that we fought with an international force of many countries in the first Gulf War.

The participants were generally representative of their communities in terms of gender, race, income, religion and occupation, although they were more highly educated and included fewer Republicans: 84% had at least some college compared to 74% of the control group, and 28% said they were Republicans compared to 33% of the control group. (Democrats comprised 37% of the participants, compared to 34% of the control group.)

Professor James Fishkin, Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford, said "these experiments offer a glimpse of democratic possibilities--what our politics would be like if people became more informed and talked to others who had different points of view. Instead of offering their impression of sound bites and headlines, these citizens are working through difficult issues, learning key facts and coming to an informed judgment. Their voices are well worth listening to."

The Citizen Deliberations were sponsored by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions' By the People project and by a network of local and national organizations in Rochester, NY; Pittsburgh, PA; Sarasota, FL; Baton Rouge, LA; Kansas City, MO; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; Green Bay, WI; central Nebraska, San Diego, CA; and Seattle, WA.

A second round of deliberations is planned for October, just before the presidential elections. They will take place in a much larger number of cities and involve substantially more people.

GREEN BAY

Iraq

Participants in Green Bay became significantly less tolerant of the cost of the war in Iraq over the course of the deliberation; only 45% of participants agreed post-deliberation with the statement that “by the time we leave Iraq, the results will have been worth the cost in lives and dollars,” compared with 52% prior to deliberation. 56% of participants believed that the war in Iraq had impeded the war on terror, as compared to only 41% of the control group, furthermore. There was also a significant increase (from 77 to 87%) in support for involving other countries and/or the UN in Iraq. This put participants 12% above the control group in support for this multilateral approach. There was a corresponding increase in opposition to unilateralism as a general US policy, from 51% of participants pre- to 63% of participants post-deliberation.

In line with the results nationally, participants were less concerned about the establishment of democracy in Iraq than the control group (27% versus 49% believing it was important), while they were more concerned than the control group with establishing a stable government (84% of participants versus 75% of the control group) and rehabilitating the Iraqi economy (69% versus 51%).

Trade

As with participants nationally, those in Green Bay were more supportive of free trade generally than their control group counterparts; 45% of participants supported free global competition without special protections (such as subsidies) for American industries, while only 20% of the control group did so. And Green Bay participants were about as skeptical as participants nationally regarding the impact of free trade on jobs, with 50% of participants (compared to only 34% of the control group) disagreeing with the statement that “on the whole more free trade means more jobs, because we can sell more goods abroad.” But participants were more supportive of the WTO than the control group, with 51% agreeing that “the U.S. should generally obey WTO decisions that go against us” (compared to only 34% of the control group).

Knowledge

As with participants nationally, those in Green Bay showed significant gains in knowledge in both the areas of national security and trade. 95% of participants correctly rejected the statement that “Iraq’s oil revenues are currently paying for the occupation and rebuilding of Iraq,” compared with only 63% of the control group; 64% correctly identified the WTO position on US steel tariffs (compared with only 14% of the control group); and 86% correctly identified the parties to NAFTA (compared with only 41% of the control group).