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

After day-long "Citizen Deliberations" this weekend, Americans from across the United States said they believed establishing democracy in Iraq was less important than ensuring the country has a stable government.

Also, they were strongly in favor of 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, unless we have international support.

In Kansas City (see results below), the results closely reflected the national trend.

They expressed their views in a unique national/local experiment in civic dialogue that took place Saturday in ten cities around the country. In each, a scientific random sample of the community was invited to consider America's national security and trade policies. And in each city a "control group" of citizens who did not deliberate was asked the same questions. Altogether, 725 citizens deliberated in the ten cities and their views were compared to those of 1580 respondents in the control groups and to their own pre-deliberation views.

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. The results were released Sunday by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions' *By the People* project.

Only 31% of the participants thought it was "absolutely or extremely important" that "a democracy be established in Iraq" compared to 51% of the control group. But more participants thought it was "absolutely or extremely important" that "a *stable* government be established in Iraq, even if it is not democratic" (82% of the participants compared to 72% of the control group). And 52% of the participants, compared to 43% of the control group thought that "the war in Iraq has gotten in the way of the war on terror." Furthermore, participants became significantly less tolerant of the cost of the U.S. presence in Iraq over the course of deliberation; only 38% of participants post-deliberation agreed that "by the time we leave Iraq, the results will have been worth the cost in lives and dollars," compared to 45% of the participants prior to deliberation.

Support for involving other countries and/or the UN in Iraq was very high among both participants and the control group, with 82% and 75% respectively agreeing 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.” Similarly, opposition to unilateralism as a general policy was high in both groups, with 56% of participants, and 50% of the control group rejecting 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 expressed deep ambivalence after deliberation. More participants than members of the control group thought that NAFTA had helped the American economy "a lot or somewhat" (39% of the participants compared to only 21% of the control group). And 38% of participants supported free global competition without special protections (such as subsidies) for American industries, while only 28% of the control group did so. But participants were skeptical that more free trade would bring more jobs. Only 43% of the participants 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."

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

Participants were generally representative of their communities in terms of gender, race, income, religion and occupation. But 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 groups. Democrats comprised 37% of the participants compared to 34% of the control groups and Independents were 27% of the participant and 27% of the control groups. (9% of the participants and 7% of the control groups answered "no party preference" or "other".)

Professor James Fishkin, Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, 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 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.

KANSAS CITY

Iraq

As was the case nationally, participants in Kansas City were significantly less tolerant of the cost of the war in Iraq than was the control group; only 33% of participants agreed with the statement that “by the time we leave Iraq, the results will have been worth the cost in lives and dollars,” compared with 42% of the control group. 65% of participants believed that the war in Iraq had impeded the war on terror, compared with only 46% of the control group, furthermore, and only 35% of participants were satisfied with progress in the war on terror, compared with 51% of the control group.

Both participants and the control group were largely in favor of involving other countries and/or the UN in Iraq, but participants were slightly more so (83%, versus 68% of the control group). Correspondingly, opposition to unilateralism as a general US policy was stronger among participants than in the control group, with 65% of participants rejecting 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,” as compared to only 45% of the control group.

In line with the results nationally, participants were less concerned about the establishment of democracy in Iraq than was the control group (35% versus 55% believing it was important), while they were more concerned than the control group with establishing a stable government there (87% of participants versus 65% of the control group).

Trade

While participants in Kansas City improved their opinion of NAFTA over the course of the deliberation – the proportion who believed NAFTA had helped the American economy increased from 17% pre- to 31% post-deliberation – they were less supportive of free trade generally than their control group counterparts (and than participants nationally); 42% of participants favored protections (such as subsidies) for American industries over free global competition, while only 32% of the control group did so. And Kansas City participants were about as skeptical as participants nationally regarding the impact of free trade on jobs; in fact, the proportion of participants who rejected the proposal that free trade creates more jobs increased from 40% pre- to 60% post-deliberation (compared with only 22% of the control group). Participants were significantly less supportive of the WTO than the control group, moreover, with 38% rejecting the statement that “the U.S. should generally obey WTO decisions that go against us,” compared to only 20% of the control group.

Knowledge

As with participants nationally, those in Kansas City showed significant gains in knowledge in both the areas of national security and trade. 79% of participants correctly rejected the statement that “Iraq’s oil revenues are currently paying for the occupation and rebuilding of Iraq,” compared with only 59% of the control group; 54% correctly identified the WTO position on US steel tariffs (compared with only 14% of the control

group); and 85% correctly identified the parties to NAFTA (compared with only 42% of the control group).