

The Dallas Morning News: North Texas hosts 'America in One Room' poll for 2020 presidential election

North Texas in the site of America in One Room deliberative poll on 2020 elections.

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North Texas this weekend is hosting a deliberative opinion poll that seeks to hash out the issues critical to the 2020 presidential election.

The [America in one Room](#) nonpartisan project is bringing 500 voters from across the country to the Gaylord Texan resort in Grapevine, where they will wade through issues related to the 2020 presidential election.

The four-day discussion starts Thursday and is designed to break through the hostility and partisanship that's come to define the nation's political dialogue and determine how voters truly feel about key issues.

"We're going to succeed in putting America in one room," said James Fishkin, Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. "Our project is about what would the American people think about issues and candidates, if they willingly focused in-depth on what is being proposed."

The issues studied by the group are: the economy and taxes, health care, the environment, immigration and foreign policy. Participants will be provided with background on the issues that includes arguments from all sides.

They will be asked to decide on policy proposals like Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, tariffs against China, how to fix the immigration system and many other policy issues.

The main participant group and a separate control group are composed of Americans from different ages, races and party affiliations.

Organizers hope the event answers the following question: What happens when voters are informed through an immersive, fact-driven experience?

The process, also known as deliberative democracy, was first developed by Fishkin in 1988 and has been used throughout the world, including bringing together Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and helping shape energy policy in Texas.

In the late 1990s, Fishkin oversaw deliberative opinion polls for electric utilities in Texas. Fishkin said the participants of the poll recommendations led to a focus on using wind power in Texas as an alternative to fossil fuels.

"We've done it all over the world," said Fishkin. "In our process people do open up and all of a sudden they begin to understand the other side."

A key goal of organizers for this collaborative event is to break through the gridlock that's plagued American democracy and led to hostility and closed minds in much of the nation's electorate.

"Our population is talking past each other, not to each other," said Henry Elkus, CEO of Helena, a group that's helping stage the event. "Deliberative democracy is a better way for large groups of people to have nuanced discussions because it provides face-to-face dialogue."

The process has its critics.

Since the group is small compared to the public at large, there's a debate as to how deliberative polling can represent the view of lay people who don't have access to the briefing materials.

What's more, will the broader debate for the 2020 elections drown out the results of the deliberative poll?

"That's where the media comes in," Fishkin said.

"It's important to bring America together with civil discourse and understanding," he said.

America in One Room is organized by [Helena](#), the [Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy](#), [NORC at the University of Chicago](#), and By the People Productions. Organizers say it will be the second [Deliberative Polling®](#) event ever conducted for a presidential campaign.

