

YOUNG DEMOCRACY AT HOME



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Executive Summary

The Bank of America Charitable Foundation and the Close Up Foundation conducted a two-day, online deliberative experiment of more than 300 high school students across the nation. Over the course of two days, the Young Democracy at Home event gave students the opportunity to deliberate current economic and healthcare policies on the Stanford Online Deliberation Platform, a web-based platform that facilitates constructive discussion through the use of an automated moderator. During the deliberations, the students held productive and polite conversations, offering a wide range of perspectives.

In the days prior to the event, the students completed a survey of their opinions on the issues and received briefing materials with relevant facts on, as well as balanced arguments for and against, the given policy proposals. On July 14th and 15th, participants virtually deliberated in small groups and took part in plenary session panels of experts, where experts answered their questions on the issues. After the first day of deliberation, the participants were surveyed, as the midpoint survey. After the second day of deliberations, the participants were surveyed a final time, and the results demonstrated how the deliberation changed the views of the students on the variety of issues.

In general, students became less favorable towards the economic proposals. For example, there was significant decreased mean support for the proposals to increase the federal minimum, provide more grants to women-owned and minority-owned small businesses, expand the Earned Income Tax Credit, and for the federal government to expand access to public colleges, although these proposals retained popular support. Other policies, such as creating a universal basic income and lowering the corporate tax rate began unpopular and became even more so.

On healthcare policy, students strongly opposed policies to repeal the Affordable Care Act, to reduce Medicaid funding, and to make COVID-19 vaccines (when available) and stay-at-home orders optional. On the other hand, students demonstrated high, but reduced after deliberation, support for access to healthcare without discrimination, federal coverage of domestic COVID-19 treatment, and implicit bias trainings for medical professionals.

Given the changed opinions, increased knowledge of politics, and more positive view of their peers (particularly those with whom they disagree) that students took away from this deliberation, in addition to the overwhelmingly positive assessments of the Deliberative Polling process and the online platform from the students, this deliberation was a resounding success.

What is a Deliberative Poll?

Most citizens most of the time are not well informed about public policy issues. As such, most polls provide a snapshot of the public's impressions when they are operating off of little information—mostly sound bites and headlines. By contrast, Deliberative Polling addresses the question: how would the views of the public changed on policy issues if they could learn about these issues under

good conditions? Those good conditions include exposure to balanced briefing materials containing relevant facts and arguments from both sides, deliberation in small groups of peers with trained moderators, the opportunity to hear from and ask questions of panels of diverse policy experts, and the opportunity to register their opinions in confidential questionnaires. Representative samples—in terms of both demographics and political affiliation—of the population are selected to participate in these Deliberative Polls, allowing statistical inferences to be made about how the views of the whole population would change if they too could deliberate. Thus, Deliberative Polls provide a glimpse of what an informed populace would want from their government, without the cost and effort of engaging an entire population. To date, Deliberative Polls have been conducted more than 100 times and in 29 countries and jurisdictions across the world by the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University and partner organizations.

Quantitative Analysis

In the sections that follow, statistical summaries from data collected from surveys completed at three time points are presented. One survey took place before deliberation, the second took place after the first day of deliberation (the midpoint survey), and the third took place after the final deliberations had concluded. Survey answers were rated on a 0-to-10 scale, with a higher number indicating more agreement with the given statement or favor for the given proposal. Since not all participants responded to all three surveys nor all questions, reported sample sizes and the mean ratings vary slightly. For the complete results, see the appendix.

Economics

Students were prompted to discuss and rate their opinions on a variety of economic policies. Many were open to understanding other points of view and the results show their shifts in opinions. Some critical issues interest among participants included the minimum wage, universal basic income, financial assistance to the lower and middle classes, and college tuition assistance.

The current federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. The first proposal was to double that minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Proponents argue that such an increase would benefit low-wage workers and women, spurring the economy and closing the gender income gap; however, opponents argue that companies will opt for technological replacement for workers and hire less employees, especially for entry-level positions and states with lower costs of living, increasing unemployment.

Before	Midpoint	After
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Increase the federal minimum wage from 7.460 6.519* 6.267***
\$7.25/hour to \$15/hour.¹**

Oppose	15.7%	24.2%	26.6%
In the middle	4.5%	11.8%	14.7%
Favor	79.8%	64.0%	58.7%
No opinion	5.3%	10.6%	12.0%

Before deliberation, most (79.8%) students supported this proposal; however, the mean rating on the proposal dropped significantly after the first day of deliberations ($P<.001$) and again after the second day ($P=.028$). In the discussions, many students supported raising the minimum wage, but thought \$15 per hour was too dramatic of a change. Others mentioned the disparity between the cost of living in rural and urban areas, the effects on small businesses, and the availability of service jobs as complicating factors for such a high federal minimum wage, as opposed to differing local minimum wages that, depending on location, varied. Despite these concerns and decreased support, the proposal maintained majority favor (58.7%) after deliberation.

Universal basic income (UBI) is a proposal to provide a periodic payment, in the case of this proposal, \$1,000 every month, to eligible adults to provide financial support or disposable income. Advocates for UBI argue that the regular cash grants will provide greater opportunities for everyone, increase consumer spending, and allow people to make more long-term investments, such as in their education, businesses, or retirement. Some question whether UBI should supplement or replace current federal welfare programs. Opponents contend that UBI will discourage people from working, require increasing taxes or raising debt, or may not be spent wisely by recipients.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The government should give cash grants of \$1,000/month to all adults at least 18-years-old.	4.988	4.605	4.479*
Oppose	46.6%	50.3%	49.7%
In the middle	13.8%	17.5%	14.2%
Favor	39.7%	32.2%	36.1%
No opinion	9.6%	12.0%	12.4%

Support for the proposal began low, with nearly half (46.6%) of students in opposition. During the discussions, many students expressed concern that UBI would not prove useful. Furthermore, many

¹ Percentages reported for “No opinion” are raw percentages. Percentages reported for all other categories are valid percentages. “*” indicates a p-value of ≤ 0.05 , “***” indicates a p-value of ≤ 0.01 , and “****” indicates a p-value of ≤ 0.001 resulting from a paired t-test.

doubted the feasibility and benefits of the proposal. Students discussed how UBI would decrease the incentive to work, require increasing taxes, and was less targeted than other government welfare programs. After the first day of deliberations, mean support had not changed significantly ($P=.133$), but after the final day, mean support had decreased significantly from 4.556 to 4.431 ($P=.014$). Notably, mean support did not change significantly among Democrats ($P=.085$) but did decrease significantly among Independents ($P=.007$). Likely due to the smaller sample size for Republicans ($n=15$), as opposed to Democrats ($n=107$) or Independents ($n=61$), there were few proposals where the views of Republicans changed statistically significantly.

One explanation for the high opposition to the UBI proposal were concerns among students about the effect of UBI on the incentive to work. In another part of the survey, participants were asked if they agreed with the statement “Universal Basic Income encourages people not to work.” While agreement with this statement did not change significantly after the final deliberation ($P=.533$), about a third (29.2%) of students agreed with this concern.

	Before	Midpoint	After
Universal Basic Income encourages people not to work.	4.556	4.882*	4.431
Disagree	47.2%	43.0%	53.8%
In the middle	17.0%	16.9%	17.0%
Agree	35.8%	40.1%	29.2%
No opinion	15.8%	17.3%	18.2%

Women-owned businesses accounted for approximately 42% of all businesses in the United States and generated a revenue of \$1.9 trillion dollars in 2019. The Department of Commerce estimates that there were more than 11 million minority-owned firms in the United States in 2019. In order to create more businesses like these, one proposal suggested increasing grants to women and minority owned small business.

	Before	Midpoint	After
Governments should increase grants to create more women and minority owned small businesses	8.080	7.610**	7.699*
Oppose	5.6%	8.7%	9.2%
In the middle	7.6%	10.9%	8.2%
Favor	86.8%	80.4%	82.6%
No opinion	5.7%	11.5%	12.0%

The vast majority of students were in favor of this proposal. In discussion rooms, many supported this proposal, but some pointed out deeper issues of inequality that would not be solved through this program. Although the vast majority of students favored this proposal both before (86.8%) and after deliberation (82.6%), the mean support for this proposal decreased significantly from 8.080 to 7.699 ($P=.013$). The decrease in mean support was only significant among Democrats ($P=.030$).

Corporate taxes are a trade-off between government revenue and corporate profits. Supporters of a higher tax rate claim that with its current corporate tax rate of 21%, the United States will continue attracting corporate domestic investment, while critics argue that the tax rate is too high, discouraging investment as companies leave for countries with lower corporate tax rates, and thereby hurting the economy and reducing the creation of new jobs. Additionally, proponents of lower taxes argue out that taxes limit small businesses and employees more than they do large corporations.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The US should lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%.	4.077	2.993***	3.049***
Oppose	54.2%	65.3%	71.8%
In the middle	13.7%	16.5%	12.4%
Favor	32.1%	18.2%	15.8%
No opinion	19.6%	18.3%	15.3%

Before deliberation, about half (54.2%) of students opposed the proposal. After deliberation, mean support for this proposal decreased significantly from 4.077 to 3.049 ($P<.001$). As with the previous proposal, this decrease in support was only significant among Democrats ($P=.008$).

The earned income tax credit is a refundable tax credit that provides financial support to workers and working-class households with low to moderate incomes. Those who support expand the tax credit argue that the anti-poverty program is effective because it encourages people to work to receive benefits, rather than discouraging labor, and expanding the program can better the financial circumstances of more Americans.

	Before	Midpoint	After
Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which provides a benefit to low-income workers, to more middle-class workers.	7.062	7.062	5.681***

Oppose	12.6%	12.6%	32.2%
In the middle	16.4%	16.4%	16.9%
Favor	71.0%	71.0%	50.8%
No opinion	12.4%	12.4%	15.3%

Initially, about three-fourths (77.8%) of the students favored the expansion of the EITC; however, after deliberation, mean support decreased significantly from 7.062 to 5.681 ($P<.001$). Students were concerned about how much the EITC benefits working class Americans. Some had never heard of the program and others thought the definition of the “middle-class workers” was too vague.

The cost of higher education has skyrocketed in America, doubling in the last thirty years. A college degree is the gateway to higher paying jobs but has become a commodity that many young adults cannot afford. This proposal was for **the government to cover college tuition** for those students who could not otherwise afford it. Supporters of this proposal argue that increasing access to higher education will provide more opportunities to more Americans while also increasing the global competitiveness of the American labor force; however, opponents argue that not everyone needs to go to college, that those who do can pay off the debt, or that such a program would be too expensive.

Given that the participants in this deliberation were high school students, this proposal was particularly relevant to their lives. Despite the initial high favor (77.8%), only about half (50.8%) of students favored the proposal after deliberation. Mean support decreased significantly ($P= 0.000$). This was one of the few proposals in which mean support decreased significantly among Democrats ($P<.001$), Independents ($P=.012$), and Republicans ($P=.035$).

	Before	Midpoint	After
The government should cover the cost of college tuition at public universities for all students who could not otherwise afford it.	7.622	6.400***	6.413***
Oppose	16.2%	25.5%	23.9%
In the middle	6.1%	13.0%	12.8%
Favor	77.8%	61.4%	63.3%
No opinion	5.3%	11.5%	13.9%

On this topic, students discussed concerns over mounting federal debt, already existing financial aid packages from private institutions, other federal and state financial support for college, alternative forms of education such as trade schools, and the important of higher education for securing employment after graduation. Perhaps after hearing various perspectives, some students may have realized there are other options besides higher education. In addition, mean agreement with the statement that “Providing free college tuition to students who could not afford it will create a better economy for the US” also decreased significantly ($P<.001$), indicating that students supported the

initial proposal less as then became less convinced of the value of expanding access to higher education to the economy.

	Before	Midpoint	After
Providing free college tuition to students who could not afford it will create a better economy for the US.	7.737	6.694***	6.912***
Disagree	11.3%	19.3%	15.5%
In the middle	10.3%	14.4%	12.7%
Agree	78.5%	66.3%	71.8%
No opinion	6.7%	13.0%	13.4%

Multiple **food assistance programs** for low-income families, such as SNAP and WIC, are provided by the federal government. These programs help Americans meet their nutritional needs and receive health advice. Some argue that families become permanently dependent on these programs while also benefitting disproportionately due to the complexity in the distribution of the program. On the other hand, others argue that decreasing the food assistance programs may increase obesity rates due to lack of choices for healthier options, while also decreasing access to vital nutrition.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government should reduce funding for SNAP and WIC programs, which provides food assistance to low income families.	1.497	1.582	1.618
Oppose	90.8%	83.6%	86.8%
In the middle	2.1%	6.6%	3.8%
Favor	7.2%	9.8%	9.3%
No opinion	6.7%	12.0%	12.9%

Students broadly opposed the proposals to reduce funding for programs that assist the poor. Many students argued that food is a necessity, which the government should help provide for those with limited financial means. The proposal—to reduce funding for the SNAP and WIC programs—began and remained very unpopular. Although mean support did not change significantly ($P=.618$), 86.8% of students opposed the proposal after deliberation. By contrast, mean agreement with the view that “The federal government already provides significant assistance to the poor; the government should be reducing government assistance, not expanding it” increased significantly from 1.847 to 2.188 ($P=.013$), but even after deliberation, the vast majority (82.1%) of students disagreed with it.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government already provides significant assistance to the poor; the government should be reducing government assistance, not expanding it.	1.847	2.328**	2.188*
Disagree	86.2%	80.5%	82.1%
In the middle	5.1%	9.7%	11.7%
Agree	8.7%	9.7%	6.1%
No opinion	6.2%	11.1%	14.4%

One-way food assistance programs like food stamps are distributed is through the **electronic benefit transfer**—an electronic system that allows state welfare departments to issue benefits through a payment card (like a credit card). Students were presented with the proposal to make these payment cards usable anywhere food is sold. Proponents claim that expanding the EBT will benefit stores in rural areas and limit contact during the pandemic if extended to online food shopping as well, while opponents argue that restricting EBT's use will encourage people to shop for more nutritious grocery food items curated by USDA Food and Nutrition Service requirements.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government should allow the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT or food stamps) to be used anywhere food is sold.	7.031	6.345**	6.606
Oppose	19.6%	23.2%	22.8%
In the middle	8.2%	18.2%	13.9%
Favor	72.3%	58.6%	63.3%
No opinion	12.0%	13.0%	13.9%

Students generally supported the proposal to expand the use of EBT. Initially, the vast majority favored the proposal (72.3%). During deliberation, students discussed healthier food options, food deserts, and fast food restaurants. While the portion of students favoring this proposal decreased, mean support did not decrease significantly ($P=.057$).

The Emergency Money for the People Act would give \$2,000 every month to Americans over the age of 16 who earns less than \$130,000 per year for at least six months, or up to 12 months total, unless employment levels return to pre-COVID-19 levels after the initial six-month period. Congress members Ro Khanna and Tim Ryan, who introduced the bill, claimed that the one-time payments from the CARES Act were insufficient and pushed for more generous financial assistance for Americans during the coronavirus pandemic. Opponents argue that the federal government has

already poured enormous resources into stimulus checks, making the CARES Act the largest direct financial aid package in history, and more money on this scale is unnecessary.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government should pass into law the Emergency Money for the People Act, which will give every American age 16 and older, who earns less than \$130,000 per year, \$2,000 every month, for at least six months, or up to 12 months total, unless employment levels return to pre-COVID-19 levels after the initial six- month period.	6.392	5.446***	4.671***
Oppose	20.4%	36.2%	46.1%
In the middle	17.7%	16.1%	14.6%
Favor	61.9%	47.7%	39.3%
No opinion	13.4%	16.3%	14.8%

The majority (61.9%) of students favored the CARES Act during the initial survey but became divided after deliberation between opposition (46.1%) and favor (39.3%), with many in the middle (14.6%). In their deliberations, students expressed their concerns about the current economic circumstance. Some seemed supportive of the stimulus packages, but more become skeptical about the feasibility and efficacy of the policy after the deliberation. After the first day, mean support for this proposal dropped significantly ($P < .001$) and then dropped again after deliberation concluded ($P = .001$).

From February to May 2020, the number of unemployed Americans rose from 6.2 million to 20.5 million. In order to receive financial assistance, unemployed Americans can receive unemployment insurance, which has since been expanded with larger payouts due to the economic downturn. Supporters argue that that the benefits provided by legislation in response to the coronavirus, such as the CARES Act, do not incentivize people to return to work, while critics of not further expanding unemployment benefits beyond pre-coronavirus levels argue that millions of American workers are struggling to find new jobs and need financial support to sustain their families.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government should keep unemployment benefits the same as before COVID- 19.	4.034	3.704*	3.452*
Oppose	55.2%	59.5%	58.3%
In the middle	18.4%	19.1%	24.4%

Favor	26.4%	21.4%	17.3%
No opinion	16.7%	16.8%	19.6%

About half of students (55.2%) opposed the proposal to “keep unemployment benefits the same as before COVID-19.” After deliberation, opposition only increased. The mean support dropped significantly ($P=.033$) from 4.034 to 3.704 by the second day. From the pre-deliberation survey to post-deliberation survey, the average fell significantly ($P=.021$) from 4.034 to 3.452 in total. Students in their deliberation groups discussed the plight of struggling low-income families, personal stories, and necessary actions to assist unemployed workers. Most agreed that the unemployment benefits should be increased as a result of the economic repercussions of the pandemic.

Healthcare

The policy proposals in the following section concern the healthcare system and the response of governments at the local, state, and federal level to the public health threat of the coronavirus. The proposals covered issues such as Medicaid, equal access to treatment, COVID-19 responses, and more. Students generally supported government-funded medical resources with increased access to all Americans without discrimination, especially in the face of the pandemic.

Since the passage of **The Affordable Care Act** (ACA) in 2010, over 20 million Americans became medically insured while also protecting Americans against discrimination against pre-existing conditions when acquiring insurance. Still, some argue that the ACA is too expensive, gives the federal government too much power, or provides insufficient support and, accordingly, should be replaced with a single system or additional private-sector options.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The Affordable Care Act should be repealed.	2.135	2.966***	2.574**
Oppose	81.0%	69.9%	73.9%
In the middle	10.1%	13.9%	14.8%
Favor	8.9%	16.2%	11.4%
No opinion	19.6%	16.8%	15.8%

The proposal to repeal the ACA was opposed by the vast majority (81.0%) of students. Students discussed more private insurance options, medical accessibility for the working class, and universal healthcare. While some pointed out that the ACA has issues, many students argued the act could be improved rather than annulled. Even after deliberation, the majority (73.9%) of students opposed the removal of the ACA; however, mean support for this proposal increased significantly from 2.135 to 2.950 after the first day of deliberations ($P=.001$). After all deliberations had concluded, mean

support for the proposal had increased significantly ($P=.010$). Interestingly, the shift in support was only significant among Democrats ($P=.001$), not Independents or Republicans.

Included in the ACA is a provision that protects Americans from discrimination against pre-existing conditions when attempting to acquire insurance. Insurance companies cannot deny people coverage or charge them more if they have pre-existing conditions.

An overwhelming majority (97.0%) of students favored the proposal that “People should have reasonable access to health insurance without discrimination against pre-existing conditions.” The discussion of this issue was straightforward, since nearly all of the students, regardless of party affiliation, favored the statement. Most students remained in favor of the proposal after deliberation; however, the mean support fell significantly after the first day of deliberation ($P=.010$) and had, in total, dropped significantly after all deliberation had concluded from a mean of 9.028 to 8.537 ($P<.001$).

	Before	Midpoint	After
People should have reasonable access to health insurance without discrimination against pre-existing conditions.	9.028	8.733**	8.537***
Oppose	1.0%	3.8%	4.4%
In the middle	2.0%	4.9%	3.3%
Favor	97.0%	91.3%	92.3%
No opinion	4.3%	12.0%	12.9%

Medicaid, the joint federal and state program, provides insurance for nearly 23% of Americans, especially assisting pregnant women, children, seniors, and people with disabilities. The budget for Medicaid grew from \$370.6 billion, in 2016, to 592.2 billion, in 2017. Supporters of reducing funding for Medicaid argue that doing so will increase efficiency, save money, and encourage people to self-sustain. Opponents argue that cutting funding would negatively impact the most vulnerable Americans and limit services such as acute care, long-term plans, and more.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government should reduce funding for Medicaid, the federal-state program that provides insurance to low-income Americans.	1.599	2.023	1.849
Oppose	89.2%	85.3%	88.4%
In the middle	4.1%	6.2%	5.5%
Favor	6.7%	8.5%	6.1%

No opinion 6.7% 14.9% 13.4%

At the outset, most (89.2%) students opposed the proposal to decrease funding for Medicaid. During deliberations, students brought up issues concerns such as immense federal spending on the military, allocating resources for low-income individuals, and concerns between cutting federal health care support and COVID-19. Afterwards, students still opposed the proposal and their mean support did not change significantly ($P=.156$).

The **COVID-19** pandemic has grown into a complicated public health and economic issue. Diagnosis and varied medical access have placed financial strain on Americans who are already struggling from the economic fallout. In March 2020, the federal government passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) to cover the cost of testing and assist uninsured patients. Some argue that covering more treatment would require \$1 trillion from the federal government, but others emphasize the ethical obligation of the government to protect Americans and advocate for federal coverage of COVID-19 treatment. Although testing is covered, the cost of hospitalization in the Intensive Care Unit or follow-up visits cost patients.

Within the context of the pandemic, some Americans are also calling for mandatory vaccination against the disease (when a vaccine is available) and mandatory stay-at-home orders. The race to develop a vaccine is still ongoing, but the result would allow the United States to lift social distancing measures, depending on efficacy and popular use. Those who support a compulsory vaccine view it as the best way to build immunity and resume normality, but others have expressed concerns about how requiring a vaccine would infringe on civil liberties, such as protected religious or philosophical beliefs. On the issue of stay-at-home orders, the mass mitigation efforts protected Americans, but also halted the economy. Many argue that mandating that citizens stay at home limits their freedom and harms the economy, while others argue that it is necessary given the pandemic.

	Before	Midpoint	After
The federal government should pay for COVID-19 treatment for everyone.	7.486	7.234	6.572***
Oppose	15.2%	13.7%	22.5%
In the middle	11.2%	14.2%	10.4%
Favor	73.6%	72.1%	67.0%
No opinion	5.7%	12.0%	12.9%
	Before	Midpoint	After
Coronavirus vaccines should be optional.	2.267	3.118***	3.192***
Oppose	77.9%	66.8%	65.2%

In the middle	9.2%	11.4%	10.5%
Favor	12.8%	21.7%	24.3%
No opinion	6.7%	11.5%	13.4%
	Before	Midpoint	After
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Compliance with stay-at-home orders should be optional.	2.028	2.983***	2.886***
Oppose	83.5%	67.0%	73.1%
In the middle	8.0%	15.1%	10.4%
Favor	8.5%	17.8%	16.5%
No opinion	4.3%	11.1%	12.9%
	Before	Midpoint	After
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Having mandatory COVID-19 vaccines would be the fastest way to revive the country's economy.	6.604	6.833	6.849
Disagree	18.7%	18.2%	16.8%
In the middle	14.3%	13.6%	14.0%
Agree	67.0%	68.2%	69.3%
No opinion	12.9%	15.4%	14.4%

Nearly three-fourths (73.6%) of students favored the proposal for the federal government to cover the cost of COVID-19 treatment. Students sympathized with both sides of the issue: all Americans deserve assistance during challenging times, but the government would be under immense amounts of pressure to spend even more resources on treatment. After deliberation, mean support for the proposal decreased significantly from 7.486 to 6.572 ($P<.001$), although the majority (67.0%) of students still favored it. Most students were also opposed to making vaccinations against COVID-19 optional. Once again, however, mean support increased significantly ($P<.001$), although the majority (65.2%) of students still opposed the proposal. As with optional vaccines, students became more receptive to making social distancing measures optional, with the mean support increasing significantly ($P<.001$), although the majority (73.1%) of students still opposed the proposal.

Students touched on a range of topics in their discussions, including the medical importance of vaccines, economic feasibility of universal vaccines, the policies of other countries, and the plight of essential workers. Although support for mandatory vaccination decreased, agreement that "Having mandatory COVID-19 vaccines would be the fastest way to revive the country's economy" remained high at (69.3%) after deliberation, having not changed significantly in terms of mean support ($P=.249$).

Implicit bias subconsciously influences how people think and act towards others based on underlying stereotypes. In medical contexts, some argue that implicit bias substantially affects the level of care patients receive based on their race, gender, or other parts of their identity. For instance, African American women are three to four times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than White women. Supporters of the proposal to require “Trainings to reduce implicit bias... for medical professionals prior to receiving their degrees” believe that these trainings are necessary, but others doubt the efficacy of these limited interventions, which they claim do not change behavior and may prove counterproductive.

	Before	Midpoint	After
Trainings to reduce implicit bias should be required for medical professionals prior to receiving their degrees.	8.939	8.506**	8.152***
Oppose	3.2%	4.9%	11.5%
In the middle	3.7%	6.0%	5.5%
Favor	93.1%	89.0%	83.0%
No opinion	10.0%	12.5%	12.9%

Initially, almost all students (93.1%) initially favored implicit bias trainings and about 61% of them disagreed that trainings were not effective. Discussions were brief since the vast majority believed in medical treatment without discrimination. A few thought trainings should be applied to all job fields such as teachers and police officers, suggested ways to improve trainings, and shared background knowledge on implicit bias. While agreement that “Trainings to reduce racial bias and/or discrimination are not effective” did not change significantly after deliberation ($P=.756$), mean support for requiring these trainings fell significantly from 8.939 to 8.506 ($P=.002$) by the first day of deliberation. Overall, mean support dropped significantly ($P<.001$) and favor dropped by 10.0%.

Due to a lack of **mental health services** available, especially for minority populations, one proposal suggested that “Governments should increase funding for culturally and linguistically competent mental health professionals.” Minority populations may face barriers to proper to treatment due to discrimination or limited coverage for mental health resources. Opponents argue that increased funding does not necessarily mean people will start seeking these services, since there are stigmas against mental health treatment, or that there is no need for mental health professionals to receive special cultural training depending on who they are treating.

	Before	Midpoint	After
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Governments should increase funding for culturally and linguistically competent mental health professionals. **8.282** **8.000** **8.074**

Oppose	3.8%	5.1%	5.6%
In the middle	7.6%	9.6%	6.7%
Favor	88.6%	85.4%	87.7%
No opinion	11.5%	14.4%	14.4%

Nearly all (88.6%) of student favored this proposal. In their groups, students discussed deeper issues of mental health stigma and implicit bias, which may not be addressed by increased funding. On this issue, the views of students did not change drastically. The mean support did not change significantly ($P=.190$).

Qualitative Analysis

In each of the discussion rooms, the student demonstrated their knowledge and insight on the issues through thoughtful deliberation. Some groups had a few participants who dominated the discussions, but overall, participants were respectful, only interrupted except when appropriate and permitted by the platform.

The quantitative results aligned with the qualitative observations. For some issues such as equal access to education and healthcare, survey means did not change significantly and the student discussions were brief. However, for other policies regarding the EITC, federal wage, corporate taxes, free college, Emergency Money for the People Act, and stay-at-home order, many students voiced their arguments and listened attentively to their peers. Students emphasized their personal opinions relating to the policies and generally remained open-minded to everyone else’s perspectives.

One group (*Economy 14G*) with seven members had a productive conversation filled with polite disagreements. Each participant, with the exception of one whose microphone was not functioning, contributed at least 7 minutes of active dialogue. Even when they cut each other off, everyone’s comments built off of the previous speaker and added a new layer to the deliberation. For the first proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, the students spanned the spectrum of opinions. Some believed the increase in salary would benefit poor Americans, but others justified that the wage might be too high in certain locations. Instead of exactly \$15 per hour, many thought the minimum should be increased but should be determined on a state-by-state basis. A snapshot of the conversation reveals the variety of reasoning presented:

Note: Pseudo names are used, ellipses (...) represent filler words such as “like,” and parts of the transcript have been paraphrased for clarity.

Alice: *I think that we should raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. I just feel that way because... 60% of America is under the poverty line which means that they don't make enough to support themselves and their families....*

Lucy: *...if anyone disagrees, please like join any because I want to hear that discussion. I agree primarily because people are like you need to work harder if you want more money, but I feel like someone's education level [should] be what determines their ability to survive or have a family particularly because we can't really trust large corporations to do what's best for their employees over what's best for the company itself...I think having this federally implemented instead of on a state to state level or just within companies is necessary.*

Maryam: *I agree to a certain extent. I personally think that obviously the minimum wage should increase and I would argue that in certain locations like New York, LA, and Chicago \$15 minimum wage is probably not enough to even survive...I would also argue that in really small rural communities a fifteen dollar minimum wage may not be necessary... maybe like \$12.*

Alice: *I cut you off. I'm sorry, but I agree with Lucy when you said that you shouldn't have to go to school to be able to maintain your lifestyle. And I think that that's part of what fuels the poverty cycle mostly because if you have to go to college then you have to pay \$50,000 a year and it takes you into debt and...then they end up not being able to support themselves...*

Eduardo: *...I'll be the black sheep here and say I'm a little bit against this. Primarily, I don't believe that a federal minimum wage is needed. I think it is going to have to go by a state-by-state basis. Obviously [like you] said earlier, New York has a higher cost of living therefore maybe it would have to be a little bit more around 15 dollars an hour, but compare that to Florida where...we have lower taxes and everything....*

Lucy: *Sorry to cut you off.... disabled workers don't actually have to be paid minimum wage to be paid lower than that...Also I think that the federal minimum wage doesn't necessarily have to be \$15 an hour, but I don't think seven dollars and twenty five an hour is enough to sustain yourself in any state so the federal minimum wage should be higher than this and then states can raise it higher as appropriate.*

In another snippet of their discussion, the students discuss the merits and pitfalls of the free college proposal. The overall support declined in the quantitative analysis, and the policy also garnered mixed reactions in the discussions. As high school students, participants shared common concerns about the cost and benefits of higher education, but turned the conversation towards federal debt, specialized job preparation, and scholarships.

Mary: *I wholeheartedly agree with this statement because I think like one of the cons saying that this would have huge federal debt. I think the way we start fixing the issues in our society is by educating people and we wouldn't need the government to spend so much money on law enforcement and other aid programs if we were able to educate people and give them the tools they need to go out and get jobs...everything starts with...equal access to education because that's how we get equal opportunities for everyone.*

Alice: Yes, I agree. But the first con that I see here says that we already have a huge federal debt...so I think first before doing that we'd have to re-evaluate where our funds are going where our tax money is going...

Maya: I'm so sorry for cutting you off. Well, I'm in the middle again... I see where they're coming from and also factoring the debt, but I feel like what measures are they going to put in place to make sure the people who need their policy papers after getting paid because I feel like a lot of people have different family incomes...

Eduardo: I personally believe that there are already a substantial amount of scholarships and grants that are accustomed to low-income populations and minorities. There are even some jobs where the employers will actually cover some of the tuition cost. For example, if you join the military you get your full tuition cost cover after you serve furthermore...the cost of college does not have to be as expensive as most people say you can go to community college or even in state universities, and I think the biggest thing I want to say is that not everyone used to go to college. I feel like there's this stigma.

Lucy: ...I really disagree with the fact that like you get your college subsidized if you go to the military...I just think it's kind of messed up but for the most part I agree that college should be covered but it kind of brings up some problems like in France. You only have to pay Bali 200 Euros a year, but the problem is only 30% of people graduate in 4 years and 20% of people don't get a degree at all...

Mary: I agree that not everyone needs a college education to be successful...but I think everyone should have the opportunity which is where we get into like equal opportunity for everyone...And our government is spending so much money on other things like law enforcement... and if we were educating people in those poor communities there wouldn't be a need for all.

Alice: ...I also think that everyone should go to college and I'm not saying that you need to go to college to be successful...I think everyone should go to college and there is stigma against people who don't go to college and I think that that's just the way that society is set up...We need more funds to get more people to college because college is the gate to success...

Eduardo: Sorry about that. I really do disagree. For example, trade schools are very important for society. If we only had a society of white-collar workers, lawyers, scientists, judges, politicians, then nothing in this country would get done...

Lucy: I think that's a good point. But just because we're making college free does not mean that everyone has to go like I know that there's a bus shortage...in Michigan so people who drive buses have really high wages... We will still have workers in every single sector, but then that just means that people who are working service jobs will get paid a reasonable amount... I think it's just a win-win...

Mary: Well, I definitely see the value in other other paths other than college which is why we do need trade schools to be an option. But again, we should make sure that anyone who wants to go to college has the means to do so and that they won't graduate with debt and then be at a

disadvantage once they enter the working world....because there are low income families where college would be an enormous burden...

Maya: *I agree that the government should [cut the cost of college]...Public schools...in Florida can cost up to \$50,000. Florida has one of the worst education systems...and somebody's gonna be under budget in the next coming years...so I do encourage going to trade schools because it costs a lot to go to college.*

Alice: *Right now, there's currently a lack of doctors and scientists... there's actually an increase...over the years of age H-1 B-1 visas, which are skilled worker visas, that they're importing people... from India from Germany to be doctors, to be engineers, to be scientists... I do think higher education is most definitely necessary in our country because we don't have these workers...*

Eduardo: *Yes, but there is 46 million dollars worth of scholarships and grants that are awarded by the United States Department of Education every year. The majority of these are geared toward lower income populations and minorities...If everyone got into college for free, then there would be no motivation to do well in school because it's free. You're not paying for it... you can get kicked out, but then you can just go to a different University and it's still going to cost you nothing.*

Maryam: *Okay, so I disagree with what she just said... First of all, everyone should not get their college paid for at public universities, only those who are low income and would not be able to otherwise afford it...I know that if you get financial aid to attend college, you also have to work for the University...the government should obviously account for if a student got scholarship they would decrease the amount for the scholarship. I just in the current system needs to be expanded upon.*

Lucy: *Sorry for cutting you off. I think the fact that we have so many scholarships that are being spent and still people can't get the education that they need... shows that we need to spend that money and put it into everyone else being able to get an education...We need doctors from America instead of immigrants from Germany...that are particularly minorities that you can relate with because...health care discrimination is a huge issue...I think by encouraging people to get higher education, we could have better lawyers and doctors who would be able to be more empathetic...*

Mary: *I want to address the thing about scholarships. There are a lot of scholarships that exist but it's so difficult to navigate scholarships... I live in Northern California where there's a large Latino population and there's not necessarily enough outreach to minority groups to let them know that there are options available. If there was a government option...then the education system would be more equal and there would be more opportunity for everyone to get a degree.*

Furthermore, other groups discussing healthcare also had productive conversations on a variety of issues. Many spoke from personal experiences relating to COVID-19 responses and some emphasized the effects on lower income communities. Groups with active deliberations shared a range of opinions but managed to take turns listening to others. For instance, group 14H brought up multiple

important points concerning a mandatory stay-at-home order during the pandemic. Although they recognized the risk of COVID-19 transmission, students also realized the privilege of working from home. More students became sympathetic to people who have service jobs, and everyone agreed that non-essential activities and gatherings should not be allowed.

Sarah: *I don't think that they should be optional especially if you're in a state like currently like Texas or Florida...Texas still does not have mandatory stay-at-home orders and...the case amount of cases there is crazy...*

Andrew: *Yeah, I agree. I think that stay-at-home order should not be optional and especially large gatherings like campaign rallies should not be held during this time... not only do you put yourself at risk for contracting this disease, you will also put others at risk...*

Amelia : *I might have a different opinion on this but I think the stay-at-home should be optional...it does discriminate against poor communities and minorities as in my neighborhood in Arizona. A lot of Hispanic individuals are working as we are staying at home, it's a privilege that they cannot take upon themselves to feed their children or pay their rent...there's a certain discrimination that comes with this that I don't think it's fair.*

Zayn: *Yeah, my point was kind of going to be similar to Amelia...some people don't have the privilege or the ability to be able to stay at home. I do think though if your job is something you can do online, then you should be at home but for minorities and people who are earning their incomes from working in a restaurant shift...that's their whole source of income...how do you expect them to survive if they can't work?*

Cindy: *I definitely think that the stay-at-home orders should be mandatory, but I understand what Amelia and Zayn were saying with the fact that some people have to go out to make their living and keep their family afloat, but I don't think people that are going to parties...should be allowed...*

Tanya: *I think that stay-at-home order should be optional for states that don't have a lot of cases, but if a state that has a lot of cases then it shouldn't be optional.*

George: *I absolutely agree with Amelia and Zayn on this one because a lot of the problems that we are discussing could be solved by mandatory mask ordinances or limiting the size of social gatherings and that is a way that is not as discriminatory...*

Andrew: *I appreciate Zayn and Amelia for offering that other perspective when I think about stay-at-home orders. I didn't think of it in terms as...a job...[but rather] for recreation activities... if people do have jobs where they are required to go out and work, I definitely think they should still be able to do that.*

At the conclusion of the discussions, students formulated and edited questions that were addressed in the plenary sessions. Students respected each other's opinions and bonded through the experience, with a few groups exchanging social media information to stay in contact. In the post-deliberation survey, participants believed the discussions and briefing materials were eye-opening and informative. Most students strongly agreed with statements about the discussion providing an

opportunity for everyone to participate, recommending the platform to friends and family, and learning about people who live different lives.

The Split-Half Design

This Deliberative Poll utilized a split-half design to isolate the effects of experience of the small group deliberations and plenary sessions on the opinions of participants from other confounding variables. In this design, the participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups: deliberation of economics first and deliberation of healthcare first (henceforth referred to as “E-first” and “H-first,” respectively). Given the large sample sizes of the treatment groups, with E-first consisting of 101 participants and H-first consisting of 105, there were statistically significant shifts in opinion that mirror the aggregate shifts in opinion of all participants through the entirety of the deliberation.

On the first day of the Deliberative Poll, E-first had been provided the briefing materials on the economic proposals, deliberated in small groups on the economic proposals, and observed the plenary session on the economy, while H-first had done the same, except for healthcare, not economics. After this first day, participants were surveyed to determine how their views on the issues had changed since before the Deliberative Poll began.

It was expected that there would be statistically significant changes in opinion on the healthcare proposals for H-first, but not on the economics proposals, which this treatment group had yet to consider. In general, this was true, with exception for three proposals, yet in all three cases the p values were less 0.05 but greater than 0.01. Moreover, given that the briefing materials were distributed to all participants at the same time, regardless of which subject they deliberated first, some participants may have changed their opinions moderately on the economic issues prior to deliberating them.

Likewise, it was also expected that there would be statistically significant changes in opinion on the economic proposals for E-first, but not on the healthcare proposals, which this treatment group had yet to consider. This, however, was not the case. There were statistically significant shifts on 5 of the 10 proposals from E-first. Of those 5 proposals, the p values were less than 0.001 in 3 of them. Notably, on those 5 proposals, H-first did not shift significantly at all ($P > .0858$ all).

		Before	Midpoint
Number	Proposal	E-First	H-First
3A	The Affordable Care Act should be repealed.	0.938***	0.543
3B	People should have reasonable access to health insurance without discrimination against pre-existing conditions.	-0.414*	-0.269

3C	The federal government should reduce funding for Medicaid, the federal-state program that provides insurance to low-income Americans.	0.713**	-0.033
3H	Trainings to reduce implicit bias should be required for medical professionals prior to receiving their degrees.	-0.620***	-0.207
3I	Governments should increase funding for culturally and linguistically competent mental health professionals.	-0.753***	0.138

After the final day of deliberations—when both E-first and H-first had deliberated both economics and healthcare—there were *only 2* proposals for which there were significant differences between the mean ratings of E-first and H-first. Neither of these proposals were about healthcare. Accordingly, it is possible that the deliberation on economics primarily influenced the participants’ views on the healthcare proposals, not the actual deliberation on healthcare.

Representativeness

The sample of high schools collected by the Close Up Foundation included 292 students who completed the survey prior to deliberation. Of that 292, 209 participants completed the final post-deliberation survey. Only two demographic questions were asked of participants “Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent or none of these?” and “When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative?” to determine party affiliation and political ideology, respectively. Among both participants and non-participants, the majority of students identified as Democrats (53% and 54%, respectively) and liberal (63% and 68%, respectively) before deliberation. There were no significant differences between the distribution of demographics of participants and non-participants in terms of party affiliation ($P=.100$) or political ideology ($P=.826$).

Furthermore, when the responses of participants and non-participants on the pre-deliberation survey were compared, there were also minimal differences. The only notable differences in opinion were on the proposal that “The federal government should pay for COVID-19 treatment for everyone” (3D), with non-participants supporting this proposal, on average, significantly higher than participants ($P=.003$), as well as the proposal that “Governments should increase funding for culturally and linguistically competent mental health professionals” (3I), which non-participants also supported, on average, significantly higher ($P=.003$).

Political Efficacy

After deliberation, participants became relatively more optimistic about the state of American democracy and their place in it. The mean rating for the question “How poorly or well would you say

the system of democracy in the US works these days?" (1) increased significantly ($P < .001$) from 4.844 to 5.327. While about half (44%) of participants thought the system worked poorly before deliberation, after deliberation, that proportion declined to less than a third (29%) and almost half (46%) of delegates thought the system worked well. Notably, while the mean perception of how well American democracy functions increased significantly among Democrats ($P < .001$) and Republicans ($P = .013$), no such significant change was observed among Independents ($P = .259$). Likewise, mean agreement that "Public officials care a lot about what people like me think" (6A) increased significantly among Democrats ($P < .001$) but did not change significantly among Independents nor Republicans. Overall agreement remained low, with more than half (56.4%) of participants disagreeing. Although deliberation increases positive perceptions of American democracy, it does not dramatically negate deeply held dissatisfaction with the current functioning—or disfunction—within American government. Mean agreement with the statement that "People like me don't have any say about what the government does" (6C) did not change significantly ($P = .354$) and remained low at 4.416.

Mutual Respect

Following deliberation, participants viewed those they disagreed with on the issues—"the people who disagree strongly with [them] about [the] issues" deliberated—more positively. Mean agreement that those people "just don't know enough" (7A) "believe some things that are untrue" (7B), "are looking out for their own interests" (7E), as opposed to the interests of others, all fell significantly ($P = .006$, $P = .001$, and $P < .001$). Likewise, mean agreement with the statement that "They have good reasons; there just are better ones on the other side" (7D) increased significantly ($P < .001$). These changes indicate that while participants continued to disagree with others on the issues, they did so more respectfully, viewing those they disagree with to be less guided by self-interest, misinformation, or ignorance, and more guided by good reasons that ultimately prove to be incorrect.

While these *changes* in perception were significant, negative views of those with whom they disagree persisted. Even after deliberation, agreement that others are "looking out for their own interests" (7E) remained high at 73.7% (down from 84.0%). Moreover, mean agreement that others "are not thinking clearly" (7C), although relatively low at 4.914, did not change significantly as a result of deliberation ($P = .116$).

Notably, these perceptions participants held of those with whom they disagree changed significantly after the first day of deliberation, but not much after the second. Perhaps experiencing deliberating in small groups with their peers was enough to change the views of the students, while I second day made little difference.

Knowledge Gains

Participants were asked 8 factual questions to measure their knowledge of contemporary politics relevant to the topics deliberated. There were no significant changes in mean knowledge on the question, “Which political party holds the majority in the Senate?” (K1) ($P=.286$), nor the same question for “the House” (K2) ($P=.319$). While knowledge did not change significantly, it was nonetheless high on these particular questions. After deliberation, 86.8% and 79.1% of participants answered correctly “Republicans” and “Democrats,” respectively. The largest increase in knowledge was on the question, “What percentage is the highest tax rate for capital gains taxes?” (K8). The mean knowledge increased significantly ($P<.000$) and, after deliberation, half of participants (51.1% up from 20.8%) answered correctly “Around 20%.” After deliberation, participants scored, on average, more than 50% on all questions except, “Prior to COVID-19, approximately what percentage of people in the U.S. did not have medical insurance?” (K3). While the increase in mean knowledge was significant for this question ($P=.013$), only a quarter (26.4% up from 17.8%) of participants answered “10-15%” correctly.

Given that knowledge increased significantly on all other questions, it is not surprising that mean agreement with the view that “Most public policy issues are so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on” (6B) decreased significantly from 4.129 to 3.541 ($P=.002$), while mean agreement with the view that “I have opinions about politics that are worth listening to” (6D) increased significantly from 7.641 to 7.952 ($P=.041$).

Evaluations of the Process

The vast majority of participants viewed the deliberations favorably, with 84.1% agreeing that they “would recommend this deliberation platform to my friends and family.” 94.4% of the students felt the “The event as a whole” was valuable, including 91.8% of Democrats, 98.0% of Independents, and 92.9% of Republicans. 77.0% thought “The plenary sessions,” and 85.2% thought “The briefing materials,” and 92.7% thought “The small group discussions” were valuable. Notably, there were minimal differences between how favorably participants of differing political affiliations and differing political ideologies viewed the event and each of its parts.

With regards to the small group discussions, 94.9% of participants agreed that “The deliberation platform provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussion.” 79.3% agreed that “The members of my group participated relatively equally in the discussions.” Critically, more than 80% of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents agreed that “The deliberation platform tried to make sure that opposing arguments were considered.” In total, 72.3% of participants agreed that they “learned a lot about people very different from me—about what they and their lives are like” through the deliberation process. The overwhelmingly positive reviews of the Deliberative Poll, regardless of party affiliation, demonstrates that fact-based deliberation across party differences is both possible and rewarding.

Appendices

Appendices are available [here](#).