Project Report
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 3
What is a Deliberative Poll? ....................................................................................................................... 3
The Sample Gathered by NORC .................................................................................................................. 4
Agenda .......................................................................................................................................................... 4
The Issues ..................................................................................................................................................... 5
   Immigration ............................................................................................................................................ 5
   The Economy ......................................................................................................................................... 6
   Healthcare ............................................................................................................................................ 7
Foreign Policy ............................................................................................................................................. 8
The Environment ......................................................................................................................................... 9
The Candidates .......................................................................................................................................... 10
   Candidates skip partisan rhetoric ........................................................................................................ 11
   Respect shown to opponents .................................................................................................................. 12
   Honest Elections ................................................................................................................................... 12
Changes by Party ....................................................................................................................................... 13
Values and Ideals ...................................................................................................................................... 17
Political Efficacy ..................................................................................................................................... 17
Mutual Respect ......................................................................................................................................... 18
Knowledge Gains ..................................................................................................................................... 18
Evaluations of the Process ......................................................................................................................... 19
Appendices ................................................................................................................................................ 19
Executive Summary

On September 19, 2019, a scientific sample of American registered voters was convened to deliberate on the major issues and candidates ahead of the 2020 presidential election. The participants of this Deliberative Poll, known as “delegates,” and the control group were selected using a systematic stratified sample design. Both groups received balanced briefing materials prior to the event. The delegates were flown to a resort in Dallas, Texas, where they deliberated the issues and candidates in small group discussions and posed questions to panels of politically diverse experts and presidential candidates in plenary sessions over the course of two days.

While only a few of the candidates in the 2020 presidential election remain in the running as the presidential primaries have concluded, the proposals on immigration, economy, health care, foreign policy, and environment are still relevant in national politics. This overview examines the quantitative changes in preferences among the delegates and control group—collected using questionnaires before and after deliberation—for those policy proposals.

The results of this deliberation were not only more informed voters with a better sense of their personal values and the value of their perspective in American politics, but also greater respect and regard for those with whom they disagree politically. Moreover, despite initial divides, differences in opinion by gender, race, and ethnicity, region, education, and even party affiliation broadly decreased. On 22 of the 47 proposals deliberated, partisan polarization between Democrats and Republicans decreased statistically significantly.

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 change 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.
The Sample Gathered by NORC

Both the control group and treatment group, including those who would be selected to serve as the Deliberative Poll delegates, were drawn from a representative sample of registered voters organized by NORC at the University of Chicago. The target population consisted of American citizens aged 18 and over who were registered to vote. The respondents in both groups were selected using stratified random sampling from NORC’s probability based AmeriSpeak® Panel, the most scientifically rigorous panel solution available in the United States. It consists of randomly selected American households that have been recruited through offline and online methods, providing coverage of approximately 97% of American households.

The sample, which was divided into the treatment and control groups, was selected under a systematic stratified random sample design to ensure a balanced sample with respect to age, gender, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, political party identification, geography, and other dimensions that corresponded with the American registered voter population benchmarks from the November 2018 Current Population Survey or the 2018 General Social Survey. After selecting a nationally representative sample of registered voters from the AmeriSpeak® Panel, the voters were randomly assigned to one of the two groups. A pre-event questionnaire was administered to the control group (1,101 completions) and the treatment group (2,741 completions), and the final list of delegates was assembled from those members of the treatment group that were willing to participate. A more detailed breakdown of the demographics and other factors that went into the sampling can be found in the NORC Methodological Report. The process resulted in 526 delegates who received the treatment and 1101 control group participants.

The delegates then participated in the Deliberative Poll. The post-event questionnaires were administered to the treatment (523 completions, 99.4% completion rate) and control (844 completions, 76.7% follow-up rate) groups.

Agenda

At the event, delegates were given a Briefing Booklet with executive summaries on each of the key areas and arguments for and against policy proposals in each. In order to ensure balanced presentation of information, the Briefing Booklet was prepared and vetted by policy experts from both parties and a distinguished Advisory Committee. The delegates then deliberated the policy proposals in small, moderated groups in five key areas that were determined, through polling, to be the most important to registered voters in the current election cycle: immigration, the economy, healthcare, foreign policy, and the environment. The delegates could choose to focus on the proposal they found the most relevant, with a trained moderator overseeing the conversations to encourage civility, participation, and for the delegates to reference the provided materials. After the small group deliberations, the delegates had the opportunity to attend plenary sessions and ask experts questions about the proposals that each group crafted during their deliberation. The experts’ list can be found here.
The Issues

Immigration

The deliberation on immigration focused on three major issues at the heart of American immigration policy: the recent influx of refugees and asylum seekers, work visas for legal immigrants, and how to respond to illegal immigration.

On the issue of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the United States, delegates became more opposed to reducing the number of refugees allowed to resettle in the United States and more supportive of resolving the immigration court backlog and providing aid to reduce the poverty and violence causing refugees to flee to the US. Initially delegates were roughly evenly split between favor (37%) for and opposition (40%) to the proposal to “reduce the number of refugees allowed to resettle in the United States” (2A), with 23% of delegates in the middle, but, after deliberation, the mean rating for the proposal decreased significantly ($P<.001$) from 4.984 to 3.419, with a majority (61%) of delegates opposed. As delegates became more amenable to allowing refugees to resettle in the US, their favor for the proposals to “increase personnel to process asylum seekers’ claims faster” (2B) and to “provide aid to reduce poverty and violence in Central America” (2C)—the cause of the refugee influx—likewise increased. After deliberation, a majority of delegates favored these proposals. Notably, 92% of all delegates favored an increase in personnel (up from 75%), including 96% of Democrats, 91% of Republicans, and 90% of Independents.

Delegates also became more favorable towards increasing the number of work visas available for legal immigration. On the proposal to “increase the number of visas for skilled workers” (2D), favor increased significantly ($P<.001$) from a mean rating of 6.384 to 7.618. Similarly, on the proposal to “Increase the number of visas for low-skilled workers... for industries that need them” (2E), favor increased significantly ($P<.001$) from a mean rating of 5.940 to 7.319. Both proposals were enormously popular with three-quarters of all delegates in favor. Surprisingly, given the potential for concerns over competition for jobs, those delegates who were unemployed but actively looking for work were also favorable to increasing work visas and, after deliberation, became even more so than those currently employed.

Finally, delegates supported more lenient policies towards undocumented immigrants. Delegates after deliberation, on average, supported allowing “undocumented immigrants who have [in the United States] peacefully for years” significantly ($P<.001$) more than the control group (delegates were not surveyed on this specific question before deliberation). 74% of delegates, including more than half (60.6%) of Republicans supported allowing these undocumented immigrants to stay. Likewise, the proposal that “First-time violators of immigration laws should only be expelled, not subject to criminal punishment” (2G) gained majority favor after deliberation. Likewise, favor for the proposal to require “Undocumented immigrants... to return to their home countries before applying to legally come to the US to live and work permanently” (2I) decreased significantly ($P<.001$) from a mean rating of 5.356 to 3.668. On the proposal to “Continue DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program” (2H), favor was not only high prior to deliberation, at a mean rating of 6.881, but
increased significantly ($P<.001$) to a mean rating of 7.891, with a majority of all delegates, regardless of party affiliation, in favor. Notably, Republicans shifted more than their Democratic or Independent counterparts on all three proposals.

Although delegates favored more lenient responses towards undocumented immigrants, there was broad bipartisan favor for the proposal to “Require employers to use the E-Verify computer system to confirm workers’ eligibility” (2F), with 74% of all delegates in favor, including 84% of Republicans, 73% of Independents, and 69% of Democrats. Moreover, a majority of delegates (54%) agreed that “Requiring employers to determine the legal status of people they hire will deter people from coming here illegally” (7A), and this view was positively correlated with favoring the use of E-Verify. This indicates that while delegates in general supported more welcoming policies towards refugees, less hardline policies towards current undocumented immigrants, and increased legal immigration through work visas, they also supported policies intended to stem the flow of refugees and deter further illegal immigration.

The Economy

In general, delegates supported altering the tax code to increase taxes on the wealthy, although support decreased after deliberation. On the proposal that “taxpayers earn[ing] more than $2$ million per year... should pay a higher tax rate on additional income” (4D), favor decreased significantly ($P=.027$) from a mean rating of 7.262 to 6.988, with 72% of delegates still in favor. Likewise, on the proposal to “impose a wealth tax on the richest taxpayers” (4B), favor decreased significantly ($P<.001$) among delegates from a mean rating of 6.219 to 5.795, although the proposal maintained a majority (57%) of delegates in favor. While support for a wealth tax decreased, average agreement with the concern that “Imposing a wealth tax on the richest taxpayers will lead to many of them leaving the US” (7F) remained low at a mean rating of 3.717 and did not change significantly ($P=.976$).

While proposals to increase taxes retained popular support, proposals to decrease taxes remained unpopular. The mean rating on the proposal to “Lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%” (4F), decreased significantly from 3.894 to 2.480 ($P<.001$), with the largest increase in opposition among Republicans, who had supported it most. The mean rating for the proposal to “repeal the estate tax” (4C) changed insignificantly ($P=.207$), but about half (53%) of delegates were in opposition. By contrast, the proposal to “Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit” (4E) gained favor. The mean rating increased significantly from a high of 7.263 to 7.951 ($P<.001$). After deliberation, 82% of all delegates, including 89% of Democrats, 82% of Independents, and 71% of Republicans favored this proposal.

Not only did proposals to change the tax system generally lost support, many liberal economic proposals—that gained notoriety in the run-up to 2020 presidential election—also lost support after deliberation. Favor decreased significantly on the proposals to “Increase federal minimum wage from $7.25/hr. to $15/hr.” (4G) from a mean rating of 6.035 to 4.572 ($P<.001$), for “The government [to] cover the cost of college tuition at public universities for all students who could not otherwise afford it” (4H) from a mean rating of 5.414 to 4.748 ($P<.001$), for “The government [to] fund a bond for each child born” (4I) from a mean rating of 5.080 to 2.459 ($P<.001$), and for “The government [to] give
cash grants of $1,000/month to all adults” (4J) from a mean rating of 2.629 to 1.633 ($P<.001). In every case, the largest average decrease in favor was consistently among Democrats.

Even though the proposal for “The government [to] cover the cost of college tuition at public universities for all students who could not otherwise afford it” (4H) lost majority support, about half (53%) of delegates agreed with the view that “Providing free college tuition to students who could not afford it will create a better economy for the US” (7G). One potential source of concern for delegates considering many of these proposals may have been their cost to the federal government. For example, on the proposal to drastically expand Medicare, a majority of delegates (56%) agreed with the view that such a proposal would “require increasing the debt to impossible levels” (7H).

Healthcare

The deliberation on health care focused on three areas: The Affordable Care Act, Medicare, and prescription drug prices.

Overall, there was high opposition against repealing or replacing The Affordable Act, which only increased after deliberation. On the proposal to repeal The Affordable Care Act (5A), favor decreased significantly ($P<.001) among delegates from a mean rating of 4.303 to 3.451. Likewise, support for “Repeal[ing] the Affordable Care Act and replace[ing] with grants to state Governments to create their own systems” (5B) remained low, with only 26% in favor. While 69% of Republicans initially favored repealing The Affordable Care Act (5A), that number dropped to a little less than half (48%) after deliberation.

Not only did delegates oppose repealing The Affordable Care Act, they supported expanding parts of it. A majority of delegates favored, and the mean ratings increased significantly for, the proposals to increase “The federal subsidies in the Affordable Care Act that help the poor” (5C) ($P=.001) and to expand “The federal subsidies in the Affordable Care Act that help the middle class... to include more people” (5D) ($P<.001). Republicans shifted the most in favor of these proposals, most Republicans still opposed them.

While the Affordable Care Act enjoyed widespread support, support for expanding Medicare benefits was mixed. Favor was high for the proposal to allow everyone to “be able to buy a public plan like Medicare” (5F) at a mean rating of 7.065 but did not change significantly ($P=.510). Favor was also high for the proposal to allow “People aged fifty-five and older [to] have the option of purchasing Medicare, instead of a private insurance plan” (5G) and increased significantly ($P=.024) from a mean rating of 7.349 to 7.641. By contrast, although about half (48%) of delegates initially favored the proposal to have everyone “automatically enrolled in a more generous version of Medicare” (5H), favor decreased significantly ($P<.001) from a mean rating of 5.679 to 4.851. The largest decrease in favor for this proposal, which is essentially “Medicare for All” proposal, was among Democrats. One explanation for this shift in opinion was an increase in concerns over the cost of such a massive expansion of Medicare. Agreement with the view that “Providing healthcare that is like Medicare for everyone will require increasing the debt to impossible levels” (7H) increased significantly ($P<.001) from a mean rating of 5.464 to 5.935, particularly among Democrats.
Democrats, Independents, and Republicans were united in their support for policies intended to reduce prescription drug prices. The proposal to “Allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices” (5I) had a mean rating of 7.985, which increased significantly ($P<.001$) to 9.002. No other proposal on any issue had such high support, except that “People should have reasonable access to health insurance without discrimination against pre-existing conditions” (5E). After deliberation, 92% of all delegates, including 92% of Democrats, 92% of Independents, and 91% of Republicans, favored this proposal. Likewise, the proposal to “make changes to the patent system to allow generic drugs to come on the market more quickly” (5J) had a mean rating at 7.827, which increased significantly ($P<.001$) to 8.404. After deliberation, 88% of all delegates, including 92% of Democrats, 90% of Independents, and 81% of Republicans, favored this proposal.

Overall, support for expanding access to health care and affordable prescription drugs was widespread, bipartisan, and increased after deliberation. While delegates did not support the expansion of Medicare to all, they did support some limited expansion of the benefits for both Medicare and The Affordable Care Act.

**Foreign Policy**

On the topic of American intervention abroad, proposals focused on how and when the United States should use its power to promote democracy and protect human rights. In general, delegates supported some interventionism. On the proposal that “The U.S. should intervene abroad when it is necessary to prevent genocide” (6H), a majority (64%) of delegates were in favor after deliberation; however, the mean rating decreased significantly ($P<.001$) from 6.911 to 6.495. On the proposal that “The US should use diplomacy and financial support,” as opposed to direct military intervention, “to promote democracy and human rights throughout the world” (6J), favor increased significantly ($P<.001$) from a mean rating of 6.670 to 7.111. Consistent with this more popular soft power approach was the proposal that “Presidents should be required to obtain explicit congressional approval for sending US troops into combat situations” (6G). Favor for this proposal was high and increased significantly ($P=.007$) from a mean rating of 6.855 to 7.187. In general, Democrats were more enthusiastic for American intervention abroad and limiting the military power of the President, while Republicans and Independents were less so. In particular, Republicans were evenly divided on the proposal to limit the President’s power to deploy US troops with 44% in favor, 44% opposed, and 12% in the middle. This is unsurprising, given that the current President is a Republican.

Delegates also expressed high support for responding actively to the strategic threats of China and Russia. On the proposal for the United States to “enhance its military presence in the Asia Pacific to prevent aggression by China” (6E), favor was high at a mean rating of 5.478 and increased significantly ($P=.007$) to 6.041. Likewise, favor increased significantly ($P<.001$) on the proposal for the United States to “rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trading agreement between 12 countries excluding China” (6A) from a mean rating of 5.716 to 7.379—the single largest increase for any proposal; however, after deliberation, about half (49%) of delegates opposed the proposal to “increase tariffs on Chinese goods” (6B). This is unsurprising, given that America in One Room took place in the midst of the China–United States trade war, which cost the American economy. While the
issue of tariffs divided Democrats and Republicans, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were united in their favor for enhancing the American military presence in the Asia Pacific region to counter China. Likewise, a majority of Democrats (82%), Republicans (71%), and Independents (65%) favored the proposal to “tighten sanctions on Russia” (6C).

Although delegates generally supported more aggressive foreign policy towards America’s strategic competitors, favor for the proposal to “increase military spending by up to five percent per year for the next few years to meet rising global challenges and ensure readiness” (6E) decreased significantly ($P<.001$) from a mean rating of 5.478 to 6.041. After deliberation, half (51%) of delegates opposed this proposal.

Even as the United States has strained its relationship with its NATO allies in recent years and withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal, delegates affirmed their support for both. The proposals for the United States to “reaffirm its commitment to defend any NATO ally attacked by a hostile force” (6D) and to “recommit to the Iran Nuclear Agreement” (6F) received majority favor. The mean ratings increased significantly ($P<.001$ and $P<.001$, respectively) after deliberation, and while Democrats, Republicans, and Independents all shifted in favor of these proposals, the largest shifts were among Republicans. After deliberation, 90% of Democrats, 79% of Independents, and 77% of Republicans favored reaffirming the US commitment to defend NATO allies.

The Environment

In general, proposals to combat climate change were popular, with support increasing after deliberation. On the proposal that “The US should commit to the 2014 Paris Agreement to combat climate change” (3A), favor began high at a mean rating of 6.740 and increased significantly to 7.132. Accordingly, there was significant increase ($P<.001$) in agreement with the view that “Cooperation between the countries of the world is necessary to fight climate change” (7E) from a mean of 8.098 to 9.036. Notably, this view was widely held across the political spectrum, with 97% of Democrats, 91% of Independents, and 90% of Republicans agreeing. Favor also increased significantly ($P=.002$) for the proposal that “The US should go beyond the Paris Agreement and aim for more significant cutbacks on greenhouse gas emissions” (3B), which garnered 68% of delegates in favor. In order to achieve those emissions reductions, delegates favored the use of “taxes or other market incentives” (3C). Favor for this proposal began high at a mean rating of 6.378 and increased significantly ($P<.001$) to 6.944.

While Democrats did not change their opinions significantly on any of these proposals ($P=.370$, $P=.345$, and $P=.368$, respectively), Republicans and Independents did. The largest shifts in aggregate opinion were consistently among Republicans. The mean rating among Republicans for the proposal to commit to the Paris Agreement (3A) increased significantly ($P=.003$) from 3.759 to 4.657. An explanation for this increased support for fighting climate change is an easing of concerns about the associated economic impacts. Among Republicans, agreement with the concern that “Effectively fighting climate change will hurt economic growth” (7D) decreased significantly ($P=.041$) from a mean rating of 5.738 to 5.084.
Although delegates supported going beyond the Paris Agreement to cut emissions, they did not support all proposals to combat climate change. Favor for the proposal to “mandate zero carbon emissions for cars, trucks, and buses” (3H) decreased significantly \( (P<.001) \) from a mean rating of 5.242 to 4.676. Favor also decreased significantly \( (P<.001) \) for the proposal for “A Green New Deal to commit to major investments in infrastructure and renewable energy” (3D) from a mean rating of 6.086 to 5.594—although about half (54%) of delegates remained in favor. The shift in opposition was primarily driven by decreased favor among Democrats and Independents. In particular, favor among Democrats for “mandat[ing] zero carbon emissions for cars, trucks, and buses” (3H) decreased significantly \( (P<.001) \) from a mean rating of 6.910 to 6.090. While there were no significant changes in the views of Democrats \( (P=.400) \) or Republicans \( (P=.055) \) on the Green New Deal proposal, there was a significant \( (P<.001) \) decrease in the mean rating among Independents.

Consistent with the increased support for combating climate change, support for expanding oil and gas production generally fell. On the proposal to “expand oil and gas production” (3E), delegates were evenly divided before deliberation, with 36% in opposition, 39% in favor, and 24% in the middle, but after deliberation, the mean rating decreased significantly \( (P<.001) \) from 5.122 to 4.571. Likewise, on the proposal to “Allow expansion of oil and gas production on federal lands previously dedicated to wildlife preservation” (3F), favor began low at a mean rating of 2.739 and decreased significantly \( (P<.001) \) to 2.205. By contrast, on the proposal for “The U.S. government [to] facilitate fracking throughout the US” (3G), favor began low at 61% of delegates in opposition, but did increased significantly \( (P=.004) \) from a mean rating of 3.179 to 3.592. Perhaps delegates were concerned about expanding oil production, but less concerned about expanding natural gas production. Natural gas is more abundant and burns cleaner than petroleum.

Overall, delegates supported combating climate change, opposed the expansion of oil production, and believed that reducing emissions need not come at the cost of the economy, with Democrats and Republicans, two groups which tend to be divided on the issue of environmental protection, agreeing far more after deliberation than before it.

The Candidates

The following is an op-ed written by Jim Fishkin and Larry Diamond and published in USA Today in December of 2019. It details the delegates’ preference changes of the then presidential candidates.

*What if we had a better way to select presidential nominees, one that didn’t reward appeals to the most ideologically committed voters and donors in each party? What if we weren’t trying to excite the already convinced — to vote, to contribute and to volunteer on campaigns? This pulls each party toward more militant postures and deepens polarization. What if we prized substantive dialogue across the partisan divides over intense mobilization within them? Would it make a difference?*

*“America in One Room” was an experiment to find out. Over a long weekend in September, we brought a national sample of registered voters to Grapevine, Texas, to discuss in depth the issues facing the country. This group from 47 states was representative of the U.S. electorate in all its diversity. The 526*
Participants discussed policy proposals on five big issues — immigration, health care, the environment, taxes (and the economy) and foreign policy.

When this sample of ordinary citizens talked to each other about the issues in small groups under good conditions — with balanced and carefully vetted briefing materials, trained moderators who impartially facilitated the discussions, and questions to panels of competing experts representing different points of view — their opinions changed dramatically. The policy proposals farthest on the right lost support (often substantially) among Republicans, while the proposals farthest on the left lost significant support among Democrats.

**Candidates skip partisan rhetoric**

The delegates also had the opportunity to question five presidential candidates. With Republicans, Democrats and independents deliberating together in civil fashion, the candidates avoided polarizing partisan rhetoric. Instead, they were incentivized to address the full range of interests and concerns in the electorate. As a result, we observed a startling shift in the nature of the campaign discourse.

Five candidates spoke live by video link to America in One Room: three Republican challengers to President Donald Trump — former Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, former Illinois congressman Joe Walsh and former South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford (who has since suspended his campaign) — and two Democratic candidates, former Housing Secretary Julian Castro and Sen. Michael Bennet of Colorado. Each appeared individually to answer the participants’ questions.

Our results enable us to see who gained in support (in the overall sample, and broken down by party), and on which issues. Strikingly, each of the five candidates had stronger appeal afterward, not only to members of his own party (and to independents), but also to members of the opposite party (and on all the five issues).

In fact, the support levels for each candidate (as measured by a score of 6 or higher on our 0 to 10 scale) were at least 15 percentage points (and in some cases as much as 30 points) higher than those among the control group that did not deliberate and hear the candidates. The candidates of both parties knew they were speaking to the entire country “in one room.” Hence they avoided partisan triggers and attacks on other candidates or the other party. The name “Trump” was rarely mentioned. Instead, they offered substantive and reasoned answers on the five issues.

Walsh, a former Tea Party ally, affirmed the rights of immigrants to receive due process in their asylum claims. Weld referred to Emma Lazarus in praising the role of immigrants in American society. Democrat Bennet questioned whether a one-size-fits-all approach was appropriate to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour. On immigration, Castro argued for a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented who had committed no serious crime. We need immigrants, he argued, to maintain “a young and vibrant work force” to keep the Social Security Trust Fund solvent in the face of a declining birth rate and a coming wave of retirements among Baby Boomers.
Respect shown to opponents

When the other party was mentioned, it was invoked with respect. Walsh argued that health care was an issue “where the Democrats clearly have an opinion, and we should respect that opinion.” Worrying about how we would pay for “Medicare for All,” he argued instead for universal “catastrophic coverage.” Bennet argued for universal coverage but with a public option in order to maintain choice and allow those who liked their current private insurance to keep it.

In contrast to two of the three Republicans, the Democrats had been in the race long enough to enable us to measure change in their support levels before and after deliberation. Overall support improved from 30% to 57% for Castro and from 14% to 58% for Bennet, in part because those with no opinion of the two candidates sharply declined.

Bennet finished with the strongest cross-party support (of all Democrats): 73% among Democrats, 57% among independents, and a third among Republicans. Castro scored higher among Democrats (82%) but weaker among independents (53%) and Republicans (24%). Although it is difficult to compare candidates who spoke to the sample with those who did not, former Vice President Joe Biden, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren are by now well known to Americans. Bennet proved to be more appealing to Republicans and independents than any of the three better-known candidates.

What about intensity of support? It is thought that most Republicans will still walk through fire for Donald Trump, but our data suggests otherwise. When our delegates were interviewed before deliberating, two-thirds of Republicans had a strongly favorable (8-10) view of the president. On leaving, only 54% did. The percent giving Trump a perfect “10” fell from 47% to 31%.

Imagine if dialogues like this, with random samples of the whole electorate deliberating on the issues, became the norm at this stage in the primary season. Without partisan triggers, people might actually consider issues on the merits and the candidates might actually address them.

Might we learn more about where the candidates stand? And wouldn’t we learn more about their general election prospects, which depend in part on attracting independents and even members of the other party? Campaigns can do more than just mobilize the already convinced. Why not test candidate positions with the whole country in the room?

Honest Elections

In addition to being surveyed on their views on the primary candidates, the delegates were asked the following question:

Some people think that the good political campaigns are ones that win at all costs, even if that means there are smear campaigns. Other people think the good political campaigns are the ones that focus on the issues and are truthful, even if that means losing elections. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
An overwhelming majority of delegates (91%) supported focusing on the issues compared to winning at all costs, including 94% of Independents, 91% of Democrats, and 87% of Republicans. Moreover, delegates supported focusing on the issues significantly more than the control group ($P<.001$), although support among the control group was also high (81%). Regardless of party affiliation, Americans would like to see campaigns that focus more on an honest discussion of the issues over a ruthless bid for victory.

Changes by Party

On all but 6 of the 47 proposals the delegates deliberated, there was a decrease in the partisan polarization between Democrats and Republicans. Of the 41 proposals where the divide between the average Democrat and average Republican decreased (Figure 1), the decrease was significant in 22 cases ($P<.020$ on all).

By contrast, of the 6 proposals where the divide between the average Democrat and average Republican actually increased (Figure 2), there were no cases were that increase was statistically significantly ($P>.081$ on all).

Of all 47 proposals deliberated, partisan polarization increased significantly ($P>.081$ on all) on none of them.

Although the divide between Democrats and Republicans consistently decreased, the proportion of delegates that placed themselves “in the middle” fell after deliberation on all but 3 of the proposals. At first, this appears contradictory. Why would the proportion of delegates “in the middle” decrease if the polarization between partisans also decreased?

Consider, for example, the proposal to “Increase federal minimum wage from $7.25/hr. to $15/hr.” (4G). On this proposal, support for the proposal among both Republicans and Democrats decreased; however, the bipartisan decrease in support brought the average Republican, who already opposed
Figure 1: Difference between the overall mean rating for each of the proposals and the mean rating among Democrats (blue) and Republicans (red) for the 41 proposals where partisan differences decreased. Trails show difference before and after deliberation.

- Closer Together

  1A. Reduce the number of religions allowed to record in the US.
  1B. Increase personal to prevent mass shootings in schools.
  1C. Provide deaths to reduce poverty and violence in Central America.
  1D. Increase the number of visas for all skilled workers to move to the US.
  1E. Increase the number of visas for low-skilled workers to move to the US for industries that need them, like agriculture and service.
  1F. Require employers to use the E-Verify computer system to confirm workers’ eligibility.
  1G. Forgive the interest on student loans for seniors over 50.
  1H. Continue NAFTA, the free trade agreement with Mexico.
  1I. Reduce immigration from Mexico by enforcing the border.
  1J. Increase the minimum wage.
  1K. Increase the income tax for all individuals over $100,000.
  1L. Increase the corporate tax rate from 35%.

- The US should respond to the Paris Agreement and act more significantly on greenhouse gas emissions.

- The US should reduce taxes on lower market acivities to achieve economic recovery.

- Allow a significant cut in gas production on federal lands previously dedicated to wildlife protection.

- The US should mandate zero carbon emission for cars, trucks, and buses.

- The US should improve the safety of all roads, requiring states to pay a small portion of their costs in an annual basis.

- The US should report the entire tax, which currently taxes deceased individuals’ estates at $5 million and decreases complex estate worth at tax.

- Reduce the corporate tax rate from 35%.

- Increase federal assistance to help the poor.

- The government should cover the cost of college tuition for public universities for all students who could not otherwise afford it.

- The government should finally balance the budget, which will account for the entire US federal debt and will make the government solvent.

- The government should give cash grants of $1,000 to every adult at least 18 years of age.

- The Affordable Care Act should be repealed.

- TheExplicitVerticals Ant and ant with the power to evolve.

- The federal subsidies in the Affordable Care Act that help the middle class should be expanded to include more people.

- People should have reasonable access to health insurance without discrimination against pre-existing conditions.

- Everybody should be offered a public plan like Medicare, the current plan for seniors and people over 65.

- People aged 55 and older should have the option of purchasing Medicare instead of a private insurance plan.

- People should be automatically enrolled in a more generous version of Medicare.

- Allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices.

- The US should raise the Trans Pacific Partnership, a trading agreement between 12 countries including China.

- The US should increase tariffs on Chinese goods.

- The US should tighten sanctions on Russia.

- The US should improve its commitment to defend any NATO ally attacked by a hostile force.

- The US should reduce its military presence in the Asia Pacific (e.g.,对中国).

- The US should return to the Iran War Agreement.

- The US should undertake negotiations to end the war in Syria.

- The US should increase aid to Syrian refugees.

- The US should work to promote democracy and human rights throughout the world.
increasing the minimum wage to $15 per hour, further from the middle at “5.” By contrast, the decrease in support brought the average Democrat, who initially favored increasing the minimum wage, closer to the middle (Figure 3). Resulting in an aggregate decline in the proportion of delegates “in the middle.”

Figure 3: Mean rating for proposal 4G to “Increase federal minimum wage from $7.25/hr. to $15/hr.” Trails show difference before and after deliberation.

This pattern, where the average Democrat and average Republican shift in the same direction, even if they are on opposite sides of an issue, was observed in 31 of the 47 proposals (Figure 4). With this first pattern, both groups of partisans shift either in favor or in opposition to a proposal, not necessarily towards the middle.

For only 5 of the 47 proposals, did the average Democrat and average Republican move directly towards each other, rather than to one side (Figure 5). With this second pattern, both groups of partisans (Democrats and Republicans) generally become less extreme in their stances on the issues.

Figure 5: Mean rating among Democrats and Republicans for the 5 proposals in which the average Democrat and average Republican moved directly towards each other. Trails show difference before and after deliberation.

It might be expected that deliberation would produce more of the second pattern, with partisans coming to find a middle ground between them, than the first, with partisans moving in the same direction. But that the first pattern was observed in the majority of cases shows that Americans, regardless of party affiliation, respond similarly to convincing arguments and, accordingly, can be convinced by “the forceless force of the better argument” and have their minds changed, even slightly, as a result.
Figure 4: Mean rating among Democrats and Republicans for the 31 proposals in which the average Democrat and average Republican moved directly towards one side. Trails show difference before and after deliberation.
Values and Ideals

At the end of each survey, delegates were asked to consider their “values” or “some things that people find more or less important for themselves and society to have,” without discussion of specific policies. They rated seven statements, including “Seeing to it that everyone has equal opportunities,” “Making one’s own choices,” and “Earning as much money as possible,” on how important they personally thought they were on a scale from least important (0) to most important (10). The Briefing Materials, which focused on the policy proposals, did not discuss any of these values, but these values were implicitly and, often explicitly, discussed by the delegates in the deliberations.

There were significant shifts in opinion on four of the seven statements. The mean rating increased significantly on “Seeing to it that everyone has equal opportunities” (12A) from 7.925 to 8.692 ($P < .001$), on “Not having to worry about being fired” (12D) from 6.170 to 6.590 ($P = .001$), and “Making sure that nobody suffers from lack of food or shelter” (12E) from 8.194 to 8.610 ($P < .001$). These changes in the values of the delegates reflect an increased concern for, and generosity towards, their fellow Americans. Even though valuing “Earning as much money as possible” (12F) decreased after deliberation, the average delegate placed themselves closer to “Get as rich” at the cost of a “More equal society” (0) after deliberation than before it ($P < .001$). These changes in values indicate delegates increasing preference for a society that allows for personal wealth achievement at the cost of broader equality, while guaranteeing equal *opportunities* and supporting those that fall behind. No significant change was observed in the values or ideals of the control group that did not deliberate ($P > .488$ on all).

The post-deliberation survey had delegates respond to a new set of value questions that were not on the pre-deliberation survey. When compared to the control group, delegates after deliberation believed the United States was generally more successful at achieving its core values. 70% of delegates agreed that the county was successful at achieving the “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (17D) compared to 48% of those in the control group. Delegates also believed the country was more successful at achieving “freedom” (18A) and “democracy” (18D); however, the average delegate thought the United States was significantly less successful at achieving “equality” (18C) than the average member of the control group ($P = .0135$). A little less than half of delegates thought the United States was successful at achieving “equality” (18C) and “justice” (18B) (42% and 49%, respectively). While these results are consistent with the more positive perception of the functioning of American government expressed by delegates after deliberation, they do reveal underlying concerns about the inability of the United States as a nation to realize its core values.

Political Efficacy

After deliberation, delegates became 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 4.531 to 5.878. While about half (46%) of participants thought the system worked poorly before deliberation, after deliberation, that proportion declined to less than a quarter (24%) and more than half (60%) of
delegates thought the system worked well. While mean agreement with the statement that “Public officials care a lot about what people like me think” (15A) increased significantly from 2.885 to 3.813 ($P<.001$), 56% of delegates still disagreed with the statement after deliberation. Likewise, while mean agreement with the statement that “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does” (15C) decreased significantly ($P<.001$), delegates were split between agreement (41%) and disagreement (42%). Although deliberation increased positive perceptions of American democracy, it did not dramatically negate deeply held dissatisfaction with the current functioning—or disfunction—within American government.

Mutual Respect

Following deliberation, participants viewed those they disagreed with on the issues more positively. Mean agreement that those people “believe some things that are untrue” (16B), “are not thinking clearly” (16C), and “are looking out for their own interests” (16E), as opposed to the interests of others, all fell significantly ($P=.010$, $P<.001$, and $P=.005$, respectively). Likewise, mean agreement with the statement that “They have good reasons; there just are better ones on the other side” (16D) 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 broadly. Even after deliberation, agreement that others “looking out for their own interests” (7E) remained high at 72% (down from 76%). Moreover, mean agreement that others “just don’t know enough” (16A) did not change significantly as a result of deliberation ($P=.924$) and remained high with 53% of delegates agreeing. Notably, however, agreement with most these statements did not differ largely between partisans and independents.

Knowledge Gains

Delegates were asked 7 factual questions to measure their knowledge of contemporary politics. There were no significant changes in mean knowledge on the question, “Which political party holds the majority in the Senate?” (K1) ($P=.454$), nor the same question for “the House” (K2) ($P=.803$). While knowledge on these questions did not change significantly, it was nonetheless high on these particular questions. After deliberation, 84.9% and 81.1% of participants answered correctly “Republicans” and “Democrats,” respectively. The largest increase in knowledge was on the question, “About how many undocumented immigrants are in the US?” (K3). The mean knowledge increased significantly ($P<.001$) and, after deliberation, most participants (84.1% up from 42.5%) answered correctly “10 million.” On one question, knowledge actually decreased. On the question, “The Affordable Care Act allows which of the following?” (K5) the proportion of delegates answering
correctly decreased from 70.4% to 67.5%; however, the change in mean knowledge was not significant \((P=.626)\). After deliberation, participants scored, on average, more than 60% on all questions. Given that knowledge increased significantly on all other questions, it is not surprising that mean agreement with the view that “I have opinions about politics that are worth listening to” (15D) increased significantly from 7.574 to 8.387 \((P<.001)\).

Evaluations of the Process

The vast majority of participants viewed the deliberations favorably. 98% of the delegates rated the “The event as a whole” as valuable “in helping [them] clarify [their] positions on the issues,” including 96.0% of Republicans, 99% of Independents, and 100% of Democrats. Likewise, 90% of delegates thought “The plenary sessions,” 90% thought “The briefing materials,” and 97% thought “The small group discussions” were valuable.

With regards to the small group discussions, 96% of delegates agreed that their moderators never attempted to influence the group with their own personal political views, with little deviation in agreement by party affiliation. 95% of delegates also agreed that the moderators “provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussion.” After this weekend of thoughtful dialogue across political divisions and all of America’s diversity, 95% of delegates agreed that they “learned a lot about people very different from [themselves]—about what they and their lives are like.” 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](#).