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“Can deliberation cure our divisions about democracy?”

By **NED FOLEY** on [August 21, 2023, 11:09 am](#)[electoral reform, ranked choice voting](#)

[Boston Globe opinion essay by James Fishkin and Larry Diamond](#) describing the results of their deliberative poll on various electoral reforms. The whole essay is a “must read”; here’s a bit of it:

“Partisan differences seem immovable, [some say even “calcified.”](#) However, in our recent national experiment [“America in One Room: Democratic Reform”](#) we find a very different picture. When Americans take the time to talk to each other in a civil, evidence-based way, they learn to listen to each other and often change their views dramatically, depolarizing across partisan divides. This [Helena](#) project shows that Americans’ views are not so deeply entrenched but very much open to reason. ...

“When our nationally representative sample of 600 (selected by NORC at the University of Chicago) deliberated for a weekend about these issues, Republicans often moved significantly toward initially Democrat positions and Democrats sometimes moved just as substantially toward initially Republican positions. The changes were all consonant with basic democratic values, such as that everyone’s vote should count and that our elections need to be administered in a nonpartisan way.

“Only 30 percent of Republicans initially supported providing access to voter registration online, but after deliberations, Republicans moved to majority support, joining Democrats (who overwhelmingly supported it at 81 percent). Republicans abandoned their view that “increasing opportunities for voter registration would open up more opportunities for voter fraud.” The percentage of Republicans believing that dropped 26 points (from 56 percent to only 30 percent). Republicans similarly abandoned their opposition to restoring federal and state voting rights to convicted felons upon their release from prison. Republican support for restoring voting rights for felons increased dramatically, from 35 percent to 58 percent.

“By contrast, only a minority of Democrats (44 percent) initially supported the mostly Republican proposal for each state to require its voting jurisdictions to conduct an audit of a random sample of ballots “to ensure that the votes are accurately counted.” However, after deliberation Democrats increased their support by 14 points to 58 percent (joining Republicans who supported it even more strongly at 75 percent). Getting an accurate count was a goal broadly shared, and audits with a random sample seemed a practical method of assuring everyone about the results. The same goal was served by another, initially Republican, proposal “that all voting machines produce a paper record of the vote that the voter verifies and then drops in a ballot box.” Democratic support rose from 44 percent to 55 percent, with Republican support staying at over 70 percent. ...

“Deliberators were asked about ranked choice voting for primaries and general elections for Congress, state legislatures, and local elections. In all six cases, there was an overall majority in support of ranked choice voting after deliberation. While the weakest support came from Republicans, for most ranked choice voting options at least a third of Republicans were favorable. For the option of “final four or five voting” (using a nonpartisan primary to choose the top few candidates to advance to a general election using ranked choice voting), Republican support increased after deliberation from 32 percent to 43 percent. There was general dissatisfaction both before and after with our current “first past the post” method of conducting elections (after deliberation, only 33 percent of the overall sample wanted to keep it, but that included about 50 percent of Republicans).”

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