Report on Deliberation

# Introduction

On May 1st, 2021, approximately 600 Americans aged 18 to 29 were brought together to deliberate the future of our presidential elections. These participants were recruited through The Generation Lab—a polling firm targeting younger Americans—and partnerships with over 30 universities around the country.

The conversation was hosted on The Stanford Online Deliberation Platform—a video chat platform capable of hosting dozens of auto-moderated deliberations simultaneously. Prior to the deliberation, the participants were surveyed about their opinions on the Electoral College and the proposals. After completing the pre-event survey, they received balanced [briefing materials](http://deliberations.us/briefing-videos) approved by a bipartisan [Advisory Board](https://www.deliberations.us/advisory-board) of experts on the Electoral College and electoral reform. Over the course of an hour and a half, the participants deliberated three proposals for changing the Electoral College—[a national popular vote](https://www.deliberations.us/the-electoral-college/a-national-popular-vote), [fractional proportional](https://www.deliberations.us/the-electoral-college/fractional-proportional), and [ranked-choice voting](https://www.deliberations.us/the-electoral-college/ranked-choice-voting)—and developed questions about the proposals for a bipartisan [panel of experts](https://www.deliberations.us/events/the-electoral-college/05/01/2021-3). After the deliberations, the panel answered a selection of the questions in a [live, Zoom webinar](https://www.deliberations.us/events/the-electoral-college/05/01/2021-3) viewed by all the participants. After the deliberations and expert panel, the participants were surveyed a second time to measure changes in opinions, attitudes, and knowledge as a result of the event.

The deliberation not only produced more informed, empathetic, and optimistic Americans, it also demonstrated that—when given the facts, the best arguments from all sides, and the opportunity to speak with a diverse group of peers—Americans can find common ground on divisive issues like Electoral College reform. After deliberation, a majority of Democrats, independents, and Republicans supported fractional proportional and ranked-choice voting, while a majority of Democrats and independents supported a national popular vote.

In this report, we outline these results in detail. First, by providing a quantitative description of the opinion changes. And, second, by discussing select statements from some of the participants. These statements—recorded during the deliberations—can help explain the thinking of the participants and the statistical trends observed.

# Quantitative Results

## Outlook 1

We asked participants if they thought democracy was working well or poorly in the United States. Initially, a certain percentage of people disagreed with the statement. After some consideration, the majority of people still agreed with the statement as before. However, among those who identified as Democrats, there was a greater decrease in disagreement. Before, the majority of Democrats agreed with the statement and after discussion, there was even more agreement among them. Among Independents, there was a significant decrease in support, leading to no clear majority either way after discussion. For those who preferred not to state, there was no change before or after discussion. For Republicans, there was no shift in support, with the majority still in agreement before and after discussion.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |

## The Electoral College

We asked participants whether they agreed that the Electoral College should be used for electing the president, where the candidate with the majority of electoral votes wins. The results showed an increase in support of 4.5%, but after deliberation, the majority were still in support of this method. When breaking down the results by political affiliation, Democrats showed an increase of 2.7% in support, with a super majority still supporting this method after deliberation. Independents showed no change in support, with a majority still in favor after deliberation. Those who chose not to state their political affiliation showed a significant increase of 16.7% in support after deliberation, with no majority opposition before or after. Republicans showed no change in support, with a majority still opposing this method after deliberation.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |

## A National Popular Vote

We asked participants whether they agreed with the following statement: "We should elect the president based on the popular vote, where the candidate with the most overall votes wins." Some people were initially opposed but, after the discussion, the opposition decreased by 4.5%. However, the majority remained opposed. Interestingly, those who identified as Democrats were initially in favor but, after talking it out, the majority still ended up being against the idea. Independents also shifted in their opinion; before the discussion, most were opposed, but after, there was no clear majority either way. Participants who preferred not to state their political affiliation, saw an increase in opposition after the discussion, with no clear majority either way. Meanwhile, Republicans remained steadfast in their support of the original statement, with an overwhelming majority still in favor even after the discussion.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |

## Winner-Take-All

We asked people if they think we should keep using winner-take-all to decide which presidential candidate gets a state's electoral votes (this means all of a state's votes go to the candidate with the most votes in that state). More people said yes after thinking it over. Almost everyone still agreed after talking about it. Democrats were especially likely to agree, with an increase of 5.4%. Independents were less likely to disagree, with a decrease of 6.7%. People who didn't want to say how they identified themselves were more likely to disagree after thinking, with an increase of 8.3%, but still no clear majority. Republicans were about as likely to agree before and after, but they still mostly disagreed.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |

## Fractional Proportional

We asked people if they agreed that presidential candidates should receive electoral votes proportionate to the fraction of the vote they received in each state. After discussions, opposition increased by 9%, and there was still a majority against the proposal. Among Democrats, opposition increased by 8.1%, and the majority still opposed it. Independents shifted towards opposition, and there was still a majority against it. Those who didn't want to say their affiliation saw a whopping 33.3% increase in opposition, and there was now a majority against it. Republicans maintained their support, and there was still a majority in favor of the proposal.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |

## Plurality Voting

We asked participants if they agreed that we should keep using plurality voting for electing the president. This means each person selects one presidential candidate on their ballot, and the candidate with the most votes wins. After some discussion, there was still no clear opposition. However, support increased by 9% from the initial agreement. Among Democrats, there was a slight increase in opposition by 2.7%. Initially, there was no strong opposition, and after discussion, there was no clear majority support. Independents, on the other hand, showed an increase in support by 13.3%. Majority support remained before and after deliberation. For those who prefer not to state their political affiliation, support increased by 25%, and there was no clear opposition before or after the discussions. Lastly, for Republicans, support decreased. Initially, there was no strong support, but after the debates, there was a majority in favor of plurality voting.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |

## Ranked-Choice Voting

We asked people if they thought we should use a system called ranked-choice voting when we elect the president. This means voters rank the presidential candidates on their ballot and the candidate with the most votes wins. Before we talked about it, there wasn't a clear majority in favor of the idea. But after discussing it, most people were against it. Democrats were still mostly against it after discussing it, while independents overall became more in favor. People who didn't want to say their political affiliation became more against it, and Republicans became even more in favor of the idea.

| Group | Agreement (%) |
| --- | --- |
| Total (Before) |  |
| Total (After) |  |
| Republican (Before) |  |
| Republican (After) |  |
| Prefer not to state (Before) |  |
| Prefer not to state (After) |  |
| Independent (Before) |  |
| Independent (After) |  |
| Democrat (Before) |  |
| Democrat (After) |  |