KEY FINDINGS

LET'S TALK, MARATHON COUNTY
Voting and the U.S. Presidential Election System

Election Deliberative Dialogues

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GOALS OF LET'S TALK, MARATHON COUNTY

In the fall of 2023, the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) launched the Let's Talk, Marathon County project.[1] Like much of America, Central Wisconsin is beset by political division, magnified by digital media, which often portrays citizens in a constant state of disagreement around public issues with a shrinking middle ground. Social and popular media offer podiums to the loudest, most persistent voices, which typically represent the opposite poles of the political spectrum. However, research shows that most Americans do not fall neatly into one political party or ideology.[2]

Let's Talk, Marathon County is aimed at fostering constructive conversations among residents on a variety of public issues. It aims to give a voice to those whose thoughts and ideas have been overshadowed by dominant and polarizing narratives. By bringing together individuals from different backgrounds and viewpoints, this program seeks to create an inclusive space where all voices are heard, valued, and respected. The broader goals of Let's Talk, Marathon County are:

1. **Create spaces for residents of central Wisconsin to address issues that matter in a civil and constructive manner.**
2. **Build and sustain a community culture of civil dialogue around important issues.**
3. **Improve feelings of trust among fellow residents despite differences in viewpoints.**
4. **Train local facilitators with capacity to moderate future deliberative dialogues.**

Let's Talk, Marathon County was selected as one of 32 grantees for the Healing Starts Here initiative, a nationwide effort to address and understand divisive forces in communities and promote healing. This initiative is fully funded by New Pluralists, an organization committed to helping Americans recognize our shared humanity, embrace our differences, and solve challenges together.[3] WIPPS was chosen from a pool of almost 800 applicants, and no taxpayer dollars were used for this project.

WHAT ARE DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES?

The Let's Talk conversations use a deliberative dialogue process to facilitate conversations among community members. Deliberation—sometimes called "choice work"—is a way for the public to weigh together various approaches to solving problems and find courses of action consistent with what communities and individuals hold valuable. Deliberation is more than simply raising and discussing important issues in a public setting. Genuine public deliberation is a thoughtful public process by which communities and stakeholders learn from one another and strive to come to judgment together about real policy matters.[4]

This form of public dialogue is not far removed from what citizens, including elected officials, routinely do every day. However, constructive dialogue is frequently drowned out by incivility and hyper-politicization of issues in public spaces. Advocates of deliberation seek to grow the practice so that public deliberation becomes a healthy and realistic way to create spaces for individuals and communities to work through complex issues and come to common ground on difficult policy choices. Deliberation is, therefore, public work—that is, work by the public, for public purposes.

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[1] https://wipps.org/lets-talk/
[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/
[3] https://newpluralists.org/
[4] See, for example, Yankelovich, Daniel, and Will Friedman, eds. Toward Wiser Public Judgment. Vanderbilt University Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17vf70s.

While public deliberation will not address or solve all community problems (nor erase fundamental conflicts in values), it remains an important component of healthy democratic practice and an avenue for residents to become involved in public policy. It also offers a vehicle for individuals to learn more about complex issues and the real tradeoffs that different approaches to community problems entail.

SELECTING THE LET'S TALK, MARATHON COUNTY PANEL

The Let's Talk, Marathon County team assembled a participant panel of nearly 100 community members from across Marathon County to meet in small groups of approximately 10 people per group over the course of two years and to engage in conversations about public issues. To date, the conversations have focused on several topics, including youth mental health, homelessness, immigration, and the U.S. presidential elections. The goal was to select a panel of community members who reflected a range of political affiliations and ensured geographic representation of residents from rural and urban areas of the county, as well as a cross-section of demographics.

The following process was used to populate the Let's Talk panel:
- A community-wide public marketing campaign using a combination of media and social media resources, as well as informal networking and outreach to individuals and organizations across the county, was launched in the spring of 2023. Interested individuals were asked to sign up via an online application. In addition to collecting the individual's name, the application also asked standard demographic questions, including the individual's political leaning. Following this campaign, we received 259 unique applications.[5]
- Following the initial recruitment, a random selection process (weighted by political leaning to ensure balance) was used to whittle down the list to 127 applicants. A follow-up survey was sent via email to the 127 applicants to verify that they were residents of Marathon County. We received valid and affirmative responses from 91 of the 127. Additional recruitment helped increase the diversity in the panel.
- The exact number of individuals in the Let's Talk panel at any given time fluctuates due to occasional attrition, as well as from new panelists being added. For example, a few panelists have dropped out for personal reasons such as moving out of the area. When a panel member leaves, project staff attempt to add a new panel member with a similar political affiliation and geographic representation (urban or rural). As of the time that the election dialogues were conducted, there were 93 Let's Talk panelists.

The self-reported political affiliation of the 93 Let's Talk panelists reflected a distribution of approximately 30% liberal, 40% moderate, and 30% conservative. In creating these categories, we aggregated responses as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Let's Talk Panel Political Affiliation Categories

Aggregation of Self-Reported Leaning							
Liberal		Moderate				Conservative	
Very liberal	Moderately liberal	Slightly liberal	Middle of the road	Neither liberal nor conservative	Slightly conservative	Moderately conservative	Very conservative

Table 2 on the following page shows the political affiliation, geographic residence, and demographic characteristics of the Let's Talk panel, along with the characteristics of the panelists who participated in election deliberative dialogues.

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[5] This number reflects the total individuals after the registration data were cleaned to remove possible spam.

Table 2. Let's Talk Panel Characteristics Compared to Deliberative Dialogue Participants

	Let's Talk Panel	Let's Talk Panel	Dialogue Participants	Dialogue Participants
	N	%	N	%
	93	100	48	100
Political Affiliation				
Liberal	27	29	14	29
Moderate	40	43	23	48
Conservative	26	28	11	23
Georgraphy				
Urban	68	73	35	73
Rural	25	27	13	27
No response	0	0	0	0
Age				
16-20	1	1	1	2
21-29	9	10	3	6
30-39	20	22	6	12
40-49	15	16	7	15
50-59	14	15	7	15
60-69	17	18	11	23
70+	16	17	13	27
Prefer not to answer/no response	1	1	0	0
Gender				
Woman	49	53	28	58
Man	39	42	19	40
Other	3	3	1	2
Prefer not to answer/no response	2	2	0	0
Race (Select all that apply)				
Alaskan, American Indian, Indigenous, or Native American	4	4	0	0
Asian	4	4	3	6
Black or African American	3	3	1	2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
White	80	86	45	94
One or more not listed	1	1	0	0
Prefer not to answer/no response	5	5	0	0
Ethnicty				
Hispanic/Latino	9	10	1	2
Not Hispanic/Latino	84	90	47	98
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0
Highest Level of Education				
Some high school	1	1	0	0
High school graduate/GED	8	9	5	10
Nontraditional education	0	0	0	0
Trade school	1	1	0	0
Some college, no degree	15	16	10	21
Associate degree	15	16	8	17
Bachelor's degree	28	30	12	25
Master's degree	17	18	8	17
Professional degree	4	4	2	4
Prefer not to answer/no response	4	4	3	6

* Percentages might not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding. For race, numbers can add up to more than the group sample size because respondents were asked to select all options that applied to them.

The panel for the election dialogues reflected a geographic distribution of approximately 73% urban and 27% rural.[6] About 53% selected "woman" as their gender; 42% selected "man," with 5% selecting "other" or "prefer not to respond." About one-third (35%) were aged 60+ (20% of the county population is age 65+). The vast majority were white (86%), which is similar to the county (86%).[7] Four percent (4%) were Asian and ten percent (10%) reported Hispanic or Latino ethnicity; this was generally comparable to the county (6% and 4%, respectively). The panelists reflected higher educational attainment in comparison to the county, with about 22% having a master's degree or professional degree compared to about 9% in the county's population.

U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES

Seven deliberative dialogues were conducted on the topic of *Voting and the U.S. Presidential Election System – What Kind of System Do We Want to Have?* These dialogues were held in two locations in Wausau, as well as in Mosinee; four dialogues were held virtually. Within each dialogue, the goal was to include approximately 10 Let's Talk panelists (or 70 total participants). In addition, each dialogue was structured to reflect a distribution of approximately 30% liberal, 40% moderate, and 30% conservative participants. With 10 participants for each dialogue, therefore, the goal was to include 3 liberal, 4 moderate, and 3 conservative-leaning individuals. To accomplish this, the 93 Let's Talk panelists were divided into three groups according to the panelists' self-reported political affiliation. Each of the three groups was sent a unique dialogue sign-up link with the dates of the various sessions. This allowed participants to choose a date and location convenient to them while allowing the project team to manage political affiliation representation within each dialogue.

During this round of deliberative dialogues, a total of 54 of the 93 Let's Talk panelists registered to participate; after accounting for cancellations and no-shows, a total of 48 individuals participated in one of the election dialogues. As shown previously in Table 2, the demographics of the participants were not materially different from the Let's Talk panel as whole. Panelists who were unable to participate will have a chance to do so in the next round of deliberative dialogues. As a recruitment incentive and as a token of appreciation for their time, each participant received a $100 gift card.

Table 3. U.S. Presidential Election Deliberative Dialogue Participants

Community Member Deliberative Dialogues						
Political Affiliation	Let's Talk Panelists	Percent (%)	Registered for Dialogue	Percent (%)	Participated in Dialogue	Percent (%)
Liberal	27	29	16	30	14	29
Moderate	40	43	26	48	23	48
Conservative	26	28	12	22	11	23
Total	**93[8]**	**100**	**54**	**100**	**48**	**100**

Of the 48 Let's Talk panel members who participated in the election dialogues, all had participated in at least one prior Let's Talk dialogue on the topic of youth mental health, homelessness, or immigration. Of the 48 participants, 33 (69%) had participated in all three of the other dialogues; 10 (21%) had done two of the other dialogues; and 5 (10%) had done one other dialogue.

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[6] This distribution reflects an approximate population density in Marathon County by Census Track. In Marathon County, 43% of the population lives in a low population density area based on County Health Rankings. https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/wisconsin/marathon?year=2024

[7] https://www.marathoncountypulse.org/index.php?module=DemographicData&controller=index&action=index

[8] Of the 93 Let's Talk election panelists, 25 (27%) had not participated in any of the dialogues; 9 (10%) had participated in 1 dialogue; 12 (13%) had participated in 2 dialogues; 14 (15%) had participated in 3 dialogues; and 33 (36%) had participated in all four dialogues.

STRUCTURING THE DIALOGUES

The approach used during the elections deliberative dialogues differed from prior Let's Talk deliberative dialogues in several key ways. The main features of the alternative format in comparison to the more traditional format used during the youth mental health, homelessness, and immigration dialogues was: (1) trying a different format for the sessions which included the use of a PowerPoint slide deck as an alternative to an Issue Guide; (2) fewer action items; and (3) the use of live polling to gauge participants' views of various action items in real time. The motivations for trying the alternative format were rooted in an interest in trying to innovate. Table 4 outlines the key differences in the approaches.

Table 4. Characteristics of the Traditional Dialogue Format vs. the Alternative Format Used in Elections Dialogues

	Traditional Format	Alternative Format
Topic	Youth Mental Health, Homelessness, and Immigration	U.S. Presidential Elections
Format	Mostly In-Person; Some Zoom	Mostly Zoom; Some In-Person
Framing the Issues	Issue Guide, Definitions, Glossary	PowerPoint, No Definitions, No Glossary
# Approaches per Topic	3	3
# Action Items per Approach	5	3
Use of Live Polling	No	Yes

To structure the dialogues, the project partners created a PowerPoint guide that was used during the dialogue to "name and frame" the topic (see Appendix B). The PowerPoint guide was modified from a slide deck originally developed by the National Issues Forum.[9] In prior dialogues the Issue Guide was printed and was provided to the participants at the start of each dialogue and consisted of background information on the topic, including a curated page of national statistics on the topic at hand and a glossary. For participants in previous Zoom dialogues, the Issue Guide was mailed to participants in advance. In the traditional format, the Issue Guide is read out loud and can be cumbersome to develop. It is also hard to expect people to be prepared ahead of time. The PowerPoint format offers a much more condensed and streamlined structure.

The slides outlined three potential approaches to the topic of modifying U.S. presidential elections and voting, including (1) making it easier to vote; (2) protecting against cheating; and (3) changing the system. For each of the three approaches, the slides provided three potential action items for dialogue participants to consider, along with their possible drawbacks or tradeoffs. The alternative format reduced the number of action items from five to three. This adjustment to the format was taken since it is often difficult for moderators to get through five action items for each approach and sometimes those at the end get less attention.

Prior dialogues did not use live polling. Live polling on the participants' personal devices or iPads was used throughout the deliberation so that participants could identify within each approach, which proposal they favored the most. The results of each poll were displayed so that participants could view the results in real-time. At the conclusion of the dialogue, participants had a chance to consider all of the proposals across all three approaches together and vote on the one or two they favored most, as well as the one or two they favored least. Zoom's polling function was used for the virtual sessions and Poll Everywhere was used for the in-person sessions.

Two (2) trained moderators facilitated each dialogue by carefully examining each approach, including weighing trade-offs among the proposals and identifying areas of tension as well as common ground. A public notetaker assisted in recording the results of the dialogues to capture key themes and takeaways as well. The dialogues were conducted in person and via Zoom and were scheduled for approximately 120 minutes (of the seven sessions, four were held virtually).[10] A technical staff person was also present at each dialogue to troubleshoot any issues with the polling.

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[9] See https://www.nifi.org/
[10] This was the first time the Zoom sessions outnumbered the in-person ones. This was because the Let's Talk team was particularly interested in testing out the polling via Zoom vs. in person.

EVALUATION APPROACH

This round of Let's Talk dialogues was largely focused on piloting the alternative format of using live polling during the dialogues to gauge participants' views on the topic at hand, as well as a more streamlined format that reduced the number of action items within each approach from five to three. In addition, in this round of dialogues, participants were not provided with a detailed Issue Guide at the start of each dialogue. Let's Talk staff were interested in trying this alternative approach and focusing the evaluation primarily on feedback about the process.

There were three components to the evaluation of the election dialogues: (1) a post-dialogue survey was administered to all of the participants at the conclusion of each dialogue in order to get feedback on the dialogue process from the participants' perspective; (2) a review of the detailed notes taken by the observers and notetakers in order to identify feedback on the dialogue process within each group; and (3) a compilation of results of the polling conducted in each dialogue.[11] This report, *Let's Talk Key Findings–Voting and the U.S. Presidential Election System Deliberative Dialogues*, includes the findings from the post-dialogue survey, identified key themes across dialogues regarding the dialogue process, and summarizes the results of the polls identifying which proposals participants favored the most and least.

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[11] In prior Let's Talk dialogues, detailed summaries were prepared of each individual dialogue in order to document the content and nature of each group's discussion and to identify key themes across dialogues. These summaries were compiled in Supplemental reports. Because the purpose of the elections dialogues was primarily to pilot the new approach of using the PowerPoint slides and live polling, we did not prepare a Supplemental Report for this round of dialogues. Instead, we report the results of the live polling in Tables 14 to 17.

At the conclusion of each deliberative dialogue, participants were asked to complete a brief, 20-question survey about their experiences engaging in the deliberative dialogue. The questions were designed to gather information about whether the dialogues expanded participants' views on the issue; helped them consider tradeoffs and solutions; increased appreciation for diverse viewpoints; and increased interest in engaging in community issues. A QR code was available at the dialogue to allow participants to scan and complete the survey on their devices, and paper copies were also available. Participants in virtual dialogues were provided with a survey link.

In this section of the report, we summarize the key findings from the post-dialogue surveys for the Let's Talk dialogues on the election topic. For reference, participants' responses were further separated into rural versus urban respondents. Although the data in the tables can be used to observe the general patterns of responses, given the relatively small sample sizes, we often combined response categories when discussing results. In addition, tests of the statistical significance of the differences between groups were not conducted. Therefore, we do not make direct comparisons of the differences between the urban versus rural respondents. It is unlikely that the results in any one cell are significantly different from the results for that same cell for another group. As such, the data should not be used to draw conclusions about the magnitude of differences between urban versus rural respondents. Responses to two open-ended survey questions are included in Appendix A.

SURVEY RESPONSE RATES
Table 5 below shows the survey response rates. Overall, 100% of dialogue participants completed the survey.

Table 5. U.S. Presidential Election Deliberative Dialogues – Participant Survey Response Rates

Community Member Deliberative Dialogues			
Political Affiliation	**Dialogue Participants**	**Completed Post-Dialogue Surveys**	**Response Rate (%)**
Liberal	14	14	100
Moderate	23	23	100
Conservative	11	11	100
Total	**48**	**48**	**100**
Urban	35	35	100
Rural	13	13	100
Total	**48**	**48**	**100**

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS
Table 6 shows the demographic characteristics of the dialogue participants in comparison to the survey respondents. Since all of the dialogue participants completed the survey, there are no differences between the respondents and the participating panelists. The table also provides the characteristics of the rural and urban respondents. However, because of the small group sizes (16 rural and 37 urban respondents) we do not make direct comparisons between the two groups.

Table 6. Let's Talk Deliberative Dialogue Participant versus Survey Respondent Characteristics

	Dialogue Participants	Dialogue Participants	Survey Respondents	Survey Respondents	Urban Survey Respondents	Urban Survey Respondents	Rural Survey Respondents	Rural Survey Respondents
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	48	100	48	100	35	100	13	100
Political Affiliation								
Liberal	14	29	14	29	7	20	7	54
Moderate	23	48	23	48	19	54	4	31
Conservative	11	23	11	23	9	26	2	15
Georgraphy								
Urban	35	73	35	73	35	100	0	0
Rural	13	27	13	27	0	0	13	100
Age								
16-20	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
21-29	3	6	3	6	2	6	1	8
30-39	6	12	6	12	6	17	0	0
40-49	7	15	7	15	4	11	3	23
50-59	7	15	7	15	5	14	2	15
60-69	11	23	11	23	9	26	2	15
70+	13	27	13	27	8	23	5	39
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gender								
Woman	28	58	28	58	21	60	7	54
Man	19	40	19	40	13	37	6	46
Other	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Race (Select all that apply)								
Alaskan, American Indian, Indigenous, or Native American	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	3	6	3	6	3	9	0	0
Black or African American	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	45	94	45	94	32	92	13	100
One or more not listed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity								
Hispanic/Latino	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Not Hispanic or Latino	47	98	47	98	34	97	13	100
No response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Highest Level of Education								
Some high school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
High school graduate/GED	5	10	5	10	5	14	0	0
Nontraditional education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trade school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Some college, no degree	10	21	10	21	9	26	1	8
Associate degree	8	17	8	17	8	23	0	0
Bachelor's degree	12	25	12	25	8	23	4	31
Master's degree	8	17	8	17	3	9	5	38
Professional degree	2	4	2	4	0	0	2	15
Prefer not to answer/no response	3	6	3	6	2	6	1	8

* Percentages might not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding. For race, numbers can add up to more than the group sample size because respondents were asked to select all options that applied to them.

CONSIDER TRADEOFFS AND SOLUTIONS

➤ **The dialogues helped participants consider alternative approaches to U.S. presidential election voting systems, as well as to evaluate the pros and cons of potential actions and proposals.**

- A little more than half of the Let's Talk panelists who participated in the dialogues reported that the dialogue helped them better understand the issue they discussed and helped them to evaluate the pros and cons of potential changes to presidential election voting systems. Fifty-six percent (56%) of community members reported that participating in the dialogue helped them better understand the issue "quite a bit" or a "great deal" and the same percentage (56%) reported that the dialogue helped them evaluate the pros and cons of potential proposals "quite a bit" or "a great deal."

Table 7. Understanding Issues and Considering Tradeoffs

How much did today's dialogue...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
...help you better understand the issue that you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	4	17	23	31	25
Rural	8	23	23	31	15
Urban	3	14	23	31	29
...help you evaluate the pros and cons of various potential solutions to the issue that you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	4	10	29	35	21
Rural	8	8	31	38	15
Urban	3	11	29	34	23

➤ **Less than half of the participants reported at least some disagreement among the panelists, and nearly all identified at least some common ground among the participants on the topic of presidential elections and voting.**

- Twelve percent (12%) of participants reported "quite a bit" or "a great deal" of disagreement among the participants, with an additional 29% reporting "some" disagreement. When these three response categories are combined, less than half of respondents (41%) reported at least a moderate amount of disagreement among the panelists.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) reported "quite a bit" or "a great deal" of common ground; 19% reported "some" common ground among the dialogue participants. When these three response categories are combined, 96% of the participants reported at least some common ground among the participants.

Table 8. Levels of Disagreement and Common Ground

Thinking overall about today's dialogue...	None ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
...how much disagreement was there among the participants? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	12	46	29	10	2
Rural	0	54	31	15	0
Urban	17	43	29	9	3
Thinking overall about today's dialogue...	None ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
...how much common ground was there among the participants? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	4	19	58	19
Rural	0	0	31	62	8
Urban	0	6	14	57	23

EXPAND VIEWS ON AN ISSUE

➤ **The dialogues helped community members expand their views on proposals to adjust presidential elections and voting systems.**

- When asked to think about the dialogue in which they participated, 48% of community members reported that they considered perspectives or viewpoints they hadn't considered before "quite a bit" or "a great deal." About 56% thought that the other participants had considered perspectives or viewpoints they hadn't considered before "quite a bit" or "a great deal." More than one-third (35%) reported that they considered perspectives or viewpoints they hadn't considered before "some"; 29% reported they felt their fellow participants considered these "some."
- Eighty-three percent (83%) responded that they valued the input provided by the other participants "quite a bit" or "a great deal"; 39% felt that their input was valued "quite a bit" or "a great deal" by the other participants.

Table 9. Considering New Perspectives

Thinking overall about today's dialogue...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
...how much did you personally consider perspectives or viewpoints that you hadn't considered before? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	4	12	35	38	10
Rural	8	15	46	23	8
Urban	3	11	31	43	11
...how much do you think the other participants considered perspectives or viewpoints that they hadn't considered before? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	12	29	46	10
Rural	8	15	38	38	0
Urban	0	11	26	49	14
...how much did you value the input provided by the other participants? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	4	10	52	31
Rural	8	0	8	62	23
Urban	0	6	11	49	34
...how much do you think the other participants valued the input you provided? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	6	6	48	29	10
Rural	8	0	54	31	8
Urban	6	9	46	29	11

➤ **The dialogues were characterized by high levels of respect, including for those with differing views.**

- Many of the dialogue participants (75%) reported that those with differing views acted "very respectfully" toward one another. Respondents noted that participants treated those with similar views "very respectfully" (83%).

Table 10. Understanding Issues and Considering Tradeoffs

During today's dialogue...	Very disrespectfully ↓	Somewhat disrespectfully ↓	Neutral ↓	Somewhat respectfully ↓	Very respectfully ↓
...how did participants with differing views act toward one another? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	2	17	6	75
Rural	0	8	15	8	69
Urban	0	0	17	6	77
...how did participants with similar views act toward one another? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	0	10	6	83
Rural	0	0	15	8	77
Urban	0	0	9	6	86

APPRECIATE DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND DECREASE "DEMONIZATION" OF THOSE WITH DIFFERING VIEWS

> **The dialogues helped participants appreciate diverse viewpoints and develop greater comfort with and trust in fellow community members with differing views.**

- About two-thirds (67%) of the community members reported that participating in the dialogues made them value viewpoints on the issue that differ from theirs "somewhat more" or "much more" than before the dialogue.
- Sixty-eight percent (68%) reported being "somewhat more" or "much more" comfortable interacting with members of their community who hold different viewpoints from theirs than before the dialogue.
- When asked about how trusting they feel towards community members who hold viewpoints that differ from theirs, 64% reported that they were "somewhat more" or "much more" trusting than before the dialogue; 34% reported no change.
- Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the community members reported being "somewhat more" or "much more" connected to community members who hold viewpoints that differ from their own than before the dialogue.

> **Coming out of the dialogues, participants were more confident that their community can engage in civil conversations.**

- A large majority (83%) of community members reported that coming out of the dialogue, they felt "somewhat more" or "much more" confident that their community can engage in civil conversations about the issue they discussed.

Table 11. Trust, Comfort, and Connectivity as a Result of Participation

Coming out of today's dialogue...	Much less than before ↓	Somewhat less than before ↓	No change ↓	Somewhat more than before ↓	Much more than before ↓
...how much do you value viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	0	31	44	23
Rural	8	0	31	46	15
Urban	0	0	31	43	26
...how comfortable do you feel interacting with members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	2	27	35	33
Rural	8	0	23	38	31
Urban	0	3	29	34	34
...how trusting do you feel toward members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	0	34	47	17
Rural	8	0	23	54	15
Urban	0	0	38	44	18
...how connected do you feel to members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	0	42	42	15
Rural	8	0	31	54	8
Urban	0	0	46	37	17
...how confident are you that your community can engage in civil conversations about the issue you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	0	15	52	31
Rural	8	0	23	46	23
Urban	0	0	11	54	34

INCREASE ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY ISSUES AND INTEREST IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

➤ **In general, participants reported an increased interest in learning more about the issue of presidential elections and voting and an increased interest in engaging with fellow community members about the topic.**

- When considering the percentage of community members who selected "quite a bit" or "a great deal," 63% reported that participating in the dialogues made them want to learn more about the issue they discussed; talk more with fellow community members about the issue (47%); collaborate more with fellow community members (41%); and be more involved in decision-making in their community about the issue (69%).

Table 12. Interest and Engagement in Community Issues

Did participating in today's dialogue make you want to...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
...learn more about the issue you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	4	11	22	47	16
Rural	0	17	25	42	17
Urban	6	9	21	48	15
...talk more with your fellow community members about the issue you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	9	11	33	29	18
Rural	17	8	25	33	17
Urban	6	12	36	27	18
...collaborate with your fellow community members to address the issue you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	6	11	41	28	13
Rural	17	0	42	42	0
Urban	3	15	41	24	18
...be more involved with decision-making in your community about the issue you discussed? (%)					
Let's Talk Panelists	4	9	18	53	16
Rural	0	8	25	67	0
Urban	6	9	15	48	21

As shown in Table 13, in general, participants' perceptions of the group dynamics based on the survey responses were generally consistent with the observations of the moderators and note takers that were reported in the notes from each dialogue. Looking across all groups at the moderators' and note takers' perceptions of group dynamics on similar metrics as the participants, they observed generally "some" to "a little" disagreement about the topics discussed, as well as "quite a bit" to "a great deal" of common ground. They felt that participants considered viewpoints they had not previously considered "some" to "quite a bit" and valued the input of their fellow participants "quite a bit" to "a great deal." Moderators and observers consistently noted "a great deal" of respect among the participants towards one another, including those with differing views.

Table 13. Moderator and Note Taker Perceptions of Group Dynamics

		Thinking overall about today's dialogue…				
		...how much disagreement was there among the participants?				
		None	A little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
October 17, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			2		
October 22, 2024	Virtual - Zoom	1	1			
October 24, 2024	Mosinee Library - Mosinee			2		
October 28, 2024	Virtual - Zoom		2			
October 30, 2024	Center for Civic Engagement - Wausau		1	1		
October 31, 2024	Marathon County Public Library - Wausau			2		
November 4, 2024	Virtual - Zoom	1		1		
		...how much common ground was there among the participants?				
		None	A little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
October 17, 2024	Virtual - Zoom				2	
October 22, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			1	1	
October 24, 2024	Mosinee Library - Mosinee				1	1
October 28, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 30, 2024	Center for Civic Engagement - Wausau			1	1	
October 31, 2024	Marathon County Public Library - Wausau			2		
November 4, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			1	1	
		...how much did participants consider viewpoints they hadn't considered before?				
		Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
October 17, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			1	1	
October 22, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			1	1	
October 24, 2024	Mosinee Library - Mosinee				1	1
October 28, 2024	Virtual - Zoom		1		1	
October 30, 2024	Center for Civic Engagement - Wausau			2		
October 31, 2024	Marathon County Public Library - Wausau				2	
November 4, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			2		
		...how much did participants value the input provided by fellow participants?				
		Not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	A great deal
October 17, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			1	1	
October 22, 2024	Virtual - Zoom				2	
October 24, 2024	Mosinee Library - Mosinee				1	1
October 28, 2024	Virtual - Zoom				1	1
October 30, 2024	Center for Civic Engagement - Wausau			1	1	
October 31, 2024	Marathon County Public Library - Wausau				1	1
November 4, 2024	Virtual - Zoom			1	1	
		...how did participants with differing views act toward one another?				
		Very disrespectfully	Somewhat disrespectfully	Neutral	Somewhat respectfully	Very respectfully
October 17, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 22, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 24, 2024	Mosinee Library - Mosinee					2
October 28, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 30, 2024	Center for Civic Engagement - Wausau					2
October 31, 2024	Marathon County Public Library - Wausau				1	1
November 4, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
		...how did participants with similar views act toward one another?				
		Very disrespectfully	Somewhat disrespectfully	Neutral	Somewhat respectfully	Very respectfully
October 17, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 22, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 24, 2024	Mosinee Library - Mosinee					2
October 28, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2
October 30, 2024	Center for Civic Engagement - Wausau					2
October 31, 2024	Marathon County Public Library - Wausau					2
November 4, 2024	Virtual - Zoom					2

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ON THE ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE PROCESS

At the conclusion of each dialogue, in addition to administering the survey summarized above, the moderators asked participants for their feedback on the dialogue process. Since these dialogues used an alternative format, the Let's Talk staff wanted to gain additional insight into whether participants liked the use of the PowerPoint slides to frame the discussion and action items in lieu of the more detailed Issue Guide; whether they favored the reduction of action items from five to three; and their feedback on the polling process. Participant feedback on these and other process-related items was captured in the notes taken at each dialogue; a review of the notes across the dialogues was used to summarize this feedback in the bullets below. In addition, feedback was gathered from Let's Talk staff about their perspectives on the dialogue process.

> **Participants' feedback suggested that Let's Talk should continue to offer deliberative dialogue sessions in-person as well as via Zoom in order to accommodate those who prefer one format over another.**

- Several participants noted that "in-person has more magic." They feel they learn more from others and have more animated discussions when they are in person. Others noted that in-person allows participants to build off each other's comments and they feel more connected with their fellow community members when in-person.
- Those who preferred the Zoom option noted that attending virtually takes up less time for participants, which was especially appreciated with meetings at night. One person who was under the weather liked having the Zoom option, although they noted that they preferred in-person. It was noted in one group that it was more challenging to read the body language of participants over Zoom and that asking participants to remain on camera is helpful.
- Others made a specific point to recommend that Let's Talk should offer both formats. Let's Talk staff shared that they do plan to offer a combination of in-person and Zoom sessions in future dialogues.

> **There was generally positive feedback on the PowerPoint format with three action items rather than five, with some suggesting that it led to more focused and more efficient discussions. However, others suggested that the format and fewer action items resulted in less discussion and less engagement in the topic and that they did not learn as much about the topic as they did in other sessions using the traditional format.**

- In many groups, participants liked the PowerPoint format, suggesting that it was easier to follow along and to consume the information and form opinions. Those who liked the format noted it was more focused and more efficient than the previous formats, where "too many things were being addressed at the same time." One noted, "There were less words on the page [referring to the PowerPoint in comparison to the Issue Guide] and I appreciated that. I was able to get to the heart of it faster." Another noted that, "It did help us be more succinct." Some feedback suggested that having three action items instead of five helped the discussion be more focused. "[With] the other format, there are too many topics happening at the same time. It's a lot to consume and form an opinion on."
- However, in several groups, including both in-person and virtual sessions, it was noted that there was less overall discussion of the topic in comparison to other Let's Talk dialogues that participants had attended. Some suggested that the format minimized discussion. In one group, it was suggested that it was perhaps the topic and/or the action items that generated less discussion in comparison to the other Let's Talk topics that had more conversation. One participant noted that they preferred the other format because it is "more educational and informative." Another noted that they learned less from others due to the reduction in action items. For some, the reduction in the number of action items in these dialogues resulted in some key considerations being left out (such as lobbying and redistricting).
- A review of the notes indicates that the "less discussion" comment was raised in both the in-person and Zoom formats. Some of the "less discussion" may have been due to the absence of an Issue Guide. "Someone said in the very first session that, without the Issue Guide, there was just not a lot to work off of."
- Project staff may not use the PowerPoint in the future dialogues due to concerns that it does not add value, and it is more work to create. It may not be necessary to have the PowerPoint if the participants are provided with an Issue Guide.

- Project staff had generally favorable views of reducing the number of action items from five to three as a way to ensure that there is sufficient time to fully discuss all actions items. In this format, moderators were able to use the "Are there other action items?" placeholder to generate discussion beyond the three action items. However, considering how to incorporate any new action items into the polls is important.

> **While participants generally liked the alternative format, most want information in advance (the Issue Guide) so they know what they are going to talk about and so they can prepare for the discussion. There was generally consistent support for the need for an Issue Guide and that the inclusion of an Issue Guide with relevant background statistics and definitions is helpful for providing context to the discussions and helped participants be more prepared for the dialogue.**

- Several participants shared that they preferred having a handout (referring to the Issue Guide used in the traditional format) and being able to dig deeper into the issue and options. One participant shared that "the dialogue was better with Issue Guides." Others noted that the Issue Guide helped "populate ideas."
- For some, having an Issue Guide helped them be more prepared and allowed them to think about the topic in advance. One participant disliked that the materials were not as in depth and that they didn't have time to look up information. One noted, "I got the Issue Guide before and I felt more prepared because I could study it." One person expressed that they "missed the background information." Others agreed, noting that it puts them in the headspace to discuss. Some like to take the Issue Guide home. By having the Issue Guide in advance, one participant noted that they could have added new topics.
- Participants liked having the data and facts in the Issue Guide. For example, in one group there were several questions that arose around things like are we talking about Wisconsin or nationally? Are we talking what would be best or what is most achievable? What is ranked choice voting? How does the Electoral College work? These kinds of things could be addressed in an Issue Guide.
- Several participants were ambivalent about not having an Issue Guide. One noted, "It didn't make a difference if I had an Issue Guide ahead [of the discussion]. I don't remember getting them before." Another person said they don't have time to read the Issue Guide.
- Project staff also noted the importance of including an Issue Guide in future dialogues, along with a glossary and definitions. "One negative that I did not expect, which came up over and over again, was that people felt like without the Issue Guide, they weren't as well informed or educated."
- Groups need definitions in order to help combat misinformation that could creep into the discussions. This was also reinforced by one of the moderators. Some topics, like the Electoral College or ranked choice voting, were not necessarily familiar to people and it was a disservice to not have factual information available to ground the discussions. "[Moderator] she said that she really felt like we're doing a disservice to people by not providing them with facts and definitions because then it did just open it up for all these myths."
- In several of the groups, there was a participant who happened to be a poll worker; these individuals were able to offer their perspectives and help clarify voting process issues for their group members. In this manner, participants are able to "debunk myths" themselves without the moderators having to do it. This is consistent with the intended process. "There are just so many myths surrounding voting and voting security that it was hard to come at it. And maybe if we had done the second page of the Issue Guide, [which] is always the statistics, that might have helped a lot."

> **Participants had generally positive views of the introduction of the polling into the dialogue format, suggesting that the use of the polls added to the dialogue experience in a positive way and helped direct the conversation.**

- Participants in several groups noted that the polls offer an opportunity for participants to convey their opinion on a specific topic even if they did not speak up during the discussion. In other words, voting allowed them to engage even when they might not have been able to do so verbally during the discussion.
- In one of the smaller groups, it was noted polling would be more comfortable with more people in attendance. With only four participants, it was easier to identify who voted for which action item, eliminating anonymity.

- One participant shared that they liked seeing the results at the end of each poll, although another felt there was a disadvantage of not seeing how others voted in comparison to hand-raising.
- A few comments suggested that some participants had some discomfort with using the polling from a technology standpoint. For example, one participant in an in-person session stated they did not mind the new format, but having a more user-friendly format for voting would be helpful.
- Project staff also had positive views of the polling technology and identified opportunities to improve how the polls are incorporated into the dialogues. They noted that participants "loved the polling" and were generally very comfortable using it. "A couple of people said, you know, I'm not always comfortable speaking up in a group, but this way my voice could be heard."
- The polls were administered at the beginning of the discussion of each approach so the results represent a snapshot of views prior to the discussion of each approach. The moderators were able to use the results of the poll in guiding the discussion. For example, by discussing the action item that received the most votes first. One consideration would be administer the poll at the end of the discussion of each approach or conduct a pre- and post- poll to see if views changed. For future consideration, it would be helpful to be able to modify the polling technology on the fly in order to be able to introduce new action items to the poll. This was a limitation of the polling used in the elections' dialogues.
- Having the poll at the end forces participants to consider all of the action items relative to each other was useful for getting a big-picture view.
- With a smaller group, there is a concern about the lack of anonymity of the poll results.
- Having iPads available for participants to use in-person for polling was essential, as some did not have phones.
- Incorporating the polling for any individual(s) who may be visually impaired is an important process consideration.
- Having a technical support person on-hand was also essential. Sometimes there were glitches with the polling in terms of what was displayed at the initial log-in in terms of which specific poll would appear. Having the tech person was important for making sure that the group was at the correct starting point. "For instance, when they log in before the dialogue even begins, they're not supposed to be seeing anything. Or they're just supposed to be seeing, 'wait for the poll to begin'. Sometimes [the poll] had the first question up there already. Sometimes [it] had the third question. I still don't exactly understand why that kept happening."
- The technology increases the staffing resources needed at each session, as well as equipment needs. "The technology piece has its own set of challenges… we needed a whole extra person there just to manage the technology, whether it was on Zoom or whether it was in person. When it was in person, we needed to have a screen and a projector, which we'll continue to do, because we need that for the polling."
- Managing the two applications for the polling technology also created challenges. Zoom has the polling built into the application, whereas the in-person groups required a separate "Poll Everywhere" application. These also added steps to compiling the polling results after the dialogues. It was also not clear how percentage distributions were being calculated based on the polling results, leading to the need for staff to do some manual calculations. The team will try a different polling application in the future and will create a tracking spreadsheet to capture poll results more systematically across groups.
- The use of the polling may have made the hand-off between co-moderators a bit more challenging in terms of sharing the note taking responsibilities while also managing the PowerPoint.

PANELISTS' INSIGHTS ON U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

PARTICIPANTS' CONCERNS ABOUT ELECTIONS

In this section we summarize the data from the live polls taken during the dialogue discussions. While we report the poll results for each individual dialogue, for the purposes of summarizing the data, we combined the results across all dialogues. At the beginning of the dialogue discussion, participants were asked to select from a set of options which statement concerned them the most about U.S. presidential elections. The purpose of this question was to get people thinking about the topic and to gauge the areas of highest concern. As shown in Table 14 below, when the poll results across all dialogues were combined, the most frequently selected option was, "Too many Americans don't bother to vote and take democracy for granted." About one in four dialogue participants selected this option.

Interestingly, a similar percentage selected "Something else," suggesting that participants had other pressing concerns beyond those that were provided in the poll. Unfortunately, the poll did not provide the option to provide more detail about the nature of these other concerns. Adding in the option to type in an open-ended response is something to consider if polls are used in the future. About 17 percent of dialogue participants chose, "There are too many efforts to suppress the vote in minority communities" and "Too often we end up with candidates that are extreme." Relatively few participants (n = 4 or 9%) indicated that "There seems to be too much voter fraud" as the statement that concerned them the most. Three (3) participants (or 7%) selected "Sometimes it is difficult and inconvenient for me to vote."

Table 14. U.S. Presidential Election Dialogues - Participants' Concerns About Elections

Which statement concerns you the most?	10/17/2024 Zoom	10/22/2024 Zoom	10/24/2024 Mosinee Library	10/28/2024 Zoom	10/30/2024 UW Center for Civic Engagement	10/31/2024 Marathon County Library	11/4/2024 Zoom	Total	Percent (%)
Number of Dialogue Participants	7	4	7	5	9	11	5	48	
Too many Americans don't bother to vote and take democracy for granted	2	2	1	0	1	6	0	12	26%
Something else	1	1	2	0	2	1	4	11	24%
There are too many efforts to suppress the vote in minority communities	1	0	2	1	3	1	0	8	17%
Too often we end up with candidates that are extreme	1	0	1	3	1	2	0	8	17%
There seems to be too much voter fraud	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4	9%
Sometimes it is difficult and inconvenient for me to vote	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	7%
Total Responses*	7	4	6	4	9	11	5	46	100%

* The total responses to a given poll may not equal the total number of participants in a given dialogue if an individual chose not to vote.

FAVORED ACTION ITEMS BY APPROACH

Dialogue participants discussed three different approaches to U.S. presidential elections; within each approach, there were three action items. When the moderators introduced each approach, participants were provided with a live poll listing the specific action items associated with each approach. They were asked to identify which action item from the list they favored most. Table 15 summarizes the results of the three polls. When discussing Approach 1 – Make It Easier to Vote, a majority of participants (n = 30 or 63%) favored "Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day." For Approach 2 – Protect Against Cheating, a majority of participants (n = 31 or 67%) favored the idea of "Requiring a photo ID (like when traveling by air." The most frequently favored option for Approach 3 – Change the System was "Eliminate the Electoral College" (n = 18 or 38%).

Note that when there was an action item that was already in place in Wisconsin, such as a photo ID being required to vote or early voting, panelists were asked to consider if they thought such policies should not only be kept in Wisconsin, but also be put in place (or not) nationwide. Groups were largely in favor of keeping both of those action items in Wisconsin and also extending them to the rest of the country.

Table 15. U.S. Presidential Election Dialogues Poll Results by Approach

Which action item do you favor the most?	10/17/2024 Zoom	10/22/2024 Zoom	10/24/2024 Mosinee Library	10/28/2024 Zoom	10/30/2024 UW Center for Civic Engagement	10/31/2024 Marathon County Library	11/4/2024 Zoom	Total	Percent (%)
Number of Dialogue Participants	7	4	7	5	9	11	5	48	
APPROACH 1 - MAKE IT EASIER TO VOTE (Count of Responses to Poll Question 1)									
Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day	3	2	6	4	6	8	1	30	63%
Make Election Day a national holiday	3	1	0	0	1	1	1	7	15%
Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters	1	1	0	0	1	1	3	7	15%
None of these	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	4	8%
Total Responses to Poll 1*	7	4	7	5	9	11	5	48	100%
APPROACH 2 - PROTECT AGAINST CHEATING (Count of Responses to Poll Question 2)									
Require photo ID (like when traveling by air)	3	3	4	4	6	9	2	31	67%
Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	6	13%
None of these	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	6	13%
Only allow mail-in ballots with a valid excuse	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	7%
Total Responses to Poll 2*	7	3	6	5	9	11	5	46	100%
APPROACH 3 - CHANGE THE SYSTEM (Count of Responses to Poll Question 3)									
Eliminate the Electoral College and rely on the popular vote instead	4	1	2	3	2	4	2	18	38%
Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries for either party	3	1	2	1	3	3	2	15	32%
Allow ranked-choice voting	0	1	1	0	2	3	0	7	15%
None of these	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	7	15%
Total Responses to Poll 3*	7	4	6	5	9	11	5	47	100%

* The total responses to a given poll may not equal the total number of participants in a given dialogue if an individual chose not to vote.

After discussing all the approaches and associated action items individually, at the end of the dialogues, participants had the opportunity to consider all of the action items together. There were two final polls that allowed participants to vote on the one or two action items that they favored the most and the least. These results are summarized in Table 16.
The most favored action items when all action items were combined in the poll, accounting for more than 50% of all responses, were:

- Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day (n = 26 or 28%)
- Require a photo ID (like when traveling by air) (n = 25 or 27%)

The least favored action items when all action items were combined in the poll were:
- Only allow mail-in ballots only with a valid excuse (n = 24 or 27%)
- Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years (n = 17 or 19%)
- Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters (n = 17 or 19%)

Table 16. U.S. Presidential Election Dialogues Poll Results When All Proposals Are Combined

Which action one or two items do you favor <u>most</u>? (multiple options allowed)	10/17/2024* Zoom	10/22/2024 Zoom	10/24/2024 Mosinee Library	10/28/2024 Zoom	10/30/2024 UW Center for Civic Engagement	10/31/2024 Marathon County Public	11/4/2024 Zoom	Total	Percent (%)
Number of Dialogue Participants	7	4	7	5	9	11	5	48	
Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day	2	2	3	5	5	7	2	26	28%
Require photo ID (like when traveling by air)	3	2	2	3	6	8	1	25	27%
Eliminate the Electoral College and rely on the popular vote instead	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	11	12%
Make Election Day a national holiday	4	1	0	0	1	2	0	8	9%
Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries for either party	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	6	7%
Allow ranked-choice voting	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	5	5%
Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	5	5%
Only allow mail-in ballots with a valid excuse	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	3%
Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3	3%
Total Responses	13	8	11	10	18	22	10	92	100%
Which action one or two items do you favor <u>least</u>? (multiple options allowed)	10/17/2024 Zoom	10/22/2024 Zoom	10/24/2024 Mosinee Library	10/28/2024 Zoom	10/30/2024 UW Center for Civic Engagement	10/31/2024 Marathon County Library	11/4/2024 Zoom	Total	Percent (%)
Only allow mail-in ballots with a valid excuse	3	2	5	2	2	6	4	24	27%
Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years	3	2	0	3	2	3	4	17	19%
Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters	4	1	2	2	1	6	1	17	19%
Make Election Day a national holiday	0	0	5	1	2	2	1	11	12%
Eliminate the Electoral College and rely on the popular vote instead	2	1	0	1	1	5	0	10	11%
Require photo ID (like when traveling by air)	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6	7%
Allow ranked-choice voting	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	4	4%
Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries for either party	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total Responses	12	7	12	10	16	22	10	89	100%
*Note: Due to an error, "Allow ranked-choice voting" was not listed as an option to this poll question. "Nonpartisan commission draws congressional districts" was listed.									
** Participants could choose 1 or 2 responses to these questions.									

As summarized in the notes for each dialogue, the results of the polls were consistent with the moderator and note taker's observations about the overall level of support for or opposition to the specific action items. Across groups there was a consistent theme related to the need to remove roadblocks to voting and for making voting easier and more convenient, including for those with special needs. There was emphasis on support for in-person early voting, including the need to have consistent early election hours across the state, as well as for requiring a photo ID to vote.

There was less support for sending mail-in ballots to all registered voters due to concerns about the costs of this action item and potential for fraud. The moderators and note takers also observed mostly strong opposition or mixed views to allowing mail-in ballots only with a valid excuse or for removing people from voter rolls if they have not voted in the past five years. While participants agreed on the need to clean up voter registration lists, such as removing deceased people from voter rolls, some thought that removing people after only five years could be too soon.

Table 17. Dialogue Participants' Views about Proposals to Address U.S. Presidential Elections (Based on Notetaker and Observer Characterizations)

Issue Approach and Action Items	Let's Talk Deliberative Dialogues						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	10/17/2024	10/22/2024	10/24/2024	10/28/2024	10/30/2024	10/31/2024	11/4/2024
APPROACH 1: MAKE IT EASIER TO VOTE							
Offer in-person early voting for extended hours for 2 weeks before election	Support	Mixed	Support	Support*	Support	Support*	Support
Make Election Day a national holiday	Support	Mixed	Mixed	Oppose*	Mixed	Mixed	Support
Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters	Oppose	Mixed	Oppose	Oppose*	Mixed*	Mixed	Mixed
APPROACH 2: PROTECT AGAINST CHEATING							
Require photo ID (like when traveling by air)	Support	Support	Support	Support*	Support	Support	Support*
Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years		Oppose	*	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Oppose*
Only allow mail-in ballots with a valid excuse	*	Oppose	Oppose	Oppose	Oppose	Mixed*	Oppose
APPROACH 3: CHANGE THE SYSTEM							
Eliminate the Electoral College and rely on the popular vote instead	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed*
Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries for either party		Support*	Support*	Support*		*	*
Allow ranked-choice voting		Mixed	Mixed	Oppose*	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed*

If a cell is blank, the notes indicated that the proposal was not discussed by the group or was only raised by one person without affirmation for or against by other participants.

*The notetaker and observer had different assessments of the perceived level of agreement; the analyst reviewed their notes and made a characterization based on the documentation of the discussion.

Another area of consistent common ground was the need for more public education on the importance of voting and civic engagement and for more education about how to vote and about elections. Participants across multiple groups felt their vote is important and that Americans should "cherish the right to vote." Some groups expressed frustration that every state has different voting regulations.

A NOTE ABOUT METHODS

In addition to demonstrating how deliberative dialogues can be used to foster civil discussion and communication among community residents, we can also use the content of the dialogues to identify community members' views. Much like a focus group, it is important to remember that deliberative dialogues are not intended to yield results or insights that are generalizable to a larger population (in this case, the population of Marathon County as a whole). Rather, they can help better understand the reasons underlying individuals' perspectives or the range of perspectives on a given topic, and provide insights about how a situation is perceived and experienced. The information shared in this report *only* reflects the insights, feedback, and experiences of the individuals who participated in each dialogue.

Given the nature of the topics discussed and differences in individuals' experiences, there may be different voices and multiple views that need to be presented. Our goal is to accurately represent the range of views expressed by the participants. For each individual dialogue, multiple sets of notes were taken by a notetaker and at least one observer (in many cases there were two observers). All notes for a given dialogue were shared with a member of the WIPPS Research Partners team whose responsibility was to combine and synthesize the notes for the purpose of creating Table 17.

For readability, convenience, and to improve the flow of the narrative, throughout the report we sometimes use terminology such as "Participants reported…," or "Participants noted…" These are all shorthand references to the individuals who participated in the dialogues and should not be interpreted as reflective of, or generalized to, all county residents. At the same time, these perspectives can yield powerful insights that are valuable to understanding a broad and diverse group of individuals' views on the topics discussed.

> **Do you think it was valuable to engage in this dialogue with other members of your community? Please explain.[12]**

- Absolutely. It is always a way to view and work toward a solution.
- Always.
- Everybody so congenial and willing to learn.
- Extremely valuable! I work with the Democratic Party of Wisconsin and I really enjoyed hearing everyone's opinions and viewpoints regarding this year's election.
- Great session!
- I am a voting official, and was able to shed some insight on certain subject matters.
- I love this as I get to talk and discuss issues with people I normally would not get to interact with.
- It is representative of America. We all have a right to speak.
- It was nice hearing different points of view.
- It's always good to hear other people's opinions.
- Not a ton of value because it felt very unactionable.
- Not really, I think the premise was flawed and based on a false narrative Several participants were misinformed and talked constantly.
- Others live in this community. Others have thoughts and info that all can use. If I am uninformed or anyone else is uninformed, you need to informed. Things change but truth needs to be heard.
- This is important to talk about.
- Thoughtful people with differing ideas are stimulating.
- Very much so.
- We learn thru dialogue.
- Yea, it's good to see everyone be respectful with their opinions. I think talk is cheap though. Whatever anyone wants to do, they need to be out there on the ballot.
- Yes.
- Yes, it is very valuable to hear everyone's perspective and bring discussion that you hadn't thought of.
- Yes, it was beneficial to have this and it was reassuring to me to hear fellow community members express their valuing our right to vote and to want to protect it while encouraging others and working towards reducing barriers in the voting process.
- Yes, it's nice to see how other people feel about these issues.
- Yes, to be able to learn more about the different aspects of voting. And what's the most and least important to the American people.
- Yes! These conversations have been motivating and empowering.
- Yes! We need these civil conversations monthly. It teaches us to have respectful dialogue! Practice makes "perfect!"
- Yes, because the age gaps make a difference in opinions.
- Yes, but I wish others would participate more, I have a lot of thoughts, viewpoints and opinions and it seems I always tend to dominate the conversation, but I don't mean to, it's just that other people don't talk. Sorry. But maybe my expressing myself also gets others to talk too.
- Yes, but it is a hard subject and some don't seem comfortable in sharing.
- Yes, but some of this doesn't I think exploration of the issues (entered manually).
- Yes, explore other POV, gain insights you have missed.
- Yes, I believe it helped me see different perspectives that I wouldn't otherwise consider.
- Yes, I learned from this experience and I always find it interesting to consider things I hadn't before.

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[12] The open-ended responses in this appendix were not edited.

- Yes, I think is always good to hear others options and experiences. It helps you consider other points of view.
- Yes, I think the right to vote is a privilege. I think this election season is more challenging than any other election I've seen and today's session was very civil and I didn't feel any negativity towards either of the two presidential candidates.
- Yes, it was good to hear view-points from varying age groups and nationalities in this group. Everyone had something of value to share and weren't afraid to ask questions.
- Yes, opened the lines of communication.
- Yes, very.
- Yes, very interesting perspectives.
- Yes, you do get ideas from others, like voter site. Also learned about ranked voting.
- Yes. Engagement in dialogue, regardless of position, is important.
- Yes. Very important but contentious topic.

> **Is there anything else you would like to share with us about today's session? Please explain.**
- Education is the Key, civics needs to be a subject in Highschool.
- Enjoyed. Pleasure to be in a CIVIL discussion. But I suspect there was some homogeneity among the group.
- Everything went very smoothly and I enjoyed having the opportunity to participate.
- Glad I was included.
- Great dialogue.
- I always get a lot out of these sessions, but I do prefer in person. The Zoom worked ok but it's nice to be more face to face with people. Thank you for allowing me to participate in this!
- I am a contemplative person, and I miss having issues to think about ahead of time.
- I appreciate the in-person session over zoom.
- I enjoyed the conversation that we had today. The meeting flowed a lot better this time.
- I liked having Lidea (Guatemalan lady) in group. She brought in lessons learned from other countries. She also was quite educated in our system.
- I love meeting all these new people and get their ideas - makes me more understanding!!
- I love these lets have more!
- I really liked the Zoom format and doing it on the computer. It was pretty easy and fun doing it this way
- I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to participate in these events. Thank you.
- I think a slightly bigger group would help with getting more viewpoints.
- I wish I would have been educated more about the Electoral College vote that was discussed beforehand.
- It would be nice if we could be allowed to see a final report after all the focus groups are done. A percentage of all the polls and a write-up or summary of what majority agreed or disagreed on.
- It would have been great to talk about ballot boxes, I suspect that would have been a strong area of contention. I also would have liked to have seen more stats/data/info explaining voter suppression in minority communities, or speaking to voter fraud. The previous discussions that explained more context in the packets I did feel to be helpful in understanding the larger issues more in depth even though the online content was helpful to see the polling and keep the conversation going.
- Let's keep talking!
- Liked the Issue Guide better.
- No.
- Not legible???
- Thank you (3).
- Thank you for this opportunity. I hope we can meet in a year with the people that discussed the issues and get an update on the results compiled.

- The topic could have had more depth to it, including subjects that ultimately affect our election process (lobbying, jerrymandering, etc.).
- The use of interactive polling is a great way to interact with virtual participants.
- Very good moderation of discussion by the team leading this session.
- Voting in the polls is good.
- well organized, good subject, good experience.
- When a topic is suggested, how about an email question for the person attending of what main thing they may want to discuss. Thank you.
- Zoom should be no cameras if you wish.

Welcome to a National Issues Forum

The Purpose of an NIF Forum
To weigh different approaches for addressing a problem and exchange views with others on what should be done
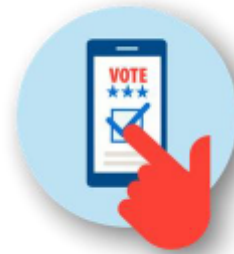
2024

Today's Forum

1 Introduction

We'll agree to some guidelines.

2 Share our concerns

We'll focus *on voting and the US election system—the kind of system we want to have*. We'll share our experiences and listen to others. We'll look to the future and consider a range of practical changes.

3 Consider each approach

We'll weigh *three different* approaches to fixing our voting system, along with some specific proposals for each. These aren't the only ideas, but they are a starting point.

4 Review and reflect

We'll look at:
- Advantages, risks, costs, & trade-offs
- Possible unintended consequences
- Priorities—we can't do everything
- Areas of common ground & remaining concerns

Forum Guidelines

Consider all the approaches fairly.

Listening is just as important as speaking.

No one or two individuals should dominate.

Maintain an open, respectful atmosphere.

Everyone is encouraged to participate.

Refrain from interrupting.

Anything else?

What is the PROBLEM?

Possible Concerns about the Current System

1. Sometimes it's difficult and inconvenient for me to vote
2. There are too many efforts to suppress the vote in minority communities
3. Too many Americans don't bother to vote and take democracy for granted
4. There seems to be too much voter fraud
5. Too often we end up with candidates who are too extreme
6. Something else?

APPROACH 1:
Make It Easier to Vote

Let's make sure all Americans get a chance to vote by keeping polls open longer and mailing paper ballots to all registered voters.

But could these changes make it easier for people to cheat?

APPROACH 2:
Protect Against Cheating

Let's prevent cheating by requiring photo IDs, limiting mail-in paper ballots, and cleaning up voting rolls to remove those who may have died or moved away.

But could these changes make it more difficult to vote?

APPROACH 3:
Change the System

Let's create a system that gives us better elections and candidates by opening primaries to Independents, ending the Electoral College, and having nonpartisan commissions draw Congressional districts.

But could redesigning the election system have unintended consequences?

And . . . it's unlikely everyone will agree. Few of us are likely to get all the changes we want.

So, what is your top priority?

APPROACH 1

Make it easier to vote

Voting is one of the most important ways we improve our country, and it should be simple and convenient. But if you work long hours or live far from a polling place or face long lines or miss the registration date, you don't have a fair chance. Given our country's low turnouts and history of voter suppression, our priority should be to make voting accessible to all.
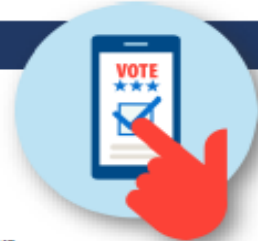
PROPOSALS	POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS
Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day.	This is a huge cost for local governments, and people often wait until the last minute anyway.
Make Election Day a national holiday, as some other countries do.	This will hurt small businesses and won't help essential workers such as nurses and firefighters.
Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters. Some states already do this regularly.	This means blanketing the state with paper ballots and makes it easier for people to steal or misuse them.

Other proposals?

But how easy should it be? Is it truly unfair to ask people to make the time to go to vote?

Polling Question No. 1: Make It Easier to Vote

Questions will appear on the participants' computer
or cellphone screens formatted for responding

1. Which proposal do you favor most?

1. Offer in-person early voting for extended hours and for two weeks before Election Day
2. Make Election Day a national holiday
3. Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters
4. NONE OF THESE

APPROACH 2

Protect against cheating

Voting should represent the will of the people, and we should make changes to guarantee the accuracy and security of our elections. We have too many out-of-date registration lists and poorly monitored voting practices. The system is just too lax. Our priority should be to ensure that all votes are cast legitimately and counted correctly. Making it harder to cheat will give everyone confidence.
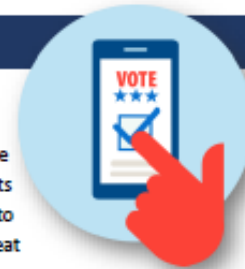
PROPOSALS	POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS
Require photo ID for voting, like we do to get on a plane. It's more reliable than matching signatures.	This makes voting difficult for people who don't drive or have another photo ID.
Only allow mail-in ballots for people who present a valid excuse, such as travel or illness.	Mail-in voting is much easier for those who work long hours or care for others. Limiting this option could reduce voter participation.
Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years. This helps eliminate the names of people who have died or moved.	Americans have the right to sit out elections. This causes problems for people when they do want to vote.

Other proposals?

But we have a history of voter suppression and still see instances of people waiting hours in lines to vote. Shouldn't states be required to make voting easier for everyone?

Polling Question No. 2: Protect Against Cheating

Questions will appear on the participants' computer
or cellphone screens formatted for responding

2. Which proposal do you favor most?

1. Require photo ID for voting, like we do to get on a plane
2. Only allow mail-in ballots for people with a valid excuse, such as travel or illness
3. Remove people from voter rolls if they haven't voted in the past five years
4. NONE OF THESE

APPROACH 3

Change the system

The problem is more fundamental—the current system seems engineered to limit voters' choices. Politicians can draw Congressional districts to favor their own party. In some states, primaries aren't open to Independent voters. And presidential candidates can win the popular vote but lose the election because of the Electoral College. These changes should be the priority.
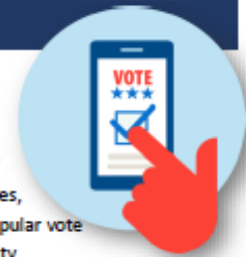
PROPOSALS	POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS
Allow ranked-choice voting, where voters rank all candidates from most-favored to least-favored.	This could be confusing to voters and would require a significant voter education effort.
Eliminate the Electoral College and rely on the popular vote instead.	This requires changing the Constitution and gives voters in rural areas less say in the outcome. Candidates may ignore their concerns.
Let registered Independents participate in primaries for either party. This will give us more moderate candidates.	This damages the two-party system and will lead to a lot of candidates who try to please everyone.

Other proposals?

But the US has benefited from a strong two-party system, and countries with many political parties are often unstable and ungovernable. Is it so smart to move away from our current approach?

Polling Question No. 3: Change the System

Questions will appear on the participants' computer
or cellphone screens formatted for responding

3. Which proposal do you favor most?
   1. Allow ranked-choice voting
   2. Eliminate the Electoral College and rely on the popular vote instead
   3. Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries for either party
   4. NONE OF THESE

Here's what we talked about...

- In-person early voting

- A national holiday

- Send mail-in ballots to all voters

- Require photo ID

- Mail-in ballots only with a valid excuse

- Remove names of those who haven't voted for five years

- Allow ranked-choice voting

- Eliminate the Electoral College

- Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries

Which 1 or 2 proposals do you most FAVOR?

Which 1 or 2 proposals do you most OPPOSE?

Polling Question No. 4: Most Favored Proposals

Questions will appear on the participants' computer
or cellphone screens formatted for responding

4. Which one or two proposals do you most FAVOR? (multiple answers allowed)
- In-person early voting
- A national holiday
- Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters
- Require photo ID
- Only allow mail-in ballots for a valid excuse
- Remove if haven't voted in past five years
- Allow ranked-choice voting
- Eliminate the Electoral College
- Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries

Polling Question No. 5: Most Opposed Proposals

Questions will appear on the participants' computer
or cellphone screens formatted for responding

5. Which one or two proposals do you most OPPOSE? (multiple answers allowed)
- In-person early voting
- A national holiday
- Send mail-in ballots to all registered voters
- Require photo ID
- Only allow mail-in ballots for a valid excuse
- Remove if haven't voted in past five years
- Allow ranked-choice voting
- Eliminate the Electoral College
- Allow registered Independents to vote in primaries

Areas of Common Ground

Where did we have common ground? Where were there areas of tension?

Thank you for participating!

After the session, please feel free to keep or remove the Zoom application from your phone. If you need help with deleting it, please let us know.

For more information about National Issues Forums, please visit www.nifi.org

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