The Independent Fulcrum Caucus: What Voters Think

Findings from AllSides Roundtables on Congress and the Independent Fulcrum Caucus

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This report summarizes themes, areas of disagreement, and common ground across dozens of participants during the Roundtable on the Independent Fulcrum Caucus, convened by AllSides in September 2026 and held in an online deliberative dialogue format.

The findings presented in this report are synthesized from observed participant discussions, and views expressed do not necessarily reflect positions held by AllSides.

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Executive Summary

AllSides conducted a National Roundtable in September 2026 exploring how Americans view Congress and whether a small caucus of Independents — an Independent Fulcrum Caucus — could change how it works. The roundtable brought together participants across political lines for structured, self-moderated small-group conversations.

AllSides convened 18 small-group conversations — encompassing 72 participants — and asked them to react to the Fulcrum Caucus idea. Participants reacted to the concept, imagined its effects, described what it would take for them to vote for an Independent, and considered how elected Independents could stay independent. Rooms were deliberately composed to mismatch participants across political lines, and an integrated conversation guide allowed participants to deliberate without a moderator.

A few themes emerged from the conversations. While participants liked the idea, they also identified challenges and necessary conditions before they could get behind it.

First, **The Fulcrum Caucus concept had a lot of hope.** In a Congress this evenly split, a handful of seats that neither party controls becomes the handful of seats that decides everything, including who the Speaker is. Several people said the idea felt attainable. The hopeful case was that Independent leverage would make the parties negotiate, keep coalitions steadier, and let someone block votes taken for purely partisan reasons. When asked what Independents should do first, people reached for process and institutions: change House rules so the Speaker doesn't run everything, pass ethics and anti-corruption measures, tackle campaign finance, affordability, and the budget, and try to find consensus on important — especially divisive — issues.

Second, **when asked to imagine Independents actually holding the balance of power, there were some persistent concerns.** The biggest question was what would hold these candidates together once they're elected. Leverage only works if the group sticks together, and independent thinkers by definition may not. A Green and a Libertarian don't share an agenda. And even five or ten Independents may have to pick a side to organize a chamber. Furthermore, a few remembered earlier centrist efforts that fell apart under pressure from party leadership, and worried that people change once they're in office.

Other structural barriers beyond unity were considered, including ballot access concerns, signature requirements for Congress that run far higher than for local office, and a push in some states to make local elections partisan.

How to keep independents independent was a question posed in the conversation, and many participants went straight to campaign finance. Many argued that, once elected, members do what they can to raise more funds and win re-election. People also asked what would keep them independent when party leaders control committee assignments and the district is pressuring them, and some people said the major issue is gerrymandering, not party balance.

Overturning Citizens United by amendment or statute and passing anti-corruption laws were steps most often named. Term limits were also named — and defended strongly by some — but received no broad consensus.

Finally, **they had some definite conditions the caucus must meet to gain their support.** *They wanted to know who the candidates would be and what they would stand for and they wanted some reason to think those candidates could win.* People wanted at least some basic criteria for who they'd be asked to support. Once elected, the caucus would need a way to hold together without becoming another party. Others pushed back on the idea that the caucus should be ideologically centrist at all; what mattered to them was a willingness to work across the aisle on things most Americans already agree on.

Viability came up more than anything else as the condition for voting Independent. People do not want to throw away their vote, so many said they'd need to see a real chance of winning, with the Independent running close to even with or ahead of a major-party candidate, before they'd abandon a “lesser-of-two-evils” vote. Ranked choice voting was commonly regarded as needed to remove the spoiler effect, so that a vote for an Independent no longer risks electing the candidate the voter least wants.

The conversations suggest that the Independent Fulcrum Caucus is persuasive to people who already believe Congress is broken, and that what persuades them is the detailed description of a closely divided chamber in which a few members could make a big difference.

The roundtable was convened by AllSides in partnership with Independent Vo!ce and Renew American Democracy (RAD), for whom this report was prepared.

Roundtable Overview

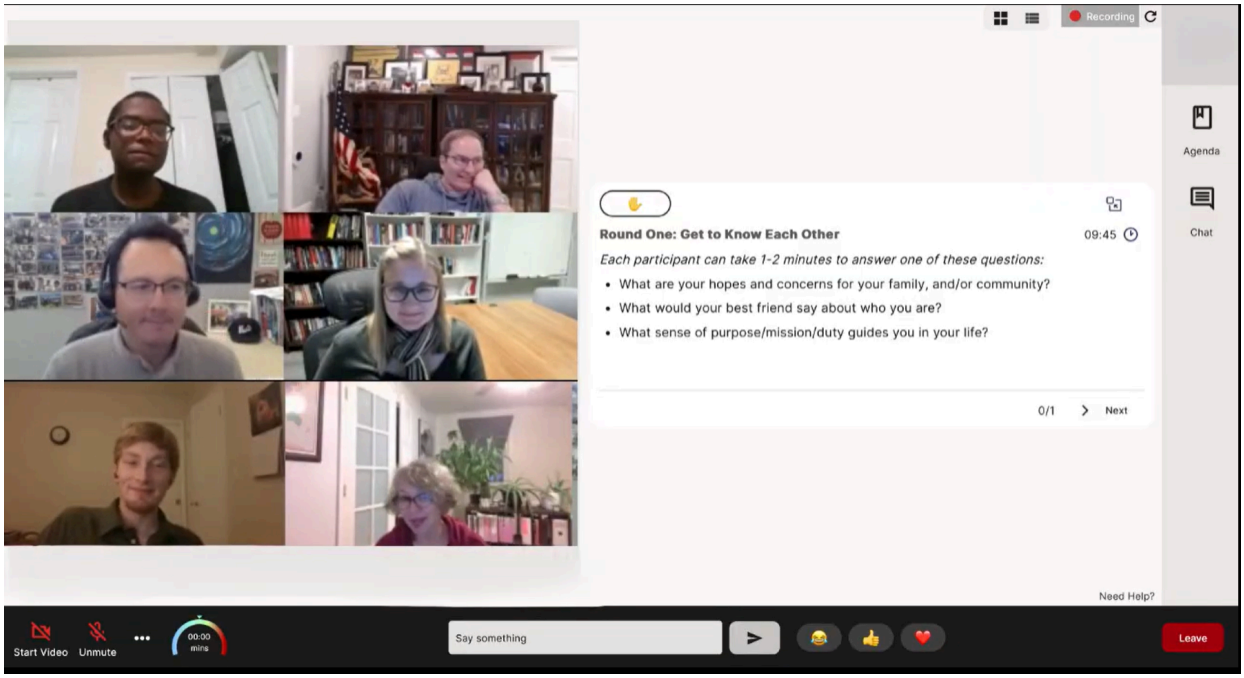
From September 14–18, 2026, AllSides hosted the National Roundtable on the Independent Fulcrum Caucus, a series of online small-group conversations organized around a single question: *could a handful of Independents make Congress work again?* Partners for the Roundtable included organizations from across the independent movement, veteran-led, democracy-reform, dialogue-and-bridging, and media-and-research communities.



The Independent Fulcrum Caucus (IFC) is a proposal advanced by Independent Vo!ce and allied organizations. As its proponents describe it, the IFC would be a small bloc of independent members of Congress who, rather than caucusing with Democrats or Republicans, organize with one another around a shared governing agenda. In a closely divided House or Senate, that bloc would hold the seats neither party could pass legislation without — the "fulcrum."

The roundtable was framed as a multipartisan deliberative conversation about a structural idea, not an endorsement of any candidate or any cause. Registration was open to everyone.

This research and analysis was conducted by AllSides using AllSides Roundtables and its internal team of research and AI experts. AllSides Roundtables are virtual events hosted on AllSides' custom live video dialogue and research platform. The events enable organizations to host self-moderated, simultaneous, balanced small group discussions with very large numbers of participants on a topic of their choice.



The roundtable process began when participants selected a session time and were directed to roundtables.allsides.com. When on the platform, participants were prompted to answer a pre-event survey, followed by a form that asked about their political bias, voting history, gender, age, race, geographic location, and more. The answers to these questions were used to automatically "mismatch" breakout rooms during the event, so that participants were matched with those whose answers differed from theirs.

AllSides Roundtables facilitated effective deliberation using a combination of technologies, including Frankly and a tailored conversation guide. The conversation guide was critical to establish the listening and deliberative experience essential to effective group discussions, and was modeled after guides developed by Living Room Conversations.

Following the Roundtables, the AllSides research team employed human-led, AI-supported thematic analysis of the conversations and statistical evaluation of the pre-and post survey results to identify common themes, points of agreement and disagreement, and how participants' views evolved during the Roundtables.

This report first discusses the data and methods used, provides detailed insights from the analysis of participant conversations, and then examines quantitative findings, with an emphasis on how participant views may have evolved throughout conversations.

Data & Methods

This study treated large-scale structured deliberative groups not only as an intervention that builds better listening and mutual understanding across differences, but also as a measurement tool. AllSides' Roundtable research used a mixed-methods design to examine how Americans understand, explain, and respond to issues facing society. The study combined qualitative dialogue analysis to extract findings from discussions with quantitative pre- and post-event surveys.

These combined methods enabled comparative analysis across discussion groups and across different demographics to identify where changes were more or less pronounced.

Deliberative Group Research Method

Deliberative groups, through AllSides Roundtables, offer a different methodological approach than traditional surveys and focus groups. Rather than providing isolated responses or moderator-led discussion, deliberative groups are designed to observe how participants respond and refine their views through interactions with people they disagree with.

The comparison below illustrates the approaches of each research method and how they differ.

	Survey	Focus Group	Roundtables
Easily host thousands of participants	✓	✗	✓
Participants can discuss with one another	✗	✓	✓
Geographically diverse sample	✓	✗	✓
Reveals participants' independent thoughts and views beyond testers' preconceptions	✗	✓	✓+
Detailed insights into why someone has a particular response	✗	✓	✓
Captures body language and non-verbal cues	✗	✓	✓
No skilled moderators required	✓	✗	✓

Human-Led Analysis Augmented with AI

The Roundtable discussions produce an immense amount of data about participants' views, how they interact, and how they evolve. AllSides human researchers lead the analysis of that data, including the development of themes and insights that emerge from both surveys and participant conversations. However, given the amount of data, AllSides researchers employ a set of tailored AI tools to help assess the data.

AllSides' ethos is to use artificial intelligence responsibly, transparently, and intentionally as a means to supplement or augment human understanding and agency, not to replace it. AllSides acknowledges public skepticism toward AI, including its scale, incentives, and reliability. Combined with ethical, environmental, and misuse concerns, these dynamics underscore why AllSides does not treat AI as an authority but as an analytical tool grounded in the data and reviewed by people.

The generative model runs on a provider's infrastructure, and its energy use is not measured by AllSides.

There are two main bias concerns when using AI to study deliberative groups: (1) AI generating false information, and (2) misrepresenting or underrepresenting perspectives. Generative AI can mimic human expression and perform tasks that once required specialized skills, but its overconfidence, its tendency to agree with whoever is prompting it, and its statistical distortion of outputs mean it carries inherent biases. AllSides built its analysis platform, RAAP (Roundtables as a Platform), to address both concerns with several key steps.

First, artificial intelligence analyzes roundtable discussions after they occur. The process combines traditional AI, established machine-learning technology with predictable and repeatable outcomes, and generative AI, which is trained to produce new text from patterns learned across massive amounts of data. AllSides employs predictable machine-learning design rules by running a predictable method first and the generative model only where a simpler method cannot settle the question.

Second, every finding is grounded in a verifiable utterance, which prevents hallucination. The result is that wherever the platform measures something (who spoke how much, whether a discussion deepened, whether views shifted), the number is computed from data, not narrated by a model. When a model does write, it writes from a structure computed beforehand and must cite the exact utterance behind every claim.

Finally, to avoid representational bias, AllSides researchers mechanically enforce representation across rooms and speakers at several points in the pipeline rather than reported after the fact, which prevents representation bias.



Throughout the pipeline, the system never force-includes irrelevant content, never manufactures a perspective that was not expressed, and never lets a majority room's views overwrite the record of a minority one. **What this methodology strives for is a philosophy of transparency and democratic representation of all perspectives and beliefs, rather than allowing artificial systems to decide which perspectives are important and which are not**. The pipeline is described stage by stage in Appendix B.

Methodological Limitations

AllSides' rigorous human-led, AI enabled process does have some boundaries:

- Transcription and speaker separation are automatic and can err, particularly with crosstalk.
- Labels such as stance, argument type, and justification level are produced by a language model against a written rubric; no inter-rater reliability study against human coders has been conducted.
- Generation is not bit-reproducible, so two runs can word the same finding differently.
- Redaction and name replacement are strong but not perfect, which is why utterances containing redactions are never quoted.
- Forced per-room retrieval is a ceiling on dominance, not a guarantee of equal representation.
- Quality scores are relative to the other questions in the same event and are not comparable across events.

Scope & Limitations of the Study

The topic shaped who showed up — the event was advertised to people who were largely already interested in pushing for an Independent in Congress. As such, the sample of participants is most informative about that group.

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting all findings and results:

- Participation was voluntary, meaning the sample is entirely self-selective, and likely more politically engaged and open to deliberative dialogue.
- Findings describe the views expressed in conversation, not their prevalence in any population. Counts and percentages in this report refer to participants in this study only.
- These results may not be generalizable to other groups or the general population of American voters.

A demographic breakdown of participants is in Appendix A.

Detailed Findings

This section describes the perspectives and opinions expressed by participants during the event. While the group demonstrated a great deal of agreement about Congressional dysfunction and enthusiasm for an independent movement, participants identified a number of significant challenges realizing it. All perspectives are grounded by citations of real spoken utterances by real people.

The findings largely reflect questions asked in the Conversation Guide during each session. Appendix D contains the exact questions asked of participants.

How Congress is [Not] Working For People Right Now

Participants were asked to offer a single word describing how Congress is working for them right now, along with a brief explanation. The question drew immediate and largely uniform negative responses, with a notable minority voice calling for structural replacement of the two-party system entirely.

The dominant sentiment across nearly all other participants was a blunt assessment that Congress is simply not functioning. Words chosen included "ineffective," "broken," "ossified," "detached," "embarrassing," “dysfunctional,” "selfish," among many others. One participant summarized the prevailing mood: "I would say ineffectual. And why that word? I think it's self-explanatory." [1] Another put it in structural terms: "Congress is totally polarized — so polarized it’s incapable of action on anything significant." [2]

Several participants chose the word "not" or a close variant as their single descriptor. A young man offered a terse assessment: "One word that describes Congress' work? It's not." [3]

Others pointed to the feeling of not being represented, landing on the word “unrepresentative.” A man who used the word described congressional communications as "performative" — noting that outreach to members of Congress yielded only "canned thank you for contacting me" responses. [4]

One participant offered a more ambivalent assessment, describing Congress as "bipolar," acknowledging that "it does process a lot of necessary legislation fine. But it has way too many performers." [5]

The opening question functioned as a rapid temperature-check that quickly revealed near-universal dissatisfaction, with participants spending little time debating whether Congress was failing and more time competing to find the most precise word for its failure. The one substantive tension that emerged was between participants who viewed the problem as one of performance — polarization, performativity, corporate capture — and some argued the

problem was structural and that the two-party system itself was constitutionally illegitimate and required replacement by an organized Independent Party.

One individual's invocation of the 14th Amendment as a basis for challenging the major parties' "political privilege" [6] and another on the need for a "viable candidate … that has a viable platform" [7] kept this structural argument alive even as most participants remained focused on describing Congress's day-to-day dysfunction.

The question of what "independent" means — whether it denotes a formal party membership or simply unaffiliated voters — was raised by one person. They argued that "the media and the political parties are confusing" distinguishing between a capital-I Independent Party member and a lowercase-i unaffiliated voter.[8] That distinction remained unresolved across the discussions.

Some Called the Two-Party System Vulnerable

According to participants in one group, the existing arrangement between Republicans and Democrats is fundamentally broken, [9] and the margins of power are so thin that introducing independent voices could shift the balance without requiring massive organizational infrastructure. [10] One participant noted that "there's just less infrastructure and overhead" needed to make a difference, and that even modest shifts in party balance could bypass the entrenched "party politics and corporate interests" that currently dominate U.S. politics. With approximately two-thirds of Americans identifying as independent, there may be substantial popular support for a third way that mirrors the constitutional system of checks and balances already embedded in the three branches of government. [11]

Perceptions of the Independent Fulcrum Caucus

The Independent Fulcrum Caucus concept drew a genuine mix of hope and skepticism from participants, with enthusiasm for the underlying vision consistently tempered by serious doubts about real-world viability.

The mathematical logic of a small independent bloc holding balance-of-power seats resonated widely. One person articulated that getting five independent candidates elected to congress would prevent either party from having a majority. The parties are forced to cooperate with the independents to get anything across the finish line, making that small group the most powerful one in Congress. [12] Another made a similar case, arguing that "if that small number of seats were won by people who were of an independent frame of mind...they could change the whole way Congress operates. Because those seats would control the passage of anything, including appointing the Speaker of the House." [13]

Several participants pointed to evidence that cross-party cooperation and independent candidacies are not purely theoretical. One noted that a group of roughly ten centrist congressmen, split between parties and more centrist in orientation, "were able to bring that thing around and make some compromises, and [a] bill got passed" on infrastructure. [14] One participant pointed to local nonpartisan governance: "In Wisconsin we elect our local representatives. They're all non-partisan. And so I know that on my City Council, there are Democrats, Republicans and independents that are all working together. And you know what? My garbage gets picked up. I've got clean water when I turn on the tap." [15] Another argued there were "more than enough" competitive races "to form a caucus" and "create a mediating force and deny either party [a] majority." [16]

The framing of independents as free from party money and corporate influence also drew support. One person argued that independents would not be "involved with the money" and could help pass legislation that "gets killed because the corporations don't want it," suggesting they could "bring it over the line" where partisan gridlock blocks popular measures. [17] Another identified financing as central, stating "I really think money has a lot to do with it, unfortunately, we're a capitalist society." [18]

Several participants found the concept itself encouraging. One called the idea "genius" and argued that "self belief in the cause is an extremely powerful thing. So I think it's actually extremely attainable," identifying the main challenge as "convincing people that it's possible." [19] One stated "I felt really hopeful" and "I think that could work. I don't think it's unrealistic at all." [20] And another described the concept as "a good starting place for change." [21]

Yet the central question — how to actually elect enough independents — remained largely unanswered. One person acknowledged that while having a true independent bloc would be "terrifically powerful," the core problem was: "how do you get 18 of them?" [22]

One participant interpreted the major parties' recent attacks on independents as a sign of strength for the movement. [23] They noted that the parties used to ignore independents but now actively marginalize them, which the participant saw as evidence that independent voices are gaining real traction. [24]

Doubts About Cohesion and Viability

A central concern was what would actually unify independent candidates. One participant posed the question: "Who are these people that we want to get elected to create this caucus and once elected, what is their position going to be?" [25] One acknowledged the idea "gives us hope" but questioned whether "a handful of people...will be people who agree with each other...in a way that they somehow are this solid group that they'll actually be able to counter the forces of the parties." [26] One argued that "the big assumption behind all this is… we're assuming they're going to focus back on the people's work and not have their own culture

war," adding "until we figure out how to elect people who do that, I don't think anything can change." [27] And another expressed hope that organizers could "come up with some parameters for the people we support, even if they're very basic" to feel confident about supporting them. [28]

Another person offered a measured long-term view, conceding that "it's a movement that's going to sputter a little bit as it gets started, but I think if more independents get elected that's going to put pressure on because both parties then are going to need to negotiate with those independents in order to get the votes to pass legislation." [29] One participant suggested that for the concept to survive, members would need to "actively work to make sure that a group like this can continue in the future" and focus on "getting some policy wins that allow for more independence." [30] [31]

Effect of Independents Holding the Balance of Power

Whether a small group of Independents holding the balance of power in Congress would improve or worsen legislative functioning drew a wide range of views. Some expressed cautious optimism about forced bipartisan negotiation while others expressed deep skepticism about structural constraints, political incentives, and the difficulty of maintaining genuine independence. The debates focused in two key areas: what independents' priorities should be and the possibilities and challenges exercising leverage.

First Priorities in Congress

Participants' initial priorities focused on procedural reforms, ethics rules,and building bipartisan consensus in areas like affordability. Someone stated "the first thing I'd like to see [them] do is change the rules of the House… so that the Speaker of the House no longer runs the whole show." [32] One proposed that "They should implement some form of rank choice voting. They can select the speaker that way." [33]

Anti-corruption measures were treated as foundational rather than supplementary — one participant stated that "the very first thing I want to see them do is pass anti corruption laws," [34] and another called for anti-corruption laws "with teeth" to hold Congress and the Supreme Court accountable. [35]

One participant hoped they could "reach a consensus" with the two major parties "on some key issues" like immigration and healthcare, which "seem to be polarizing this country." [36] Others focused on affordability as a concrete area where Independents could deliver results. [37] [38] A participant captured the underlying demand simply: "we want solutions, we don't want allegiance to parties if that's interfering with an honest compromise or a solution." [39]

Exercising Leverage Once in Office

Those who saw promise in Independent leverage argued it would break existing gridlock by compelling dialogue across party lines. One person argued that if roughly one-third of Congress were Independent, "a lot of stuff would be passed better" and that "coalitions and alliances would be better maintained" with "a bit more of a stable environment." [40] Someone argued that Independents could "stop the insanity" by "blocking the votes of when Republicans or Democrats are doing the wrong thing" in their view, framing the problem not as partisan people but as partisan behavior. [41] Another suggested that if "independents and 3rd party electors are able to caucus with each other and strategize," it "could be really powerful and kind of force the two parties to" respond differently, though he acknowledged this remains theoretical since "it hasn't happened before." [42]

Skeptics raised concerns about the mechanics of Independent power. One individual cautioned that leverage — if they hold the balance of power — depends entirely on cohesion: "If they don't [stick together], one [member] leans Republican or one member leans Democrat." [43] These concerns about whether Independents could actually coalesce were persistent. One participant identified a core tension: "My concern is that the fulcrum is made-up of independent thinkers. And they may not agree with each other." [44]

In fact, there was some skepticism that independents would align in their view. One participant raised a practical question about what "independent" actually means, asking "what if you have someone who's green? Someone who's libertarian? Someone who's just kind of independent" and noting that they might "have very different agendas." [45] Also, one cautioned against treating independents as a unified bloc, noting that "Caucus means we're all going to agree to go together," and worried this framing might undermine the very flexibility that makes independents appealing. [46]

Balancing their responsibility to constituents and an independent agenda was another issue. A man raised a practical accountability concern: independents would face pressure to "turn their backs on their legislative district" that elected them, making it "tough for me to understand" how they could maintain both independence and accountability to constituents. [47] Another pointed to a mathematical reality: even with five to ten independent senators, "those independents have got to pick a side" to establish majority control, limiting their leverage. [48]

Participants also pointed to systemic challenges for independents. One participant made a striking claim: "there are people who get into it for noble reasons and who are pretty decent humans," but that "when they get in and they're in this system… either you adhere to the system or you're out." [49] Another participant cautioned that independents would not "fix the core problem, which to me is rooted more [in] district redistricting and gerrymandering," suggesting electoral reform was necessary alongside any shift in party balance. [50] Someone argued that independent power in Congress would work better only if those representatives

commit to serving all Americans rather than narrow party or constituent interests. [51] The real test, they suggested, is whether independents can be transparent about what they'll actually do with power. As they explained, voters need to know that elected officials will act as public servants and vote according to what matters for the country. [52]

What Would it Take to Vote for an Independent this Year?

Participants were asked what it would take for them to vote for an independent candidate in the 2026 midterm elections — which, at the time of the conversations, were less than two months away.

To maybe no surprise, viability stood out as the single most repeated threshold for voting Independent. One individual described the spoiler problem directly: "if you vote for the independent, maybe the person who gets elected is the person you absolutely don't want to get elected because the vote is split," though they suggested "ranked choice voting" could ease that concern. [53] Ranked choice voting was raised among several participants.

As one person put it: "if they were viable … then I would vote for him," but added that if an Independent could only reach 10% of the vote, "it's lesser of two evils, I got to pick the one that's going to do the least amount of damage." [54] Someone else set a comparable bar, saying a candidate "would have to be beating out one of the two major party candidates" before earning serious consideration. [55] Another similarly said voting Independent would require "some kind of likelihood that they could actually win." [56]

Perceived Structural Barriers

Structural barriers compounded these viability concerns, beginning with ballot access. A participant noted that "each state" has implemented "election laws that kind of make it very hard for another party to become a party or for an independent," with ballot access varying significantly by state. [57] Another detailed the mechanics: while 125 signatures suffice for local office, Congress requires 1,000 in the state of Virginia, and described ongoing efforts to make local elections partisan to further restrict independent candidates. [58] One participant noted that in Florida ballot access for Independents is effectively "impossible," [59] and another added that candidates "have to get too many signatures." [60]

One participant worried that without structural reforms to level the playing field, it would be difficult for many independents to succeed. [61] They noted that the best chances come when one of the major parties steps back, and they flagged a deeper concern about whether candidates calling themselves independent would truly remain independent once in office.

One participant notes that working on the rules of elections themselves is more important than individual candidate choices, because systemic reform would naturally produce more viable Independent candidates once they reach office. [62]

Finally, some noted that achieving the structural changes needed requires finding allies "who believe more in democracy than they believe in their party" or their own political survival. [63] Some argued this mirrors historical precedent. Men had to vote to grant women the right to vote and large numbers of white members of Congress had to vote for the Civil Rights Act. Today, current party members must champion electoral reforms like removing partisan labels from local races—reforms that may diminish their own party's power. [63]

What Participants Want in a Candidate

On candidate qualities, participants converged on pragmatism, authenticity, and platform alignment. Several participants focused on authenticity and integrity. One man said, "the way they operate, the integrity that they operate with, would be the core reason I would vote for them." [64] Someone else echoed this, stressing that assessment would focus on "who they are," "whether they have integrity," and "what do they actually stand for," concluding that "it's probably less about the moment and much more about the candidate." [65]

Groups also coalesced around pragmatic problem solving. Another participant described his own vetting process: "I now study candidates, all serious candidates from all parties. And I reject all who I see as partisans … virtue signaling." He wanted candidates who are "pragmatic" and "problem solvers" willing to "work with anyone if it's needed to solve the problems," and added that "Independent is not to me the defining characteristic." [66] He pointed to someone "already a member of Problem Solver Caucus" who "already helped to pass some bipartisan legislation" as the kind of representative he sought. Another similarly cited the Problem Solvers Caucus, suggesting that "if there were an independent Fulcrum Caucus, might very well be able to support that group in working in a bipartisan way." [67]

Platform alignment and concrete policy answers mattered as much as character. One participant explained that decisions depend on "what their platform is and how closely I aligned to it," acknowledging that "no one ever has a platform that I completely agree with." [68] A woman explained she would vote Independent "if I believe" in their views and "if they had [a] reasonable platform." [69]

How Should Independents Stay Independent?

Structural questions about how Independents would actually function in Congress generated considerable concern. One person suggested independent candidates "would have to first, be accountable to one another" and "be a counterbalance to the two parties," though he acknowledged uncertainty about "who else would hold them accountable." [70] [71] Another

cautioned that "someone is independent doesn't mean that they're going to do a good and thoughtful job," warning against letting party affiliation alone determine votes. [72]

Keeping a Fulcrum Caucus genuinely independent once elected requires layered accountability — electoral, structural, financial, and constituent-facing — and participants were candid about how easily that independence can erode. The core tension, as one participant put it, is how independents could organize without losing their independence. [73] This group identified written commitments, transparency requirements, recall mechanisms, campaign finance reforms, and structural rule changes as potential answers.

Electoral Changes to Improve Accountability

On the issues of campaign finance, participants converged around the conclusion that "there's no way to talk about this without talking about money."[74] One speaker framed the core challenge as "figuring out the problem of how campaigns, elections, everything is funded." [75] Another observed that elected representatives' first concern is typically "what [are] donors going to think?" making campaign finance reform essential. [76] One participant warned that "as soon as they're elected" politicians "automatically tow whatever line in order to stay elected and get reelected," calling for getting "dark money out." [77] Many advocated for "a constitutional amendment to overturn the Citizens United ruling," [78], and one participant noted that "Congress does have the power to pass a law that overrides Citizens United." [79]

Skepticism about whether independents could actually deliver reform also surfaced, with one participant questioning whether they could "get a majority on both other parties to go along" to pass legislation like campaign finance reform. [80]

Term limits drew significant debate with multiple points of view. A woman argued they "would certainly, I think, improve accountability. Or at least help remove the incentive to be focused only on [their] next reelection." [81] A man proposed changing House terms to three years with a two-term limit, creating "a total of 6 years" and "more accountability at the electoral level." [82] [83] Another woman offered a related counterpoint, noting that shorter term limits might make elected officials "more influenced by outside people" rather than less. [84] Finally, another noted that "there's a lot to be said with institutional knowledge" when considering term limits. [85]

Independent Fulcrum Caucus Rules and Accountability

On internal caucus rules and peer accountability, one participant proposed that independents "create their own independent caucus" with "their own rules" where "they keep each other accountable and honest," and "if somebody goes off the reservation, they kick them out." [86] Internal discipline was also proposed more bluntly: "They're censored if they don't. If you don't

hold to your promises, you are censured." [87] Another proposed tracking voting records through "a report card." [88]

A woman pointed to the recent No Labels effort as a cautionary tale, arguing that "what ends up happening with those groups is that… ultimately some of the members will peel off when leadership says 'Nope, you have to vote this way.'" [89] Someone else acknowledged that while commitment to constitutional principles was promising, there was concern that "once people get elected, they change." [90]

Someone argued that Independents must "commit to not caucusing with either party because otherwise you are essentially just giving over your power to that party." [91] Someone else expressed uncertainty about how Independents could "secure seats on committees" without such caucusing commitments. [92] Another detailed how party leadership controls committee assignments and can punish members who do not raise money for the party, potentially sidelining an Independent from committees important to their constituents. [93]

A tension emerged between cohesion and authenticity. One participant worried that the Independent Fulcrum Caucus "might not operate consistently as a caucus" and that "individual members peeling off left or right for particular issues" could cause it to "lose its brand as a fulcrum caucus." [94] Yet someone else questioned whether independents should "always have to vote as a block, as a caucus," expressing concern that doing so would make them "look like their own party" rather than truly independent actors. [95] One person raised a fundamental challenge underlying both concerns: "Can we agree on what is the right thing on every issue? That's the hardest part." [96]

The risk of the caucus itself becoming a new faction was a recurring concern. The question of who certifies independence drew skepticism: one participant asked "how do you decide who decides that they're certified 'corruption free?'" [97] One participant asked the foundational question directly: "who's going to be the check to their power?" [98]

Quantitative Results

Alongside the recorded dialogue, participants answered a short survey before and after their session. The surveys asked questions about openness to disagreement, respect for opposing views, and confidence in one's ability to make a difference. The post-survey added questions about the Independent Fulcrum Caucus itself and about the experience of the event.

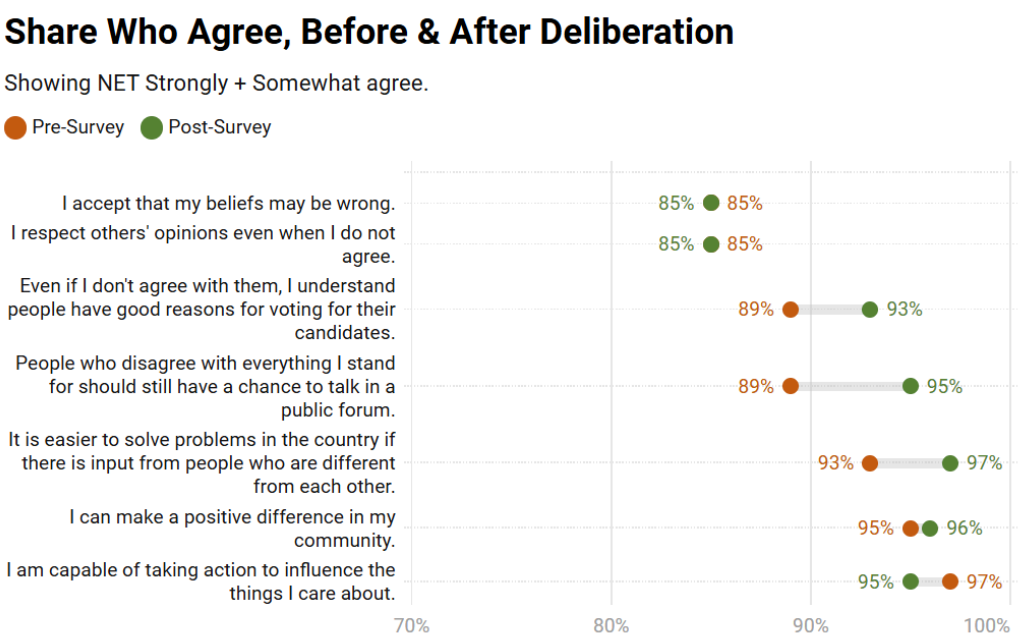
One caveat could apply: if participants without a matched post-survey differ systematically from those who completed it, the paired results would describe a narrower population than the one that entered the rooms. Those who completed surveys did not differ significantly from those who did not in political bias, 2024 vote, age, education, or region. Participants who declined to state their gender or race were less likely to complete the post-survey, however, suggesting those less inclined to complete surveys in the first place were more likely to churn. All percentages below are calculated on the matched participants so that pre- and post-survey data describe the same people.

Statistical significance was assessed using McNemar’s exact test on the NET Agree measure. In other words, it indicates if people shifted in their agreement with a statement. Because many items had very high baseline agreement among those saying “Strongly agree” and “Somewhat agree,” the same test was also run on "Strongly agree" alone to check whether participants moved within those two options.

Views Were Stable Across the Deliberation

None of seven pre/post statements shifted significantly among participants. Given the sample was mostly from participants recruited through Renew American Democracy’s partnership organizations, this was expected. Nearly two in three (62%) participants said they heard of the idea of an Independent Fulcrum Caucus before their conversation took place.

Where movement occurred, it was almost entirely within the agree range and in the expected direction. The share strongly agreeing that they "understand people have good reasons for voting for their candidates" rose from 54% to 62%; strong agreement that "I respect others' opinions even when I do not agree" rose from 47% to 54%; and strong agreement that "I can make a positive difference in my community" rose from 65% to 72%. **None of these reached significance, and each should be read as a directional evidence rather than a result.**



Share of matched respondents who agreed with each statement before and after their session (n=74). There were no statistical significant shifts at p<0.05

Taken together, the pre/post results describe a group whose openness to disagreement and sense of civic efficacy were high going in and remained high. The conversations did not measurably change those attitudes, and given the high baseline — known as the “ceiling effect,” it makes it less likely that the conversations would.

Views on the Independent Fulcrum Caucus

The post-survey asked three questions about the idea of the Independent Fulcrum Caucus itself. About nine in ten (92%) said an Independent Fulcrum Caucus would be very (72%) or somewhat (20%) valuable for the country, and about the same share (89%) said they would be very (77%) or somewhat (12%) likely to consider voting for a credible Independent for Congress. Just two participants said the Caucus would be not very valuable; one said they were not very likely to vote Independent.

Asked whether the conversation changed how they think about the idea, participants split evenly between "more favorable" (46%) and "no change" (45%). Two participants (3%) came away less favorable, and 7% were unsure. The same was true for those who haven’t heard of the Independent Fulcrum Caucus before — among the 28 participants who had not heard of it before, half came away more favorable, and none were less favorable.

Question Distributions

Post-Survey Question	Very	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all	Unsure	NET Very + Somewhat
How valuable do you think an Independent Fulcrum Caucus would be for the country?	72%	20%	1%	0%	8%	92%
How likely would you be to consider voting for a credible Independent for Congress?	77%	12%	1%	0%	9%	89%

Participant Experience

Four questions were asked only after the session about the experience of the Roundtable itself.

Nearly all participants (95%) felt they could express their opinions and concerns freely and safely, and 93% said they would be interested in attending more events like this. Most found the format productive and said the conversation guide helped them understand perspectives different from their own, at 88% and 78% respectively.

Post-Survey Statement	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure	NET Agree	NET Disagree
I felt I could express my opinions and concerns freely and safely in this conversation	91%	4%	1%	1%	3%	**95%**	**3%**
I would be interested in attending more events like this	78%	15%	4%	0%	3%	**93%**	**4%**
I found this format to be productive	65%	23%	9%	0%	3%	**88%**	**9%**
The conversation guide helped me understand perspectives different from my own	59%	19%	15%	0%	7%	**78%**	**15%**

Conclusions and Recommendations

Participants genuinely saw the value of the Independent Fulcrum Caucus but also identified significant obstacles and concerns. They saw the Caucus as a possible solution to the problems they believe have made Congress completely dysfunctional. In this view, a small group of independent congress members could hold the balance of power in Congressional votes, limit the influence of corporate and party money, and seemed viable. Members were also optimistic that legislators who joined this movement would likely support widely popular measures, such as anti-corruption laws, and help deliver consensus on divisive issues like immigration, healthcare and affordability. However, the groups also identified significant challenges, including whether a group of independents would be unified on key issues because they could come from widely divergent orientations. Participants also raised concerns about structural constraints, political incentives and the challenge of maintaining independence.

The participants identified ideas to address some of the challenges, such as ensuring Independent Fulcrum Caucus legislators put national interests above personal or regional interests. However, it is not clear if the broader population would support their legislator subsuming local interests for national ones.

Moving forward these questions suggest two potential next steps. First, testing ideas with members outside the community may help refine their concepts, strategies, and tactics. The lack of significant movement in the post-Roundtable survey suggests that the community has stable views. They now need to see how a broader swath of the public responds to their mission. Do they share similar views about the fundamental causes of governmental dysfunction? Can outsiders bring new views on the value, opportunities, and challenges of an Independent Fulcrum Caucus? That would also allow them to explore common ground with existing solutions, such as the Problem Solver Caucus.

That outreach can help the group develop an operational plan for the Independent Fulcrum Caucus, including a viable platform, and agenda, which leads to the second step: mobilization. The group needs to develop and execute an outreach plan to convince people to get involved.

Getting Involved

The following section was provided by Independent Vo!ce, a partner organization for this roundtable. It reflects their perspective and calls to action, not those of AllSides. AllSides does not endorse any candidate, caucus, or organization.

Thank you for taking part in — or reading about — the National Roundtable on the Independent Fulcrum Caucus. This report is a beginning, not an ending. An Independent Fulcrum Caucus in the 120th Congress will only become real if people who care about fixing the system stay connected, informed, and engaged. Here are two concrete ways to keep going.

1. Join Independent Vo!ce

Independent Vo!ce is helping to build the movement of independent voters and candidates, and is a partner in the campaign to form an Independent Fulcrum Caucus in the Senate and House.

- **Learn more and get connected:** independent-voice.com
- **Become a member:** Join Independent Vo!ce as a member

2. Join Renew American Democracy and the Renew to Thrive Community

Renew American Democracy (RAD) is working with partners across the movement of movements to renew our democracy and build an economy where all Americans can flourish — starting with a Congress that answers to the people rather than to two-party gridlock.

- **Read the plan and get involved:** renewoursystem.com/the-plan
- **Join the Renew to Thrive Community:** Sign up for our mailing list to receive updates, forum invitations, resources, and opportunities to engage with the Renew to Thrive community.

Appendix A: Perspective Inclusion by Room

Participants were recruited through Renew American Democracy's partnership organizations.

Perspectives in this study were heard at the room level, so this appendix shows how many of the 18 breakout rooms included at least one participant from each group, with participant counts for reference.

Category	Answer	Number of Rooms Represented in *(of 18)*	Number of participants
Political bias	Left	14	24
Political bias	Center	15	24
Political bias	Right	7	10
Political bias	Other	14	8
Political bias	Prefer not to say	7	6
2024 vote	Kamala Harris	18	36
2024 vote	Donald Trump	5	6
2024 vote	Third party	12	12
2024 vote	Did not vote or prefer not to say	15	18
Gender	Male	18	43
Gender	Female	16	25
Gender	Other or prefer not to say	8	4
Age	Younger than 20	1	1
Age	20s	4	4
Age	30s	7	7
Age	40s	6	7
Age	50s	8	14
Age	60s	16	22
Age	70s and older	12	17
Race	White	18	61
Race	Prefer not to say	9	6

Category	Answer	Number of Rooms Represented in *(of 18)*	Number of participants
Race	African American or black	3	3
Race	Mixed or other	2	2
Education	High school or GED	1	1
Education	Some college, no degree	2	2
Education	Associate's degree	4	2
Education	Bachelor’s degree	11	17
Education	Post-graduate degree	15	41
Education	No answer	7	9
Area type	Suburban	16	40
Area type	Rural	14	11
Area type	Urban	13	17
Area type	Other	7	4

Appendix B: Methodology

B.1 Data Gathering

This research project was run on AllSides Roundtables, a custom live video dialogue and research platform.

AllSides hosts self-moderated, simultaneous, balanced small group discussions guided by an integrated conversation guide carefully designed to drive more natural, authentic conversations where people listen more deeply and deliberate freely.

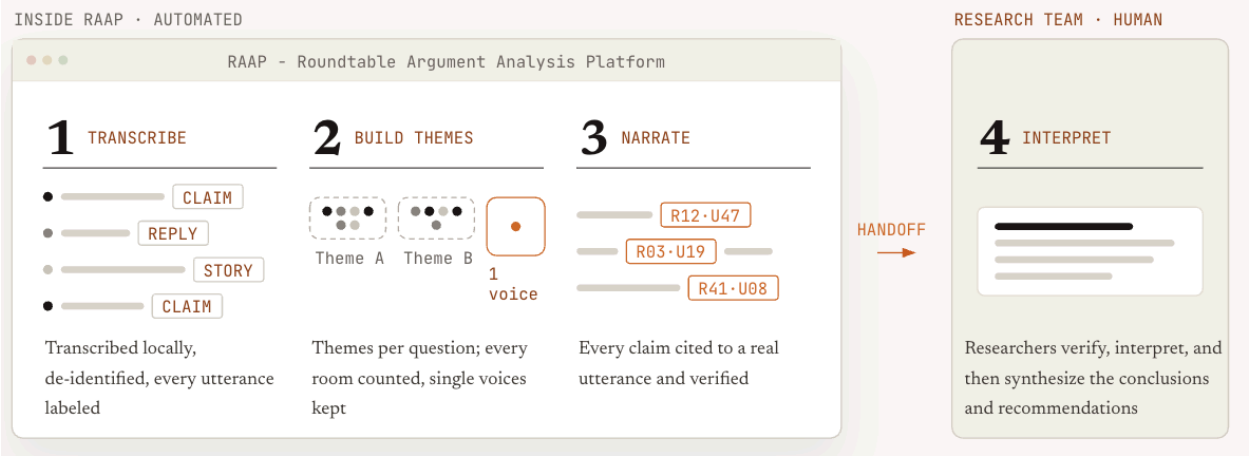
Participants for these “deliberative groups” are all volunteers, recruited by AllSides and a variety of other organizations and public announcements in order to attract a sufficiently large and diverse pool.

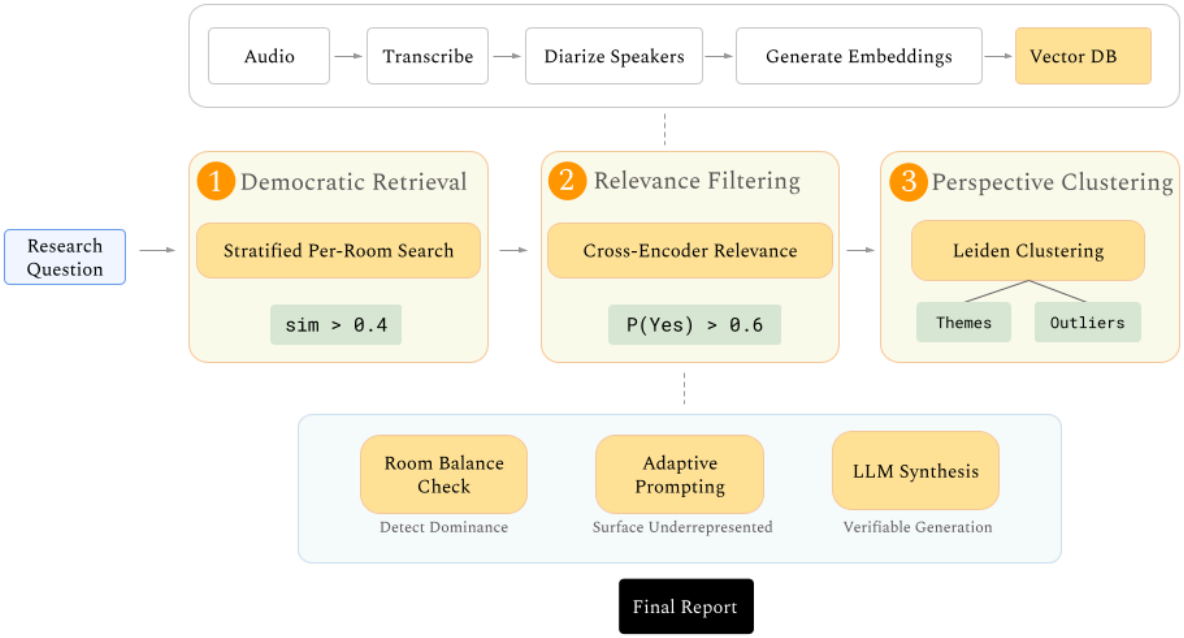
Participants are “mismatched” into diverse groups providing different perspectives and revelations. AllSides then anonymizes and analyzes each conversation.

Steps for this :

1. **Pick a time, RSVP**
   Participants selected a session time and completed a form about political bias, voting history, gender, age, race, geographic location, and more.
2. **Mismatch**
   Answers used to automatically “mismatch” breakout rooms, seating participants with those who answered opposite to them.
3. **Survey**
   After registering, participants answered the pre-event survey, then joined their room. They also answered a post-event survey to measure change.
4. **Deliberative discussion**
   Participants took turns answering questions that help them listen and appreciate one another before back-and-forth deliberation.

B.2 Analysis Pipeline in Detail





B2.1 From Recording to Structured Evidence

Events arrive directly in RAAP as transcripts exported from the Agora meeting platform. Each unit of speech, called an utterance, carries its speaker seat, room, session, and timestamps, and this metadata is what makes balanced representation possible later.

Transcripts are cleaned of stutters and filler words by rules, with the original wording preserved so any quote can be traced to what was actually said. Backchannels ("mm-hmm") and facilitator talk are identified and excluded from every downstream analysis, so they can never



become a theme, inflate a participation count, or be cited as evidence. A long turn that makes several distinct moves is split into separate argument units that keep the speaker's own words. Each utterance is then converted into an embedding, a list of 2,000 numbers that captures meaning rather than vocabulary, so that "security" and "peace of mind" sit close together even though they share no words. Embeddings are computed by an open-source model on AllSides' server and stored in its own database.

RAAP then departs from ordinary thematic analysis by reconstructing the shape of each conversation before summarizing any of it. A language model annotates each substantive utterance with intent, sentiment, civility, stance, the type of argument being made (from Walton's catalogue of argumentation schemes, including fallacies), the evidence offered, and three fields taken directly from the Discourse Quality Index used in deliberation research: how well a position was justified, whether counterarguments were engaged or dismissed, and perspective taking. Outputs are validated against fixed vocabularies, and a malformed value is set to unknown rather than guessed. Guide questions are located by finding the anchor points that best match the guide subject to the rule that guide order must equal time order, so every utterance is filed under the question actually being discussed even when facilitators circle back. Finally, the platform classifies how nearby utterances relate to each other (answer, elaboration, agreement, contrast, correction, and so on, from Segmented Discourse Representation Theory) and builds a graph of each room's conversation. From that graph come measures that do not depend on anyone's judgment of content: how deep exchanges went, how evenly participation was shared, whether people who disagreed later moved, and whether counterarguments were engaged rather than ignored.

B2.2 Pipeline Stages

Each room is processed through the following stages in order. "Local" means it runs on AllSides' server; "hosted model" means a redacted, de-identified text call to Anthropic's Claude.

Stage	What it does	How
Audio extraction	Video to mono 16 kHz WAV, picture discarded	FFmpeg, local
Transcription	Speech to text	faster-whisper large-v3-turbo, local GPU
Speaker separation	Who spoke when; largest-overlap assignment; fragments under 0.2 s dropped, same-speaker gaps under 1.5 s	pyannote.audio 3.1, local GPU

Stage	What it does	How
	merged, flips under 1 s smoothed	
Transcript ingest	For Agora exports: parse cues, merge same-speaker cues, read survey legends	Rules, local
Persist utterances	Store utterances; replace names with seat labels (R{room}·S{speaker}, with a session prefix for multi-session events)	Rules, local
PII redaction	Redact persons, phones, emails, locations, SSNs, card numbers; original kept separately and encrypted; redacted utterances never quoted	Presidio + spaCy transformer, local
Smart cleaning	Remove stutters, false starts, fillers; type each utterance (substantive, responsive, backchannel, facilitation, fragment)	Rules, then hosted model for ambiguous short utterances
Classification, pass 1	Intent, sentiment, tone, emotional intensity, civility, personal attack, is-argument, is-substantive	Hosted model (Claude Haiku 4.5)
Classification, pass 2	On arguments only: stance, Walton scheme (20 values), claim strength, evidence type and quality, deliberative move (18 values), DQI justification level 0-3, counterargument engagement, perspective taking	Hosted model (Claude Haiku 4.5)
Embedding	2,000-dimension meaning vector per utterance and per argument unit	voyage-4-nano, local GPU; pgvector HNSW index

Stage	What it does	How
Guide alignment	Order-constrained placement of guide questions; every utterance tagged pre-guide, in-guide, post-guide, or off-guide	Dynamic program over embeddings, local; hosted model verifies picks
Argument splitting	Split long turns into claim, value statement, narrative, example, question, concession, evidence; originals preserved	Hosted model, instructed to keep verbatim wording
Discourse relations	Label pairs within a 10-turn, 90-second window with one of 16 SDRT relations	Six rule-based auto-labels first; hosted model for the rest
Discourse graph	Build the room's conversation graph; break cycles at the weakest link; compute depth, orphan rate, cross-speaker ratio, guide coverage	Local
DelibScope	Collapse same-speaker chains into moves; compute the room fingerprint (participation, convergence, respect, constructive share, depth profile) and archetype	Local
Post-analysis	Walton critical questions raised, deliberative sequences, argument interactions	Local, no model calls

Event-level analysis then runs: retrieval, relevance filtering, clustering, theme synthesis, representation scan, reranking and highlighting, and report generation.

B2.3 Models, Tools, and Data Handling

Everything that touches raw audio or identity runs on AllSides' own secure server: converting recordings to audio, transcription, telling speakers apart, converting text into numbers for similarity search, storing and searching that data, clustering, citation checking, and every statistic in this report. Recordings and transcripts live in a private database and private cloud storage controlled by AllSides.

Before any text reaches a generative language model, every speaker's name is replaced with a seat label (for example, R3·S02 for the second speaker in Room 3), with real names kept in a separate, access-restricted table the analysis never reads. An open-source detector (Microsoft Presidio) then redacts personal names, phone numbers, email addresses, street-level locations, and financial identifiers. An utterance containing a redaction is still counted in every statistic but is never quoted.

The generative steps (labeling utterances, classifying how remarks relate, judging relevance, narrating themes, and drafting text) use Anthropic's Claude models through Anthropic's commercial API. Only redacted, de-identified text leaves AllSides' server, and under Anthropic's commercial terms that content is not used to train its models. No names, contact details, video, or audio are ever sent to a third-party model. Every model call is logged with its prompt version, model, full input and output, and cost, creating a complete audit trail behind this report.

Component	**Model or tool**	**Runs where**	**Sees**
Transcription	faster-whisper large-v3-turbo	AllSides server (GPU)	Audio
Speaker separation	pyannote/speaker-diarization-3.1	AllSides server (GPU)	Audio
PII detection	Microsoft Presidio with spaCy en_core_web_trf	AllSides server	Raw transcript
Embeddings	voyage-4-nano (open weights)	AllSides server (GPU)	Cleaned text
Vector search	PostgreSQL + pgvector, HNSW (cosine)	AllSides server	Embeddings
Relevance and citation checking	gte-reranker-modernbert-base cross-encoder	AllSides server (GPU)	Redacted text
Clustering	FAISS mutual k-nearest-neighbors + Leiden; star clustering; UMAP for layout	AllSides server	Embeddings
High-volume labeling	Claude Haiku 4.5	Anthropic API	Redacted, seat-labeled text



Component	Model or tool	Runs where	Sees
Synthesis, narration, chat, drafting	Claude Sonnet 4.6	Anthropic API	Redacted, seat-labeled text
Recordings and transcripts	Private AWS S3 bucket	AllSides account	Media
Structured data	PostgreSQL 16	AllSides server	All analysis tables

Every prompt is versioned in a registry (76 prompts at the time of writing), each carrying written principles the model must follow: judge relevance on substance rather than political leaning, quote only verbatim, never invent a citation, never characterize rooms as entities. Every model call is written to a call log with stage, prompt version, model, tokens, cost, and full input and output.

B2.4 Democratic Representation by Design

A critical insight drove the design: if fairness measures are applied only at the end, rooms with less discussion volume can be excluded before any balancing happens. If Room A discussed a question for 45 minutes and Room G for 5 minutes, a conventional similarity search would fill its slots with Room A, and Room G's perspectives might never enter the pipeline at all. RAAP therefore enforces representation at every stage where a room or a single voice could otherwise disappear.

1. **Every room's discussion of every question is included in full.** For guided events, a theme is everything said in each room between one question being raised and the next: a time window, not a topic detector, so no room's answer is sampled away.
2. **Absence is a recorded finding, not a side effect.** Every room is scanned against every theme and given an explicit verdict, relevant or no relevant content, and relevant remarks it made elsewhere are also added. "This room does not appear here" is a checked result, never an accident of where a boundary fell.
3. **Open-ended searches retrieve per room first.** In discovery mode and in Rappie chat, each room is queried separately with a similarity floor and a per-room ceiling before results are merged, so a talkative room cannot crowd the others out. The ceiling is not forced parity: a room that did not discuss a topic contributes nothing, because AllSides never manufactures perspectives that were not expressed.
4. **Relevance is judged on substance, not leaning.** Each candidate receives a yes/no relevance judgment framed explicitly to ignore political leaning; a technical failure is retried rather than given a neutral score, because silent degradation is worse than visible failure.



5. **What the model sees is interleaved by room.** Utterances are round-robin interleaved across rooms before they are packed into a model's context, and the prompt requires at least one citation from every room.
6. **Minority views are kept, not discarded as noise.** Small clusters are preserved as outliers, each report section must cite at least one claim made by a single speaker, and every such voice is listed in an appendix built without any model involvement.
7. **Coverage is audited and shown to people.** The rooms that participated in a theme are compared with the rooms actually cited, and the gap is recorded rather than enforced, because forcing a citation from a room with nothing quotable would be citation padding. A human judges the gap.
8. **Dominance is named.** Question Diagnostics scores every question on balance and labels it "one voice dominated" when a single participant carried it.

B2.5 Retrieval, Filtering, and Clustering

Per-room retrieval. For open-ended queries, each completed room is queried separately: utterances above a similarity floor (0.40 for analysis, 0.35 for chat), ordered by similarity, capped per room (50 for analysis, 30 for chat). Excluded uniformly: inactive utterances, guide restatements, backchannels, facilitation, and compound parents that were split. The pooled list is sorted by relevance before use so that no consumer sees only the first rooms retrieved.

Relevance filter. Each candidate receives a yes/no judgment from a model, twenty at a time, with instructions to judge substance rather than leaning. A failed call raises and is retried under the stage's retry policy rather than being assigned a default score.

Clustering. Duplicate text is removed within rooms only, so the same sentence spoken in two rooms counts as two voices. Embeddings are indexed with FAISS and each utterance's fifteen nearest neighbors are found; an edge survives only if each is in the other's neighbor list, which stops generic "hub" statements from smearing communities together. Leiden community detection runs over that graph. Communities smaller than three become outliers and are kept as a list, not dropped. Each cluster's five representatives are the utterances closest to its center.

Representation scan. For every theme and room, the room's utterances are scanned against the theme center at a 0.55 similarity floor. The verdict (participated or no relevant content) is stored, and qualifying utterances missed by clustering are added to the theme as a "halo" tagged with their source stage. An utterance can join at most two themes this way.

Coverage audit. Rooms marked participated are compared with rooms cited in each section: complete, partial, or gap. Advisory only.

B2.6 Turning Themes into Verifiable Findings



Once every utterance has been labeled, filed under the question being discussed, and gathered with every other room's contribution into one theme per guide question, what remains is to say what people in each theme said, and to make every sentence of that checkable.

The platform first works out what recurs, before any model writes a word. Claims that make the same point are grouped by similarity. A group counts as a perspective only if it comes from at least two speakers, and perspectives are ranked by how many people voiced them and how closely they agree. Points made by one person are kept as single voices rather than merged away.

Only then does the language model write, and its role is narration, not selection: one section per perspective, in the given order, citing only utterances in it. Every claim carries a marker pointing to a specific utterance, and every quotation must be the participant's own words. Three checks run on the finished prose: a citation that does not resolve to a real utterance is deleted; a quoted span must match its source word for word; and a locally run relevance model, fitted on hundreds of hand-checked citations, confirms that each cited utterance supports its sentence. A failing citation is repointed or its sentence dropped; the model is never asked to try again. In the platform, any citation can be clicked to see the speaker's seat and room, why it was included, and the surrounding transcript.

B2.7 Themes and Perspectives

For guided events, a theme is the time window between one question's anchor and the next in each room, plus the halo. Speech outside every window is grouped by similarity into "discovered" themes; discovered themes that contain almost no claims (ground rules, process talk) are labeled process and excluded from reports but never deleted.

Within a theme, star clustering runs over claim-type units with a similarity bar fitted per event (default 0.76, bounded between 0.70 and 0.86, fitted against that event's near-duplicate statements). A perspective must contain at least one claim from the question's own time window, its headline claim must be from the window, and it must have at least two distinct speakers. Perspectives are ranked by distinct speakers times cohesion. Reasons are attached in three tiers: same turn (structural), explicitly linked by the discourse pass, and similarity-searched (shown only in the exploration sidebar, never in reports, until hand-verified). Claims nobody echoed (often the majority of claims in an event) are grouped into "Voices heard once" categories and listed exhaustively in an appendix built without any model. The stored structure carries a fingerprint of its membership; if rooms are added or realigned, it is rebuilt automatically. The model narrates this structure, one section per perspective, citing only its members.

B2.8. Report Generation and Citation Verification

Reports are built by one shared builder from the live stored perspectives, so the report, the sidebar, and the chat cannot disagree. Utterances are round-robin interleaved by room before being packed into measured, context-sized batches; batch summaries are merged up a tree that stops when two

consecutive merges add no new citations. Duplicate arguments are detected in three layers ordered by cost: shared citations (dropping requires mutual overlap of at least 80%), embedding similarity, then a model judgment only for borderline pairs. A dropped duplicate's citations are merged into the argument it duplicates so no room's provenance is lost. Each guide question's section contains an introduction, summary, key tensions, a strongest-agreement block (only with three or more speakers across two or more rooms), and a Voices heard once block; the report closes with cross-cutting analysis, the every-voice appendix, and a citation index listing only utterances actually cited.

Citation markers have the form [UTT-xxxxxxxx]. Verification runs in this order:

1. Any marker that does not resolve to a registered utterance is deleted.
2. Guard A (verbatim): every quoted span in a sentence must appear word for word in that sentence's own cited source. Pure string comparison.
3. Guard B (relevance): a locally run cross-encoder scores each claim against its cited source; the passing floor was fitted on 620 real citations. Enforcement is on.
4. On failure: repoint to the correct source if one exists within bounds; otherwise drop the quote, strip the citation, or drop the sentence. The model is never asked to regenerate. If the verifier itself errors, prose passes through unchanged and is flagged as fail-open.
5. Sentences with no citation may receive up to two back-filled markers by embedding similarity (0.65); these are recorded as inferred and shown as such.
6. All display surfaces take their quote text from a single function, so what a reader sees is exactly what was checked.

B2.9 Discussion Quality and Question Diagnostics

Room-level Discussion Quality scores are arithmetic over the discourse graph: reciprocity (share of responsive relations), engagement depth (average depth), inclusion (one minus the share of utterances nobody responded to), constructive conflict (elaborations relative to contrasts), and guide adherence (questions reached). The DelibScope fingerprint adds participation (Shannon entropy of speaker shares, normalized; a single-speaker room scores 0, not 1), convergence (share of disagreements whose author later agreed with someone), respect (counterargument engagement rather than agreement, with 0.5 meaning unknown when nobody engaged), and constructive share (bridge building, synthesis, or solution proposals). The inputs to these (relation labels and per-utterance codes) are model-produced; the scores are not.

Question Diagnostics computes five axes per guide question: engagement (utterances, speakers, room reach), depth (mean graph depth, elaboration density), quality (30% justification, 25% evidence, 25% counterargument engagement, 10% perspective taking, 10% civility), contention (stance entropy, cross-speaker contrast share), and balance (participation entropy, cross-speaker link ratio). Axes are normalized within the event and tiered into thirds against the event's other questions; an axis whose raw values all fall within a 25% band tiers everyone "mid" so no verdict is manufactured from noise. A rule table maps tier patterns to seven archetypes: barely reached, deep deliberation, productive clash, one voice dominated, easy consensus, shallow touch, solid discussion. Each question's written diagnosis and recommendation are model-generated; the scores and archetype are not. Group syntheses require



at least three speakers, and cross-camp echo pairs require similarity above 0.62 and at least sixty seconds' separation within a room.

B2.10 Surveys and Demographics

Demographic descriptors attached to quotes ("white male, 70s, lean left, said:") are built from five pre-survey dimensions (race, gender, age band, political lean, education) and pass a uniqueness check so a descriptor cannot single out an individual. Chat over a demographic cohort refuses groups of fewer than three participants.

B2.11 How This Report Was Written

AllSides analysts wrote this report. RAAP generates a report for every event, but that document is treated as a structured reference, not as the deliverable. The analysis was carried out by people working in the platform's Insights workspace:

- **Themes**, with their computed perspectives, evidence, and per-room representation.
- **Questions and Impact**, which scores each guide question relative to the others on engagement, depth, quality, contention, and balance, assigns an archetype (deep deliberation, productive clash, shallow touch, and so on), and shows whether views moved between the pre- and post-discussion surveys.
- **Discussion Quality**, which reports reciprocity, depth, inclusion, constructive conflict, and adherence to the guide, computed from the discourse graph.
- **People**, which shows participants only as seats, with demographic facets drawn from survey matches an analyst has confirmed.
- **Rappie**, the platform's assistant. In chat it answers questions with cited utterances and builds charts from read-only, anonymized views of the data. In the report editor it rewrites a selected passage or weaves in a verified quote on request, and in Report Studio it proposes larger structural changes. Every proposal is accepted or rejected individually by the analyst, every accepted edit is logged with the editor's identity and cost, and a snapshot is kept before any regeneration.

Human judgment enters at fixed points: analysts confirm every speaker-to-survey match before demographics are used, approve any spending beyond the per-event budget, and decide what the final report says. Human-AI sensemaking relies on AI to identify patterns and organize evidence, but decision-making, judgment, and the interpretation of meaning remain with people.

B2.12 Rappie Safeguards

Chat retrieval uses the per-room method described in Appendix B; the context handed to the model is selected deterministically by re-weighted similarity with a per-room cap, and the agent loop is capped at



ten steps with a forced final synthesis so a question is always answered from evidence rather than narrated. Charts are computed by generated SQL that is parsed and validated (a single read-only SELECT with no write or locking clauses), run under a read-only database role against event-scoped views in which speakers appear only as seat labels or one-way pseudonyms and display names do not exist, with a row cap and a timeout; every query is logged.

In the report editor, Rappie's rewrite is checked for refusals and meta-commentary, citation markers are protected through the edit, and the result is linted. Add-quote runs the same retrieval and citation verifier as report generation. Report Studio proposals are never applied automatically; the analyst accepts each change, the commit is stamped with the editor's identity and cost, and a full snapshot is kept before any regeneration.

B2.13 Glossary

- **Utterance**: one turn of speech by one person, as transcribed.
- **Argument unit**: a piece of an utterance classified as a claim or as supporting material (narrative, example, evidence, value statement, concession, question).
- **Embedding**: a list of numbers representing what a piece of text means, so similarity can be measured.
- **Guide question**: a question the facilitator poses to every room.
- **Anchor**: the moment in a room's timeline where a guide question was raised.
- **Theme**: for guided events, everything said under one guide question across all rooms, plus related speech from elsewhere (the halo).
- **Perspective**: a group of claims, from at least two speakers, that make the same point within a theme.
- **Seat label**: the anonymous identifier for a speaker (R3·S02 = Room 3, Speaker 2).
- **Discourse relation**: how one utterance relates to an earlier one (answer, elaboration, contrast, agreement, and so on).
- **Citation marker**: the [UTT-xxxxxxxx] tag that ties a sentence to a specific utterance.
- **Inferred citation**: a marker back-filled by similarity after generation, flagged as weaker evidence.

Appendix C: Quoted Participants

1. S5·R1·S00 — 60s, associate's degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 1": "*And if I would say one word. For how I think Congress is working. I would say ineffectual. And why that word? I think it's self-explanatory. I don't think Congress is very effective right now.*"

2. S1·R1·S04 — white male, 70s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 1": "*I think that Congress is totally polarized, so polarized it. It's incapable of action on anything significant.*"

3. S1·R2·S02 — white male, younger than 20, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*One word that describes Congress's work? It's not.*"

4. S2·R4·S04 — white male, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 4": "*Performative.. When I. Reach out on an issue. I get the canned. You know, response. Thank you for contacting. Unrepresentative.*"

5. S6·R1·S02 — white male, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 1": "*Bipolar. I actually think it does it, it process a lot of necessary legislation fine. But it has way too many. Performers.*"

6. S2·R3·S02 — white male, center, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*His whole argument is that the big two parties have a political privilege. As gays. Gatekeepers. Of the political process, and that is unconstitutional according to the 14th Amendment. Equal protection flaws. It it's OK. You know, everyone's allowed to assemble. But they're one. And entity is not permitted to have a a privilege. Over others.*"

7. S2·R3·S01 — white male, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*Viable candidate. That has a viable platform. Form that's different from Republicans and Democrats. They can bridge that gap.*"

8. S7·R1·S00 — white male, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*This nation was founded on American rugged individualism. That's what we need to bring back. That's what we need to bring back. So we're actually doing the right thing for all the people. So we're actually doing the right thing for all the people. Or that's my belief. Or that's my belief. As an independent. As an independent. Now there's a difference between a capital I independent and a little I. Now there's a difference between a capital I independent and a little. They're the media and the political parties are confusing that. They're the media and the political parties are confusing that. Saying that. Saying that. An independent. An independent. Is actually …*"

9. S6·R2·S04 — white male, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 2": "*A healthy Republican Party, healthy independent party, the way that we're working right now. Doesn't work. So to the extent that we can get independence in there, that's great. I. I think [PERSON] chose to would be a wonderful solution to that, but here to discuss all of this.*"

10. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 3 · Room 1": "*Well, I worked on this video so I can go first if you want because I've seen it a lot of times. I think what's exciting to me about this idea is like. It would require such a small amount of people. Like the margins are already so thin. That doing something like this. Maybe feels a little bit more within the realm of possibility. And for me it's exciting because. There's just less infrastructure and overhead, right? Like even if you were to shift the balance one*

way or the other, then there's all the party politics and. Corporate interests, et cetera. So yeah, for me, when I heard about this idea. That that's what was interesting."

11. S7·R1·S00 — white male, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*…The the House, the Senate, the presidency. And the Supreme Court are a cluster. And the Supreme Court are a cluster. That's the bottom line. That's the bottom line. And and and unfortunately. And and and unfortunately. The fulcrum is the thin wedge in, and it can. The fulcrum is the thin wedge in, and it can. Basically. Basically. The stupidity. The stupidity. But to actually bring about what you're talking about, you have to have a majority and a party A, but to actually bring about what you're talking about, you have to have a majority and a party A third way. Third way. Just as we have 3 branches of …*"

12. S5·R3·S00 — white male, center, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 3": "*Yeah, that's so I. I'm a member of the Forward Party. And we? Part of our, our biggest? Strategy is if we can get 5 independents or Forward party candidates elected to Congress because that would be enough to where neither party has a majority. And they're forced then? To cooperate with independents and forward Party candidates, right? Therefore, then, that tiny minority. In a way, becomes the most powerful because you can't get anything across the finish line.*"

13. S8·R2·S03 — white male, lean left, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*… seats in Congress are already gerrymandered to be a blue or red. But there's this smaller set. You know, less than 10 percent, 5%. Of the seats in Congress. Where there are there, there's a real contest that goes on, and in in 25 of those districts, independents outnumber. Party members on either side. And given how tight the margins are in Congress right now? I if if those. If that small number of seats. Were won by people. Who were of an independent frame of mind that is not committed to a party narrative. That really. Wanted to work. To make Congress work. They could change the whole way Congress operates. Because those seats would control. The passage of anything. Including appointing the Speaker of the House. So they could actually appoint. They could cause the appointment of a speaker of our House who's not even a member of Congress because you don't have to be a member of the Congress to be the speaker of the House. According to the Constitution. So rallying in those. A couple of doses. Districts. And and having. A a game plan. A shared game plan. Could actually change what we've been seeing. Lately.*"

14. S2·R3·S03 — white male, lean left, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*That way. Where there's, there's been that. No Labels Caucus. The Common Sense Caucus has gotten together. And been able to manipulate some of the bigger things, you know, whether you whether you liked it or not, the infrastructure bill. Ended up getting passed. Not because the Democrats could run it through. And not because the Republicans could block it, but eventually. It was a group of about 10 congressmen. Kind of split Republican and Democrat who were more in the center. They were able to bring that thing around and make some compromises. And the bill got passed.*"

15. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*In Wisconsin we elect our local representatives. They're all non partisan. And so I know that on my City Council, there are Democrats, Republicans and independents that are all working together. And you know what? My garbage gets picked up. I've got clean water when I turn on the tap. You know, so we. We've great parks to take our kids to, so I I see that like government can actually work. It just seems to work at the local level where there aren't labels.*"

16. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*So that is very much a second option independent. Rather than third option. And that is the. Main mechanism The main area where. You're likely likely.*

To get wins. So the. Thesis behind this Part of the thesis behind this is that there are more than enough of these areas, especially as you build up. This perceived viability and credibility. To form a. A caucus. To. Create a mediating force and deny either party majority."

17. S2·R4·S02 — white male, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 4": "*Three certified candidates. That would not be involved with the money right, Their votes would be based off of you know, not money and, and actually I finished a book called The Politics Industry, which is really interesting. I would encourage people to read that. You know, what I think we really need in the country is open primaries. And then ranked choice voting because that would give the independence. You know, a fighting chance. You know, we need those electoral reforms right now. The duopoly's. Got the grip. They like it the way it is and the result of the system is that we get this, you know, division. And then and dysfunction and then that's our dissatisfaction coming out of that, so. Anyway, I think the idea is that these. Attendance when when you have positive. Legislation that the people want. What happens is usually legislation that you know the people want. Gets killed because the corporations don't want it. You know, the rich people. You know, don't want it. The idea of the independence can can save that stuff and bring it over the line. So that's not a very good. Description. But yeah, I'm very positive. On …*"

18. S5·R1·S03 — female, center, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 1": "*I I really think money has a lot to do with it. Unfortunately, we're a capitalist society, fortunately, or unfortunately I should say.*"

19. S3·R2·S04 — mixed or other male, 30s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*I originally heard of the, uh, fulcrum caucus idea, maybe? 5 or 10 years ago. Umm, several of these independent organizations, umm. Have been kind of floating the idea for a while. I think it's genius. Uh, you know, it's kind of force. The party's hands. Um, I am a psychiatrist by training transitioning into public health. I've been a teacher, I've been a coach. And belief. Self belief, belief in in the cause, is an extremely powerful thing. So I think it's actually extremely attainable. Somebody said, you know, there's there's never been a better time than right now. But kind of convincing people that it's possible. Is uh. The biggest hurdle? And ultimately also getting getting the airwaves and getting the message out because we had somebody say that. Their inbox is extremely full and we know how that looks. Umm. So just getting the idea out is is half the battle getting people to believe in it. Would be the other half, but I think it's extremely feasible and I think it's idea.*"

20. S7·R2·S02 — white female, 70s, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 2": "*Thinking about the video. Thinking about the video. I I felt really hopeful. I I felt really hopeful. I I think. I think that could work. I I think. I think that could work. I I don't think it's. Unrealistic at …*"

21. S2·R2·S02 — white female, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*What stood out for me about the video? Was the idea of a new balancing point. A point that allows movement. And ways to find agreement. While speaking. Truth. Uh. So far it doesn't seem unrealistic because it's a hope I have. I think it's a good. Starting place. For change.*"

22. S6·R1·S02 — white male, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 1": "*So maybe. It felt how to get there as a little little unrealistic I can I can imagine. Yeah. But in cold concept, if you had. 210 Republicans and 210 Democrats. At 18 True independence. Yeah, that would that would, that would be terrifically powerful. It's how do you get 18 of them? Or 25 or whatever that's that would be powerful.*"

23. S2·R2·S04 — white male, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*Cool. Yeah, I mean, the two parties are now attacking the independents. They used to just ignore them, but now they're attacking them. And trying to like, you know, marginalized them so. This is a phenomena that's happening all across the country, so. I think it's a good sign for the movement of independent voices, so. Just that's what they're going to do.*"

24. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*Yeah, the more they attack them, the more. Uh, focus gets put on the independence. More visibility.*"

25. S8·R2·S00 — white male, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*I have a question. Who are these people that we want to get elected to create this caucus and once elected? What is their position gonna be or their platform? Are they going to actually do? What the right thing is for America. That's never been brought up yet. Where is? Is it stated somewhere? That's what I would like to know, because if it's right, it'll work, if it's not right, if it's already failed.*"

26. S4·R1·S03 — white male, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 4 · Room 1": "*Yeah, I am I have the perspective of someone who's never registered with a political party. I've always been independent. And well, I understand the concept of the Fulcrum Caucus. I think. It's also an example of how desperate we are where that? Idea gives us hope. Because really, Because things are so bad. At the moment. By that. I mean. The idea that a handful of people a will get elected. B will be people who agree with each other. In the on the toughest issues. In a way that they somehow are this. Solid group. That they'll actually be able to counter the forces of the parties. Who know how to play chess? Plus. With factions like the Freedom Party. Or the DSA. The idea that that group is gonna be the control group. That's going to force decisions. It's it's not a certainty. So. While it's attractive in theory. I don't know. It to me it's just a minor element. Or example of things that we should be shooting for to really make a difference. To have the government work the way it's true.*"

27. S4·R1·S04 — white male, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 4 · Room 1": "*Yeah, I I think that's true. I've, I've lived on four different continents. And many of the most of them had a parliamentary system as opposed to ours. And although that's. I wouldn't prefer to live under parliamentary governance it does have. Some benefits including things like. You know, an independent folk from party could get in and force more coalitions. But what [PERSON] was saying? I think the big assumption behind all this is let's say there is a. An independent fulcrum. I we're assuming they're gonna. Like focus back on the people's work. And not just you know, have their own culture war, kind of stuffed and they're. Until we figure out how to elect people who do that. I I don't think anything can change.*"

28. S5·R1·S04 — a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 1": "*Is that if if we could come up with some parameters for the people we support, even if they're? Very basic. Very basic. I think I would feel better. I think I would feel better. About working hard to get them elected. About working hard to get them elected.*"

29. S2·R2·S00 — white male, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*I think that's where the negotiation would have to come into play. And I I think it's, it's a it's a movement that's going to sputter. A little bit as it gets started, but I think if, if more independents get elected. That's going to put pressure on because both parties then are going to need to negotiate with those independents in order to get the votes to pass legislation.*"

30. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*I would agree with that and. As long as whoever. Is in this group. Can actively work to make sure that a group like this can. Continue in the future as well. You know, the minute anything like this happens, the two parties. Will collaborate to try to change rules that would prevent. Future. Fulcrums from occurring, so they would have to really. Act as power brokers to ensure.*"

31. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*You know we can have more fulcrums and that they can. You know, as long as they focus on policy priorities like. They're not going to get all the wins. That's just. Effect, but if they can focus on getting some policy wins that allow for more independence in the future. Then that would be a win. And I, I agree, you know, got to have a few. Get through that threshold and that'll open the door for others as well.*"

32. S2·R1·S03 — white male, center, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 1": "*I'm the first thing I'd like to see him do. Is change the rules of the house? And the rules of the Senate? So that the Speaker of the House no longer runs the whole show. And everything doesn't come down. The Majority Leader, The Minority Leader. And in some cases. The vice president. And I would worry that they might not.*"

33. S1·R2·S03 — white male, 60s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*You guys may remember the debacle. 2 almost two years ago. With the selection of the speaker, the House. And the yeah, we have. You know, the House has the opportunity right now to change the rules of the House. Not make this. Horrible, convoluted, uh, way that they select the speaker. Umm. They should implement some form of rank choice voting. So. They can. They can select the speaker that way.*"

34. S2·R4·S01 — white female, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 4": "*Yeah, and that's why I was saying that the very first thing I want to see them do is pass anti corruption laws.*"

35. S2·R4·S01 — white female, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 4": "*That is I mean like, so let's say that they got into into Congress and they got. Actual. But power is it where? The ability to to to get these things. I want to the first thing I'd like to see them do, and I answered this in the last, you know. Question what was the first thing you want to see them do is I want to see them pass anti corruption laws. With teeth. Something that will hold Congress accountable, Hold the Supreme Court. Accountable. Whole, you know, the Senate. Accountable. Uh. I, I, I I want to see that.*"

36. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 1 · Room 1": "*And we're making the positive assumption. And we're making the positive assumption. That the independents are able to reach a consensus on. That the independents are able to reach a consensus on. On with with the. On with with the. Two major parties on some key issues. Two major parties on some key issues. You know, those issues that I would find most important are things like immigration. You know, those issues that I would find most important are things like immigration. Healthcare. Healthcare. Like would they, would there be an opportunity to move the needle on those? Like would they, would there be an opportunity to move the needle on those? Two major issues that seem to. Two major issues that seem to. Be polarizing this country. Be polarizing this country. You know, I'm also mindful that we have a a growing movement of what's. You know, I'm also mindful that we have a a growing movement of what's. Being called Social Democrats. Being called Social Democrats. I live in in New York. We*

have had a very interesting experience with the mayor. I live in in New York. We have had a very interesting experience with the mayor."

37. S6·R1·S01 — white male, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 1": "*I I tend to think the focus on the affordability issue.*"

38. S6·R1·S01 — white male, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 1": "*To really deliver. Something tangible. To people. Would bolster this idea. And.*"

39. S5·R3·S02 — white female, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 3": "*I I think that. As you were talking about that, I think you you all have said the same thing in much better words. It's more that we want solutions, we don't want allegiance to parties, if that's. Interfering with a an honest compromise or a solution?*"

40. S3·R1·S03 — white male, 20s, center, some college, no degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 1": "*Independence across the country, but we are the majority. And my ideas if we had maybe 1/3 of Congress, whether it be the House or Senate. Be independent. I think a lot of stuff would be passed better. I think coalitions and alliances would be better maintained and I think we'd have. Politically and socially speaking, a bit more of a stable. Environment than what we do right now.*"

41. S7·R1·S00 — white male, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*… and yes, you are correct in everything you're saying. Yes we can, and yes, you are correct in everything you're say. You have to have. You have to have. A mechanism. A mechanism. The fulcrum is the thin wedge into start. The fulcrum is the thin wedge into start. You can stop the insanity. You can stop the insanity. By blocking the votes of when Republicans or Democrats are doing the wrong thing, it's not the parties that are the I mean, it's not the Republicans or Democrats as people that are a problem. By blocking the votes of when. Republicans or Democrats are doing the wrong thing. It's not the parties that are I mean, it's not the Republicans or Democrats as people …*"

42. S5·R3·S00 — white male, center, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 3": "*Without getting them on board. That's the theory, anyway. And the reason why I say it's a theory is because it. Hasn't happened before. So we we don't have. A lot of great data or experience on what would happen if that were to occur. But if? Independents and 3rd party. Electors are able to caucus with each other. And strategize for, what? You know, kind of story they want to tell with their time in the legislature. I think that that could be really powerful and kind of force the two parties to.*"

43. S2·R3·S04 — white male, lean right, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*Me if they stick together. If they don't, if they one liens Republican or one member liens Democrat.*"

44. S7·R1·S01 — 60s, associate's degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*… on committees, but not as important as once was I am also a braver Angel as does [PERSON] say. Love the braver angels mission. I am also a braver Angel as does [PERSON] say. Love the braver angels mission. And then [PERSON] really says this. My concern is that the fulcrum is made-up of independent thinkers. And then [PERSON] really says this. My concern is that the fulcrum is made-up of independent thinkers. And they may not agree with each other. And they may not agree with each other. Same thing with, we the people, There is a huge diversity of people in We the People. Same thing with, we the people, There is a huge diversity of people in We the People. And those are very, very important because and those are very, very important because.*"

45. S5·R2·S00 — white male, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 2": "*Fulcrum ideas I. Understood. It is yeah, let's say we get 4 people in the senate, and I'll say we're*

independents. And then neither side whoever normally be in power. And just get away with doing all this stuff they get away with and not listening. I guess we have. 3030 seconds. Umm, but I guess the one thing question I always. Have as well. What if you have someone who's green? Someone who's libertarian? Someone who's just kind of independent, like. What is an independent exactly? And what happens when they have very different agendas? So that was one question that rose. Maybe there's a straightforward answer, but I'm not sure. Did everyone else go?"

46. S8·R1·S01 — mixed or other female, lean left, Room "Session 8 · Room 1": "*Right. Or, but actually one thing that stuck out in the video was it's not a party line, so it's. This topic I agree here and this topic I agree here. And we can do that. So it's almost like. Even the word caucus I would. Maybe caution again, it's like. Caucus means we're all going to agree to go together.*"

47. S2·R3·S04 — white male, lean right, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*… purpose of being an independent. Solely for the purpose of being an independent and and identifying with some kind of independent ideology. And and identifying with some kind of independent ideology. Then they might work together easily. Then they might work together easily. But they have to turn their backs on their legislative district. They got them appointed. They got them elected. But they have to turn their backs on their legislative district. They got them appointed, I got them elected. It's tough for me to understand that. It's tough for me to understand that.*"

48. S3·R2·S03 — white male, 50s, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*And in the Senate, you have to have 51 votes in order to pick. You know, decide who's the majority. So, you know, if both parties had 40 some seats and an independent caucus had you know, 5 or 10 in the Senate. They still have to eventually those independents have got to pick a side. So that one of them has control.*"

49. S5·R1·S04 — a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 1": "*… I think this is correct, but in many cases I think this is correct, but I think that there are people who get into it for noble reasons and who are I think that there are people who get into it for noble reasons and who are pretty decent humans. Pretty decent humans. But then when they get in and they're in this system, it's sort of either you adhere to the system or you're out. But then when they get in and they're in this system, it's sort of either you adhere to the system or you're out. And not that that's a defense. And not that that's a defense. In any way. But I do think there are …*"

50. S8·R2·S01, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*So I don't like anything that feels forced. Like and I also think that the the, the that that doesn't fix the core problem, which to me is like rooted more about the, the district redistricting and gerrymandering and all that stuff like I think. Because it needs to be, we need to find a way. Forward where we can agree on how we can make it truly representative.*"

51. S5·R3·S03 — white male, Room "Session 5 · Room 3": "*Yes. It it's about. The solution to the issues. And are those solutions. Declaratorial. Constitutional. And billable. OK. And amendable. Do are they doing what's right for the American people? All the people. Not just their political party, left or right? That's the problem. Even the small third parties, all the third parties. Their issue? Parties. But they don't have a full national. Uh, what do you call it? Platform? And in order to get people in the Congress. They have to know. The people have to know. That when I'm electing this person. They are going to be constitutional. Within the laws and abide by and act like public servants. Instead of government. People over you. That's it, it depends on each issue is very important. And how they're going to vote is what is important to America.*"

52. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 5 · Room 3": "*I for me personally. I I do think the speakership is. You know 1 attainable thing. If you have a fulcrum in place. But all of that is just an extension of. This setup and this is one of the things that I've felt… one of the messaging gaps within [the Forward Party] is. This is all of this idea of reform. As shifting who has power? But it's not answering the question of what do you. Want the the people you want? Us to give power. What are they going to do with that power? And that is where voters are going to be. A little. Suspicious where voters are going to be apprehensive. And where you really need to make clear, because the reality is. As far as we're. People see the solutions as far as where independents see the solutions. There is a wide variety of answers. That they will give wide variety of. Stanzas. And I, I think one of the critical things is. You have to foster. An additive conversation. You have to have. Something at the table and I don't know what the the first issue that you approach with that mean is. That means is going to be whether it's cost of living.*"

53. S5·R2·S02 — white female, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 2": "*Yeah. And I think. When you talk about being a grade 2 and I mentioned that I. Think it's a risk they're sort of like. Because the party because it. The system is set up for two parties. There's, you know. The concept of oh, yours is you know, they're, they're a spoiler. You know, if you vote for the independent, maybe the person who gets elected is the person you, you absolutely don't want. To get elected because the vote is split. So if we had things like. For example, ranked choice voting. Then it would be a lot. Easier to vote for independence.*"

54. S5·R1·S02 — white male, lean right, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 1": "*That's a great question. That's a great question. I I've lectured people on, I I've lectured people on not doing that. Not doing that. It you know if you you got to choose the tallest. You know if you you got to choose the tallest. How tall is pygmy? What tall is pygmy? Although I would say that if. Although I would say that if. They were viable. They were viable. In other words, it looked like they had a chance. In other words, it looked like they had a chance. Then I would vote for him. Then I would vote for, but if it's gonna be 10% of the people voting …*"

55. S3·R1·S03 — white male, 20s, center, some college, no degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 1": "*Oh, thank you. Well, I think for me personally. In terms of viability. First and foremost, they would have to uh. Be beating out one of the two major. Party candidates. In terms of their, I'm so sorry about that.*"

56. S7·R2·S02 — white female, 70s, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 2": "*… November? What would it actually take for you to vote for an independent for Congress this November? What would need to be true about the Canada? What would need to be true about the Canada? The campaign. Are the moment. The campaign. Are the moment. And I what it would take for me to vote for an independent. And I what it would take for me to vote for an independent. Would be would be some kind of? Likelihood. Some kind of? Likelihood. That they could actually win. That they could actually win. The cause usually happens. Because usually what happens? Is that. Is I tend to …*"

57. S8·R2·S02 — white female, lean right, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*Yeah, well, I used to live in Rhode Island, and since Rhode Island is so small. You would think it you wouldn't need as much money, but they do spend an awful lot of money. Uh, to get elected. But it is a smaller state and the ability to get on the ballot in the general election is not. It doesn't sound as difficult as it is in Florida. That's the other. That's the other thing, each state. It's not only gerrymandering. They've done other*

things with the election laws that kind of make it very hard for another party to become a party or for an independent. But these guys, the people, these five or six people are 10. I'm not sure how many it is I think, I think right now. Four of them are gonna be on the ballot. And I guess the rest of them are working on it."

58. S1·R2·S03 — white male, 60s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*… You need to get 125 signatures which is is you know, definitely doable, right? It's not insurmountable. You know, definitely doable, right? It's not insurmountable. Uh, it's, it's 1000 for Congress, but again, that's not. It's hot. It's 1000 for Congress. But again, that's not outrageous, outrageous. And, and so, so. It's important to Oh, and the other thing is every year in Virginia they try to submit a bill. It's important to Oh, and the other thing is every year in Virginia they try to submit a bill. It's usually Republicans, but usually they have Democratic. It's usually Republicans, but usually they have Democratic. Co sponsors. Co sponsors. To make local elections partisan. To make local elections partisan. And so I've, I've worked really, really hard and it's gotten scary because they've gotten through committee, it's gone to the floor. And so I've, I've worked really, really hard and …*"

59. S8·R2·S03 — white male, lean left, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*I'll just say really quickly, in Florida, it's impossible to.*"

60. S8·R2·S02 — white female, lean right, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*They they may. They make it. They have to get too many. Signatures.*"

61. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 6 · Room 1": "*I love and support the idea. I think it has the same. Potential like share the same concern. That without systemic or structural reforms that allow them to compete on a level or even reasonably level playing field. It'll be difficult. For that many to win. I think this cycle the ones that have the best shot are the ones where. The one of the parties has backed off. Or backed out and said. OK, Mr. [PERSON] or Miss [PERSON], you go for it. And you compete against the the the Republican or the Democrat. I think it would mostly be a Republican that in that I can that I know of. But anyway, setting that aside. I will offer and I've shared this before. But umm. What I consider. Concerning and dug you. Gave me a good segue when you use the word true independent. And and even [PERSON], you kind of alluded to. Are they going to really be independent? I, I I.*"

62. S8·R1·S03 — white female, right, Room "Session 8 · Room 1": "*I always felt. That it's more important that we work on the way we're electing people. And that if we can make changes to those rules, we'll start getting more independence. And I think that once you get in office.*"

63. S1·R2·S03 — white male, 60s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*… I had to find people who would, would champion my cause to not make. Would champion my cause to not make. Local elections partisan. Local elections partisan. And there's other electoral reforms, same thing. So think back to, and there's other electoral reforms, same thing. So think back to you know women's right to vote. You know women's right to vote. You know white men had you know white men had, had to vote to give women the right to vote, you know, Same with the civil rights. Had to vote to give women the right to vote, you know, same with the civil rights movement. You know, white men and women had to vote to give. Movement, you know. White men and women. …*"

64. S3·R2·S04 — mixed or other male, 30s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*I'd want you to go see help. I want you to go see a doctor. You know, like the idea that you have to agree with every single position is just ludicrous. So for me, it would be the fundamental*

core of is this person a true independent? After that. All the other issues are second. Secondary to me because the the way they operate, the integrity that they operate with would be the the core reason I would vote for them."

65. S8·R1·S04 — female, Room "Session 8 · Room 1": "*Yeah, independent, independent presence. In converse equal goods. But that doesn't mean that this particular person. So I think I'd have to assess. Who they are? Whether they have integrity, Whether they actually will have. The fortitude and persistence. That's going to be needed. To stay independent, what do they actually stand for? Does that match? My you know what what I think is is good for the country. So for me, it's probably less about the moment and much more about the candidate. I don't even really the campaign portion. You know. It may make might muddy being able to figure out what this candidate's really about if I'm. Just going by their campaign, like want to look at their record and all of those things so. I don't think it would be automatic. For me, we'd have to have really. It would have to be a good candidate. And a good person. On a good platform.*"

66. S7·R2·S01 — white male, 70s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 2": "*… thumbs. So first. Or rules of thumbs. So first. I I now. At least. Yes, now I study candidates, all serious candidates from all parties. I I now. At least. Yes, now I study candidates, all serious candidates from all parties. And I reject all who I see as. And I reject all who I see as. Uh, partisans. Uh, who are running in support of this? Partisans. Uh, who are running in support of this? Virtue signaling. This litmus test, kind of virtue signaling, Uh, this. If you uh, so and usually it's easy to elite most test kind of issues. Uh, so and usually it's. So that that's. The first criteria. So that that's. The second criteria I see if they are pragmatic. The first criteria. The second criteria I see if they are pragmatic. Independent is not to me the defining. …*"

67. S4·R1·S01 — white female, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 4 · Room 1": "*Well, I would just as a as a point. Well, I was going to say for some. Reassurance. It's reassuring to me. There is a group. In the House of Representatives called the Problem Solvers Caucus. Are you guys familiar with that? It's a group of an equal number of Democrats and Republicans. And they haven't had any independence in there as far as I know. But if you want if. Somebody wants to join that caucus. They have to bring a partner from the other party with them. In order to join. And their whole point is to work. For bipartisan. Bills and proposals. And they they all agreed that if they can't agree on it. They won't. The group won't support it. So I think there is some, some move, at least in the house. To to try to improve the functioning. And if there were an independent? Fulcrum Caucus. Might very well be able to support that group in in working in a bipartisan way.*"

68. S7·R2·S00 — white female, 30s, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 2": "*People in most of the parties. People in most of the parties. It's more about what their platform is and how closely. It's more about what their platform is and how closely. I aligned to it. I aligned to it. No one ever has a platform that I completely agree with, no one ever has a platform …*"

69. S4·R1·S01 — white female, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 4 · Room 1": "*… have to vote against that. Person. In the party. To make me vote for the other party. Before fear of losing and getting somebody worse. I think I'd be more than willing. To vote for an independent if I believe. If I appreciated the the views that they I wouldn't vote for somebody if he, he or she sounded like a screwball. But if they had reasonable. Platform. I I'd be happy to vote for an independent. I did 1 long time ago. 1980 I think. Uh, his name was John Anderson. And he was running as an independent. And at that point, you had to get a certain percentage of the vote. In order to get*

matching campaign funds from the government. And so I voted for him. I didn't. Care that much about either of the party candidates. So I voted for him to try to help him get to the point of getting that money from for the campaign. So I did it once."

70. S2·R2·S00 — white male, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*We just, you know. We just, you know. They would have to, they would have to first, be accountable to one another. First, be accountable to one another.*"

71. S2·R2·S00 — white male, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 2": "*… counterbalance to the two parties that. To to be a counterbalance to the two parties that, that they would. That they would. They would hopefully in their heart would be committed to that. They would. Hopefully in their heart would be committed to that. Come hell or high water. Come hell or high water. But beyond that I'm not sure. But beyond that I'm not sure. Other than boaters? Other than boaters? Who else would would hold them accountable? Who else would would hold …*"

72. S5·R2·S01 — white female, lean right, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 5 · Room 2": "*So I I, I, I wouldn't vote for or against someone just because of their party and because someone is independent. Doesn't mean that they're going to do a good and thoughtful job. So that's what I would say about that. [PERSON], a question for you. What are when you say, oh, people are afraid to vote for an independent? Fear of what?*"

73. S1·R2·S04 — white female, 50s, lean right, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*Just kind of thinking about that, like how do independents organize? Without losing their independence. Without losing their independence.*"

74. S3·R1·S01 — white female, 40s, left, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 1": "*I think there's no way to talk about this without talking about money.*"

75. S3·R1·S01 — white female, 40s, left, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 1": "*Like. There's no way to get around this without. It figuring out the problem of how. Campaigns, elections, everything is funded.*"

76. S6·R1·S00 — white male, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 1": "*And it just the you know. The idea? To me. Again, I'm I'm a little guilty of you know when you're when you're hammer, everything looks like a nail, right? And almost. Guy who's focused on structural reforms. But I'm focused on, I believe that elected representatives. I'm all about incentives and I think when they get elected, the first two things that. Whenever an issue comes up. That they have to think about or take a position on or vote on something that the first two things. Or two of the four things that go through their mind. Or what am I donors gonna think? And one of my primary voters going to think. And those two issues are my two big issues and you know, somewhere early on somebody mentioned the money, but.*"

77. UNKNOWN, Room "Session 2 · Room 1": "*What would work better or worse? For me, I said it before. What would work? Better or worse? We need to get dark money out. For me, I said it before. We need to get dark money out. Also, what we need to do is, like you mentioned, [PERSON], we need to restrict. Also, what we need to do is, like you mentioned, [PERSON], we need to restructure, but restructuring our Congress, our Senate, our whole government. Structure, but restructuring our Congress, our Senate, our whole government. To me. Is embedded right in the Declaration of Independence. We have the right to alter or abolish. We need to get rid of our current system the way it is. To me. Is embedded right in the Declaration of Independence. We have the right to alter or*

abolish. We need to get rid of our current system the way it is. Because as several of you mentioned. Because as several of you mentioned. All that happens in the system is that politicians get in and then as soon as they're elected. All that happens in the system is that politicians get in and then as soon as they're elected. They automatically. They automatically. Tow whatever line in order to stay elected and get reelected."

78. S3·R1·S03 — white male, 20s, center, some college, no degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 1": "*Well, I've I've got a few. Thoughts of my own to add. So first and foremost for the money aspect. Especially dark money. Get a constitutional amendment to overturn. The Citizens United ruling, which in my opinion and in the opinion of a lot of other independent. Voters independent minded people was one of the worst Supreme Court rulings in modern history. I mean it just completely.*"

79. S7·R1·S01 — 60s, associate's degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*Well, as [PERSON] put in the chat. Well, as [PERSON] put in the chat. Congress does have the power to pass a law that overrides Citizens United. Congress does have the power to pass a law that overrides Citizens United. And she's right because Citizens United, like you said, [PERSON]. And she's right because Citizens United, like you said, [PERSON]. Is a 2010, you know, Supreme Court constitutional law case. But what it did is a. 2010 you know, Supreme Court constitutional law case, but what it did? It basically invalidated older laws like I had brought up before like [PERSON], [PERSON] and other laws. It basically invalidated older laws like I had brought up before like [PERSON], [PERSON] and other laws. To make sure. That there were limits. To make sure. To what could go on in the finance situation? …*"

80. S7·R1·S01 — 60s, associate's degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*And our Supreme Court has done nothing but agree with it and our legislatures for the last. You know. 16 years have done nothing but sit on their hands. You know. 16 years had done nothing but sit on their hands. So are they motivated? And I wonder, even if an independence could get in there, would they be able to? So are they motivated? And I wonder, even if an independence could get in there, would they be able to? Get the majority on both other parties. Get a majority on both other parties. To go along. So that they would actually pass it. To go along. …*"

81. S4·R1·S01 — white female, left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 4 · Room 1": "*I agree. Term limits would, would certainly, I think, improve accountability. Uh, or at least. Help remove the incentive. To be focused only on my next reelection. And focus maybe on on issues and, and uh. Priorities and, and things for the country.*"

82. S2·R3·S04 — white male, lean right, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*… in some states at the individual local levels. There is in some states. At the individual local levels. But not at the congressional level. But not at the congressional level. But I. But I. Term limits. Term limits. Might work in that regard to improve. Might work in that regard to improve. Accountability. Downability. And also consider the idea of, and also consider the idea of changing the length of a term. Changing the length of a term. Because because. Once you're elected to Congress, it's extraordinarily. Once you're elected to Congress, it's extraordinarily. Complex. Complex. To get your feet on the ground and become an effective member. To get your feet on the ground and become an effective member. To work with other people to make compromised mini store. To work with other people to make compromised mini store. If you gave a House member a three-year term. If you …*"

83. S2·R3·S04 — white male, lean right, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*And limited them to two years. Two potential terms if you got re-elected. Two potential terms if you got re-elected. That'll be a total of 6 years. That'll be a total of 6 years. AUS senator selector for six years. AUS senator selector for six years. Limit them to 2 terms. Limit them to 2 terms. And you have more accountability at the electoral level. And you have. More accountability at the electoral level.*"

84. S3·R2·S02 — white female, 30s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 3 · Room 2": "*I heard was if you have people that are. Not there. For just little time. They spend most of their time campaigning. And they become. More influenced by outside people when it should be the elected. But I would, yeah, I would argue that it's probably already like that. It's just term limits might. Make it worse if they're shorter. I don't think that would be such a problem …*"

85. S2·R3·S03 — white male, lean left, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 3": "*3rd of the Senate. Because there's a lot to be said with institutional knowledge. Because there's a lot to be said with institutional knowledge.*"

86. S1·R2·S01 — white male, 60s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*I think they create. Their own independent caucus. I think they create. What they call a full. Their own independent caucus. Fulcrum caucus or an independent caucus, just like the Freedom Caucus and the whether you call it a holcomb Caucus or an independent caucus, just like the Freedom Caucus and the, the various other caucuses. In Congress. The virus. Other caucuses. Or in the Senate. And as a group, they have their own rules. In Congress. Or in the Senate. And as a group, they have their own rules. And they keep each other. Accountable and honest. And they keep each other. If somebody goes off the reservation, they kick them out. Accountable and honest. And just say you're not an independent, you're a if somebody goes off the …*"

87. S8·R2·S00 — white male, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*Well, the the caucus. What what they do in caucuses then? They're censored if they don't. If you don't hold to your promises. You are censured. That's just a given.*"

88. S6·R2·S03 — african american or black female, lean left, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 2": "*Is that way of tracking or maintaining their voting records or something like that? You know how they. Voted in Congress. And I don't know, maybe like a report card like thing? I don't know.*"

89. S1·R2·S04 — white female, 50s, lean right, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*I feel like. No Labels, which is a group I followed for a couple years. Was trying to do something similar. Working with their they had a group of senators they were trying to work with, and then they work with the Problem Solvers in the House and what ends up happening with those groups is that they are DRR and ultimately some of the members will peel off. When leadership says Nope, you have to vote this way. And that's why with independence, if independence go in, I guess what you have to ask is what pressures would there be for independent to not act independently? So because they are human.*"

90. S1·R2·S00 — white female, 40s, bachelor's degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*I think that makes it realistic and I think. Honoring your commitment and what the Constitution says in its Constitution week. So it's just, I don't know. I think that that is promising, but also I think. What you think is concerning? Concerns me too, because sometimes once people get elected, they change. So hopefully they can hold steadfast to their principles.*"

91. S6·R2·S00 — white male, lean right, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 6 · Room 2": "*For people to commit to not caucusing with either party because otherwise. You are essentially just giving over your power to that party will. You know. Willingly or unwillingly, whatever, but so. And and they do need to hold together. I'm I'm less prescriptive on.*"

92. S7·R1·S02 — white male, 60s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*What stood out for me was was the, what stood out for me was was the, the the, the the big potential for just a small number of representatives to deny the majority from the the big potential for just a small number of representatives to deny the majority from either party so. Either party so. It it, it felt very hopeful and it resonates with it it, it felt very hopeful and it resonates with, with the hope that I have that. With the hope that I have that, that just a that just a, a few independents can can make that big difference. A few independents can can make that big difference. In in thinking about. In in thinking …*"

93. S8·R2·S02 — white female, lean right, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*One of the things that I thought [PERSON]. You might be getting at, and and and I know once they get up there. Once your member of Congress gets there, they automatically separate them. To Democrats and Republicans, and then they go to their big meetings, OK, and then? The leaders of each party, both in the House and the Senate. Have the ability. To a point. Well, they're it's their job to appoint. Each member to a committee. Now committee membership is really important. Especially if you wanna do things for your district, like if they say they employ a person who is in the farming committee and they're they're not raising the money, that's the other thing they make them do. They make them raise money for the party. And if and and if the leadership doesn't feel like they're doing what they're supposed to be doing for the party, they're not gonna put them on a really good committee. So somebody who is a it is in Kansas, let's say. And they would like to be on the agriculture …*"

94. S7·R1·S02 — white male, 60s, center, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 7 · Room 1": "*… its brand as a fulcrum. In such a way that it it begins to lose its brand as a fulcrum. Caucus and you have. Caucus and you have. Individual members peeling off. Individual members peeling off. Left or right for particular issues as. Left or right for particular issues as, as they should have that. As they should have that. Right to do, but because it's a, right to do, but because it's a such a small group. Such a small group. Again that that would somehow. Again that that would somehow. Dilute its brand as in dilute its brand as in independent. …*"

95. S1·R2·S04 — white female, 50s, lean right, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 1 · Room 2": "*… all different. You don't always have to vote as a block, as a caucus, right? Because I think the minute you say we're an independent. You don't always have to vote as a block, as a caucus, right? Because I think the minute you say we're an independent. Fulcrum Caucus. Fulcrum Caucus. Are you, are you becoming your own? I don't. I don't want them to ever look like their own party because I don't know that this is about a third party. This is about. Are you, are you becoming your own? I don't. I don't want them to ever look like their own party because I don't know that this is about a third party. This is about independence, being able to act independently for the good. Independent Being able to act independently for the good. Just kind of thinking about that, like how do independents organize?*"

96. S8·R2·S00 — white male, Room "Session 8 · Room 2": "*Well, just because of the logistics of getting elected politically. Yeah, you're you are correct, but those those can have an effect. If they're going to do the right thing. Question for everyone is can we agree on what is the right thing? On*

every issue. That's the hardest part and and how do you base that? And you have to go off the chargers of freedom, what we all swore an oath to or were burnt born into that oath? As American citizens."

97. S2·R4·S02 — white male, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 4": "*Yeah. Like like, like, well, I don't know about the history, but like everything like justice, right? It's a little complicated. You got to figure out how do you. How do you decide who decides, right, that they're certified corruption free? And is it their history, the last five years, you know?*"

98. S2·R4·S00 — white female, lean left, a post-graduate degree, Room "Session 2 · Room 4": "*OK, oK. Thank you. I would say. There again that balance of power. Peace is really important, so who's going to be the check? To their power. Who's gonna Who's the check on the power of an independent caucus? Independent Fulcrum Caucus What? What is the checks and balances that keeps that? In in proper balance, I guess. So yeah, that's that's my question.*"

Appendix D: Conversation Guide

The following is the Conversation Guide used to facilitate the conversations analyzed in this report. The questions shown here are exactly what participants saw when participating in a session.

Round & Time	Question
Round 1 — Who's in the room (5 min)	"Share your first name, where you live — your state, and your district or town if you're comfortable — and one word that describes how Congress is working for you right now. Why that word?"
Round 2 — First reactions (6 min)	"Thinking about the video you just watched: what stood out to you most? What felt promising about the Independent Fulcrum Caucus — and what felt unrealistic, confusing, or concerning?"
Round 3 — The value question (8 min)	"Imagine it's January 2027, and a small group of Independents holds the balance of power in the House and Senate. Would that make Congress work better or worse for you? What would you hope they'd do first — and what would you worry they might do?"
Round 4 — Making it real (8 min)	"What would it actually take for you — or your neighbors — to vote for an Independent for Congress this November? What would need to be true about the candidate, the campaign, or the moment?"
Round 5 — Making it work and keeping it honest (7 min)	"Once elected, how should Independents stay independent? What rules, public commitments, or forms of accountability would keep a Fulcrum Caucus working for voters — instead of becoming just another faction or getting bought off?"
Round 6 — Closing: the message you want heard (5 min)	"The findings from these conversations will reach candidates and newsrooms in your state and across the country. If you could say one sentence to them about this idea, what would it be?"