Members of the *Discourse* participating in 23, 24 and 25 March discussion sessions endeavored to answer what is essentially a singular question expressed in two ways. What values do Democrats or Republicans believe their respective party ought to portray as its own? What values ought to inspire the rhetoric, policy proposals and platforms of the two parties?

**In Phase 1** of each session, members generated a list of “American Values,” values that each or either of the political parties ought to adopt as its own.

|  |
| --- |
| **“American Values”** |
| 23 Mar | 24 Mar | 25 Mar |
|  |  |  |
| Honesty | Pragmatism | Multiculturalism |
| Transparency | Choice | Independence |
| Mobility | Freedom | Responsibility |
| Social Mobility | Courage | Individualism |
| Investment | Transparency | Self-Reliance |
| Thrift | Altruism | Diversity |
| Fairness | Empathy | Self-Sufficiency |
| Equitability | Humanity | Opportunity |
| Solidarity | Caring | Equality |
| Access | Charity | Fairness |
| Opportunity | Awareness | Freedom (of Assembly) |
| Collectivism | Knowledge | Generosity |
| Individualism | Expertise | Helpfulness |
| Pragmatism | Truth | Freedom (of Religion) |
|  | Equality | Freedom (from Fear) |
|  | Equitability | Expertise |
|  | Virtue\* | Knowledge |
|  | Honor\* | Fear |
|  | Integrity\* | Patience |
|  |  | Trust |
|  |  | Due Process |
|  |  | Discourse |
|  |  | Education |
|  |  | Mutual Respect |
|  |  | Justice |

\*These three values were added to the aggregated list during phase 2 when self-identified democrats indicated that these values had been improperly excluded from the aggregated list generated during Phase 1. Though they thought the values important enough to be included in the aggregated list.

**Phase 2** of the discussion sessions offered participants an opportunity to determine core values for each political party. Members of the 23 March session did not attempt to identify core values, but members of the 24 and 25 March *Discourse* sessions did – by selecting values already articulated in the “American Values” lists above and/or by articulating and including values not previously included in the American Values list. The lists below reflect the work of the 24 and 24 March groups of Democrats and Republicans.

Readers of this read ahead are urged to read the lists with some skepticism – and a realization that the members of the 24 and 25 March Discourse sessions had too little time to construct the lists with confidence. The lists clearly represent some flaws. For example, “term limitations” listed as a 25 March core Democratic value is not a value at all. Term limitations represent a policy. Yet the notion of term limits likely stems from a value or a set of values. I speculate that as a possibility, it could be that the Democrats who espouse term limitations could indeed see limitations as a mechanism by which the nation state avoids establishing a class of political elites. If that is the case, the idea of term limitations might actually suggest that the value that should be in place is “political egalitarianism.”

During the May Discourse, I hope that participants will evaluate and suggest some changes to the core values list.

**Core Values**

|  |
| --- |
| 24 March |
|  | Core “Republican” Values | Core “Democratic” Values |
| tier one | Responsibility | Caring |
| Liberty | Fairness |
| Individualism (self-reliance) | Honesty |
| tier two | Industriousness | Liberty |
| Freedom of Choice |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| 25 March |
| Core “Republican” Values | Core “Democratic” Values |
| Self-Reliance | Human Dignity |
| Capitalism | Equality of Opportunity |
| Tradition | Assimilation |
| Security | Term Limitations |
| Individualism | Mutual Respect |

**The Possibility of Shared Values and the Potential for Cooperation.**

The question that intrigues us for the May Discourse discussion sessions is whether there exists the possibility that shared values might lead to partisan cooperation. Might shared values make partisan cooperation possible?

The obvious answer to the preceding paragraph’s question almost certainly would seem to be, “yes.” Of course shared values could and likely would lead to cooperation. Democrats and Republicans could and probably would cooperate if indeed they shared values – and understood that they shared values. The partisan warfare in Washington, DC might end, or, at least be tempered in the face of there being a shared set of values.

Absent shared values, as a corollary, it would appear that partisan warfare would continue. Stalemate in the halls of Congress would remain the norm. The people’s business would continue to suffer. The House and Senate and White House would fail to achieve much.

When we examine the lists initially, particularly the core values lists, we see little to give us solace or hope. There seems to be little in the way of shared values. The single value that Democrats and Republics of the 24 March session share, “liberty” (highlighted in yellow in the 24 March core values table above) is an important suggestion of some commonality, but one data point does not offer a trend; it seems little more than a drop of possibility in a vast bucket of little hope.

Our purpose during the May Discourse is to discover where there might be commonality of values. We examine the core values lists to see, if upon a deeper exploration of the meaning and implications of the terms, there might actually be more commonality than we saw upon an initial examination.– commonality that could catalyze cooperation between the two political parties, as commonality, I submit, is akin to an avenue toward agreement - a way to “Get to Yes,” If there is greater commonality than typically understood, there is reason to believe that political partisans can reach a mutual state of satisfaction from a negotiation or other form of cooperation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

To examine the core values and the implications more deeply, we might need the aid of a dictionary to be certain that we understand the meaning of the terms used in the core values lists. We might even want to remind ourselves of the definition of “values.” We might also speculate what the surrounding values hierarchy might look like. In other words, we might want to speculate what the supporting and supported values are of those values listed as core. If we were to find, for example that a supporting value to a core value matched a core value of the opposing political power, we would have identified a possible commonality and thus, a piece of common ground on which Democrats and Republicans could cooperate.

1. Here I make a very thinly veiled reference to the book, Getting to Yes by Roger Fisher and William L. Ury. One important point of the book is that finding common ground helps to reach negotiation results that satisfy all parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)