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## Deliberative Polling® in Action in Athens



James Fishkin  
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Photo: L.A. Cicero/Stanford News Service

Stanford Professor of Communication James Fishkin has a new approach to democracy that is making its way around the world. The idea is simple: Give scientific samples of the public an opportunity to become more informed and more engaged in issues and decisions. The results are intriguing.

Deliberative Polling® in China allowed the residents of Zeguo township to impact the budgetary decisions of their local government. The Nebraska Public Power District utilized Deliberative Polling® to gauge customer support for Renewable Energy. And on a recent Sunday in June, Deliberative Polling® was used in Greece to select a candidate for mayor in Marousi, one of the principal municipalities in the Athens area.

Fishkin recruited a scientific random sample of 160 citizens to deliberate about the merits of candidates and the nature of the issues facing the city. The citizens in the sample met in small groups and in plenary sessions with candidates for ten hours and considered 19 issues ranging from traffic and waste disposal to private universities and issues of development. Every citizen of Marousi was eligible to be randomly chosen. After taking an initial questionnaire by telephone, participants were invited to attend and were sent briefing materials on the issues along with candidate positions about them.

"One of the big things we in politics face is the abstention of the people from politics. We don't put the complexity of the issues to them. When we do ask them their opinion, we do so in a superficial way," said Pasok Party Leader George A. Papandreou in an interview with the *Financial Times*. "What this does is to go back to an ancient Greek concept - and carries the idea that everyone is equal. But it does it with a scientific method so that we get close to an idea of what society as a whole is saying."

At the end of the process ballots were cast and the official candidate of Pasok, one of the two leading political parties in Greece, was selected. The Pasok experiment in Marousi was the first time in 2,400 years that a deliberating microcosm of the citizens, chosen randomly, made an important public decision in the Athens area.

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