

Do Michigan Citizens Actually Want a Tax Hike?

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Last month, By the People, a group working for MacNeil/Lehrer Productions under the Center of Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, published their poll results from November 2009. In the report, By the People showed that a representative sample of Michigan residents are in favor of raising taxes, as long as it is done so that the government can spend more money on education, health care and pensions.

The poll conducted was a Deliberative Poll, which is an attempt to gain responses and answers that would be given if the public were more educated on the given topics. The way the polling worked was that a large representative sample was given poll questions. Then a representative sample - 314 to be exact, of that first group was taken and given more information about the topics asked. The briefings given to the 314 participants were to help them gain knowledge. The group was then randomly put into smaller groups where issues were deliberated and the ideas or solutions that arose were recorded.

The surprising findings were that the majority of the group were in favor of a tax hike, after becoming better informed on the issue. Some of the findings on taxes include:

	Before	After
In favor of increasing tax credits for energy efficient homes and business	54%	66%
Increasing tax credits for low income workers	59%	61%
MI should spend more on programs like education, health care, and pension, even if it means increasing taxes	50%	55%

The polling also resulted in a more educated group. Questions asked of the participants included factual, party placement and overall knowledge questions, each of which overall increased in correct answers after the course of deliberation.

The Deliberative Polling method has been used in other regions around the world, and has resulted in positive changes in policy. For example, in the 90's, eight Texas utility companies polled customers on energy choices. As a direct result of this, Texas has become the leading US state in wind power.

Just because some project showed that a more educated group is in favor of increasing taxes doesn't mean that Michigan will see it happening as a result, but with the success that these types of research projects have had, a tax hike may not have such an adverse response if it presented with an educated reasoning behind its enactment.

Resources:

<http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/btp/2010/mi-hardtimes.pdf>

<http://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20100115/FREE/100119895#>

<http://www.wkcf.org/news/Articles/2010/01/New-Poll-Findings-What-do-residents-think-about-issues-affecting-Michigans-future.aspx>