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On June 24-26, 300 randomly selected Californians participated in the state's first ever [deliberative poll](#)—a three day focus group experiment that aimed to measure the thoughts and opinions of California citizens on policy and political issues. Participants were divided into groups and spent time discussing the following topics: state-local reform, taxation and fiscal policy, the initiative process, and representation. Each group then formulated a question to ask the expert panels that followed group sessions. The expert panels consisted of professionals with ample experience in the policy and political matters discussed by the groups. Needless to say, it was an exciting time for California and government reform wonks.

In observing the Saturday morning session focused on the topics of California's initiative process and legislative representation, we were struck by the difference in group dynamics, as some groups encouraged participation from all members while others took the lead from three or four vocal participants. Each group's discussion was substantively different, with each reaching its own conclusion about how California's flaws could be repaired. Whether it is through the abolishment of the bicameral legislature in favor of a unicameral or the complete elimination of the initiative process, opinions varied wildly about what should be done.

After observing the deliberative poll for just a few hours, we think that California's political future is becoming brighter.

Following the Deliberative Poll, a "What's Next California?" analysis shows that Californians overwhelmingly want to engage with their government and desire real, honest solutions. Transparency and accountability topped the list of demands while the desire for a pro-active legislature wasn't far behind. In particular, support rose for the creation of a formal process to allow an initiative to be amended after submission and the publishing of the top five campaign contributors for and against each ballot measure.

We join the mastermind behind the methodology of the poll, Jim Fishkin of the Center for

Deliberative Democracy at Stanford, when he says he “is hopeful these results change the dialogue in Sacramento and spur real change.”

»Read: [Poll finds strong desire for accountability and real solutions](#) (What's Next California, June 29, 2011)

—*Jodi Epstein and Dean Searcy are interns at Common Cause California.*

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