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What's Next California? Deliberative Poll Results Released



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With approval of the California State Legislature consistently registering around 25 percent, it is clear that the public is generally frustrated with the way things are being run in Sacramento. Earlier this summer, the Bill Lane Center for the American West, together with a coalition of non-partisan reform groups and academic institutions, co-sponsored “[What's Next California](#),” a three-day deliberative poll looking to develop a better sense of public opinion on a variety of proposals that would reform the way state government operates.

“What's Next California” invited a representative sample of over 400 randomly selected citizens from all over the state to spend a weekend considering solutions for how California can address the partisanship, gridlock, and chronic budget shortfalls that confront our state. The

itinerary for the weekend included small group discussion sections, Q&A sessions with policy experts, access to non-partisan briefing materials, and banquet-style dinners allowing participants to interact in a more informal setting. The participants were surveyed on a range of state government issues and reform proposals upon arriving at the event site and submitted an exit survey on the same issues and proposals at the conclusion of the weekend. The idea is that instead of gauging top-of-the-head opinions as traditional polls do, a deliberative poll highlights how opinions evolve as respondents learn more about the issues and have the opportunity to discuss them with their peers.

At a press conference in Sacramento today, organizers behind this event presented the highly-anticipated results from the weekend. Some of the most interesting highlights from the report results unveiled today include:

- When asked to choose between having fewer legislators who each represent more people vs. more legislators who each represent fewer people, support for the latter option increased from 57% to 71%.
- Support for “creating a formal review process to allow an initiative’s proponents to amend an initiative following public input” increased 17 percentage points from 59% to 76%.
- One of the most popular proposals of the weekend was “publishing the top five contributors for and against each ballot measure in the ballot pamphlet”, which increased in support from 82% to 91%.
- “Allowing local governments to raise taxes for local services in exchange for increased coordination of service delivery and public reporting of performance” increased in support from 54% to 63%.
- The proposal to lower “the supermajority vote required in the Legislature to raise taxes” rose 18 percentage points from 32% to 50%.
- Participants also supported limiting the use of one-time revenue “spikes” to one-time expenditures, starting with paying down state debt and filling the state rainy day fund (84% after deliberation, 80% before).

As an academic observer at this event, I had the opportunity to sit in on various sessions- including the small group discussions- and witness first-hand how this deliberation process unfolded. I was struck by the positive tone, civility, and general pleasantness of the discussion despite some clear deep disagreements on certain proposals. One participant later expressed a similar impression to a local newspaper, telling them, “We were a bunch of strangers, from different backgrounds, economic levels, political persuasions, ages, ethnicities and professions, and we were all respectful of each other, listening to one another, expressing different thoughts, observations, considerations, concerns.” I was also surprised to see how in contrast to the headlines and catch-phrases that often capture the extent of our political discourse, the participants in this event showed a real willingness to discuss the merits of the proposals on a deeper level. Some participants had even diligently highlighted and bookmarked key facts included in their briefing books so they could reference them during the course of the debate. Participants really engaged on the issues and showed that they understood the difficult political tradeoffs involved. Overall this event was an eye-opening experience and the results released today hopefully provide policy-makers with greater insight into how the public thinks we can move forward and address the challenges facing California.

For more information on this event as well as the full results, please visit nextca.org.

Read more at the student blog [Out West](#) »

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