

the center for
deliberative democracy

ENERGY CHOICES

Results from Deliberative Polling^{®1} - An Innovative Public Consultation Method

- Averaging across 8 Deliberative Polls in Texas, the percentage willing to pay more on their monthly bill for wind and solar energy increased from 52% to 84%
- As a result of a series of Deliberative Polls there, the state of Texas has become the leading state in wind power in the US
- Support for Vermont's electricity to be produced mostly or entirely inside Vermont dropped from 78% to 69%

Why Deliberative Polling[®]?

The Problem Citizens are often uninformed about key public issues. Conventional polls represent the public's surface impressions of sound bites and headlines. The public, subject to what social scientists have called "rational ignorance," has little reason to confront trade-offs or invest time and effort in acquiring information or coming to a considered judgment.

The Approach Deliberative Polling is an attempt to use public opinion research in a new and constructive way and present results of a poll with a human face. A random, representative sample is first polled on targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a single place to discuss target issues. Carefully balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and are also made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and policymakers based on questions developed in small groups with trained moderators. During this process, participants are not asked to reach any consensus or decisions. Participants are asked only to deliberate on topics at hand. Parts of the weekend events are broadcast on television, either live or in taped and edited form. After deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had the opportunity to become more informed and engaged by the issues.

Here are quick summaries of 4 regions where Deliberative Polling[®] was implemented for the topic of energy choices.

T E X A S

From 1996 to 1998, 8 Texas electric utilities companies polled their customers to determine what energy options they preferred to meet future electric requirements. The graph below shows the percent of knowledge gained after deliberations. The Polls asked a range of knowledge questions, such as what energy source does CPL use most to produce electricity.

Utility	% Before	% After	Change
Central Power and Light	29	45	+16%
West Texas Utilities	40	69	+29%

Index of Knowledge Questions

N O V A S C O T I A

In 2004, Nova Scotia Power's "Energy Forum" brought together 150 people from across the province to talk about fossil fuels, renewable energy, the environment and energy conservation. The graph below shows how important each of these issues is before and after deliberations.

Issue	% Before	% After
Limiting pollutants	20	36
Lowest price for electricity	19	7

N E B R A S K A

In 2003, the Nebraska Public Power District invited a scientifically selected sample of its wholesale and retail residential customers to discuss energy alternatives. 95 percent of participants felt this event was valuable.

Value Category	Percentage
Extremely valuable	60%
Valuable	32%
Somewhat valuable	3%
Don't know	5%

V E R M O N T

In 2007, Vermonters deliberated on the state's future electricity needs including whether the state should buy energy from existing suppliers, a few central facilities, or smaller and more geographically distributed ones. The graph below shows how friendly participants felt methane and solar is to the environment before and after deliberations.

Issue	% Before	% After
Methane is extremely friendly	22	43
Solar is extremely friendly	66	83

¹ Deliberative Polling is a registered trade mark of James S. Fishkin. All income from the trade mark is used to support activities and research of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. Please visit the CDD website for more information: <http://cdd.stanford.edu>.