



Deliberative Approach To Energy And Climate Challenges Shows How To Bring Americans Together

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Nearly all climate scientists (97%) agree that, over the past century, climate change is likely due to human activity. But what do regular Americans believe and how do they think we can work toward stemming this trend? In our current polarized political climate, Americans are surprisingly closer on this issue than you would think according to a recently completed Deliberative Poll.

“Much of today’s political discourse is driving people apart,” said Micah Weinberg, CEO of California Forward. “Yet this Deliberative Poll shows that people can come together, listen, learn from each other and work together to solve problems.” The Deliberative Poll will be explored as part of a larger conversation during the “Building a Sustainable Energy Future” working session at the [2021 California Economic Summit](#), which will be held November 9-10 in Monterey.

In September, “America in One Room: Climate and Energy,” the largest controlled experiment with in-depth deliberation ever held in the U.S., was conducted. It brought together the largest nationally representative sample of the American electorate ever gathered in a single place to

debate key policy issues. A [Helenaproject](#) in partnership with California Forward, The Greater Houston Partnership, The Center for Houston's Future and In This Together, the poll was supervised by the [Center for Deliberative Democracy](#) at Stanford University and conducted by [NORC](#) at the University of Chicago.

The poll addressed the question, "What would the American public really think about our climate and energy challenges if it had the chance to deliberate about them in depth with good and balanced information?"

To answer this question, 962 respondents deliberated online. It began with an extensive questionnaire posing 72 substantive questions about climate and energy. Participants then received a briefing document and engaged with one another on the issues in 104 moderated small groups. At the end of the deliberation, participants retook the original survey to measure the changes in knowledge and opinions on the issues.

A control group of 671 Americans answered the same questionnaire with no deliberation process. Little changed in the control group compared to changes in the deliberative group.

Some of the key findings include (read the [executive summary](#)):

- **Climate Change Threat:** "Rising temperatures are caused by human activities that emit greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, which trap heat in the atmosphere and warm the earth's climate." Participants moved from 67% agreeing before deliberation to 76% after. Democrats rose slightly to 94%. Independents rose 14 points to 76%, and Republicans rose from 35% to 54%, which is a significant minority to majority support.
- **Climate Change and Human Activity:** "In order to stop the increase in global temperatures, humans must stop adding to the total amount of climate-heating gases in the atmosphere." Support among Democrats rose slightly to 91%, while Independents and Republicans each increased their agreement by about 20 points to 78% among Independents and to 55% among Republicans.
- **Climate Change and Future Generations:** "We should take serious action to reduce greenhouse gases in our atmosphere because waiting to do so is taking an irresponsible risk with our kids' future." Agreement increased 15 points to 78%. Democrats rose 9 points to 95%, Independents 18 points to 78% and Republicans 21 points to 57%, again moving from minority to majority agreement.
- **Greenhouse Gases from Coal:** On energy sources, there was overall agreement with "eliminating greenhouse gases from coal, ideally by 2035." Support rose 14 points to 72%. Democrats remained highly supportive at 88%, Independents rose 20 points to 69%, and Republican support more than doubled, from 24% to 53%.
- **Mixed-Technology:** Support among Independents rose 20 points to 69%, while Republican support more than doubled, from 24% to 53%. 71% of the overall sample (a 9% increase, with majorities of each party) came to support a mixed technology

transition to net zero, including renewables (solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal and biomass from waste) as well as “new generation nuclear.”

- **Pathways to Net Zero:** Strong bipartisan agreement on priorities for how a transition to Net Zero greenhouse gases should be implemented, including:
 - Support for federal goals with state flexibility;
 - The development of a long-term budget that shows how much the transition will cost, how the funding will be provided, and who will pay (i.e. a durable, bipartisan approach);
 - Ensuring the way forward is affordable for low-and-middle-income Americans; and
 - Minimizing impacts on U.S. economic competitiveness, in particular job impacts for American workers during and after the transition

The biggest difference in opinion was not what needs to be done, but by when. The disparity was visible during the following questions: a 2050 target for reaching Net Zero (Democrats at 85%, Independents at 70%, and Republicans at 39%); eliminating sale of new gas and diesel-powered cars and passenger trucks by 2035 (Democrats at 71%, Independents at 44%, Republicans at 23%); and requiring all new buildings and major appliances to use only electricity (no gas) by 2035 (Democrats at 76%, Independents at 53% and Republicans at 32%).

Californians and Texans were oversampled to evaluate the differences between the nation’s biggest blue and red states. The poll found surprising agreement between residents of the two states on most issues. For example, Texans showed a 23-point increase in support for achieving Net Zero moving toward closer agreement with Californians. And Californians moved toward agreement with Texans with a 15-point increase in support for new generation nuclear power.

“Americans across the political spectrum align around the urgency and policy actions to address climate change when they take the time to have a fact-based dialog,” said Lenny Mendonca, Leadership Council member of California Forward. “The only question is if policymakers will take up the challenge with the same urgency.”

Weinberg added, “We need a lot more of this approach, and bringing people together across ideologies, regions, communities and sectors to solve our most pressing challenges is what drives our work at California Forward.”

If you would like to participate in the discussion about challenges surrounding climate and energy policies, you can attend the California Economic Summit by registering [here](#).