

# **Online Town Hall Meetings**

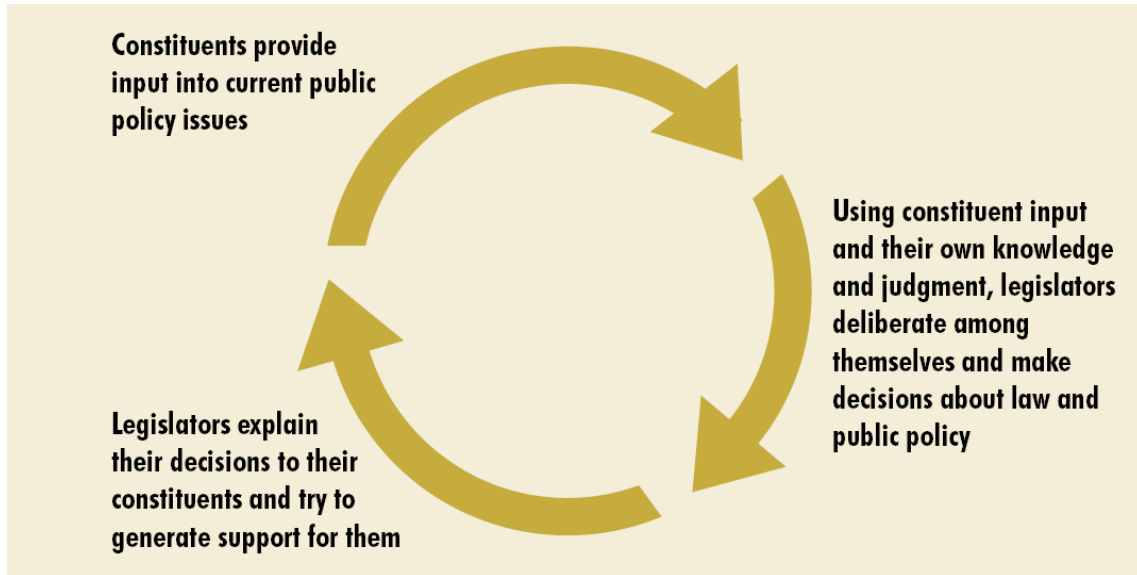
**Exploring Democracy  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**




*A report by*  
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*and*  
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# The Madisonian Feedback Cycle



- How can Congress make use of the Internet to foster deliberation in an emerging digital democracy?
- How can Members apply the principles of the Madisonian cycle, which is second nature to them off line, to the Internet?
- What impact will online deliberation have on constituents' perceptions of their Member and of the issue under discussion?
- What impact will online deliberation have on constituents' views of, and engagement in, politics?

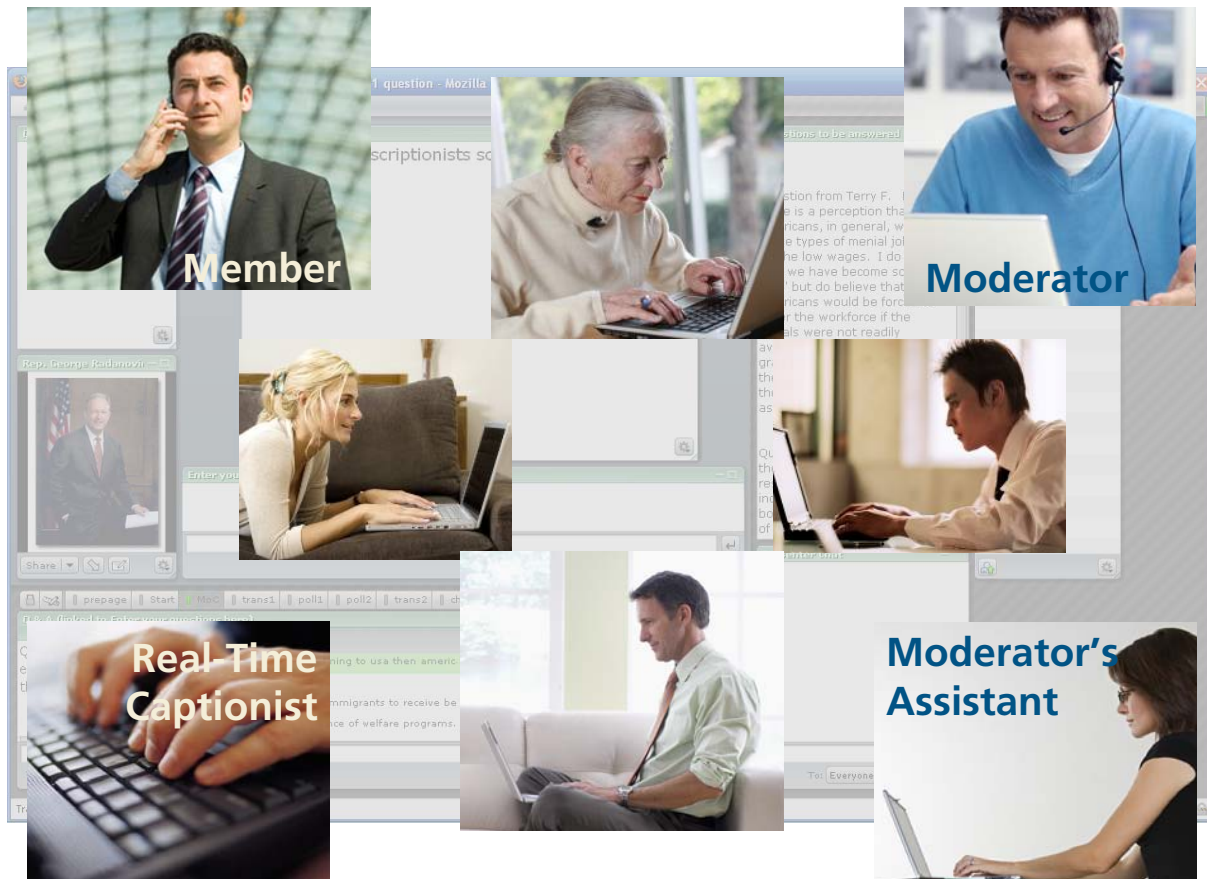


# Agenda

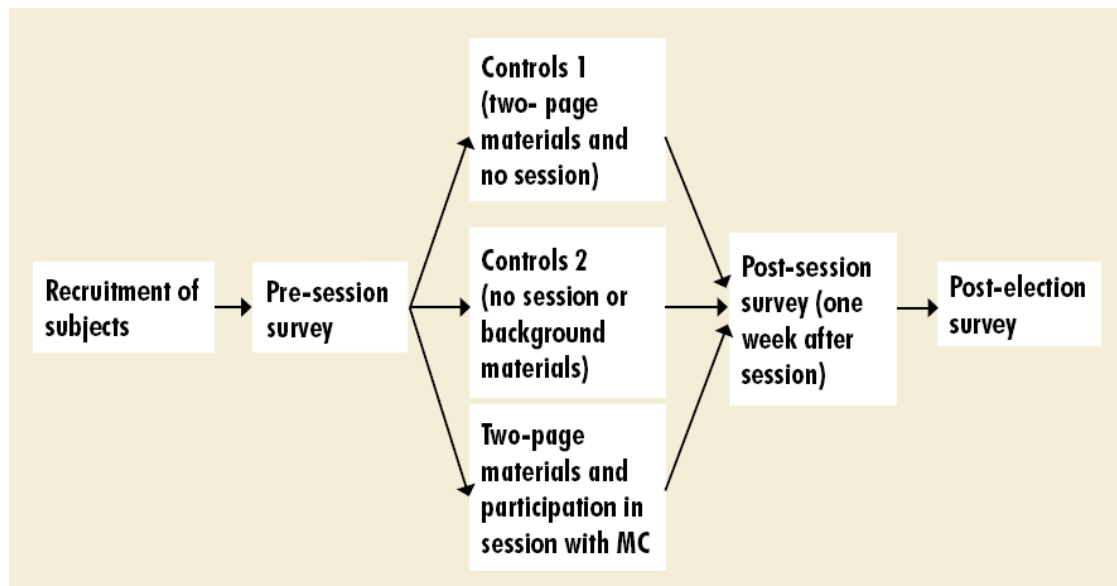
- I. Introduction
- II. Key findings of our research
- III. How to conduct an online town hall
- IV. Q & A



# Methodology



## Research was Conducted Like a Drug Trial





**Constituents found the sessions valuable and informative**

## Quotes from Constituents

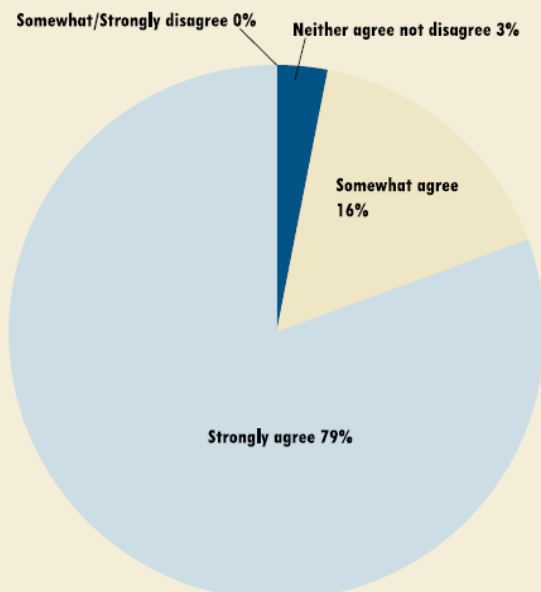
*“I believe we are experiencing the one way our elected representatives can here [sic] our voice and do what we want.”*

*“I think that it was a good way to let our voices be heard.”*

*“Definitely like to see more discussions like this w/our political representatives.”*

### Constituents would overwhelmingly do this again

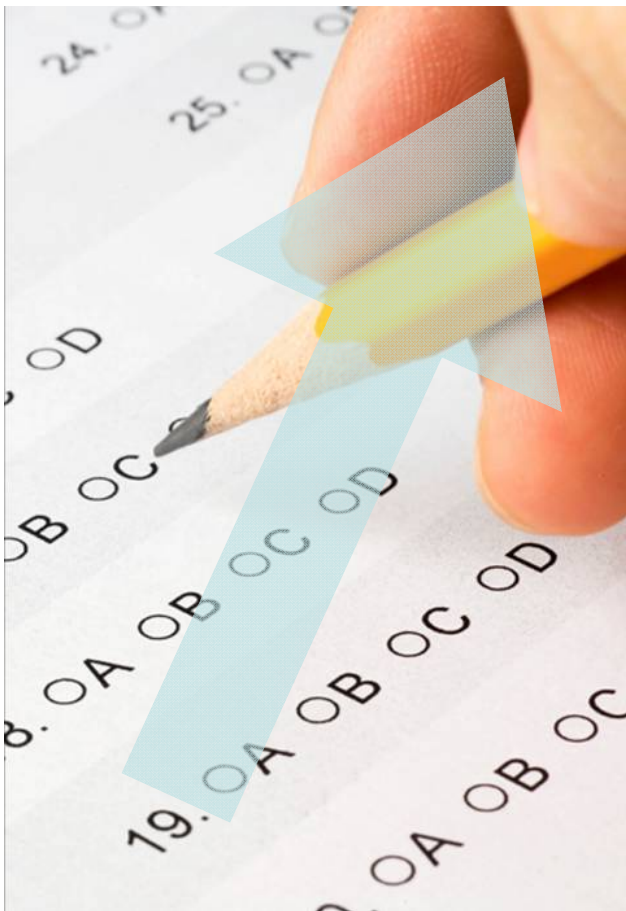
**In the future, I would be interested in participating in discussions like this one about other political issues**





## The sessions attracted those not typically engaged

- Younger people
- Racial minorities
- Women
- Individuals with less strong party ID
- Non-church-goers
- Lower income people
- Only education had the same effect

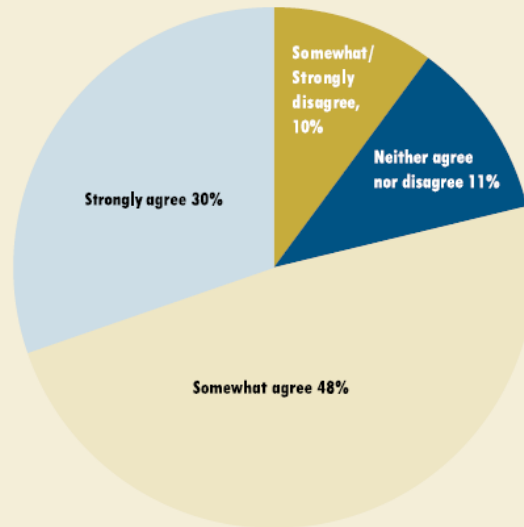


## The sessions increased participants' knowledge about the issue discussed

Correct answers on policy "quiz" increased by 50%

## Constituents found the sessions valuable

**I found the discussion with [my Member of Congress] helpful and informative.**



## The sessions were of high deliberative quality

- Reached a broad array of citizens
- Promoted equal participation
- Arguments by Members and constituents were generally well-supported
- Members and constituents were highly respectful of differing opinions
- Many facts were brought to light
- Participants felt the sessions were of high quality





**After the sessions,  
constituents felt they  
knew their Member  
better**

## **Quotes from Constituents**

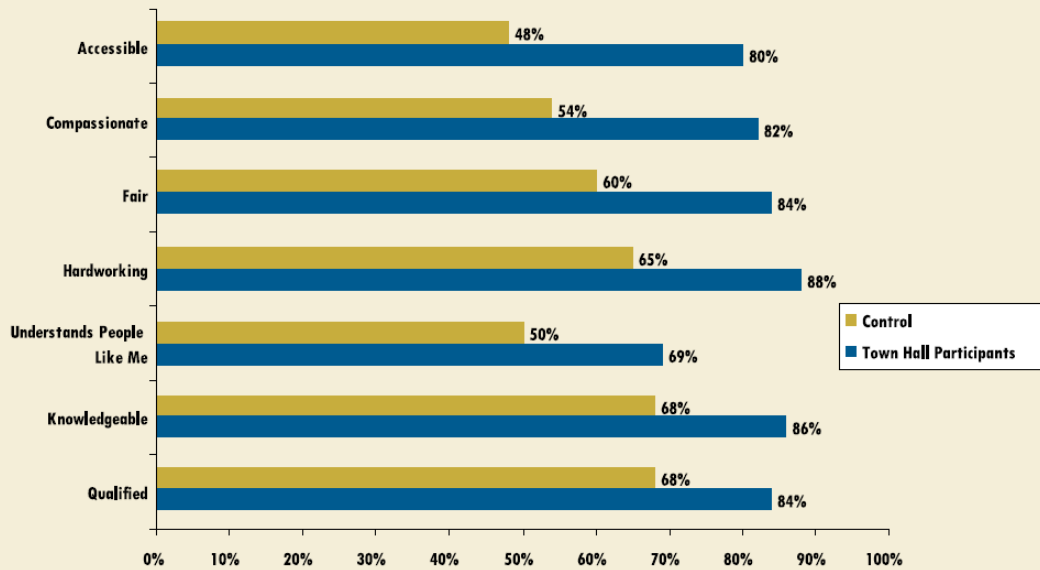
***“I think they gave very good responses and seemed quite knowledgeable of the whole issue.”***

***“She seemed thoughtful and well informed and on the right path to constructive solutions.”***

***“It was nice to see that they had some detailed answers to our questions, and not just skip over them or give us one word answers.”***

## Constituents' perceptions of Members' attributes dramatically increased

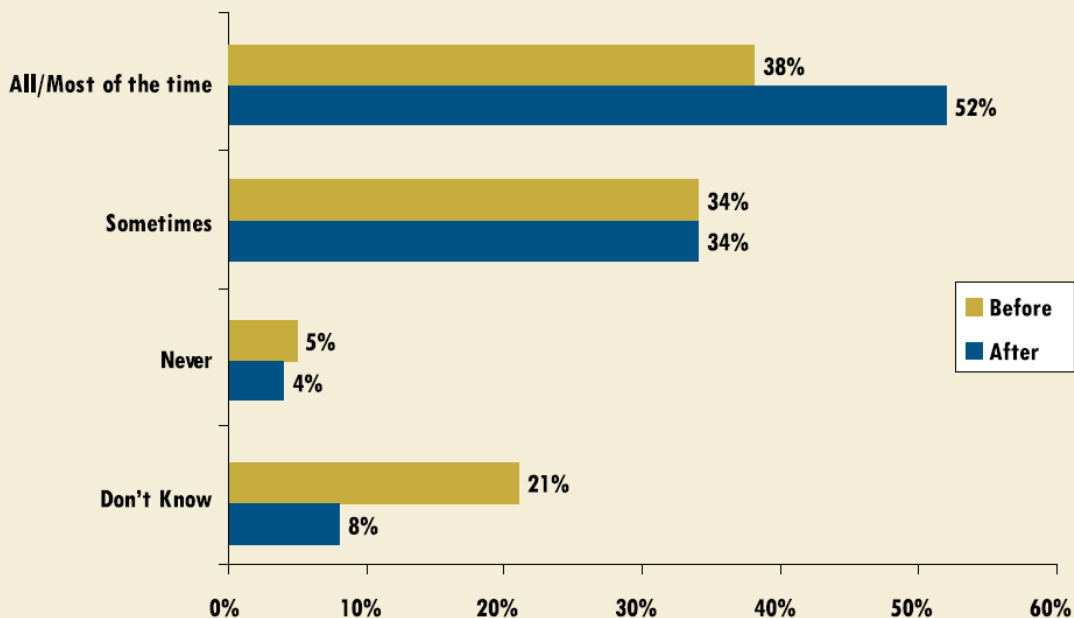
Thinking about [Member's Name], in your opinion, how well do each of the following words describe him/her?\*



\* Data reports percentage of participants who responded that the characteristic applied to the Member "extremely well" or "quite well".

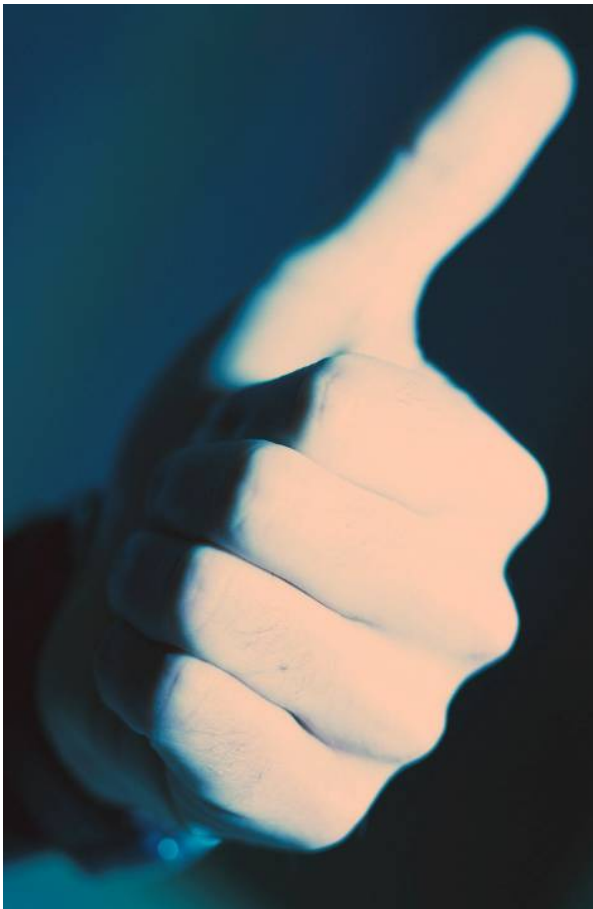
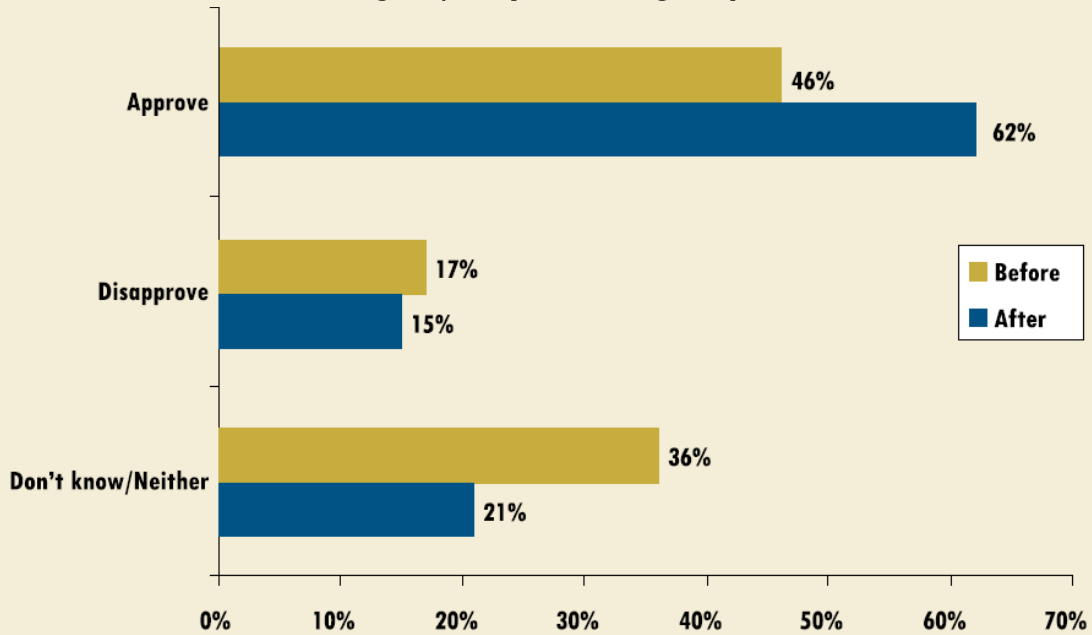
## Notably, trust by participating constituents increased, as well

How much of the time do you think you can trust [Member's name], your Member of Congress, to do what is right?



## After the sessions, constituents felt better about how the Member was handling the job

Do you approve of the way that [your Member of Congress] is handling his/her job as Congressperson?



After the sessions, constituents felt better about how the Member was handling the issue

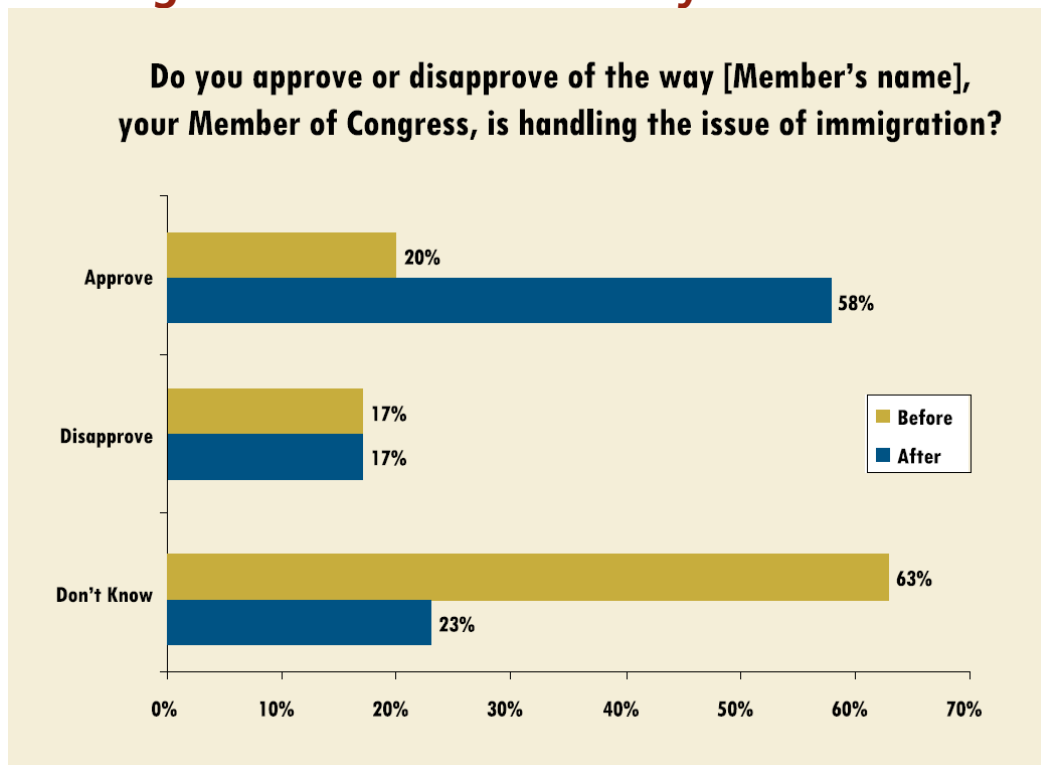
## Quotes from Constituents

*“I thought they really tried to address the issues we were bringing up instead of steering the conversation in any particular direction, which was cool.”*

*“I like his approach, I think he's very open-minded and appears to want what's best for our country's and state's economy, as well as for its residents”*

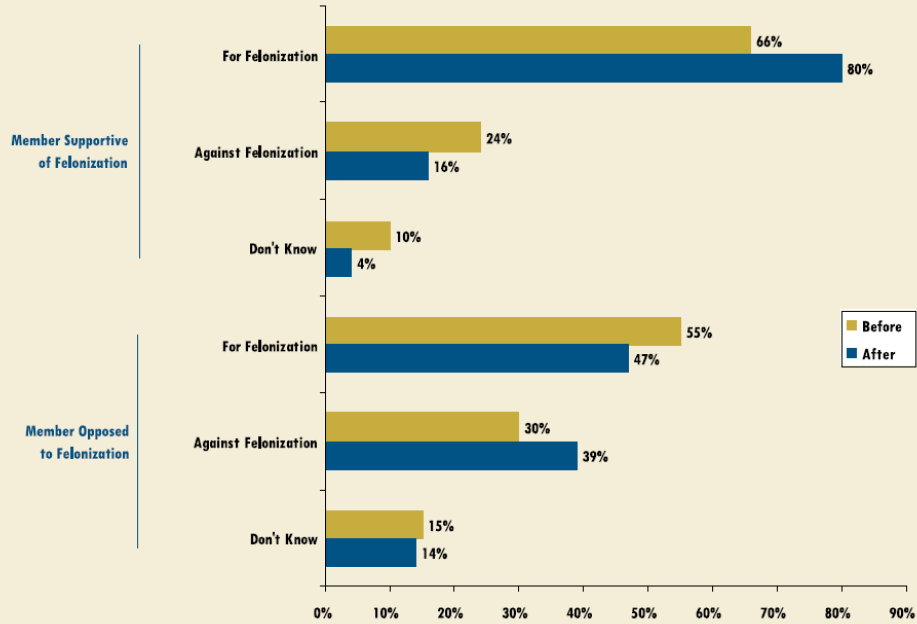
*“He seemed comfortable and knowledgeable about the subject. I agree that it is extremely complex.”*

## Constituents undecided about how the Member was handling the issue felt favorably after the sessions



## Constituents were more likely to agree with the Member's position after the sessions

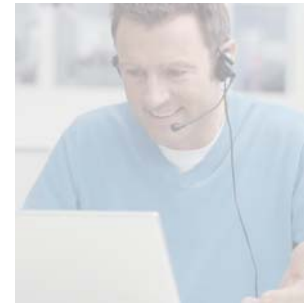
If you were faced with this decision, would you vote for or against making it a felony to illegally enter or remain in the US - that is, to be an illegal immigrant?



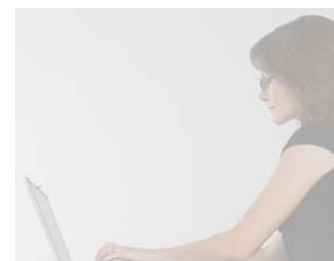
Participants were more likely to be politically engaged after the sessions

## Some of the academic papers on the research . . .

- **Who Wants to Deliberate - and Why?**  
([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1476461](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1476461))
- **Estimating Treatment Effects in the Presence of Noncompliance and Nonresponse: The Generalized Endogenous Treatment Model**  
([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1269485](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1269485))
- **Networks, Hierarchies, and Markets: Aggregating Collective Problem Solving in Social Systems**  
([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1413298](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1413298))
- **Explaining the Diffusion of Web-Based Communication Technology among Congressional Offices: A Natural Experiment using State Delegations**  
([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1451450](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1451450))
- **Website Interactivity & 'Distributional Path Dependence' in the U.S. Congress: An Analysis of Freshmen**  
([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1477642](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1477642))
- **Means, Motive, & Opportunity in Becoming Informed About Politics: A Deliberative Field Experiment with Members of Congress and Their Constituents** ([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1301772](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1301772))



**Your office  
can do this!**



## Choose a Meeting Tool

- Text chat functionality
- Audio integration
- Screen sharing
- Robust moderating capabilities
- Polling capability
- Session recording
- Reliability
- User-friendliness



**Schedule the Meetings**



## Plan the Meetings

- Prepare materials
- Test the application
- Establish roles & responsibilities
- Prepare Member & staff



**Invite a Broad Spectrum  
of Participants**



## Conduct the Meeting



## Follow Up



## **We found it key to . . .**

- **Include a neutral moderator**
- **Invite a broad sample of constituents**
- **Allow unscripted, real-time interaction**
- **Let them hear the Member**
- **Provide brief, unbiased information in advance**
- **Focus on a timely and specific issue**



**Thank You!**



**Full report at [www.cmfweb.org](http://www.cmfweb.org)**

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