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# BENCHMARK

## RESEARCH

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### METHODOLOGY

In association with Vote Solar, Benchmark Research has completed a statewide survey of registered voters in South Carolina regarding several important political issues and policy proposals. Data was gathered from December 8-11, 2018 and represent the opinions of 400 South Carolinians. Respondents were contacted by telephone using a combination of valid residential and cellular telephone listings (285 respondents were reached via landline; 115 respondents were reached via cell phones.) Each respondent was registered to vote in South Carolina and part of a representative sample based on current voter registration statistics. Data was stratified to represent accurate proportions in vital characteristics including race, age, gender, geography and political persuasion. The margin of error for a survey of this type is  $\pm 4.46\%$  for 19 out of 20 cases.

### KEY FINDINGS

- A large majority of voters (77%) would support a new law that gives consumers more choices in where they buy power and “let consumers choose their energy supplier.” There are no statistically-significant differences found, regardless of service area, race, age or gender.
- A large majority of voters agree (37% “Strongly Agree; 35% “Somewhat Agree”) that they would be able to find a better deal on their energy bills if utilities had to compete with other suppliers of energy.
- A large majority of voters (69%) believe utilities should be required to purchase power from a private power producer if that company can produce power more cheaply...and an even greater majority (87%) believe consumers should have the right to purchase directly from the private power producer if that company can produce power more cheaply.

- Voters will use a candidate's position on expanding choice and allowing independent power producers better options to help guide their level of support for that candidate...

How likely are you to vote for a candidate who supports allowing independent power producers to compete with utilities that want to build their own new power plants to generate electricity?

5%	Very unlikely
8%	Somewhat unlikely
18%	It will not affect my vote
34%	Somewhat likely
29%	Very likely
7%	Undecided/Unsure/Don't Know

<b>13%</b>	<b>TOTAL UNLIKELY</b>
<b>63%</b>	<b>TOTAL LIKELY</b>

How likely are you to vote for a candidate who supports giving you a choice of energy providers other than your existing utility?

5%	Very unlikely
4%	Somewhat unlikely
14%	It will not affect my vote
34%	Somewhat likely
39%	Very likely
4%	Undecided/Unsure/ Don't Know (DNR)

<b>9%</b>	<b>TOTAL UNLIKELY</b>
<b>74%</b>	<b>TOTAL LIKELY</b>

## KEY FINDINGS ABOUT SOLAR

- There is “Statistically Unanimous” support (i.e., within the margin of error,) for giving consumers the choice to install solar panels on their homes or businesses.

Consumers should have the choice to install solar panels on their home or business to reduce the reliance on the utility.

76%	Strongly Agree
19%	Somewhat Agree
2%	No Opinion
1%	Somewhat Disagree
1%	Strongly Disagree
1%	Unsure/Don't Know/Refused

- Voters will use a candidate’s position on solar issues to guide their level of support for that candidate. Further, 64% said they are more likely to vote for “a candidate who supports expanding access to clean energy choices like rooftop solar.”
- Once informed, a large majority of voters support net metering...and that sentiment extends to increasing the caps/limits.

Rooftop solar power gives families, churches, schools and businesses a way to produce their own electricity. There may be times when those solar panels produce more power than the customer needs, and so that extra solar electricity goes into the power grid for the utilities to re-sell to other customers nearby. South Carolina, along with 43 other states, has a policy called ‘net metering’ that makes sure these customers who go solar receive a full credit on their utility bills when their solar panels produce extra energy. Having heard this do you support or oppose this policy of net?

Support	86%
Oppose	5%
Undecided	10%

Currently there is a limit on how many consumers are allowed to net meter. After that net metering cap is reached, the utilities are no longer required to give additional customers net metering credit for the solar power they send to the utility grid. Do you think this cap should be increased to allow more South Carolinians to use net metering to save with solar??

Yes-Increase	80%
No-Don't Increase	6%
Undecided	14%

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

- In the “for what it’s worth” column, the only semi-consistently variance in the crosstabs can be seen among those who self-report that their provider is a Co-Op. Here are some examples...

	Overall	Co-op Members
“Let consumers choose their energy supplier”	77% support	67% support
Competition would be a better deal.	72% agree	61% agree
Support independent producers’ candidate	63% likely	55% likely
Support energy choice candidate	73% likely	64% likely

- South Carolina voters are overwhelmingly supportive of the solar cause and they are positive in their outlook (something not seen very often in public opinion surveys these days.)
- These results point to unmistakable conclusions, but messaging is important. Use this as a guide to wordsmith your communications as precisely as possible.