



Wisconsin Voters Give Community Solar a Green Light

Wisconsin Voter Survey Results
August 2025



Background and Methodology

Overview

This survey was conducted to measure public opinion on community solar in Wisconsin, with an emphasis on four priority legislative districts identified as key battlegrounds in ongoing policy discussions. The statewide results provide a comparative benchmark.

Geographic Coverage

- **Key Districts:** These districts are generally Republican-leaning, less urban than the state average, and represent competitive legislative terrain. Key districts results are shown in aggregate.
 - **Senate District 17** (Southwest Wisconsin) — Largest city: Platteville
Driftless-area along the WI/IA/IL border; predominantly rural and small-town.
 - **Senate District 31** (Chippewa Valley – Western WI) — Largest city: Eau Claire
Centered on Eau Claire and the lower Chippewa River; mix of small-city, suburban, and rural communities.
 - **Assembly District 85** (Wausau area – North-central WI) — Largest city: Wausau
City of Wausau with surrounding suburban neighborhoods in Marathon County.
 - **Assembly District 88** (Greater Green Bay – South/East suburbs) — Largest city: De Pere
Suburbs along the Fox River south/east of Green Bay; predominantly suburban.
- **Statewide Benchmark:** A representative sample of Wisconsin voters.

Sample Design and Fieldwork

- **Key Districts:** n=219 registered voters; mixed-mode (telephone and online) to maximize representativeness; field dates: July 18–August 1, 2025. **Key District Allocation:** ~55 per district (~60% online, ~40% phone).
- **Statewide:** n=206 registered voters; online data collection only. Field dates: July 18–24, 2025.

Background and Methodology

Weighting

Both samples were stratified and weighted to match the demographic and partisan composition of their respective electorates. Statewide weighting parameters were derived from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau ACS data and statewide voter file records. Key district weights incorporated L2 voter file demographics, blended Census estimates, and partisanship benchmarks based on historical voting patterns and Cook Political Report Partisan Voting Index scores.

Questionnaire

Respondents were presented with a neutral, factual description of community solar prior to attitudinal questions (full wording provided in Appendix A). The instrument measured support, voting salience, perceived urgency, and response to key message frames.

Margins of Error

- Statewide sample (n=206): ± 6.8 percentage points
- Combined key district sample (n=219): ± 6.6 percentage points
- Margins are calculated at the 95% confidence level using a conservative proportion assumption ($p=0.5$).

Executive Summary — Community Solar Support at a Glance

In Republican-leaning, less-urban key districts, voters back locally controlled community solar, see affordability pressure, and reward a YES vote.

77%

Want lawmakers to allow
community solar
(79% statewide)

66%

More likely to support a lawmaker
who votes **YES** on community solar
(64% statewide)

65%

Say allowing community
solar is **urgent**
(78% statewide)

64%

Say lawmakers aren't doing
enough about **rising utility bills**
(same statewide)

Only 9%

Say lawmakers should oppose
all solar projects
(15% statewide)

~8 in 10

Support a mixed energy approach
that includes community solar
(same statewide)

Key districts n=219 (mixed-mode), registered voters; statewide n=206 (online), registered voters.

Key Districts Are More Republican and Less Urban Than Statewide

- Key districts lean Republican relative to the statewide electorate.
- The districts are less urban and somewhat older (more small-town/rural residents and a higher 65+ share).

	Key Districts	Statewide
Political Affiliation		
Republican	38%	34%
Democrat	29%	30%
Independent / Other	33%	35%
Living Area		
A large city or urban area	17%	24%
A suburban area near a city	35%	40%
A small town	23%	17%
A rural area	25%	19%
Age		
18-29	7%	13%
30-44	25%	21%
45-64	33%	39%
65+	35%	24%

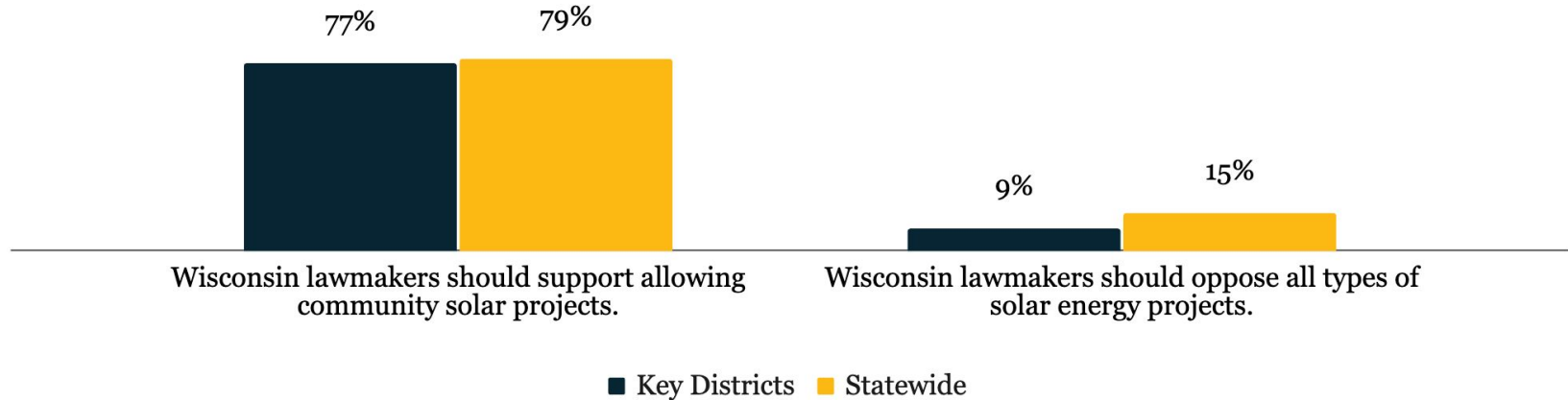
*Weighted results; minor age differences may reflect mode and weighting inputs.

Strong Majority Supports Allowing Community Solar

- Majorities agree in both key districts and statewide.
- Very few want to ban solar entirely.

Agreement with Solar Policy Statements (Top 2 Box: Strongly + Somewhat Agree)

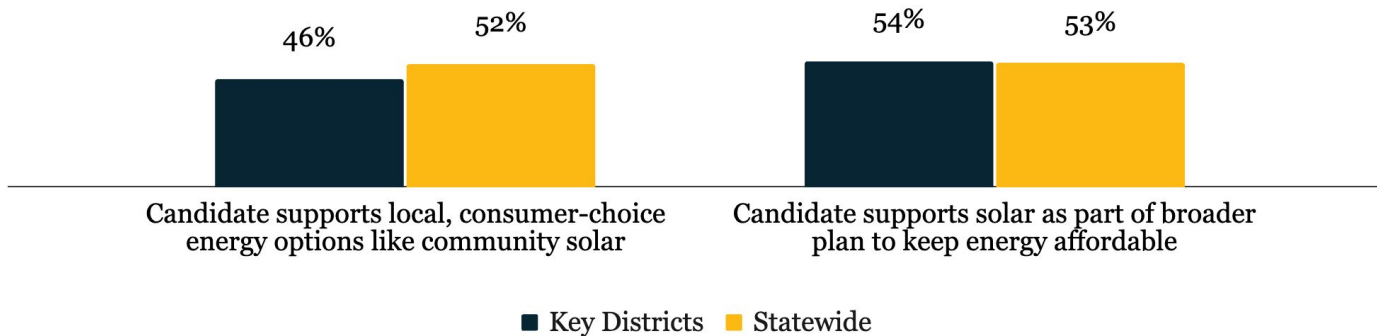
Support by party (Key Districts): Republicans **74%** · Democrats **87%** · Independents/Other **71%**



Many Voters Factor Community Solar into Their Vote Decisions

- Around half of voters in key districts and statewide say a candidate's position on community solar is important when deciding how to vote.
- Support for solar as part of a broader affordability strategy is rated similarly important.

Importance of Candidate Positions When Voting (Top 2 Box: Very + Extremely Important)



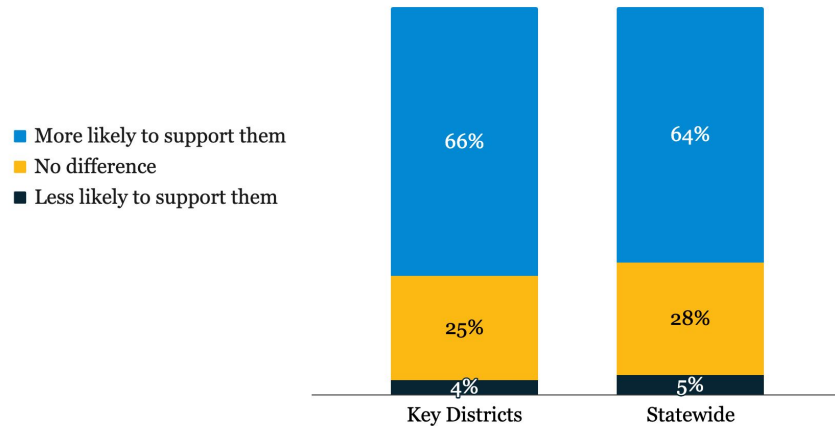
Context: Nationally, the economy is $\approx 81\%$ “very important.” Mid-tier issues typically sit near $\sim 50\text{--}56\%$ —e.g., gun policy 56%; abortion 51%. Energy actions benchmark similarly: enforce clean air and water 56%; expand the U.S. clean-energy industry 53%. Our $\sim 46\text{--}54\%$ candidate-position scores fit that mid-salience band. Sources: Pew Research Center (Sept 2024); AP-NORC/EPIC 2024 Energy Survey.

Measures differ across sources (Top-2 vs “very important” vs “very/extremely important”); treat as directional context.

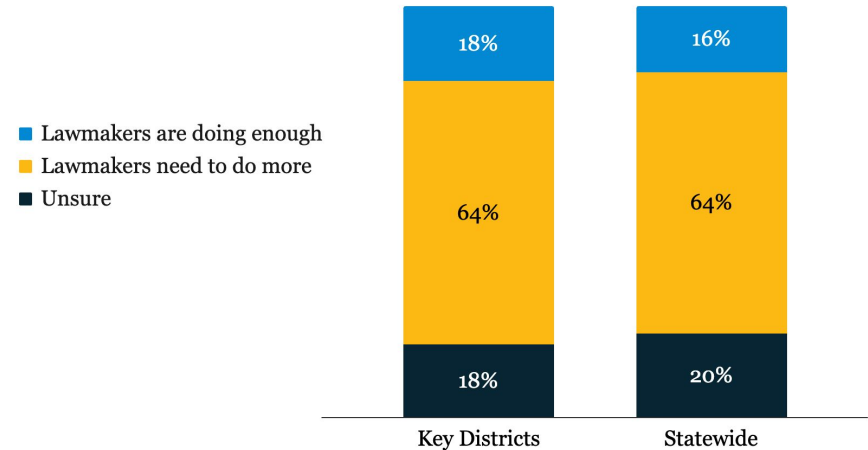
Many Reward a YES Vote; Most Say Lawmakers Must Do More on Utility Bills

- About two-thirds in both key districts and statewide say they'd be more likely to support a lawmaker who votes YES on a community-solar bill; very few say less likely.
- Roughly two-thirds say lawmakers need to do more to address rising utility bills; only about one in six say lawmakers are doing enough.

Impact of a Legislator Voting for a Local-Control Community Solar Bill



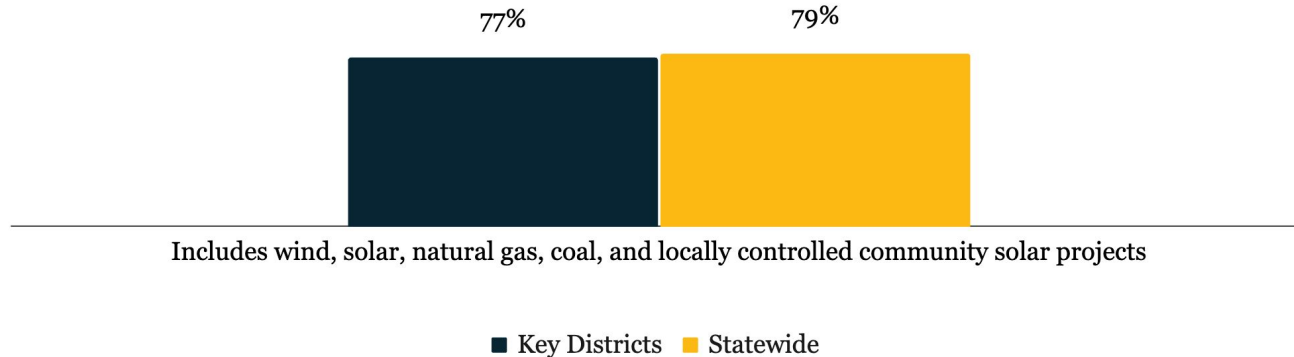
Perceptions of Lawmakers' Action on Rising Utility Bills



Strong Support for an Energy Strategy That Includes Community Solar

- About 8 in 10 voters in both key districts and statewide support a mixed energy approach that includes locally controlled community solar.

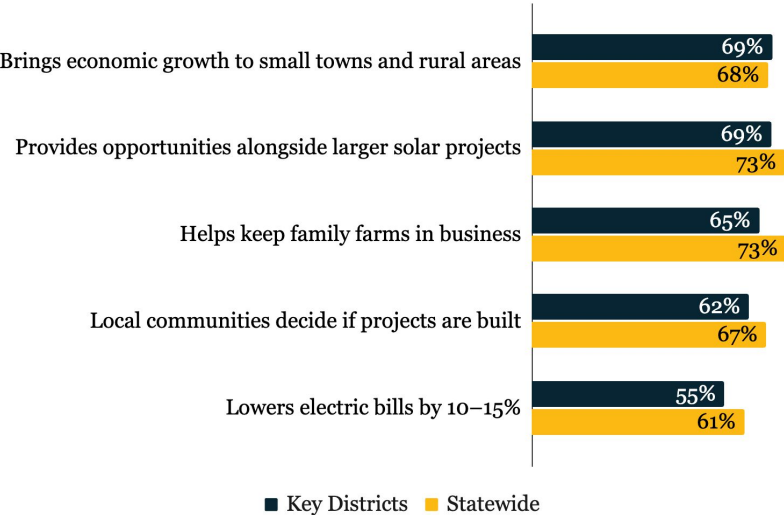
Support for a Comprehensive Energy Strategy That Includes Community Solar (Top 2 Box)



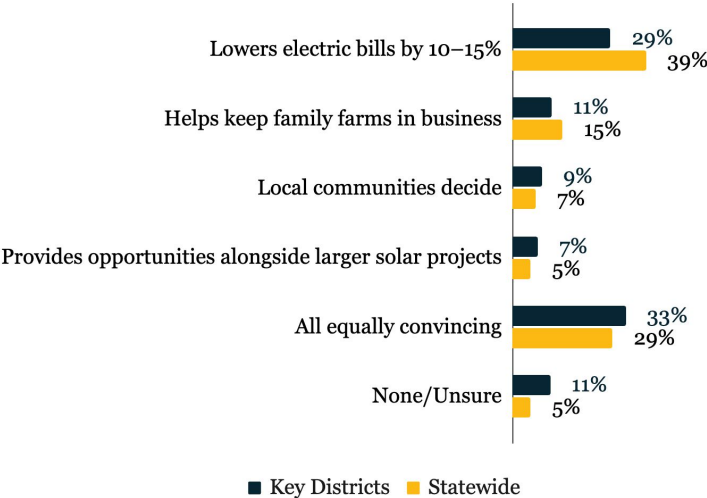
Economic and Local Benefits Drive Support for Community Solar

- Strong agreement on multiple benefits, with highest ratings for opportunities alongside larger projects and rural economic growth.
- Lowering electric bills is the single most convincing reason to support community solar.

Agreement with Statements About Community Solar (Top 2 Box)



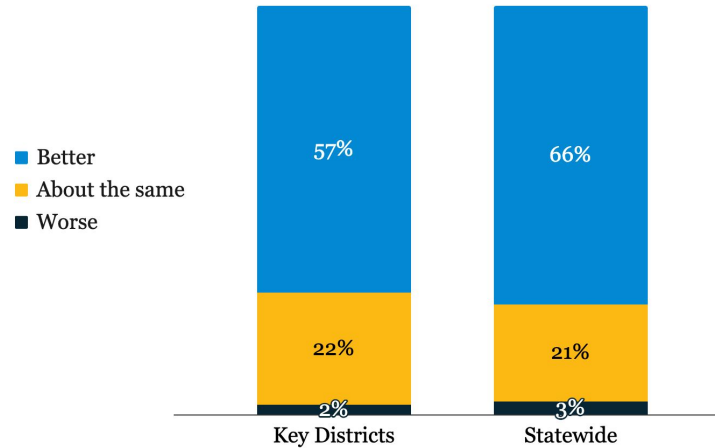
Most Convincing Reason to Support Community Solar



Most Say Community Solar Is Better Than Large Utility-Owned Solar Farms

- Majority in both key districts and statewide say smaller, local projects are better than large-scale solar farms.
- Only a small fraction see them as worse.

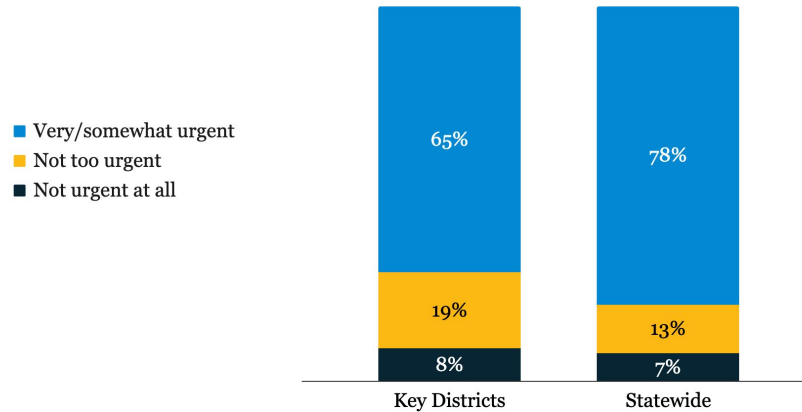
Perceived Impact of Community Solar vs. Large Utility-Owned Solar Farms



Majority See Urgent Need for Lawmakers to Act on Community Solar

- 65% in key districts and 78% statewide say action is very or somewhat urgent.
- Only a small minority view the issue as not urgent.

Perceived Urgency for Lawmakers to Allow Community Solar



Why Voters Support Community Solar — In Their Own Words

What this page shows: The most common themes from the open-ended prompt, “Imagine you have 30 seconds to speak directly to your Wisconsin state legislator about community-solar projects...” Themes are ordered by frequency; quotes are verbatim (lightly edited for clarity) and labeled by district.

1. Lower household electricity bills (33%)

- a. Voters repeatedly tie community solar to **affordability** and relief from rising utility bills—often framed as basic cost-of-living. This echoes the structured finding that “lower bills” is the top specific reason to support community solar.
 - i. *“Community solar projects can help us reduce electricity bills, create jobs, and promote the use of renewable energy.” (AD-85)*
 - ii. *“Please help make electricity more affordable.” (SD-17)*

2. Protect the environment with clean energy (22%)

- a. Respondents see community solar as **clean/renewable power** and a step toward lower emissions; some explicitly mention climate or leaving a better future.
 - i. *“Community solar enables renters to participate in clean energy, which is quite important.” (AD-88)*
 - ii. *“Solar is very beneficial to the future of the country.” (SD-17)*

3. Use a balanced energy mix; expand solar options (18%)

- a. A pragmatic **“all-of-the-above”** outlook—keep a diverse mix and add community solar to the toolkit; less reliance on any single source.
 - i. *“A mix of energy at different scales is probably good for the state.” (SD-17)*
 - ii. *“It’s important to bring other avenues of solar energy.” (AD-85)*

4. Let local communities, not big utilities, decide (16%)

- a. Strong preference for **local decision-making** and community choice about projects.
 - i. *“The state shouldn’t stop an area from having solar if the community agrees.” (SD-17)*
 - ii. *“Please put more emphasis on local, smaller community-solar systems.” (AD-88)*

Why Voters Support Community Solar — In Their Own Words

5. Support / pass it (no specific reason) (10%)

- a. A direct, no-frills **“please pass it”** message to lawmakers—even when a specific benefit isn’t cited.
 - i. *“I think you should approve it—let’s give it a try.” (SD-31)*
 - ii. *“Solar energy is a very good idea—please support it and get it done.” (AD-85)*

6. Smaller footprint; sensible siting (9%)

- a. Preference for **community-scale projects** and siting on existing rooftops/parking—not large, land-intensive installations.
 - i. *“Better to have smaller solar areas than acres of solar farms that take too much space.” (SD-31)*
 - ii. *“It may make more sense to cover parking lots rather than farmland with solar panels.” (SD-17)*

7. Create local jobs and help the economy (9%)

- a. Community solar is also seen as a **jobs and local-economy play**.
 - i. *“An excellent opportunity to reduce energy costs and create jobs.” (AD-88)*
 - ii. *“Community solar could be a great initiative for creating jobs and saving money.” (SD-31)*

8. Keep Wisconsin family farms viable (8%)

- a. Some connect community solar to **keeping farms afloat** and sustaining rural communities.
 - i. *“Family-owned farms are disappearing; this can help the few that are left stay in business.” (AD-88)*
 - ii. *“What can you do to help local farmers?” (SD-17)*

Other top themes: need more information (7%), hear both sides (7%), plan for the future (7%), access for renters/low-income (6%), put residents first (5%), act now (5%). **Light opposition (~2% each): anti-solar/fossil fuels; costs/taxes; Wisconsin practicality/weather; general opposition.**

Appendix

Appendix A

Community Solar Description

Thank you for your responses so far. Now we're interested in your thoughts about energy options in Wisconsin, especially community solar.

Community solar allows residents, businesses, and local governments to subscribe to small-scale solar projects in their area, letting them access solar energy without installing panels on their own property. Subscribers typically save 10 to 15 percent on their electricity bills. These projects use far less land, usually just 1 percent of the size of large utility-owned solar farms, and generate power locally, bringing economic opportunities for small businesses and farmers. Importantly, local communities themselves decide whether a project is right for their area.

Currently, Wisconsin law does not allow these types of locally controlled, small-scale community solar projects statewide. The next questions ask for your opinion about this topic.

(Click "Continue" to begin.)

Appendix B

Benchmarks from page 7

- **Pew Research Center.** Issues and the 2024 election (Sept 9, 2024). Report & topline.
 - <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/09/09/issues-and-the-2024-election/>
- **AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research & Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC).** 2024 AP-NORC/EPIC Energy Survey — Poll Results (fielded Mar 26–Apr 10, 2024; posted 2025).
 - <https://epic.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2025/06/EPIC-2024-Poll-Results.pdf>