Winds of Change: Examining Attitude Shift Regarding an Offshore Wind Project

Samantha Bingaman, U. Delaware; Jeremy Firestone, U. Delaware; David Bidwell, U. Rhode Island; Aaron Russell, U. Delaware

How do attitudes towards offshore wind change over time?

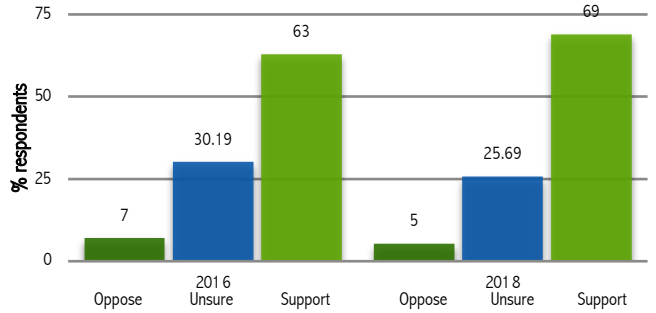
The world needs clean energy – and fast. In the marine renewables sector, especially offshore wind, tech innovation is important, but it is also crucial to take steps to integrate social wants and concerns into the planning process to make it fair, but also efficient. If opposition grows, projects can be delayed or cancelled, and distrust between communities and developers or state planners can take root.[1]

This research takes a first-of-its-kind, mixed methods approach to assessing longitudinal attitudes regarding the first US offshore wind project. We ask: ***how did attitudes shift, and why?***

We combine survey responses of 397 residents of Block Island (BI) and coastal Rhode Island with semi-structured interviews of 24. The survey was administered in 2016 and 2018 (pre-turbine installation and one year after operation), with interviews in 2020. Respondents were grouped, based on whether opinions stayed stable or shifted from 2016 to 2018: **stable oppose** (22), **undecided** (31), and **support** (259); **shifted negatively** (19) or **positively** (66).

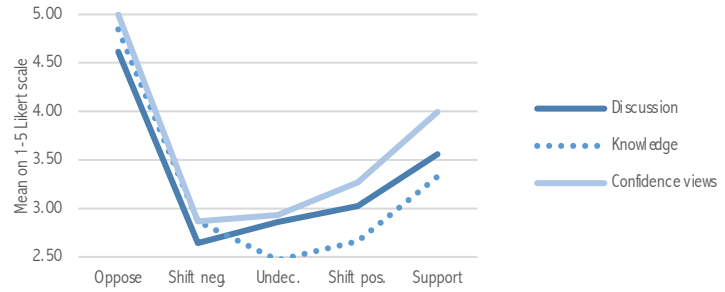
1. Firestone et al., 2020

Using statistical analysis, a regression model, and interview data, we explore which factors predict stability or shift. **What did we find?**



1 | Attitudes changed net positively over time. 16% of attitudes shifted positively; 8% shifted negatively.

2 | Knowledge, confidence, and discussion: Shifters and undecideds were less confident in views about the project, less knowledgeable, and discussed it less often (based on means reported on a 1-5 Likert scale in the survey) than those who remained supportive or opposed.



Reference A: Participant quotes showing balance (see finding #4).

Positive shifter: "We survived the bad. Now we have the good."

Negative shifter: "We felt like we were left behind."

3 | Top concerns about the wind project's effects differed by attitude. Opposers, negative shifters, and undecideds listed viewshed, fishing, boating; positive shifters and supporters listed energy security, renewable energy, environment. All groups listed wildlife.

4 | Shifters balanced the process and aesthetics with the project's benefits. Negative shift occurred when the weight of the drawbacks of the process and aesthetics exceeded that of the local and global benefits by 2018; positive shift occurred vice versa (see *Reference A*).

This research is applicable to various offshore wind projects. It emphasizes:

- Many attitudes are stable, but some shift due to levels of knowledge, confidence, and discussion
- Negative attitudes are influenced by unfair process and aesthetics; positives by local and global benefits
- Engagement should occur both before and after project is built

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