Guide to Polis for XR

Welcome to a new kind of conversation! Polis is an interactive democratic platform used around the world to gather, understand and analyse what large groups of people think.

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What is Polis?

Polis is an interactive inclusive and fair online polling tool that helps groups of people have conversations and make decisions together. It's especially useful when you want to understand what a large group thinks about a certain topic.

What makes Polis special?

- It **listens to everyone** equally.
- It avoids arguments or trolls because there's no back-and-forth arguing.
- It helps us see what a **whole community** thinks, not just the loudest voices.

Who uses Polis?

Governments, cities, and organisations around the world use Polis to shape policies or decisions **based on real input from the public**.

How we Use Polis in XR

Polis can be a stand-alone tool, or used in conjuction with assemblies. Using Polis can strengthen community assembly processes **'by harvesting the wisdom of the crowd'**. It produces reports statistically as well as meaningfully, which also allows for transparency of the process.

Contact the UK Assemblies team if you have questions, would like to get involved in this exciting new way of decision making, or if you need further support with XR's Polis tool.

Case study - Polis in Taiwan

What happened? The government of **Taiwan** used **Polis** to help decide how to regulate **Uber**, which was a controversial issue. Taxi drivers, Uber drivers, government officials, and everyday citizens all had different opinions.

The problem: People strongly disagreed. Taxi drivers wanted protection, while Uber users wanted cheaper, flexible rides. Traditional public meetings turned into shouting matches—no real progress.

How Polis helped: The digital minister, Audrey Tang, invited the public to use Polis online and thousands of people participated by voting on statements and adding their own. Polis grouped people into **clusters** of opinion (e.g., people who supported Uber vs. people who didn't).

Most importantly, it found **shared values** across those groups, like:

- Drivers should be insured.

- Prices should be transparent.
- Passengers deserve safety.

The result: Polis helped the government find **areas of agreement** that everyone could live with. These ideas shaped new regulations that balanced safety, fairness, and innovation. Because people saw their voices reflected in the results, they were more willing to accept the final rules.

Why it worked:

- Everyone had an equal say.
- No one shouted or dominated the conversation.
- The government made decisions based on **common ground**, not just opinions from lobbyists or activists.

Audrey Tang talks about how Polis was used to help pass laws with public inclusion.

Guide: Polis for Participants

How does Polis work?

- You get a link to a Polis poll on a particular topic which includes a number of statements for you to read and react to.
- You can **Agree**, **Disagree**, or **Pass / Unsure** on each statement.
- You can then suggest new statements, and then everyone can vote on those too.
- You **won't** be able to vote on your own statement.

Polis uses maths (algorithms) to see where people agree and disagree on issues. It groups people into clusters based on how they vote and not who they are. This helps set priorities fairly. If there are demographic statements, these help cluster groups based on specific characteristics, e.g. age, location, gender etc. Read the XR Polis privacy info here.

The most powerful part: Polis highlights statements that different groups agree on, and where they disagree. Learning where people's opinions align, allows for fairer and more acceptable decision making. More info the history and use of Polis here.

Adding Your Own Statements

This is your chance to contribute new ideas to the poll for everyone else to vote on. Use clear and concise wording, **limited to 140 characters**. Your statement shouldn't be a question that requires anything more than a simple response! Remember, people will be replying with **'Agree', 'Disagree' or 'Pass / Unsure'**.

What Happens Next

- Polis collects your anonymous responses and then analyses the results.
- The most popular ideas will become obvious.
- The poll results are then downloaded as reports to be shared on the Rebel Toolkit.

How Polis Respects Your Privacy

- There is no registration process.
- It is anonymous.
- Your responses to demographic questions help identify which groups vote in particular ways; this helps with fairer decision-making.
- Your computer has its own address - known as the IP address; this information is deleted from our XR servers after 5 days. (We have to keep that information for this short time in order to protect us all from spammers, etc.)

- If there are too few participants, demographic questions could identify you. These will be deleted if there is any risk of breaking anonymity. (Demographic questions may include e.g. age, gender, location)
- Read XRUK's full privacy policy.

Moderation

There are trained dedicated Moderators for every Polis poll. They help keep the poll simple and ensure protection of privacy.

Sometimes participants add statements that have two options, in which case Moderators will reword this into two statements, both of which can be voted on. There may be repetition of ideas; Moderators will reject those statements that are too similar.

To view rejected statements and reasons why they've been rejected by Moderators, join the Polis Support broadcast on Telegram app.

If you have any questions or need support - contact the UK Assemblies Team

Guide: Polis for Assembly Organisers

This guide is for anyone wanting to organise an assembly and use an interactive poll on Polis, or as a stand-alone 'sentiment check' on an important issue.

How to Organise and Use Polis

It can be difficult to get an accurate picture of people's opinions and feelings on sensitive or complex topics. Polis is a great tool for you to open conversations, first by seeding some initial facts or position statements into your poll. Secondly by allowing participants to vote on these and add their own, if they feel that important, relevant issues have been omitted.

People can then vote on these added statements; this ability to actively engage is the value of an interactive poll.

You will be supported by the UK Assemblies Team. You can request training on how to run a poll, how to frame your question, how to write good seed statements and how Polis works within an assembly.

Find more general information here on What is Polis?

Difference Between Polis Questions and Statements

Open questions are used as the topic for your Polis poll.
Statements are concisely expressed facts or perspectives for people to respond with either: 'AGREE' / 'DISAGREE' or 'PASS' / 'UNSURE'.

The Question

A good polling or assembly deliberation question or topic inspires, fires imaginations and invites all involved to participate in a spirit of hope, trust, openness, inclusion, creativity and empowerment.

There are no wrong and right answers to designing your Polis question, but it is important to be clear about your ultimate goal first. Then refine and distill the topic to serve your agreed purpose. Think about what will inspire feeling as well as ideas, because that will generate real enthusiasm for the process and can help generate energy for putting in place ideas generated!

How to Frame the Polis question

Begin with getting clear on the purpose of your poll and who is participating. How you frame it is important, because it sets parameters and keeps people focussed who take part.

Does your organising group want:

- to expand thinking?
- to find a solution for a specific issue?

Consider who the issue is relevant to, is it...

- a XR movement-wide issue and just XR rebels will participate.
- a local/regional issue and is open for just rebels or the wider community.
- a UK-wide issue open to all citizens.

Sense-checking

Co-creating with others will help you develop your question and statements for participants to vote on.

- The question for deliberation needs to be clearly understandable.
- It needs to be summarised in as short a sentence as possible.
- It will be broad enough to allow for creative thinking, but not so broad that a structured poll and possible later conversation around it is difficult.
- Keep participants focussed with e.g. geographical locality or time-based limits.

Example Question Openers

- Broad = How might we... How can we...
- Narrow = Should we do X or Y? Do you agree with this or that?

Example Questions

Open questions but with boundaries work well and open up discussions by inviting all voices to join in.

How can we nurture nature in (community / village / town, etc.) across the seasons?
This question sets a geographical limit, which will suggest solutions that can be implemented locally and offer a breakdown of recommendations based on different times of year. It may also suggest where there is a need for possible actions at a national or even international level.

How can (name of locality / town / county) make sure that everyone in our community can access healthy, affordable food for the long term?
Food resilience is a massive topic, with many threads, all of which could be addressed by expert or enthusiast groups coming together on specialist areas.

How might XR be more focused on its demand for systemic change - a Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice?
This could be asked just for UK circle role holders and it could be narrowed down to what they could do within their curren role or team. Or it could be asked to whole movement to get wider ideas of what to do locally.

How might communication be improved between the UK Circles, Nations and Regions, Local, Campaign and Community groups?
A movement wide Polis on this could come up with new ideas and show where there was strong agreement.

Possibly too broad:

How can [locality: local, regional, national] do something about climate change together within the next year?
Being a broad question, it will involve a longer poll, with many more statements to vote on. However, Polis will automatically show which statements gain the most popularity to help prioritisation and point to possible connected issues.

How might we rely less on fossil fuels?
There are no timelines in this question, which broadens the scope. The locality may offer some limits to statements to vote on. This is potentially a huge topic, which will generate need for further deliberation.

Statements

Some examples (each statement cannot be more than 140 characters):

- For XR to stand out and get attention is for our action design to include creative, colourful elements.
- The best way to get feedback on any Movement Strategy or Actions Plans is by presentation with Q&A to every group that requests it.
- Regular Polis polls on different topics would help to understand the views of the movement.
- Local groups should make time for social gatherings to build connection and community between rebels.
- The offer of free cake is the best way entice new members to join a meeting.
- Zoom meetings shouldn't be longer than one hour, unless a break is included.
- I have made good friends within the XR community.

NOTE - always double check that someone can answer with 'AGREE' / 'DISAGREE' or 'PASS' / 'UNSURE'.

Moderation of Polis

Running an interactive Polis poll requires **Moderators**. The work closely with Assembly Organisers.

Moderators are needed to:

- protect those taking part,
- protect the system from abuse,
- join a Mattermost channel for support and to access full guidance.

They moderate peoples' added ideas, e.g.:

- remove Personally Identifiable Information (PII), e.g. phone numbers,
- remove abusive comments,
- edit ideas to better fit criteria for the polis topic or assembly question,
- ensure transparency of the process by explaining rejected ideas via a UK Assemblies hosted 'XR Polis Broadcast' Telegram channel.

If you have any questions or need support - contact the UK Assemblies Team

Polis: In Depth

Deep Dive - Representative Balance

Spoiler alert! No system of democracy is perfect. However, anyone who takes part in an assembly, will mostly say how rewarding they find the experience and some local groups have gone onto holding multiple assemblies. However, sometimes the recording of peoples' discussions can be difficult with the time constraints of community assemblies, that normally only have a few hours to work through what is a jam-packed process. Sometimes, facilitators and note-takers are fresh volunteers, which can create bias, mistakes and limitations. That together with assemblies not being part of our everyday culture means that despite best efforts, the recommendations or outputs of an informal assembly are not as good as they could be.

The key to people valuing this process is assemblies being as **representative and inclusive** of all views as possible. UK Assemblies will ensure that inputted statements for voting on in Polis are well-balanced and include as many participants and their views as possible.

The final decision on which statements remain for people to respond to rests with Assembly Organisers and Moderators who have been trained in fair moderation methods.

One of the three pillars of a community assembly is 'Trust the Process'. We ask of all taking part that they trust Assembly Organisers and Moderators will be offering the best possible experience with their training, knowledge and skills.

Nuts And Bolt Ons

- An assembly deliberation is held, in which participants vote on a variety statements. These can be informative on a topic and help people think through issues, then vote.
- All taking part can then submit their own short statements, or comments, (<140 characters), if they feel their perspective has not been represented. These will be in their own words, albeit, they will not be able to see their own additions. The important thing is everyone else gets to vote on that additional idea.
- These additional polling statements are then viewed by participants who then vote on them, by choosing 'Agree', 'Disagree' or 'Pass'/'Unsure'.
- Polis allows groups or organisation to create inclusive interactions, which can involve up to thousands or even, in the case of Taiwan, millions of participants.
- Participants do not need to complete the entire survey to contribute meaningfully to where we are all at and our preferred future direction(s).

Inclusion, Privacy and Demographic Information Trade Offs

- The poll may also be picking up issues of diversity in perceptions, according to demographic groups they belong to.
- Depending upon numbers taking part, we want to really be inclusive, as per one of the three pillars of community assemblies: 'radical inclusion'. However, the risk is that if only small numbers take part, demographic information can reveal who is saying what.
- So for instance, if you 'agree' you are a disabled person, share that you live in the Midlands, and believe your budgies should have the vote, then, chances are your neighbours and / or other participants will know it is you voicing opinions about including pet birds in future assemblies.
- The Assembly Organiser, Moderators and UK Assemblies team will be making decisions on the day as to what data is kept or deleted to protect privacy of everyone involved. Rest assured, there is training in the lead up to any assembly using Polis, together with guidance for all supporting the process to ensure best practice.

Automatic Curation of Ideas and Like-Minded Folk

- The beauty of Polis is its ability to create a real-time, anonymised report on results of the deliberative process.
- It can also show clusters of opinions in images, so people can get an idea for how participants feel about other inter-linked issues.
- Hundreds of of your evaluations of statements will trigger an algorithm that sorts participants into diverse clusters of like-minded responders.
- Pois identifies 'consensus statements', about which all the diverse clusters agree.
- As part of reporting back to everyone who took part, the Assembly Organisers may also share graphics revealing the cross-section perspectives.
- Another positive use of Polis is that over time your statements will tend to become more specific, focussed and offer practical ways forward.
- Bear in mind too, that over time, should these movement assemblies be successful, these Polis supported deliberations could create an on-going feedback loop, deepening insight and connection across the movement. The more we flex our Polis muscle, the stronger it is.

Sharing

- If XR wanted to, information from future assemblies using Polis can also be shared with data scientists, or other groups potentially.
- In the short term, our XR-Wide Assemblies are purely for us to really explore our thoughts on how we operate and what direction we want to take.

In summary then, Polis is allows us to bring our collective intelligence to bear, based on shared understanding of issues and enables us to deliberate at scale, in the tradition of nonviolent communication. It isn't purely a polling tool, it's more of an interactive 'suggestion box'" helping us to get consensus around controversial or contentious questions we all face.