

Benefits of Using Polis

Introduction

Polis[1] is a powerful open-source platform for harnessing the wisdom of the crowd; this helps communities whether local, entire cities, states, or even countries find common ground on complex issues. It reveals hidden areas of agreement so decision-makers can find consensus and resolve tensions on divisive and complex issues.

Inclusive Participation

Polis is an interactive, simple to use online tool that helps groups of people have fair and inclusive conversations and make decisions together at scale and over extended periods[2]. Unlike standard polls, it involves people directly in the conversation by enabling them to contribute their own statements and ideas[5].

Extinction Rebellion UK hosts its own version of Polis on secure servers running on renewable energy in Switzerland.

What Makes Polis Special?

Polis:

- Takes all voices into account equally.
- Allows for inclusion of anyone in deliberation on topics, wherever they are.
- Avoids arguments or trolls because there's no back-and-forth arguing.
- Helps us see what a whole community thinks, not just the loudest voices.
- Enables continued exploration of issues collectively for extended periods to find consensus.
- **Protects your privacy.**

Video

Looking at Polis - a new tool hoping to reboot democracy and find common ground amongst even the most polarised views. ['Can Taiwan Reboot Democracy?'](#) BBC Click [7mins 38secs]

Understanding Group Opinion at Scale

It is especially useful when you want to understand what a large group thinks about a certain topic[2]. Polis is particularly valuable when you need to understand who exactly believes what within a larger group; for instance, identifying opinion clusters among people with varying levels of experience or background[3].

Potential Outcomes

- Put fairness, inclusion and justice at the centre of decision-making.
- Better decisions are made together based on the wisdom of the crowd informed by experts.
- Enables us to work better together by finding common ground and next steps.
- Provides clear, actionable outcomes.
- Increased awareness and understanding of how people can be empowered to participate in a more democratic process.
- Enhance awareness and practice of **citizens' assemblies** which add legitimacy to the democratic process.
- Can be used for large-scale participation in decisions.
- Attract UK-wide media coverage (due to the novelty and potential scale of engagement).

Transparency and Statistical Rigour

Polis produces understandable statistical reports, As the analysis can be shared publicly at the end of a conversation, this process is transparent.[2]. The most powerful part is that it highlights statements that different groups agree on, and where they disagree. Finding where people's opinions align makes for more legitimate decision making that everyone has been involved in. This gives legitimacy and weight to any Polis deliberation process, supporting more willing adoption of its conclusions by organisations and institutions.

Policy and Community Applications

- It can be used as a stand-alone tool or in conjunction with community assemblies, strengthening those processes by "harvesting the wisdom of the crowd"[2].
- It has been applied to complex policy debates, such as data-driven political campaigning, where it allowed people to define key issues in their own words[4].
- It enables mapping of the values and motivations underlying people's beliefs, making it a useful tool for finding solutions to difficult policy issues[4].
- Tech upskilling makes system learners potentially more employable, which in turn, may make the democratic process attractive to a younger demographic.

Deeper Dive

Further info: [Consensus Building in Taiwan, the Poster Child of Digital Democracy](#) by Sebastian Cushing Rodriguez. Read this blog by James Sweetland: 'A sophisticated conversation about misinformation via Polis' [5].

Polis: Gamified Consensus Finding

Polis has been central to the success of vTaiwan. A topic is put up for debate and anyone with an account can comment and downvote or upvote other people's comments. While this may appear similar to other participation tools or forums, there are several features that set Polis apart.

First is that Polis does not allow users to respond to other people's comments, drastically reducing the risk of trolls disrupting the debate. Second, it turns the upvote and downvote feature into one that clusters people who vote similarly. A visualisation emerges highlighting where there are like-minded viewpoints and division.

As the debate begins, Polis draws a map showing all the different knots of agreement and dissent as they emerge. As views are expressed in greater numbers, the platform gives visibility to statements that find consensus not just among people within the same ideological bubble, but with those outside as well.

Polis in essence gamifies the process of finding consensus. It encourages users to propose and refine viewpoints to win greater support from all sides of a discussion. The greater the consensus around a viewpoint, the greater attention it gets.

As the avatars of each user cluster around specific viewpoints, the platform's design hides divisive statements, provocation and trolling. The debates are spared the toxicity prevalent on other platforms, which so often fail to foster civil discourse.

Eventually, a group of consensual statements emerge. The final viewpoints may not appear like any of the ones made at the beginning of the discussion. The new consensus can then be turned into laws and regulations.

Summary

As a digital engagement platform, Polis offers a powerful framework for collective decision-making and community governance on a large scale.

Sources

1. [Pol.is](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pol.is) en.wikipedia.org
 2. [What is Polis?](#) Rebel Toolkit
 3. [Polis: Why and How to Use it](#) by brook, Chana Messinger
 4. [Polis and the Political Process](#) by Harry Carr and Josh Smith in partnership with the Open Rights Group
 5. [A sophisticated conversation about misinformation via Polis](#) by James Sweetland
 6. [How do we find consensus?](#) YouTube (42secs)
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