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.
- Polis 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.
