[Pol.is](#) and the Quest for Public Deliberation at Scale

Simon Wright
contact@trustdemocracy.nz
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Democracy innovation is needed

2024 IPSOS poll:

- Over half of NZers feel the country is in decline and that our society is broken.
- Two thirds believe the economy is rigged in favour of the rich and powerful, and that a strong leader is needed to balance the scales.
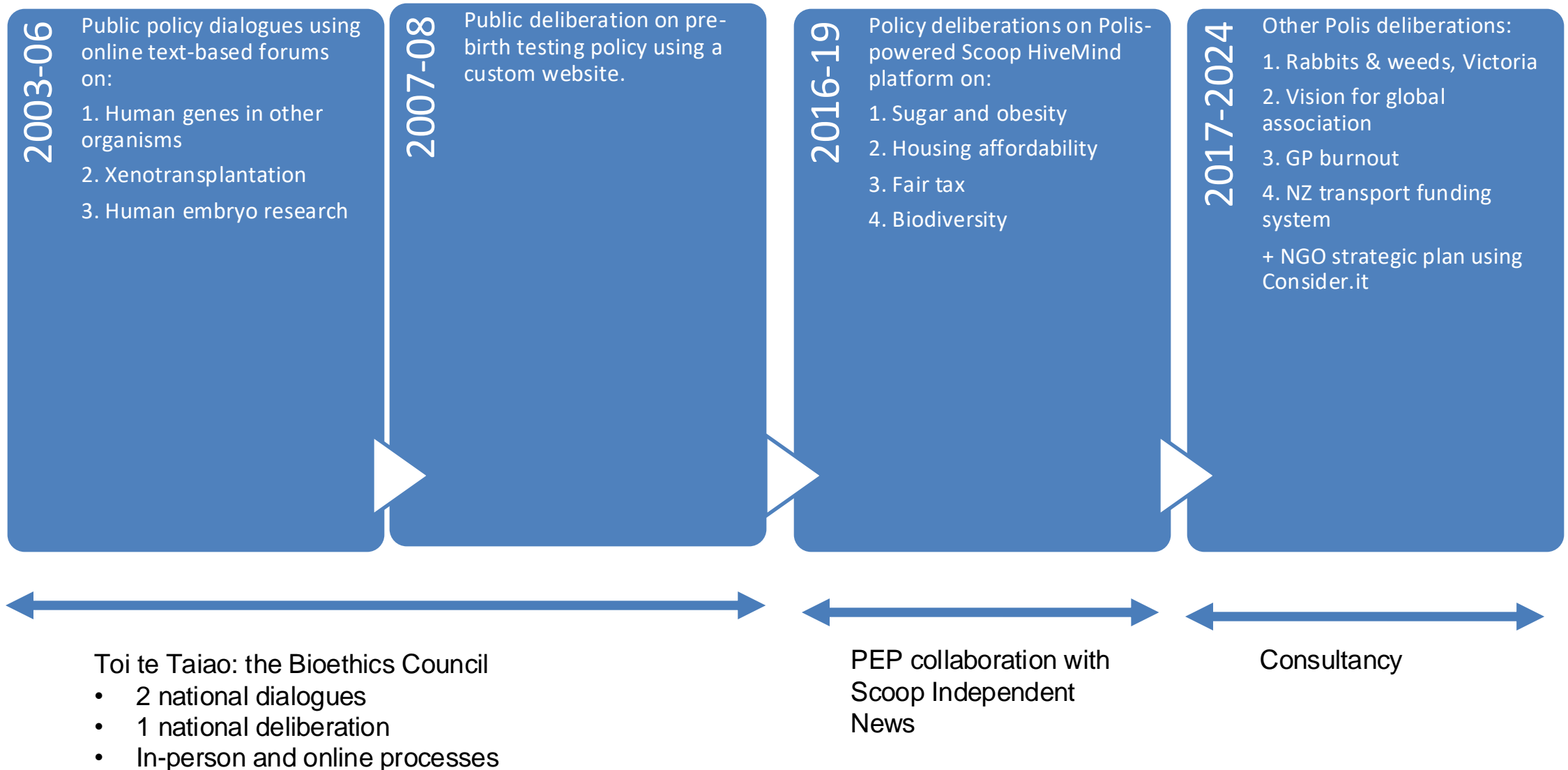
2025 Edelman Barometer:

- Trust in business, NGOs, Government and media have fallen since 2024, & lower in NZ than global average.
- an increasing majority say that leaders from government (58%), business (59%) and journalists (67%) are purposefully misleading the public.

Problems with representative democracy

- Wholesale **policy u-turns** when new governments come into office
- A system that incentivises **short-term thinking and responses**, even for long-term, intergenerational issues
- **Governments that over-claim electoral mandate** and subsequently limit public involvement in policy and decision making
- The **lack of checks and balances** on executive government
- The **lack of standing of local government** and its limited ability to serve its communities
- The lack of political attention to:
  - **strengthening our democratic infrastructure** and addressing issues such as lobbying, political donations
  - **empowered inclusion in agenda setting, will formation and decision-making**.

My experience

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2003-06
Public policy dialogues using online text-based forums on:
1. Human genes in other organisms
2. Xenotransplantation
3. Human embryo research

2007-08
Public deliberation on pre-birth testing policy using a custom website.

2016-19
Policy deliberations on Polis-powered Scoop HiveMind platform on:
1. Sugar and obesity
2. Housing affordability
3. Fair tax
4. Biodiversity

2017-2024
Other Polis deliberations:
1. Rabbits & weeds, Victoria
2. Vision for global association
3. GP burnout
4. NZ transport funding system
+ NGO strategic plan using Consider.it

Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council
• 2 national dialogues
• 1 national deliberation
• In-person and online processes

PEP collaboration with Scoop Independent News

Consultancy

Policy dialogues 2004-06

- Moderated discussion forums
- Multiple 'consultation' questions
- Participants could initiate new threads
- Threads quickly diverged & tapered out
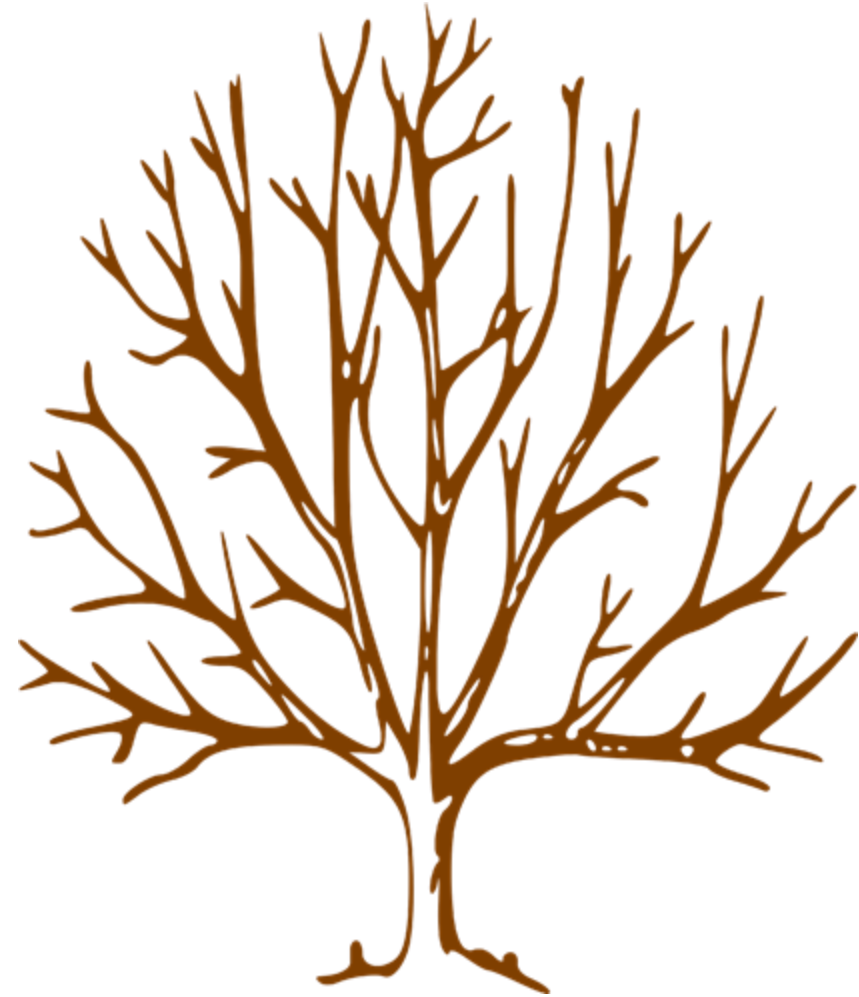
Who gets born?
Pre-birth testing
toi te taiao
the BIOETHICS COUNCIL

how to participate

- Deliberation home
- How to participate
- Shared area
- About this initiative
- Reading room
- Help/FAQs
- Keep me informed!
- Paper version
- Tell a friend
- Contact us
- Bioethics Council home

Your input can make a difference

> deliberation home >participate

How to participate

Deliberation involves asking people to make decisions after examining what matters most to them. It does not necessarily result in absolute agreement, but it can reveal the general direction people want to move, the range of approaches to a problem that would be acceptable, and what people are or are not willing to do to solve a problem.

There were three ways for participants to share their views, as described below. Additional resources are available on the left hand side menu of this page. Feel free to browse through each area and return to this page when you're ready to proceed!

Your Steps to Follow

Step 1: Complete the choicebook
The choicebook provides you with information on the issues and options under consideration, and probes for your views in a structured question and answer format. It should take about 30 to 40 minutes to complete. A paper version of the choicebook is also available.

We are no longer collecting data through the choicebook, but you may still choose to complete it if you'd like to learn more about the issue and the options under consideration.

Start the choicebook!

Step 2: Share a story or idea
Here, we invite you to share your thoughts and personal experiences. You can tell your story, or that of someone you know, or share your ideas for addressing a specific issue.

Read participants' stories and ideas!

Step 3: Join an online deliberation
This online forum is a space where participants join in a moderated conversation to further explore, refine and prioritise the issues and approaches presented in the choicebook... and perhaps identify new ones!

The Bioethics Council hosted three online deliberation groups between November 2007 and February 2008.

Read each group's online deliberation!

The Council's work is ongoing and we will be holding more online forums in the future. We urge you to join our mailing list so we can stay in contact and let you know about the projects we have coming up. Visit us at www.bioethics.org.nz for more information!

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Who gets born? Pre-birth testing

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Approach 1: My choice, my right

In New Zealand today...

Some people say that mothers/parents should be able to make their own decisions about reproduction.

This approach promotes personal responsibility and the freedom to make our own choices.

According to this view:

- Decisions whether to begin or continue a pregnancy involve the woman's right to control her own body, the father's interests, and the rights of the whānau/family.

- Mothers/parents are in the best position to know whether a decision is right for them, their whānau/family and their child.

- Pre-birth testing is a very personal and private issue. Allowing the government to regulate reproductive decisions will lead to erosion of our personal freedoms and will allow the government to increase its control over individuals.

- If you are free to make any choice you want, you may have to pay for it yourself.

Barriers to accessing pre-birth testing

No data is collected about how many women are offered pre-birth testing. However, research has found that some people cannot access pre-birth testing because:

- not all tests are available everywhere;
- only 50% of practitioners offer screening to all women;
- some women don't know to ask for tests;
- some women cannot afford tests.

Learn more!
Fact 2: How pre-birth testing is funded in New Zealand

PREVIOUS   Click NEXT to continue   NEXT

Step 10 of 30   Facts < 1 2 >

Who gets born?
Pre-birth testing
toi te taiao
the BIOETHICS COUNCIL

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shared area

- Deliberation home
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Click here to learn about this initiative

> deliberation home >shared area

Shared area

Welcome to the Shared Area! These are the stories and ideas that other participants have chosen to share with visitors to this website.

Shared submissions are posted here. Visit this area regularly to read the latest submissions.

What	Title	Date
Story	Fertility is personal and political	02/12/08
Idea	Give your baby a chance to live.	02/07/08
Story	Vahri	02/04/08
Idea	5 Reasons why parents should not decide whether their children are allowed to live	01/23/08
Idea	Response to what is right or wrong	12/10/07
Idea	Govt shouldn't be putting out biased (towards termination) deliberation process	12/07/07
Idea	The Government should illegalise abortion	12/04/07
Story	How not being offered testing affected my life.	12/03/07
Story	I might not have been born if my parents had tested me	12/03/07
Idea	I have Turners syndrome and a BSC in genetics	12/03/07

Previous   << 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 >>   Next

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3

comment

Ben'80:11/27/2007 03:41 PM NZST
Incidentally here is a link to a great site – bioethics news. Each weekly edition has a commentary by people in the field. The most recent one is very pertinent to our discussions here.

Feel free to visit and check out some of the past commentaries in particular.

[Check out this site for up-to-date, digestible information - I've fixed the link - Sam]

Suggested Link:http://www.BioNews.org.uk/Commentaries.lasso

Reply to this post   Make a New Post   Whisper   Edit   Delete

idea

Seeking indications of your support

Sam:11/27/2007 03:49 PM NZST
My understanding is that if you wish to keep an embryo(s) beyond the 10 year period - which has yet happened - you will need to make a case to ECART (The Ethics Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology) otherwise they will be 'left to perish'.

The following is a list of potential actions or recommendations which I am hoping will provoke your support or otherwise as the case may be. Remembering that nothing is set in concrete and that we w will have an opportunity after completing approach 3 to look across all the approaches and refine actions and recommendations. Firming up your thinking now might well help when we come to do this across all approaches

Please don't rate this, this was only explaining what I wanted you to do

Rate this Idea   Reply to this post   Make a New Post   Whisper   Edit   Delete

idea

Proposal one
Sam:11/27/2007 03:50 PM NZST
Maintain the status quo on abortion but look to raise public discussion on why we have such a high rate relative to other countries

Rating
4.6   Rate this Idea   Reply to this post   Make a New Post   Whisper   Edit   Delete

idea

Proposal two
Sam:11/27/2007 03:52 PM NZST
New Zealand has the right balance on PGD

Rating
4.0   Rate this Idea   Reply to this post   Make a New Post   Whisper   Edit   Delete

**Proposal three**

The Potential of Polis: Going for Democracy at Scale

LOTS OF PEOPLE
LOTS OF ISSUES
LOTS OF INTERESTS
LOTS OF POSITIONS

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Ways of thinking about Polis

- Machine learning to enable deliberative democracy

- A way of producing a map of an opinion space

- A survey that is created by the people that are taking it

- An anonymous but focused exchange of ideas, perspectives & reasons

- An open source platform for efficiently gathering & making meaning of perspectives at scale using machine learning

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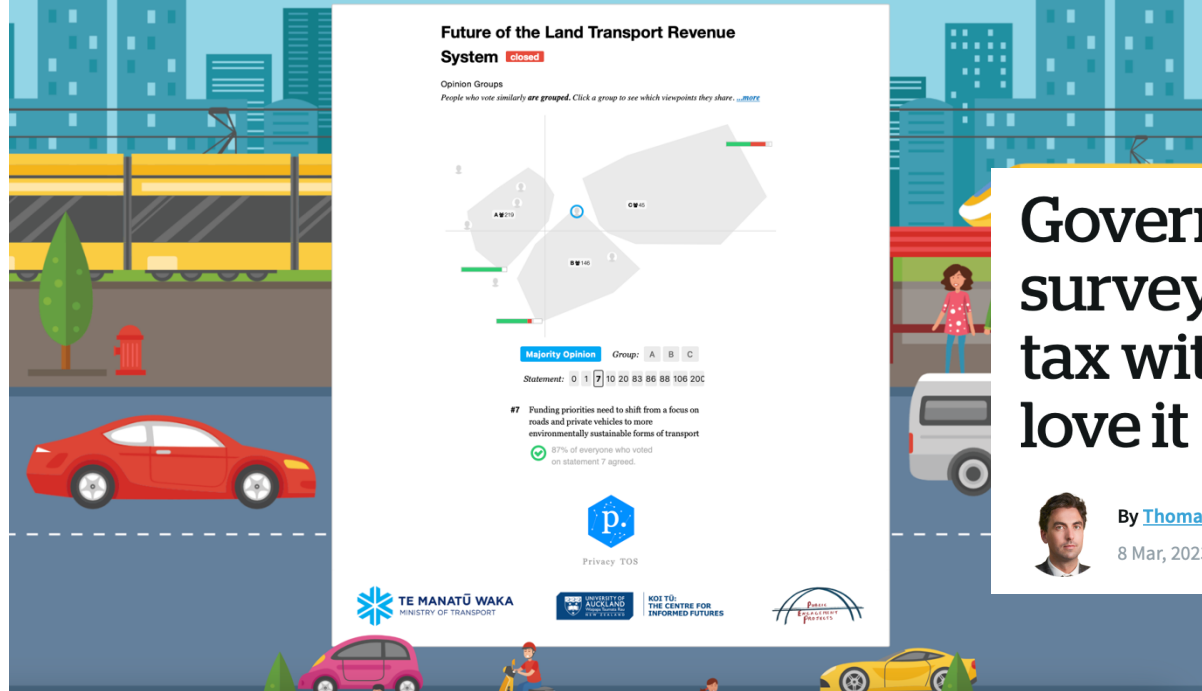
Government-commissioned survey suggests replacing fuel tax with wealth tax - and people love it

By **Thomas Coughlan**

8 Mar, 2023 05:00 AM · 5 mins to read

🔖 Save | ↗ Share

wealth tax idea. Willis was quoted as saying even studying such options was wasteful. "How loosey-goosey have contracting arrangements got that public money is being used to poll people on a wealth tax that the government promised it wouldn't be implementing?"

How a rogue survey over public transport funding reveals a stark generational divide

Bernard Hickey
Contributing podcaster

↗ **Share Story**

Polis User Interface?

Welcome to a new kind of conversation - vote on other people's statements.

> **Anonymous wrote:**   *100+ remaining*
> Better pay and perks/benefits would attract more GPs - easing workforce shortage and burnout
>
> ✓ Agree   ⊘ Disagree   Pass / Unsure

Are your perspectives or experiences missing from the conversation? If so, **add them** in the box below.

What makes a good statement?

- *Stand alone idea*
- *Raise new perspectives, experiences or issues*
- *Clear & concise (limited to 140 characters)*

Please remember, statements are displayed randomly and you are not replying directly to other participants' statements.

[Share your perspective...]

Submit

Opinion Groups

People who vote similarly **are grouped**. Click a group to see which viewpoints they share. ...*more*

A ♟ 121

B ♟ 442
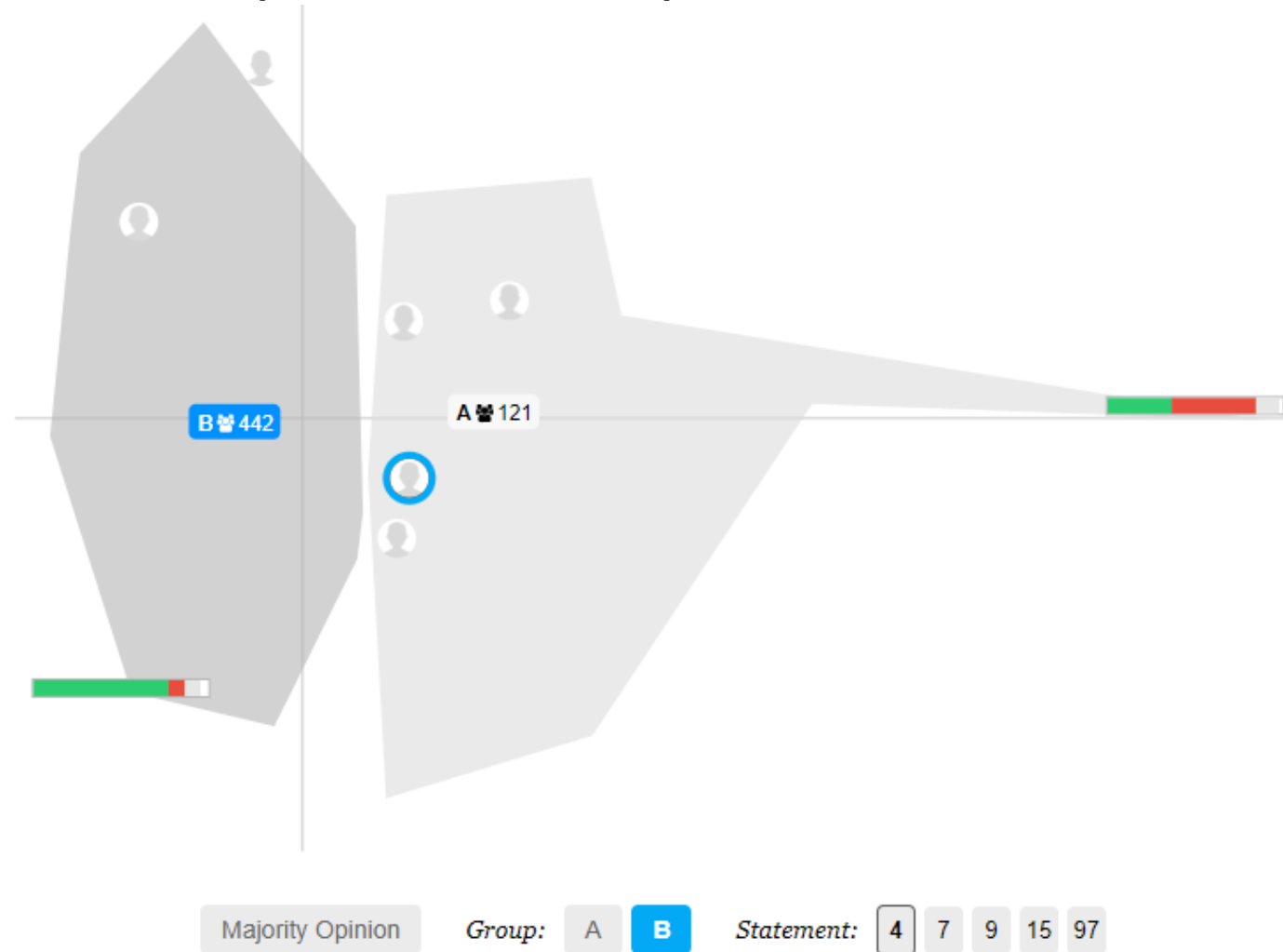
Majority Opinion   Group: A   B
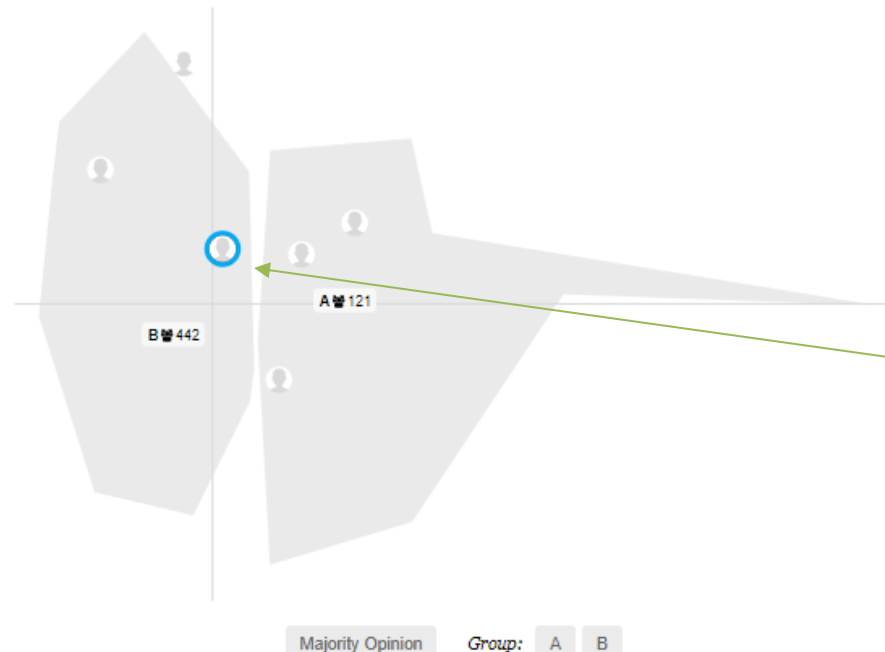
Vote on other people's statements

Add your own statements

Understand views & your views relative to others

Participants can explore difference

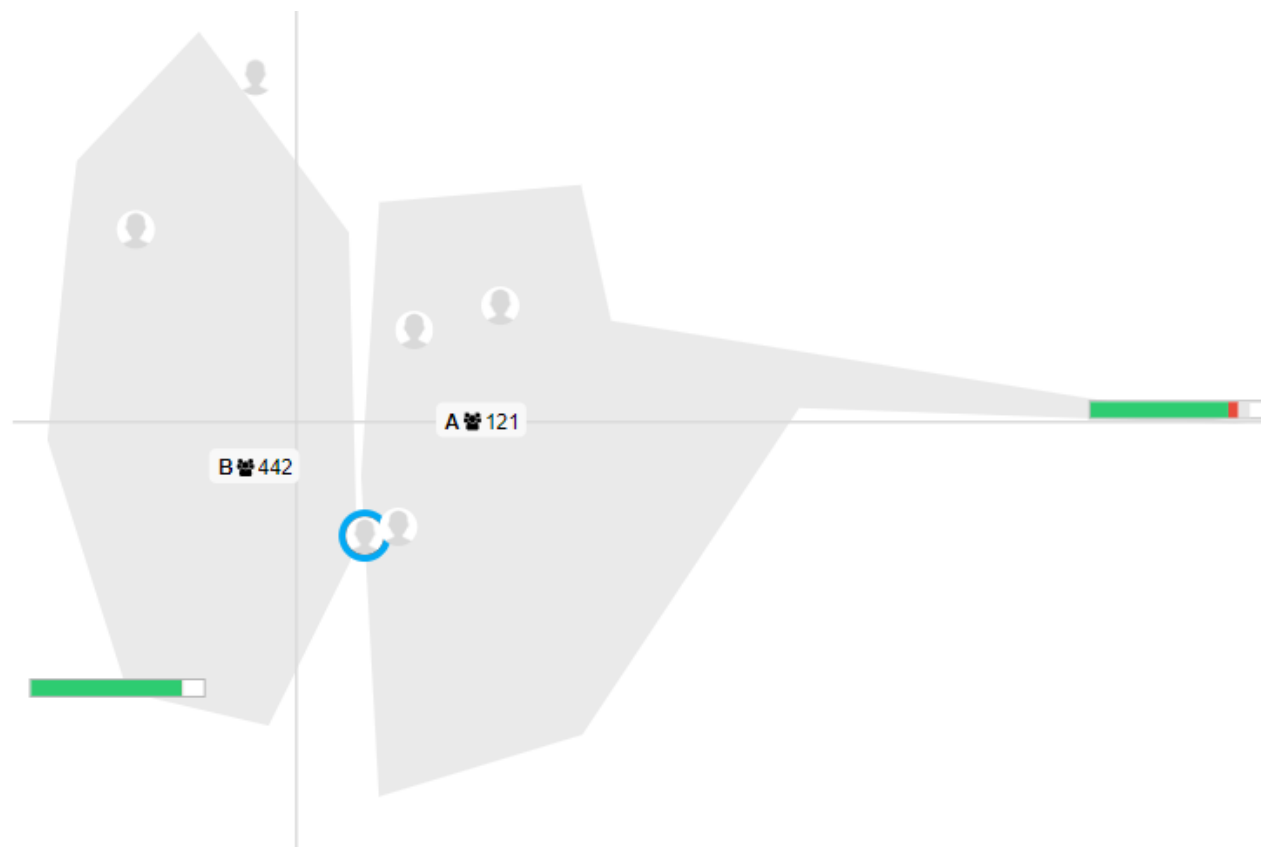Majority Opinion   *Group:*   A   **B**   *Statement:*   4   7   9   15   97

#4   Difficulty accessing specialist input is a significant factor that contributes to burnout

✅ 80% of those in group B who voted on statement 4 agreed.

Participants can explore common ground

Majority Opinion   *Group:* A B   *Statement:* 3 6 10 14 16 **22** 61

#22 Managing more and more demanding patients with unrealistic expectations contributes to burnout

✓ 96% of everyone who voted on statement 22 agreed.

Why Polis?

Free (fees for new AI features coming)

Handles big

Perserves minority positions

Stays coherent

People can join at any time

Safe

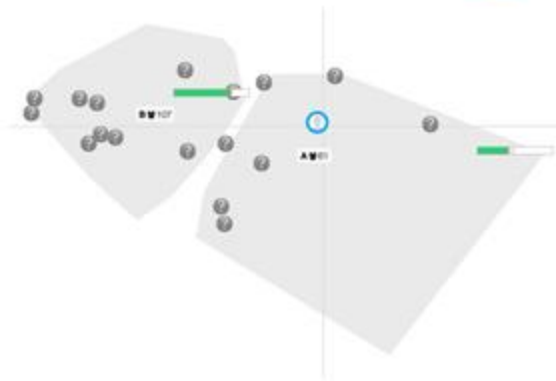Produces lots of data

People feel listened to

Facilitates learning

No sugar coating: what should we do?

Have your say on sugar and obesity in New Zealand

With Scoop's new interactive discussion platform – HiveMind

Opinion Groups
*People who vote similarly **are grouped**. Click a group to see which viewpoints they share. ...more*

Majority Opinion   Group: A   B   Statement: 17   21   23   34   35   36   37

#17   We should ban or restrict the marketing of sugary drinks and food to children and teenagers.

90% of everyone who voted on statement 17 agreed.

Making housing affordable – let's crack it

Making housing affordable – let's crack it.

Welcome to our second interactive HiveMind exploration on the topic of housing affordability. This is an opportunity for you to think about and share your perspectives on this issue and what, if anything, needs to be done.

Opinion Groups
*People who vote similarly **are grouped**. Click a group to see which viewpoints they share. ...more*

Majority Opinion   Group: A   B   Statement: 6   8   13   17   22   23   75   104   156   162

#6   Property speculation is artificially driving up the price of houses since housing offers investors some of the best passive returns on offer.

90% of everyone who voted on statement 6 agreed.


Fair enough? How should New Zealanders be taxed?

Scoop and PEP invite you to share your issues, ideas and perspectives on the NZ tax system with other New Zealanders using Scoop's HiveMind.

This Tax HiveMind is intended to complement and feed into the review being run by the Government-appointed Tax Working Group (TWG), which is looking at the fairness, balance and structure of the tax system with a 10-year time horizon. The TWG has invited the public to send in written submissions, which close on 30 April.

We at Scoop and PEP believe that an issue as important as the fairness of the tax regime should be open for discussion, debate and dialogue. Unfortunately, a written submission process just doesn't encourage the kind of public exchange we think is necessary in a well-functioning democracy.

Opinion Groups
*People who vote similarly **are grouped**. Click a group to see which viewpoints they share. ...more*
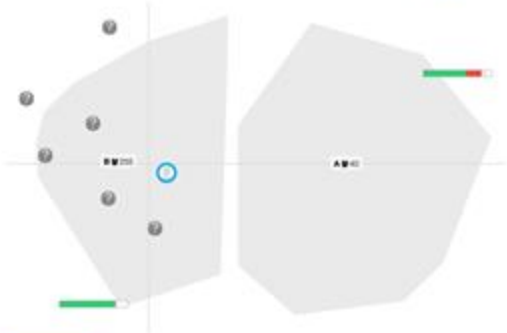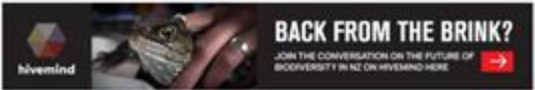

Majority Opinion   Group: A   B   Statement: 17   18   20   21   37   39   40   46   56   80

#40   Tax isn't a weapon politicians use against the economy. It's what we use to pool our resources and secure the things we need: schools, hospitals, homes and more.
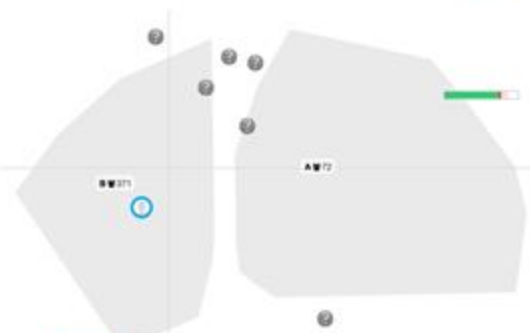
91% of everyone who voted on statement 40 agreed.

Scoop Hivemind: Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity

BACK FROM THE BRINK?
JOIN THE CONVERSATION ON THE FUTURE OF BIODIVERSITY IN NZ ON HIVEMIND HERE

Opinion Groups
*People who vote similarly **are grouped**. Click a group to see which viewpoints they share. ...more*

Majority Opinion   Group: A   B   Statement: 23   24   40   42   45   79   91   96   126   205

#23   Our physical and mental health and prosperity depends on our natural environment

90% of everyone who voted on statement 23 agreed.

Limits to using Polis

- Semi-random presentation of statements lacks narrative
- No statement moderation can be a barrier to participation due to huge numbers of statements to consider, lots of nonsensical/off-topic/similar statements
- Manual pre- or post- moderation is difficult and time-consuming work
- Analysis and report writing is difficult and time-consuming work

Polis 2.0

- LLM-generated real-time narrative narrative analysis to deal with analysis and report writing issues
- Beta example of narrative report
- Beta example of new visualisation

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Polis 2.X

- LLM-generated statement moderation recommendations
- Better data visualization
- LLM assistance to participants in statement writing

Scaling up public deliberation

- To date, many democratic innovations have focused on relatively small scale, in-person, mini-publics and citizens assemblies

- 1990s optimism that digital technologies could transform democracy and politics replaced by scepticism from late 2000s due to social media, trolls, political polarisation, etc

- Advantages to online deliberation include collapsing tyranny of time and distance time, low cost, inclusion generally including disabled

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Challenges to going big

- Scale v quality
- Maintaining deliberative ideals i.e. inclusiveness, respectfulness, non-coercive, equality, equity, reason-giving
- Attracting people due to digital divide, lack of trust, suspicion, differing capacities and abilities
- Loss of social cues and empathy in text-based communication
- Achieve mutual understanding takes time (many turns of speech)
- Power: gender, social status and knowledge as barriers, self-selection, representativeness, modes of communication and inclusiveness
- Helping people make sense of all the arguments
- More data, more analysis
- Privacy and security

But having just been part of a citizens' assembly …

- The task is much greater than exploring issues, perspectives, reasons

- Commitment of decision-makers to respond to collective citizen recommendations raises the stakes

- The collective task, the carefully facilitated and structured process addresses issues of polarisation, trust, social cohesion

- Demonstrates how hard public decision making is

- Often participants go on to leadership roles

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Beyond Polis?

- Pre-birth testing online deliberations at least as good as in-person but were very resource intensive and challenging to large scale
- Social media enables general and targeted recruitment
- Crowd-sourcing based platforms such as Pol.is can be used to help naming and framing, and creating a public
- AI-powered argument mapping, facilitation tools and gamification could make the PBT online approach feasible at scale, and this could augment in-person deliberations
- Platforms such as consider.it, which incentivise reason-giving, could be used to test recommendations with the wider public