Rescuing Democracy

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7
DESIGN DETAILS OF THE
PEOPLE’S FORUM

Chapter 6 broadly described the People’s Forum and then compared its likely political value with that of three other proposed institutions by assessing potential yields of institutional, political equality and governmental goods. As that assessment assumed the Forum would work, another assessment is given here to indicate how likely that is. This involves looking more closely at: (a) the functions by which the Forum is intended to execute its strategies for achieving its mission; and (b) the structure that is intended to produce those functions. So this inspection covers more functions than the five specified in §6.3, and they are listed below in §7.1. The elements of structure, together with the ways in which they are expected to produce those functions, are set out in §7.2.

This more detailed description of function and structure necessarily repeats much of that in Chapter 6, and in discussing the structure required to produce each of the functions specified below, it repeats information about structure that is relevant to more than one function.

7.1 Twelve functions of the People’s Forum

The five major functions of the Forum specified in §6.3 are replaced here with twelve functions. These cover the five major functions and introduce others. The ways in which the twelve
functions would arguably perform the five major ones are indicated in the list below by the notation $MF_1$, $MF_2$ and so on, where the numbers give the order of appearance of a major function ($MF$) in the previous chapter; that is, 1 for ‘public deliberation of issues’; 2 ‘deliberating what is to be deliberated’; 3 ‘examining basics’; 4 ‘an element of meritocracy’; and 5 ‘economizing citizen effort’. In addition, those functions that are intended to assist the Forum’s first strategy (developing mass public opinion) are indicated by ‘So’ (Strategy for opinion) and those that should contribute to its meritocratic second strategy (producing political influence for citizens’ opinions that are likely to be relatively well developed) are indicated by ‘Sm’ (Strategy for meritocracy). The twelve functions are as follows.

1. The Forum presents a public opinion poll that is structured to provide incentives for citizens to debate and deliberate ($MF_1$, $MF_2$) fundamental (strategic), long-running issues ($MF_3$) (described as an ‘opinion development poll’ in §6.1) (So).

2. The Forum’s poll is open and easily accessible to the whole electorate, so that the deliberation it fosters may be widespread ($MF_1$, $MF_2$, $MF_5$) and all electors, including politically alienated or marginalized groups, find it easy to vote (So).

3. The poll assists its voters to indicate the specific responses they want their government to make to the issues it covers ($MF_1$, $MF_2$) (So).

4. The poll indicates when its voters have reached a stable set of views on an issue after extensive public discussion and voting ($MF_1$) (So).

5. The poll develops political influence for the public opinion it registers ($MF_4$) (Sm).

6. This political influence is developed as or after, but not before, the expressed opinion develops into a stable public judgment ($MF_4$) (Sm).

7. The Forum reserves its political influence on the issues it deals with for those who have thought about these issues ($MF_4$) (Sm).
8. The Forum invites the public to review its opinion on an issue, as expressed in Forum polls, before any political influence of these polls causes that opinion to shape policy or law (MF1, MF4) (So, Sm).

9. The Forum minimizes the ability of powerful narrow interests to distort the development of public opinion and voting in its polls (MF1, MF2, MF4) (So, Sm).

10. The Forum develops the political will for difficult political decisions to be executed (MF4) (Sm).

11. The Forum is structured to enable citizens to initiate and run it without government assistance and funding, if these are difficult to obtain.

12. The Forum develops the confidence of the people in the People’s Forum, so that they and their representatives will maintain and use it. This includes a capacity for the public to set or supervise the agenda (MF2, MF4, MF5) (So, Sm).

7.2 Elements of the design of the People’s Forum and why they should produce its twelve functions

7.2.1 Twenty-two elements of the design
The People’s Forum is intended to produce its twelve functions largely through the influence of the following 22 elements (designated E1 to E22) of its design. These elements are given more description later in sections §7.2.2 through to §7.2.13, where their contributions to producing the twelve functions are discussed.

E1 A reference document to facilitate deliberation and voting by the public (the ‘ballot paper’, which also serves as an agenda for public discussion of issues).

E2 Agenda contributions from citizens.

E3 Voluntary voting — which provides self-selection, not random selection.

E4 Regular repetition of the poll — probably annually — posing substantially the same questions each time.
E5 Demonstrating trends in the development of the opinions of the citizens who participate.
E6 Feedback: Relaying voters’ opinions back to the public to stimulate public debate and deliberation and future participation in the poll.
E7 Accessibility: All electors eligible; voting by phone and internet; personal identification available for voting on impulse; a week for voting; media coverage before / during / after voting.
E8 Focus: The voluntary nature of the poll extends to the voter having the freedom to focus on only those issues and only those questions that he or she wants to.
E9 Dealing with long-running, fundamental (strategic) issues
E10 Wide-ranging menu of issues.
E11 Investigating connections between issues.
E12 Issues and questions that search for solutions to causes rather than treatments of symptoms.
E13 Questions on voters’ attitudes to questions (i.e. their preferences for policy), on mechanics of policy, justifications for preferences and implementation of policy.
E14 The ‘solidarity exchange’: Eliciting willingness to pay for solutions.
E15 Competition between rival People’s Forum polls, to satisfy the public.
E16 Report cards: Ratings for politicians and parties, mainly on how closely the actions of each reflect the trends of the People’s Forum poll.
E17 Advisory influence: Poll results are not binding on the legislature.
E18 Executive review: Opportunity for the public to reverse voting trends before these trends change the law or government policy.
E19 Defence against manipulation (of public opinion and voting) by special interests.
E20 Incentives for participation by the public in democratic government — including motivations for voting in the People’s Forum and for deliberating the questions it poses.
E21 Ability to privately finance the People’s Forum, especially for its introduction to the electorate.

E22 Voting security.

The ways in which these design elements are expected to produce the twelve functions of the People’s Forum are now explained, for each function in turn.

7.2.2 Function 1
The Forum presents a public opinion poll that is structured to provide incentives for citizens to debate and deliberate fundamental (strategic), long-running issues.

E1 A reference document to facilitate deliberation and voting—The ballot paper. The ballot paper would not only enable citizens to vote, but it would provide a standing agenda, in hardcopy and on website, of key questions on important issues that would help citizens to relate these issues, discuss them and think them through. This agenda would be compiled by the managers of the poll, with input from the public as discussed below in §7.2.13 (E3 and E2). For each issue, a concise description would provide information as impartially as possible, including the major pros and cons. Questions are then posed, each with a range of answers for the voter’s choice. The ballot paper may note sources of information on the issues it polls and the internet version may give active links to relevant references. Some of this type of issue dissection has been done for many years for small groups that deliberate face-to-face, for example, in the US by the Kettering Foundation’s National Issues Forums and the Paul J. Aicher Foundation’s Everyday Democracy. In Australia, Issues in Society (Healey 2005) has produced more than 250 small books, each dealing with one public issue. These organisations concentrate on presenting information for discussion, but the People’s Forum would usually restrict itself to very little of this in order to focus on posing the most significant questions, some of which would invite respondents to explicitly state or re-examine the value system they use in making their choices.
The ballot paper would give instructions on how to vote by phone and internet and how to have input into the management of the poll. New editions of the ballot paper may be published annually and, if necessary, a few issues or questions may be dropped, replaced or added each time. The intention is to have an annual vote on each question for many years, to encourage extended public debate and informal deliberation on each one. This continuity should help citizens to gather relevant information and carefully consider those issues that interest them. The ballot paper would try (as explained in §7.2.13 E3 below) to present menus of issues, questions and answers that are relevant, comprehensive and competent.

As a mechanism to facilitate deliberative participation in democratic government, the ballot paper conforms to Dryzek’s (2000, 162) stipulation that ‘authenticity of deliberation requires that communication must induce reflection upon preferences in non-coercive fashion.’ The ballot paper invites and assists this form of participation. It might be expected that the Forum’s process of individuals voting in a secret ballot would allow the expression of narrow self-interest, but experience with Citizen Assemblies and deliberative opinion polls indicates that the secret vote does not prevent public-spirited judgements (G. Smith 2009, 97–98). Those two types of panel have participants considering public goods with face-to-face meetings that are informed by experts and carefully moderated, but the People’s Forum should achieve a public goods focus via its ballot paper questions and by allowing several years for these to be publicly addressed by technical experts, interest groups and concerned citizens. Moreover, as noted in §6.3.4, the popular assumption that people vote selfishly (SIVH, the self-interested voter hypothesis) has been discredited (Caplan 2008, 198).

Dalton (2004, 146, 151) observes that in the past several decades, expanding concerns of citizens have raised so many new issues that

in a multidimensional policy space a government can satisfy most of the people some of the time, or some people most of the time,
but not most of the people most of the time … [There is] strong evidence that this factor contributes to the public’s growing frustration with their government … It is not so much that governments produce less, but that citizens expect more.

The People’s Forum ballot paper is intended to assist citizens to take up much of the extra work that they now expect from government. It would be a response to the ‘lack of institutions and processes that can aggregate and balance divergent interests into coherent policy programmes that the participants can accept’ (Dalton 2004, 205).

The treatment of issues by the ballot paper will require much expert knowledge and would therefore become costly as it is extended and made more sophisticated. For the introductory phase of a People’s Forum, the number of issues listed may be restricted to perhaps fifty or so of the most urgent ones, but as the Forum continued to operate, its agenda would be expanded (see §7.2.13 E10 below). This would increase not only the appeal of the poll to a wider range of citizens, but the ability of the ballot paper to draw the attention of voters to important relationships between issues that they should consider before finalizing their vote.

E3 Voluntary Voting. It may seem superfluous to specify voluntary voting as a design element, because the usual assumption is that voting is voluntary. This specification is made partly to focus on the importance for this poll of self-selective sampling rather than random sampling, and also to help distinguish this system from other voting events such as in Australia where referendums may be held together with elections as a compulsory vote.

As discussed below (mainly in §7.2.4, §7.2.6 and §7.2.13), egoistic and solidary predispositions will drive interest groups, activists and others to want their points of view on public goods to do well in the poll results. Voluntary voting gives citizens more incentive to compete with each other for this goal, because it puts them in the position of not only wanting to persuade oth-
ers to vote their way, but also wanting to persuade them to vote. Such tension or competition should help to raise the profile of the poll, thus provoking the community into more debate on the issues it presents, which should motivate people to educate each other and also themselves as they express, revise and develop their arguments.

E4 Repetition. The People's Forum poll is to be held at regular, preset, well-publicised intervals, say, once a year, asking the same questions each time. One vote by a respondent may comprise answers to any questions on any number of the issues presented on the ballot paper. The annual repetition of questions on each issue run in the poll would allow years for debate, which should assist public opinion to develop constructively. Debate may be stimulated as people become aware that they have time to convince others of their views and thus to influence future poll results. The repetition of the poll would invite the proportion of the electorate that is voting on any issue to increase as people see the event recur and become tempted to debate and vote.

Political scientists Matthew Mendelsohn and Andrew Parkin (2001, 20) argue that repetitive referendums could produce a 'public brokerage' that fosters real deliberation, instead of argument intended to produce a victory by avoiding full consideration of the issue. In reviewing constitutional referendums, Chambers (2001, 250–51) also advocates treating referendums as 'rolling drafts rather than as final accords, which makes them 'part of an ongoing process of consultation rather than a once-and-for-all ratification'. She anticipates this would not only produce significant deliberation, but also more legitimacy for the ultimate outcome. She cautiously supports this with observations of the voting behaviour of jurors.

Studies that compare juries that have unanimity as a rule versus juries that have majority rules show significant differences in the internal dynamic of deliberation. Indeed, some have argued that where there is a simple majority rule, jurors do not really deliberate
in the sense of formulating arguments that could persuade interlocutors … Once a referendum is called or even knowing the conversation will end in a referendum diminishes the sense that what one has to say counts for something. Both majorities and minorities lose an important incentive to be reasonable … it creates the incentive to find arguments that will sway only the needed number of voters.

Knowing the rules of the end game exercises a huge influence on how participants approach the process. This fact has been overlooked by much of the literature on deliberative democracy. (Chambers 2001, 241)

The fostering of deliberation by repetition should help chronic issues to be tackled and ameliorated. One of these is the alienation of citizens from civic engagement. Although those individuals may not be stimulated by the repetition of polling to join in as voters, others who do vote may be able to provoke constructive policy action on alienation and its effects, through their engagement with the Forum. Such ‘de facto representation of the shy and disinterested by the articulate and engaged’ (Brown 2006, 211–12) is common in direct-democratic assemblies such as New England town hall meetings, and might also be expected in the People’s Forum because of its repetition and other features designed to foster deliberation. The importance of alienation is emphasized by sociologist and political scientist Martin Gilens (2005, 778), who finds that in American democracy actual policy outcomes strongly reflect the preferences of the most affluent but bear virtually no relationship to the preferences of poor or middle-income Americans. The vast discrepancy … stands in stark contrast to the ideal of political equality that Americans hold dear … representational biases of this magnitude call into question the very democratic character of our society.

But even without repetition, it is noted by political scientists Arthur Lupia and John Matsusaka (2004) that referenda stimulate citizens to increase their political knowledge, to donate campaign contributions to interest groups and to vote. These re-
sponses occur even among the most poorly informed segments of the electorate.

**E6 Feedback.** Each annual poll is to be spread over a week, with television and other media coverage of the progress of the voting on the most topical issues each evening. This should provoke reactions from the public to the trends in polling, sharpening interest in the poll and its issues and encouraging more to vote before that poll closes. Such promotion of the People’s Forum should encourage debate among citizens through current channels, such as the electronic and print media, books, schools, universities and talk between friends, thereby helping public opinion on the Forum’s questions to develop between polls. A discussion with the manager of a Tasmanian television station on the feasibility of week-long media coverage of People’s Forum polling has indicated that this may be readily undertaken by the media as a part of their coverage of news and current affairs.

**E7 Accessibility.** The extent to which the People’s Forum helps to develop mass public opinion will depend to some extent on the number of people who are attracted to participate. Voting by telephone and internet would therefore be employed to make participation as quick and convenient as possible. A central computer would receive all voting calls, which would be made by keying code numbers for answers on phones or by selecting answers offered on the poll website. Other elements aiding accessibility are noted in §7.2.3 below. In the recent past, the ‘digital divide’ would have tended to exclude the poor and the elderly, but they will now find that voting via telephone or internet is hardly more complex than paying their utility bills in these ways.

**E8 Focus.** As their time and interests are limited, citizens must be able to focus on a restricted number of issues. The voter may deal with only those issues and vote only on those questions that he or she wishes to. Focus is also assisted by **E9**, as noted below.
E9 Long-running fundamental (strategic) issues. As the questions are to be repeated over many years to facilitate deliberation and to register trends in opinion, the issues that the poll treats must be long-running. This indicates, together with the focus described above and the need to make the limited personal input of an annual vote as politically significant as possible, that the issues dealt with are of strategic importance, which means they should be both long-running and of fundamental importance. As discussed above in §6.3.5, this focus would facilitate effective public participation.

In studying sixteen deliberative organizations, Ryfe (2002, 369) observes they

have learned that conversations about values ought to be organized differently than conversations about actions. For instance, disagreements between pro- and anti-abortion activists are not likely to be reduced by the distillation of more policy information or the convening of a debate… [When values are not shared,] conversations break down very quickly.

The Forum’s focus on fundamentals may enable this problem to be addressed by helping people to recognize where they share values (see §6.3.3). This may enable differences in values to be seen as less significant or more understandable.

The strategic focus might be objected to as unnecessary because state and national democratic governments are thought of as already dealing with ‘strategic’ issues because they focus on the long term by making decisions that are intended to persist far into the future. However, this does not mean that these governments actually attend to strategy. They may fail to do this in two ways: by not addressing issues that are of fundamental importance to society; and when they do address them, they may only address their superficial aspects, such as alleviating their symptoms. The People’s Forum therefore aims to assist society to deal with strategic issues by including them in its ballot paper, by describing their fundamental nature and by posing questions on those aspects. A current Australian example of the need for
this approach is the continuing and unresolved political furore over the last decade or so on how to deal with refugees from places such as Afghanistan, Iran and Sri Lanka who sail from Indonesia for Australia on small boats. As a party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, Australia accepts genuine refugees and this, in combination with its reputation as a stable, prosperous and open society, makes it an attractive destination for people in troubled (or even just crowded) countries. Yet Australians appear to respond to the influx of ‘boat people’ with concern about being overrun by hordes of refugees and pseudo-refugees from around the world, presumably as this might change the Australian culture and lifestyle, increase ethnic and religious tensions, lower wages and exacerbate pressure on natural resources. While such concerns are largely strategic, the public dispute over ‘boat people’ tends to be short-term, as it focuses on such aspects as: the horror of hundreds drowning as leaky boats sink; the misery of the ‘boat people’ detained in camps while their refugee status is assessed; trying to deter ‘boat people’ from sailing for Australia by detaining those who arrive; and the unfairness of receiving those who can afford to journey to Indonesia and then pay for passage on an ‘illegal entry vessel’ while hundreds of thousands of refugees are too poor to travel. Meanwhile, important strategic aspects are ignored, although these are necessary for constructive public policy on immigration. One of these gaps is that Australia has essentially no policies for preventing or mitigating global warming, or for coping with its consequences — one of which is that millions more refugees may be fleeing coastal inundation, monsoon failure, resultant warfare and so on. A second yawning gap in Australian strategic policy is that being a party to the UN convention on refugees is incompatible with trying to stop ‘boat people’ by deterring them with the prospect of prolonged incarceration. Both these gaps might begin to be closed by recognizing the need for two major planks of strategic policy. The first is that, after three national population inquiries since 1975 (see §4.2.1), Australia still lacks a policy on the size of population that it prefers. The second plank is that Australia’s respon-
sibility to the rest of the world in terms of its carrying capacity has never been addressed. This requires Australia to consider and decide what it wants its carrying capacity to be (the first plank above) and then to negotiate with the UN about whether this is acceptable to other nations. A UN agreement on this may have implications for the UN Convention on Refugees and/or for Australia being a party to that Convention. Such negotiation or agreement may encourage other countries to be more conscious of their responsibilities to control the size of their populations in the interests of the sustainable quality of life for their citizens. They may then select their own desirable carrying capacities and start to work towards achieving them while respecting those of other countries. This subject of carrying capacity and the focus on its strategic content is illustrated in §7.3 below, with a suggestion as to how it might be treated in a PF ballot paper. That illustration splits the subject into several fundamental issues that are briefly described and then analysed with several questions for the respondent to consider and answer.

E10 Wide-ranging menu of issues. The People’s Forum ballot paper would present a wide spectrum of issues (see §7.2.13 E10 below) and embrace controversy, in order to raise all options and stimulate voter participation, debate and mutual education. Dryzek (2006, 47–48) has called for this type of approach, arguing ‘for a discursive democracy that can handle deep differences … [to] seek robust and passionate exchanges across identities.’ He recommends that these exchanges be moderated by ‘partially decoupling the deliberation and decision aspects of democracy, locating deliberation … in the public sphere at a distance from any contest for sovereign authority’ (2006, 47). Such decoupling is to be achieved by the non-binding status of Forum results (see E17 in §7.2.7 and §7.2.13). Mutz (2006, 80–84) observes that dogmatism/non-dogmatism is a stable personality trait and exposure to oppositional views creates tolerance in non-dogmatists and intolerance in dogmatists. Most learning from exposure to crosscutting information will thus be done by non-dogmatists. Intolerant responses should be minimized by
making information available with minimal confrontation, such as by presenting references and web links that citizens may use if they wish and by ensuring that this presentation displays different conclusions, if these are held by experts in that field.

E11 Investigating Interconnections. Many issues are strongly related to other issues. For example, the issue of matching supply and demand in energy in a way that minimizes depletion of natural resources is usually seen by democracies as being the narrow issue of whether to supply more energy in ways such as solar or wind power that are less destructive of these resources than using fossil or nuclear fuels or converting rivers, valleys and natural lakes into hydro-electric reservoirs. However, matching supply and demand in energy has another component, the social choice of the size of the demand to be supplied, as discussed in Chapter 5. Dealing with an issue by ignoring its connections with others may allow both it and the others to get worse.

Connections between issues are to be identified in the ballot paper by references in an issue’s description or in its questions, to other issues or questions on the ballot. These references would invite the voter to consider those other issues and questions before finalizing their vote on the question before them. This should reduce the problem noted in 1954 by opinion polling experts Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley (cited in Bennett 2006, 115): ‘People often express approval of two ideas which are quite incompatible with one another and they frequently uphold a general principle while denying its specific application’.

E12 Search for Solutions. The ballot questions must focus on causes and systemic solutions rather than on the amelioration of symptoms of problems. To fail to do this will make the poll superficial and invite public criticism and boycott, but this task will be complicated for some issues as there may currently be no universally accepted definition of the problem. This complication is one of the reasons why the poll managers must be skilled in the analysis of issues, as noted previously in §6.1.4.
E13 Questions on attitude, mechanics, justification, implementation and willingness to pay. Several ‘attitude’ questions on an issue would usually be the first posed on that topic in the ballot paper. These would ask voters for their attitudes on key aspects of the issue, which may then be explored by ‘justification’ questions that might search for common ground underlying the differing attitudes of voters. Justification questions would inquire into the reasons for answers given to attitude questions and may prompt the voter to re-examine her worldview or ideology (see §4.1 (8) and Chapter 8, for comment on the stubbornness of world views). To make this inquiry more thorough, secondary justification questions might be posed on primary justification questions, but this could make the ballot paper too complicated. It may be possible to achieve such in-depth investigation by changing justification questions in subsequent polls. Justification questions should help the debates that precede a vote, as they would allow analysed feedback to the public on the reasons for attitudes and ideologies that were expressed in the previous poll, and this may show why opinions diverge in the community, allowing subsequent public debate to focus on the reasons for this. Such analysis might also correlate voters’ differing attitudes on an issue with whether they gave answers to justification questions. This may help the public to further deliberate these issues by indicating which attitudes seem dogmatic and which appear to be more firmly based on evidence and reason. Other types of questions that might be posed on an issue are: ‘mechanics’ questions, which ask the voter to state (and thus think about) how a particular policy (such as one they favour) would work; ‘implementation’ questions, which ask what specific action the government should take; and ‘willingness to pay’ questions, which ask citizens what they should do about the issue, as discussed under E14 in §7.2.4 below.

The importance of mechanics questions is seen from elegant studies showing that when people are forced to explain how their favoured policies would work, they downgrade their estimates of their understanding of these and moderate their opinions (Greene 2014, 297). Control versions of these experiments
show that when people only had to give reasons for their opinions on policy (i.e. only to answer justification questions), those opinions remained intact — no doubt because confirmation bias and rationalization had not been challenged. Mechanics questions may therefore cultivate more rational attitudes and reduce polarization. As moral psychologist Joshua Greene (2014, 297–98) observes:

Simply forcing people to justify their opinions with explicit reasons does very little to make people more reasonable, and may even do the opposite. But forcing people to confront their ignorance of essential facts does make people more moderate. As these researchers note, their findings suggest an alternative approach to public debate: Instead of simply asking politicians and pundits why they favour the policies they favour, first ask them to explain how their favoured (and disfavoured) policies are supposed to work [underlining added].

Greene’s recommendation is supported by Slovic’s observation on people’s world views, as given above in §4.1 (under 8 Externalizability).

The truly disconcerting thing about this work is that it shows how difficult it is to change people’s views and behaviours with factual information … People spin the information to keep their worldview intact. (cited in Bennett 2008, 4, 5)

People do this automatically with the ‘affect heuristic’, in which they judge or decide by consulting their emotions instead of by inspecting the relevant information and logic. In doing this they substitute an easy question for a hard one: The easy one being ‘what do you like?’ and the hard one ‘what are the relevant facts and what do they indicate?’ (Kahneman 2011, 97, 103, 139). As the psychologist and Nobel Laureate in economics Daniel Kahneman (2011, 217) observes: ‘people can maintain an unshakeable faith in any proposition, no matter how absurd, when they are sustained by a community of like-minded believers.’ In the
following example from law and psychology scholar Dan Kahan (Economist 2015c), what people like is determined by their primal social need to belong to a group. He observes that on the issue of climate change, their beliefs

have become determined by feelings of identification with cultural and political groups. When people are asked for their views on climate change… they translate this into a broader question: whose side are you on? The issue has become associated with left-wing urbanites, causing conservatives to dig in against it.

People’s reliance on affect heuristics indicates that the Forum’s ballot paper would encourage voters to think more clearly if it asked questions that show them when they are using those heuristics and invite them to eliminate that substitution by specifying the information and logic behind their attitude or preference on the question. Justification and mechanics questions may be able to do this if they have wide-ranging menus of answers with sufficient specificity and if, as noted above, the mechanics questions precede those on justification. From a broader perspective, Chambers (2001, 251) has emphasized the importance of a wide answer menu for each question by noting that it ‘encourages substantive discussion on issues.’

Other ways by which the People’s Forum may minimize polarization are discussed in §6.5.1. To sum up, then, the major design elements with that purpose are E11 (investigating connections between issues), E12 (searching for solutions to causes—rather than to symptoms), E13 (mechanics and justification questions) and, as described below in §7.2.4, E14 (the solidarity exchange). In addition to helping ameliorate polarization, the Forum’s descriptions of issues and its menus of questions and answers should be designed to avoid biased intuitive responses such as those discussed by Kahneman (2011), for example, duration neglect, adaptation neglect, focusing illusions, attending to salience (e.g. vividness of description and frequency formats vs. probability formats), narrow framing (such as the ‘inside view’ vs. the ‘outside view’ and WYSIATI—what you see is all there
is) and other framing effects, such as the contexts of questions, preference reversals and the specification of consequences as losses or as gains (loss aversion trumps desire for gain).

This discussion of the types of questions (and their contexts) that would help People's Forums to function well may seem to make the voter's task too complex, but this is not necessarily the case. Much public deliberation may be achieved merely by the Forum's annual repetition of a few crucial questions on each of the strategic issues it treats. The extent to which this is enhanced by the range and sophistication of the questions on each issue will be a trade-off between the complexity of the ballot paper and its convenience for voters. No doubt that trade-off would become an art form in which the Forum's managers develop considerable skill as they practice it.

7.2.3 Function 2

Being open and easily accessible to the whole electorate so that the deliberation fostered by the poll is widespread and all electors, including politically alienated groups, find it easy to vote.

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002, 239) have observed: ‘While people are not eager to provide input into political decisions, they want to know that they could have input into political decisions if they ever wanted to do so. In fact they are passionate about this.’ Moreover, they want their participation to ‘be welcome and meaningful’. This indicates that the Forum’s poll must be very easy to access and give some political influence to the views of its voters. Easy access is provided by several elements of its design, such as E7, E8, E9 and E22. The last of these concerns, voting security, is discussed below in §7.2.13.

E7 describes accessibility as being provided by several features of the poll: all electors being eligible to vote; voting to be done by phone or internet; the availability of personal identification for voting on impulse (discussed above in §6.1.3); a week for voting so that it is hard for electors to overlook the opportunity; and media coverage before, during and after voting. E8 is the ability of voters to choose, according to their interests,
from a wide variety of issues on the ballot paper, and E9 is the strategic power given to voters by the ballot paper’s focus on long-running fundamental issues.

7.2.4 Function 3

Assisting citizens to indicate the specific responses they want their government to make to the issues covered.

E13 Questions on preferences for action (i.e. on implementation of policy). Each issue should, if appropriate, have a question asking respondents what they want their government to do about it.

E14 The solidarity exchange: eliciting willingness to pay for solutions. Perhaps the most crucial responses by governments on many issues, and often the most difficult for elected governments to make, are those requiring them to ask citizens to make costly contributions, perhaps with money or with changes in lifestyle or attitudes, if they are to deal effectively with those issues. The People’s Forum could assist here by inviting citizens to declare the contribution they would be prepared to make in order to have their society achieve specific objectives. Those concerning the willingness of citizens to pay financially for government action are collectively referred to here as ‘solidarity exchange’ questions, for this function of the poll bears some resemblance to that of a stock exchange.

The stock exchange is a market for individual choice in which entities choose to purchase and sell rights to profits (which are private goods) and thereby invest in the production of other private goods. The solidarity exchange (SoX) is similar in that it would be a market for financial investment in goods, but in this case these are public goods. This market would operate through questions in the People’s Forum poll where citizens may pledge to pay, or request to cease to pay, for specific public goods — if most other citizens make similar contributions. Over a sequence of polling events, these pledges and requests may develop into strong trends that become seen as instructions to politicians to
purchase or liquidate public goods, as discussed in §7.2.6 and §7.2.11 below. The solidarity exchange would thereby address the crucial problem that many thousands or millions of citizens must be able to negotiate easily with each other on how much they will pay for important public goods that cannot be provided unless each makes a financial contribution. Action on global warming poses this type of problem, for whether the concern of people around the world creates an effective response depends on highly developed capacities for collective action, both within nations and between nations. Before describing the proposed structure of the solidarity exchange, circumstances affecting collective action are now outlined as a basis for understanding why this ‘exchange’ might work. These same circumstances also affect the functioning of the People’s Forum as a whole.

Circumstances affecting the possibility of democratic collective action. Evolutionary psychology indicates that the fundamental preference of humans for group life has given them a social environment that over several million years has selected the genetically determined predisposition of ‘wary cooperator’ (Hibbing and Alford 2004). This means that we are generally ‘willing to pay our fair share only assuming others do the same and evaders face swift and certain consequences’ (Alford and Hibbing 2004, 711). Kevin Smith (2006, 1015, 1013) observes that ‘what drives the behavior of wary co-operators is ‘sucker aversion’… It is not just what they get from decisions, but whether they perceive the process of decision-making as fair that leads people to view the decisions as legitimate.’ In democracies, confusion from ambiguous delegation about who directs the polity may help prevent politicians’ directions being seen by all citizens as fair. This would evoke sucker aversion in the form of reluctance to pay for public goods.

Confusion about directorship is a crucial confusion in communication that prevents collective action. As public communication scholars Andrew Flanagin, Cynthia Stohl and Bruce Bimber (Flanagin et al. 2006, 32) observe: ‘collective action is communicative, insofar as it entails efforts by people to cross
boundaries by expressing or acting on individual (i.e. private) interest in a way that is observable to others (i.e. public).’ They note that ‘formal organization is central to locating and contacting potential participants in collective action, motivating them and coordinating their actions’ (Bimber et al. 2005, 365). However, this organization often fails in democracies and this is at least partly due to the ambiguity of their delegation. The People’s Forum is designed to rectify this by clarifying the roles of electors and their delegate/trustees. This should facilitate communication between electors and also between them and their political representatives, so that reciprocity, openness and trust are fostered, to assist negotiation of the norms, rules and sanctions for collective action. The solidarity exchange would perform the same role, but with a specific focus within the People’s Forum. It would assist citizens to act as directors of the polity by helping them to decide and state what public goods they want, by inviting them to decide and state whether they are prepared to pay for them.

Political scientist Robert Putnam (1993) has described such assistance by institutions as producing social learning, a ‘learning by doing’ that can produce social capital. This type of capital comprises attitudes and behaviours such as reciprocity, openness and trust, which help societies to function productively. Putnam identifies ‘networks of civic engagement’ as an essential form of social capital. ‘The denser such networks in a community, the more likely that its citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit’ (Putnam 1993, 173). His conclusions from studying institutional reform in modern Italy are that, although preexisting social capital conditions the effectiveness of new institutions, these innovations may also change social capital and political practice through social learning: ‘Formal change induced informal change and became self-sustaining’ (Putnam 1993, 184). A polity’s networks of engagement may be expanded by the establishment of a People’s Forum, and the solidarity exchange could be a crucial part of this.
Before the structure of the solidarity exchange is outlined, two specific feelings that it is designed to help develop and communicate are described: commitment and solidarity.

Objectives for the solidarity exchange: the development of commitment and solidarity. If a liberal democracy is to take strong action on an issue that will require a significant cost to be borne by most citizens, then they must have what social psychologists call a strong ‘commitment’ to taking that action and considerable ‘solidarity’ with fellow citizens in such commitment (Fetchenhauer et al. 2006). For the solidarity exchange, these two factors might be defined as follows.

1. Commitment: A citizen’s commitment to a collective action is her feeling that the action is worth her paying her share of its cost. The measure of commitment might be the individual’s willingness to pay (WTP) for the action, in terms of the percentage of its per capita cost that she offers (via the SoX) to pay. This WTP may be in terms of extra income tax or higher cost of living (COL).

2. Solidarity: The solidarity of a community on an action is the feeling of each of its citizens that the others will support her commitment to it. The SoX measure of solidarity on an action could be the ratio of the number of SoX votes to pay something for that action, to the total number of SoX votes (those to pay something plus those to pay nothing). This measure ignores those who do not vote in the People’s Forum’s SoX (which may be a large majority of citizens), but nevertheless it may be considered a fair indication if the government will not act on it until it has asked all citizens (as discussed below under ‘How the SoX would operate’) whether they accept that ratio as being a part of an instruction from them to government. The other part of that instruction is citizens’ ‘average commitment’, the mean of all commitments made via the SoX, whether they are positive or zero. This second part of the instruction would also be tested by government
asking all citizens whether it should regard that average commitment as representative.

Commitment and solidarity may be developed in a community if they are demonstrated by citizens to each other in a repetitive manner that allows them to respond by joining or leaving the demonstration or by revising their commitment up or down. By facilitating such repetition, the SoX part of the PF poll may help citizens build a common resolution to act on difficult issues.

*How the SoX would operate.* As noted above, average commitment is intended to eventually be interpreted as the commitment of the whole community even though it expresses the views of just those who vote in the SoX part of the PF poll. Only a minority of electors, let us say, perhaps five to twenty per cent, may bother to regularly vote in a People’s Forum poll — and much less on any particular issue that it treats in its SoX. However, after several well-publicized annual votes beyond the stage where the voting trend (see §7.2.5 below) for a particular SoX question has levelled, the average commitment being registered for that question may be taken by the government as acceptable to those who do not bother to cast a ballot, for the poll is voluntary and open to every elector to take part. An average commitment that is sufficient to pay for the implementation of a policy *if paid by all citizens (subject to capacity to pay according to personal income)* may be tested to see if it is to be accepted as an instruction by the people, by the government declaring an intention to implement it unless the next PF poll shows a reduction of this WTP. This intention would heighten the incentive of electors to vote in the PF’s SoX, because it may soon influence the taxes or prices they pay and whether effective action is taken on that issue by the government.

An indication of the strength of the resolve of the community to pay to fix an issue could be given by multiplying average commitment with solidarity, to produce a ‘solidarity index’. As solidarity may be anywhere from 1 (every SoX voter wants to pay something) to 0 (no SoX voter wants to pay), then when it
is multiplied by average commitment (the mean fraction of per capita cost offered to be paid by each SoX voter) to produce the solidarity index, that index will be a figure somewhere between 1 and 0. A solidarity index for a proposed action that is close to 1, say 0.7 or 0.8, would indicate a strong desire by SoX voting citizens to pay for their government to execute that action. Solidarity indices could be publicised by government to warn the general public that it is being pressured by the People’s Forum to either act or refrain from acting, so that citizens who have been disengaged from this process are encouraged to join in and vote to strengthen or overturn such pressures. If the hitherto disengaged do not join in, the government may assume that they are happy with the existing pressures and expect government to act accordingly.

The operation of the SoX may be considered to comprise three stages. Two lie within the People’s Forum process, the first of these being the questions in the poll that ask voters to express their WTP for the implementation of particular policies, together with the responses of PF voters. These questions would state the approximate costs to each citizen of implementing a range of policies on an issue (if all taxpayers paid an income-proportional contribution) and invite each voter to pledge some commitment to the one they prefer. The hard copy ballot paper would include a table entitled ‘CHECK YOUR OFFER!’ where voters should enter each pledge that they make to pay more, either in tax or in cost of living. This is to help them add up their SoX pledges so they can see their total commitment to pay, before they lodge their vote. That addition would be done automatically by the website ballot paper, which would display it to prompt voters to check for over-commitment on SoX questions before they submit their vote.

The second stage of the SoX is the post-poll analysis, publication and public discussion of the answers to the WTP questions. The analysis would summarize the answers in terms of average commitments, solidarities and solidarity indices. Its publication would invite citizens to reconsider what they really want to pay for. This analysis, publication and discussion would occur be-
tween the annual polls leading up to the situation where the political pressure of SoX voting trends is about to make politicians take appropriate action.

The third stage lies outside the People’s Forum and it is the response by politicians to solidarity indices. Those indices that show citizens sustaining demands that they pay for specific policies to be executed will request or command politicians to organize this, by increasing taxes and/or cutting back other government programs and/or introducing appropriate policies that raise prices (such as a tax on carbon emissions). To help citizens ensure that they make pledges they can afford, the SoX would present a comprehensive menu of policy costs covering, in very broad terms, programs currently implemented by government as well as the additional costs of the public goods canvassed by the People’s Forum. These costs (including those of existing programs) would be expressed as percentages of either the citizen’s annual income before tax, or COL. If voters want to pay less than they currently do, they register this by voting for reductions in government expenditure on existing programs and voting zero WTP on SoX questions. Negative commitments on WTP questions would not be recognized by the SoX but may be interpreted as zero WTP. This system should enable electors to vote for funding transfers from existing programs to new ones presented by SoX questions.

7.2.5 Function 4
*Indicating when the people have reached a stable set of views on an issue after extensive public discussion and voting.*

**E4 Repetition.** Repetition of the vote by the People’s Forum would allow the plotting of trends in the opinions it registers, as noted above at the end of §6.1.2. The issues on which these trends show no change over the last few voting events can be considered to be those on which the public has made up its mind after the process has given it considerable opportunity to evolve and vote for different views. At this point, either a degree of consensus has been reached or the people have in some sense
agreed to differ, so there may be an acceptance that the majority could have its way. This could be tested as described below in §7.2.9, and if this leads to political implementation of the views expressed in the PF poll on that issue, then it may be taken out of the poll.

7.2.6 Function 5

*Developing a strong political influence for the public opinion expressed in People’s Forum polls.*

**E4 Repetition.** The repetition of the People’s Forum vote is to be a regular event that is very public and gives sustained exposure to the opinion it reflects. After a year or two the public profile of the poll should start to focus widespread attention on the issues it covers, not only in the weeks before the poll, but throughout the year. Public awareness that these particular issues are voted on year after year should make them and the specific questions posed by the poll, ongoing subjects of attention by the media, schools, universities, interest groups, legislators, political candidates and the public at large. As people see the event recurring, more may be stimulated to argue, discuss, read, think and vote. The resultant public profile of the poll and the numbers voting in it will do much to give it political influence.

**E5 Trends.** As noted above under §7.2.5, repetition of the vote allows the poll to show trends in the development of opinion. The managers of the People’s Forum would publicize these trends before each poll, during those events and in the publication of their results. Trends that run against existing policies or laws, or urge new ones, should apply a degree of public pressure on politicians to make the changes these trends advocate, as discussed below under ‘E3 Voluntary voting.’ Such pressure may excite more voter participation, which may then generate more political influence, more discussion of the issues and greater public wisdom. Note that a People’s Forum majority vote is likely to be a small minority of the electorate. ‘E3 Voluntary voting’ below gives reasons to anticipate that the views of ma-
Design details of the People’s Forum

Majorities within this small minority may develop public status and political power that far exceeds their weight as a proportion of the whole electorate.

The suggestion in §7.2.5 that People’s Forum trends will develop collective agreements to act receives some support from a comparison with juries.

Some juries are described as ‘evidence driven’ while others are ‘verdict driven’. In the verdict driven juries many votes tend to be taken while in evidence driven juries discussion is less focused on closure, and more on the spirit of airing all the facts, while holding off a decision. Evidence driven juries try not to discuss conclusions. In both cases, of course, a vote is taken at the end of the deliberative process. What is interesting is that in interviews and in polling after jury duty, participants in evidence driven juries had a stronger sense of satisfaction with the process, the verdict, and the reasonableness of their fellow jurors… the process was perceived as more legitimate and they had a stronger sense of efficacy, that is, that they as individuals had made an important contribution to the process and that they were actually listened to. (Chambers 2001, 248)

Conventional referendums are similar to verdict driven juries in that they produce one vote, the verdict. People’s Forums are more like evidence driven juries as they have a regular sequence of votes that are not verdicts but merely registrations of the progress of a public discussion or debate. On this basis, we might expect the Forum to develop more legitimacy and efficacy than current forms of referenda.

E6 Feedback. Stringing the voting period out over a week as described under E6 in §7.2.2 should accentuate the public profile of the Forum and thus enhance its political influence. The annual repetition of People’s Forum polls would do this as well and also enable the people to see what they as a society think, and to some extent why they think that way (see E13 in §7.2.2). This invites them to argue and discuss again before voting next year and so on, continuing such feedback until it becomes obvious to
all that a majority view has developed that is stable in the face of, and as a result of, all the argument and information that can be mustered. As noted in §7.2.5, this should generate agreement by the majority and minorities on any issue that they differ and that they all accept that the majority can have its way.

E3 Voluntary voting.

*Power to those who are interested enough to vote.* It has been argued (see §6.3.4) that the management of public affairs should follow the views of those who are interested in the issues. This provides a basis for the People’s Forum to acquire public status and political influence, as its voluntary, self-selective voting should ensure that it registers only the views of those who are interested in the issues it treats. Their interests will have stimulated many of these voters to develop their knowledge and opinions on the issues they specialize in. But as noted in §6.3.4, voter interest in issues also means that People’s Forum voters will include dogmatists as well as questioning thinkers. Both types should be drawn into exchanges of views by the polling process, and the questions it poses would be designed to use this interaction to try to develop more reasoning and negotiation, as discussed above under §7.2.2 (e.g. E11, E12, E13). These effects should lead the public to recognize that People’s Forum poll results reflect more considered judgement than conventional opinion polls, so that the public learns to grant more status to the Forum than to opinion polls despite (and even because of) the fact that the Forum represents the views of only a fraction of the population. Sustained exposure to Forum polls may therefore encourage citizens in general to demand strong responses by politicians to Forum results, even if only a low proportion of the public votes in these polls. Although the mass public has very low levels of political information, with only perhaps ten per cent of the population having much political sophistication (see §2.2.3), citizens try to compensate for their ignorance by using heuristics for political judgments (e.g. Lupia 1994, Zaller 1992). This suggests that the People’s Forum might perform as a heuristic that helps to guide citizens’ votes at elections, espe-
cially if PF managers and political commentators publicly compare PF trends with candidates’ policies. Some of this should be done with ‘report cards’, as discussed in E16 below. Such heuristics may replace those currently provided by political parties, especially as citizens have now become political consumers who shop around, frustrated by the sameness of parties that try to appeal to the mainstream voter (*Economist* 2015a, 21).

High status and influence for this poll would also be supported by a public awareness that its voluntary voting allows any elector to participate. After the introduction of a People’s Forum poll it should soon become common knowledge that if bystanders become alarmed at the way that concerned opinion is evolving and expressed through this process, they can decide it is time that they became concerned and voted in the next poll, or even in the current one if it is still open.

*Leading edge*. Because the voluntary vote of the People’s Forum will reflect the views of those who are interested in the issues, it is likely to indicate what the views of the majority of the whole population will be on those issues in the future, if and when most citizens take an interest in them. Such growth of interest in issues may be accelerated by the publicity generated by the People’s Forum. Politicians will be sensitive to any such ‘leading edge’ indication by this poll because many of them want to be seen to be providing ‘leadership’ (leadership is discussed in §2.2, §2.2.1, §2.2.2, §2.2.4, §2.2.8 and §2.7).

**E16 Report cards: People’s Forum ratings for politicians.** The managers of the People’s Forum would publish ‘report cards’ similar to those proposed by the Director of Democratic Audit, Stuart Weir (2004), to help citizens monitor the performance and attitudes of political candidates and members of the executive and the legislature. A prominent section of each card would be the degree to which the subject’s views conform to People’s Forum voting trends. As indicated above (under E3), those trends are likely to show the most informed and considered views of the community on the issues it deals with, and will thus
indicate to politicians the views they should espouse in order to represent the people in the most responsible way. If electors develop an appreciation of this, the report card would become a highly regarded guide for their vote at the next election, giving the poll more political clout. In addition to helping establish the Forum as a heuristic, such report cards should also promote community-wide deliberation by helping to focus attention on the Forum’s questions.

7.2.7 Function 6
*Developing political influence as or after, but not before, opinion develops into a stable public judgment.*

E17 **Advisory Influence.** People’s Forum results would not be binding on legislatures, merely advisory. They would exert the pressure of concerned public opinion for new laws and policies reflecting the trends in concerned opinion that have been established by successive polls.

E3 **Voluntary Voting.** Voluntary voting means that People’s Forum results will reflect the views of only a part of the electorate. This may make politicians in the few countries such as Australia, where the whole electorate is compelled to elect representatives, slow to alter their current laws and policies in order to follow People’s Forum results. In countries where voting for representatives is voluntary, the Forum may exert political influence more quickly because those who are concerned enough to vote in its polls may also be those who vote in elections.

E5 **Trends.** Politicians would be likely to wait for trends in the People’s Forum to establish, or to establish and then level off to a flat line, rather than react immediately to a poll result only to become known for outdated views after a few more polls. They will want to wait to see if there is any reversal of trends, as discussed in §7.2.9 below.
7.2.8 Function 7
Reserving political influence on issues dealt with by the Forum for those who have thought about these issues (the meritocracy principle).

E3 Voluntary Voting. In §7.2.6 above it is indicated that political influence is likely to be generated for the opinion registered by People’s Forum polls. As the voting that expresses this opinion is voluntary, it will tend not to register the opinions of those who are disengaged and give little thought to the issues that the Forum treats. The People’s Forum will therefore tend to give political influence to those who have thought about those issues. These people are likely to include dogmatic types as well as citizens with more carefully considered opinions, but the involvement of dogmatists may stimulate them to think more constructively as discussed in §7.2.6 (E3 ‘Power to those who are interested enough to vote’).

7.2.9 Function 8
Inviting the public to review its opinion on an issue, as expressed in People’s Forum polls, before the political influence of these polls causes that opinion to be expressed as policy or law.

E18 Executive Review. As a People’s Forum is run, electors who have not voted in its polls may become worried that politicians will introduce new policies or laws to reflect the Forum’s polling trends. This prospect may also cause previous voters to change their minds. Politicians will therefore warn the electorate of their intention to act if the trends are not reversed at the next poll. With an eye to future votes, they will want electors to approve their actions.

7.2.10 Function 9
Minimizing the ability of powerful narrow interests to distort the development of the opinions of the public and their voting in People’s Forum polls.
Wealthy interests may seek to manipulate public opinion in many ways, such as by funding biased media programs and movies, by dictating editorial policy via ownership of media, by advertising, by supporting selected scholars, activist individuals and groups, by deterring activists through strategic litigations against public participation (SLAPPS), by funding political electoral campaigns, by lobbying and so on. Such activities compromise democratic integrity by corrupting the one person-one vote principle, in effect delivering multiple votes to those with money who choose to use it in such ways. Graham Smith (2001, 88) considers this danger to be a criticism of the existing practice of initiative and referendum, not of their potential…we need to spend more time investigating possible ‘imaginative safeguards’ to ensure that information is balanced and that the influence of money and media interests does not grow…However, even with…[the existing] imbalance of resources, greens have had success [with initiatives and referenda on environmental issues].

Lupia and Matsusaka (2004, 478) support this view by finding that the evidence does not endorse the ‘idea that the initiative allows special interests to subvert the policy process to the detriment of the public’. Nevertheless, the more influence that the People’s Forum develops, the more attractive a target it will become for control by parties with narrow interests. However, as explained under E4 below, the transparency of the People’s Forum process should mean that as its influence increases, undemocratic attempts to manipulate it are more likely to be counterproductive for the manipulators.

E4 LONG-RUNNING REPETITION OF ISSUES AND QUESTIONS. The long-running nature of the Forum’s process should make manipulation expensive and also endanger the public image of manipulators.
Exhaustion of wealthy manipulators through long-running repetitive polling. The People’s Forum process would take several, perhaps many years to facilitate and demonstrate the development of public opinion on a question. More time may elapse before such trends are translated into political action, as indicated by §7.2.7 and §7.2.9. Such time spans would make it very expensive to fund a propaganda campaign to sway the views of citizens and their responses to the poll.

Exposure of manipulators to public censure through long-running repetitive polling. The passage of time as these polls deal with each issue would also make any attempt to buy votes on it risky for the manipulator, because the public, media and politicians will have plenty of opportunity to recognize what is going on. When a manipulator’s effort is focused on a question running in a People’s Forum poll, the publicity surrounding that effort is likely to make it obvious to citizens. The more money the manipulator spends, the more blatantly undemocratic their activity will appear to citizens, especially those concerned with the issue. As the latter are also those who are likely to vote in the poll, big spending by manipulators risks damaging both their reputation and their cause. Such situations are also likely to encourage citizens to become more discerning about whether the information they receive is misleading and also to spur them to vote in PF and contribute to the public discourse on the questions it poses.

Similar risks arise for manipulators whose power to distort the poll arises not so much from wealth as from an ability to organize and control electors who comprise a significant proportion of the community being polled by PF. Such potential organizers may be large corporations with many employees or shareholders, unions with many members, or government agencies with many employees. The managers of such groups could attempt to influence the vote on People’s Forum questions in which they had an interest by encouraging or instructing their shareholders or members or employees to vote in the poll with the responses the managers want. Such behaviour is likely to be-
come public knowledge because of (a) anticipation by many cit-
izens that any entity with this organisational ability and vested
interests in a question on the ballot will be tempted to do it; (b)
suspicions and protests of citizens with opposing views; (c) poll
results on that question which appear surprisingly weighted to-
wards these vested interests; and (d) the possibility of evidence
being found, for example, by whistle-blower disclosure of unfair
organization of voters by narrow interests. The annual repeti-
tion of the voting event allows time for these factors to provoke
alarm and for citizens to respond with public criticism and by
voting in protest against causes promoted by undemocratic ma-
nipulation.

Suspicion or confirmation of this type of activity should
spark public debate about whether it is excessively self-interest-
ed and thus against the public interest. Such debate could be
assisted if the People’s Forum added another question to those
dealing with an issue that evokes an undemocratically manipu-
lated vote. This could ask voters whether they considered that
responses to the questions on this issue were being unduly in-
fluenced by narrow interests acting against the public interest.
Any controversy over such a question would focus more public
attention on the issue in the ballot that is stimulating it, draw-
ing in electors who are not necessarily interested in that issue
but want to vote on the problem of manipulation of democracy.
The managers of the People’s Forum should continue to run the
questions generating this ‘manipulation’ debate until it has been
cleared up. If the dispute over manipulation drags on without
showing signs of resolution, all the questions at stake may have
to be deleted from the ballot. If the controversy is resolved, the
question on undemocratic manipulation would be dropped,
leaving the questions on the issue itself to be run through more
polls until they had developed stable votes indicating that public
deliberations on them had run their course.

The outcome of extended public debate and voting on wheth-
er votes organized by vested interests are excessively self-inter-
ested may depend on whether the government has procedures
in place to compensate those who would suffer loss because of
new laws and policies. This is crucial for democracy, because providing public goods at unjust cost to individuals and minorities is likely to damage the image of the public interest and the legitimacy of the relevant government.

E19 Defence against manipulation of opinion and voting. If manipulation by powerful self-interested entities is not stopped by financial exhaustion, nor by exposure to ethical judgment by citizens, the credibility of the People’s Forum may suffer as the one-person one-vote fairness of its voting becomes suspect. How much damage such suspicion does to the reputation of the Forum may depend on whether the questions on its ballot that are subject to this manipulation can be identified, so that they are protected as suggested above, or abandoned as being likely to generate undemocratically distorted results. A backup procedure for preventing such damage to the Forum is that it could run questions specifically on the issue of powerful narrow interests manipulating the opinions and voting of the public. This would be done by placing that issue on the ballot paper without waiting for signs of manipulation and reacting to them as recommended above under E4.

One target for such inquisition that is given little attention above is the media. The political power of the media differs from that of narrow interests that are either wealthy or can directly organize and control large numbers of voters in that it comes from incessant communication to the public. As free and diverse media are essential for informed and well-developed public opinion, free-to-air television and radio sponsored by the state and thereby independent of commercial imperatives are vital parts of the operating environment for the People’s Forum. The Forum’s managers should have their ballot paper suggest laws or policies designed to prevent manipulation of public opinion by all types of powerful narrow interests, not least the media. As indicated above, such suggestion must be done at the inception of a Forum’s polls, not only for their protection but for the protection of democracy itself. One possibility here is for the Forum to question whether it should be illegal for commercial
interests to make public statements on, or to advertise views on, or to pay others to state views on, any issue in which they have a pecuniary interest. Such law should help prevent commercial interests using their financial muscle to exert unfair and misleading influence on public opinion and legislators — as we have seen from the tobacco industry on lung cancer and from the fossil fuel industry on climate change.

If a People’s Forum in the USA ran such questions on restricting the activities of vested interests it would, to some extent, be reviewing the 2010 finding by the US Supreme Court in Citizens United v Federal Election Commission, which held that the First Amendment of the US Constitution prohibits the government not only from restricting political expenditures by nonprofit organizations, but also those by for-profit organizations, labour unions and other organizations. That determination concerned expenditures on campaigning for candidates and parties within 30 days of a primary election and within 60 days of a general election, but the action for the People’s Forum suggested here is concerned with public discussion and campaigning on issues rather than on candidates and parties, and it would be about a continual prohibition of public argument by vested interests rather than about such prohibition only in the month or two before elections. The idea here is to follow two principles stated in §2.1: (1) that the sole purpose of government is to choose and implement an optimal provision of public goods; and (2) public goods are often in mortal competition with private goods. Citizens with vested interests in private goods are very likely to be biased towards these and often have financial muscle they can use to persuade others to accept their bias. In the interests of productively deliberative democracy, they should be restrained from such activity so that all citizens are free to debate, discuss and decide the issue without distortion by powerful private interests.

7.2.11 Function 10
Developing the political will for difficult political decisions to be executed.
E20 INCENTIVES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION. The People’s Forum should increase the political will to both recognize issues and act on them, for it would help citizens participate more directly in the policy formation process. It would enable them to more actively determine what issues are seen as important and what they, through their government, will do about them. Widespread distrust of politicians, as discussed above in Chapter 1, in §2.2.1, §2.3.2 and in §3.2, should motivate many citizens to take the opportunity offered by the Forum, to issue public instructions to them. Although these directives would be nonbinding in a direct sense, citizens will be motivated to issue them (by voting in PF) for both expressive satisfaction and to take advantage of the possibility that they may eventually become binding, as discussed above in §7.2.6.

E4 REPEITION OF THE POLL. The ongoing operation of the People’s Forum would allow it to monitor — and apply pressure for — the implementation of the policy changes that it effects. Lupia and Matsusaka (2004, 476) observe that currently, difficulty with such implementation arises because

the same governmental actors who once blocked the policies from proceeding through traditional legislative channels may be in a position to influence, or even determine, the extent of their post-election implementation and enforcement… Organizations that pass initiatives… often disband soon after the election… Compared with professional legislatures, such entities are in a relatively bad position to oversee those charged with implementing their edicts.

7.2.12 Function 11
Offering a capacity for citizens to initiate and run the poll without government assistance and funding, if these are difficult to obtain.

As is discussed later in §9.3, the Forum is not amenable to starting up as a small, inexpensive, very local project and then expanding it. This is because a large operation that covers a province, state or nation is needed to create the strong politi-
cal impact required to stimulate public interest and deliberation on the issues that PF would focus on. Publics of large size usually have much more power to determine their long-term future than small ones, so it would only be People’s Forums run at large scales that offer the prospect of strategic influence to those eligible to participate in them. As the People’s Forum is designed to develop strategic policy, running it at a small local scale risks making it appear irrelevant and impotent. This requirement of large scale for the People’s Forum makes it difficult for citizens to initiate and test it. However, as noted under E3 / E17 below and discussed above in §6.2.3, this is basically a financial problem that is probably easier to solve than that of raising the political will to have government introduce and run the system.

E3 Voluntary voting, E17 Advisory influence. As voluntary, advisory voting does not compel voting and the implementation of results, it allows the People’s Forum to be run by a private organisation if government will not run it as a service to the public. Voluntary, self-selecting voting also facilitates its operation on a large scale.

E7 Accessibility. Polling by telephone and the internet makes voting highly accessible to citizens. It also facilitates fast tallying by computer and minimizes cost. As noted under E7 in §7.2.2, the virtually extinct ‘digital divide’ should not restrict accessibility.

E21 Funding. Possible sources of finance for this system are discussed above in §6.4. The economy of operation noted above under E7 support the feasibility of raising funds for a demonstration poll covering a substantial region such as a province, state or even a nation. This may have to initially use low or negligible voting security as discussed under E22 in §7.2.13 below, and be restricted to online ballot presentation and voting, without backup with hard-copy ballot papers.
7.2.13 Function 12

The Forum develops the confidence of the people in the People’s Forum as a political institution, so that they and their representatives will maintain it and use it. This includes a capacity for the public to set or supervise the agenda.

The People’s Forum should be attractive to many citizens, for there is growing interest in new democratic processes. As Warren observes,

people in the developed democracies have become disaffected from their political institutions. They are now less likely to trust their governments and more likely to judge them incompetent, untrustworthy, and even corrupt. While the causes and meanings of these trends have been subject to considerable study and debate, it seems that disaffection reflects not apathy but increasingly critical evaluations of government … increasing disaffection from formal political institutions seems to be paralleled by increasing attention toward other ways and means of getting collective things done … The most dramatic developments over the past couple of decades include the rise in power of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the international arena and the dramatic increase in associations devoted to problems of collective action that replace, displace, or work in concert with state powers. (2002b, 681–82, emphasis in original)

The same concerns of citizens are also noted by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) as being a major cause of Americans’ dislike of government. However, instead of referring to it as disaffection with ‘institutions’, they refer to it as a ‘procedural’ problem.

[W]e do believe that the research contained here, on balance, favors procedural rather than policy explanations for Americans’ dissatisfaction with government … Moreover, public negativity is unlikely to be corrected by attempts to facilitate public involvement in the political process. Rather, the best strategy for improving public attitudes toward government is to enact reforms that would make it
difficult or impossible for decision makers to feather their own nests by virtue of the decisions they render. (2001, 250)

As the People’s Forum offers transparency and also sensitivity to public reaction, its deployment as a part of the policy-making apparatus should allow citizens to make it more difficult ‘for decision makers to feather their own nests by virtue of the decisions they render.’ If citizens cannot do this, for example by insisting on better laws against such corruption, by voting against politicians with excessively narrow policies and by directing strategic policy, then who will? Although the Forum appears to contravene Hibbing and Theiss-Morse’s advice to avoid relying on public involvement in politics, that contravention is more apparent than real, as much involvement via the Forum is ‘at arm’s length’, being merely an annual vote that is made in private without face-to-face political discussion or disputation. In addition, those who actively participate in the Forum by voting on or arguing about its questions may be only a very small part of the population, while the results of that vote may provide heuristic guidance for the rest, who might promote those results by voting for political candidates who support them.

E3 Voluntary voting. If the People’s Forum is to succeed, its selection of issues, questions and menus of answers must be seen by the community to be relevant, comprehensive and competent. If citizens see or suspect shortcomings, they are unlikely to participate. Voluntary voting therefore confers an easily exercised power of boycott on citizens, and this will oblige poll managers to invite suggestions from them on the selection of issues, questions and menus of answers, as discussed in E2 below. This invitation would be a prominent, permanent feature of the ballot paper.

E2 Agenda contributions from citizens. In response to requests from citizens for issues and questions on the ballot paper to be altered or deleted, or for new ones to be added, the managers would publish a list of the requests they have received
since the previous poll. This would note whether each request has been acceded to and if not, why not. The reasons given for refusing requests, together with any ensuing public controversy, should contribute to the deliberation of issues by the public. Such capacity for the public to have a continuing influence on the agenda conforms to the recommendation by Chambers (2001, 251) that questions should be chosen and framed as an iterative, nonbinding process that makes referendums ‘part of an ongoing process of consultation rather than a once-and-for-all ratification.’

As discussed below under E10, the agenda may be of indeterminate length, so any agenda suggestions could be accepted by the Forum to produce what might be called a ‘wikiagenda,’ after the manner of compilation of Wikipedia. However, this is unlikely to produce a high-quality ballot paper without strong control by the managers of the Forum, including their insertion of many issues and questions and editing to eliminate any duplication and overlap in issues, together with questions that may cause confusion. Their judgement would be needed to ensure that the issues placed on the ballot are long-running and preferably of high public significance either on their own or because of their relationships to other issues on the ballot. The managers must also ensure that the most crucial questions are posed (see e.g. §7.2.2 E11, E12, E13), including questions aimed at systemic solutions rather than solely at the treatment of symptoms. They would also make sure that references are given in issue descriptions and questions, to other issues or questions in the paper that are related to them. The description of each issue also requires editorial supervision to minimize bias and to make sure that crucial aspects are covered. For such reasons, the published agenda must be the responsibility of the managers, but the voluntary voting of the Forum ultimately transfers this responsibility to the public, for they will see what the managers present and may pass judgement on this by voting in the poll, or by boycotting it, or by publicly voicing their approval or disapproval of the management of the Forum.
An alternative to relying on the poll managers to write the agenda might be a government regulation that requires the Forum to run issues and questions that are requested by the public through a minimum number of signatures on a petition, as is done with citizen-initiated referenda. This is not recommended, as it should not be necessary, it requires the government to assist the Forum, and it would be time-consuming and expensive for citizens. The cost of collecting signatures to place one measure on a citizen-initiated referendum in California has now risen to over US$1 million (Lupia and Matsusaka 2004).

As the Forum’s ballot paper would require voters to give their personal response to pre-prepared questions, it restricts their creativity in devising solutions to policy problems by comparison with deliberative processes, such as consensus conferences and citizen juries, in which the whole group discusses an issue and devises a joint response (G. Smith 2009, 100). However, this constraint should be countered by a prominent invitation at the head of the ballot paper for citizens to make suggestions for its revision. One effect of this might be that new questions are introduced to the ballot, implying solutions different from those suggested by its previous questions.

E10 WIDE-RANGING MENU. An extensive ballot paper that covers the widest range of important long-running issues would maximize the number of citizens who could find within it issues of concern to them and who may therefore engage with the poll. The size of this menu should not be intimidating to citizens because, as with using dictionaries, telephone directories and the internet, people will see that size is helpful rather than a problem, for it means they are more likely to find that the ballot includes issues on which they want to have a say.

An extensive ballot paper will not make large demands on the time of citizens, for they can only vote once a year in a PF poll, and when they do, they would only vote on those issues in which they are interested. They will be assisted to find these in several ways: by grouping related topics under headings (such as International Relations, Population, Natural Resources and...
the Environment, The Economy, and Ethics or Value Systems); by showing headings and specific topics in a table of contents; by listing issues in an index; and by providing a search engine in the web-based ballot paper. The act of voting should only take an hour or two at home, and probably less when the voter becomes familiar with the ballot paper and more expert with the set of issues that he or she wants to vote on.

Another demand on the time of citizens is noted by Beetham (1999, 8): ‘It takes time to grasp and discuss the complex issues involved in public decision-making, and there is only so much time that people will agree to devote to it.’ The People’s Forum provides economy of time by not requiring citizens to attend deliberation events, either in person or online. However, as PF would provide an easy, quick and a potentially slightly influential way for each citizen to express political views, it may encourage them to spend more of their free time reading about, observing, discussing and thinking about issues. As part of this activity, they may join deliberative groups such as study circles.

The length of the ballot paper will be determined by how much editorial and associated work the Forum’s management team can handle, and this includes responding to requests from citizens and groups for changes to the menus of issues, questions and answers. As the years of polling pass, the staff of a Forum should be able to extend the length of its ballot paper.

E15 Competition. Competition between two different People’s Forums may assist with creative approaches to the menus of issues, questions and answers that are presented to citizens, and this would maximize their choices of issues and questions and their interest in this system. However, as indicated above in this section under E3, E2 and E10, public scrutiny and good management should make this unnecessary.

E20 Incentives for Public Participation. People may be motivated to use the People’s Forum (by voting in its polls and by arguing to get others to vote in support of their ideas) through both egoistic and solidary interests. Egoism will incline them to
try to get their preferences to dominate the results in order to take advantage of any political influence that is developed by the Forum. The solidary, or cooperative and altruistic motivation (e.g. Alford and Hibbing 2004; Fehr and Fischbacher 2003; Orbell et al. 2004), would be to raise the profile of important public issues in order to promote public discourse that both develops and helps to execute wiser public policy. As the Forum would give each citizen the prospect of having slightly more power to express and implement their opinions (at a very low personal cost in effort and time, as noted in E10 above) it should stimulate some citizens to further develop their opinions on public affairs, and in turn this may increase the demand for accurate information. An additional incentive for these egoistic and solidary responses is, as noted in §7.2.11 E20, that widespread distrust of politicians and conventional political processes should drive some citizens to take the opportunity offered by the Forum to attempt to publicly and regularly issue instructions to them. In order to enhance the public credibility and thus the force of their instructions, some citizens may become motivated to learn more about the issues they vote on.

Bennett (2006) emphasizes the importance of cognitive ability, motivation and opportunity in determining the level of political information possessed by citizens. This makes good organization and communication essential, because organization produces both motivation (Bimber et al. 2005) and opportunity, while communication motivates by developing both trust and incentives of purposive, expressive and solidary types. The introduction of PF into a democracy should significantly strengthen its organization and communication. Bennett (2006) considers nothing can be done about deficits in cognitive ability, but the People's Forum's meritocratic function (§7.2.6 and §7.2.8) aims to circumvent much of this problem by allowing many people with these deficits to be bypassed, by facilitating the political influence of those who are thinking about public issues. The Forum’s design assumes that many of those engaged citizens will have high cognitive ability.
E22 Voting security. Some degree of voting security is essential if citizens are to have confidence in the Forum as an institution that assists governments to function. Security is provided by several conditions: That only those people who are eligible to vote do so; that they each have only one vote per polling event (one vote may comprise answers to any number of questions on any number of the issues on the ballot); that their privacy is protected; that their votes are tallied without corruption; and possibly other facilities, such as a voter being able to revise her vote before the final tally and being able to discover if her vote was omitted or miscounted and then to be able to correct this (Schneier 1996, 125). A security system should permit easy access for voting and preferably the freedom for the poll to operate without interference by government. Ease of access ideally includes the opportunity for electors to vote on impulse, without prior registration, as discussed in §6.1.3. In Australia, impulse voting with some security requires the electoral roll to be used as votes are cast, in order to check whether each voter is eligible and to ensure that they only vote once. High security will not cater for voting on impulse as it requires the voter to first contact the Forum’s central tabulating facility (CTF) to register and be allocated an identification number. The voter may then vote, quoting that number and attaching a personally selected two-part code. When the CTF publishes her vote with the first part of the code she may confirm it by attaching the second part and returning it to the CTF (Schneier 1996, 129). This procedure allows errors in tabulation to be corrected by the voter and also permits her to alter her vote, but its complexity may discourage engagement if it were used by the People’s Forum. As this poll is not an election but only registers non-decisive opinions, a simpler lower-security approach should be adequate.

To enable impulse voting in countries where citizens do not have a personal identification number (PIN) that locates them on an electoral roll, the People’s Forum security system must personally deliver a PIN to every eligible voter before the poll, or the ballot paper must instruct the voter how to devise his or her own PIN, so that the tally computer can use it to locate the
voter’s name on the roll. The latter type of PIN might be name and date of birth, converted by the voter into a number code if this is needed for telephone voting. Both types of PIN require the cooperation of the government for the use of its electoral roll, and this may not be forthcoming. If a government chose to assist in this way it could either (a) license the polling company to use the electronic form of the roll to identify eligible voters in order to check the validity of incoming electronic votes, or (b) authorize its (government) electoral department to be contracted by the People’s Forum to validate incoming electronic votes and then transmit them to the Forum’s CTF for tallying, classified as either fraudulent or valid. In Australia, use of the electoral roll by either option (a) or (b) requires the government to approve the Forum as one of the few organizations that is permitted to utilize the electoral roll, and this may not be possible until a demonstration People’s Forum poll is carried out to raise public and political awareness of its potential.

Where a demonstration of the People’s Forum does not have the support of the government, it must be cheap enough for the necessary funds to be raised by citizens, and it must proceed without checking each voter’s eligibility against the electoral roll. These conditions present two options for the demonstration, both of which would use a web-based ballot paper. The first is to essentially dispense with voting security and perhaps merely require that voters give their name and address before being permitted to vote. This insecure way of demonstrating the People’s Forum may be sufficient to gain public comprehension and support. Public confidence in the validity of the results of the initial demonstration polls may be much less important than citizens using the system or seeing it operate, to get a feel for its potential. The second option gives a slight degree of voting security and has citizens either registering before the poll or using a credit card to identify themselves if they choose to vote on impulse. To register, a citizen would ask (by phone, website or email) PF to allocate them a PIN and send it to their postal or email address. In the case of postal delivery, registration may have to close a few days before the close of the poll to allow the
PIN to arrive in time for a vote to be cast. Citizens who do not register before the poll may vote on impulse during the week that it is open by prefacing their telephone or internet vote with a credit card payment of a nominal fee, say 1c, to the People’s Forum. Successful payment by the bank to the Forum would inform it that the name used was authentic, or at least linked to the credit card number used. Neither that name nor that card number could be used to vote again without the managers of the Forum seeing it recur, in which case they would block those votes and perhaps the initial one as well, to tally them as fraudulent for a subsequent analysis of which views were falsely represented by multiple votes. With this procedure, impulse voters would pay about 21c to vote (20c for the credit card transaction and 1c for the vote), which is hardly a disincentive. A demonstration of the People’s Forum by either the insecure or the slightly secure option may produce pressure from the public for its government to assist future operation of this system, by public funding and also by allowing voting security to be implemented by making the electoral roll available in either of the two ways (a) and (b) suggested above.

The Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) provides very useful information on voting systems, including the internet-based voting that is now used in a number of countries, including Norway, Estonia, France, Netherlands, Spain–Barcelona, US–West Virginia, Australia–New South Wales, Canada–Markham and Switzerland–Geneva. Each country, province or city selects a system that suits their situation and priorities. However, as IFES is focused on state-run systems, it does not address the independent polling that may be needed to establish the People’s Forum, as discussed above. An exception to that qualification is the Estonian digital identity card, which has been operating successfully for a decade in many applications including voting, and which is open to ‘non-resident ‘satellite Estonians’, thereby creating a global, government-standard digital identity’ (Economist 2014b). This may not be convenient enough, as applicants pay a fee of around
US$40 to 70 and must provide biometric data and suitable documentation.

E17 Advisory Influence. If the People's Forum is to earn the confidence of the public, it must not incite violent conflict between citizens as they probe controversial and strongly held beliefs. In considering such possibilities, Dryzek (2006, 47) argues for ‘partially decoupling the deliberation and decision aspects of democracy’ (as discussed above in §7.2.2 E10). The People's Forum does this by producing choices that are not binding on government but which would invite the mass public to make them so.

7.3 Comments on design element E1—the ballot paper

As the transferability of the People's Forum to liberal democracies will depend on the receptions that their publics give to the ballot paper, a few additional comments on its design and potential impact are offered.

A Forum covering a limited jurisdiction such as a state or province would not restrict itself to issues managed at this level, but would also cover issues of a broader scope, from national to global. This is partly to encourage residents to develop preferences for their state in recognition of the wider context in which it operates. It also enables state residents to send messages to their national government and perhaps on occasion to the rest of the world, as well as to their state government. A Forum that is run at a high level of jurisdiction, say nationally in a federation of states, would use ballot papers that may differ from state to state in their treatments of state issues but which posed identical questions in each state for issues of national and wider concern, as noted in §6.1.4. The ballot paper should include subjects that are not normally considered to be issues of public policy, such as the way citizens think, the values they hold and whether they make choices with self-assurance or defensiveness. Such inquiry into the culture would be a vital part of the deliberation
that the People’s Forum would try to stimulate among citizens, for their culture influences the opinions they hold and therefore the policies of their democratic government.

An example of the possible treatment of a subject, or a class of issues, by the ballot paper is now given, to help the reader imagine how it would try to foster public deliberation on strategic issues. This illustration uses the subject of population size and shows a possible treatment of this by a ballot paper for the state of Tasmania in a national People’s Forum for Australia. The strategic importance of this subject was discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and this long-term focus is addressed by the first three issues selected below in this subject (coded PO1, PO2 and PO3). This contrasts with practice in Australia, where population size tends to be treated with a short- to medium-term emphasis, stressing the impact of migration on unemployment, congestion of cities, adequacy of infrastructure, aging of the population and the desire of the business lobby for labour and greater domestic demand.

The menus of issues and questions given here for this subject are offered merely as examples and it is, of course, possible that wide consultation may produce a different selection that addresses the public choice of population size more effectively. Questions and answer menus are identified here by codes such as Q1, which means question 1 for an issue (such as issue PO1 in the subject of ‘size of population’, which is given the identification code PO). A1 is the answer menu for question Q1, A2 the answer menu for Q2 and so on. The bracketed descriptions following Q and sometimes A, such as ‘state’, ‘national’, ‘attitude’, ‘justification’, ‘implementation’ or ‘willingness to pay’ (see §7.2.2 E13) may not be displayed on operational ballot papers. The menus of answers have a code number to the right of each answer that the voter may select as part of their vote.
A POSSIBLE TREATMENT OF ONE CLASS OF STRATEGIC ISSUES BY A PEOPLE’S FORUM BALLOT PAPER FOR THE STATE OF TASMANIA

PO POPULATION SIZE

PO1: HOW MANY OF US DO WE WANT?

What future population size do you think our governments should aim at, for the next century or more, in both Australia and the state of Tasmania? Before you commit yourself, you may like to examine and explain your thinking by considering and answering the questions in PO2 and PO3.

Something you may be concerned with here is the question of whether Tasmanians and Australians have the right to choose the size of their populations. Should these decisions be made by these residents or should they be made by the global community instead (if this were possible, say, through the UN or a future world governing body) or should they not be made at all?

You can vote on GO4 if you want to express your wishes on the desirability and structure of a world government [issue GO4 in the subject of Government (GO) is not included in this sample of a ballot paper].

Q1 (NATIONAL, ATTITUDE)
What size of population do you think we should aim for in Australia?

A1

Zero 0
<10 million 1
15 million 2
23 million (approximately the current size) 3
25 million 4
30 million 5
40 million 6
>40 million 7
We shouldn't aim for any particular size of population. We should be open to the ebb and flow of migration across the planet and to whatever birth rate we happen to have. We should adhere to any population targets for Australia which may be determined by the world community, for example, under the auspices of the United Nations.

Q2 (STATE, ATTITUDE)
For this question, just ignore the problems of changing or controlling the size of Tasmania’s population — if we wanted to — and state the size you prefer it to be.

A2
Zero
<300,000
400,000
500,000 (approximately the current size)
600,000
800,000
1,000,000
2,000,000
>2,000,000

We shouldn’t aim for any particular size of population within Tasmania but be open to ebb and flow of people over the whole nation.

Q3 (STATE, ATTITUDE)
If your answer to Q2 expresses a preference for restricting the size of Tasmania’s population, either currently or after some further growth in the future, do you want Tasmania to secede from Australia if that is necessary to achieve this restriction? This may be needed if federal policy on population size does not restrict the size of the nation’s population — so that the state can implement its own population policy, including controlling migration into the state from both the mainland states and from overseas.
No, Tasmania should not secede. 20
Not sure. 21
Yes, Tasmania should secede if this is necessary to restrict its population size. 22

PO2: ARE THE BENEFITS OF POPULATION GROWTH WORTH ITS COSTS?

Over the last decade, Australia’s population grew at around 1.2% per year. This is the fastest of the developed countries, which average 0.3% per year and is the same as the current average for the world. In 2007, Australia’s population grew at 1.6%, more than half of which (56%) was produced by net migration and the rest (44%) by natural increase (Weaver and Weaver 2008). A larger population gives benefits such as more people enjoying the Australian lifestyle, greater ethnic diversity, more cultural development and cultural facilities, bigger domestic markets and more intellectual and other human resources for our industrial development and our defence forces.

On the other hand, growth of population incurs economic costs. It requires expenditure on expansion of infrastructure such as housing, hospitals, schools, roads, factories, power stations, oil wells, mines and farms in order to maintain the national level of per capita affluence for more and more people. The cost (in terms of human effort, which is largely measured by financial expenditure) of the population growth-driven part of our expansion of infrastructure and skills has been estimated in Australia at 9.6% of GDP (for a 1.4% growth in population per year) and in the USA at 12.5% of GDP (for a 1% growth in population per year) (Cocks 2012; O’Sullivan 2012; Thurow 1986). This means that if we decided not to expand our population, we could take approximately an extra month holiday each year without being financially poorer for it, or if we prefer, spend that 10% of our GDP on developing a carbon-neutral economy, or boosting foreign aid, or giving more help to disadvantaged Australians, or protecting more of our environment, or contributing...
to the development of a global administration as described in go4 [not included in this sample of a ballot paper] and so on.

There is another type of cost incurred by growth of population, and this cannot be measured in monetary terms. As the population expands it makes natural resources more scarce. The nation’s limited stock of these is shared between more and more Australians. Those that are non-renewable deplete more quickly as more citizens consume them. Renewables may not be diminished, but more Australians means smaller shares for each to enjoy. Depending on the particular renewable resource, smaller shares can result in them being less enjoyable (crowding effects) or in being overused and destroyed, despite their potential for renewable use. So a growing population diminishes the per capita availability of natural resources. This not only raises the prices of those that are marketed, but also erodes the quality of those that are free (such as biodiversity, wilderness and stocks for fishing and hunting) while making it more feasible to have people pay to use them. Some of the natural resources affected in such ways are overseas, such as oil reserves and native forests of the tropics and North America. Australians are among the world’s heaviest per capita consumers of natural resources, including a per capita contribution to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emission that is around ninth out of 185 countries (a ranking that includes emissions from changes in land use).

Q1 (NATIONAL; ATTITUDE AND JUSTIFICATION)
In view of the possible costs to both financial and natural resources, of increasing the size of Australia’s population, do you think this population growth should be slowed or stopped to allow these resources to be used for other purposes?

A1 (ATTITUDE)
I think our population growth rate should be increased. 23
I think our population growth rate should be maintained. 24
Population growth in Australia should be slowed. 25
Population growth in Australia should be halted. 26
Population growth in Australia should be reversed. 27
PO3: QUALITY OF LIFE, GLOBAL EQUALITY AND OUR CHOICE OF POPULATION SIZE

Since the early years of colonization, Australians have enjoyed a lifestyle largely based on a high per capita availability of natural resources. This may be regarded as unfair when compared with the situation of people in more heavily populated countries. The word ‘lifestyle’ is used here to refer to affluence (or per capita income), plus quality of life. The latter comprises all those public goods that help to make life pleasant, such as a healthy and interesting environment, a supportive and stimulating culture and high standards of social justice and social welfare.

Q1 (National; Attitude)
Do you want Australia to maintain (or to achieve and then maintain) standards of per capita affluence and quality of life that are higher than those in many other countries, because of an advantage for Australians of a relative per capita abundance of natural resources? Or do you think Australians should eliminate any such privilege in order to share our natural resources more equitably with other people around the world, perhaps by inviting more of them to migrate here?

A1
Select one of the following four options:

We should try to remain more affluent than the world average (also see Q3 below).
We should try to remain more affluent than the world average — provided that this affluence is not produced by exploiting other nations (also see Q3 below).

We should only be as affluent as the world average.

We should be less affluent than the world average.

*Select one of the following three options:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We should try to retain a relatively high quality of life (also see Q3 below).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We should have just an average (in a global sense) quality of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We should have a quality of life below the world average.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Q2** (**NATIONAL; ATTITUDE, JUSTIFICATION**)
Do you think that an important ingredient of both affluence and/or high quality of life is a low pressure of population on natural resources, in other words, a high per capita abundance of land, sea, air and the natural resources (including native wildlife and vegetation) that go with them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, for affluence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, for quality of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, for affluence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, for quality of life.</td>
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**Q3** (**NATIONAL; ATTITUDE**)
Do you think that if we are to maintain living conditions that are better than those in many other countries, we will have to maintain immigration controls to restrict the inflow of immigrants wanting to enjoy these favourable conditions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We must restrict immigration to maintain relative affluence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We must restrict immigration to maintain relative quality of life.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We do not have to restrict immigration to maintain relative affluence. 45
We do not have to restrict immigration to maintain relative quality of life. 46

**PO4: WHO DO WE WANT TO JOIN US?**

**Q1 (NATIONAL; ATTITUDE)**
If Australia is to continue to accept immigrants, on what basis should they be selected?

**A1**
*Select one or more of these answers*
No selection criteria. First come, first accepted. 47
Acceptable races and cultures only. 48
Their value to Australia’s economy — accept the wealthy, those with skills in short supply, young, healthy, English language proficiency … 49
People seeking to avoid economic difficulties. 50
Refugees from acute difficulties, such as persecution, disaster or war. 51
Family reunion. 52
Minimize the numbers taken now, to maintain a maximum capacity for Australia to take refugees in the longer term, for example, if global warming inundates places or causes famine by disrupting the Asian monsoon. 53

*End of issue treatment example*