



## THE CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT (SEED)

### PARTICIPATORY POLLING IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES AND IN PEACEBUILDING CONTEXTS

#### 1. What is participatory polling?

Participatory Polling is an innovative action research methodology through which the general public is consulted on policy related issues, using a questionnaire that has been designed with the contribution of societal and political stakeholders, whereby the results then serve as a basis for public dialogue and in support of the policy making process.

#### 2. a. What makes it different from regular opinion polling?

Participatory polling not only observes public opinion, but serves a communicative and democratic function: It opens up substantive avenues of communication between society at large and policy makers, avenues that in the normal course of events often become blocked due to the realities of political life, even in representative democracies. The participatory polling methodology is designed to bring decision-makers and citizens closer in an attempt to set the policy agenda and identify salient issues.

#### b. What makes it different from deliberative polling?

By contrast with deliberative polling that is conducted in an experimental setting, the results obtained through participatory polling have more external validity in real world settings. Participants remain in their own social contexts, whereas deliberative polling entails before and after snapshots of responses in a controlled environment. Moreover, in participatory polling the questionnaire (QNR) is designed through a collaborative participatory process, therefore it entails the stakeholders' viewpoints, proposals and concerns that are being tested through the QNR, rather than the research team's viewpoints, proposals and concerns.

#### c. What makes it different from focus group consultations?

The participatory polling method is complementary to focus groups in that material generated in the focus groups can then be fed into a participatory poll questionnaire. At the same time, participatory polling offers advantages over focus groups in that results are more broadly representative of the underlying population.

#### d. What makes it different from conventional think-tank reports?

Similarly to a think-tank reports, participatory polling generates and evaluates policy options to be considered by political leaders. In contrast to think-tank reports, participatory polling achieves this aim through an inclusive process which involves the perspectives of the various groups and layers that make up society and official perspectives, thus paving the way for a broader convergence.

#### 3. What can participatory polling be used for?

Participatory polling is a tool for policy making that bridges the vertical gap between the policy makers and society, as well as the horizontal gap between different groups in society. More specifically, Participatory Polling can contribute towards the fulfillment of the following objectives:

- *Bridging of Gap between Track 1 and Society at large* - Participatory Polling carries the voice of ordinary citizens to societal and political leaders in much greater sophistication than is usually achieved through conventional polling, and thus supports and enables the functions of leadership: To guide and encourage the people more effectively wherever it is shown that fear or lack of insight are holding the general public back, but also to listen to



the people and accept their lead wherever it is shown that the general public is already ahead of the elites in courage and vision for the future.

- *Enhanced Awareness and Acceptance between Groups in Conflict* - Participatory Polling in divided societies opens up windows of understanding between groups and communities in conflict. By putting each group face to face with the views and opinions of the other groups, stereotypes are dismantled and a more realistic foundation for dialogue on the basis of the underlying concerns and priorities of each group becomes possible.
- *Development of Consensus Proposals* - Participatory Polling makes it possible to compare the level of acceptance for several competing proposals on any relevant policy issue. Through this process, policy proposals that have the potential of becoming consensual solutions that are acceptable to all groups involved become readily apparent, while in contrast polarizing proposals, that are seen as ideal by one group but unacceptable by other groups, are shown to be problematic. A policy proposal tested in a participatory poll that proves to be simultaneously acceptable to all groups involved, may then form the basis for bringing all the parties around the same table to elaborate on the proposal and lead it through to implementation.

#### **4. When would you consider participatory polling?**

Participatory polling could be considered in any context where:

- Different groups of stakeholders hold radically different opinions on how to address a social/political problem
- The problem being considered would directly/indirectly affect a large segment of the society in question
- In the perspective of various stakeholders, the society in question does not possess adequate consultative mechanisms to address such horizontal and vertical gaps in views and perspectives.
- In such contexts, participatory polling can contribute by injecting inclusivity. At the same time, it can discover potential convergences between groups that otherwise appear to be holding opposed positions.

##### **a. Who implements participatory polling?**

The first step towards designing a participatory poll is to designate the editorial team. The editorial team is normally comprised of project researchers and / or consultants, while within the team there must be adequate expertise both in relation to the participatory polling methodology, and in relation to the current social and political context in which the poll will take place. Additionally, the editorial team must include skilled interviewers, have access or the capacity to gain access to political and civil society leaders, and possess basic skills in data analysis and the use of statistical software packages.

##### **b. What skills and competencies are required?**

Implementing participatory polling requires access to stakeholders and political sensitivity. Furthermore, it requires analytical skills to process, interpret and contextualize the results. Finally, facilitation and communication skills are required in order to leverage the impact of the participatory poll.

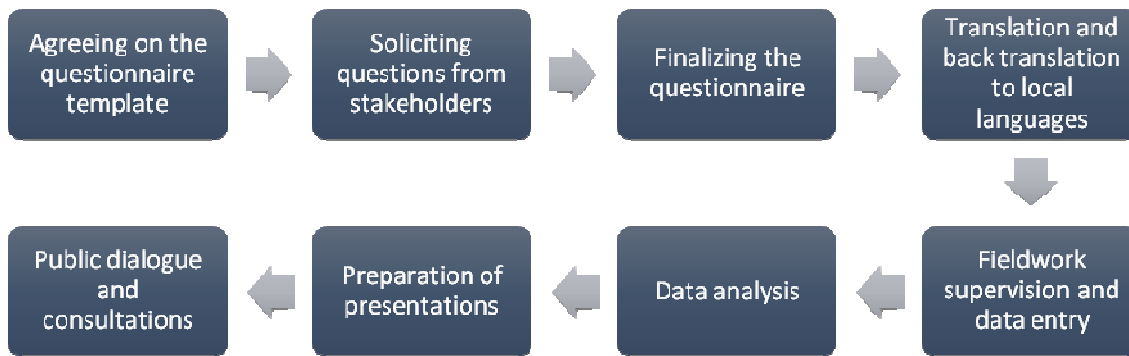
##### **c. What kind of external support is required?**

It is envisioned that the participatory polling will be implemented by experts and stakeholders of the society in question. The only external capacity required is training and supervision. Seed will provide an initial training to the designated team and then provide support as required in the different stages of the participatory polling process.



**d. What steps does it involve?**

Defining the timeline for a participatory poll needs to take into account both the internal realities of the research process and the external realities of the social-political processes that the poll will be investigating. Depending on the various factors, the overall time period for implementation can range from four months to 10 months. Implementation broadly involves three stages: designing the questionnaire through a participatory process, collection of data from the general public and officials and feeding the results into a consultation process with relevant stakeholders.



**e. Can its scope be adjusted?**

Depending on the societal or political needs, the scope of participatory polling methodology can be adjusted to accommodate different contexts. Simpler or singular issues require less preparatory stages since relevant stakeholders are more readily identifiable, in contrast with the identification and tackling of broader societal concerns or with complex projects including constitution-making. Moreover, ‘simple’ or single issue foci are less costly and are faster to implement than more complex polling efforts. Against this and despite variation in complexity, the fundamental principles guiding the implementation of participatory polling design remain unaltered.

**What time frame does it require?**

Task	Duration for a simple project (up to 4 months)	Duration for a complex project (up to 10 months)
Agreeing on Questionnaire template	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks
Soliciting questions from stakeholders	2-3 weeks	1-2 month
Finalising the Questionnaire	1 week	1-2 weeks
Translation and back-translation	1 week	1-2 weeks
Fieldwork and Data Entry	1 month	1-2 months
Data Analysis and Preparation of Presentations	2-3 weeks	1-2 months
Public Dialogue Phase	1 month	2-3 months
<b>Total Duration</b>	<b>4 months</b>	<b>10 months</b>



**f. What are the main cost areas?**

The main cost areas are as follows:

- *Local fieldwork costs (Polling):* At least 250 to 500 interviews per significant societal group are required. Criterion for defining a group can be ethnic, tribal, religious, political and/or other, depending on the context of a specific society, but with a view of ensuring that all relevant groups are included. For example, in a society where there are 3 major ethnic groups we would require from 750 to 1500 participants. Also, an approximate estimate for the number of interviewers required is that one interviewer would conduct 5 interviews per working day. For instance, to conduct 1500 interviews, 300 interviewer days would be required (or 10 interviewers working 30 days each).
- *Local human resources:* This involves at the minimum the part-time engagement of a facilitator, a data analyst, a communication officer and a project director for the duration of implementation (i.e. 4 months to 10 months).
- *Training & supervision costs of SeeD:* This would involve an initial training visit for one week by the representatives of the SeeD team and 2-3 more visits as well as email follow-up by individual SeeD representatives as the project is being implemented.

**5. What added value does participatory polling offer?**

Participatory polling in divided societies opens up windows of understanding between groups and communities in conflict. By putting each group face to face with the views and opinions of the other groups, stereotypes are dismantled and a more realistic foundation for dialogue on the basis of the underlying concerns and priorities of each group becomes possible. Participatory polling has a high degree of credibility because the political leadership and wider society are closely involved in the process, and because the production of quantitative data is often considered more convincing by policy makers as compared to reports and opinions obtained through participatory processes that do not include polling.

**6. It is not recommended to use participatory polling - when?**

Security situation of the context is such that the life or freedom of the research team can be in danger.

**7. What participatory polling is not a well suited instrument- for ?**

Participatory polling can point the way towards mutually acceptable policy directions and solutions, but the technical/legal operationalization of such solutions is beyond the scope of participatory polling.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT SeeD OR IPAT:**

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