The Politics and Public Policies I Hope for

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The problem: Politics

- Politics is rarely about policies
- Politics is often about “optics”:
  - Personalities (drink-a-beer-with-ability)
  - Scandals (-gates)
  - Who made a mistake (or flipped a flop)
  - Socio-historical voting institutions (e.g., farmers)
- This process encourages the wrong kind of people to get into politics
- Bad politicians make bad policies (too many e.g.s)
Bad policies?

- Policies that are not evidence based (or worse)
- Policies that look good but don’t really do anything
- Policies that have negative wellbeing effects for many New Zealanders
- Policies that have negative wellbeing effects for New Zealanders that are already struggling
- Policies that may improve some indicator but do not improve wellbeing
  - E.g. Doing something that increases production but not wellbeing
Good policies?

- Policies that efficiently and fairly promote wellbeing
- Efficiency is a common policy goal
- Fairness is complex, but includes treating like a like (not necessarily in the Don Brash way)
- Wellbeing = when peoples’ lives go well (for them)
- Promoting wellbeing is probably best pursued through providing capabilities
  - Real opportunities to pursue (non-anti-social) views of the good life
Like using the Treasury’s Living Standards Framework
But how to get politicians (and the public) interested in good policies?
A naïve proposal for a richly democratic wellbeing-centred political policy process (Overview)

- Generate a list of Nzers goals for NZ
- Political parties rank the goals
- Political parties generate policy proposals
- The policy proposals are assessed relative to the goals
- “Actual” rankings are assigned to political parties
- The media report on the policy goals information
- Citizens vote for political parties (informed by goals)
Stats NZ arranges for a large study of NZers goals for NZ (similar to Australian efforts circa 2012)
A list of (~10?) common goals are created
The list is included in the census for NZers to rank
- Gets amended via the same process as adding religions to the census
Political parties rank the goals

- Parties use their own processes to decide their policy goals.
- They can combine the new goals information with their own polling etc.
- The parties can campaign on the goals they are prioritizing
  - (instead of saying they are pro everything good)
RDWPPP: Policy proposals are assessed relative to the goals

- A specialised government department (part of Treasury?) assesses each (major) political party's policy proposals against the goals
- The assessments are fully transparent
- They include a user-friendly goal-based summary and specific comments
- This would be a lot of work up front and X months out from each election
- Journalists, think tanks, and academics should monitor and assess these assessments to keep them honest
RDWPPP: “Actual” rankings are assigned to political parties

- Political parties are assigned a ranking of the goals based on their proposed policies.
- The assigned rankings are updated as new policy proposals are released and especially enacted by government.
- The rankings are publicised in a user-friendly way.
  - A specific set of graphical indicators is always used?
RDWPPP: The media report on the policy goals information

- All reporting is highly user-friendly
- Discrepancies between stated and “actual” goal rankings
- Changes in a party’s stated or “actual” goal rankings
- Comparisons between different parties’ rankings

?Ways to refine the system in light of the above?
RDWPPP:
Citizens vote for political parties (informed by goals)

- Citizens can introspect their own goal ranking
- Citizens could use software to discover their policy goals ranking
  - E.g. Multiple pair-wise choices
- Citizens could use software to see which political parties best match their policy goal ranking
- Citizens can easily find user-friendly unbiased policy assessments
The solution?: RDWPPP

- Media workers find it easier to report on policies and political party’s policy goals
- Citizens now find it easier to investigate (or hear about) whether specific policies or political parties share their policy goals
- Politicians come under pressure to make politics about good policy
Interesting potential issues

- What if NZers wanted aspects of subjective wellbeing as the main policy goal?
- What if NZers came up policy goals that we don’t know how to bring about via policies?
  - Set up government funded contestable research grants to find out how to give people what they want
- How to incorporate efficiency and fairness?
  - Efficiency: the same (e.g. via cost benefit analyses of options)
  - Fairness: Possibly have versions of fairness appear as values (e.g. Via equality of inputs/outcomes)