



CROWDLAW FOR CONGRESS SERIES

vTAIWAN

DEMOCRACY AS A WORK IN PROGRESS

<https://vtaiwan.tw/>

BRIEFING NOTE

Owner: g0v.tw, a collaboration between the Digital Ministry, the Parliament and a volunteer civil society organization.

Location: Taiwan

Years in Operation: 2015-present

Implementation Level: National

Platforms: Web, Offline

Method: AI-based insight generation

Participatory Task: Ideas, Opinions, Expertise

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vTaiwan is a four-stage process for moving from issue to legislative enactment while building consensus among diverse stakeholders. Rather than build a new tech platform, vTaiwan relies on a series of well-known existing tools that are open source (meaning they can be freely modified and customized, as needed). The process begins with anyone, from public officials to everyday citizens, proposing an issue and a relevant government agency agreeing to steward and participate in the process.

1. **Proposal Stage** - Offline and online discussion of which problems to address using Discourse for discussion, sli.do for document sharing and Typeform for frequent questionnaires.
2. **Opinion Stage** - It then moves to an online process of getting input, taking advantage of an artificial intelligence (AI) tool known as Pol.is to collect and visualize participants' views, which becomes the basis for determining the extent of consensus about the nature of a problem. During this stage participants post their statements about the problem and can vote to Agree, Disagree, or Pass on statements written by others or indicate if the statement is important to them. As voting progresses an algorithm is used to sort participants into opinion groups, capturing what each group feels most strongly about, how a group perceives what the problems are and areas where people are divided and where there is consensus. Presented as a visualization, this "opinion landscape" is made available to the public and the relevant government agencies. This so-called "crowdsourced consensus-mining" makes the process of obtaining information about the "dynamics of the issue, the facts of the matter, what is at stake, and who is involved" efficient and scalable.
3. **Reflection Stage** - Following the opinion stage are two in-person stakeholder meetings where notes are taken online using HackPad and, to extend participation and maximize transparency, livestreamed online with a chatroom where anyone can comment. The goal is to determine if the issue is ripe for advancement.
4. **Ratification Stage** - In some cases, the issue is resolved with a guideline, policy, or statement from the competent government agency. This often includes a point-by-point explanation of why legislation is not being enacted. In others, it is formulated into a draft bill to be sent to the Yuan (Taiwanese Legislature).

All the steps are combined onto a single set of webpages on the vTaiwan website so that the public and public servants alike can easily track the progress of an issue. Taiwan's Digital Minister stresses that the process is flexible and the path often deviates from this roadmap. Some issues have taken as few as three months to settle while others have taken over a year.

What Are The Outcomes?

In Taiwan, 200,000 people have participated in this open policymaking process to define the problem around such complex issues as Uber, telemedicine, online alcohol sales and other hard topics. More than 80 percent of processes once initiated lead to “decisive government action.” The Taiwanese have used the process to formulate 26 pieces of national legislation. Since 2017, each Ministry is obliged to appoint a Participation Officer responsible for engaging in the process.

What Does It Cost?

The vTaiwan process uses a number of different tools, most of which are free. Pol.is is free to use and also open source. The vTaiwan process was supported pro bono by the organization that develops and maintains pol.is, which provides support at negotiable fees. The entire process is run and maintained by volunteers with support from the government's Digital Ministry**.

What Are The Benefits?

- ▶ Joint ownership between government and civil society builds trust and reduces the risk of failure while sharing the workload.
- ▶ Flexible and transparent process enhances legitimacy.
- ▶ Combination of online and offline fosters participation by diverse audiences.

What are the risks?

- ▶ Focus on generating consensus may conflict with the need for urgent response.
- ▶ Not all Ministries or public officials are convinced of the efficacy of the process.
- ▶ Online process tends to favor discussion of technology-related topics.

vTaiwan has facilitated productive discourse among thousands of people at a time on a range of key issues. The process has helped resolve disputes between groups, ease concerns among citizens, and ultimately shape more effective and representative policies.

For more information, please contact: crowdlaw@thegovlab.org

Special thanks for editorial assistance to:

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- Audrey Tang, *Digital Minister, Taiwan*

****Correction:** An earlier version of this case study had an incorrect description of the cost structure for using pol.is. That information has been updated with the input of Pol.is. October 14, 2020