

# **DATA EVIDENCE and the PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

---

Shaping and re-shaping the policy narrative

## **PRESENTATION BY**

Alan Johnson

SOCIAL POLICY ANALYST

THE SALVATION ARMY SOCIAL POLICY & PARLIAMENTARY UNIT

## **TO**

Institute of Public Administration New Zealand Seminar

AUCKLAND – 25<sup>th</sup> MAY 2017

**1**

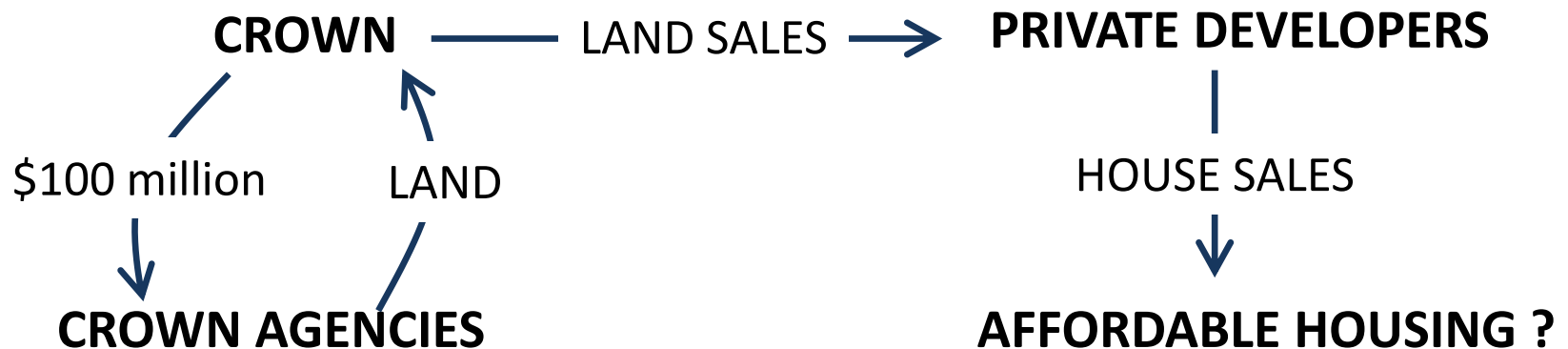
# Spin v fake news



## **\$100m boost to develop Auckland housing**

Housing development on surplus Crown land in Auckland is receiving a \$100 million boost in Budget 2016, Building and Housing Minister Dr Nick Smith says

PRESS RELEASE – MAY 2016

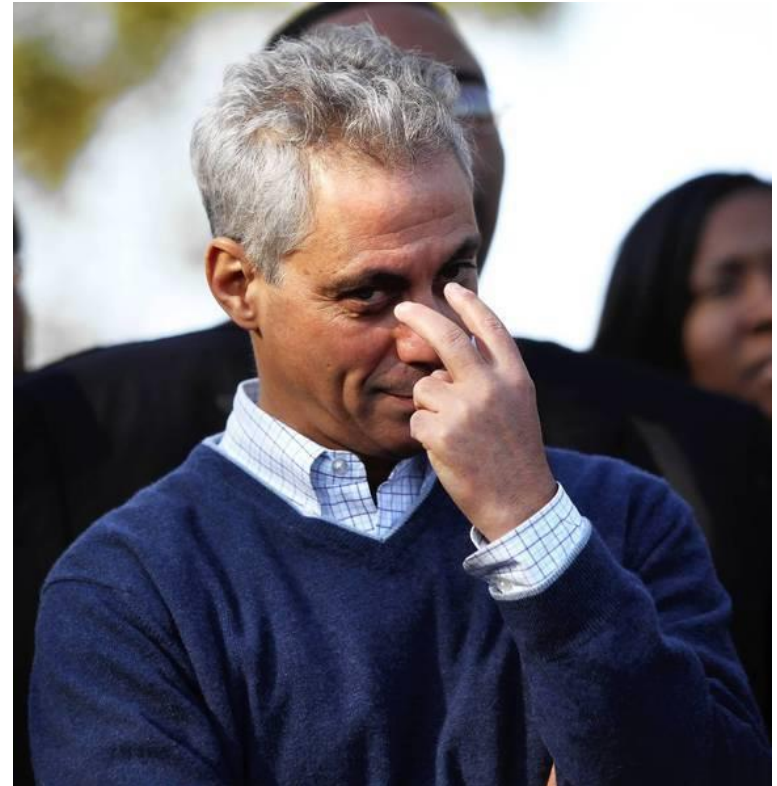


1

## Spin v fake news

---

*'You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before'*



**RAHM EMANUEL**

Former White House Chief of Staff - 2008-10  
44<sup>th</sup> Mayor of Chicago

# 1

## Spin v fake news

---

### TRUTHINESS

Truthiness is a term coined by American comedian Stephen Colbert in 2005 in a pilot episode of his TV show.

It is "the truth that you feel in your gut regardless of what the facts support".

*'I just don't feel that we need to trawl through evidence and give that much kind of evidence to something that is just so obvious.'*



Paula Bennett in a Radio NZ interview in August 2012 justifying drug testing of welfare beneficiaries

# 1

## Spin v fake news

### CLAIMS WITHOUT EVIDENCE

The Government claims progress in relieving poverty and other social outcomes resulting from its welfare reform agenda despite the absence of a study of what has happened to the people affected

*'it is no coincidence that 42,000 fewer people are living in benefit dependent households than three years ago, that the number of sole parents on a benefit is the lowest in 30 years, that immunisation rates for Maori are almost the same for a time as the rest of the population and that youth crime has dropped by 48% since 2011.'*

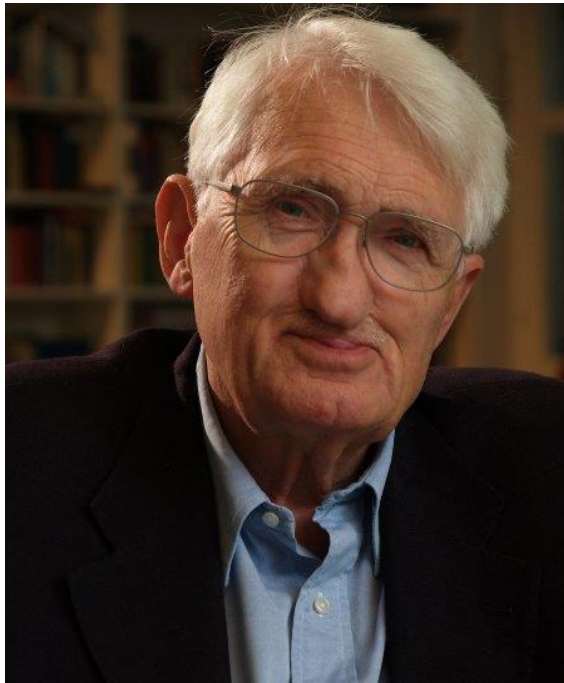


Associate Social Development  
Minister Jo Goodhue at SUPERU  
Evidence to Action conference  
April 2016

## 2

# The public discourse

---



JÜRGENS HABERMAS

German sociologist

## PUBLIC SPHERE

*‘society engaged in critical public debate’\**

Conditions for this to occur include:

- the formation of public opinion
- all citizens have access to the discourse
- the coincidence of unrestricted freedoms (assembly, association, expression)
- debate over the general governing relationships

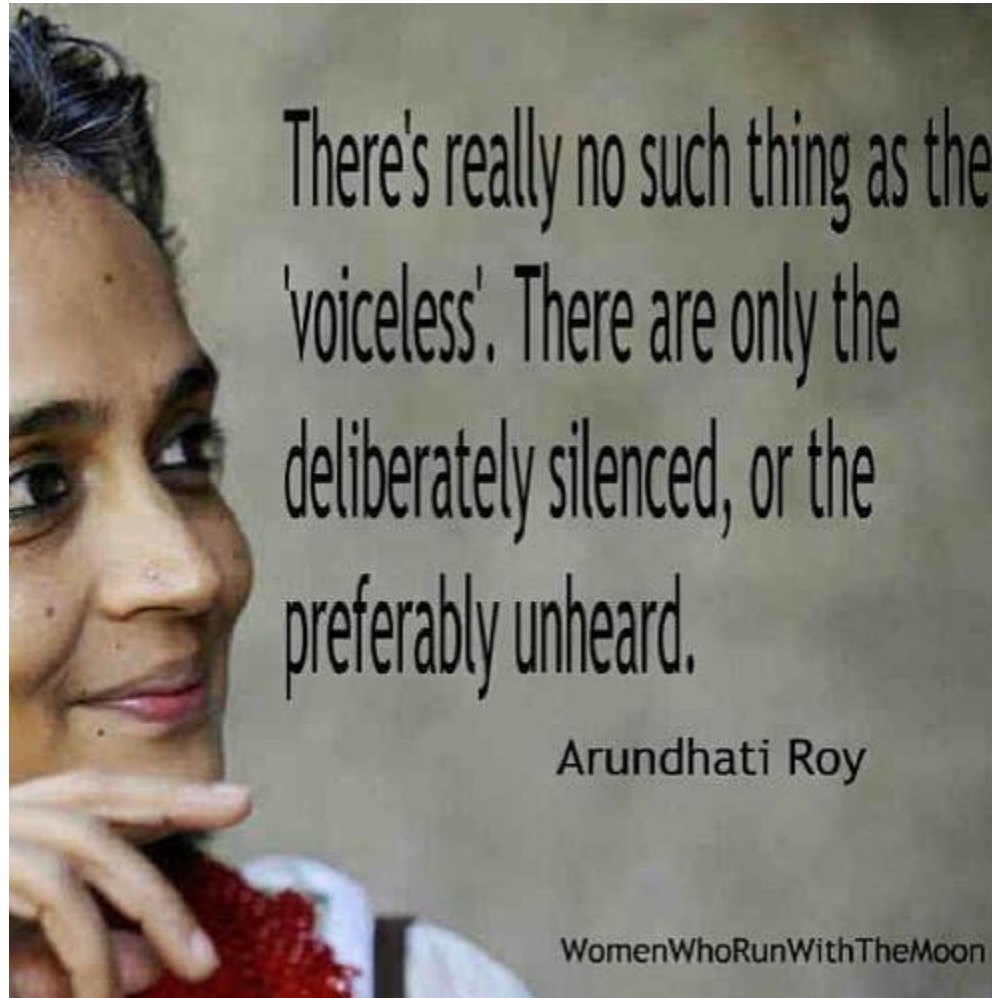
\* HABERMAS, J. (1962) The structural transformation of the public sphere – An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society



## 2

## The public discourse

---



## 2 The public discourse

---

### SOME NARRATIVE FROM THE UNHEARD

*'The flipside of South Auckland - Not enough doctors but heaps of police. Long queues for emergency department at Middlemore that can't be addressed but extra staff on at the Manukau DC on court days. If there's extra dollars to spend on community growth, we will have to fight tooth and nail for it because the funding for social services is high. Building lots of houses but dunno how many of them are for us'.  
#SA #thuglife*



## 2 The public discourse

---

### A DIVIDED DISCOURSE

Disintegration of middle ground with the demise of the mass media and the rise of multiple media channels

Informed ignorance – lots of ‘information’ to support my perspectives offered by polarising sources

Opinion = fact and not the fact of the opinion



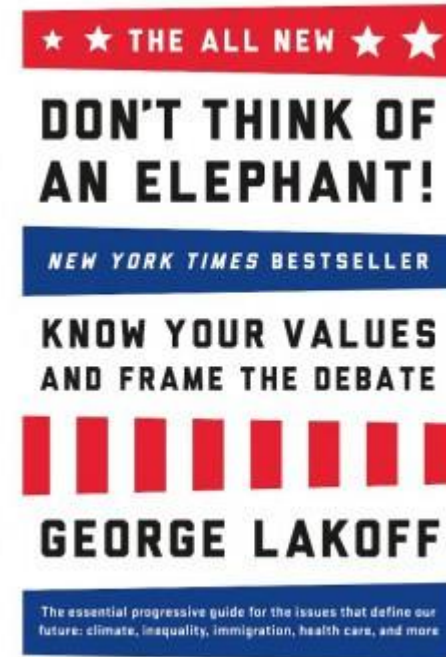
**The Daily Blog**  
Read The Other Side Of The Story



### 3 Framing

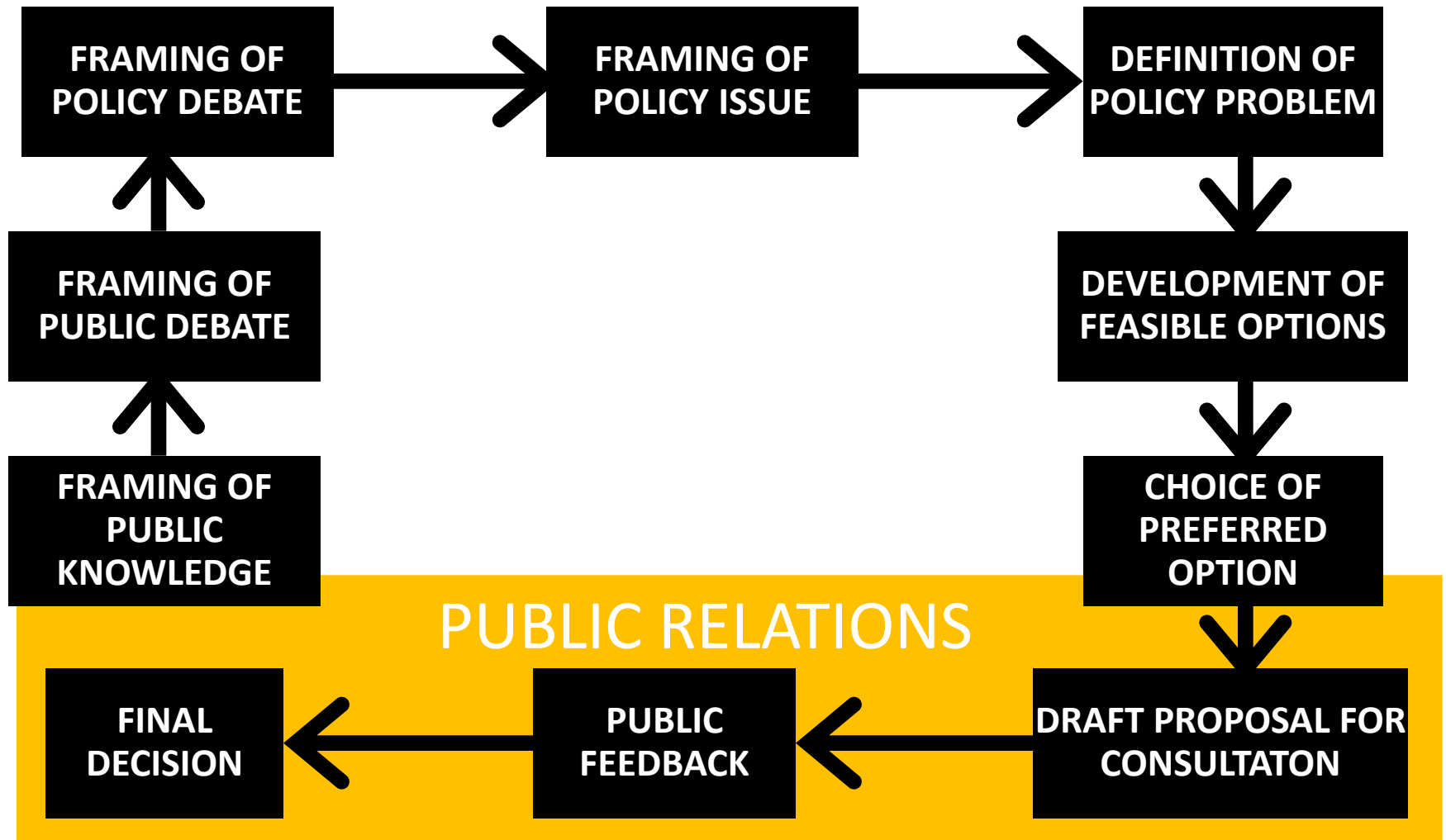


GEORGE LAKEOFF  
American nuero-linguist

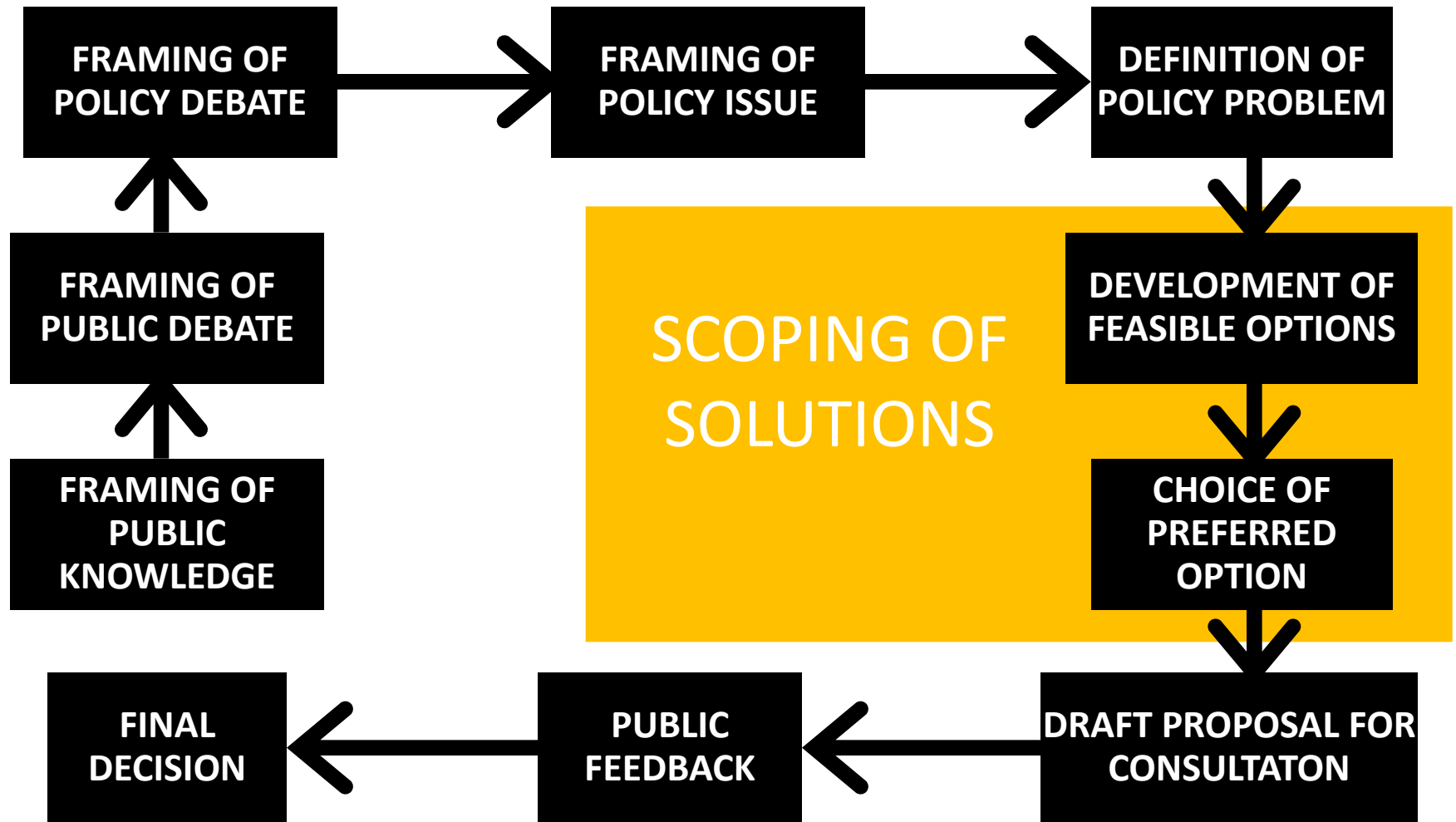


Frames are mental structures that shape the way we view the world  
They are heuristic in that they provide us with shortcuts for making sense of complexity – metaphors are essential for this task

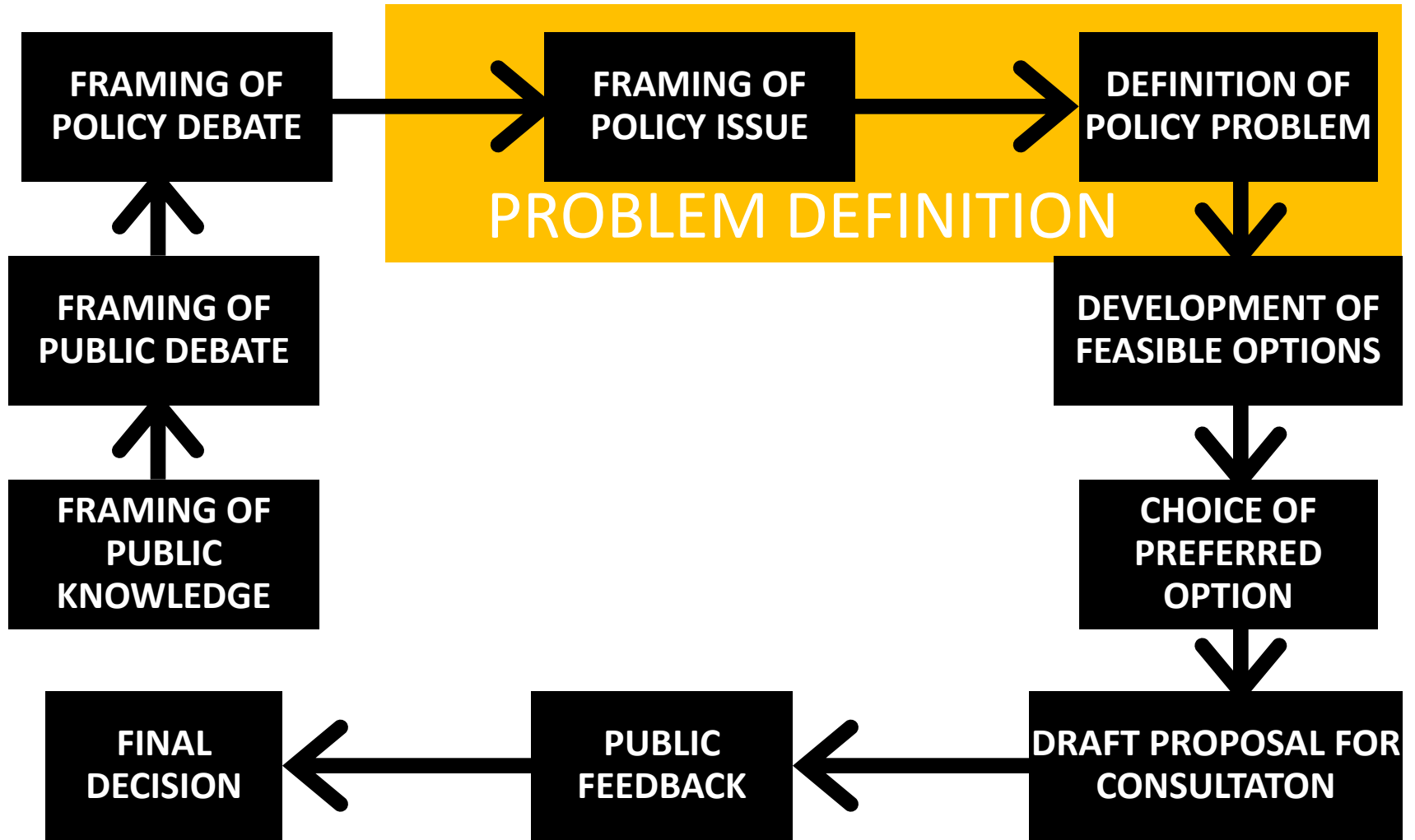
### 3 Framing



### 3 Framing

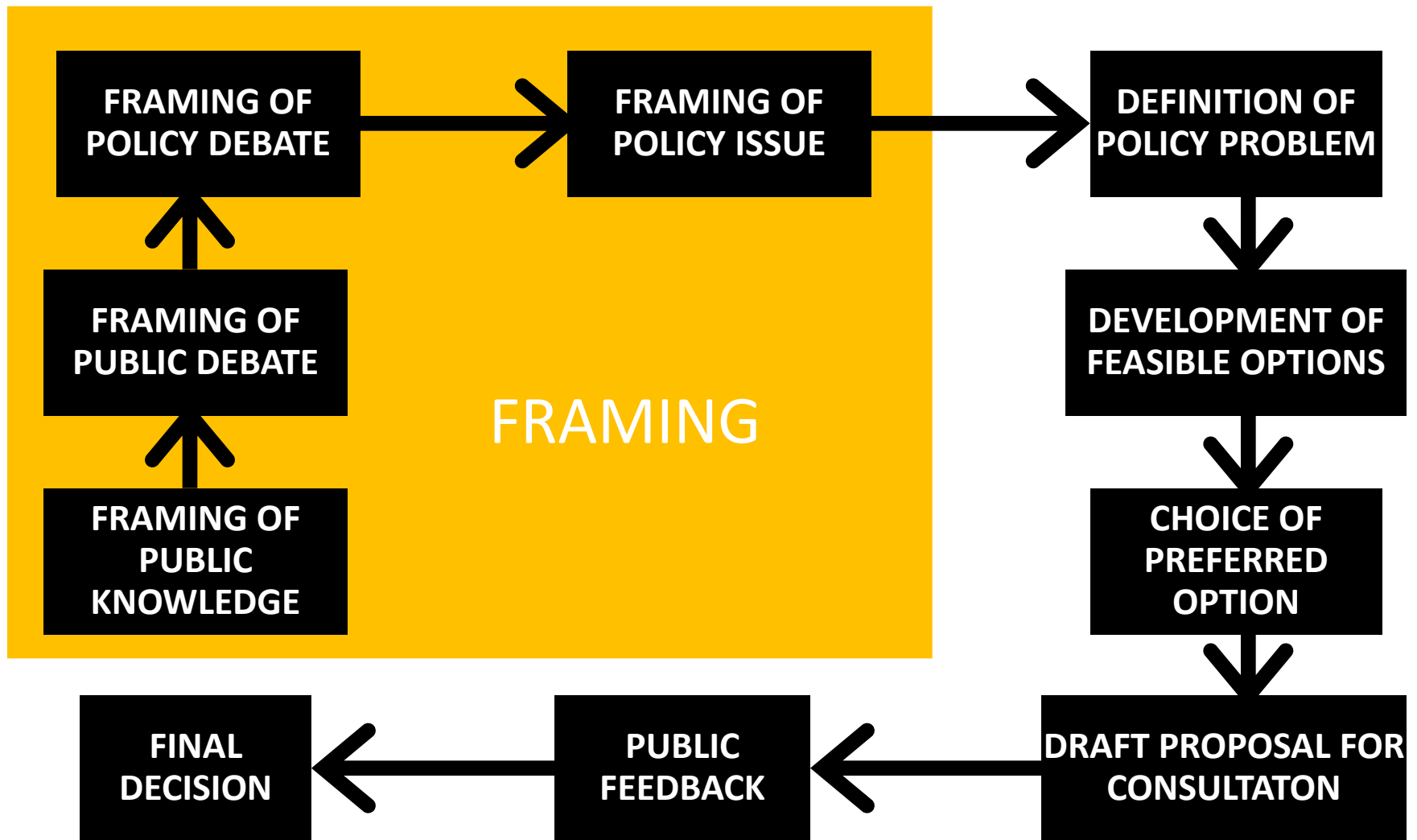


### 3 Framing



### 3

## Framing



## 4 Reframing

### THE UBIQUITY OF ECONOMIC DATA



SHARE MARKET INDICES ON BUILDING ON WELLINGTON WATERFRONT

Data on economic trends is everywhere – almost in real time. This creates the impression of importance even though much of the data is noise and of little relevance to the real economy



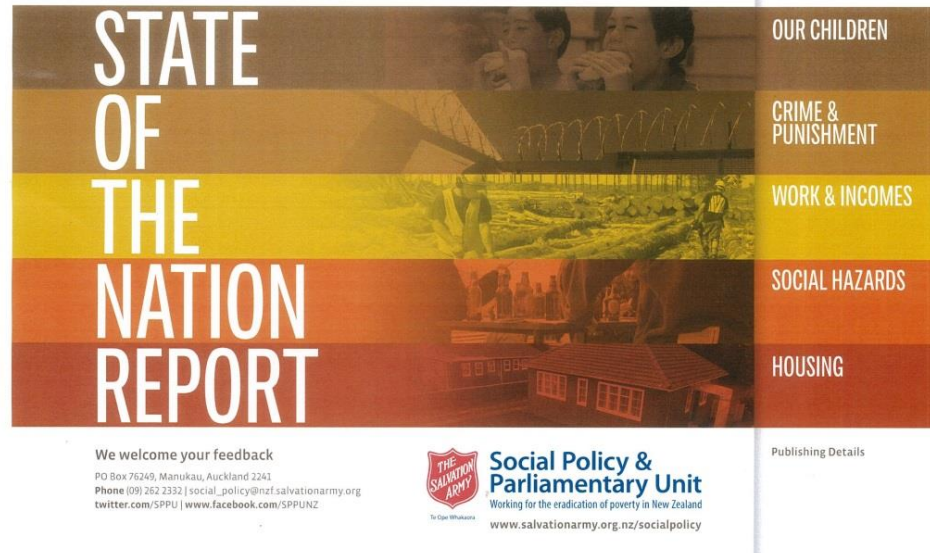
# 4

## Reframing

### MEASURING SOCIAL PROGRESS

#### Off the Track

Alan Johnson | Social Policy Analyst  
The Salvation Army Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit  
February 2017



In an attempt to re-frame the public debate since 2008 SPPU has published a State of the Nation report which is released in February

This is an attempt to measure and discuss social progress and by doing so raising the status of social outcomes in the public discourse

## 4 Reframing

### OUR CHILDREN

Child poverty  
Children at risk  
Children & violence  
Youth offending  
Early childhood education  
Student achievement  
Infant mortality  
Teenage pregnancy

### CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Overall crime  
Violent crime  
Sentencing & imprisonment  
Recidivism

### WORK & INCOMES

Employment  
Unemployment  
Incomes  
Benefits & pensions  
Livings costs & food poverty

### SOCIAL HAZARDS

Alcohol  
Illicit drugs  
Gambling

### HOUSING

Housing availability  
Housing affordability  
Household & housing related debt

The report measures progress across five policy areas and 23 indicators

# 5

## Political & policy opportunism

---

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SENTINEL EVENTS

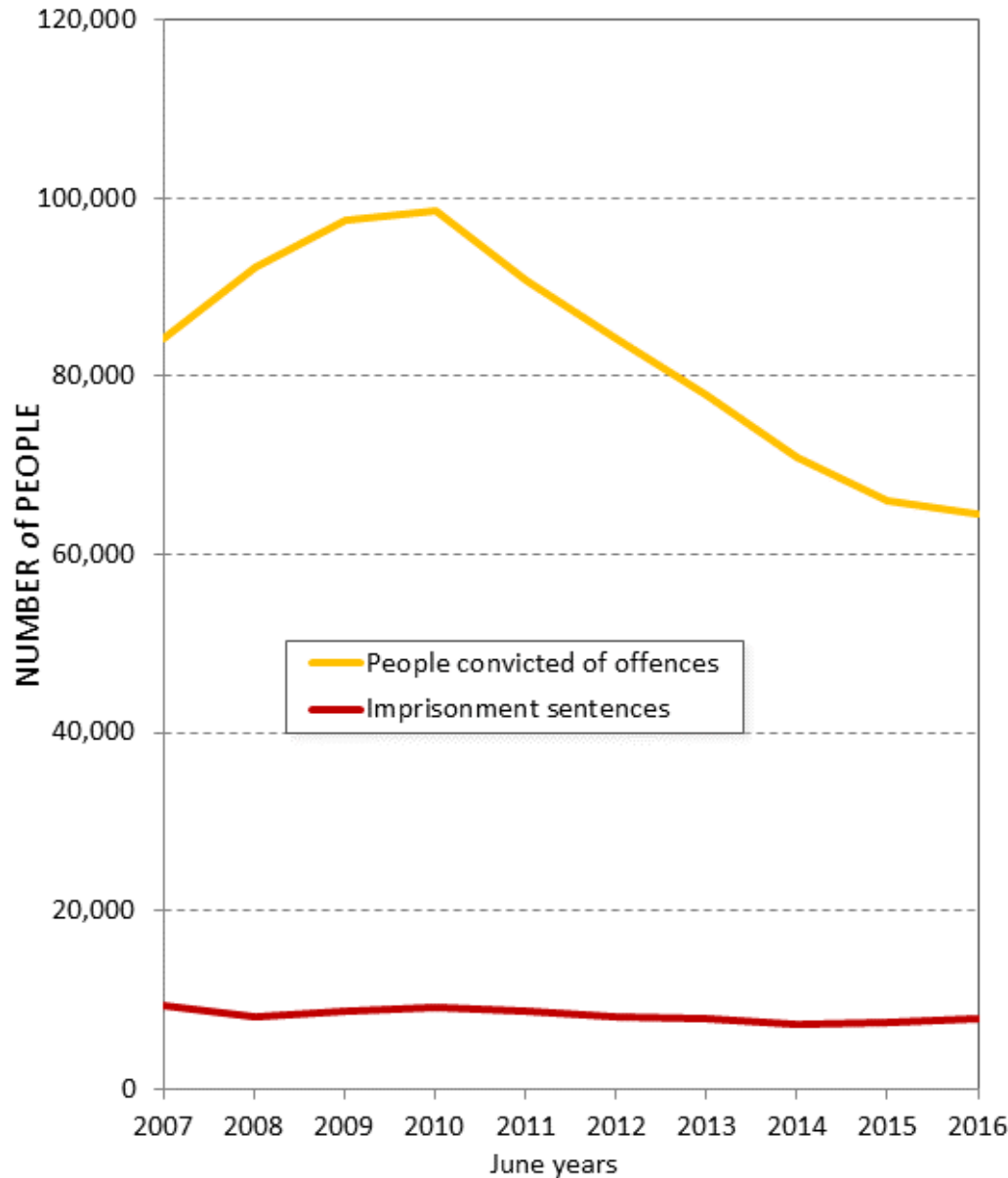


Graeme Burton a convicted murderer on parole subsequently randomly murdered Karl Kuckenbecker in 2007.

This became a so-called 'sentinel event' which shifted public opinion around prison policy.

## 5

## Political & policy opportunism

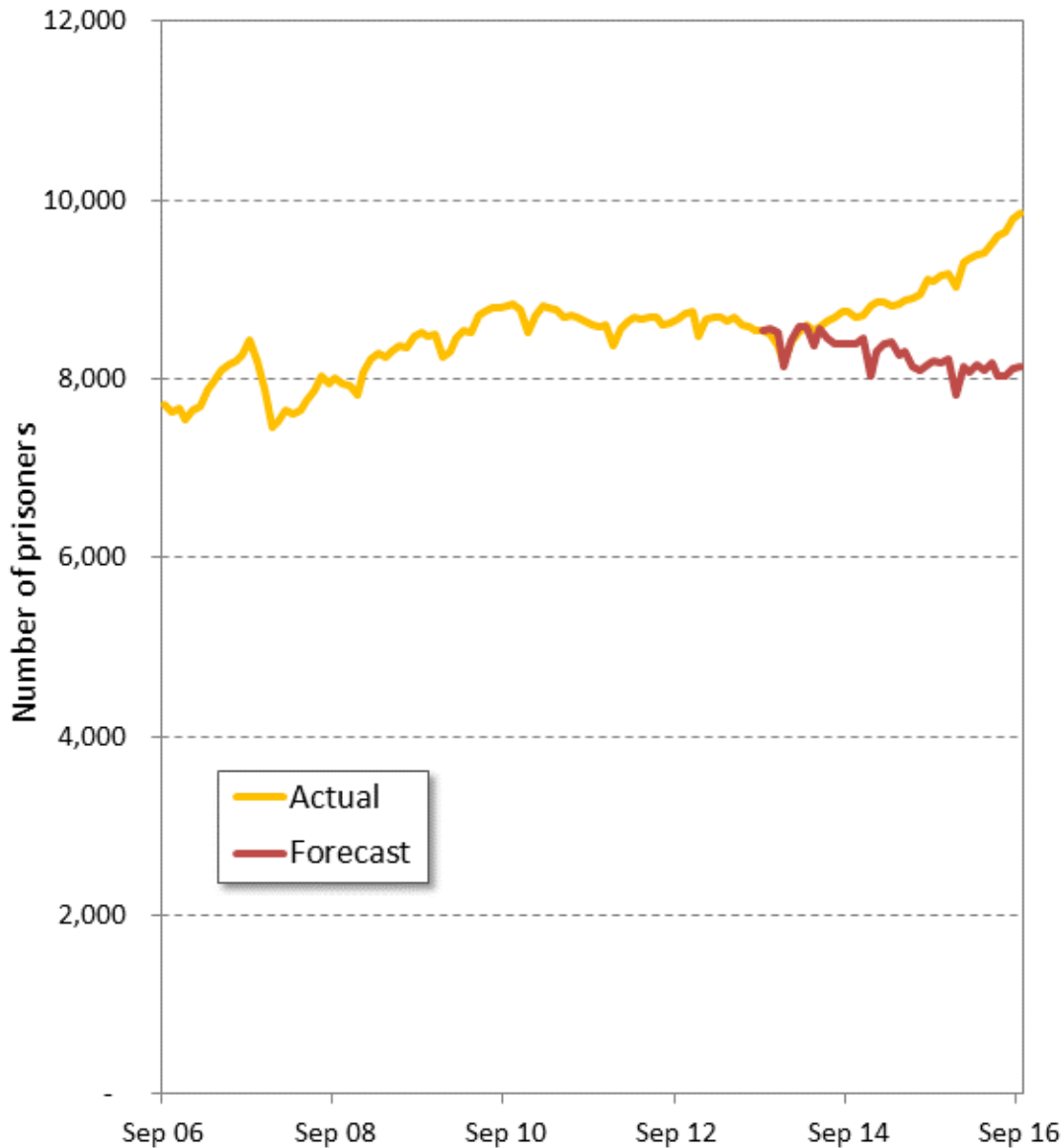


Despite the political rhetoric there is evidence that criminal offending is declining – the numbers of adults convicted of offence declined 29% over the past five years

Yet the numbers being sent to prison declined 10% and have actually begun to increase again

## 5

## Political & policy opportunism



Prisoner numbers have reached new record levels and will most likely have reached 10,000 inmates in early 2017

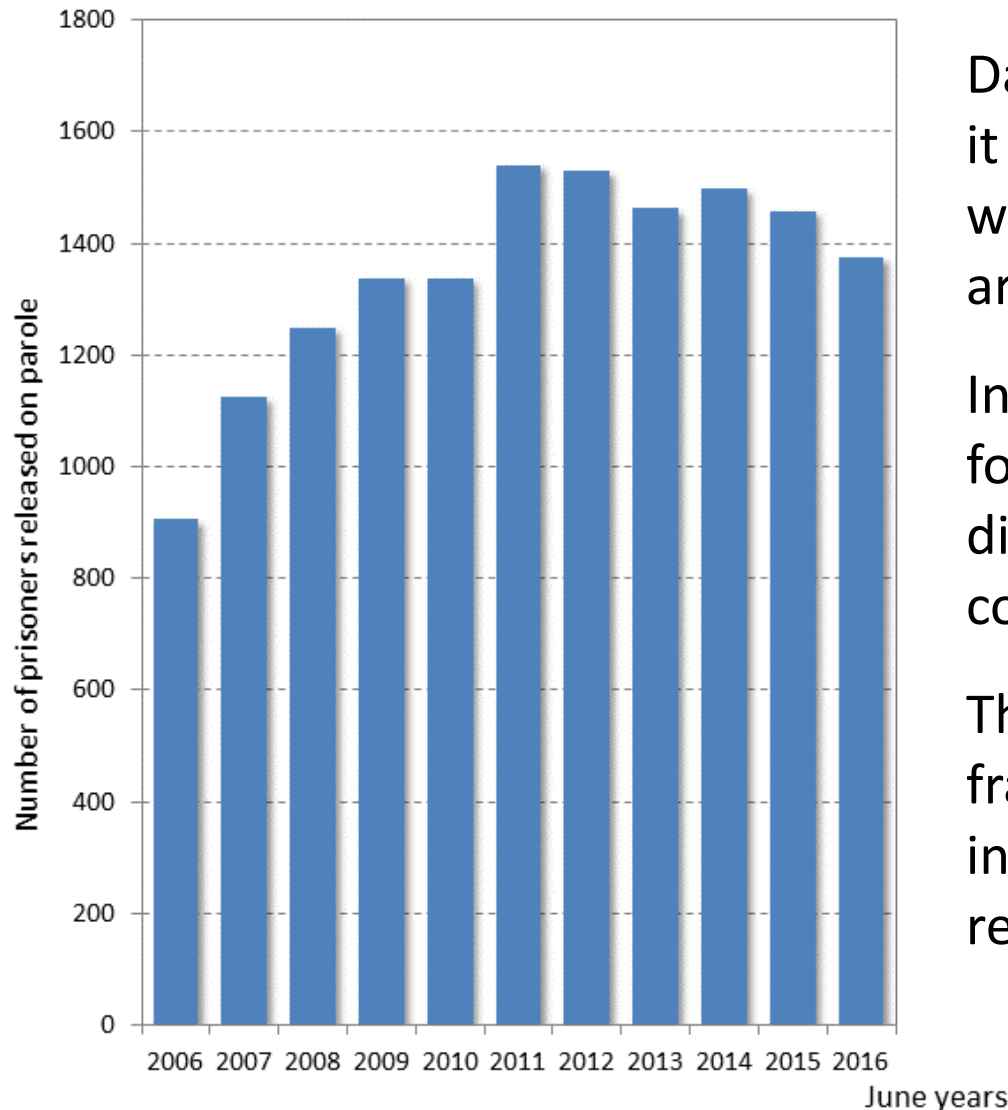
Yet less than three years ago Ministry of Justice were forecasting a present prisoner population of 8000

In September 2016 Government promised a further \$1 billion to provide a further 1800 prison beds

## 5

# Political & policy opportunism

## COMPETING NARRATIVES



Data by itself doesn't tell a story – it becomes useful as evidence when there is a story wrapped around it.

In the public sphere the contest for influence in the public discourse can be around competing narratives.

These narratives are always framed and they may be interpretative or perhaps just representational

## 6 The politics of policymaking

---

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SENTINEL EVENTS





## 6 The politics of policymaking

---

### ACTIVISM SPACES

FRAMING

CITIZENS & VOTERS



PUBLIC SPHERE



PROBLEM DEFINITION

POLITICIANS & LOBBYISTS



POLITICAL SPHERE



SCOPING

ALTERNATIVES &

DEVELOPING OPTIONS

POLICY BUREAUCRATS

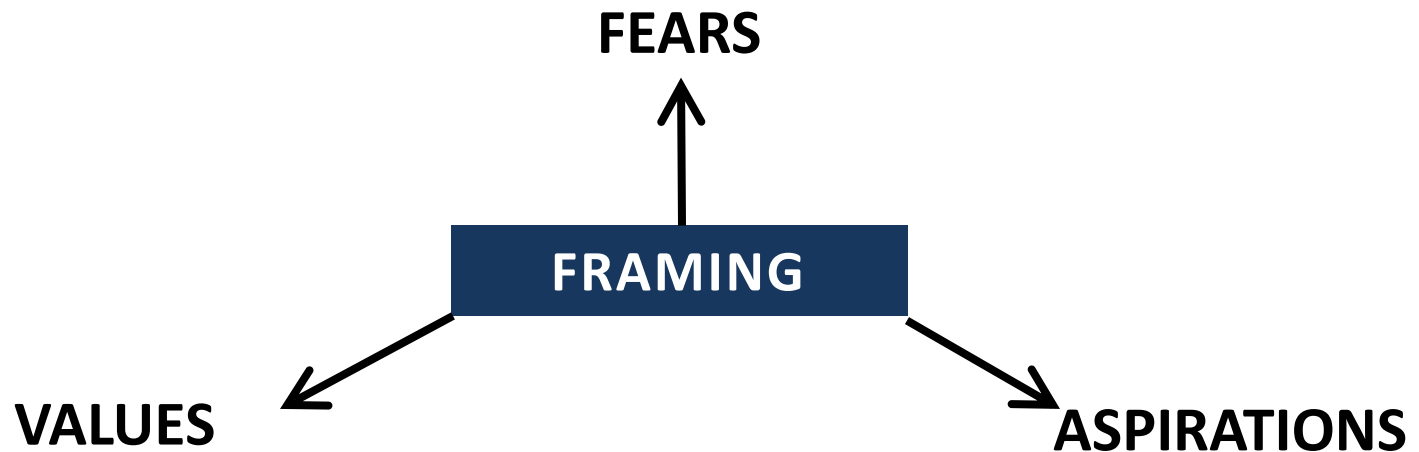


POLICY SPHERE

## **6** The politics of policymaking

---

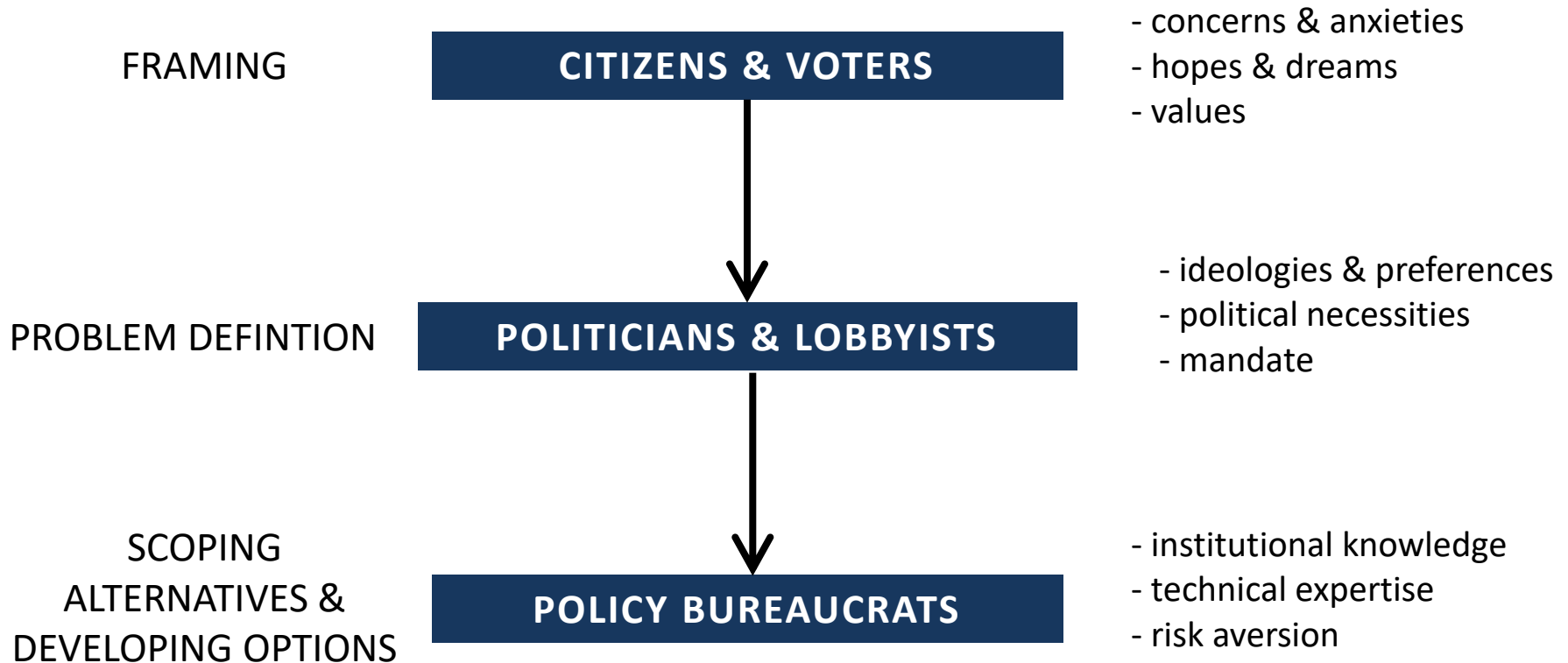
### **HOW FRAMING CAN WORK**



## 6 The politics of policymaking

---

### POLICY ROLES



7

## Speaking truth to power

---



Mike Wesley-Smith's TV3 report on Auckland's Hidden Homeless in May 2016



Park-Up-Homes in June to August 2016



Lisa Owen's TV3 expose of predatory landlords renting out garages in South Auckland July 2016

## Manurewa landlord fined for renting garage to young family

By Holly Ryan N Z Herald Friday Mar 17, 2017

Building and Construction Minister Nick Smith said the conviction sent a strong message to landlords.



*'This prosecution is significant in that it is the first time the Government has pursued a landlord for failing to provide a warm, dry, safe home.'*

## 7 Speaking truth to power

---

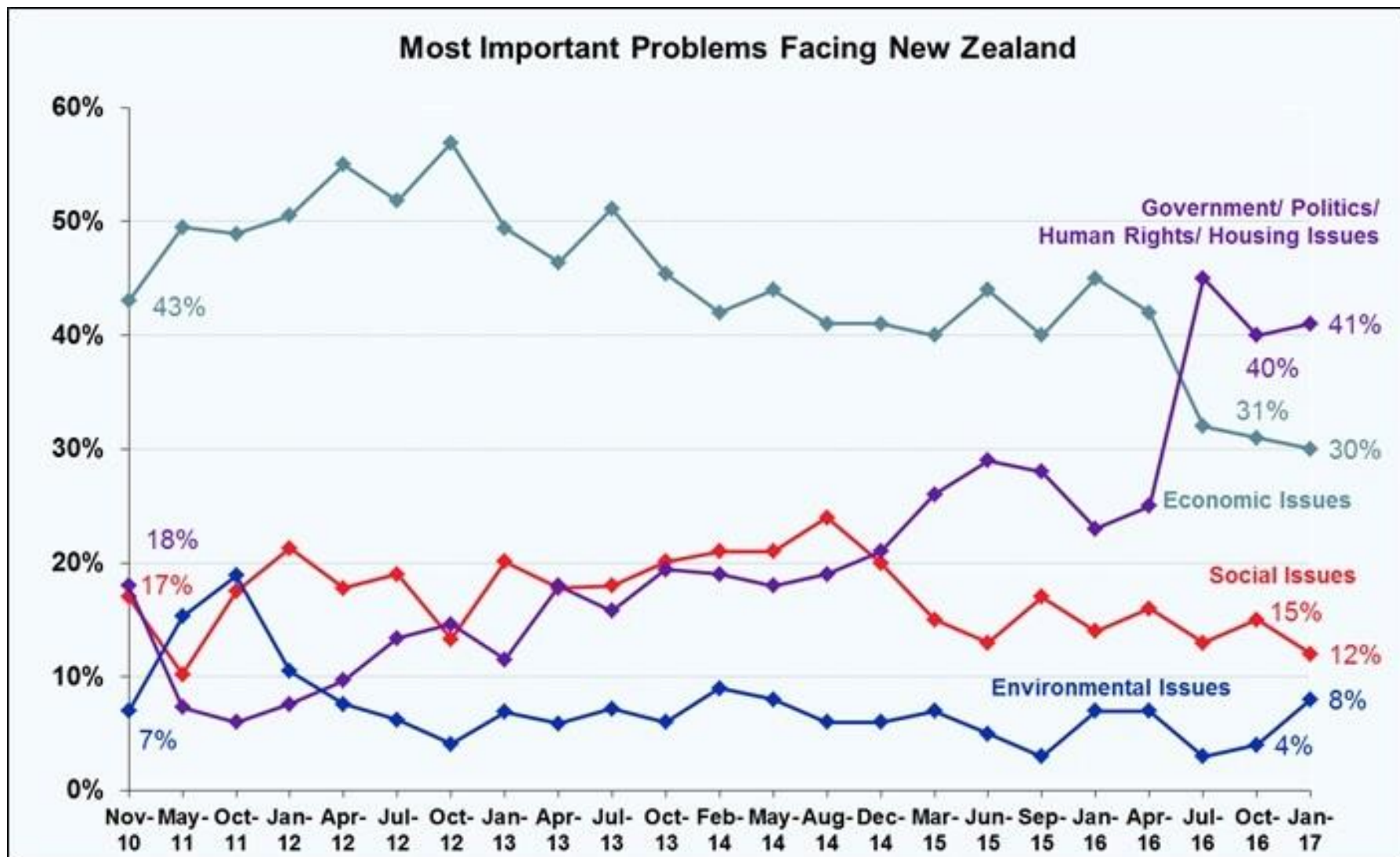


GARAGE AT 5 ASTOR PLACE – MANUREWA – AUGUST 2016

- ▶ Divided into four rooms – no kitchen shower or toilet
- ▶ Occupied by four adults & a child who has Rheumatic fever
- ▶ The occupants were paying \$660 per week – including power
- ▶ Rent was paid directly to landlord by MSD from tenants' benefits



# 7 Speaking truth to power



**SOURCE: ROY MORGAN RESEARCH**

- <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7128-most-important-problems-facing-new-zealand-february-2017-201702271519>



### **FUTURE of PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

1. The public discourse is likely to be polarised and perhaps divisive with few shared meanings or understandings
2. The discourse might shift quickly and frequently and capturing such change may be part of the political capital
3. Public policy processes are likely to be called into the service of political processes which aim to capture or at least shape the discourse

### **THE NEED FOR A CLEAR MORAL COMPASS**

1. Public servants need to have a higher moral code to work – one which promotes & protects the public good
2. There is an essential and explicit need to focus on values and in particular concepts of justice
3. This moral compass perhaps should be directed by the idea of service and an understanding of who you serve