Making community decisions
in the absence of consensus

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The Issue

XenProject Security Process

- A well-known place to report vulnerabilities
- A structured way of announcing vulnerabilities to users
- A pre-disclosure list

Pre-disclosure

XSA-7: Intel SYSRET


LOW | MEDIUM | HIGH |
TRUST

Discussion goals

- Find the best solution
- Do it in a way which everyone felt their voice was heard

ONE

Make sure you have a fall-back

in case consensus can’t be reached

Process isn’t necessary —
until it is

ONE

Make sure you have a fall-back

in case consensus can’t be reached

TWO

Have an online discussion

but don’t stop there.

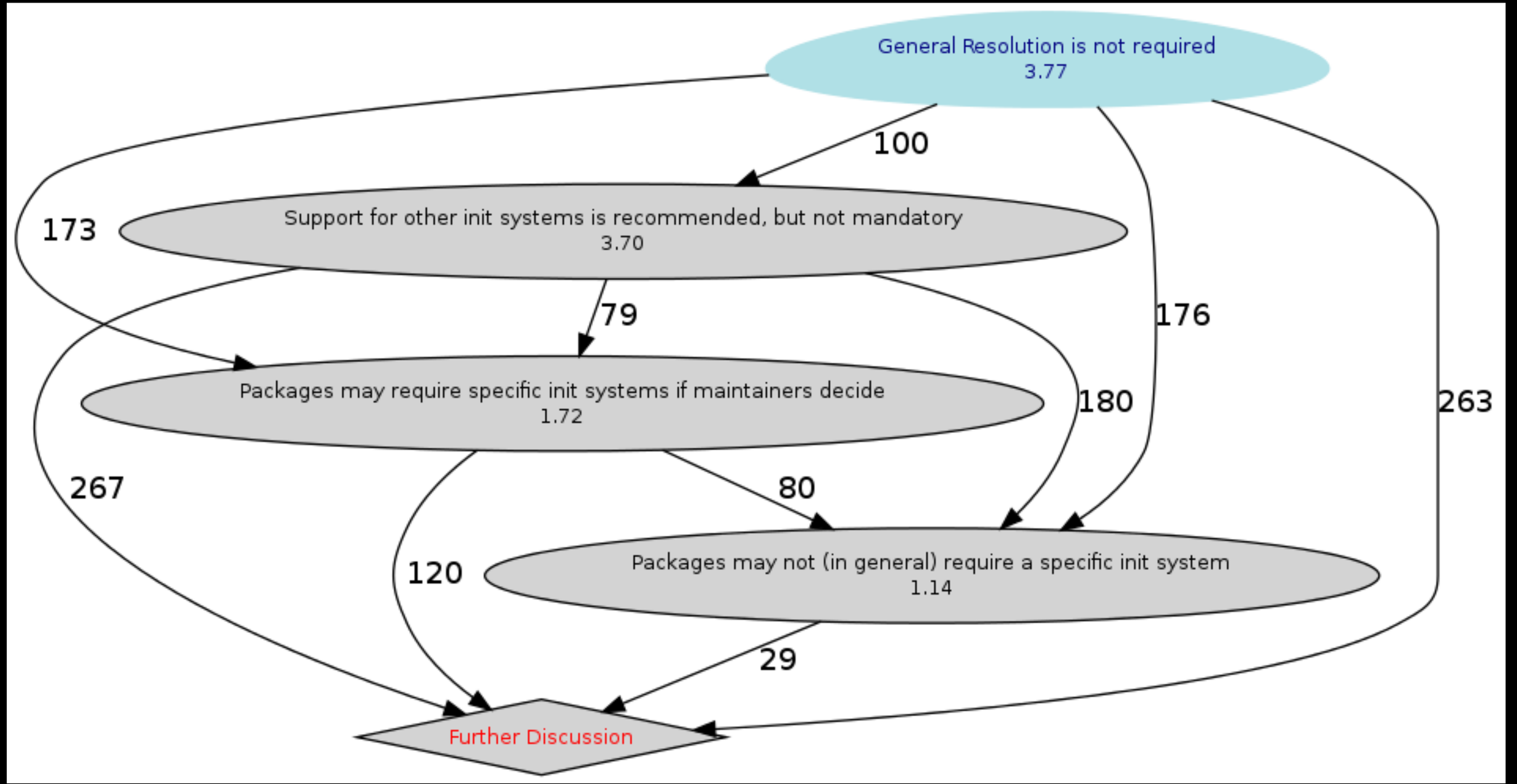
Online discussions are great for…

- Identifying important factors
- Clarifying thinking
- Exploring possible solutions
- Understanding implications, pros and cons of different options

Online discussion: Weaknesses

- Favor people who…
  - Like to argue
  - Are articulate, have a high command of English, or type quickly
- Sociological: Favor people who…
  - Feel like they're in the "in" crowd
  - Think their opinion will be popular
- Hide silent agreement

Social factors and silent argument : Debian systemd discussion


General Resolution is not required
3.77
100
173
Support for other init systems is recommended, but not mandatory
3.70
79
176
180
263
Packages may require specific init systems if maintainers decide
1.72
267
80
120
Packages may not (in general) require a specific init system
1.14
29
Further Discussion

TWO

Have an online discussion

but don’t stop there.

THREE

Summarize the major positions and hold a five-point survey

Four options

- No pre-disclosure
- Pre disclosure to software providers only
- Pre disclosure to software providers and a small number of public cloud providers
- Pre disclosure to software providers most public cloud providers

Five-point survey

- Based on “Identify the Champion”
- For each option, ask people to rate it:
  - This is a great idea, and I would argue for it
  - I am happy with this idea, but I would not argue for it
  - I am not happy with this idea, but I would not argue against it
  - This is a terrible idea, and I would argue against it
  - No opinion

Further details

- “Other options / comments” box
- Anonymous or named?
  - Allow anonymous votes but say votes with a name attached would be given more weight
- Two-week survey window, announced publicly

Outcome

- 33 survey responses
- Only 4 anonymous votes
- Other 29 were a good mix:
  - Developers
  - Distributions
  - Both large and small cloud providers

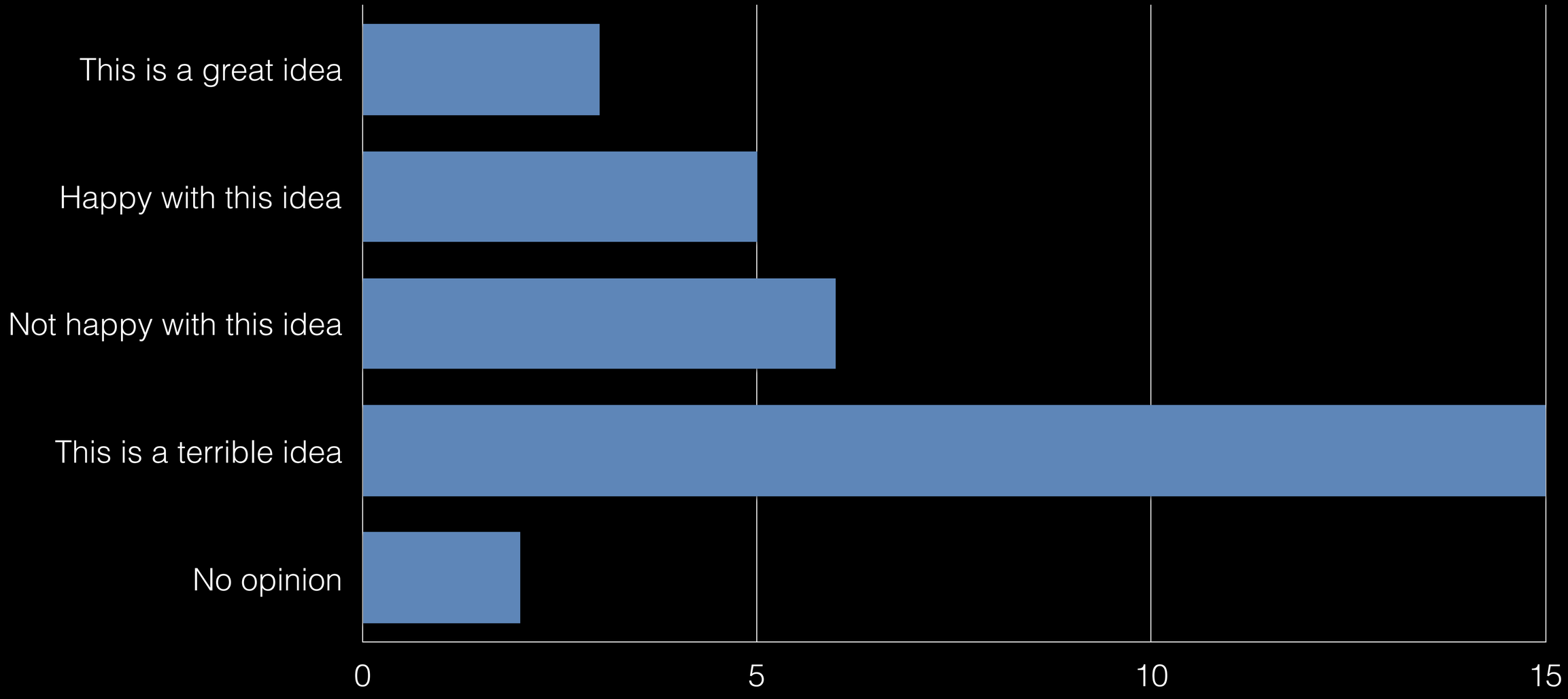
FOUR

Look for the “center of gravity”

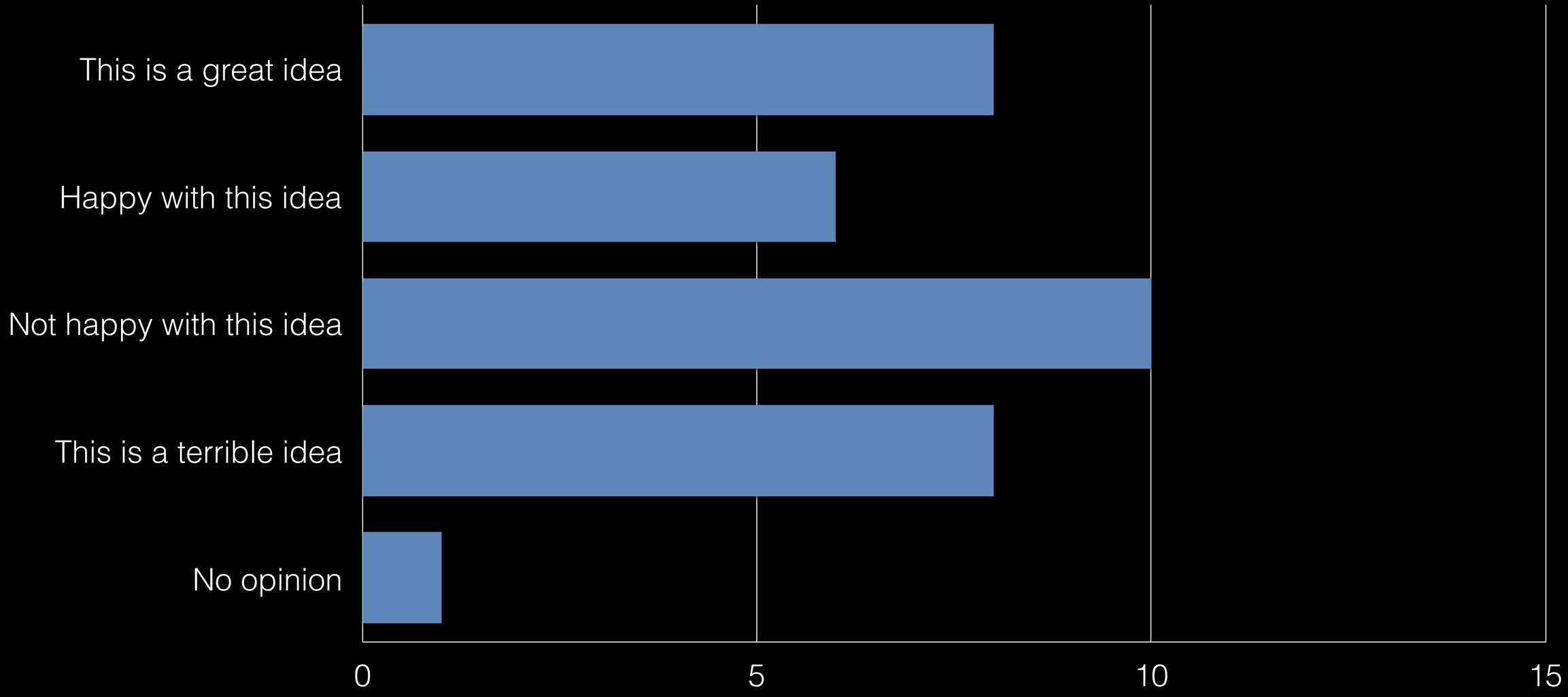
Things to look for

- Good: Total approval vs total opposition
- Bad: Polarized options, particularly divided by sub-group
- Good: Options that are opposed for opposite reasons

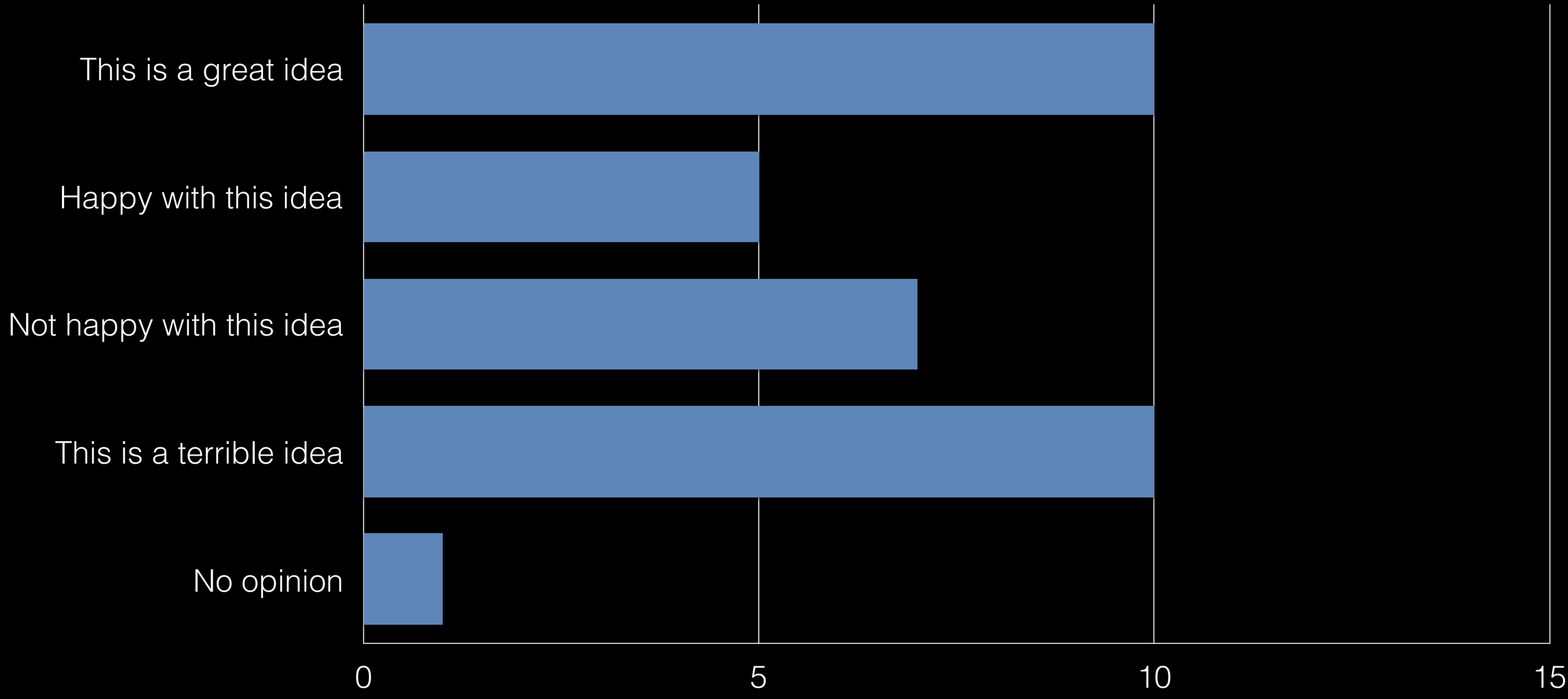
No pre-disclosure



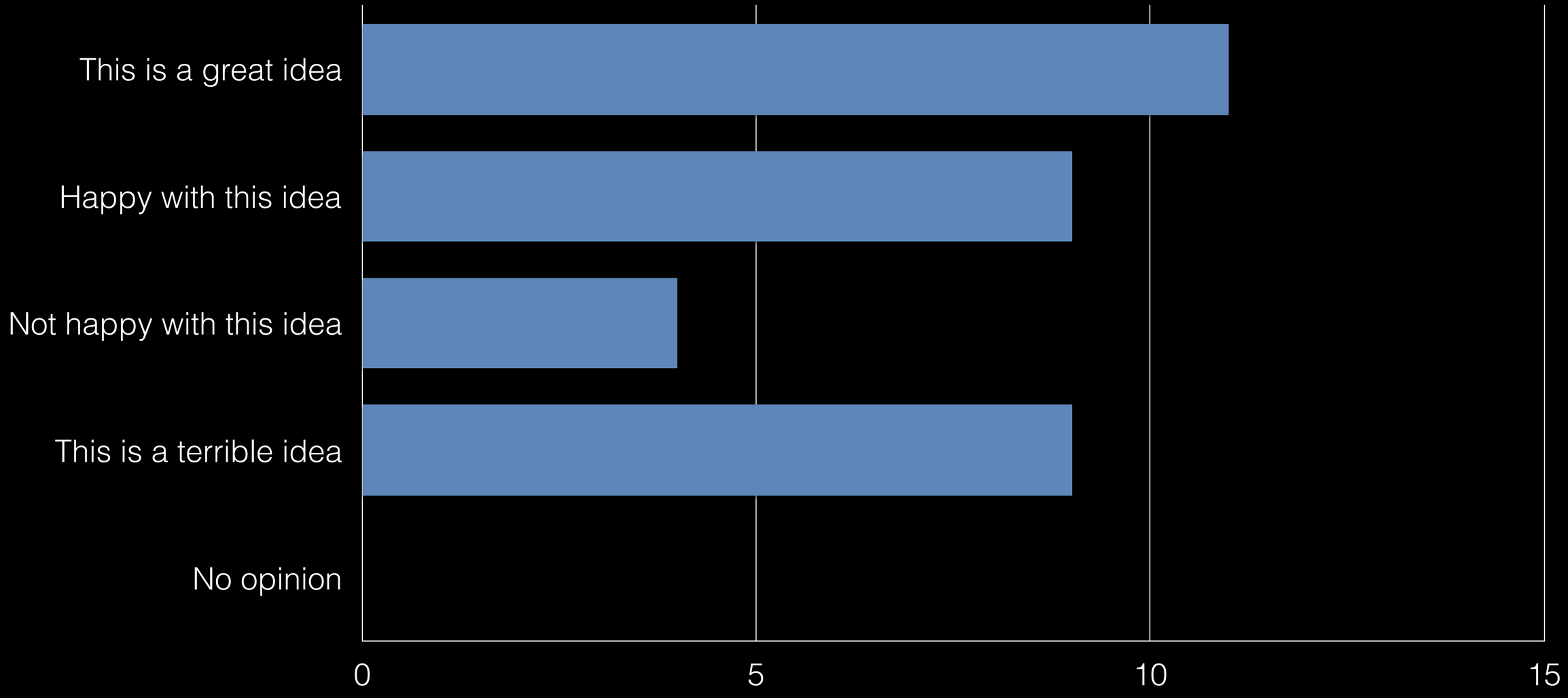
Software providers only



Software and large cloud providers



Software and all cloud providers



FIVE

Write up a concrete proposal

Recap

- Make sure you have a fall-back if consensus fails
- Have on online discussion, but don’t stop there
- Summarize the major options and run a five-point survey
- Analyze the data to find the “center of gravity”
- Make a concrete proposal based on the findings

Questions

Comments / criticism:

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References:

XenProject Security Policy (including pre-disclosure list)
https://www.xenproject.org/security-policy.html
Identify the Champion
http://scg.unibe.ch/download/champion/