



*List of chapters and appendices*

- *Chapter 1.* Voting Advice Applications in a Comparative Perspective: An Introduction, by Stefan Marschall and Diego Garzia
- *Chapter 2.* The Content and Formulation of Statements in Voting Advice Applications: A Comparative Analysis of 26 VAAs, by Kirsten Van Camp, Jonas Lefevere and Stefaan Walgrave
- *Chapter 3.* Comparing Methods for Estimating Parties' Positions in Voting Advice Applications, by Kostas Gemenis and Carolien van Ham
- *Chapter 4.* What's Behind a Matching Algorithm? A Critical Assessment of How Voting Advice Applications Produce Voting Recommendations, by Fernando Mendez
- *Chapter 5.* Voting Advice Applications as Campaign Actors: Mapping VAAs' Interactions with Parties, Media and Voters, by André Krouwel, Thomas Vitiello and Matthew Wall
- *Chapter 6.* Data Quality and Data Cleaning, by Ioannis Andreadis
- *Chapter 7.* Profiling Users, by Stefan Marschall
- *Chapter 8.* The Impact of Voting Advice Applications on Electoral Participation, by Diego Garzia, Andrea De Angelis and Joelle Pianzola
- *Chapter 9.* The Impact of Voting Advice Applications on Vote Choice, by Ioannis Andreadis and Matthew Wall
- *Chapter 10.* Social Presentations of VAAs: A Comparative Analysis, by Vasiliki Triga
- *Chapter 11.* Being a VAA-Candidate: Why Do Candidates Use Voting Advice Applications and What Can We Learn From It?, by Patrick Dumont, Raphaël Kies and Jan Fivaz
- *Chapter 12.* Using VAA-Generated Data For Mapping Partisan Supporters in the Ideological Space, by Fernando Mendez and Jonathan Wheatley
- *Chapter 13.* Matching Voters with Parties in Supranational Elections: The Case of the EU Profiler, by Maria Laura Sudulich, Diego Garzia, Alexander H. Trechsel and Kristjan Vassil
- *Chapter 14.* Does the Electoral System Influence the Political Positions of Parties and Candidates? Answers from VAA-research, by Andreas Ladner
- *Chapter 15.* Keeping Promises: Voting Advice Applications and Political Representation, by Jan Fivaz, Tom Louwerse and Daniel Schwarz
- *Chapter 16.* Voting Advice Applications and Political Theory: Citizenship, Participation and Representation, by Joel Anderson and Thomas Fossen
- The Lausanne Declaration on Voting Advice Applications.

### *Chapter contents*

The introductory chapter of the book presents an overview of the state of progress in voting advice applications, as well as successful implementations in local, national and European level. Reference is made to EU profiler as a VAA success story, attracting more than 2.5 million users all around Europe in six weeks. The chapter is concluded with an outline of the following chapters and the rationale behind the structure of the book.

In a first part of this book, focused on the state-of-the-art and open issues in the design and development of voting advice application. Chapter 2 discusses one of the key components of VAA methodology, the way political party profiles are composed and how their statements are selected and presented in VAAs. Examining political party statements from 26 VAAs in 9 countries, the authors explore the extent to which these statements meet traditional survey formulation standards. Chapter 3 that follows compares the four most popular methods used in order to estimate political party positions in VAAs, namely party self-placement, conventional expert survey, iterative method between party self-placement and expert coding and the Delphi method. A number of statements from the 2012 Dutch parliamentary elections are used to perform the comparison. Chapter 4 presents two different preference matching techniques (low-dimensional and high-dimensional matching) in order to analyse how the policy preferences of political parties are aggregated so as to match respondents with the candidates/parties better fitting their views. Chapter 5 examines the relations between political parties, voters and mass media, with a focus on how VAAs can influence these stakeholders and vice versa. In this effort, content from 51 VAAs is analysed and the input from 15 practitioner views is used. Concluding this discussion, Chapter 6 explores the view that, generally speaking, VAA data suffer from lack of representativeness due to limited coverage and measurement errors. The author provides guidelines on how users' votes could be calculated and how the probability of error could be treated.

In a second part of the book, focused on issues on the VAA users' side, Chapter 7 discusses the quality and quantity characteristics of potential VAA users. The author discusses how many and who may be the ideal users of a voting advice application, using a comparative analysis model. Institutional setting is considered as a key factor, whereas a number of cross-national differences are identified. Chapter 8 that follows examines the effects of VAA use on citizens' political behaviour during electoral processes. The authors review existing literature and perform a statistical analysis of eight datasets from Finland, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland. In a similar line of thought, Chapter 9 studies a sample of data from national elections in nine countries and discusses the effect of VAA on voters' choices, whereas Chapter 10 discusses the users' perspective, in terms of VAA usage and its effects on electoral processes, using focus groups from Greece, Spain and Cyprus.

In a following part of the book, taking the standpoint of political parties, Chapter 11 explores why and how political parties and candidates make use of VAAs and Chapter 12 examines whether VAA-generated content can help with the ideological mapping of political parties.

The last part of the book is based on discussion of specific case studies. Chapter 13 presents the first pan-European VAA platform launched by the European University Institute (EUI) in conjunction with the Dutch Kieskompas and the Swiss smartvote applications, in the context of the European election of June 2009, discussing whether

this platform can be successfully used to map political parties ideological positioning. Chapter 14 explores the impact of different electoral systems on the positioning of parties and candidates during electoral campaigns. The authors identify variables that should be considered for defining ideological frames between different parties, using the smartvote VAA in Switzerland for data analysis towards this end. Chapter 15 looks into voting behavioural patterns, discussing to what extent the post-electoral legislative behaviour of Members of Parliament (MPs) corresponds to their pre-electoral campaign pledges, using case studies from the Netherlands and Switzerland. Last but not least, Chapter 16 explores the criticisms that VAAs have faced, with respect to their capabilities for accurately measuring users' preferences and reporting valid results free of political bias. The argument is put forward that these issues are not just technical, but are essentially linked to the democratic theories and models that hold in each case.

### *Significance for the state of research and practice*

Voting advice applications (VAAs) are online-based tools that compare positions of candidates/parties with positions of the voters, indicating which party is the closest to the individual voter on the basis of selected issues (Garzia and Marschall, 2012). Although VAAs constitute a recent domain in electoral studies, there is an increasingly widespread use of VAAs at national and transnational level (Rosema et al., 2014). In general, VAAs are considered to efficiently raise citizen competence, conveniently transforming users into better-informed voters (Fossena and Anderson, 2014). They also provide entertainment value and introduce more accountability regarding the genuine positions of political parties or candidates (Marzuca Perera et al., 2011). Issues that remain to be further explored, however, include the validity and reliability of VAA results, the strength of the influence that VAAs may exercise on voters' decisions, as well as their potential impact on electoral outcomes (Louwerse and Rosema, 2014; Rosema et al., 2014).

So far, most studies on voting advice applications have relied on data from post-test surveys administered randomly to VAA users. As a result, according to Pianzola and Ladner (2011) chances were that *“we might end up with a sample of highly enthusiastic and convinced users who report stronger effects of the tool on their voting behaviour than if we had had the chance to survey a representative sample of users”*. At the same time, according to van de Pol et al. (2014) *“not all users of VAAs belong to the group of interested and efficacious voters; a large share of VAA users is in need of information about politics in order to make their minds up before going to the ballots. They use VAAs to receive tailor-made information about parties' positions and their own position, and they increasingly often do so close to the Election day”*.

In this context, building on existing literature on the state of the art of voting advice applications, the book offers the first systemic and reliable assessment of these tools, beyond just another empirical data analysis. VAAs are discussed in a comparative way, from a design and development perspective alongside a usage and impact one. The experts involved as authors, as well as the datasets and case studies presented and discussed and the issues raised, all critically contribute to the success of this endeavour. Taking stock of real cases (more than 40 national-level cases, as well as transnational ones such as that of EU profiler are analysed) the authors highlight the huge potential of VAA, especially in terms of enhancing our understanding of the reasoning that underlies voters' choices during electoral processes. Additional findings contribute to more general

debates such as voting behaviour, political communication and political party statements formulation.

While perusing this collective volume, it becomes clear that design of voting advice applications depends, beyond technical considerations, on normative and political conceptions of democracy and citizenship. At the same time, the attention that needs to be paid to the impact that design choices embodied by VAAs may have on their outcomes is clearly brought forward, as an issue that still today has been left largely under-researched (Louwerse and Rosema, 2014). Arguably, there are still more alternative perspectives on VAAs to be further explored, such as their implications for political party organisations and statement monitoring before and after the election, as well as a series of methodological issues about their use, in the effort to present the positions of political actors in a valid and reliable way. This will increase confidence in the use of voting advice applications, both from the perspective of the public and from that of third-party users of VAA data (Gemenis, 2013).

Last but not least, the importance of the Lausanne declaration (provided as an appendix to the book), that serves as a starting point on professional and ethical aspects of using voting advice applications, should not go unnoticed.

#### *Significance for managers and instructors*

VAA tools are gaining in popularity in electoral campaigns and increasing numbers of citizens make use of them, especially in multi-party systems (Garzia and Marschall, 2012; Gemenis and Rosema, 2014). As a result, they attract more and more the interest for national elections implementation bodies in their effort to strengthen communication and interaction between policy makers and citizens (Pianzola, 2014; Rosema et al., 2014).

From an academic and research standpoint, VAAs represent the leading edge of an emerging subfield of electoral research and therefore attract the interest of both political and social scientists who are interested in improving the experience of individuals seeking to take informed voting decisions, and/or in exploring electoral behaviour and political party discourse before and after electoral processes (Andreadis, 2013; Alvarez et al., 2014; Rosema et al., 2014). In this context, the book offers insight on issues such as whether and how citizens vote, the effect of VAAs in mobilising citizen groups of citizens, as well as the sources and methodology necessary to determine party positions. From an instructor perspective, in particular, the book comes of hand for electoral campaigning and e-democracy courses for undergraduate and post-graduate students, as a solid and integral contribution to the relevant literature field. It offers concrete suggestions for future research paths, namely the relation between VAA design/development and democratic theories and its normative implications.

At the same time, the book offers both the theoretical background and a set of practical recommendations to policy makers, IT experts and e-government managers who are concerned with design, implementation and evaluation of voting advice applications. It represents a first holistic and comprehensive evaluation of VAA trends, pros and cons, do's and don'ts in a systematic, reliable and user-friendly manner. Through discussing concrete cases, analysing generated content and presenting real life scenarios of VAAs, implemented in different socio-political environments (local, national and European settings), the book offers useful design knowledge and development guidelines for who wish to plan and/or build such systems.

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