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The Policy Positioning Tool for Political Parties:

A facilitator's guide



Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy

ProDemos
Huis voor democratie en rechtsstaat

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Foreword

In my years as an active politician in Georgia, I have always been struck by what can be called the policy dichotomy. On the one hand, rapid policy developments during the past 20 years have created a historically unprecedented socio-economic and geopolitical turnabout in my country. On the other hand, policy positions have played a less prominent role within political parties and election campaigns. As a Speaker of Parliament, the main representative body of the Georgian people, I see closing this gap between policy changes and policy choices as one of the country's main democratic priorities. It is a priority I have worked on for many years.

In 2006 I was invited by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) to visit the Netherlands during the Dutch parliamentary election campaign. As a member of a multiparty delegation of Georgian political party representatives, we also visited the Dutch non-governmental organization ProDemos—House for Democracy and Rule of Law. ProDemos presented its StemWijzer (VoteMatch), an online voter advice application (VAA) that, in a playful way, matches individual voters to parties on the basis of policy positions.

Even though our multiparty delegation came from opposite sides of the Georgian political landscape, we nonetheless jointly recognized the value a VAA could have for us. In our emerging democracy, parties have struggled—and continue to grapple—with the question of how to present themselves distinctively on content.

Political parties in my country remain young organizations, often founded on general notions shared among a group of initiators, but in order for such 'start-ups' to take the next step to professionalize and consolidate is a real effort.

Finding the time for profound contemplation and detailed development of positions and policies is, in practice, not a priority. We recognized that participating in this tool would function as a form 'self-applied pressure' on parties to commit ourselves to working on common party positions among party members and seeking internal party consolidation. However, in order for parties to present their ideological or political content-based profile through a joint tool, a considerable trust-building effort would be needed. Furthermore, we needed internal party-deliberation processes and capacity strengthening to decide on our positions to be presented in the tool.

This guide presents, step-by-step, the process of implementing this tool. It also describes how to design and manage an inclusive process that puts political parties centre stage during the development of the voter test. The name Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) for political parties is therefore spot-on. It is a pleasure to learn that this approach was positively implemented in Lima, Peru, in 2014 by International IDEA and NIMD, and that by the time of launching this publication it will have been used in three more countries.

As a delegation member of the exchange visit back in 2006, I am proud that the seed of the PPT was planted in Georgia. As a Speaker of Parliament, who is often seen as guardian of representative and high-quality political debate, it is a great pleasure to lend my support to this guide, which has come about as the result of a locally led, jointly initiated and innovate approach. I can only hope that many other young democracies will also benefit from it.

David Usupashvili
Speaker of the Georgian Parliament

Preface

In recent years, two important topics have emerged in the field of political-party assistance. The first concerns the rise of so-called 'programmatic parties', and focuses on ways to support political parties as they move from a reliance on personalities and patronage towards an emphasis on internal and external debates on the policy positions that parties take. The second topic concerns the increase in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) by political parties, many of which are now finding innovative uses for technologies with the potential to reach out to voters. Despite the importance of these two emerging trends, however, there has been relatively little focus on the value of ICTs as tools to help political parties focus more on policy debate.

The Policy Positioning Tool described in this guide does exactly that: it brings political parties together to develop and promote their individual policy positions through an online voting advice application (VAA). As the level of Internet access in emerging democracies increases, these online applications have become an attractive way for political parties to mobilize voters. Meanwhile, in the context of global debates around issues such as migration, climate change and financial crises, political parties need to develop and express clear policy positions in order to respond to citizens' demands. The Policy Positioning Tool helps political parties reach out to citizens based on these policies.

This guide describes both the technical and the real-world steps involved in assisting political parties in the development of a Policy Positioning Tool, including encouraging parties to collaborate and agree on the design of the tool, and then developing an appropriate media strategy to promote it during campaign time.

In this respect, the three organizations behind this guide form a unique combination. For over 15 years, International IDEA and NIMD have brought together political parties in emerging democracies around the world. ProDemos builds on 25 years of experience with VAAs, which have grown widely popular in Europe, and currently feature in a majority of Latin American countries as well. Our combined experiences provided the right formula for the piloting of the Policy Positioning Tool in the national elections in Georgia in 2007 and in the local elections in Lima, Peru, in 2014.

With this guide, we are proud to present a product that combines two of today's priority topics in the field of political party assistance into one accessible and innovative tool.

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Special acknowledgement goes to the intellectual parents of this tool: the three Georgian politicians who came to the Netherlands in 2006 as part of a Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) visitor's programme during the Dutch parliamentary elections, and who proposed trying this approach in Georgia. They are David Gamkrelidze, Chair of the New Rights Party in 2006; Levan Duchidze, a member of parliament for the United National Movement; and David Usupashvili, Chair of the Republican Party in 2006, and Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia at the time of writing.

We also extend our appreciation to all those involved in the piloting of the joint NIMD–ProDemos Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) in Georgia in 2007 and in Lima in 2014.

We would like to thank the Georgian political parties that participated in the pilot, as well as the implementing team in Tbilisi of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development under the leadership of Ghia Nodia. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights generously co-financed and co-managed the implementation of the pilot process in Georgia. Special thanks goes to Lotte ten Hoove and Nino Kobakhidze, who ran the day-to-day implementation of the pilot on behalf of NIMD. Nel van Dijk, the former Executive Director of the Dutch Institute for Political Participation (now ProDemos) and Georgi Ganev from the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, Bulgaria, also played a constructive role in actively engaging the Georgian parties.

In Lima in 2014, the political parties that participated in GPS Politico ahead of (and during) the October 2014 elections played an essential role. Yet this tool would never have come to fruition without Jorge Valladares, Percy Medina, Pillar Tello and Claudia Ly from International IDEA, who worked under tight deadlines; their dedication and networks were crucial to the pilot. The project and technical support provided by Jochum de Graaf of ProDemos and associated consultants Cinthya Uribe and Pike van Kemenade was indispensable. Mariana Alegre at Lima Como Vamos and Patricia Zárate from the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos were dedicated partners linking their institutes to this project.

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Finally, we are grateful to David Prater, Nadia Handal Zander and the publications team at International IDEA, and to Anita Ramharakh and the communications team at NIMD, for coordinating the production of this publication.

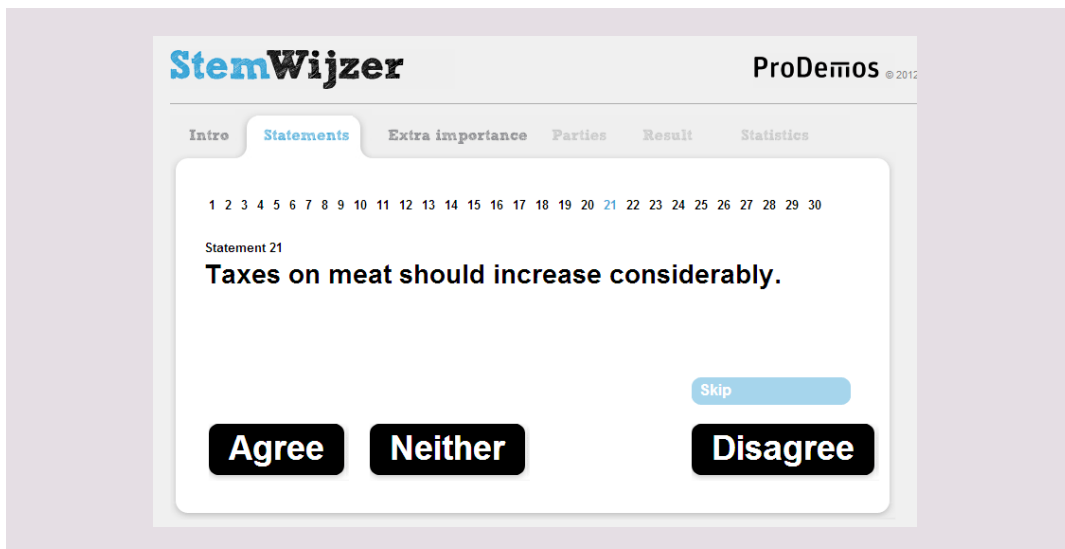
1 Introduction

In young and emerging democracies, electoral campaigns tend to involve electing political leaders on the basis of personal characteristics. Another important driver in electoral dynamics can be identity-based backgrounds that link competing parties to groups of voters on non-issue-based grounds, such as relationships based on patrimony (inheritances) or clientelism (patronage). This contest on the basis of leadership qualities (and sometimes cultural bonds) is a natural—and perhaps necessary—part of election campaigns in any democracy. Policy-based campaigns, however, inspire a more profound debate over a country's future. Parties should therefore present a coherent stance on a variety of policy issues and focus on winning votes based on these positions. They have traditionally done so by publishing their manifestos and participating in public debates that are covered by the media.

The Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) is a new way for parties to determine their policy stances. It uses a voter education instrument known as a voting advice application (VAA) to define parties' existing policy stances in a way that appeals to the most voters. VAAs are used in many countries as voter education tools to compare political parties' policy stances. These tools typically contain a list of questions or statements on the main substantive issues during an election campaign (see Figure 1.1 for an example). A user can confidentially submit opinions on policy issues using scales such as 'agree/disagree/no opinion', or 'agree a little/disagree strongly'. VAAs should not be confused with or misinterpreted as opinion polls or surveys; they produce a customized overview of which parties align most closely with a voter's opinions on certain issues.

Figure 1.1

StemWijzer (Vote Match): the world's first voting advice application



With the rise in Internet usage, VAAs have grown wildly popular. They first emerged in Western Europe, but soon spread to Eastern Europe, the United States and South America. Significant numbers of voters (e.g. roughly one in every four voters in Switzerland, and one in every three in the Netherlands) use VAAs to help them decide which party to vote for, and in many countries they have become an integral part of the election campaign. The PPT is designed to help political parties more effectively use and contribute positively to VAAs in order to develop and present their policy positions (see Box 1.1 on how this idea originated).

The PPT uses VAAs by encouraging political party involvement in introducing VAAs in new countries. The goal is to build parties' capacities to internally deliberate, decide and submit their positions on a variety of substantive issues. Instead of just using it to help parties present their existing policy views to voters, it goes back a step to help parties determine their policy views in the first place. Once the tool becomes publicly available throughout the election period, the PPT can help communicate each party's policy views and encourage a content-based debate between parties and candidates.

Defining policy positions is a small but important step towards parties becoming more programmatic. Policy positions are different from short campaign messages or more elaborate election manifestos. While they are a far cry from fully developed and implementable public policies, policy positions have the potential to introduce issues and policies into what are often mainly personality-driven campaigns. Implementing the PPT may include diverse groups of a party's cadre, members and supporters, while still allowing party leaderships to be the main drivers of the party's policy positioning process.

Box 1.1

The emergence of the Policy Positioning Tool

In 2006 the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) invited politicians from around the world to attend a visitors' programme centred on the Dutch parliamentary elections. The political delegations visited ProDemos—House for Democracy and the Rule of Law (then known as the Institute for Political Participation) and were presented with information about a host of voter and citizen education projects. One of these projects was StemWijzer (Vote Match), the world's first voting advice application (VAA).

Three Georgian attendees (one politician from the then-ruling party and two from parliamentary opposition parties) concluded that a public VAA tool—the Policy Positioning Tool (PPT)—would help both Georgian voters and political parties navigate the country's post-revolution political landscape. They argued that such a tool would strengthen Georgia's democracy by stimulating parties to determine and communicate their detailed positions on policy issues, which would help voters appreciate the differences between the numerous parties.

The two Georgian political parties represented at the meeting jointly proposed that NIMD implement a VAA in Georgia. In 2006 and 2007 NIMD and ProDemos, with support from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, supported the development of a VAA; the implementation phase was redesigned as a PPT in order to include political party input.

In 2008, ProDemos developed an internal guide for NIMD on VAA/PPT implementation. International IDEA, as part of its strategic partnership with NIMD, proposed the development of a public guide. A first edition of this guide was developed in 2013 with support from academics, and a second pilot of the PPT was held around the municipal elections of Lima, Peru in 2014. The present guide is an updated second edition that incorporates lessons learned from the Lima pilot project.

This guide is structured as follows. Chapter 2 describes the PPT's objectives and how it aims to influence political parties' role in a society. It continues by describing VAAs, online voter tests that form the basis of the PPT design. Chapter 3 describes where the tool can be implemented and which actors should be involved. Chapter 4 presents a 13-step process for implementing the tool.

Chapter 5 describes how to increase the chances of successful implementation, using both carrots and sticks: by investing in trust-building with political parties and supporting capacity-strengthening programmes, as well as increasing public awareness of its democratic value and emphasizing the electoral benefits for parties when they communicate their policy positions well. Chapter 6 presents the Lima case and how the PPT was successfully used in the 2014 local elections there, and the annexes provide further background on VAAs.

2 The Policy Positioning Tool for political parties

What is the Policy Positioning Tool?

Helping political parties develop basic policy positions can be an important step towards the emergence of more programmatic political party systems, especially in contexts where political parties are not known for their ideological basis or policy agenda. The process of introducing the Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) involves political parties in a number of ways.

1. **Programmatic profile.** In many countries, political parties struggle to shift from relying on personalities and patronage to debating and implementing policies and platforms. Such countries lack programmatic parties that reach out to people by emphasizing policies for inclusive public goods. This tool provides incentives for political parties and candidates to develop a programmatic profile that the electorate can use to identify them. The tool therefore forms the first step towards developing a programmatic party system.
2. **Multiparty collaboration.** The tool supports the building of multiparty collaboration platforms in which parties from across the political spectrum become active ambassadors for the online voter test. Party support of the tool throughout its implementation is important to guarantee its impartiality and popularity among voters.
3. **Influencing parties to engage.** The tool transforms political parties from subjects of an online test into active contributors to the development of the voter test. Party input into which issues the questions will address gives them a role in jointly setting the policy agenda for an upcoming election campaign.
4. **Dialogue facilitation and capacity strengthening.** The PPT helps political parties prepare their positions by providing guidance

on both content and the clear formulation of stances. This guidance can take the form of facilitating and moderating intraparty dialogue. Parties can also benefit from capacity strengthening on policy development and election manifesto drafting skills.

5. **Publicity.** Parties can use media campaigns to generate publicity based on the compilation of their own answers, which can serve their partisan agenda; they can also be perceived to be taking politically correct or democratically desirable actions.
6. **Advocacy.** Political party assistance organizations can use a well-developed communications strategy to encourage both the media and parties to use the political context presented in the PPT more politically, for example by highlighting PPT statements in candidate debates in the media or identifying surprising or unexpected party stances. PPTs can help focus electoral campaigns on substantive issues instead of individual personalities.

What is a voting advice application?

Voting advice applications (VAAs) are online tools that voters can use to compare their own views on political issues with those of the different political parties.¹ Although VAAs are usually developed by politically independent organizations such as democracy-assistance organizations, universities or the media, they often involve political parties in the process. The PPT adds new and complementary elements to the VAA model.

Typically a VAA contains 25 to 30 statements on the main substantive issues in an election campaign. Voters anonymously respond to each statement (with 'agree/disagree/no opinion' or 'agree a little/

¹ While such tools are referred to by many other names—including 'voter education application', 'voting aid application', 'voter assistance application', 'voting navigator', 'party profile website' or 'political preference test'—the term 'voting advice application' is the main term used in academic research.

disagree strongly' and so on), which corresponds to party positions. The tool sums the scores to identify which party best matches the voters' personal policy preferences (based on the issues addressed). Most VAAs were not designed to give voting recommendations, but rather to engage voters by helping them better define their own political preferences and stimulating them to seek further political information.

VAAs in their various forms have been used in many countries. For over a decade, millions of voters in established democracies have used these tools in the run-up to election day. Younger democracies have now increasingly started to introduce similar tests. Many of them focus on launching the tool as a form of voter information but fail to engage political parties in the process.

Classic VAAs are based on party positions, and some new variations are based on individual candidate views or candidate voting behaviour in parliament (or other representative bodies). In developing countries, experimental paper versions and light digital software packages for offline use (distribution via USB sticks, for instance) have been used.

The added value of voting advice applications

VAAs are mainly valuable to voters because they present a quick overview of the parties' opinions on the main substantive issues of an election campaign. Most voters will not read all the election manifestos, but this tool provides them with the necessary basic information. Since VAAs are entertaining and fun, like a magazine personality quiz, they have the potential to reach a broad population.

For parties, VAAs offer the opportunity to communicate with large numbers of voters. The main challenge for parties will be to find the right balance between nuance and clear opinions. While nuances are important for professionals, election manifestos and (post-electoral) political negotiations, voters rarely notice small differences of opinion. If voters cannot distinguish between parties' stances, they may question the need for so many political parties. To ensure that voters can

understand the statements in the VAA, they should be as unambiguous and simple as possible.

Finally, VAAs can contribute to the transparency and accountability of democracy, as they require parties to declare their positions on a series of policy issues. Therefore, they can encourage greater public participation in debates during the campaign and help hold parties accountable to their campaign promises.

This PPT adds new and complementary features to the traditional VAA model by starting from the opposite point of departure: instead of extracting existing programmatic positions from political parties, it uses VAA methodologies and software to help parties define their programmatic views. By facilitating the implementation of a VAA and ensuring the collaboration of political parties, the PPT fosters the creation of more programmatic parties.

The two most internationally active developers of VAAs are both Dutch: ProDemos (the developers of StemWijzer) and Kieskompas (a private business in partnership with the Free University in Amsterdam). Each has been active in a majority of European Union member states, including young democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, and increasingly globally.

ProDemos operates in (among others) Bosnia and Hercegovina, Chile, Mexico, Morocco and Peru, while Kieskompas has worked in (among others) Egypt, Israel, Mexico, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, the USA and Venezuela. Table 2.1 lists some of the many (and increasing) examples of locally developed VAAs.

By adding political party input to the successful VAA model, the PPT makes voter advice a party-centred process—and encourages parties to become more programmatic. It is important to note that the tool, especially when implemented for the first time, will not change the outcome of an election. In emerging democracies, it will generally be one small electoral initiative among many.

Table 2.1

Locally developed voting advice applications (VAAs)

Country	VAA	Developer(s)/implementing organization(s)
Austria	Wahlkabine.at	Institute for New Culture Technologies, Austrian Political Science Association, Society for Political Enlightenment, Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck (political education organizations)
Belgium	DoeDeStemtest	<i>De Standaard</i> newspaper
Brazil	Questao Publica	Valores do Legislativo, Responsabilidade do Cidadao (civic network of non-governmental organizations and institutions)
Canada	Vote Compass	VoxPopLabs, with academic and media partners (also active in Australia and the USA)
Cyprus	Choose4Cyprus	PreferenceMatcher (academic consortium of the University of Zurich, University of Twente and Cyprus University of Technology that has been active in multiple countries)
Ecuador	Ecuador Vota	FLACSO and AECIP (academic organizations)
Finland	Vaalikone	YLE (broadcasting company)
Poland	Latarnik	Center for Civic Education (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej)
Latvia	Providus	Centre for Public Policy
Switzerland	Smartvote	Politools (non-profit organization)
Tunisia	IKTHIAR Tunis	Jeunes Indépendants Démocrates (youth network/NGO with local expert support and international funding and advice)

In summary, PPTs can:

1. educate voters about parties' policy views, to counter the influence of patronage and the focus on personality in campaign media coverage;
2. help parties develop more strongly identifiable policy manifestos;
3. help parties present their content-based platforms more effectively to voters;
4. assess policy differences between parties and the potential for political competition during a campaign; and
5. support greater interparty consensus and determine which policy issues are important for all parties.

3 Operational guidelines for assistance providers

Are the political and electoral contexts suitable?

Virtually all election campaign-related tools are potentially politically sensitive. A context analysis can highlight the political dynamics and appraise the tool's chances of success. State authorities rarely obstruct the implementation of VAAs. Convincing the political parties to participate in a PPT's development or getting them to understand what the tool is (politically correct, a form of corporate social responsibility) and what it is not (an extended arm of their framed campaign messaging), will likely require the most effort.

This chapter discusses the necessary steps and considerations in the successful implementation of the PPT, including both political and electoral contexts.

Assessing the political context

Does the country have stability and freedom of speech?

To persuade parties to develop their programmatic positions, the political climate should allow parties to express their opinions on the relevant and dominant issues in the campaign. Restrictions, due to either limited freedom of speech (e.g. legal restrictions or forms of undue oppression) or to geopolitical realities (e.g. domestic or regional instability, external pressure or interference), may seriously constrain programmatic party project efforts.

Is there minimal interparty trust?

The extent of political party cooperation on the implementation of the PPT can vary greatly. But even if parties do not directly engage with each other and only give their 'blessing' to the project

and promise to respect the PPT's impartiality, there needs to be a minimal level of trust between the parties. A joint endorsement of the PPT, for example in the form of a multiparty signed declaration or memorandum of understanding, will have a stronger effect between the parties (and on the public at large) than separate supporting statements.

Does the public trust the impartiality of the implementer?

Societies with a strong political (or ethnic, religious, regional) divide have a high potential and a strong need for differentiated policy platforms. However, these contexts also make the impartiality of the implementing organization all the more necessary, so that both political parties and the public maintain trust in an unbiased facilitator. If there is a potential lack of trust in the impartiality of the implementing organization, this must be addressed from the beginning, for example by forming a politically balanced supervisory or advisory board or commission (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1**Building trust through a multiparty supervisory board**

In 2007, trust between the Georgian political parties was very low, and any public figure (even non-political people like popular celebrities) would (rightly or wrongly) be quick to claim to belong to a particular political persuasion. To prevent the implementing organization from developing a reputation of being biased, the political parties jointly agreed to form a multiparty balanced supervisory board, co-chaired by the Dutch and Swiss ambassadors in Georgia. This board was not created to manage the day-to-day process or have a say in decision-making, but to secure the impartial reputation of the project and, if needed, help resolve any criticism or accusations.

In 2014 in Lima, Peru, a supervisory board was proposed, but the parties and other political and electoral stakeholders deemed it unnecessary, given the political climate and the impartial reputation of the implementer.

Will political and cultural divides complicate the process?

In addition to purely political and electoral technical considerations, the context analysis also needs to consider the extent to which matters such as ethnicity, religion and region determine societal decisions. Are there patronage incentives for political alignment and voting? To what extent might the PPT expose sensitive divides that have polarizing effects? The PPT should avoid increasing polarization. However, socio-cultural divides are not a sufficient reason not to implement the tool; all societies have certain divides, many of which represent effective differences in points of view to debate. One needs to assess the political relevance of any societal divides. Some can be dormant but easily become salient, while others may persist for decades or centuries without polarizing the political landscape.

Do parties have programmatic profiles?

The objective of the PPT is to help political parties define their programmatic views in contexts where issue-based politics is lacking. It is therefore

important that political parties are to some extent willing to express and distinguish themselves in terms of profile, ideology or position on certain issues. A party that is entirely personality-based or clientelist and has no intention to develop a coherent set of positions on the issues proposed would be difficult to include when implementing the tool.

Numerous online ideological profile tests help a user discover whether they are, for example, mainly socialist or liberal in their political thinking. In most cases, however, irrespective of government level, practical or more emotional topics, the PPT is issue based, which is what links them to the electoral process: what electoral promises by parties are we voting for in terms of policy pledges and delivery?

Assessing the electoral context***Are elections legitimate, free and fair?***

Elections that are not free and fair or genuine and credible—as defined by the electoral assistance community—are unfruitful conditions for the PPT. Under such circumstances, its relevance will be small and it is undesirable to invest in supportive activities to election process that are clearly not credible. It could also discredit the reputation of the democracy assistance provider and its local partner. Situations in which political parties boycott elections (for whatever reasons) can, as rule of thumb, constitute a 'no-go' for the PPT. Yet, in emerging democracies, not every aspect of the electoral process will be equally up to standards. Implementers of the tool therefore need to carefully analyse the political space and balance the opportunities and risks of its use (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2

Are the electoral conditions conducive?

When presenting the Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) development and implementation project to the Georgian political parties in 2007, the opposition parties objected to the implementing organizations that deemed the electoral situation to be free and fair enough to be able to run such a tool. The opposition parties detailed numerous imperfections in the electoral process, including intimidation and corruption, particularly at the local levels. However, they concluded that the past imperfections were not significant enough to have altered the overall election outcome, and that the level of freedom of speech in the country was 'not full but sufficient' for such a tool. All parties decided to participate.

Should all political parties be involved?

If the election set-up or the political context make it impossible to work with parties from the full political spectrum, and if no sufficiently plausible arguments can be presented for working with only a selection of the parties, conditions are not ideal for the PPT (see Box 3.3). Implementing the tool would risk legitimizing elections that are not credible, or leave the implementer vulnerable to accusations of partisanship. Yet in practice, implementers may consider using practical criteria and arguments to include only parliamentary incumbent parties, or long-running stable parties and political actors, and to exclude some marginal newcomers. Sometimes the incumbency factor can be balanced by including only those whose approval rating exceeds a certain threshold in opinion polls.

Box 3.3

Including the right parties in the Policy Positioning Tool

In the final days before the party registration deadline in Georgia in 2007, many new marginal parties registered themselves. The parties decided that, in the interest of providing full information to the voters, all of these new parties would be included in the VAA. However, in hindsight, it may have been more efficient to focus on the six established parties that together would attract 99 per cent of the vote. In many instances, inclusiveness involves striking a balance between efficiently achieving the objective and adhering to values and principles.

What type of electoral system does the country use?

The extent to which policy platforms (should) be relevant in an electoral campaign depends on both (a) the electoral system (e.g. first-past-the-post (FPTP) or proportional representation) and (b) the type of election (e.g. local, regional or national).

For example, in national elections that use a FPTP voting system with single-member districts, election campaigns are likely to focus more on local issues and/or the personalities of candidates rather than on national policy. Implementing the PPT only once at the national level would probably have less impact in such a system than in a closed-list proportional representation model. In a FPTP system, one could consider launching either a general national-level tool with particular questions for each electoral district, or a separate tool for each district. In the Netherlands, because the provincial representatives elect the members of the Senate, national issues tend to dominate both Dutch provincial elections and the political balance of the parties in the House of Representatives. Therefore, in the 2011 and 2015 provincial elections, a national Senate version of a VAA was launched in addition to the VAAs for the provinces.

What type of election is being held?

The level of government is also relevant when developing the PPT, in terms of understanding the intensity of the policies and citizens' engagement with them (see Box 3.4). Ideological choices may be underlying practical party positions on certain issues. For instance, a policy statement on garbage

collection in a local election may seem very non-political, but if the issue is whether it should be a state-run service, a privatized business or the citizens' own responsibility, it can have an ideological or political dimension.

The PPT can be implemented for any level of election as long as two conditions are kept in mind. First, is the issue in the statement targeted in line with the body of government up for election (for example, local councils usually have no decision-making power on national highway infrastructure)? Second, do the issues have a moral or ethical dimension (rights-based issues) that entices voters much more strongly than technocratic political issues? These issues seem to trigger more debate and voter interest, even when they seem to be less political from a public administration technocratic or financial perspective.

Box 3.4

Choosing which elections to target first when introducing the Policy Positioning Tool

One challenging issue when developing the PPT for the 2014 municipal elections in Lima was the fact that, in many ways, the city is managed by 47 communities. Although the metropolitan government deals with policy areas such as public transport, land use, mobility and cultural heritage, other tasks emphasize its coordination role between the communities. Many municipal-level issues seemed technocratic and were viewed as not interesting enough to engage citizens. However, while this was reflected in the low number of PPT users in the local elections, it also provided a safe testing environment ahead of the 2016 national-level GPS Electoral, which is expected to be more engaging as it relates to more prominent political issues.

In contrast, in the Netherlands, Vote Matches became so established around national elections that everyone demanded and expected them to be available for local elections. The question of these being 'exciting enough' was only a challenge for the implementing organization; citizens did not question their usefulness.

Who should implement the Policy Positioning Tool?

The two key players in the implementation of the PPT are political party assistance providers and the political parties themselves. Whereas the former will be in charge of the broader project management and design, the latter provide the content and lend their moral authority to the project. Logical initiators of PPTs would be political party assistance providers and other democracy assistance providers or organizations. These could be organizations promoting multiparty cooperation, including all kinds of informal constructions of interparty dialogue platforms or policy forums. Depending on the context, a democracy assistance provider could help a country implement its first PPT, by establishing an ad hoc dialogue platform.

In theory, civic actors can initiate the PPT independently of parties. They can select the issues covered in the tool based on sources such as citizen surveys, government policy themes and political party manifestos. They can even define the parties' positions on each statement based on public sources (election manifestos, media performances of politicians, voting behaviour in parliament or council). While the quality of such approaches may be very high, a tool designed without direct party involvement may suffer criticism from parties and other electoral stakeholders.

In practice, therefore, PPT implementers often ask the parties themselves to give their position on each statement, or at least authorize the position selected for them. The intensity of party involvement can have different degrees and forms (discussed in Chapter 5). However, it is generally important to understand that for parties, the emergence of a public VAA tool in the elections can appear threatening. A party-inclusive PPT can develop long-term trust between the parties and the implementing organization. However, a foundation of trust is helpful (in addition to an impartial reputation based on previous or long-running cooperation). A horizon for future collaboration with the implementing democracy assistance organization may be an additional incentive for parties to participate in the PPT (see Box 3.5).

Box 3.5

Building trust in the implementing organization

Initially, parties may find it daunting to lay out all of their positions on issues for the first time. This may be because they have to determine their positions quickly and are insecure about their choices, or because they guard their policy positions as proprietary information to be presented only once they are in power, due to fears that other parties will copy them.

In Lima, International IDEA, as the implementer, functioned as a trust-building partner ahead of the PPT project. All parties had worked with International IDEA over a period of several years, so there was little need to convince them of the usefulness of the tool. Some parties admitted there was some electoral risk in participating, but acknowledged it was politically correct to get involved. Once one party announced its interest, the remaining parties were more likely to do so in order to avoid being seen as blocking progress.

In Georgia, in contrast, there was also trust in the NIMD ahead of this project, but the initiative for the tool came from the parties, which had discussed it together.

In both cases, trust in the impartiality of the implementer and the incentive of continued relations were motivations for parties to engage.

Implementers of the PPT may be any organization that promotes citizens' political and public participation and, specifically, voter education and voter-turnout promotion efforts. In some countries, local governments are involved in financing VAAs for these reasons. For the sake of the diversity in expertise needed, it can make sense to work with a wider coalition of relevant organizations. Typically, local partners in PPT implementation are media outlets, think tanks, non-profit civil society organizations or departments of academic institutions. To maintain the trust of the political parties, it is preferable to keep the team engaging with the parties as small as possible.

In certain cases, the electoral management body (EMB) plays a role. However, EMBs often

consider themselves unsuitable partners, given that—legally or by internal policy—they will not give out information on political party policy positions. Many prefer to stick to the technical or procedural responsibility of running the elections. However, in some countries, EMBs are responsible for requiring parties to submit their manifestos as part of the registration process; here the link with promoting policy-oriented politics is more evident. If the PPT voter advice is clearly delivered using a neutral and impartial methodology, or even through another related-but-separate implementing partner, EMBs have been involved in the process in different ways, from convening the parties to publicly endorsing the tool.

Some of the more successful VAAs in terms of mass use and popular spread have been joint projects between the developer/implementer and a media house. In many cases most of the 'traffic'—user visits to the tool—was achieved via channels of the media partner, and not through the implementer's website. Therefore, partnering with a media outlet can be very useful.

Yet a media partner can also jeopardize the impartial reputation of the VAA or PPT, especially when media organizations are known to be politically owned or display political favouritism. In these cases, an implementing organization must balance the benefits related to usage and dissemination with the risks to the tool's impartiality. The endorsement of the project by an official EMB and a multiparty memorandum of understanding or other joint declaration may help guarantee impartiality. Each situation will be context and country specific, but generally media partnering should be possible and is recommended.

Choosing an information technology partner

When considering whether and how to implement the PPT, a good starting point is to understand the demographics of Internet and smartphone penetration and how the Internet is used in the country or region—in other words, who will the PPT reach and how do the available means correspond to this? This information also helps determine what services to ask of the information technology (IT) provider, such as regarding online versus offline accessibility or web-based versus downloadable

The IT requirements, to a large extent, influence which organization should implement the PPT. Some implementers have a strong in-house IT capacity, while in other cases teaming up with a large media house can secure much of what is needed. Yet it is important to first differentiate between the political content, the technical backside of the tool and the IT needs related to media communications. It is also important to realize that while proper testing of the IT environment is needed before going live, the final political content is often available only just before the launch. IT support should therefore be readily available to fix bugs in the days before and after launch. As the correct functioning of the application is important for building trust, testing is essential. Additionally, in countries with strong mutual mistrust, the physical location or owner of the server host that stores the data may even be a trust-building issue. The IT infrastructure must be secured from the onset, and the tool must work flawlessly from day one. Further, IT support should be on the ground: dependency on remote assistance, several time zones away, proved to be a challenge in the Lima pilot study. If it is necessary to outsource IT support, it may be wise to have IT partners in the same time zone that are aware of the urgency of political developments in relation to their technical task.

Choosing the right time to implement the Policy Positioning Tool

A PPT can be conceived any time political parties are willing to develop their positions and increase their internal policy coherence. The most obvious time, however, for political parties to make up their minds on political content is during the run-up to elections—the most politically relevant period for political parties and other electoral actors to support the PPT process.

Circumstances can differ from country to country, and should be assessed in close cooperation with local stakeholders that have a clear sense of the political context and dynamics. For example, some countries decide on or announce elections at very short notice.

When planning to use the PPT, several timing issues should be taken into consideration. The process normally takes 6–9 months from start to finish: it

requires time for discussion, contemplation, drafting of positions and internal party communication. A PPT should be started well before elections (12–18 months in advance), but not too close to the official pre-election period (see Figure 3.1), as it might be hard for parties to grasp the relevance and opportunities of the PPT: the tool may not 'come to life' and may be seen as a theoretical exercise only.

However, if it is started too close to elections there might be equally large drawbacks. Close to elections, parties need to invest considerable time in practical matters such as logistical mobilization and campaign preparations, party and voter registration, internal candidate selection and campaigning. In addition, when elections approach, campaign dynamics commence and political tensions increase, which can influence the success of the PPT implementation. For example, a sense of safety and trust in confidentiality are crucial for deliberation on content, yet parties might become unwilling to meet in multiparty settings, afraid that other parties will mock, steal, or attack one another on their policy priorities and opinions. Close to elections, tension can also get too high in contexts where intimidation, violence and obstruction might occur, distracting parties from working on content or pressuring them to conform to external pressures, public expectations or other influences.

4 The 13-step implementation process

The process of implementing the PPT consists of a number of specific steps (see Table 4.1). In most stages the implementer can choose the intensity of political party involvement in the process. In other stages, however, parties should be kept at a distance to avoid politicizing technical matters. Since PPTs are digital tools, including web-based platforms and mobile apps, the following subsections divide practical operational matters into political and technical steps, where applicable.

Table 4.1

The 13-step implementation process

STEP 1	Consult and inform the political parties about the PPT's objectives, process and procedures
STEP 2	Seek political parties' public commitment to participate
STEP 3	Form an expert analysis and drafting team
STEP 4	Determine common themes
STEP 5	Determine issues within the common themes
STEP 6	Produce a long list of 100 statements
STEP 7	Send the long list to all parties, with the request to answer and motivate their positions
STEP 8	Assemble a total overview and compare parties' answers with their manifestos
STEP 9	Communicate and discuss differences of opinion with political parties
STEP 10	Make a final selection of statements
STEP 11	Launch the tool
STEP 12	Design a communication plan
STEP 13	Evaluate and follow-up through dialogue

4 The 13-step implementation process

STEP 1

Consult and inform the political parties about the PPT's objectives, process and procedures

This step will require a combination of bilateral visits and multiparty meetings (depending on the sensitivity of the political context) to allow parties to showcase their intentions. Often, a multiparty workshop is organized to present the PPT to party leaderships, answer initial questions and gain initial support for the tool. Take sufficient time to explain that the PPT is different from an opinion poll or survey. Explain the tool's advantages for parties, but also make it clear that parties cannot use it to their individual party's advantage. They will not have the right to add their themes and statement formulations independently.

In many emerging democracies, political parties often interpret concepts like party programme as the party's internal strategic and organizational plan, which they logically consider confidential. While the PPT encourages parties to publicly present their issue-based policy platform or manifesto, some parties will consider it a risk—sometimes for good reasons—that other parties will copy their unique, original and innovative approaches and policies with which they intend to move the country forwards. The implementer of the PPT should distinguish between manifestos and strategic plans, and outline the democratic pros and cons of making manifestos public.

Assess technical needs

At this stage, it will be important to decide which types of partnerships will be sought to secure the required technical capacity. If the implementing

TIP 1:

Developers regularly seek a name with a twist: one that hints at the tool's multiparty and neutral essence, political nature and objective, but also its function of guiding and assessing—for example, 'GPS Politico'. Others have had more descriptive names like 'EU-profiler' (EU parliamentary elections), 'StemTest' (Belgium, Flemish for vote test), '¿Por Quien Voto?' (Guatemala, Spanish for 'Who do I vote for?') and 'Ikhtiar' (Tunisia, Arabic for 'to choose').

TIP 2:

Include parties and stakeholders in the process of deciding the name. It is a fun and informal way of engaging them all in the project, and may help identify the potential sensitivity of proposed names.

organization has no presence on the ground, it can consider partnering with a local organization. As discussed above, there is a difference between a locally based partner organization with experience in supporting political party development that has (some) in-house IT capacity and a media house that is interested in carrying out a political project. In many cases, the democracy assistance organization will want to outsource some technical services, or partner with a (media) organization that takes on that responsibility as part of their role in the project.

Claim a web address and/or application name

Deciding on the name of the tool is a communication strategy task but, after a decision is made, the web address (the universal resource locator, or URL) will need to be claimed. It is wise to explore whether there are non-political websites or applications with similar names or comparable

political websites and applications with sufficiently different names. Be aware of the risk of copyright issues and registered names, including other countries that speak the same language, which may risk legal consequences.

When selecting parties to feature in the PPT, quantifiable thresholds that can be used as a formal justification for the selection depend on the local context, but can include a combination of a number of criteria (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1

Guidelines for selecting parties to feature in the PPT

The choice of which parties to include in the PPT can be made according to a number of criteria.

Implementers may wish to include:

1. all parties that are formally registered;
2. only parties that have representation in parliament;
3. the main ruling and opposition parties;
4. all parties that participated in the last elections;
5. parties that have reached a certain national or regional electoral threshold;
6. parties that represent a balance of diversity and pluralism (for example, ideological differences, new and old parties);
7. parties that represent ethnic, religions, regional or other minorities;
8. participating parties should jointly represent almost 90 per cent of parliament;
9. parties with representation at the local as well as national level;
10. parties with an acknowledgeable presence and influence in the country (for example, as reflected in the media); or
11. parties that receive public funding (where applicable).

Source: International IDEA, NIMD and Oslo Center, *Political Party Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide* (Stockholm: International IDEA, NIMD and Oslo Center, 2013), p. 109.

STEP 2

Seek political parties' public commitment to participate

Determine whether the entire process needs to be formally agreed upon by the parties at the start, or whether a step-by-step approach can be applied with a go/no-go approval given at the halfway point. The latter would mean starting with the steps to identify themes, select issues and formulate statements before asking the parties to pursue and launch a live tool. This approach involves greater uncertainty in the early project stages about its ultimate success, but it allows parties to warm up to the tool before giving their formal commitment. Creating the required trust and support from the parties can take many forms. For instance, a multiparty Board of Trustees or political party advisory council—the members of which have high-level access to their party leadership—could be formed to mitigate any disagreements between the parties and serve as a spokesperson in communications with the media.

Another option is to have the leadership sign a memorandum of understanding, code of conduct or other form of declaration detailing the project's roles and responsibilities. Doing so signals to the broader public that the PPT is party owned and multiparty in its set-up—and is therefore impartial.

Internally, it is crucial that the parties express trust in the implementing partner to make decisions on their behalf. The parties should, however, remain one of the project's beneficiaries and provide their blessing and practical input, but not be in a project management position. Political sensitivity will require the partner to consult the parties when needed.

Political parties should clearly understand the internal organizational and logistical requirements needed to ensure participation in the PPT (see Steps 7 to 11), especially with regard to establishing internal committees to decide on policy positions. These requirements can be discussed at a bilateral or multiparty introductory workshop. It is the parties' responsibility to establish internal discipline against undue internal meddling, interference or confusion. The party leadership needs to be on board with this (see also Step 7).

Licensing or partnering with a ready-made test or building from scratch

There is an increasing number of established VAA publishers around the world, most of which have their base (or at least their origin) in Europe. It can be efficient to sign a license agreement with an organization that has the online or application back-end and front-end available off the shelf and only needs to customize the tool's country context, language and look.

Since the technical side to this project is not too complex, in many countries it could be done more cost-efficiently locally. For a one-time or first-time use, licensing an off-the-shelf version may be practical for the sake of piloting and learning. If long-term reuse is foreseen, building one's own may be a worthwhile consideration.

Whichever support is chosen, it is never too early to start building the website and/or application. It can be very frustrating to have to delay a demonstration of the PPT because it hasn't been built yet. Ideally, the technical side should be completed so the tool can be presented to the political parties when first approaching them about it. However, in reality planning is often less structured and advanced.

STEP 3

Form an expert analysis and drafting team

The members of this team need to have knowledge of policy topics and current political affairs; they may be drawn from universities, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, business community, media, etc. Together they should be able to identify the main policy issues to include in the PPT.

To balance the desired fields of expertise—and achieve a political balance if needed—with efficiency and effectiveness, a team of 4–8 people is best. They are generally expected to meet several times over the course of a few months for meetings, discussions and working sessions, and to work individually and share their contributions with each other. Remuneration varies by country, and depends on the membership of the team (for example, editors from a media house partner vs. individual experts).

The internal organization of the drafting team can vary. In Georgia, ProDemos provided a staff member to train the team and to chair the first meetings, while the local NIMD representative coordinated the team's efforts. The team had no formal chairperson; it worked as a collective. In Peru, International IDEA chaired the team sessions.

Depending on the context the team will be neutral (pure topical or skill experts), non-partisan/impartial (known as, for example, public figures, personalities or even democracy advocates, but clearly non-aligned) or politically balanced. If political balancing is needed for the whole team to be perceived as sufficiently neutral, it is still crucial that the team members are in no way representatives of the party: their performance must be independent of the party, and they must not be seen to negotiate on behalf of the party, but to analyse and decide independently. Consult with parties bilaterally to verify trust in the selected team. If needed, it should be possible to state publicly that all stakeholders put their trust in the team.

The political work for the editing team and seeking confirmation from the parties can all be done using general word processing office software. However, it can help to have the back-end of the tool ready at this stage: the formulation, selecting and sharing of draft work on statements can be done online (password secured for a limited number of stakeholders), which gives all participants a better understanding of it early on. Licensing an existing VAA will often include this option.

STEP 4

Determine common themes

Over the course of a few weeks or a month, ideally several months before an election, the group of independent experts determines common themes of general importance. These might include health, education, infrastructure and so on, as well as issues that are specifically relevant to the upcoming elections, and on which all parties have (or intend to have) policy views (see Annex 1, Table A.1.1).

Parties can be consulted (either individually or as a group) for their ideas and input to encourage their involvement in the process; but be clear that this is not a political negotiation. Parties should supply their logos and/or pictures of their party leader or main candidates to be used in the tool, as well as links to their main election manifesto or campaign messages online before the tool is available to view for the first time.

STEP 5

Determine issues within the common themes

Themes (for example, education) are usually too broad to be able to formulate sensible statements. Statements that are more useful are developed by referencing more specific issues (e.g. tuition fees, quality of teachers). The expert team should analyse party manifestos and other sources (founding statutory documents, political quotes in media, media and academic analyses, parliamentary voting track record) and/or consult the parties directly to identify the most politically salient issues.

Parties can have a passive role, for example by sending (draft) manifestos, or they can actively participate in bilateral or multiparty interviews or brainstorm sessions. Again, this is not a political negotiation and party input is merely exploratory and inspirational.

In preparation for Steps 7 (asking parties to give their answers) and 11 (launch), it is very important to test the tool using dummy answers, to make sure it includes all the desired functionalities and does not have any bugs. Adding functionalities later on can be very complicated and can introduce new bugs. Some parties will be late submitting their statements, so resist the temptation to test only once the fully submitted version is available, as this will often be at the last minute.

STEP 6

Produce a long list of 100 statements

The previous step will result in a list of 30 to 100 issues, or even more. The next step is to develop one or more statements concerning each identified issue. Formulations can be taken from party manifestos, but the statements should not contain leading questions (see Box 4.2). A VAA expert could be engaged to perform or train on this step.

It will be hard to create statements that abide by all the rules, all the time. The expert team's judgment is very important for determining when it is acceptable not to follow one of the rules. It is also recommended to have multiple formulations of statements on the same issue. When asking the parties to respond, it will become clear which version works best.

Engaging parties in writing the statements is not recommended. While they have an interest in using campaign language to attract the largest voter group, the PPT is not a campaign tool. In addition, if one party has written a statement, others may feel they have the same right.

Box 4.2

Rules for formulating statements

A statement should contain a political choice ('does the government have a say in it?') and challenge the respondent to take a side (i.e., it should force you to choose, and be opposable), but may not be leading (i.e. it should not hint at a preferred answer).

Statements should be:

1. fundamental, undifferentiated and sharply formulated;
2. concrete, topical and clear (generally one sentence); and
3. sharp, short and understandable.

Statements should not:

1. contain negatives (not always avoidable) or double negatives (must absolutely be avoided);
2. include (misleading) details (time, planning, amounts, locations);
3. contain conditions or pre-conditions that deal with multiple subjects at the same time; or
4. use non-obligatory formulations (e.g. 'it would be preferable if citizens were consulted in policy development')

Try reversing a statement to see if it makes sense. If it does not, it is not a good statement because it means it is not possible to answer 'no' or 'disagree' to the first version. Also, it can help to avoid leading or politically correct formulations, and trigger readers to think more deeply about the issue.

As parties are getting ready to work on the statements, and in order to continue to build their trust and to maintain their engagement without allowing them to influence the content, it may be a good idea to present the tool's back-end and explain the algorithm used to determine the match between voter/user and party (perhaps call it the 'simple calculation method'). Transparency early in the process will help prevent future problems. Such a workshop could also be held for journalists.

STEP 7

Send the long list to all parties, with the request to answer and motivate their positions

It is very important to have a single point of contact from each party with high-level access who can communicate with the implementing organization and provide any necessary materials. It is the parties' responsibility to establish internal discipline against undue internal meddling, interference or confusion. The party leadership needs to be informed about these matters in Steps 1 and 2. Parties identify their own positions on each statement ('agree/disagree/no opinion'), but some may benefit from assistance provider support during this process (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Example of party scorekeeping in a simple Excel sheet

Statement	Party response
Pension system should mainly be based on private pension funds.	agree
Every person—regardless of their work scope, positions and work experience—should be assigned an equal pension.	agree
Every pensioner should receive an equal amount of pension.	agree
The state should financially support the private sector in order to promote the employment of citizens.	disagree
The state should fully delegate the employment of citizens to the private sector.	agree
Free professional training should be a priority of the employment policy.	disagree
Families with many children should be granted free outpatient services.	disagree
...	...

Source: Adapted from the implementation of the PPT in Georgia in 2007 by NIMD and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

In a second step, the parties also have to provide a brief (approximately 5 phrases) explanation for each of their chosen positions. This will serve as check that they understood the statement correctly, and helps clarify all positions and assess how usable a topic or statement is—and what reformulations are needed to clarify differences between the parties. Having to formulate explanations also encourages the parties to think through their positions. The explanations serve as a starting point for drafting a party manifesto, if needed, and provide additional information to help voters understand the various parties' policy positions.

Asking parties to write explanations can be postponed until Step 10, depending on how much time is left and whether this information will be used in future projects with the parties. An alternative is to ask them to write explanations only for the final 25 to 30 statements used in the tool.

Parties can be given hard or electronic copies of the list, or online survey tools can be used. Alternatively, parties can be given access to their own customized space in the back-end of the tool where they can provide their input privately (hidden from other parties). The method chosen will depend on the staff and time available at the democracy assistance organization running this project and the IT savviness of the political parties. If online tools are used, it is advisable to send an e-mail to the party confirming their responses to avoid misunderstandings.

STEP 8

Assemble a total overview and compare parties' answers with their manifestos

The analysis and drafting team verify the correctness of the positions supplied by the parties (without party involvement). To the extent that staff members from the implementing or partner organization are not on the expert team, this step should be a joint effort: once launched, the tool is the implementer's responsibility, and it cannot refer to the expert team in case of errors.

Also the expert team will not have been in direct contact with the political parties, so the implementing organization should explain to the parties that they should keep their distance, which should make the parties feel that the implementing organization is now responsible for their collective and individual interests and concerns. At this stage of the project, the political content (created by the expert team) needs to be checked against the political feasibility, interests and country context (by the implementing organization).

Confidentiality is needed at this stage: the implementer knows the position of the national political landscape, which is often very sensitive and valuable information. Absolute discretion is required until the launch of the tool.

STEP 9

Communicate and discuss differences of opinion with political parties

In many cases parties will have submitted their party positions for the first time, and there is little documentation on which to base their choices. However, a party may claim to be for or against a certain statement while their parliamentary voting behaviour or media quotes suggest otherwise. If corrections are needed to the answers a party has given, let them know bilaterally and ask them to present sources/documentation as support. Discuss and resolve any differences of opinion privately.

STEP 10

Make a final selection of statements

One or two parties will always respond very late—normally the dominant ruling party or the party leading in the polls (since they have the least incentive to participate in the project) and small, under-capacitated parties. As it is impossible to select the final statements to use in the tool without all parties' input, there will need to be open lines of communication with these parties. The expert team

should provisionally fill in missing party answers based on their knowledge of politics in their country (to be replaced with party responses as soon as they are available).

There are many factors to consider when selecting the statements to use in the final tool. VAA experts may be needed to ensure the right balance of issues and responses is included (see Box 4.3). The calculation method used in the tool will affect the selection process (see Annex 3 for a discussion of the most common methodologies used in VAAs). Importantly, in each comparison of any combination of two parties there must be a minimum number of statements on which the parties have different positions. Otherwise, the tool will not be able to distinguish between all parties and identify the closest party to a voter's preferences. This is a delicate balancing act to achieve with only 30 statements and 2–20 parties, but it is easier if the software instantly recalculates the difference between each two-party combination each time the expert team checks or unchecks a statement.

Box 4.3

Guidelines for selecting the final statements

The final statements should:

1. sufficiently cover a spread of the relevant electoral issues as determined in Step 4 and 5;
2. find sufficient differences in positions between each combination of two parties;
3. sufficiently lead each party to present a unique position: include some statements for which one or two parties have an opposite position to most of the other parties;
4. yield a balanced number of agree and disagree responses from each party to avoid presenting parties as negative; and
5. include a balanced number of left and right topics (or any other relevant ideological cleavage).

In addition, any parties that failed to submit explanations of their positions in Step 7 should do so in this step. While postponing this process saves time by only requiring explanations of the final statements, it produces less output that parties can use to draft manifestos.

STEP 11

Launch the tool

It is important to devote considerable attention to an effective communication strategy. Publicly disseminating and promoting the tool accounts for at least 50 per cent of the project's success. In this process, the differences in public relations (PR) and media distribution options in each country must be taken into account.

A proven and successful way of launching the tool is a physical press conference in which all party leaders use the tool to show they get a recommendation for their own party. For this approach to be effective, the parties should be on board as ambassadors of the project (via a board or council, as mentioned in Step 2), and be prepared to answer critical questions from the media. For many media outlets and parties this will be one of the first policy discussions during the campaign, and it is important to encourage reporting on substantive issues over personalities. Parties could be given the chance to present their platform manifestos at the press conference, and the project could offer support in this process if needed.

Once the final statement selections have been made, and ideally after initial technical tests have been conducted, it is advisable to have a test panel explore the content and functionality of the website or application in a beta version (i.e. semi-live, but not public) to test for glitches.

The implementer should appreciate the technical steps needed to publish the tool online, and identify all other places that the tool may be embedded or connected (e.g. social media). It is important to keep in mind that undue pressure from the implementer for political reasons on the technical supplier or partner (e.g. if a technical error makes it impossible to see the answers of one party) may lead to external, public or party criticism of the implementer and damage the reputation of the tool or, worse, a particularly party.

STEP 12

Design a communication plan

While it is logical to pursue a social media strategy to help the tool go viral, this focuses on the medium through which the message is communicated. Organizing physical promotional activities (distributing flyers, street actors, press conferences and so on) and developing a mixed-media approach (including television, newspapers, radio, promotional bus tours and so on) will reach both offline and online audiences. A local comprehensive communication plan that takes the local context into account is also needed to determine the most important content to share, since one of the PPT's main goals is to emphasize substantive policy issues (see also Chapter 5).

It is very important to develop clear terms of reference regarding web specifications, embedding the tool in other websites, applications and social media platforms—and to test these plans—well in advance. Bugs, however, are inevitable. The technical service provider, partner or facilitator must be aware of the project's political sensitivity. If errors are detected after the launch it is very important that instant solutions can be found, or that convincing responses can be communicated that these faults do not disadvantage any party or misguide the voters.

Therefore, technical support must be on permanent standby in the first few days after the launch. Even if a licenced VAA tool is used, there should be little to no time difference between the project country and the support organization's headquarters (or it needs to be willing to work night shifts).

STEP 13

Evaluate and follow-up through dialogue

Feedback should be requested bilaterally (rather than in a multiparty setting) to elicit more comprehensive, open responses. It is important to ask each party about its interest in using such a tool again in the next election and any ideas for

improvement. It would also be useful to assess whether parties are likely to use the results of the policy explanations and statements to develop a manifesto (if they have not done so yet) or strategic work plans. Furthermore, it may be important to assess whether parties are likely to change their internal deliberation mechanisms as a result of the statement formulation process, or develop plans for interparty cooperation and dialogue, for example on legislative processes.

An additional follow-up approach is to develop the tool into a parliamentary voting record monitor with the PPT representing the baseline of electoral promises. In this way, the PPT can serve as a policy dialogue, development and monitoring tool until the next election.

It is a good idea to keep the test online for an agreed length of time after the election, although it should clearly state that the test was made prior to the last election and is no longer directly relevant to the current political landscape. Moreover, since the back-end of the tool—that captures all the party scores on statements—is little more than a spreadsheet covered in layout and web design, it is easy to modify for alternative and future uses.

5 Considering the broader political environment

This chapter describes how to implement the PPT successfully by considering the broader political environment.

Building on a relationship of trust

While parties will likely see the political correctness and corporate social responsibility advantages of participating in the PPT, the direct material or strategic advantages of involving themselves in the project may be less obvious. Many parties win elections by emphasizing the personality of a party's leaders rather than its policies. In addition, some parties view describing their positions in detail as a risk: they may hold some generally unpopular opinions, or be afraid that other parties will copy their platform.

In both the Georgia and Peru cases, on which this guide is based, the parties' commitment was in part achieved because of a long-term relationship between the parties and the implementer that involved other party support activities. Therefore, the PPT should ideally be introduced based on prior activities with parties; many supporting or aligned political party support activities can be implemented as part of the process. These activities fall under the linked intervention strategies of facilitating interparty dialogue and capacity strengthening.

Facilitating dialogue within and between parties

An important component of any interparty process (including participating in the PPT) is intraparty dialogue: an internally unprepared party can make little headway in a political process. While helping parties deliberate to form their positions on the statements can serve multiple support objectives, it is important to maintain a fine line between facilitating deliberation and dialogue and influencing how democratically a party conducts its internal debates.

Internal deliberations can either include a broad or narrow selection of people. Table 5.1 presents the benefits of both approaches.

If the PPT project seeks to improve the internal democracy of parties, an assistance provider should ensure that parties are receptive to—or have made a request for—such support. Any support for internal party deliberations should mainly serve the modest objective of empowering parties to answer the statements put forward by the implementing partner's expert team. Additional support can include a wide range of specific objectives concerning internal party organizational structure, dialogue training and the development of a particular internal culture.

In contrast to the formal VAA process, which requires the implementing partner to provide strictly equal treatment to participating partners, additional support could be customized for each party as needed. This opportunity to combine parties' participation in the PPT with support for parties' internal capacities should be announced, discussed with and agreed among all parties at the start of the process. Box 5.1 discusses various types of support that implementing partners can provide.

Table 5.1

Benefits of broad vs. narrow involvement in formulation of party position statements

Broad involvement		Narrow involvement	
Description	Benefits	Description	Benefits
Representatives from regional branches, youth/women platforms, or thematic experts	Provides insight to the party leadership on the opinions of formal party bodies, which might be useful for internal organization, instruction, training and communications	Formulation of party positions by commission of senior party members	Can strengthen inner party cohesion on issue positions
General party member discussions	Provides insight to the party leadership about the opinions of party supporters, which might help mobilize volunteers	Approval of chosen position by party leader	Can strengthen the durability of the position within the party
Discussions with external party supporters (focus group)	Provides insight to the party leadership into potential electoral gains	Decision and approval of positions by party leadership	Can help the lower branches through instruction and training, and can function as a control mechanism for the leadership
Approval by all members (e.g., an annual party congress)	Can strengthen support for the positions		

Box 5.1

Types of additional support

Process facilitation: help parties design and plan their consultative deliberative processes according to each party's objectives. This includes helping them:

1. develop a clear mandate and decision-making process (including internal communication) to ensure clear expectations and outcomes; and
2. design and plan the organization of small discussions at national party conferences, online surveys, focus groups, or other distance arrangements to include party branches in deliberations.

Technical facilitation: supplement parties' planning processes by financing or developing:

1. venues and transport for participants;
2. printed questionnaires; and
3. web-based or offline software, or mobile app questionnaire forms and analysis solutions.

Moderation facilitation: provide a consultant to chair and moderate meetings, and train moderators and survey conductors. The party may prefer someone from outside the party—or even someone from outside the realm of politics—for this role.

Outreach and campaign support: after the tool is launched, support could be provided to help:

1. fund the production of leaflets or printed manifestos;
2. joint website development presenting all the parties' manifestos; and
3. develop media, radio and TV discussions.

Whichever type of support is offered, it should be clear to the implementer of the PPT project that the party leadership has expressed support for the PPT project, and has designated a point of contact to communicate with the PPT project team and/

or other parties. Furthermore, the implementer should ensure that the PPT team has received the party position (approved by the leadership) on all statements from the point of contact, and that other party members do not publicly dissent from the party line or publicly attack the tool.

Interparty dialogue lies at the heart of the PPT in many different ways. Even though the tool highlights the differences between parties—and therefore emphasizes multiparty competition—the project is ultimately a form of multiparty cooperation (see Box 5.2).

Box 5.2

Guidelines for interparty dialogue

1. Engaging in the PPT and maintaining all parties' trust in the tool throughout the electoral process requires continuous mutual agreement between the parties.
2. In different stages of the implementation process, conducting direct interparty dialogue will be required. For instance, agreeing on the overall themes on which each party will formulate its stance depends on consensus-building.
3. The phase of the tool that focuses on internal party consultations to arrive at policy positions also includes (internal party) dialogue, which relies on many of the same techniques to bring together different wings of a party. Some parties may allow an external facilitator to guide that process, while others may not.
4. The essence of interparty dialogue is engaging parties in open-minded exchanges that should evolve into a joint agenda for policy development and reform over time. These future-oriented high-level political processes are different from reconciliation or conflict resolution, which are hindsight-oriented processes seeking a negotiated solution in the present.

In recent years, more and more experience and information has come to light in the area of political party dialogue. Interparty dialogue platforms have sprung up at the country level around the world, which would be well placed to initiate and implement PPTs. They not only guarantee a balanced multiparty application of the tool, but can also offer expertise in how to conduct dialogue. Recent publications on political party dialogue build on field experience in

this area (see International IDEA 2007; International IDEA/NIMD/Oslo Center 2013). They raise a number of issues that implementers of the PPT may deal with, including trust between parties; trust between parties, the implementer and the drafting team; receiving a blessing, mandate and formal commitment from the parties; continued engagement from all parties throughout the project; clarity on the rules of the game and everyone's rights and roles; and conflict resolution.

Capacity strengthening

In addition to facilitating party dialogue, implementers of the PPT can help strengthen parties' programmatic orientation or policy development skills and capacities. While parties may at first have few incentives to engage in the PPT as they see little direct strategic interest or electoral benefit, they are generally very interested in capacity-strengthening activities, and are very open to receiving election campaign training. Numerous communication, messaging, campaigning and election manifesto drafting skills training, workshops and other activities can be conceived to build on topics, positions and motivations developed by parties during the PPT implementation process.

This support can involve effective alignment and coordination by one or several political party support organizations, or it can be expressly offered by the PPT implementing organization. The support generally involves two types of expertise: technical (communication, messaging, campaigning election manifesto drafting) and/or thematic (explanations of the issues at hand to help parties formulate their standpoints and motivations). Thematic sessions can also contribute to facilitating party dialogue, as they can be done in a multiparty setting or bilaterally.

Incentives for party collaboration

The previous section discussed what could be considered part of a traditional approach in the field of political party support. This approach mainly engages in internal political party organizational matters like capacity strengthening, and seeks to commit the parties as a coherent and somewhat exclusive group to engage with each other. In both cases from the perspective of the implementer, facilitation and support are the key elements.

However, since party political decision-making is based on their interests, they should have incentives to engage in democracy assistance interventions. Such incentives include direct political gains for parties as well as civil society demand or media publicity.

Media access as an incentive for parties

This guide has highlighted the practical benefits of collaborating with media organizations. Such organizations can potentially provide (a) publicity for the tool, (b) experts for the editing team, (c) a reputation for quality and (d) the in-house IT capacity to develop the technical side of the tool.

Collaborating with a media outlet can also help implementing organizations offer support to parties beyond the scope of the PPT process. A media partner may be able to offer exposure to all parties as part of the development of the PPT, and encourage high-quality policy debates. Parties can each be offered a segment in a newspaper, or dedicated airtime on radio and television to elaborate their positions presented in the PPT. For example, if a media partner can host a national televised presidential candidate debate; this is an enormous incentive for parties to develop detailed policy positions.

Two angles of communication: the mass use of PPTs and the political factor

A PPT process requires a PR plan that addresses both social and traditional media. The guide has thus far discussed the goal of increasing the recognition, popularity and use of the tool, which is often based on its fun element for users, or saving voters from having to read all the parties' manifestos or increasing the transparency of the political process.

However, a media strategy should also try to make the PPT a politically important element of the election campaign. By participating in the tool, all parties will have improved their policy development capacity and therefore be able to present themselves more programmatically. However, the PPT can also encourage a greater focus on content during the election campaign to facilitate the long-term development of programmatic politics more broadly.

Political parties can be made aware of the main positions of all parties in an election campaign to encourage debate on programmatic issues and encourage parties to better define their positions vis-à-vis others. A workshop that emphasizes these issues can help political parties fully exploit their programmatic advantage in their election campaigns. Involving media outlets in such a workshop may encourage them to report on the programmatic differences in a political party landscape rather than the personalities of party leaders. Parties could also undertake a media preparedness course.

Identifying and mitigating risks

Implementing the PPT involves a number of potential risks to both the implementer and political parties. Identifying and mitigating such risks is an important part of the process.

Risks facing the implementer include interference by the funding organization, manipulation of the tool by parties, or accusations of partiality. Parties face the potential risk that the tool will produce unbalanced results by focusing on a specific or limited number of issues while ignoring others or by formulating loaded or leading questions (see Box 5.3). Most implementers are genuinely keen to produce balanced tools, but there must be transparency regarding sponsorship; the members of the developing team and others that are involved; and the procedures on selecting themes, drafting the formulation of statements and political party authorization.

Box 5.3

Examples of the influence of policy positioning tools over election results and legislation

In the 2006 Dutch parliamentary elections, during a television debate one party leader accused the other of manipulating the StemWijzer by giving an answer that was more popular, but was not congruent with their policy plans, although this was not readily apparent when reading the election manifesto. This party later admitted that it made sure that its election manifesto was PPT-optimized (De Graaf 2009). This incident highlights the risk that parties and candidates will tweak their answers.

In Finland, some well-known candidates have behaved very rationally by positioning themselves in the middle of the response scale on all statements, therefore capturing voters from both sides of the political spectrum (Ainola quoted in Wagner and Ruusuvirta 2012). After being ridiculed in the media for having no opinions, these candidates were later forced to change their responses.

In the 2003 campaign in Belgium, the broadcasting partner of the VAA revealed that a massive majority of VAA users was in favour of restricting the parole rules for convicted felons. In an immediate reaction to this news, the president of the Socialist Party, Steve Stevaert, tabled a motion to end this regulation, contrary to his long-standing party manifesto.

Any organization implementing the PPT should use a multiparty approach and maintain an impartial position. The ability to do so depends importantly on an implementer's reputation and capacity to work with all parties in the political spectrum in an unbiased way.

As explained in Annex 3, there are fundamental differences between the various ways to calculate and present voter advice in the PPT. Different methods can produce different results and can have different effects on parties, voters and campaigns. When working with VAAs as a PPT, one should be aware of some of these effects (see Table 5.2). Transparency regarding how the results are calculated is key; it is important for preventing accusations of supporting particular parties.

Table 5.2

How to mitigate risks

Risks	Mitigating risks	
	By implementers	By political parties
Methodology bias	Impartial partners and links to academic partners for quality control on chosen methodology	Get information from implementer on methodology before process starts
Control of quality	Only start when full implementation, budget, capacity of local implementing partner and pool of experts is achieved.	Get information on implementers before process starts
Biased standpoints	Impartial partners and links to universities and pool of experts conduct an in-depth context analysis	Possibly include expert survey on which to base positions
Sponsorship/foreign interference	Transparency of the process	
PPT directly involved in political campaigns/loss of reputation	Transparency of methodology and quality control	Support PPT in multiparty communication (e.g., a balanced party-composed Supervisory Board)
Stealing exclusive issues/standpoints	Share standpoints of all parties only at the end of the process	Share standpoints of all parties only at the end of the process
Being undermined by only one political party	Inclusive dialogue process	

6 Case study: a practitioner's experience in Lima, Peru

This chapter describes the use of the Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) during the municipal election for the metropolitan council members and mayor of Lima, Peru, in 2014 and provides practical observations for in-country usage. A previous PPT experiment in Georgia in 2009 gave the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and ProDemos a clear idea of the tool's potential. When these organizations decided in 2012 to further invest in developing programmatic parties, they decided to re-evaluate and further test the PPT. A second pilot was conducted with the October 2014 Lima municipal elections.

Every implementation process requires adapting to contextual demands. This includes reviewing—and, where necessary, repackaging—the 13-step process to fit the local situation. In Lima, this meant emphasizing the first two steps (context analysis and partner selection) and giving others less prominence; the 13-step process was ultimately reduced to 12 steps.

STEP 1 Analysing the political context

Experienced with democratic elections and with a number of social, political and economic transformations in recent decades, candidates and political parties in Peru often contest elections in non-programmatic ways: campaigns tend to focus on charisma and personal accusations, and only indirectly on indications of policy direction. Debates are generic, at best.

State and private actors have dealt with this trend in different ways. For instance, candidates are now required to submit a manifesto as part of

the nomination process. Furthermore, electoral management bodies—in alliance with private organizations such as election observers, universities or media houses—often organize candidate debates during election campaigns, or produce widely accessible information (online or in print) on the various parties' and candidates' policy stances. Voting advice applications (VAAs) are relatively unknown in Peru. In the 2011 general election, the Institute for Peruvian Studies (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, IEP) tested a type of VAA that attracted a few thousand online users.

Lima's heavily polarized landscape reached its peak amid a recall referendum held in the second half of 2013 in which most city counsellors lost their seats, with only a few exceptions including the incumbent mayor. A by-election to fill those seats reconfigured the composition of the council. Shortly afterwards, the mayor declared her intention to run for re-election to defend her legacy, as did her predecessor, a popular politician who stepped down in 2011 to run for president. Opinion polls gave the former a lead from the outset, a lead that doubled or even tripled support for his opponents. The context therefore appeared challenging for a campaign of ideas.

STEP 2 Selecting partners

When NIMD and International IDEA decided to approach parties about testing a participatory VAA implementation, they sought overarching support from two reputable organizations that are known for their impartiality and interest in urban issues: the IEP and Lima Cómo Vamos (What's Up Lima). The IEP is a not-for-profit think tank and social science research centre focused on Peru and Latin America. Its mission is to promote and engage in research

that strengthens democratic institutions and affirms the diverse range of identities and cultures in Peru. As part of this mission, the IEP contributes to the Americas Barometer, a tool that gauges public opinion in Latin America.

A partner with an extensive background in Lima's urban issues was also needed. Lima Cómo Vamos is a citizen-based observatory group that monitors and evaluates changes in the quality life of the city's inhabitants. Therefore, it is both an expert on municipal governance issues as well as an important source of data on the city and citizens' opinions, which it began collecting in 2010.

NIMD and International IDEA also sought specialist media and technical partners. To help with media engagement, they selected Grupo Integración RPP, a multi-media group with national and international scope that produces and disseminates news content in a range of platforms. The group has eight radio stations and online platforms, which helped disseminate the tool to different sectors of the population. Grupo Integración RPP was interested in the neutrality of the tool and receiving information ahead of its launch on candidates' and citizen's positions on particular issues; they used this information as a source for news items.

The project's technical partner was ProDemos, which created the VAA software used in Peru. Since the 1990s, ProDemos has used this software in the Netherlands and in several other European Union countries, and beyond. It has worked jointly with NIMD on implementing VAAs in other countries and providing technical support to the implementing organizations and political parties. It was a partner in the translation, adjustment and testing phase of the tool. Furthermore, ProDemos provided a guide for developing the statements and even sent a specialist to help create them.

STEP 3 Outreach, information gathering and soliciting commitments from political parties

International IDEA and NIMD reached out to political parties that would potentially contest the elections well ahead of the start of the campaign, in a meeting on 29 November 2013, five days after

a recall election for the Lima municipal council. The instability of the political situation made it difficult to determine whether the parties in attendance would field candidates in the 2014 Lima elections. In the meeting, International IDEA and NIMD presented the tool and explored its potential with the leaders of ten political parties. During this meeting, the organizers explained the implementation process and the potential benefits for political parties, and solicited the parties' opinions on and expectations of the tool. At this point, there was no formal agreement with the parties regarding their participation.

NIMD and International IDEA planned a project with a high level of collaboration that allowed political parties to commit in different ways and with varying intensities. The implementing organizations presented political parties with four possible forms of collaboration. NIMD and International IDEA could (a) help parties establish a commitment to citizens while keeping the parties informed; (b) co-produce the tool with the party; (c) provide support to the political party's internal discussions on formulating their policy stances; and (d) provide topical or thematic expert assistance to help parties establish their own political positions.

Two key factors left only a small window of opportunity for NIMD and International IDEA's involvement: uncertainty about which candidates would be nominated and candidates' autonomy from the party machine. On the one hand, the level of political party participation—notwithstanding the uncertainty about who would be chosen as candidates—is only defined after the candidate registration period ends (for example, the president's political party did not field candidates for the elections in Lima). On the other hand, the parties that participated in the elections exercised little influence over how their candidates developed their campaigns. Therefore the second of the four forms of collaboration described above was the only possibility.

To recruit participants to the project, International IDEA and NIMD first held bilateral meetings. All candidates were contacted directly to present a brief overview of the project and obtain their commitment to participate. All of them accepted.

Next, all 13 candidates were asked to designate a point of contact to work with International IDEA and NIMD to create the statements and provide their parties' official positions. Most of these points of contact were the coordinators of the political parties' campaigns and platforms.

In the next step, all political parties were invited to participate in meetings to discuss the progress of the tool and to define topics. As the campaign progressed and obtaining votes became a priority, organizing multiparty meetings became more difficult; only two were held.

Once the first draft long list of 60 statements was created and the campaign became more intense, multiparty meetings were no longer the most effective manner of communicating with political parties. Therefore, NIMD and International IDEA instead sought efficient interaction with the candidates, privileging personal interaction, telephone communication, private meetings organized via personal email messages, as well as meeting at public events (debates and signature of the pact on ethics).

STEP 4 Creating a team of expert analysts

The elections in Lima were quite competitive, if not polarized. Nevertheless, the political players had a lot of trust in the implementers' non-partisanship. The implementing and editing teams overlapped, and the members had more fluid roles. The team of experts started taking shape as the project's requirements emerged, and was composed of the following individuals.

1. **A public opinion expert from IEP.** This person had previously worked on a VAA in Peru, provided guidance on the methodology employed, and helped International IDEA avoid several difficulties throughout the implementation process.
2. **An expert on local governance and urban policies from Lima ComoVamos.** This person helped International IDEA focus on issues in the mayoral election that by municipal politics might consider irrelevant but which are nevertheless of interest to citizens.
3. **An independent political analyst.** This person shared knowledge about the candidates' historic positions and identified political topics of interest alongside technical issues.
4. **The International IDEA head of mission.** This person supervised the team's products and took final decisions if needed.
5. **A gender specialist.** This team member ensured that the content and dissemination campaign was gender sensitive.
6. **A content manager.** This team member provided strategic guidance on relationships with content and technical partners, dissemination to the public, statement formulation and outreach to the political parties.
7. **A VAA expert from NIMD.** This person provided remote methodological guidance.
8. **A VAA technical expert from ProDemos.** This person provided remote software development and application support.

Since the team was working in different locations, some of the meetings were held in person, but most decision-making was done via electronic communications. The team's primary objective was to identify common and specific issues to use in creating the statements. Choosing between options and strategies was based on deliberation, and debates were generally either consensual or meritocratic and respected each participant's technical expertise; the option was available to appeal to the supervisor for final decision-making.

The pace of each step was determined by the nature of the task as well as the election calendar. Table 6.1 details the work conducted by this team.

Table 6.1

Activities of the expert team

Action	Planning	Number of work sessions	Type of coordination
Identification of general issues	Approximately one month	Three meetings and multiple contacts via email, phone and so on	Two in-person meetings, one online meeting and email coordination
Identification of specific issues	Approximately one month	One meeting and multiple contacts via email, phone and so on	One in-person meeting and email coordination
Creation of the statements	Several days/ one working week	Two days of meetings and two days for revisions	In-person meetings and later review of the statements over email

STEP 5 Identifying general and specific issues

The work on the content of the VAA really began in this phase, which greatly depended on the amount of media interest in the election campaign and the issues that would dominate it, and political parties' commitment to position themselves on such issues. The tool's potential to capture citizens' interest was an important factor in the selection of issues, particularly where new issues entered the political debate. Therefore, this phase involved maintaining awareness and managing political parties' expectations about what the tool could achieve. The process was divided into three sub-phases: exploration, analysis and identification.

Exploration

The relevant content was analysed according to the following key questions: What issues are important for Lima as a city? What are the urgent issues for the city? What issues interest the citizens of this city? What issues are intrinsic to the municipal government? Based on the answers to this question, it was necessary to identify sources of information to respond to the concerns presented.

Lima Cómo Vamos compiled relevant data on the city (opinion surveys about the city and data on its transformation) for the previous four years. A meeting with a multidisciplinary team of academics allowed them to share their views on Lima's requirements and challenges. All manifestos were

collected and analysed. Next, a meeting with representatives of the political parties participating in the elections solicited their opinions.

Analysis

The local governance expert from Lima Cómo Vamos was responsible for presenting the relevant information to the team, explaining citizens' recurring points of interest over the past four years as issues that had not been sufficiently resolved. The first list of issues was established in this manner.

On 6 June, a meeting was held with representatives (not candidates) from the parties participating in the election. These party members had previously assisted International IDEA by sharing their perspectives on what the implementation team could expect from the parties during the elections, their opinions of the project and the progress made. At this meeting, the parties thoroughly discussed the areas to be covered by the statements, paying special attention to areas left out of the initial draft list. This meeting also highlighted the need to identify a single point of contact from each party, authorized by the party leadership, to serve as the liaison with the project.

On 11 June, a meeting was held with an interdisciplinary group of six academic experts in local politics, architecture and urban planning. The project and the first list of general issues were presented, and the outside experts identified

Table 6.2

Going from general issues to specific issues

General issue	Specific issue
Transportation	Transportation concessions
	Construction of mass transport, such as trains
	Building bypasses
	Enlarging roads

additional issues to include in the draft list. For this meeting, the core team's political analyst was tasked with integrating all issues that had received media attention in the municipal campaign and parallel political circles. The gender specialist raised several gender issues over which the municipality has direct influence. Other team members closely reviewed and analysed the platforms to identify which issues the politicians had included as components of their work at the municipal level.

Identification

The list of issues was expanded and reorganized during the analysis phase into central issues, as identified by most of the experts, and peripheral topics that were mentioned by at least one person in the meetings. This phase took place alongside the identification of specific issues, which gave the team a clear understanding of the specific topics related to each issue. For each general issue, the team created a table that listed the specific topics mentioned in the meetings and documents analysed (see Table 6.2).

One team meeting was sufficient to identify most of the specific issues. One of the most efficient ways to progress was by circulating the table via email. Each of the team members had time to work on different content areas and add to the list. International IDEA then consolidated the lists, which were re-circulated and opened up for discussion and agreement.

STEP 6 Creating the extended list of statements

Step 5 established a clear basis for the issues that should be included in the statements. This was used as the basis for an in-person meeting with all the team members on 8–9 August 2014 to develop the list of statements. In formulating each statement, the team used the rules for formulating statements (see Chapter 4, Step 6) to determine whether it was appropriate to the tool's purpose.

The NIMD VAA expert in statement formulation stressed that a large number of sentences with similar structures but mild variations in content should be created on the same issue to ensure that the project team could later choose the most appropriate format for each specific issue. With the recommendations from the ProDemos expert, a list of 60 statements was created.

By extending the previous list of 30 issues, a list of propositions for each specific issue topic was added. The goal was to have at least two statements for each specific issue (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3

Creating statements out of specific issues

General issue	Specific issue	Statement
Transportation	Transportation concessions	Statement 1
		Statement 2
	Construction of mass transport, such as trains	
	Building bypasses	

As the team was still not convinced that these statements were clear to both people who are knowledgeable about an issue and general users, a short test was held. A simple list was created and 15 people were asked to participate, including those who were knowledgeable about political issues, people involved in campaign issues and general citizens with indirect knowledge. They were asked three questions:

1. What is your position on this issue?
2. Is the statement clear? Did you have any difficulty understanding what it meant?
3. What do you think is missing from the list?

Based on their responses, the team conducted a final review to determine if the statements were clear and if any central issue was absent from the list. The team also discussed which phrasing of the statement was the most accurate. Taking this analysis into account, the long list of statements was created.

STEP 7 Presenting the long list to all political parties, requesting their responses and explanations of their positions

International IDEA's first contact with the political parties was at the 6 July meeting designed to gather information on the issues. This meeting produced an initial list of contacts of the people involved in the core group of each party's campaign: the candidates and the coordinators of the parties' campaigns and platforms.

The first step consisted of communicating via email to again present the project and request a bilateral meeting to obtain their commitment to the responses. Several of them responded and the meetings were planned. If they did not respond, International IDEA had to call them. Others never responded, and International IDEA had to request that a third party establish contact. Still others were not from consolidated political parties, and could not be easily contacted. These people were approached in person during public events.

The second step involved receiving the parties' responses and ensuring that these responses represented the official party view. In order to facilitate this process, a commitment letter was sent along with the table of responses as well as tips on how to fill out the table. The use of neutral responses was discouraged in order to avoid ambiguous answers from political parties that could obscure the clear differences in the political landscape. The tool's goal is to encourage political parties to position themselves. A remarks section was provided for each of the statements so that the party could list additional information (which was viewable in the tool).

As the time frame for these elections was extremely short, candidates were nominated only a short time in advance, and they had little time for non-campaign-related activities. Therefore the third step—obtaining responses from all of the political parties—took approximately three months and

involved several delays. Through several contacts or by approaching political parties at public events, outreach was conducted to candidates to receive their responses either in person or by email.

Of the parties that held a bilateral meeting, the commitment letters and response tables were presented in paper and digital formats. Several of the parties did not provide answers during this meeting. Some took the digital format of the statements and agreed to respond by email. Of those that agreed to respond by email, both documents were sent to these institutions and the project team waited for their response. There were exceptional cases in which the responses were recorded over the telephone. The final document was then sent back to these parties and the team waited for a confirmation of the responses given and recorded. The process was completed when the last responses were received a day prior to the launch.

STEP 8 The final selection of statements

When the majority of the responses had been received, the team aimed to select the statements that would most effectively highlight divisive issues between the parties in order to create political discussions. Based on this, a meeting was held with the core team using a multiple-entry table to illustrate the consequences for the distances and divisions between all parties when a specific statement was taken out.

Using the table, the team filtered and adjusted statements until they reached a set of 30 statements that would appear in the final tool. The team also ordered them in a sequence that users would find interesting from the start to the finish.

STEP 9 Creating the website

The creation of the website began in August 2014 with the purchase of the domain name and the required hosting. The purchase of the domain name entailed knowing the name of the tool that would be used by the general public.

In early August a communication team was set up composed of four members: a press coordinator

responsible for leading the team's efforts to position the tool in the media during the campaign; a community manager who managed the tool's social networks (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube); a web designer who created the web page structure and helped in the joint implementation of the ProDemos web page; and a graphic designer who created the logo and all the tool's visual products.

At the beginning of the website design process, a meeting was held to determine how the web page should look and choose the graphic design for all the tool's products. It was decided to use the *chicha* aesthetic that is well known and used in Peruvian culture as a symbol of authenticity and creativity.²

Since the VAA software is owned by ProDemos, they provided the host services. Therefore the next step involved linking the ProDemos software with the landing page created by International IDEA's Communications team. The usual manner of doing this is through a single start page that redirects the user to another window where the tool is located. International IDEA designed the website so that the VAA application was embedded in the start page.

STEP 10 Becoming familiar with the voter advice application software

Adapting the tool was a long and in-depth process that took the entire month of August. Since ProDemos managed the hosting of the software, all changes needed to be coordinated and made through them.

The first step was to translate the entire page, which required several rounds of review to ensure that all of the options were clear. After the candidates' statements and responses were uploaded, the tool was tested. It was necessary to test that everything functioned, that the images appeared correctly and that all the options were available. This review process took almost three weeks, and ended shortly before the web page launch. Several different people tested the tool in different formats (desktop computers, tablets and mobile phones), since it was difficult to identify all errors based on the standard web version alone.

The implementation of a VAA requires

² *Chicha* is usually used to refer to cultural expressions that blend the traditions of internal migrants from the Andes and the Amazon of Peru with the more Westernized traditions from the big urban centres along the Peruvian coast.

understanding and trusting the technological resources used. In order to involve the political parties in a more in-depth manner, it would have been necessary to train them on the use of the back-end of the tool; however, there was not enough time.

STEP 11 Launching and promoting the tool

The tool's communication strategy focused on two messages: the importance of information in deciding how to vote and the value of comparing citizens' positions with those of the candidates. Both messages were prominent in interviews and presentations of the tool by the GPS team. It was necessary to create a brand—including logo, website and social media messages—that could communicate the concepts of information and positioning.

The tool was launched on 12 September, three weeks prior to the election. From the day of the launch to election day, 11,368 people fully completed the tool and 17,114 used the web page.

A two-pronged launch strategy was used. First, Grupo Integración RPP introduced the tool on a radio program at 9 am, and 2 hours later it was launched on another radio program and on a cable television channel. These three appearances in the media increased the use of the tool. Second, influential people in social networks were invited to a cocktail party were invited to learn about the tool, with the expectation that they would comment on it to their Facebook friends and Twitter followers. A room with laptop computers was set up so the invitees could use the tool. Given the short notice, candidates were not invited as it was unlikely that all would be able to attend. The following day, International IDEA set up a stand with five computers at a public fair organized by the state electoral body so attendees could use the GPS, and many people did so.

The communication strategy later had three different channels

Social networks (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube)

It had been planned to develop a social network strategy to contribute to the tool's dissemination. The communication team created accounts on Facebook and Twitter for the GPS tool. According to

Google Analytics, the social networks were the third source of entry to the web page.

The GPS Politico Facebook account had a total of 1,410 followers. There were 59 entries, including an announcement posted in the five days between 17 and 22 September. This action involved an investment of less than USD 50 per day. A total of 269,413 people saw the announcement; 2,315 clicked on it and 2,004 clicked on the VVA web page.

During the period that the announcement was active, Google Analytics for the web page indicated that 563 people entered via Facebook, either through the original announcement or 'likes' and posts in reaction to the announcement by other Facebook account holders.

During the entire campaign, the Communications team sent out 207 tweets on Twitter about the tool. During the campaign period the tool had 538 followers, of which 1.2 per cent engaged interactively (responses, clicks on the links or marked as favourite). The interest level reached its peak on election day and the day before, to around a total of 6,160 interactions (thus largely achieved by retweets and responses by followers of the tool's followers).

The strategy for social networks aimed to publicize the tool so it could be used by voters. Based on data generated by the tool itself, graphs were created on the percentages of opinions for some of the statements. These were used to try to position the tool in the network of public figures or groups that were interested in certain issues.

The creation of promotional videos was one of the cross-cutting strategies that could be used in all of the social networks. A total of 16 videos were available in the YouTube account and also located on the tool's web page. The videos were viewed 2,081 times.

An additional promotional video increased the reach of the tool. A nationally known actor discussed her experience using the tool in a video viewed 872 times. However, only 21 of these views came directly from the tool's website. The Facebook post of this video received the most likes, especially when this actress shared it on her own networks.

During the last week, ten short videos were produced. These were originally developed for university professors to foster the tool's use among their students and colleagues. However, these extended to public figures with influence in the media, such as journalists and academics.

Media placement

From the launch date to election day, the tool was mentioned 26 times in traditional media outlets (see Table 6.4). It is likely that many of the people who entered the web page directly or through web search engines did so because of this media coverage.

It is useful to track how users accessed the web page to assess which method was most successful. A total of 33 per cent of users entered the web page directly. In other words, they searched for the tool after hearing about it in the media or public interventions rather than through another Internet medium. Referrals from other pages or publications were also an important source of traffic, accounting for 26 per cent of the entries.

Table 6.4

Traditional media coverage of the tool

Date	Media outlet	Type
12/09/14	Ciudad al Día	Web
12/09/14	Diario Altavoz	Web
12/09/14	América Tv	Web
12/09/14	RPP	Web
12/09/14	RPP Noticias	Radio
12/09/14	RPP TV	Television
12/09/14	Radio Exitosa	Radio
12/09/14	Canal N	Web
12/09/14	Canal N	Television
12/09/14	Terra	Web
12/09/14	La República	Web
12/09/14	ATV+	Television
13/09/14	La Mula	Web
13/09/14	Spacio Libre	Web
14/09/14	La República	Web
14/09/14	La República	Diario
24/09/14	Radio Exitosa	Web
24/09/14	Radio Exitosa	Radio
24/09/14	Bethel Radio	Web
24/09/14	Bethel Radio	Radio
25/09/14	Radio Santa Rosa	Radio
27/09/14	El Popular	Diario
30/09/14	Radio Capital	Radio
30/09/14	TV Perú	Television
03/10/14	Radio Exitosa	Radio
05/10/14	ATV+	Television

Participation in public activities and visits to university campuses

Activities conducted in the week following the launch involved taking the tool to the public and drawing their attention to it. Three laptops were provided for people to try out the tool. Information on VAAs was provided, and students were asked to share the tool on social networks. In addition, merchandise (including t-shirts, pens, bags and stickers) was distributed to the public.

These activities were conducted on six university campuses, including the Catholic University of Peru, the National University of San Marcos, Peruvian University of Applied Science and the National University of Engineering. They targeted high-traffic public spaces, not only students who happened to pass by. Student associations were also contacted for help in disseminating the tool to the student body.

STEP 12 Evaluation with the aim of improving the project for future elections

From the perspective of the implementing partners, the experience was positive in several respects; it facilitated a dialogue with different political parties and gave them the opportunity to participate in its implementation. However, the parties demonstrated varied levels of commitment.

This exchange with the parties opened up a new space in which to discuss the importance and scope of new technologies in the political sphere. None of the parties showed any suspicion of or disdain for the VAA, which indicates the likelihood of increased acceptance of this type of tool in the future. While the initial objective was to sensitize parties to the need to develop clear positions on issues and to support them in this process, this pilot revealed a potential second objective: most parties already had positions but kept them secret because they considered them strategic secrets or intellectual property. In other cases, they were aware that some of their convictions would not appeal to the population at large. Future PPT processes should also help parties understand the need to present their ideas during campaigns, and offer a neutral platform for this disclosure.

One of the biggest challenges was foreseeing the magnitude of the communications field, which required more time and preparation. Fortunately, this project allowed International IDEA to get to know the target public and identify which channels and activities are successful, which will inform future iterations of the tool. A second challenge involved overcoming the technical requirements and managing the high demand for attention and precision required for the tool's adaptation. In the future, it may well be easier to build a local VAA from scratch than to communicate cross-continentially about adaptations to a ready-made tool.

Annexes

Annex 1

Identifying themes for use in the Policy Positioning Tool

Table A.1.1

Users' access points for reaching the GPS Politico website

Possible division of themes by	Possible themes	Possible sub-themes	Possible issues	Statements
a) Names of ministries	Health	1. Hospitals	1. Free help/(maximum) fees 2. Regional spread 3. State run or private?	
b) Names of parliamentary committees		2. HIV/AIDS	1. Free medicine 2. Awareness training in schools 3. Criminal charges of rape	
c) Public/news analyses		3. Sanitation/hygiene	1. Clean water 2. Sewage 3. Immunizations	
d) Other criteria	Education	1. Primary education	1. Regional spread 2. Teacher pay 3. School lunch and milk	
		2. Secondary education	1. Books and learning materials 2. Enrolment (age) 3. State exams	
		3. University/professional education	1. Anti-brain drain policies 2. Education policy for most-needed staff in growing economic sectors 3. Support for national data gathering for policy development	
	Economic development	1. Tax policy	1. Tax policy (waivers) for self-employed 2. Income tax policy for branches of foreign multinationals that create jobs 3. Accountancy regulations for businesses	

Step 4 of the PPT implementation process described how a group of experts chooses policy themes. Broad policy areas form the basis for positions on which parties may later agree or disagree. The following table provides an example

of a possible schema for the identification of themes to be addressed in the PPT. Using these themes, implementers can formulate statements relevant to specific issues and sub-themes.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investment subsidies 2. Intellectual property laws 3. Export subsidies 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (re)Nationalization of industries 2. Privatization of businesses and liberalization of markets 3. Guarantee of minimum market prices 	
Foreign Affairs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Border issues <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Treaties with neighbouring countries 2. Refugees and internally displaced persons 3. Visa regulations 2. Trade relations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International (regional) treaties 2. Tax and subsidy policies 3. Embassies/chambers of commerce 3. Defence <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weapons sales or purchases 2. Membership in regional organizations 3. Draft 	
Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constitution <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Separation of state and religion 2. Civil rights 3. Appointment of judges 2. Anti-corruption <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hiring/firing policy for civil servants 2. Legislation 3. Citizen complaints policy 3. Election system <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fixed terms for (re)-election 2. (State) finance regulations for political parties 3. Quotas (regions, women, youth, etc.) 	

Annex 2

Frequently asked questions about voting advice applications (VAAs)

Who is involved in developing a VAA?

VAAs have been developed by a variety of providers. In Germany and the Netherlands, political education agencies are responsible for developing some of the most popular VAAs. Media corporations have also seen the journalistic and informational potential of these applications and have developed successful VAAs, for instance in Sweden, Finland and Belgium. Other VAA providers include political scientists, civil society organizations and interest groups.

Developing a VAA can be done with or without the involvement of political parties, but the final decisions about phrasing and the selection of statements should be made by the developing team, the members of which are independent and not affiliated with a party, and who are at a certain distance from politics. This is necessary to retain trust and credibility.

VAAs should be transparent to all political parties, candidates and voters about who is developing the VAA, the political analysts and other professionals are involved, and who is financing the tool.

What is the effect of VAAs on the electoral process?

VAAs are a relatively new way to inform people about the differences between political parties, and it has taken some time for political scientists to investigate their influence on voter behaviour. To get an idea of the effect of VAAs on the electoral process as a whole, it is worthwhile to understand their popularity with voters, what kinds of voters use them, whether voters are influenced by the result they get, and whether VAAs have an effect on campaigns and voter turnout.

How many voters use VAAs in different countries?

VAAs have taken Europe by storm in the past decade. Millions of voters have used these web-based tests at election time, and in many European countries, they have become a natural part of election campaigns. By 2012, at least one such tool was in use in all EU countries except Malta and Slovenia.³ VAAs are also deployed outside Europe, for instance in Latin America and North America, and three VAAs were used in Tunisia's first campaign in 30 years, after dictator Ben Ali fled in 2011. For estimates of VAA users, see Table A.2.1.

Table A.2.1

Number of users of voting advice applications

Country	VAA	Year	Users	Registered voters
Belgium (Flanders)	Stemtest	2004	circa 1,000,000	4,568,250
Cyprus	Choose4Cyprus	2011	7,000	531,463
Finland	YLE	2011	> 1,000,000	4,387,701
Germany	Wahl-o-Mat	2009	6,700,000	62,168,486
Netherlands	StemWijzer	2012	4,800,000	12,689,810
	Kieskompas	2010	1,500,000	12,524,152
Switzerland	Smartvote	2011	1,200,000	5,120,379
UK	Vote Match	2010	> 1,200,000	45,597,461

³ The EU members states in which a VAA was in use by 2012 were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

VAA's seem to be particularly popular in countries where many parties take part in elections. It seems no co-incidence that the first VAA's were developed in the Netherlands, which has a PR system without a minimum vote share threshold: approximately ten parties are represented in parliament, and more than 20 take part in elections. Other factors are widespread Internet usage, partnerships with media and an individualized society with relatively high numbers of undecided voters.

The Netherlands pioneered the first print-based application (StemWijzer) in 1989, which went online for the first time in 1998, giving 6,500 recommendations. For the 2002 elections, over 2 million voting recommendations were registered, which increased to 4.7 million in 2006 and 4.8 million in 2012 (out of a voting population of about 9.5 million). For the 2010 elections, StemWijzer and Kieskompas together registered 5.7 million users. Many other VAA's have been developed in addition to StemWijzer and Kieskompas. Finland is another pioneering country: its first online VAA was developed in 1996, inspired by a tool on CNN's website. Since then, more and more VAA's have emerged.

The Swiss Smartvote was first presented to the voters in 2003, giving 255,000 voting recommendations, while Politarena reached 135,000 users. During the parliamentary elections in October 2007 Smartvote issued about 963,000 recommendations. In 2011 as many as 1.2 million voting recommendations were issued (out of an electorate consisting of about 4.9 million voters), and more VAA's are developed for each election in Switzerland.

These numbers are impressive, but some caution is needed; the number of voting recommendations issued does not indicate the number of unique visitors: many voters use a VAA several times during the course of an electoral campaign. For example, in 2007 there were 4.9 million voters in Switzerland, 2.4 million of whom took part in the elections. Smartvote was used 963,000 times, but server statistics indicate that the tool had 350,000–375,000 unique users (7–8 per cent of voters). This estimate was confirmed by the results of a Swiss electoral study.

The extent to which user figures for other countries also need to be adjusted downwards is difficult to estimate. There are no uniform standards defining how VAA use can be reliably quantified.

What kinds of voters use VAA's?

Users of online voting aids are far from representative of voters as a whole. Several studies in a number of countries have concluded that typical VAA users are young, well-educated men. Research in 2007 on the users of the Swiss Smartvote showed that discrepancies between gender and age distribution had decreased noticeably since 2003: more women and elderly people have started using Smartvote. The data further showed that VAA's were particularly popular with left-wing voters, swing voters and voters with loose party ties. Belgian research between 2000 and 2004 showed that VAA's were less popular with people who voted for the Christian Democrats and the extreme-right Vlaams Blok; the majority of users were younger and highly educated—a group that tends to vote for the liberals, socialists, greens and moderate nationalists.

Do VAA's influence campaigns?

VAA's intensify the flow of information. The media often get involved with online voting aids, and VAA's can be easily integrated into a media outlet website. Data captured in VAA's, such as parties' positions on a particular issue, can also inform reporting on electoral campaigns. The Belgian Stemtest, for instance, was developed by several universities at the request of a television channel and was subsequently used in several television shows preceding the elections. The programme was a success in terms of audience ratings. Politicians took the shows very seriously and allegedly decided to introduce or skip certain new themes based on what happened in the programme. By interviewing more than 10,000 voters several times during the campaign (and after election day), Walgrave (2004) found that neither the show nor the test caused parties to win or lose votes. The VAA's only real influence was that it had made the campaign livelier.

VAA's can potentially contribute to turning an election into entertainment or a carnival on the Internet. Many people believe John F. Kennedy won the 1960 US presidential elections based on

his television debate with Richard Nixon because he had better skills in this new medium. VAAs are a new medium that increases equality, but the effective use of this medium requires parties and candidates to use a new skill set. Because it is clear that VAAs are not just a temporary phenomenon, parties should be aware of their possible negative effects and focus on the opportunities they offer. For example, VAAs focus on issues, clarify the differences between political parties and stimulate parties to take a position on issues.

By offering well-balanced and neutral information, VAAs meet an important demand and play an increasing role in the communication between parties and the electorate. Voters who use a VAA are motivated to gather further information about politics and political parties. In Germany about 60 per cent of people interviewed were stimulated by Wahl-O-Mat to look for further information on the elections in general and on the parties and their positions in particular; 70 per cent even claimed to have discussed their voting recommendation with family members or friends. Even among users who hardly talk about politics, the Wahl-O-Mat inspired 63 per cent of them to discuss the elections with others (Marschall and Schmidt 2010). Swiss surveys of Smartvote users likewise show the website's crucial effect on gathering and processing information: 86 per cent of Smartvote users have referred to it as an important source of information, while other online media were relegated to second position with 68 per cent of users; television channels and newspapers jointly took third position with 61 per cent each. Moreover, 55 per cent of Swiss VAA users went on to look for further information, and 70 per cent were inspired to discuss the election with other people (Ladner 2010). A VAA such as Smartvote (operated by an association unaffiliated with any party) enjoys a high degree of acceptance among voters with different political backgrounds.

Do VAAs affect voter turnout?

The literature on political knowledge states that higher levels of political information are linked to increased voter turnout. Political scientists have also found that a high level of information among citizens is a precondition for a properly functioning, stable democracy. Recent analysis of low turnout

in Switzerland also underlines the importance of information for democratic processes and outcomes. Especially in countries with many parties, the complexity of the information required to make an informed voting choice is high. Since non-voters tend to be less informed, higher turnout could be achieved by raising interest and information. Yet it is difficult to measure the impact of VAAs on turnout. A series of studies based on user interviews has examined whether VAAs increase the voter turnout rate. These studies all conclude that there is a positive effect on participation, but the figures differ strongly by country and study. In Finland it has been shown that the use of an online voting aid increases the probability that the user will vote in the election by up to 23 per cent. For Switzerland, the corresponding figure is 15 per cent, and 12 per cent for the Netherlands and 8 per cent for Germany. On the basis of these results alone it is difficult to estimate the impact of VAAs on actual participation.

A 2005 German study showed that, of those who had not yet decided to vote, about 15.3 per cent reported that a VAA helped mobilize them. About 12 per cent of those that did not have a clear party preference said the Wahl-O-Mat motivated them to vote. These interviewees were relatively often women, young voters and/or people with a low formal education.

Dutch turnout figures for the 2006 municipal elections show that in municipalities that had a VAA, voter turnout was 1.5 per cent higher than in other municipalities. Of course it is possible that these municipalities were more active in stimulating their inhabitants to vote. In the provincial elections, more than 10 per cent of VAA users indicated that beforehand they did not think they were going to vote, but using the tool made them reconsider.

Do VAAs influence voters?

Stokes noted in 1963 that voters do not make their decisions based solely on positional issues but also consider which party is most likely (and most able) to bring about their desired state of affairs. A small fringe party may represent ideological views that are attractive to a lot of people, but if it has no proven track record or government experience, few people will vote for it. VAAs, however, consider only the parties' ideological positions and disregard

their intelligence, diligence or political skill. If Stokes is still right, VAAs' influence on individuals' voting behaviour should be marginal. It is important to keep in mind that users do not accept voting recommendations uncritically; they are often simply taken as a starting point for further reflection.

Some research suggests that quite a few people are influenced by their voting recommendation, but the numbers vary widely and are somewhat confusing, depending on how influencing is defined. Voters could be influenced in several ways. For undecided voters, VAAs could contribute to preference forming, and for voters who have already decided what party to vote for, VAAs could either confirm their choice or cause them to reconsider. A common measure of influence is the conversion rate: the percentage of voters persuaded by a VAA to vote for another party than they first intended (see Box A.2.1).

The estimated impact of vote selectors varies strongly between studies. Note that, since most of the studies were based on surveys conducted before the elections, the figures are mainly derived from voters' subjective self-evaluations and have not been controlled against voting intentions and actual electoral behaviour. Self-reported voting intentions are an unreliable measure of VAAs' impact: a Belgian study in 2008 showed that among users who said the Stemtest had convinced them to vote for another party (conversion), only two-thirds did so in the end.

Box A.2.1

Voter advice applications and their impact on voter behaviour: conversion rates

Finland

In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the conversion rate was just 3 per cent, but another 15 per cent of the surveyed VAA users said that they did not have a favourite candidate and voted for the candidate suggested by a VAA (Mykkänen et al. 2007). During the 2003 and 2007 elections, Finnish National Election Studies reported that more than one-third of interviewees said that VAAs had had at least some impact on their vote choice (Bengtsson and Grönlund 2005; Paloheimo 2007; Strandberg 2008).

Another study claims that 76 per cent of VAA users were influenced by the recommendation in the 2003 elections.

Germany

During the 2005 federal elections, 40 per cent of Wahl-o-Mat users agreed that VAAs had helped them decide whom to vote for (Marschall 2005), while 6 per cent said that they were going to change their vote choice because of VAA use.

The Netherlands

In the 2006 parliamentary elections, the conversion rate was approximately 10–15 per cent (Kleinnijenhuis and van Hoof 2008). In the 2010 parliamentary elections, Wall, Krouwel and Vitiello (2014) found that the effect of online recommendations on vote choice depended on the congruence of the recommended party with the users' pre-existing preferences. When the site recommended a party that was being seriously contemplated by the user, he or she was demonstrably more likely to vote for the recommended party.

Switzerland

In the 2006 elections in the canton of Bern, 74 per cent of VAA users said that the recommendation had influenced their vote choice (Fivaz and Schwarz 2007). However, only a small minority of those who claimed that Smartvote had influenced their voting decision had voted for the exact party recommended by the tool. Pianzola (2012) found that Smartvote seems to reinforce pre-existing preferences, but voters who consulted the tool also report a higher likelihood to consider alternative options at elections. Smartvote users were significantly more likely than non-users to change their initial preferences from a single most favoured party to multiple highly preferred parties. In other words, exposure to detailed information about vote alternatives seems to incline voters to consider these alternative options more closely.

Belgium

In a study conducted in the Flemish part of Belgium, 8 per cent of the voters said the Stemtest made them doubt their voting intention, while only 1 per cent said the tool made them change their mind (Walgrave et al. 2008). This study also claims that the overall effects were modest: some parties gained some votes, others lost some votes, but the application did not strongly affect the overall election outcome.

How should the provider deal with the results?

Developers should be aware that VAAs potentially threaten the privacy of voters, the reputation of their own tool or the interests of political parties. Being secretive about the VAA's mode of operation is also potentially damaging. It is very important to be transparent and open about which choices and courses of action the developers or implementers of the tool end up taking. There is no paradox in being transparent about the reasons for publishing (or not publishing) all of the results generated by the tool.

VAAs are primarily educational tools for voters, yet some people consider them opinion polls. However, they are not, for two important reasons. First, VAA users are not a representative subset of the electorate. Swing voters, for example, are usually over-represented, while traditional and older voters are under-represented. Most VAAs can (and will) be visited more than once by certain users, including people playing with the tool, giving random or different answers. Second, there is a distinct difference between the result of the test and actual voting behaviour. When analysing the results of VAAs it is usually difficult to find a relationship with the election result.

To avoid being considered opinion polls, some VAAs choose not to publish any information on their results until after the election. In some cases, statistical information on the answers to specific statements is published. However, these results are usually not representative of the electorate. After elections, the data can be made available for research without the risk of wrongfully influencing the campaign.

Another issue related to credibility and confidentiality is protecting against hacking or other attacks. VAA websites collect sensitive information on political opinions, which can be linked to the Internet protocol (IP) addresses of individual users. Developers of VAA websites should therefore store as little data as possible and pay sufficient attention to protection against attacks. Any attacks that occur need to be dealt with transparently.

Annex 3

Differences between voting advice applications

Although most VAAs use similar ways to match the user with a party or candidate, they also differ in several ways.

Topics and phrasing of questions

VAA users can give their opinion on a range of policy proposals. The questions are not about judging whether a party is doing—or would do—a good job in a specific area. Most VAAs pose questions about the user's viewpoints on very concrete policy measures, derived from the various election manifestos, but more general ideological statements are also possible. Sometimes the questions are grouped in themes, while in others they are shuffled.

The choice of topics and the phrasing of statements are of course very important, as they can affect the result provided to users. However, most VAAs that are developed by impartial organizations appear to make more or less the same choices: they all cover the most important electoral policy areas, such as economic and social policy, defence and foreign policy matters, environment and transport, immigration, and law and order. During the statement selection process, the developers usually study the public discourse as reflected in the media and consult the general public, academics or journalists.

Orientation towards parties or candidates

In many countries' electoral systems, one can vote for parties but not directly for candidates. Therefore, the majority of VAAs are party oriented: they offer the voters a comparison with parties but not with individual candidates. In some countries, however, electoral systems have open lists and other elements allowing the direct election of individual candidates. In Switzerland and Luxembourg, for

example, voters are allowed to compile a list of candidates from different parties. The Swiss political system is characterized by strong federalism and weak party discipline.

In Finland, a voter can vote for one party only, but voters have the freedom to change the ranking order of candidates within the list according to their personal preferences. In this type of electoral system, VAAs enable a comparison between a voter and parties as well as between a voter and candidates. This means that all candidates must formulate responses to VAA statements, in order to be able to compare their individual profile with users' answers.

Options for providing answers

Different kinds of VAAs use different kinds of answering options. A first distinction is the presence of a neutral option: while some VAAs only have yes/no answers, others also include a neutral answer option ('don't know') and/or the possibility to skip the question altogether ('no answer'). Parties and candidates may sometimes also use the neutral option, but they cannot skip questions, since they need to be able to take a position on any issues that may arise.

A second and important distinction concerns the degree of scaling. In some VAAs questions can only be answered positively or negatively. Others allow more detailed answers, using a 5-point Likert scale (e.g. 'completely agree' / 'tend to agree' / 'neutral' / 'tend to disagree' / 'completely disagree'). It is important to realize that answering options relate to the way the result or voting recommendation is calculated and presented.

Third, some VAAs allow the user to give extra weight to certain questions or to all questions that belong

to a specific theme. It is also possible to allow users to define certain questions as ‘killer’ criteria: on these questions, a party must agree with a voter’s answer in order to be included as a recommended choice.

Finally, many VAAs give political parties the opportunity to explain their positions on the statements. This makes the tool easier for political parties to accept, because it helps compensate for the lack of nuance. By clicking on an information button, users can read the explanations to find out more about each party and about the background and arguments for their opinions. These features go beyond entertainment to contribute to general voter education by supplying links to further reading.

Determining the position of parties and candidates

To enable a comparison between users’ and parties’ preferences, a database is built to store all party and candidate answers, which are supplied either by the parties/candidates themselves or researched by the developers. Developers can determine these positions by directly questioning parties/candidates or providing them a login and password to enter their answers directly into the database. The latter method increases the risk that parties and candidates will manipulate their answers to appeal to the most voters. For VAAs that only contain party positions, developers can identify party preferences by analysing election manifestos, party websites and press statements, newspaper reports and other material and entering them into the database; this approach is too logistically challenging to include all individual candidates. Another disadvantage of this method is that certain policy fields may not be covered by all election manifestos, and some parties may not even have a manifesto. In addition, conflicts can arise when parties do not agree with the positions assigned to them.

Some VAAs therefore combine these two procedures by analysing election manifestos and subsequently asking parties to validate the answers assigned to them. If a party does not agree with an answer, they are usually required to give a satisfactory explanation (and proof) that it should be corrected.

Calculating the result

To measure the congruence between users’ and parties’ positions, VAAs calculate the degree of agreement across all the statements. The methods of calculating this degree fall into two main groups. The first group of methods focuses on the distance between the preferences of the voter and those of the party or candidate. Within this group, the method of simply adding up is probably the most transparent to the voter, which is important for building voters’ trust in VAAs. This algorithm assigns points to candidates according to the distance between the responses of the candidates and the user. A candidate receives the most points when a user selects the same answer as the candidate and the least points when the options selected are furthest apart. The system is applied by the Dutch StemWijzer and the many other VAAs inspired by it.

Some VAAs use related methods, but calculate the distance differently. Based on the assumption that opinions on different political issues are interrelated statistical methods, such as the ‘City block distance’ and ‘Euclidian distance’ are also used. Although some scholars would argue this is a more accurate method, most voters will not be able to (re)calculate or check the result, making it less transparent for most users. In this group of methods the results are typically presented as a hierarchically ranked list of parties (or candidates) with the best match on top.

The second group of methods divides the statements over two or more dimensions—such as a ‘left/right’ dimension or a ‘progressive/conservative’ dimension. The results are then presented as a political landscape in which the user is positioned together with the parties (or candidates). This presentation gives the user more insight into the political spectrum and his or her position within it. However, it can be difficult to discern which axis some statements belong to; parties may have different reasons for their answers, which may be divided between both axes. The result may therefore appear to be more exact than it really is. Also, depending on the level of education of the voting population, presenting the result in a political landscape might be too difficult to understand.

Presenting the result

VAAAs can present the result to the user in different ways.

One name or logo

The advice or recommendation consists of the name or logo of the party or candidate that has the best match with the user's viewpoints (see Figure A3.2). This option has the strongest surprise effect, making the tool fun, which can make it attractive to a large audience. As this way of presenting gives little insight into the positions of the other parties, most VAAAs combine this with the presentation style based on the list of parties (discussed in the next subsection).

List of parties

The advice can also be presented as a ranked list of all participating parties or candidates, with the best match on top. Although it provides no insight into the ideological position of the user and the parties, it is very transparent and easy to understand. It also does not pretend to contain more information than there is. This way of presenting the results is used by the family of VAAAs that is derived from the Dutch StemWijzer, for example the German Wahl-o-Mat and the English Vote Match.

List of parties presentation styles

Another type of VAAAs presents the result in a political landscape, in which the user can see his/her position between the political parties in a multidimensional party space. This party space can have different axes—usually left/right and progressive/conservative (or liberal/conservative). Another possibility is the so-called GALTAN axis (green/alternative/liberal-traditional/authoritarian/nationalist). This presentation is used by VAAAs like the Dutch Kieskompas and those derived from it, like the EU Profiler, the Turkish Oypusulasi and the Portuguese Bússola Eleitoral. In the Lithuanian Manobalsas, users even have the ability to choose different axes for their position in the graph.

Spider web

The advice can also be presented using a spider-web graph, which displays political positions along up to eight axes. Both the Swiss and Luxembourg Smartvote applications use this presentation. The graph is combined with a list that shows the parties

and candidates closest to the user. Smartvote also offers the Smartmap, a kind of shortened version of the Smartspider like the political landscape presentation style, which illustrates the political position of the user in a coordination system (left/right and liberal/conservative). The user can also choose to compare her position with those of candidates from a specific party list.

Combination

A new generation of VAAAs, grouped under the name PreferenceMatcher and developed by a team of researchers at the University of Zurich, offers all three types of presentations.

In addition to the actual advice or recommendation, VAAAs can also present an overview of the opinions of all parties on all the questions, so users can see on exactly what topics they agree or disagree with the various parties. This approach provides more insight into the reasons for their match with a given party. Another common additional option is to compare the user's opinions with specific political parties in a single overview.

Annex 4

Examples of voting advice applications

StemWijzer and derivatives

StemWijzer (the Netherlands):
 <<http://www.stemwijzer.nl>>
 Cabina Elettorale (Italy):
 <<http://www.cabina-elettorale.it>>
 Ecciones (Spain):
 <<http://www.ecciones.es>>
 Glasovoditel (Bulgaria):
 <<http://glasovoditel.eu>>
 Latarnik (Poland):
 <<http://latarnik.nq.pl>>
 PolitArena (Switzerland):
 <<http://www.politarena.ch>>
 Providus (Latvia):
 <<http://www.providus.lv>>
 VoteMatch (United Kingdom):
 <<http://www.votematch.org.uk>>
 Wahlkabine (Austria):
 <<http://www.wahlkabine.at>>
 Wahl-o-mat (Germany):
 <<http://www.wahlomat.de>>

Kieskompas and derivatives (with political landscape)

Kies Kompas (Belgium):
 <<http://belgie.kieskompas.nl>>
 Kies Kompas (Sweden):
 <<http://www.sverige.kieskompas.nl>>
 Bosala (Egypt):
 <<http://www.egypt.bosala.org>>;
 <<http://www.masr.bosala.org>>
 Bosala (Morocco):
 <<http://www.morocco.bosala.org>>
 Bosala (Tunisia):
 <<http://www.tunesie.bosala.org>>
 Brujula Presidencial (Venezuela):
 <<http://www.brujulapresidencial.org>>
 Brujula Presidencial (Mexico):
 <<http://www.brujulapresidencial.mx>>

Bussola Eleitoral (Portugal):
 <<http://www.bussolaeleitoral.pt>>
 Electoral Compass (United States):
 <<http://www.electoralcompass.com>>
 European Union Profiler (EU):
 <<http://www.euprofiler.eu>>
 La Boussole Presidentielle (France):
 <<http://www.laboussolepresidentielle.fr>>
 Oypusulasi (Turkey):
 <<http://www.oypusulasi.org>>
 Vote Compass (Canada):
 <<http://votecompass.ca>>

Smartvote (spider web)

SmartVote (Switzerland):
 <<http://www.smartvote.ch>>
 SmartVote (Luxembourg):
 <<http://www.smartvote.lu>>

PreferenceMatcher and derivatives (combination of list, spider web and political landscape)

PreferenceMatcher:
 <<http://www.preferencematcher.org>>
 Choose 4 Cyprus (Cyprus):
 <<http://www.choose4cyprus.com>>
 Choose 4 Greece (Greece):
 <<http://www.choose4greece.com>>
 Ecuador Vota (Ecuador):
 <<http://www.ecuadorvota.com>>

Other systems

Volebni Kalkulacka (Czech Republic):
 <<http://volebnikalkulacka.cz>>
 Voting Aid (USA):
 <<http://www.votingaid.com/start/usa2012.html>>
 Manobalsas (Lithuania):

<<http://www.manobalsas.lt>>
 Political Compass (USA and United Kingdom): <<http://www.politicalcompass.org>>
 Help Me Vote (Greece):
 <<http://helpmevote.gr>>
 Electoral Headhunter:
 <<http://www.electoral-headhunter.com>>

VAA's that are no longer online

Questao Publica (Brazil):
 <<http://www.questaopublica.org.br>>
 Tasc Democracy (Ireland):
 <<http://www.tascdemocracy.ie/>>
 Sitoyen (France):
 <<http://www.sitoyen.fr/>>
 Testvot (Romania)
 <<http://testvot.eu>>
 Mayor 4 London (UK):
 <<http://www.mayor4london.com/>>

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About the organizations

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide. The objectives of the Institute are to support stronger democratic institutions and processes, and more sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy. International IDEA is the only global intergovernmental organization with the sole mandate of supporting democracy, and its vision is to be the primary global actor in sharing comparative knowledge and experience in support of democracy.

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) strives for inclusive and transparent democracies by assisting political parties in developing democracies. Its approach is characterized by dialogue. NIMD provides safe environments for political parties in a country to meet, overcome distrust and work together on political issues. It also works directly with parties to strengthen their organizational and programmatic capacities. Furthermore, it fosters a democratic culture in countries by providing political education programmes for (potential) politicians. Based in the Netherlands, NIMD works in more than 20 countries in Africa, Latin America, South-East Asia and Eastern Europe.

ProDemos – House for Democracy and Rule of Law is a Dutch non-profit institution active in the field of democracy education and citizens' public and political participation at local, national and European levels. As part of its activities and programmes, it runs the public and educational visitors' programmes at the Dutch parliament and the historical governing court district of The Hague, publishes books and educational materials for Dutch civic education teachers, and implements municipal and provincial projects.

Colophon

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Political parties need to take positions on public issues and communicate these positions publicly. In this way, voters can see what the parties stand for and choose which party to vote for.

In many emerging democracies, political parties are based around the personality of a leader rather than a long-term identity based on policies. Parties often lack the skills and experience to debate policy positions and mobilize voters around their ideas.

For this reason, International IDEA, NIMD and ProDemos have created a Policy Positioning Tool (PPT) for political parties. The tool helps parties develop and promote their individual policy positions through an online voting application. As the level of internet access in emerging democracies increases, online applications can be a very attractive way for political parties to reach voters.

This guide describes the technical and real-world steps involved in assisting political parties in developing and using a PPT. It includes a case study on the use of the tool by political parties in Lima, Peru, and is a must-read for practitioners seeking to help political parties become more effective in their internal and external communication.



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