

Vokskabin 2018 – Methodology

In the course of preparing for the 2018 general elections in Hungary we started a research seminar for the students of Politics and International Studies at Hungary's Andrassy University [Andrassy Egyetem] and Eötvös Lóránd University [Eötvös Lóránd Tudomány Egyetem] to enable the students to participate actively in the work of the editorial team of the Vokskabin voting advice application.

The primary goal of voting advice applications (VAAs for short), particularly during election periods, is to advise users on issues which are socially most relevant, and to help point out the differences between the positions of the interviewed political parties and our own opinions. Started in the multi-election year of 2014, Vokskabin was initially composed of a team of political scientists, historians and students who followed the Western European model¹, thereby creating a voting aid based on international collaboration with the specific feature that two of its supported languages are German and, as of 2018, English, so those interested in Hungarian politics who live in German- and English-speaking areas can stay abreast of what is going on.

Via the Vokskabin online interface, visitors have the chance to respond to important questions relating to social politics that change from time to time and are relevant in everyday life and thereby get the chance to learn which political party and/or parties are closest to or farthest from their own preferences. Based on the answers "yes", "no" or "I don't know", and the weighting of the questions, the user learns the degree to which they identify with or diverge from the views of the political parties, which is shown as a percentage ranking in a graph once the set of questions has been completed.

Different values are generated depending on the answer. When the answers of the political parties and of the user match, the value is 1 point, if they do not match, -1 point. The "I don't know" answers have no influence on the accordance or divergence value since the "I don't know" answer is not an option for political parties. When skipping a question, i.e. when a user does not choose any option for one or more questions, the application advises the user that the result will be calculated based on all the questions answered "yes" or "no". As for the creators of the predecessors of Vokskabin, the primary objective was to lay down the basic principles

¹ Examples of voting advice applications include the German Wahl-O-Mat (www.wahlomat.de), the Swiss Smartvote (www.smartvote.ch) or the Dutch Stembijzer (www.stembijzer.nl).

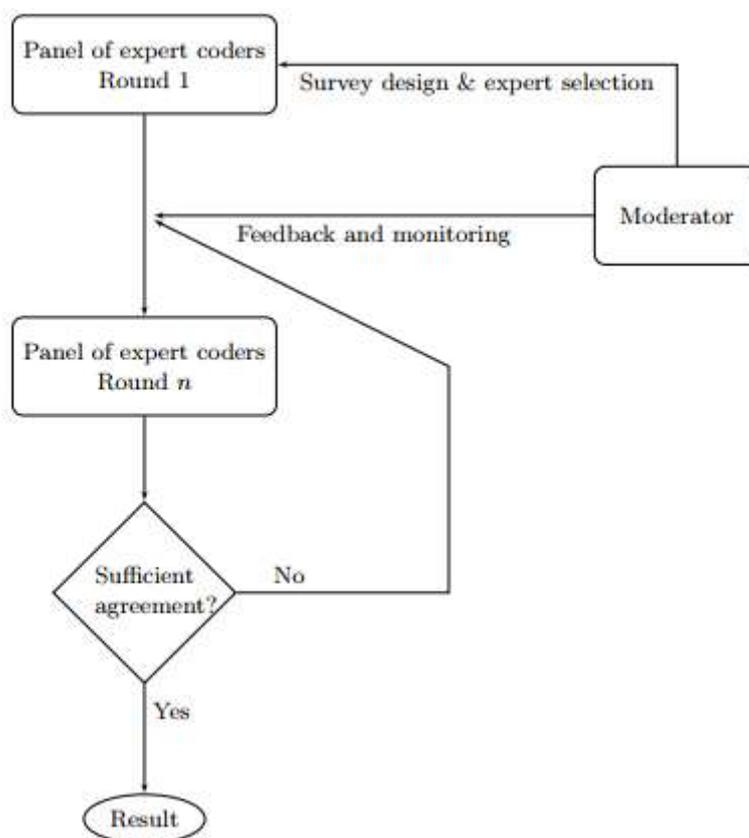
and aims of the application. For Wahl-O-Mat, Stemwijzer and Vokskabin, acting in good faith, impartiality and a non-partisan approach are indispensable. In this context, every Hungarian political party measured and included by the market research institutes will get the chance to complete the questionnaires and justify its answers prior to the general elections, local elections or European parliamentary elections. Acting in good faith and impartiality are important first and foremost because the answers received from the political parties and the creation and analysis of the tests serve two purposes: to provide information and political education for the electorate in a playful form, and to utilise the data collected in this manner for exclusively scientific research. Vokskabin's objectives include contributing to the transparency of Hungarian political life and providing information on the views of the political parties to the users. The main tool for achieving this is to strive for collaboration on a broad basis. To this end political parties, the media, non-governmental organisations and students are involved in the process of wording and evaluating the questions.

The research seminar provides an opportunity for 22 students of ELTE and Andrásy University to become an active part of the Vokskabin editorial team in 2018. Divided up into smaller groups, the task of the students is to elaborate the positions of the Hungarian parties on international politics and on issues defined by the Hungarian parties, and, with technical support from researchers of Andrásy University, to discuss these among themselves and make the elaborated views available for Vokskabin users. This "coding" is based on the Delphi method². When applying the method (see figure below) the analysts evaluate a set of questions on a chosen topic (in this case, Hungarian party politics) in multiple turns. In addition, their task, supported by experts (facilitators) is to discuss the group's average opinion and any diverging opinions so that any changes to the elaborated positions and to the positions of the parties³ asked earlier can be made.

²For further information on the effect of the Delphi method on online voting aids and its local application see: Gemenis, K. & van Ham, C.: Comparing Methods for Estimating Parties' Positions in Voting Advice Applications. In: Garzia, D. & Marschall, S. (ed.) (2014). Matching Voters with Parties and Candidates, ECPR Press, pp. 33-47.

³ Parties which are recognized by the Hungarian exit polls.

Figure 1: Delphi method



Source: Gemenis, K. et al. EUvox Coding Instructions 2014.

The members of the analyst groups are composed of 22 students of Andr ssy University and ELTE who study politics and international studies. The structure of the theoretical and practical parts of the research seminar is designed to provide preferably deep insight into applied political science, particularly into political education and political party research. All of this serves what is probably Vokskabin's most important objective: to create even more openness among young voters for public issues, and to have them make informed decisions at general elections, European parliamentary elections and local elections. However, it is important to note that while international surveys show the political involvement of Hungarian youngsters to be low⁴, Vokskabin researchers take into account the surveyed and measured political activity trends of Hungarian youngsters, which suggest that Hungarian tertiary and college students can best be mobilised by using forms of direct and online

⁴ See e.g. the Eurobarometer surveys of 2013 and 2016: http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_375_sum_en.pdf, p.5; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2016/eye2016/eb85_1_eye_2016_analytical_overview_en.pdf, p.28.

political participation.⁵ When examining the profile of Vokskabin users it emerges that the age group of 18 to 34 years has been the most active since Vokskabin's inception in 2014, and this, among other things, contradicts the misconception that youngsters show no interest in questions relating to social politics. This is particularly not true when addressing them in a modern and playful fashion which means departing from the traditional forms of encouraging political participation.

⁵ D. Oross: Changes in the political involvement of Hungarian youngsters [Oross, D. A magyar fiatalok politikai részvételének változása], http://metszetek.unideb.hu/files/metszetek%202016_4_03_oross.pdf, p.38.