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Voting Advice Applications as tools for researching and influencing voters: agenda setting and framing in European VAAs

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ABSTRACT

Voting Advice Applications are getting more and more popular throughout Europe and a lot of research prove that they have effects both on turnout and decisions of the electorate. This paper brings up the issue of possible agenda setting and framing effects which occur during the process of statements choice and construction in four European VAAs. Its aim is to check whether the statements are well-balanced or whether they suggest users a certain ideology, which is vital because if such an ideological bias is present in the Voting Advice Applications, it may influence the voters' political decisions. The research also checks whether the statements focus on the European levels of elections or include also internal political conflicts as well as what the main topics covered by the VAAs are. The outcomes prove that the bias in the medium of Voting Advice Applications is noteworthy, especially when it comes to pro-/anti-European Union dimension. The research also proves that there are a lot of statements which did not focus on the European level of the election as well as shows a map of dominant topics present in all European VAAs.

Keywords: agenda setting, framing, bias, Voting Advice Applications, European Parliament elections

1. INTRODUCTION

Voting Advice Applications – political communication tools matching voters with parties or candidates holding similar political views basing on their answers in an online questionnaire – are getting more and more popular in the world (in Europe, this type of tool is known mainly as Voting Advice Applications or shortly VAAs, in Poland, they are known as *navigators electoral*; Garzia, Marshal 2014, p. 227-228). In Europe, they are created since 1998 (Stem Wijzer, the Netherlands; Garzia, Trechsel et al. 2014, p. 25-41) and often reach significant part of voters (VAAs users constituted as much as 40% of the number of the citizens eligible to vote in the Netherlands in 2012; van Camp, Lefevere, Walgrave 2014, p. 227-228) and in other parts of the world, although still a relatively new phenomenon, they also enjoy more and more popularity. Voting Advice Applications also have a proven impact on election turnout (Gemenis, Rosema 2014, p. 281-289) as well as on political decision voters make (Wall, Krouvel, Vitiello 2014, p. 416-428). Therefore, they are becoming an important tool of political communication, targeted to improve the political knowledge among citizens and help them make decisions based on the views they share with parties. However, although the impact of VAAs is significant, still few research were done on statement choice and construction, which is extremely important because the statements themselves can frame or set the agenda for the VAAs users. That is why this paper tries to find out whether there is a certain ideology hidden behind the choice and structure of VAAs questionnaire.

The research question of this paper is whether European Voting Advice Applications face a framing bias in terms of the structure and selection of statements of their questionnaire. Basing on this question, the first hypothesis is: H1: There is an ideological framing bias in the selection and construction of statements of the questionnaire in the Voting Advice Applications for the elections to European Parliament.

There are also three further hypothesis: H1a: In the socio-economic dimension of the questionnaire, right-wing statements prevail; H1b: In the worldview dimension of the questionnaire, liberal statements prevail; H1c: In the European dimension of the questionnaire, the statements in favor of increased European integration prevail. The second hypothesis is: H2: A big part of the statements do not focus on the European level of elections. The third hypothesis is: H3: The most important topics covered in the statements are immigration, environment pollution and common foreign policy of the EU member states.

To check whether such a framing bias exists, the statements of four European-Union-wide Voting Advice Applications were examined (EU Profiler, EUI, EUVOX, Vote Match). The categorization key was used, which included three excluding dimensions: socio-economic, worldview and European. Within each dimensions there were two categories: in socio-economic dimension – left-wing and right-wing, in worldview dimension – liberal, and conservative and in European dimension – pro-integration and anti-integration. Each statement was matched with only one of the variables mentioned above which was possible because the statements are generally methodologically correct and do not touch multiple issues at once. To check whether the statements focus on the European level of elections the second categorization key was created, which checked whether a statement covers a topic which concerns the European Union and whether this topic can be affected by the EU institutions. To check which topics were the most important for the VAAs creators, the number of applications which covers each of them was counted. The outcomes were further analyzed in terms of existing frames and process of setting the agenda.

2. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND GOALS OF VAAS

Being an interesting and rewarding tool for their users, Voting Advice Applications are getting more and more popular among voters and politicians in many European countries and for several years, also in other parts of the world – especially in American countries such as Canada and Brazil (van Camp, Lefevere, Walgrave 2014, p. 227-228). The main reasons of the growing popularity of VAAs include the development of the Internet and the general tendency, noticeable in the behavior of voters in modern democracies, to blur the traditional socio-political divisions in society (Franklin, Mackie, Valen 1992) and the erosion of party importance (Dalton 2000, p. 19-37). In the world where parties often propose very similar or populist political programmes, voters do not directly identify themselves with political parties but are more individualistic. As it turns out, such voters may add to the group of undecided voters who, while voting in elections, are guided by motives other than party or class affiliation. On the contrary, they often make their political decisions based on the assessment of the convergence of their views and the ones of the chosen candidate or party. This phenomenon, based on the assumption of the rationality of voters and the existence of their knowledge about political offers of particular parties, is known as *issue voting* (Rabinowitz, Macdonald 1989, p. 93-121) and is the theoretical framework for the creation of Voting Advice Applications.

One of the main purposes of Voting Advice Applications is providing users with political information. They are perceived as educational platforms for voters, bringing the offers of individual political parties or candidates closer to users. This function is particularly important in a multiparty political system, especially one characterized by a large fragmentation of the political scene, where a voter faces a hard task of comparing individual parties, which requires a lot of work and time (Anderson, Fosgen 2014, p. 218-219). Many voters do not make this effort and decide to abstain or vote on non-substantive grounds, which make them prone to populist messages (Delli Carpini, Keeter 1996). Voting Advice Applications try to offer a solution to this problem, estimating the voter's world view based on the answers given in the online questionnaire and comparing it with the world view of individual parties or candidates (Ramonite 2010, p. 117-147). To make such information more accessible, VAAs usually present it in a visual form: bar charts, a two-dimensional coordinate system on which voter's and committees' views are placed or a spider graph. In addition, many Voting Advice Applications include additional information, e.g. about the elections in question or about all the available political options.

As they present the offer of individual committees to voters and even r e c o m m e n d individual committees or candidates basing on the congruence of their views, Voting Advice Applications are becoming an important element of political communication during the election campaign (Krouwel, Vitiello, Wall 2014, p. 67-91). What is more, recent research prove their influence on the outcomes of the elections in the countries where they are most popular. According to Kostas Gemenis and Martin Rosema (2014, p. 281-289), the use of VAAs increased the elections turnout by 4.4% in comparison to a scenario when the VAAs did not exist. This mobilizing effect is particularly visible in groups of people with lower education levels, younger people, those with weak or no party identification and less knowledgeable about politics. Additionally, according to Matthew Wall, André Kromwel and Thomas Vitiello (2014, p. 416-428), a significant impact of the recommendation users were given on their electoral decision can be noted, provided that the party in question was at all considered by the voter as one of those for which he could vote. Basing on such research outcomes, it is not surprising

that all elements of the methodology of VAAs are very important as they may have an impact on the obtained recommendations.

One of the important issues affecting the result obtained by the user is the choice of questionnaire statements (Walgrave et al. 2009, p. 1161-1180) and methods of constructing these statements (Gemenis 2013, p. 268-295). For tools such as Voting Advice Applications to operate effectively and provide voters with reliable and impartial information on the views of committees and candidates, restrictive methodological principles must be met. Therefore, the selection of statements should not focus only on one dimension of the political scene or suggest any particular ideological attitude. It is, for instance, important to appropriately balance the number of statements regarding the socio-economic dimension or worldview dimension, so that none of them dominate the whole study. After all, Voting Advice Applications are supposed to reflect the multiplicity of topics and views which are present in the discourse of the public sphere. As Voting Advice Applications are educational tools and can be considered Internet media, it is also necessary to pay attention to whether the statements do not present a certain ideology, e.g. mainly the right-wing or mainly the left-wing approach. This is because the domination of one of the ideological poles may suggest the user a certain attitude (as in models of framing and agenda setting), even though it is still possible for the user to choose the *I disagree* answer for each of the statements.

3. AGENDA SETTING AND FRAMING THEORIES

Do Voting Advice Applications' creators – intentionally or not – create a certain bias while preparing the statements of applications' questionnaire? This research question is extremely important when we assume that Voting Advice Applications are a kind of Internet medium, which thanks to its often wide range, can have a significant impact on political decisions. To find out whether there is a kind of biased framing or agenda setting in the VAAs, it is necessary to focus first on the framing and agenda setting theories themselves.

The first modern theory of media effects of the two mentioned above is the agenda setting theory. Dietram Scheufele and David Tewksbury (2007, p. 9-20) summarize it in saying that according to the agenda setting theory "there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences." According to this view and the first study of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972, p. 176-187) which introduced the agenda setting theory, media do not influence what people think but what they think about. However, this basic theory of agenda setting quickly became very popular in the academic circles, which led to significant alternations in it. McCombs himself consider now his agenda setting theory as something broader, adding an additional layer – attributes (2005, p. 543-557). He calls this 2nd phase of agenda setting theories the attributive agenda setting and claims that media do not only tell people what to think about but also how to think about it using attributes that are becoming associated with certain topics. This latter understanding of agenda setting is very close to the other modern media effects theory known as the framing theory.

Similarly to agenda setting, framing is also a broad theory, defined differently by different members of academia. According to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007, p. 9-20) framing "is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences." This definition covers greatly the main meaning of

framing in media studies but at the same time, it is also very general and tells little about different aspects of framing. More precise definition was introduced by Robert Entman (1993, p. 51-58), according to whom "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the items described." Both definitions seem to be very similar to the 2nd level agenda setting theory. But are they really so interchangeable?

According to McCombs (2005, p. 543-557), framing is in fact a part of attributive agenda setting theory. He notices that not all attributes are frames and frame is "a dominant attribute in a message," a type of central theme of a message. In his opinion, agenda setting function of media means to promote some topics among audiences by the media – both by showing them at all and by the way how the issues are shown. Another understanding of the relation between framing and agenda setting is presented by Entman (2007, p. 163-173) who enumerates four functions of frames: 1) problem definition, 2) causal analysis, 3) moral judgment and 4) remedy proposition. According to Entman (2007, p. 163-173), framing is a broader category than agenda setting, the latter being only "another name for successfully performing the first function of framing: defining problems worthy of public and government attention." In his opinion, framing is an umbrella category which includes both defining the problem and choosing ways to present it to audiences. But to make the area of media effects less complicated with multiple theories which he considers to be similar, Entman (2007, p. 163-173) also proposes a general term which could include all of them, a framing bias, which will be described later.

On the other hand, there are a lot of academics who consider agenda setting and framing as completely different theories which should be clearly distinguished. Dietram Scheufele and Shanto Iyengar (2012) divide media effects into two categories: salience-based ones which emphasize importance, salience, visibility of certain news and to which they count agenda setting and priming theories (priming is a process of setting standards in communication), and applicability effects to which they include framing. What is more, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007, p. 9-20) distinguish three other levels of differences between the two theories: news production, news processing, and locus of an effect. According to them, agenda setting is a memory-based theory and more exposure to certain message is enough to achieve an effect of the audience. Framing, however, is an applicability theory which means that labels are processed on a deeper level, require not only exposure but also attention and depend on information schema and culture of the audience.

Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, the most important being calling first approach too generalized and calling the second one too detailed. Of course, when the research focuses on very specific area of media effects, it is probably necessary to distinguish between the theories. However, for the use of more systematic research and of this article such a detailed analysis is too complex because the goal of it is to check whether there is any ideological bias in the statements of the VAAs questionnaire. Therefore, the definition of bias by Entman (2007, p. 163-173) will be used as a theoretical tool combining the agenda setting and framing theories. This definition combines content bias which means news that favors one side rather than treating both sides equally, and decision-making bias which covers motives and mindsets of those who produce the content. According to it, the bias is "consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts." Thus it can be understood broadly as impact of choosing topics and frames to promote a certain ideology and as such it best matches the goal of this paper.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This study was conducted on a sample of four Voting Advice Applications, available in the member states of the European Union for the elections to the European Parliament in 2009 and 2014. Such sampling, limited to the elections at European level, allowed for comparing topics of the statements and exclude the differences resulting from the level of election. The following Voting Advice Applications were examined: 1) EU Profiler (VAA defining the views of individual parties not only on the basis of experts' opinions, but also on the parties' self-positioning, a project of the European University Institute; 2009); 2) EUI (the first social Voting Advice Application, a project of the European University Institute; 2014), 3) EUVOX 2014 (a European project, carried out by academic consortium Preferences Matcher; 2014), 4) Vote Match (a part of the pan-European project Vote Match Europe, coordinated by the non-governmental organization Pro-Demos from the Netherlands; 2014). In total, 106 statements were obtained, successively 28, 28, 30 and 20.

Basing on the analysis of selected problems of the Voting Advice Applications, the following research hypotheses were put forward:

H1: There is an ideological framing bias in the selection and construction of statements of the questionnaire in the Voting Advice Applications for the elections to European Parliament.

H1a: In the socio-economic dimension of the questionnaire, right-wing statements prevail.

H1b: In the worldview dimension of the questionnaire, liberal statements prevail.

H1c: In the European dimension of the questionnaire, the statements in favor of increased European integration prevail.

H2: A big part of the statements do not focus on the European level of elections.

H3: The most important topics covered in the statements are immigration, environment pollution and common foreign policy of the EU member states.

In order to check the validity of the hypotheses, 106 statements from four Voting Advice Applications were examined. To check the H1 as well as H1a, H1b and H1c hypotheses the statements were encoded using a categorization key on a scale from 0 to 1 in a following way: 1) The socio-economic dimension was coded as 1 (applicable) when issues of economy, taxation and business were considered or 0 (non-applicable) otherwise. Within this dimension the left-wing statements have been coded (1 – applicable, 0 – non-applicable) when the statement touched the issue from a perspective of economically left wing, e.g. higher taxation for the rich and distribution of the money for the poor, and right-wing (1 – applicable, 0 – non-applicable) when the statement took a right-wing perception of economy e.g. freedom of trade; 2) The worldview dimension was coded as 1 (applicable) when the statement touched the issue of internal politics and nation's worldview, e.g. right for homosexuals to marry or 0 (non-applicable) otherwise. Within this dimension liberal statements were coded (1 – applicable, 0 – non-applicable) when the statement took the liberal and progressive worldview perspective e.g. right to carry euthanasia and conservative (1 – applicable, 0 – non-applicable) in case of right-wing perspective, e.g. protection of unborn children; 3) The European dimension has been coded as 1 (applicable) when the statement touched the external politics, strictly connected with the European Union, e.g. the European Union law and treaties or 0 (not applicable). As part of this dimension statements promoting broader integration (pro-integration) were coded (1 –

applicable, 0 – non-applicable) when the statement took a pro-European Union view and framed the issue in a way that suggest the European Union is something good and desirable, and opposing the integration (anti-integration) and promoting the greater importance of nation states (1 – applicable, 0 – non-applicable) when the statement framed the issue in a way that the European Union integration should be kept within the status quo or lowered. The categories used in determining the dimensions of the political scene were exclusive.

To check the H2 hypothesis the statements were encoded using a categorization key on a scale from 0 to 1, in two dimensions: 1) statements which concerns European Union issues (1 if it is true, 0 if not) and 2) issues that may be affected by the EU institutions' decisions (1 if it is true and 0 if not). To check the H3 hypothesis the number of Voting Advice Applications which covers each of them was counted. It was also checked whether the most prolific statements concerns European Union issues and whether they cover issues that may be affected by the EU institutions' decisions, using the categorization key prepared to check the H2 hypothesis.

5. RESULTS

To check the H1 hypothesis and its sub-hypotheses the statements were categorized in one of the three dimensions and then in one of the poles within each dimension using the categorization key. The outcomes of the conducted research can be found in the Table 1.

Table 1. Ideological bias of VAAs questionnaire statements.

		EU Profiler	EUI	EUVOX	Vote Match	Average
Socio-economic dimension		0,29	0,29	0,23	0,25	0,26
	Left-wing	0,38	0,38	0,29	0,60	0,41
	Right-wing	0,62	0,62	0,71	0,40	0,59
Worldview dimension		0,39	0,39	0,50	0,35	0,41
	Liberal	0,55	0,45	0,67	0,71	0,59
	Conservative	0,45	0,55	0,33	0,29	0,41
European dimension		0,32	0,32	0,27	0,40	0,33
	Pro-integration	0,89	0,78	0,38	0,87	0,73
	Anti-integration	0,11	0,22	0,62	0,13	0,27

Source: The author's own research (por. Lorenc 2018, p. 195).

First of all, it was checked whether there is a dominance of any of three dimensions covered throughout the research: socio-economic, worldview and European dimension of the political sphere. On average, 26% of statements were classified to the socio-economic dimension, 41% to the worldview dimension, and 33% to the European dimension. The disproportion between the socio-economic dimension and the worldview dimension is clearly visible – almost twice as many statements were qualified as the world-view dimension than as socio-economic dimension. There is also a disproportion between both socio-economic and worldview dimension, and European dimension – the latter equals one-third of all statements while the first and the second less and more than one-third accordingly.

Once a general share of the three dimensions was examined, the individual dimensions were also taken into consideration to check to which of the two opposing ideological poles the statement can be qualified. Within the socio-economic dimension, two poles were distinguished: right-wing (on average 59%) and left-wing (on average 41%). It is worth noting that in three out of the four analyzed Voting Advice Applications, the right-wing statements prevail.

Within the worldview dimension two poles were distinguished: liberalism (on average 59%) and conservatism (on average 41%). The differences in the results of individual Voting Advice Applications are similar as in the case of the socio-economic dimension: in three VAAs, statements with the liberal profile prevail, in one of them the conservative statements dominate. However, it should be noticed that in two cases the differences are minimal.

The European dimension was divided into the following two poles: in favor of greater integration within the European Union (pro-integration) and against the increase of such integration (anti-integration). This time, the ideological bias is clearly visible: the vast majority (on average 73%) of the statements were qualified within the pro-integration pole, while only 27% of statements on average – within the anti-integration pole. Only one Voting Advice Application breaks out from this dominant tendency – only EUVOX included phrases classified as anti-integration in most of the statements regarding European integration.

The above-mentioned results show the small average domination of the right-wing over the left-wing statements in the socioeconomic dimension, the small average dominance of liberalism over conservatism in the worldview dimension and the significant average dominance of pro-integration over anti-integration in the European dimension. These trends are also visible within the individual VAAs. Such outcomes are worrying because they suggest an ideological bias present in the European VAAs. Therefore, the creators of Voting Advice Applications should pay more attention to the selection of statements for the future VAA tools in order not to suggest answers to the users of the applications.

To check the H2 hypothesis the statements were examined in reference to whether they concern the issues of the European Union, both its general rules as mentioned in the European Treaties and the issues the EU regulates. Then, it was checked whether the European Union institutions can have any influence on the topics covered in the statements or whether they depend strictly on the member states' decisions. The results are presented in the Table 2.

From the four VAAs examined only Vote Match achieved good results when it comes to both dimensions, scoring 100% in both of them. The other three achieved much less spectacular outcomes, two of which getting around 50% in both dimensions and one having only 37% of statements concerning the EU issues and only 27% topics that can be affected by the EU institutions. These outcomes are an alarming discovery, considering that the theoretical assumption of the VAAs is that voters decide basing on the closeness of their and their

representatives' opinions on current issues. Therefore, it was also checked which topics – if not European – is covered by these VAAs.

The analysis revealed that the statements which covered other than European topics can be divided into three categories: 1) general statements which focus on basics of liberalism and conservatism, liberal economy and welfare state; 2) Europe-wide problems which are not solved by the EU but rather are in the hands of the member states; 3) country-specific topics which covers internal policy topics. Both category 1) and 3) should not be covered by European level VAAs as the goal of the VAAs is to help voters make a decision basing on the closeness of their and their representatives' opinions on the issues on which they may have an impact, not on their general or internal politics sympathies.

Table 2. Share of VAAs questionnaire statements which concerns European Union issues or may be affected by the EU Institutions' decisions.

	EU Profiler	EUI	EUVOX	Vote Match	Average
Concerns the EU	0,57	0,50	0,37	1,00	0,61
Can be affected by the EU institutions	0,46	0,46	0,27	1,00	0,55

Source: The author's own research.

Finally, to check the third hypothesis all the statements were gathered into a set of topics to which they appeal. The topics covered by three or four VAAs are included in the Table 3. In some cases, a certain VAA covered a topic not only in one but in several statements, which was indicated in the Table 3 as extensive coverage.

Out of twelve statements which were covered in more than two VAAs five were covered in all of them and extensively covered in three of them. These three topics included immigration into the EU, environment pollution prevention and restriction of civil liberties for the greater good and the remaining two included common foreign policy and same sex marriages legalization. Three of them are strictly European problems, solved by the EU institutions while two remain internal decisions of the member states.

The issues covered in three out of four VAAs included holding a referendum in each country to approve any new European Treaty, raising the EU own tax, reducing workers' protection regulations to fight the economic crisis, legalizing soft drugs, improving and strengthening the EU security and defense policy, stricter punishment for criminals and reducing government spending. Only three out of seven topics may be considered EU problems. In total, only half of the most prolific topics in the four VAAs may be considered EU problems, other remaining European issues but to be solved by the member states. These results confirm the H2 outcomes, suggesting that only a half of the statements covers the topics they were designed to cover.

What is more 50% of the topics are from the worldview dimension while 33% are from the European dimension and only 17% from the socio-economic dimension. This is a clear

disproportion, especially in favor of worldview dimension, which may be a result of the extensive media coverage of these topics.

Table 3. The most important topics covered in the VAAs

No.	Topic	Number of VAAs which covered it
1.	Immigrants in the EU	4 (extensively)
2.	Environment pollution prevention	4 (extensively)
3.	Restriction of civil liberties for the greater good	4 (extensively)
4.	Common foreign policy	4
5.	Same sex marriage legalization	4
6.	Referendum to approve any new European Treaty	3
7.	The EU own tax	3
8.	Reduction of workers' protection regulations	3
9.	Drugs legalization	3
10.	The EU security and defense policy	3
11.	Punishment for criminals	3
12.	Government spending reduction	3

Source: The author's own research.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the conducted research verified all of the three hypotheses and three sub-hypotheses set. First of all, it was found that both in selection and construction of statements of the questionnaire of the Voting Advice Applications for the elections to European Parliament there is an ideological framing bias.

In the selection of statements, the socio-economic dimension is clearly underrepresented while the worldview dimension is strongly overrepresented. This may be due to the fact that worldview dimension topics are widely discussed in the media, thanks to which they become the main points of public debate. Therefore, when academics prepare the set of statements for the VAA questionnaire, worldview topics seem perfect to depict the differences between individual committees: both politics and voters have their strong views on such *media topics*. However, this disproportion can also indicate an agenda setting effect: if the topics which

polarize the society are put in the first place, before other topics, Voting Advice Applications users can make their decisions basing on the *media topics* and do not even think about socio-economic issues which are equally important for their everyday lives.

When it comes to the construction of VAAs' statements, it was proven that there is also an ideological framing bias in this process, which allows to verify all three sub-hypotheses. The research revealed a slight dominance of the right-wing over the left-wing statements in the socioeconomic dimension, a slight dominance of liberalism over conservatism in the worldview dimension and a significant dominance of pro-integration over anti-integration statements in the European dimension. Such an ideological disparity suggests two important issues: 1) the framing bias is present in the general topics chosen by the creators of Voting Advice Applications, 2) the topics are shown in a specific way, promoting a certain worldview: right-wing economy, liberal worldview and pro-UE-integration approach.

In socio-economic and worldview dimension the average framing bias is small, which can suggest that it is only due to a coincidence or too little attention put to this aspect by the VAAs creators. Still, it is worth noticing that the specific outcomes of each VAA show a clear tendency maintained in most VAAs which can suggest a decision-making bias of the VAAs creators. In the European dimension, on the other hand, the framing bias is so significant that it is impossible to leave it unnoticed. It can be explained by the fact that the VAAs were prepared by the European Union consortium of researchers and their role is to support the institutions of the European Union. However, it is also worth noticing that statements labeled as pro-integration are the ones that are supportive for the deeper integration, which leaves the ones that were supportive for the status quo even less numerous than the whole category of anti-integration. Therefore, the framing bias which is formed by the construction of VAAs statements is not only pro European Union but also pro stronger integration, although some voters may want to decrease the integration process we experience nowadays.

The goal of the second part of the research was to find out whether the statements of the European level VAAs really enables voters to vote for the members of the European Parliament according to their views on issues in which they will represent their voters. The results show that although the VAAs considered were all prepared for the elections on the European level (to the European Parliament), the European problems take only a little more than a half of all statements on average and the problems which can be solved by the EU institutions take even less. It can be considered an under-representation when we consider that the basic theoretical background of VAAs is the theory of issue voting, according to which voters' intention is to choose candidates who are the closest to their views and thus will represent best their interest. So in the elections on the European level, European issues should take a significant part of all statements, allowing voters to compare their views with committees on the European topic. However, the research shows that it is not the case in the Voting Advice Applications considered. This should be an important message for the creators of future VAAs who should keep the theoretical background of their research.

It is understandable that to distinguish between national parties who suggest their candidates to the European Parliament it is often easy to include some general topics, European-wide topics which are, however, not decided at the EU level or even internal policy topics. However, it seems clear that at least the first and the latter should not be included in the VAAs prepared for the elections to the European Parliament. The ideal situation would be to include only the topics which can be proceeded by the European Parliament itself. However, as the VAAs considered are probably prepared not only to be a guide for the voters but also to obtain

data for further research on the societies' opinions on certain topics, it is understandable that they may cover also some other statements, concerning European-wide problems.

Finally, the analysis of the main topics covered by the VAAs allowed creating a map of issues important for the European citizens, as chosen by the VAAs creators. As forecasted in the H3 hypothesis, some topics were particularly visible in the selected statements of all the analyzed tools, especially the immigration policy, common foreign policy and environment pollution. It is worth noticing that only a half of these topics covered the EU problems or problems that can be solved by the EU institutions. This again proves the H2 hypothesis and suggests that the European VAAs should in fact be more European-centered. What is more, 50% of the topics covered are from the worldview dimension while 33% are from the European dimension and only 17% from the socio-economic dimension. These outcomes is also parallel with the H1 hypothesis results and prove a strong disproportion in the selection of topics to be used in the VAAs.

These results allow to make conclusions using the agenda setting theory. On the one hand, such outcomes may be due to the fact that the worldview dimension has more presence in the traditional media, making it a valuable waypoint for the creators of the European VAAs. On the other hand, the VAAs creators should also remember that they create a tool basing on which voters make their voting decisions and as the outcomes show that the ideological bias and presence of wrong levels of elections are a problem of European VAAs, they should adjust their forthcoming projects basing on these insights to prevent further methodological shortcomings.

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