Voters are crying out for better information about elections – here's your opportunity to help

Voters in the UK need more information about elections and candidates, particularly for local elections. **Joe Mitchell**, *a director at Democracy Club, invites you to come and help provide it for them.*

Voters need information to make decisions…

Readers of this blog will no doubt be aware that there are local elections across much of England and in Northern Ireland on 2 May 2019. Or, at least, these are scheduled for 2 May at the time of writing. But can you name your candidates? Do you know what they look like? Do you have any way of contacting them?

For many voters, the first time they know who their local candidates are will be via the ballot paper, by which point it will be a little late to do any research. Voters need better information on elections. After the local elections in 2017, The Electoral Commission commissioned a survey of 2,000 people in areas where local elections had taken place:

> We asked people in England with local government elections if they felt they had enough information to make an informed choice on who to vote for – one-third of all respondents, including nearly half of 18–34 year olds, disagreed.

We also know that searches similar to 'who are my candidates' are among the top searches on Google on and around election days. Despite this appetite for information, no public institution maintains a list of elections, let alone a list of candidates or any information about them.

…Democracy Club tries to get it to them

[Democracy Club](#) was constituted as a non-profit community interest company to try to solve this problem and give people answers. Our vision is of a country with the digital foundations to support everyone's participation in democratic life. We believe that people's expectations of access to information have changed as a result of digital technology, and if we don't work hard to meet those expectations, they will lose trust in the democratic process (if they have any left…). For starters, this means answering the most basic questions about the most popular democratic events: elections. Where are elections happening? What for? Who are the candidates? How will I choose who to vote for? Where do I vote? And, fairly importantly, who won?

This information does generally exist in digital form, somewhere. It's just scattered across local authority websites, candidate websites, local party websites and social media, and not always in accessible formats.

Democracy Club's volunteers (and some robots) bring it all together in one place. This database then powers interactive tools that are searchable in seconds – and all the voter needs to know is their postcode.

That data is then made accessible to anyone with access to an audience. The idea is to get the information to where the voters are. That means directly in Google search results, in Facebook news feeds, in vote quizzes, or emailed directly to voters. We also host our own website: Who Can I Vote For? And the data is used at LSE's Democratic Dashboard and The Electoral Commission's Your Vote Matters.

It's a tiny drop in the ocean of what is required in terms of digital infrastructure to enable everyone to take part in democratic life, but it's a step in the right direction. In the long-run, we envision much of this infrastructure being provided by some institution of the state – one that might not exist yet. But we've proved that the need is real. To date, over 10 million people have accessed Democracy Club data.

You can help!

Today, Thursday 4 April, across England (and on Monday 8 April in Northern Ireland), local authorities will publish candidate lists ('statements of persons nominated') for the upcoming local elections as PDFs on their websites. We are throwing a number of crowdsourcing parties across England (and one in Belfast) to turn this information into useful, accessible data.

We'll be in the following locations – you are very warmly invited to join us:

- Bath, 4 April
- Belfast, 9 April
- Birmingham, 8 April
- Cambridge, 4 April
- Huddersfield, 4 April
- London, 5 April
- Stroud, 6 April
- Stockton-on-Tees, 9 April

We're planning a bonus crowdsourcing event at London School of Economics on 15 April. It's possible we'll have converted all the local authority PDFs into useful data by then, so the next step is to add layers of more helpful information (beyond simply the name and party of each candidate provided via the PDFs), such as links to social media, photos or candidate statements. The work to build better voter information is never done…

For more information about Democracy Club, follow us on twitter or see our homepage.

This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of Democratic Audit.

About the author

Joe Mitchell is a director of Democracy Club.

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