

A review of the top Voter Advice Applications for the 2015 General Election

By Democratic Audit UK

*Ahead of May 7th General Election, there are more Voter Advice Applications than ever before. These webpages and apps allow voters to see which party best matches their views on policies, helping to better inform voter choice and to encourage voter participation. We asked LSE USApp's **Chris Gilson** to review this election's top VAA's, with the results below.*



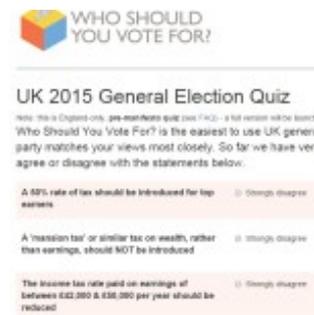
Credit: Quinn Dombrowski, CC BY SA 2.0

The general election is now only weeks away and pollsters and pundits are scrambling over each other to make the most accurate predictions as to how the votes will fall and who will be heading to Number 10 after May the 7th. But it is very likely that even this close to the vote, many people are still undecided. In January a [Survation poll](#) commissioned by the Daily Mirror estimated that as many as 31 percent of people were unsure as to how they would vote.

If you are one of these undecided voters, how will you decide how to vote? It's important to make an informed decision, but for most people poring over each party's manifesto and/or website is simply not on their agenda. Thankfully, recent weeks have seen a panoply of Voter Advice Applications (or VAAs) spring up to help you make your decision. I've reviewed them all to let you know which are the easiest to use and the most helpful in making your decision. Each of these will give you the party that your values align with the closest, according to their questions, but they may not necessarily agree with one another.

Who should you vote for – from Thoughtplay

First up is the accessibly named “Who should you vote for” from Thoughtplay, a creative duo based in Oxford who are known for other quizzes such as “What should I read next”. Thoughtplay’s VAA is relative simple, with about 20 questions on a Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree scale on the range of issues that you’d expect, including constitutional reform, defence, benefits, and taxation. It also has the helpful quirk of asking at the end what you think your result will be. After entering your information you’re given a chart of how much your answers agree with each party out of 100, e.g. 80 for Labour, 60 for Green, and gives you the link to your top party’s website should you wish to examine their parties in greater detail. My only worry is that some questions assume readers have read up on government policies – for example, asking you to agree or disagree with “Working age benefit levels should be frozen (rather than rise)” assumes that you know what working age benefit levels currently are.



The verdict: Relatively simple, but quick.

Vote for Policies

“Vote for policies” is a dedicated non-profit which has been supported by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust and some other donors. Their focus is getting people to consider what the parties are offering rather than on who leads them. You begin by selecting the issues which are important to you, which then affects how long the survey will take. I’m not sure about this approach, with every issue stated to take 5 minutes to cover. I think most people will be put off by this, or will reduce the number of issues that they say are important so that they don’t have to slog through a 35-minute survey. Users are then taken through a summary of each party’s anonymized policies and asked if they would consider voting for the party based on them. This is then repeated, but for each issue you’ve selected as important, which involves reading a large amount of text quite repetitively.



This approach is a bit problematic as it forces you to make a black and white choice between considering voting for policies or not at all – what if (as I did) you support some policies but vehemently disagree with others? It’s also easy to become confused as some parties policies are relatively similar to others, which also makes choosing more difficult. When that’s (eventually) all done you enter your postcode, and then are given a pie chart breakdown of which party’s policies you went for. I found my result odd as it listed one party at 25 percent that I would never vote for, and completely left out my intended vote. I think this a symptom of the fact even the most extreme parties will have at least one policy that most people would agree with, even if it’s to keep the status quo on an issue. But that doesn’t make me likely to vote for them if I’m completely against their main policy platform.

The verdict: Agonizingly slow and text heavy, putting a huge onus on the user to read a large amount of policy text, with a result that seemed counterintuitive.

Positiondial

Positiondial has partnered with the University of Westminster Centre for the Study of Democracy to help you generate your own dial of positions based on a series of questions. It's a fairly intuitive three stage process, where you first guess who your party match will be, and then can answer up to three levels of questions on issues, each more specific than the last. Each question changes the look of your Positiondial, which has sections which show how your responses indicate how strongly your position on the issues is. The final graphic is a little difficult to understand, but you are also presented with your percentage party matches as well.



The verdict: Quick and very easy to use, with the potential for getting a close level of detail about your political positions. The 'dial' aspect is a bit of a gimmick, though, and I'm not sure how useful people will find it.

*Votematch from Unlock Democracy

Votematch is from Unlock Democracy, which is a non-profit, non-partisan campaign for democratic reform. The site (and app) first asks you to drag and drop issues to set them in the order you find them important, and then enter your UK country and postcode. You're then taken through agree/disagree questions on specific policy issues and asked to rate how important the issue is to you. Helpfully, you can see your progress via a white bar at the top of the screen that grows with each question you answer. The ability to skip questions if desired is a good one as well. After completing these, you are then asked to eliminate any party which you would never vote for, and then presented with your party matches by percentages. This section also gives you the chance to see how other users from your constituency matched with the parties – which is helpful to see how you fit with your local population.



The verdict: An easy to use, colourful VAA which gives you an indication of how your policy and party preferences fit within your local community. One to send to your friends who really are undecided.

Who shall I vote for?

"Who shall I vote for" is an independent site which is part run by the CEO of a digital publishing company. The quiz gives you a list of 16 topics, of which you are asked to choose at least three. The ability to choose five or ten at random is also for a helpful one for people who might wish to do the text more quickly. You are then given ten questions for each topic, which has a slider for you to assign the topic's importance. This is actually more of an annoyance – the other tests show that it's far quicker to give users the chance to select importance on a scale than to manually slide the bar along at least thirty times. After the policy questions, this VAA has a 'Principles' section with options like



“Do you believe that as a society we need to become more politically correct to avoid offending minority groups?”, and “What principles do you strive towards in life, personal success or co-operating with others?”. The answer options given to users are binaries, such as “Yes we do/No we don’t”, and does not allow for any middle ground, making this part of the test seem like it’s trying to push people into a stereotypical left/right box. Users are then given a percentage score for your party alignment, along with a podium graphic with the top three party leaders’ heads grafted onto coloured figures. You can then compare your result with other users from your constituency, or go further into parties policy pledges.

The verdict: *Good and usable, if slightly idiosyncratic VAA, which gives you the option to explore the parties further after completing the test.*

Who gets my vote? From Queen Mary University

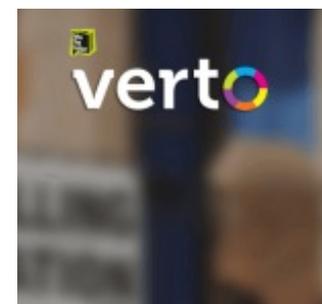
This VAA comes from Queen Mary’s School of Politics, and feels a bit more rigorous than the other so far. Like the other VAAs it asks you if you agree or disagree with various policy statements, but it also asks which party you feel closest to, which you are actually intending to vote for (or if you are undecided), and which you voted for in the last election, if you did. You are then asked to rate what you consider your position to be on two axes: economic left and right, and socially liberal and conservative. Interestingly, you can also rank where you think each of the major parties is on this axis as well, and then how likely it is you will ever vote for each party. Your results are given under three headings- your party match, where you are on a political map of economic and socio-cultural values compared to the parties, and your proximity to other users.



The verdict: *This is a great VAA, which is very straightforward and not only gives you party rankings, as the others do, but also gives you a sense of how close your values are in relation to the parties’. If you’re a politics geek, then this is the one for you.*

Verto from Bite the Ballot / Demos

Verto has been created by a team-up of Bite the Ballot – a not-for-profit which aims to encourage young people to participate more in the democratic process, and Demos think tank. I used Verto on my laptop, but the interface is definitely geared towards those reading it on their smartphones, so it’s obvious that they’re trying to focus on a younger audience which is more au fait with swiping left or right than typing on a keyboard. The app allows you to select specific policy areas, such as the economy, the environment, etc and then vote on specific policy statements with a tick or cross. The strength here is that you are not forced to answer every single question in a long series in order to progress – you can choose what’s important to you. Each statement is worded in natural language, such as “Everyone should be able to see a doctor within 48 hours”, which compares very well against the often stilted policy speak in some of the other apps which may have taken them straight from parties policy statements from their websites. Hyperlinks also make it very easy for users to learn more about the policy statement as well. Once you’ve answered a set number of questions,



you can then get a breakdown of how your views fit with the parties. Verto gives you your percentage match to each of the parties, as well as that of those in your area, and in England as a whole. You can also login and save your details if you want to stop part way though and come back later, or revisit your answers.

The verdict: Great for first time voters and for those whose main screen is their smartphone's. The accessibly written policy statements also stand out.

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***The Democratic Audit UK team were members of Votematch's voluntary, [independent advisory board](#).**

Note: this post represents the views of the author and not those of Democratic Audit UK. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

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