

## **Politics in Luxembourg: a new approach to analyze the participation and political representation in a pluralistic society (POLUX)**

### ***Project abstract***

The proposed research project consists in the conceptualization, the operationalization and the scientific evaluation of new methodological tools to analyze political participation and representation in Luxembourg. The innovative design of the project combines the study of two complementary online modules aimed at informing and enabling citizens to hold their representatives accountable for their public positions and actions.

First, POLUX aims at evaluating the electoral impact and the scientific usefulness of the online Voting Advice Application (VAA) tool that will be introduced in the context of the electoral research financed by the Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies for the coming national (and EU) elections of 2009. This tool will provide citizens with information on their political profile and how the latter matches with the political offer (parties and candidates), thereby giving them a voting 'advice' in case they would vote according to their proximities on a number of issues for which they would have indicated their preferences (their position on an issue and the importance they accord to a broader category of issues). Not only will voters but also citizens without voting rights (foreign residents, citizens under 18 years old) be invited to complete these online questionnaires, giving the social scientists' community a large quantity of information on people's values. The project will also allow for a number of analyses such as the positioning of parties and candidates in political space, the potential for using data drawn from VAAs as alternatives of traditional mass surveys in the future (by comparing data drawn from the two sources) and the political impact of VAAs on opinion formation, electoral behaviour and political participation at large.

The second objective consists in the setting up of a complementary tool, what we term here the Legislative Monitoring Application (LMA), which will enable citizens to check the voting behaviour of their representatives on legislation during the first part of the new parliamentary term. Through the analysis of these data on behaviour and those collected on attitudes for the purpose of the VAA instrument, the project be able to assess the performance of mandate theory in multi-party parliamentary democracy, evaluate the strength of party discipline and feed into a more general topic, political representation through parties and their action in parliament, a clearly under-researched field in Luxembourg. Overall, we aim at contributing to the scientific debates around the emerging field usually termed as 'e-democracy' and evaluating the potential and limits of its tools for social science research. The project clearly fits into wider research themes studied by the team at the University of Luxembourg and integration with European networks of comparative research is assured. It also has another dimension: as a large audience is expected to contribute to this large-scale experiment, benefits will also be generated for citizens in terms of non-costly gains in political information. This could serve the goals of increased political accountability and the related quality of governance, as well as needs for political integration in the specific demographic context of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

## List of total resources

Name of researcher	Partner institution	Position	Qualification Level
Philippe Poirier	University of Luxembourg	Coordinator of Research Program <a href="#"><i>Gouvernance européenne</i></a>	Lecturer authorized to manage research
Patrick Dumont	University of Luxembourg	Researcher	Doctorate
Raphaël Kies	University of Luxembourg	Scientific collaborator	Doctorate
Astrid Spreitzer	University of Luxembourg		Ph.D Candidate
Alexandre Treschel	European University Institute	Professor of Political Science	Lecturer authorized to manage research

## Current state of the art including your relevant previous work

Whatever the definition of democracy used by political scientists, observers or citizens, its presence involves political choices made by voters and that these choices have effects. Elections are therefore instruments of democracy, as they are supposed to link the preferences of citizens to the behavior of policymakers (Powell, 2000). Normative theories regarding representative democracy however award different functions to elections: a ‘majoritarian’ view would stress the effectiveness of elections in selecting a government and in making it accountable to the voters whilst a ‘consensual’ one would rather point at the function of electing a representative legislature that allows for the expression of a variety of minority preferences. In order to perform whichever of these main functions, a common requirement is that voters are knowledgeable enough to make an informed choice between sufficiently differentiable parties (either between two (groups of) competing parties, or a larger number of parties with less identifiable potential coalition preferences to form a government). According to V.O. Key, ‘voters are no fools’ (Key, 1966, p. 7), they evaluate parties, politicians and policies at the time of elections and may apply different criteria when choosing a specific party (or candidate): either those they feel most represented by, owing to the ideological roots and the segments of population the party appeals most to, those they feel close to according to electoral pledges over issues relevant to them and that they hope the party might fulfil if it becomes able to influence related policies after the elections, or those they judge as close and competent enough according to their performance in the past legislature (in power or, more rarely, in opposition).

Since the end of the 1960s, electoral research has shown that changes in social structures brought about by economic and technological changes have led either to a process of ‘dealignment’ vis-à-vis traditional political and social organizations, no longer perceived as representing the interests of voters, or to a process of ‘realignment’ on new cleavages such as the materialist / post-materialist one (Inglehart 1977; 1990). The numerical decline of traditional party clienteles (blue-collar workers, petty bourgeoisie, farmers) in favour of new white-collar middle class with no clear party loyalty, the convergence of life-styles, the process of secularisation and

individualization in our western societies have tremendously reduced votes based on structural cleavages such as class and religion and as an expression of a collective identity. Parties themselves have adapted their strategies and reoriented their appeal to this ever-increasing proportion of the 'floating electorate' (the rise of 'catch-allism'), furthering this evolution by a convergence in policy proposals (Budge et al. 2001). Scholars of the 'realignment' thesis argue that new values emerging from the post-industrial society have led to the creation of a new cleavage, evidenced by the creation of 'new left' and later green parties, potentially followed by a silent counter-revolution with the breakthrough of several 'new right' parties (Ignazi 1992). Others point to the fact stress that political parties have become less relevant in the representation of citizens' interests to the benefit of interest groups and other social movements and that we are witnessing a process of 'dealignment'. According to Katz and Mair (1995) they even become detached from society and form a political class embedded instead in the state (what is referred to as the cartel party thesis), and as a consequence we see a popular disengagement from the party political process, as evidenced by a falling electoral turnout and party membership in most established democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Party identification (the individual, affective attachment to a party) is in steep decline, electoral volatility on the rise (especially since the 1990s, see Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2006), as well as different forms of split-ticket voting and personal vote (see Dalton and Wattenberg 2000 and Dumont et al. 2006 for the case of Luxembourg), thereby indicating that voters increasingly base their electoral choice on specific issues and on individual political leaders and candidates instead of on loyalty to a party's core ideology.

In any case, the observed decline of traditional structural cleavages in explaining electoral behaviour over the past few decades suggests that voters are increasingly left with two main criteria to base their choice on: the electoral pledges of parties (identified by their leaders and candidates) and their past performance in implementing policy choices that are close to their own preferences. The media, which has become the dominant channel of political information and communication, reinforces this trend, as they focus on short term, concrete issues and political leaders rather than on abstract issues and interests. Moreover, although sophistication of voters is on the rise thanks to the democratization of education, increased complexities in public policy making (due to the growth of state, the rise of supra- and sub-national governance levels or the constraints on and interdependencies of political decisions in a globalized economy) have led to a growing cognitive distance between voters and political elites and a perceived transparency deficit with regard to the political process. These, in turn, lead to alienation with party politics and distrust vis-à-vis their representatives.

This disconnection with party-based representative democracy, well-documented in electoral research and also present in Luxembourg as evidenced by growing personal vote, inter-party panachage (the electoral system allows for a list vote or a personal vote amongst candidates of the same list or of different lists), the proportion of split-ticket voting between national and European elections (that take place simultaneously) or the trauma caused by a close result for the referendum on the European constitutional Treaty despite an almost unanimity in favour in parliament (for all these aspects see Fehlen et al. 2000; Dumont et al. 2006 and 2007) calls for a reappraisal of the functions of parties and elections as vehicles and instruments of democracy, or, alternatively, to an analysis of the potential realignments of electorates not yet translated in party political offer and competition. In either case, the current challenge on party-based representative democracy is patent, because due to a growing uncertainty about citizens' preferences and the

cartellization of political parties (becoming akin to para-statal agencies), representation mainly runs from above and no longer from below (Esaiasson et al, 1996). It is no longer voters' exogenous preferences that are translated in government policy but representatives present their own views for approval to citizens who are supposed to develop preferences over these positions. On the other hand, the unpredictability of a political agenda ever more influenced by the supra-national level and the interdependencies of decisions in a globalized world leads to a blurring of the concept of representation with the notion of accountability, as the dynamic relationship between the citizen and the representative is increasingly pushed towards an ex-post control rather than an ex-ante delegation act on the part of the voter (Andeweg 2003). Whatever the prospective or retrospective character of the vote, what is at stake is the quality of information at the disposal of citizens. The latter generally do not possess complete information over candidates, and, due to a lack of motivation or competence, prefer not to invest in costly search for information but rely on cognitive shortcuts, such as party cues, to guide their electoral choice (see Downs 1957). The danger of such a strategy is that political elites are the driving force in the process of opinion formation during electoral campaigns: according to Zaller (1992), it is indeed because they are badly informed that citizens have to rely on the cues and recommendations supplied by the political elites themselves. If citizens' capacities to seize their representatives' political positions and actions – therefore holding them more accountable – are enhanced and less dependent on political communication originating from the parties themselves, the cognitive distance between the public and the rulers could be reduced and transparency of the political process increased.

Two main theoretical and practical fields in contemporary political science propose recipes for empowering citizens in the political process by providing them with more accurate information over political issues. Deliberative democracy suggests that debates amongst citizens over political issues, with the help of experts, stakeholders or even politicians, may lead to an informed preference formation (Habermas, 1996; Dryzek, 2000). Indeed, even though apathy and distrust amongst the public appears to be high, numerous experiments show that citizens are ready to engage in political debates amongst themselves and may adopt new opinions in the process (see, for the future of European Union, the European Citizens Consultation, a pan-European participatory project involving citizens from all 27 Member States, for which the research team was scientifically and organizationally in charge of Luxembourg's event, see [www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/9.0.html#c439](http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/9.0.html#c439)).

The second, which is at the core of the present project, is termed 'e-democracy', a subject field whose potential and limits has been the main research field of part of the research team based at the University of Luxembourg (see Kies and Kriesi 2005; Kies 2008). E-democracy consists of all electronic means of communication that enable/empower citizens in their efforts to hold rulers/politicians accountable for their actions in the public realm. Depending on the aspect of democracy being promoted, e-democracy may employ different techniques to increase the transparency of the political process, enhance the direct involvement and participation of citizens or improve the quality of opinion formation by opening new spaces of information and deliberation (Kies et al. 2003: 10). The setting-up of informative internet devices in the 'pre-voting sphere' could provide relevant, less political communication-dependent heuristic cues to voters who may wish not to invest much in finding out what the 'best electoral choice' would be for them, and may even in the process motivate some of them to make a more elaborate choice than they originally intended. Voting Advice Application (VAA) tools are designed to provide for

such relevant information on the positions of parties and candidates on a number of political issues, and to see how they match with personal preferences over these same issues. The first aim of the POLUX project is to evaluate the electoral impact and the scientific usefulness of these devices, by analyzing in particular the Voting Advice Application (VAA) that will be introduced for the first time in Luxembourg for the 2009 national and EU elections in the context of the electoral research conducted by the team of the University of Luxembourg and financed by the Chamber of Deputies.

VAA's generally consist of an electronic platform developing an online questionnaire and a system of factual information (laws, regulations, etc.) enabling voters and non-voters (such as non-nationals with no voting rights) to compare their political preferences over a number of issues with the positions and electoral pledges of parties and candidates during the electoral period. After having completed the online questionnaire, dynamic and playful figures and graphs are presented to the 'cyber-citizen' who can then discover which candidates – the latter having previously answered the same questions to publicize their positions – and parties are the closest to their own positions in general and also in relation to specific themes (ex: social policy, education, foreign policy, etc.) they consider most important. Such VAA's have been experimented for some time in a number of countries: as soon as 1989 the *Stemwijzer* was set up for the Dutch general elections, and from 1998 its online application was available for all subsequent elections. Other tools were developed in the Netherlands, where the use of VAA's has become widespread, as evidenced by the 1,7 million users at the occasion of the 2006 Dutch elections for the sole system generated by Kieskompas ([www.kieskompas.nl](http://www.kieskompas.nl)), a company that also created such a tool for the Belgian elections of 2007 or the US primaries of 2008. In Switzerland, the VAA system *smartvote* ([www.smartvote.ch](http://www.smartvote.ch)) has been used nearly 940,000 times for the Swiss parliamentary elections of October 2007 (assuming each completed questionnaire corresponds to a unique voter this would mean that almost 40% of the Swiss voters used the VAA system), that is four times more than for its first version in 2003. In Germany, the *Wahl-o-mat* system had over 5 million users in the 2005 national elections, and there were other VAA's developed in France (*Mon vote à moi*, for the presidential election in 2007), in Belgium (*Doe the stemtest* since 2003), in Bulgaria (*Glasovoditel* in 2005) or in Japan (2007). At least in the Netherlands and in Switzerland have these tools been applied to different types or levels of voting choices, such as national but also local elections, as well as for referenda. Since 2004 a VAA exists for the European elections (*VoteMatch*), and for the 2009 ones a consortium (made of the European University Institute of Florence, the National Centre of Competence in Research: Challenges to Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (NCCR) of the University of Zürich and two experienced VAA companies (Kieskompas and Politools, the creator of *smarvote*) to which the University of Luxembourg takes part in will develop the EU Profiler.

Despite this spectacular rise of VAA's, both in terms of the spread across countries and in numbers of 'advices' or 'profiles' given, scientific research aiming at evaluating its potential impact on the political process is still poor. Some attention has very recently been paid to the potential effect of VAA's on citizens' voting behavior (Ladner et al. 2008; Walgrave et al., 2008; Kleinnijenhuis and Van Hoof 2008), on the reasons given by voters to participate to VAA's (Boogers, 2006, 2007), on the socio-demographic characteristics of these users (Ladner et al. 2008; Hooghe et al 2007) as well as on more methodological questions pertaining to the choice of questions and/or the way the political proximities are calculated (Walgrave et al. 2008; Krouwel

and Fiers 2008; Kleinnijenhuis and Van Hoof 2008), but all these empirical analyses are limited to Dutch-speaking cases (Netherlands and Flanders) and Switzerland.

Even more limited is research on the potential for using VAAs as a new, cheap, tool for collecting relevant data for social scientists. First, these may be well suited for positioning parties and candidates in political space. Whereas party positions are currently mostly inferred from electoral manifestos or expert surveys (for an assessment of these methods and their potential for bias see Laver 2001), techniques revealing individual candidates' preferences, which may be of importance where personal vote is allowed by the electoral system, are still left wanting (see however Giannetti and Laver 2005 for an application of computer-assisted content analysis of speeches). If the set of questions is carefully elaborated, VAAs may become a powerful tool for approaching 'true' positions of parties and candidates. These devices face the latter with a dilemma: either 'play the game' and thereby present their political preferences at low cost to a large audience, or refuse to answer the questionnaire (or to confirm their positions if these are first inferred by the team of political scientists elaborating the tool) in order not to disclose positions they would otherwise not make public, the latter strategy proving risky for them as competitors (other parties and candidates) participating to the VAA will be perceived as more transparent by the media and the voters. Furthermore, VAAs only allow for a purely informative form of advertising of political positions of parties and candidates on a set of specific political issues selected exogenously, these are not political communication instruments controlled by them to persuade voters. Political scientists could therefore take advantage of these incentives for parties and candidates to reveal 'true' preferences to locate them in political space.

Second, the high numbers of VAA visitors cited above show that, as long as they gain something in return, citizens are ready to give social scientists indications about their political preferences. Their gain is here to find out at low cost and in an entertaining way what their political profile is in comparison with those of competing parties and candidates. Just as for the latter, they have incentives to reveal their 'true' preferences if they want to know more about their own political profile and how this matches with the political offer. As curiosity led them to voluntarily take the test to have this kind of information in return, one can expect that they will be at least as truthful as they would be in a face-to-face or telephone survey in which they would give their time in a benevolent way. The problem of auto-selection (people with some degree of interest in and information on politics are more likely to accept being interviewed) may therefore be reduced in the context of a VAA. Evidently, given the voluntarily character of the source – instead of a random sample contacted by an interviewer – and the current state of the digital gap, this instrument may not in the short run be an alternative to traditional mass opinion surveys. However, due to the dramatic costs of the latter and the increasing problem of drawing representative samples of the population from citizens with landline telephone access (due to the breakthrough of portable phones), research on the potential of VAA for data collection, provided that the respondent completes both the full questionnaire and complementary socio-demographic questions, should be undertaken. Just as our non-contracting partners at the European University Institute of Florence will assess this question by comparing data gathered in the *EU Profiler* VAA project with mass surveys on European elections (see Franklin and Trechsel 2008) in the framework of the *European Election Survey* (to which the team of the University of Luxembourg is part of), we will analyze the above-mentioned questions (see also 3.2) for Luxembourg's national elections in the context of the election research financed by the Chamber of Deputies.

The second aim of the current research proposal is even more innovative. POLUX will extend the logic of e-democracy devices to the ‘post-voting sphere’, by setting up a complementary online tool aiming at monitoring legislative activities of elected representatives, what we term here a Legislative Monitoring Application (LMA). Online LMAs can be found in a number of countries but here again the Netherlands stand out with two websites devoted to Dutch politics ([www.politix.nl](http://www.politix.nl) and [www.stemmentracker.nl](http://www.stemmentracker.nl)) and one which monitors the Dutch members of the European Parliament ([www.brusselstemt.nl](http://www.brusselstemt.nl)). The Swiss company responsible for the *smartvote* VAA and non-contracting partner to the current project has also developed such a tool ([www.parlarating.ch](http://www.parlarating.ch)). Analyzing behaviour of MPs through roll-call analysis is of course hardly new (there is extant literature about parliamentary behaviour in the US Congress for instance) for parliaments that publish legislative votes. For our purposes however, it will allow for a direct comparison of attitudes and electoral pledges in the pre-voting sphere with the actual parliamentary behaviour of representatives, thereby evaluating not only the congruence of positions between voters and parties or candidates, but also the fulfilment of these positions through their actions. Citizens will therefore have the possibility of checking the accountability of their representatives throughout the legislative mandate, provided that pieces of legislation can be directly related to issues for which positions were revealed before the elections. In the longer run, data gathered through the LMA will allow for the inclusion of actual behaviour of parties and candidates in the next VAA (for the 2014 elections in Luxembourg), thereby introducing a retrospective aspect in their profiles otherwise based only on prospective action through pledges. Citizens would also be able to see if their new revealed positions contradict past behaviour, thereby creating an ‘accountability cycle’ called for by the media and increasing proportions of the population. Of course, this monitoring should respect the liberal concept of the free legislative mandate (enshrined in Art. 50 of the Constitution in Luxembourg’s case) and leave room for closed-door negotiations and debates inherent to the building of parliamentary majorities in multi-partisan systems where no single political group passes the 50%+1 threshold on its own. But rather being filtered and interpreted by journalistic accounts, deviations from ones’ publicized preferences in the legislative process could provoke more interactions between representatives and citizens, the former being invited by the latter to justify or qualify their alleged changes of positions in online for a attached to the LMA. Hence, rather than highlighting potential negative effects of e-democratic tools on ideal representative democracy principles, one should probably welcome measures aimed at increasing the transparency of political processes and the level of accountability of representatives that can at the same time partly solve public distrust and apathy with regard to politics. Note also that, although difficult to assess due to the uncertainty over voters’ preferences and the way proximities are calculated, some potential for strategic use of VAA by parties and candidates exist. Complementing VAA with LMA is therefore desirable as it would allow citizens to assess the sincerity of political elites’ positions as publicized in the VAA by monitoring their legislative behaviour, enabling the former to hold the latter accountable to their actions rather than their promises and in the event of clear discrepancies punishing them in the next elections. Again, gains in low cost information may strengthen the accountability of representatives and in the longer run extensive recourse to such tools may act as an incentive for political elites to reveal sincere preferences.

With regard to the scientific potential gains of using LMAs, we can of course point at the possibility of analyzing party discipline in parliamentary votes, the behavioural component of internal party cohesion (we already noted that the attitudinal aspect can be tackled by analyzing responses of candidates of the same party to the VAA). One could also verify whether observed

breaches of party discipline in actual votes are in effect related to divergent preferences of representatives of a party over a specific issue or if other sources (for instance constituency-related ones) motivate this behaviour. Reasons invoked in session by MPs for abstaining instead of adopting the party line whether in favour or against a piece of legislation may also be compared with positions publicized in the pre-voting sphere by the same individuals who were then candidates campaigning for popular votes. Overall not much is known of legislative behaviour or the perception of their role by political representatives in Luxembourg. Part of the research team of POLUX was involved in the last such exercise, a postal survey of MPs under the auspices of the *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union* project (within the EES) in the years 1996-97. Performing a new analysis on candidates and elected representatives with partly similar questions to those asked 10 years ago in a module complementing the online questionnaire on political issues will allow for an assessment of the evolution of elites' attitudes and their role perceptions.

Finally, the combination of LMA with VAA may also help us assess the degree of bias in using only roll-calls to place parties in political space in multi-partisan parliamentary democracies. In most of the latter the fragmentation of the party system requests the formation of either an executive or at least a parliamentary (usually not ad-hoc) coalition to pass legislation. Observed proximities in legislative behaviour through roll-call analysis may therefore simply reflect the majority/opposition divide, with parties of the former almost always voting together and parties of the latter most often voting together against initiatives of the government. Using party proximities inferred by the LMA as a baseline of party locations in political space, one will be able to evaluate the extent with which majority and opposition parties adopt other positions in actual legislative behaviour due to their respective roles in supporting or controlling government.

## **Project objectives and contribution to knowledge development**

The first objective of POLUX is to evaluate the electoral impact and the scientific usefulness of the Voting Advice Application (VAA) tool that will be introduced in the context of the electoral research financed by the Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies for the coming national and EU elections of 2009. The second consists in the setting up of a complementary tool aiming at monitoring legislative work of representatives, what we term here the Legislative Monitoring Application (LMA). The innovative design of the project, which combines the study of two complementary online modules aimed at informing and enabling citizens to hold their representatives accountable for their public positions and actions is in a sense experimental and will not only provide social scientists with new insights about opinion formation and electoral behaviour, but also have an impact on a wider audience (see 5.2). Citizens, parties, candidates and the media will indeed contribute to this large-scale experiment. With regard to knowledge development, we aim at contributing to the scientific debates around the emerging field usually termed as 'e-democracy' but and also to collect data over citizens', parties', and candidates' political preferences as well as actions for the latter two. To this end, we will focus on the following research questions:

- What is the level of 'public acceptance' of the VAA tool in Luxembourg as measured by its quantitative success in terms of users?
- What is the degree of 'political acceptance' of the VAA tool by parties and candidates?

- What is the socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of users of the system in Luxembourg and what are their motivations for looking for parties and candidates that match their political preferences through this means?
- What is the political impact of the VAA on users, especially but not exclusively on voting behaviour?
- Where do parties locate in the political spaces constructed on the basis of the issues selected in the questionnaire? Do these positions, proximities and distances mirror those inferred by other techniques? What is the degree of internal cohesion around publicized party lines according to positions taken by their candidates? Are there identifiable trends with regard to MP attitudes and the perception of their representative roles?
- To what extent could VAAs be used as a new tool for mass electoral surveys?
- What is the degree of party discipline as recorded by the LMA? Is actual behaviour predictable from data gathered in the VAA?
- What is the extent of the bias introduced by roll-call analysis in the positioning of parties in the case of a multi-partisan parliamentary democracy ruled by a well established tradition of coalition governments?
- To what extent are electoral pledges of governing parties fulfilled, as measured by legislative production in the course of their mandate?
- What are the prospects for using LMA results in following VAAs to account for the part of retrospective vote in the electoral choice of citizens? Do parties or MPs take the opportunity to justify their legislative behaviour when they contradict their pre-electoral positions?

The extent with which the VAA will be used will depend on multiple factors. As recorded in other countries, the novelty of the tool in the Grand Duchy may not be in favour of a great popular success. How the tool will be advertised in the press, the visibility of the website in the campaign, as well as the perceived credibility of this new tool by the media and the public will most likely affect the rate of visits. An institutional variable may however also have an impact on the level of citizens' usage of the VAA: in the case of Luxembourg, the electoral system which combines compulsory voting and opportunities for personal vote even across different party lists is likely to motivate citizens to gain information on parties and candidates. Such a system indeed assumes that all voters (as it is a duty for all of them to vote) have knowledge enough to decide whether their best choice should be a list vote, a personal vote for only some candidates of the same list or to cast a vote for candidates of different lists, whereas in reality information or interest is clearly lacking for a proportion of the population with voting rights. There is in any case a high potential for heavy usage due to this electoral system, either on the part of sophisticated voters wishing to get their choice confirmed by the tool or by undecided voters looking for easy access information on parties and candidates to guide their vote. Also residents with no voting rights, who represent over 40% of the population, are likely to be interested in using the VAA to find out which parties and candidates would be the ones sharing their positions. Given this demographic characteristic, the VAA platform implemented in multiple languages may even become a powerful means of political integration and social inclusion (see 5.2) for a foreign resident population generally unaware of Luxembourg's politics because of the use of Luxembourgish in most its debates (whether on TV or in the Chamber of Deputies).

The acceptance of the VAA by political parties and candidates is of course particularly important for the correct functioning of the system. Again the novelty, advertisement and credibility of the latter will have an effect on the investment of the former. Media coverage will certainly act as an

incentive for the candidates to publish their preferences to a large audience, whilst media will prefer to write articles or air programmes analyzing the preferences of most of the political offer. The credibility of the developers should also be high enough in this case, as a consortium of academic partners (the University of Zürich and the European University Institute) and experienced companies in the domain of VAAs will work with the University of Luxembourg in devising the tool in the context of the electoral research financed by the Chamber of Deputies. All parties that have accepted the setting-up of the VAA should in principle be ready to participate, whilst smaller parties not represented in the Chamber should be eager to do so to publicize their positions. Another question will be whether parties will try to, and if so will be able to control the answers of their candidates despite the potential for inter-party panachage some may represent due to their slightly diverging positions from the party line. The rate of candidates who reply to the VAA and the degree of similarity of their responses with the party official positions will reveal interesting patterns with regard to this. Note that in Switzerland, the only country where a candidate-based VAA has been introduced, the rate of candidates' participation was 50% in 2003 whereas it increased to 85% (of 3,100 candidates) for the National Council elections of 2007, thereby showing that once the tool has been used once, candidates see the potential for impact on their personal scores and participate at the next occasion. Finally, an assessment of the political acceptance of the VAA will be performed both by a workshop with chairmen of parliamentary groups and through an additional survey of all candidates (elected and non-elected) after the elections.

Who are those users who go all the way responding to the VAA questionnaire on issues, see their profile compared to those of parties and candidates, and then complete the optional socio-demographic and attitudinal questions? Do we find a clear over-representation of frequent internet users, with a typical bias towards young and educated respondents? The distribution of socio-demographic profiles as compared to the population is of course an important aspect if social scientists want to use such tools for gathering information on a representative part of it. Again, the advertisement and the credibility of the tool may well lead parts of the population who are not computer literate to seek for help (within family, through the personnel in pensions for elderly, etc.) and try to participate. As well as for foreign residents, the use of VAA tools may well have a social inclusion function by making Luxembourg's politics more attractive to groups in the population who feel disconnected to society or uninterested. Do people use the VAA to satisfy their curiosity, to seek confirmation for their choices or to receive suggestions they could well follow at the polling station? Curiosity may well be the overwhelming motivation because of the novelty of the tool, but the potential for strategic personal votes (like in Switzerland, but more than in Belgium or in the Netherlands) offered by the electoral system may also lead to more precise reasons given for its use.

A major question that is raised by the introduction of such a tool is indeed related to the impact it could have on its users. Does the use of VAA increase the political knowledge of its users? Does it encourage them to be more politically involved? And, more essentially, does it have an impact on their voting behaviour (for instance encouraging personal votes or inter-party panachage instead of list votes; does the 'advice' given lead them to cast a different vote than the one they had previously in mind?). So far the analyses of the VAA political impact are rather limited and tend to provide contradictory findings (Boogers 2006, 2007; Ladner et al. 2008; Walgrave et al., 2008; Kleinnijenhuis and Van Hoof 2008). The POLUX project will analyze data stemming from the online optional questionnaire (that every users of the system would be invited to respond) and

specific questions that will be integrated in the traditional post-electoral survey based on a representative sample of in the context of the electoral research financed by the Chamber of Deputies. This will provide a more robust evaluation of the impact the introduction of the VAA may have on the electorate than those hitherto performed.

Another reason why the VAA is particularly interesting for the political scientists' community is the opportunity it offers to locate parties in political spaces constructed on the basis of the issues selected in the online questionnaire, and to compare these results with those arrived at with alternative methods. What is even more interesting is the possibilities it offers to study the degree of internal cohesion around publicized positions of the party, as candidates themselves are asked to respond to the same questions. We may then identify determinants of deviations amongst candidates of the same party through the socio-demographics characteristics of the candidates (age, gender, size of the constituency, geographical origins, etc.), their political experience (incumbent MPs, holders of local mandate), or see if these deviations typically derive from the types of issues asked, such as ethical ones (euthanasia, abortion, wedding or possibility of child adoption for homosexual couples, bio-medicine research, etc.) for which partisan agreement is not easily reachable. Comparing positions of elected candidates with earlier findings from a comparative survey on national MPs made in 1996-97 will allow for an analysis of the stability or evolution of their attitudes. An optional questionnaire regarding the perception of the representative roles of MPs will be sent to elected candidates in order to further this type of longitudinal analysis.

To what extent could the VAA be used as a valid instrument of electoral survey in the future? At this stage of scientific research, what is reasonable is to combine traditional mass telephone surveys with data collection through VAAs (Franklin, M. & Trechsel, A. 2008) and see whether by weighting under and over represented sub-populations in the latter, as it is done to correct samples drawn from the population, we are able cross-validate results from the two sources. With the waning of the digital gap and the growing problems of drawing a representative sample of the population from citizens owning a landline telephone, problems of the day may well vanish in the future so it is time to tackle this issue. Along with larger-scale efforts in the context of the European Election Survey including both traditional surveys and a VAA system (EU Profiler), we will seek to contribute to knowledge development in this crucial field.

- The LMA will help us evaluate the degree of party discipline across parliamentary groups. Party discipline relates to individual MPs' action in parliamentary activities (mainly vote on legislation) and is enforced from above, whilst party cohesion as measured in terms of positions over issues in the VAA can be seen as emerging from below (although as mentioned earlier parties may exert pressure on their candidates to respond to the VAA in an harmonious way). What is the degree of party discipline in Luxembourg? Although the electoral system allows for inter-party personal votes and these are clearly on the rise (it has almost doubled in 25 years to represent over 34% of all votes at the national elections in 2004, see Dumont et al. 2006: 267), we do expect a moderate level of party cohesion but a rather high degree of party discipline in parliament, as exclusions, transfers or creation of a new party by rebel MPs have not been frequent in Luxembourg's political history. Discipline in legislative behaviour may of course be influenced by the size of the government coalition, so we may be to test this hypothesis by comparing roll-calls in the last sessions of the 2004-2009 parliament and the first of the next legislative mandate provided that the size of the

majority grows or shrinks significantly. However, legislative behaviour may also change according to time in the 5-year mandate, owing to the cycle of elections: either MPs tend more to vote in line with the party by fear of not being selected on its list at the next election, or they try to differentiate from it if they feel it could increase their inter-party panache electoral potential. Comparing the end of a legislative mandate with the beginning of another is therefore in order. Finally, we may analyze determinants of party defiance on the part of individual MPs, and may even be able to predict it from data gathered on positions of the same individuals through the VAA.

- Our contribution to scientific knowledge will also concern another important methodological question. Whereas roll-calls are widely used in less structured party systems such as the US to infer proximities in positions of parties and candidates, they are not considered as an efficient tool in multi-party parliamentary democracies where coalition government is the rule. In the latter, a usually comprehensive coalition agreement is signed at the beginning of the legislative term that will tie all bodies (and especially parliamentary groups) of partner parties for its all duration (De Winter and Dumont 2006). Majority MPs are therefore forced (especially when the majority in parliament is fragile) to vote in favour of all legislative initiatives of the government that emanate from that coalition pact. Looking at both the VAA and LMA datasets, we will be able to measure the extent of the disjuncture between positions taken before the elections and actual behaviour constrained by the majority or opposition role played by parties in the newly elected parliamentary body. Therefore, we will evaluate the degree of bias introduced by roll-call analysis in the positioning of parties in the case of a multi-partisan parliamentary democracy ruled by a well established tradition of coalition governments.
- The combination of the two tools will also enable us to evaluate the ‘mandate theory’ that assumes that election pledges are fulfilled by parties that managed to come to power. Although such a test is straightforward for single-party majority systems like UK, not much is known about its performance in coalition government systems. Robert Thomson’s study in 1999 dedicated to the Netherlands is an exception. We will add to this under-researched area by identifying the positions of governing parties before the elections and their fulfillment by measuring legislative production in the course of their mandate. As the project will only run until mid-2010, we will only be able to collect information on the first year (and a few months) of the new government, a period that is often seen as a ‘honeymoon’ and that should be compared with its like in Thomson’s study.

Finally, the introduction of an LMA module will allow us to create a dataset that may be used to feed back into the elaboration of a future VAA (for the 2014 elections) to reflect the actions of parties and candidates during the legislative term and not only their positions on issues that can be seen mostly as electoral promises. This raises a critical question: should VAAs aim at mimicking the mental decision-making process of citizens (here accounting for both prospective and retrospective evaluations of parties and candidates) regarding their electoral choices? The opportunity given to parties or MPs to discuss their legislative behaviour in an online forum with citizens if the latter feel that it contradicts their pre-electoral positions may well give indications as to whether citizens, parties and candidates take these tools and their effects seriously, which may then guide us in our decisions to fine-tune future VAAs with a balance of retrospective and prospective positions.

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