



# **The Impact of Question Polarity in Voting Advice Applications**

Marleen Velthuis

[m.velthuis@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:m.velthuis@tilburguniversity.edu)

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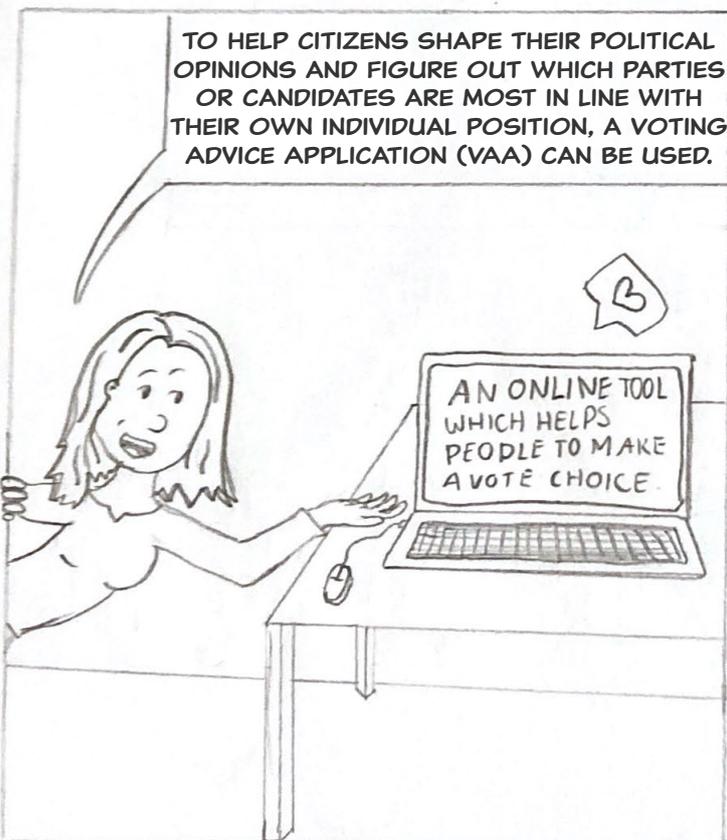
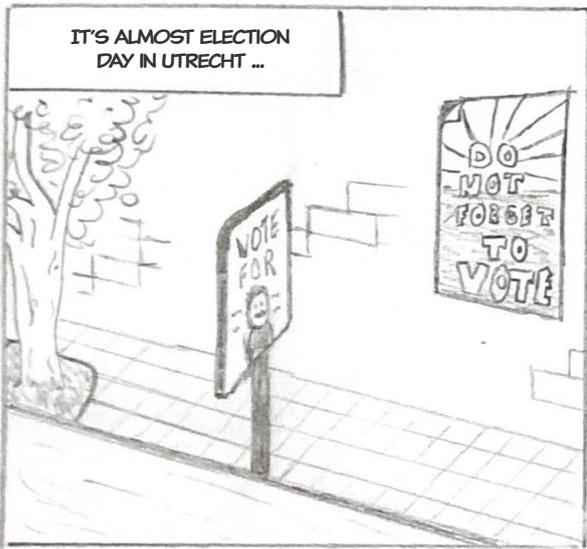
Instructor: Neil Cohn, [neilcohn@visuallanguagelab.com](mailto:neilcohn@visuallanguagelab.com), [www.visuallanguagelab.com](http://www.visuallanguagelab.com)

# THE IMPACT OF POLARITY

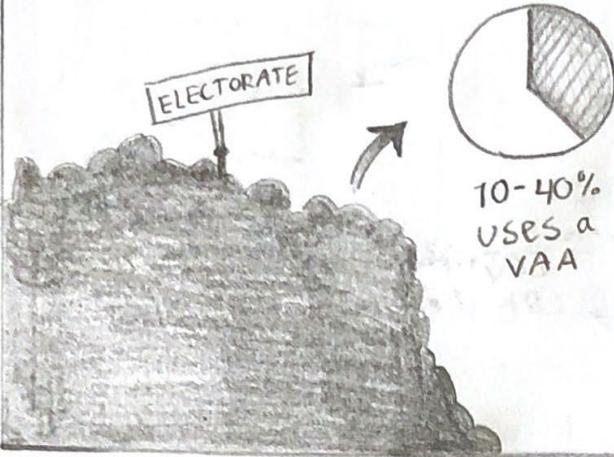
## IN VOTING ADVICE APPLICATIONS.

DRAWN BY  
MARLEEN  
VELTHUIS.

Bregje Holleman, Naomi Kamoen, André Krouwel, Jasper van de Pol, Claes de Vreese



CURRENTLY, ABOUT 10% TO 40% OF THE ELECTORATE IN MANY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES USES A VAA IN THE WEEKS PRIOR TO ELECTION DAY



SO, IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT DESIGN CHOICES MAKE IN CONSTRUCTING THEIR TOOL AFFECT THE ANSWERS TO THE VAA STATEMENTS AND THE RECEIVED VOTING ADVICE.

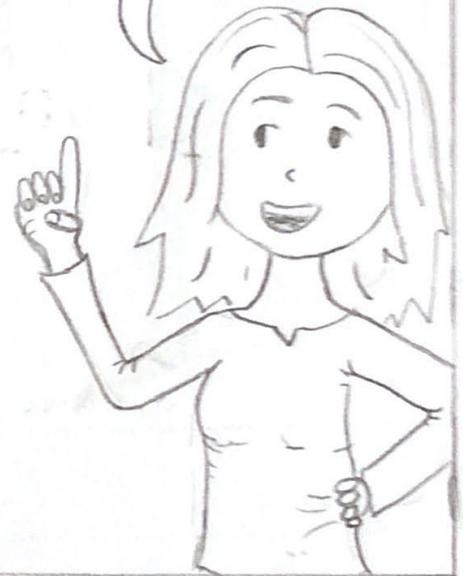


THAT'S RIGHT. FOR EXAMPLE, IN SURVEYS, RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT WORDING INFLUENCES THE ANSWERS.

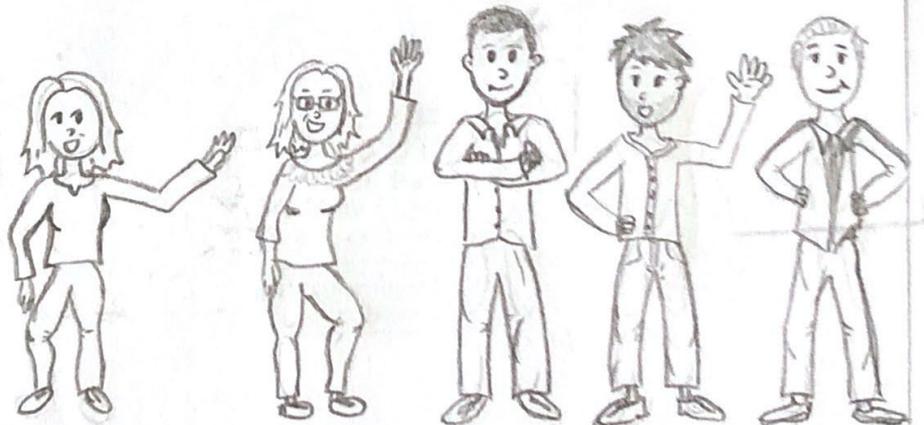


SO HOW DOES THE FORMULATION OF STATEMENTS IN VAA'S INFLUENCE VAA ANSWERS AND THE VOTING ADVICE?

GOOD QUESTION!



ME AND MY COLLEAGUES INVESTIGATED THIS BY CONDUCTING A RANDOMIZED FIELD EXPERIMENT ON A REAL-LIFE VOTING ADVICE APPLICATION: KIESWIJZER UTRECHT.





- 1 IMPLICIT NEGATIONS *for example* →
- 2 EXPLICIT NEGATIONS *for example* →
- 3 POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION (AS A MODERATOR)

IMPLICIT NEGATIVE QUESTIONS LEAD TO MORE 'NO'-ANSWERS OR 'DISAGREE'-ANSWERS AS COMPARED TO THE NUMBER OF 'YES'-ANSWERS OR 'AGREE'-ANSWERS TO THEIR POSITIVE COUNTERPARTS.



THIS IS THE CASE FOR  
1. 'FORBID' VS. 'ALLOW',  
2. OTHER CONTRADICTORY WORD PAIRS SUCH AS 'RESTRICT' VS. 'LEAVE FREE' AND  
3. A LARGE RANGE OF CONTRARY WORD PAIRS, SUCH AS 'GOOD' VS. 'BAD'.

IT ALSO OCCURS FOR 7-POINTS SCALE QUESTIONS.



BUT WHY WOULD POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION PLAY A PART IN THIS?

WELL, PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED OR PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN AN ISSUE, TEND TO PROCESS INFORMATION ABOUT THAT ISSUE MORE DEEPLY.

PEOPLE WHO ARE LESS INVOLVED TEND TO PERFORM SHALLOW PROCESSING, SO THIS GROUP WILL BE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO SUPERFICIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WAY THE INFORMATION IS CONVEYED, SUCH AS WORDING OR SOURCE CREDIBILITY).



KIESKOMPAS AND UTRECHT CITY COUNCIL CONSTRUCTED A VAA FOR CITIZENS IN UTRECHT, THE NETHERLANDS. THE VAA CONSISTED OF 30 POLITICAL OPINION QUESTIONS.

TO TEST THIS, WE CONTACTED THE CITY UTRECHT

A VAA WITH 30 POLITICAL QUESTIONS

Utrecht City Council

Kies Kompas

AFTER THE ORIGINAL VERSION WAS MADE, OUR RESEARCH TEAM DEVELOPED FOUR ADDITIONAL EXPERIMENTAL VERSIONS OF THE VAA IN WHICH WE MANIPULATED:

THE HEADING ABOVE THE QUESTION: LEFT-WING OR RIGHT-WING

THE QUESTION POLARITY: POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE

THESE QUESTIONS CONSISTED OF TWO TYPES OF CONTRASTS:

- 6 NEGATIVE QUESTION VERSIONS CONTAINED AN IMPLICIT NEGATIVE
- 10 QUESTIONS CONTAINED AN EXPLICIT NEGATIVE

USERS OF THE VAA WERE ASKED TO WHAT EXTENT THEY AGREE WITH EACH STATEMENT ON A FIVE-POINTS SCALE RANGING FROM 'COMPLETELY AGREE' TO 'COMPLETELY DISAGREE'.

BEFORE ANSWERING THE VAA STATEMENTS, WE ASKED:

- TO WHAT EXTENT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN POLITICS, WITH A FIVE- POINT SCALE
- THEIR HIGHEST FINISHED DEGREE OF EDUCATION, WITH A 7-CATEGORY SCALE AND A 'DON'T KNOW OR DON'T WANT TO TELL'.

PARTICIPANTS WERE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO ONE OF THE FIVE VERSIONS OF THE VAA AND ALL DATA WAS DOCUMENTED.



WELL...



THERE WAS AN OVERALL EFFECT OF QUESTION POLARITY FOR THE SET OF QUESTIONS WITH AN IMPLICIT NEGATION:

IMPLICIT NEGATIVE QUESTIONS INDEED LEAD TO MORE POSITIVE EVALUATIONS OF THE ATTITUDE OBJECT.



THERE ALSO WAS AN OVERALL MEAN QUESTION WORDING EFFECT FOR THE SET OF EXPLICIT NEGATIVE QUESTIONS.

WHEN EXPLICIT NEGATIVE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED, IT LEADS TO A SIGNIFICANT TENDENCY TO EVALUATE AN ATTITUDE OBJECT MORE POSITIVELY.



ALSO, POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION INDEED MATTERS:

THE HIGHER THE POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION, THE SMALLER THE WORDING EFFECT OF EXPLICIT NEGATIONS.



BUT... THE VARIATION BETWEEN QUESTIONS IN THE SIZE AND DIRECTIONS OF THE EFFECTS IS LARGE!?

YES. THE INTERACTION EFFECT WITH POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION SHOWS US THAT THE OVERALL WORDING EFFECT IS MAINLY CAUSED BY VAA USERS WITH A LOWER POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION.



THIS IS THE FIRST STUDY TO SHOW AN OVERALL EFFECT OF NEGATIVITY THAT IS GENERALIZABLE ACROSS SETS OF QUESTIONS AND ACROSS TWO TYPES OF NEGATIVE WORD PAIRS IN VAAS!

THE  
end.